

Debatable Lands: Exploring the Boundaries of Fiction and Nonfiction through Family History

Alison Baxter
Oxford Brookes University

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of
Doctor of Philosophy

September 2019

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

All images copyright © Alison Baxter except where another source is given.

For Tamsin and Eva, the next two generations, with love

*And in memory of my father, who first took me to Cornwall to look
for gravestones*

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of a work of life writing accompanied by a critical essay that examines the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. It tells the story of a Victorian family from Cornwall, whose lives were transformed by the age of steam and empire. The men went to sea as sailors or engineers, while the women became schoolteachers and governesses. These were ordinary people who left only a faint mark on history but I show how, starting from a few family relics and official documents, it is possible to reconstruct a complete life. To bring my characters alive I decided at critical moments to fictionalise, to put words into their mouths and thoughts into their heads. My narrative uses imagination to round out the facts of biography with the aim of producing a story that rings true.

In Chapter 1 of the critical essay, I examine the relationship between family and public history and consider the role played by inherited objects, myths, and secrets in reconstructing the past. I argue that while the family archive resembles and overlaps with museum collections and official records, it has a different resonance and sometimes a different relationship to the truth. In Chapter 2, I consider family history as a form of life writing. I compare how the different genres of biography, history, and historical fiction deal with what is known and unknown about the past, and I identify three ways in which fiction and nonfiction narratives may differ. The first is invention, or making things up; the second is interiority, or access to the thoughts and feelings of characters who are long dead; and the third relates to narrative structure. But the boundary between fiction and nonfiction is, I conclude, not one that can or should be policed. By allowing the two to coexist, I am proposing one possible solution to the dilemma of how to write everyday lives in a way that gives them the interest and significance that I believe they deserve.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to Emma Darwin, who came late to this project but immediately identified what I needed to do and helped me to do it. At Oxford Brookes grateful thanks are due to my supervisor Nicole Pohl and Royal Literary Fund fellow Nigel Cliff for support and encouragement, Alysa Levene for useful and perceptive comments at transfer stage, James Hawes for the screenwriter's eye, librarian Joanna Cooksey for advice on tricky points of referencing, the ever-helpful administrative staff, Charmian Hearne and Jill Organ, and all the research students and staff who have given me feedback on my various papers and presentations. At the University of East Anglia I benefited from the comments and advice of my tutors, Rebecca Stott, Ian Thomson, and Frances Wilson, and my fellow MA students, especially Rob Atkinson, Gill Blanchard, Lisa Eveleigh, Ann Kennedy-Smith and Deborah Spring.

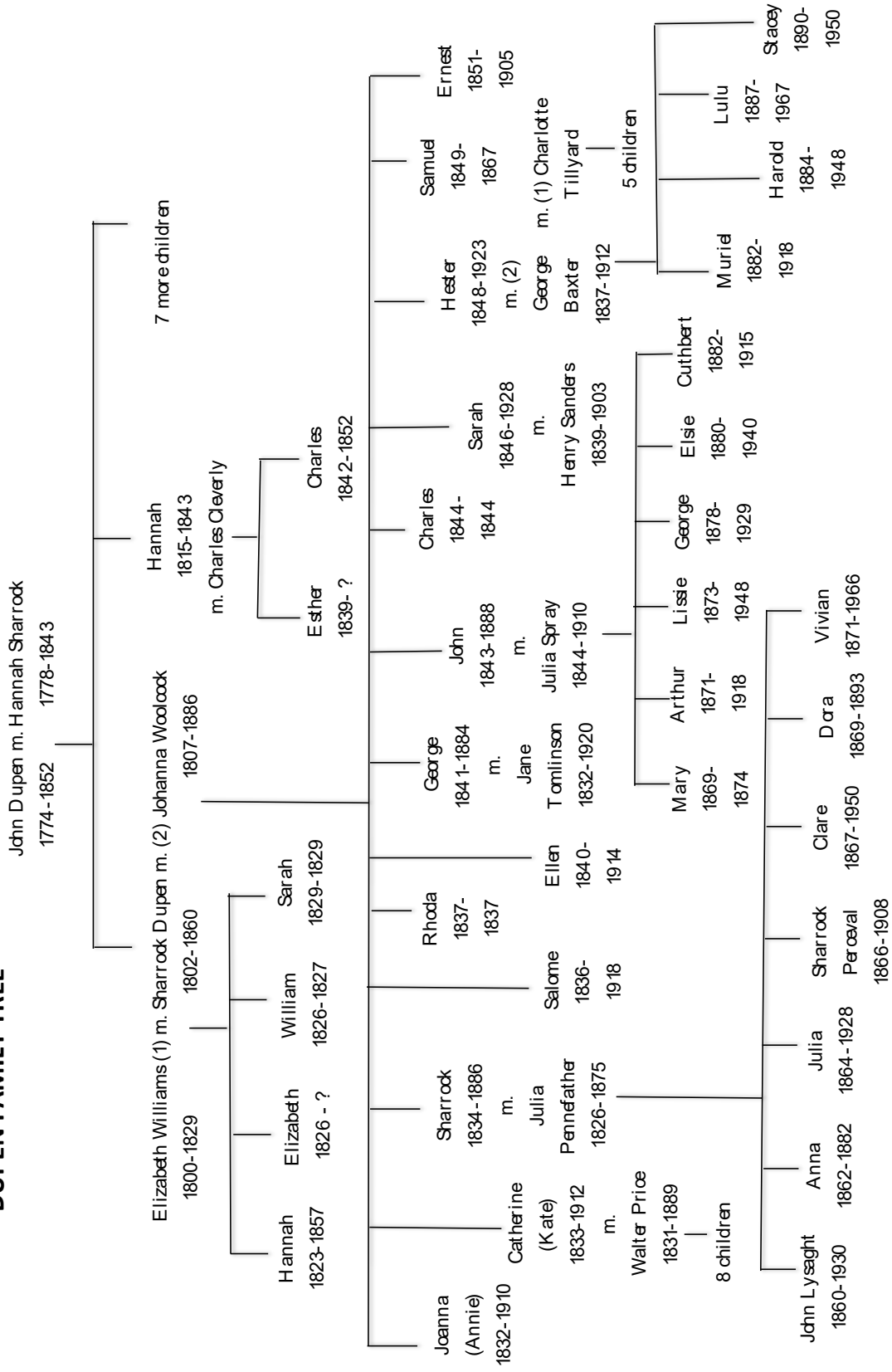
I would like to thank Commander Mark Barton RN, who answered all my naval queries with good humour and patience; any remaining errors are mine. I am grateful to the historians who gave me a grounding in the Victorian period: Simon Wenham, for the University of Oxford Department of Continuing Education course 'Exploring the Victorian Age', and Alysa Levene, Sally Holloway and Rosemary Leadbetter for the Oxford Brookes undergraduate module 'Everyday Life in Britain 1680-1880'.

I owe a great deal to the friends and family members who have read and commented on various drafts: Andy Baxter, Debra Emmett, Rebecca Goddard, Chris Lindop (thanks also for the tour of Bristol), Sarah Massey, Sorrel Pitts, Carly Schabowski, Paul Sullivan, and Henry Warren; and to those who provided a listening ear when I needed it: Needra Copley, Claire Thacker, and Morven Wilkie (with thanks also for medical expertise).

THE DUPENS

'a family of merchant venturers, mariners and engineers of Huguenot origin with a propensity to wander far over the earth'

DUPEN FAMILY TREE



CONTENTS

Sail, Steam, and Empire: A Cornish Family in the Age of Victoria

Part 1: Hayle

Prologue	9
Chapter 1 A Seafaring Heritage	15
Chapter 2 Moving to Hayle	20
Chapter 3 Doing Business in Bristol	29
Census 1841	39
Chapter 4 A Methodist Inheritance	42
Chapter 5 A Free Gardener	50
Chapter 6 Debt And Disease	58
Chapter 7 Laundry Day	69
Census 1851	76
Chapter 8 Cutting for Stone	85
Chapter 9 Starting at the Foundry	90
Census 1861	96

Part 2: The World

Chapter 10 From Ocean to Jungle	99
<i>The Queen of the Avon</i>	102
The Blackwall Frigates	112
<i>The Eastern Empire</i>	119
On the Indian Hills	129
Chapter 11 Other People's Children	138
Chapter 12 A Naval Engineer	150
Guarding the Queen	150
The China Station	160
<i>Summary of next chapters</i>	166
Epilogue	169
Notes	174
Bibliography	185

Critical Essay

Debatable Lands: Exploring the Boundaries of Fiction and Nonfiction through Family History

Introduction	195
Chapter 1: The Real and the Fictive: Sources of Historical Truth	199
1.1 Definitions: fact, fiction and truth	199
1.2 Inherited truth: the family archive	201
1.3 The truth of objects	205
1.4 Family history, museum history	210
1.5 Still lives: the meaning of family photographs	215
1.6 Finding truth in the archive	219
1.7 Family myths, family secrets	221
Chapter 2: Writing Fact, Writing Fiction	224
2.1 Making things up: the role of invention	224
2.2 'Granite and rainbow': the biographer's dilemma	228
2.3 Losing the plot: narrative structure	236
Conclusion	244
Bibliography	246

Sail, Steam, and Empire: A Cornish Family in the Age of Victoria

PART 1: HAYLE

PROLOGUE

A random and irrational sifting process takes place every time someone dies, or a relationship breaks down, or a house move compels us to sort out our stuff.

Unbalanced by emotion we make odd choices, throwing away mementos that we later wish we had kept, or preserving things that we will happily take to the charity shop in a year or two's time. But the child's sampler that hangs on my living room wall is not something I would ever part with.

On a small square of yellowing linen, the alphabet is embroidered twice, in sober shades of dark blue and red. Then come four lines of verse:

The deadliest wounds with which we bleed
Our crimes inflict alone
Man's mercies from God's hand proceed
His miseries from his own

And finally the signature:

Joanna Woolcock Dupen Her work Aged 7
Years A.D. 1839



The letters are made up of hundreds of tiny crosses that must have taken many painstaking hours to complete, but the first line of the verse is too long and there is no space for the 'd' of 'bleed', which sits orphaned above the rest of the line. I cannot know if the child who stitched it was mortified by her mistake: infused in the objects we inherit are emotions that we can never recover.

When I was growing up, the embroidered sampler hung disregarded on the wall of our sitting room. Joanna Dupen was not a person I recognised; I didn't know the maiden names of my grandmothers, let alone my great-grandmothers. Women's names are easily lost. It was only after my parents died and we cleared their house that I started to look for meaning in the objects that surrounded me. Forced to decide what to keep and what to dispose of, my brother and I divided up the books, the pictures, the silver, and the china. He had no interest in needlework so I took away the sampler. Stitching connects women in a way that often excludes men. Put away in a drawer somewhere I still have the tablecloth and napkins adorned with cross-

stitched roses that my mother and I completed together, when I was only ten years old and eager to please. It was a time of rare harmony between us, as we shared an activity that my brother could not join in.

Now I wanted to know more about the small embroidered alphabet (in French, *un abécédéaire*) that I had inherited. In sixteenth century England an ‘exampler’ was a compendium of patterns and stitches for the experienced needlewoman to follow, a source to refer to before the introduction of printed designs. Over the next two hundred years it evolved to become a record of a girl’s developing skill. In well-to-do households of the eighteenth century the sampler became a showcase for the talents of the mistress, a decorative picture to display on the wall. Tranquil domestic scenes of houses and gardens were popular, while some more ambitious designers created embroidered maps. But Joanna’s miniature exercise in morality and literacy has no charmingly naïve border of flowers and animals, and no variety of stitches to show off her accomplishments. She was not from a wealthy family who could afford large pieces of fabric or multi-coloured silk threads.

It was the verse that intrigued me. Instead of a prayer or biblical text, it is part of a ballad by the blue stocking and abolitionist Hannah More. More was teaching in Bristol in 1789 when she decided it was her duty to educate the rural poor. She set up charity schools where children learned stories from the scriptures and were taught to read – but not write, in case they got ideas above their station. Dubbed ‘Holy Hannah’ by Horace Walpole, she was a devout Anglican – although her evangelical fervour led to accusations of Methodism from local clergymen, whose neglect of their parishioners was exposed by her activities. (In case this makes her sound humourless, I should also tell you that she named her cats Passive Obedience and Non-resistance.)

More’s views on female education remained influential long after her death in 1833. Her ‘cheap repository tracts’, simple tales of Christian morality, were carried by pedlars and chapmen to even the most remote communities and sold in their millions, but to my surprise the verse does not come from one of these. It was written much earlier, when More was still a party-loving young playwright whose work excited the admiration of Garrick and Dr Johnson. *Sir Eldred of the Bower* is a tragic tale that moved Mrs Garrick to tears when read aloud by her husband. It tells of a young nobleman who falls in love with a beautiful young woman and marries her, but on their wedding night he catches her with another knight and stabs them both to

death. The stranger, he discovers too late, was no rival but his bride's beloved brother.

I was intrigued not only by the child Joanna Woolcock Dupen but by her mother. The woman who selected this verse for her daughter to embroider must surely have been an unusual character if she took her moral messages from romances. It was time to empty more of the boxes that I had stacked carelessly in the cupboard under the stairs. Amongst the neglected sediment of paper and photographs from my parents' house was a pencilled family tree that my grandfather Harold Baxter had started as he lay in his hospital bed, waiting for his heart to fail for the final time. His mother, Hester Dupen, seemed to have had ten older siblings, but there was no Joanna. Fortunately, the internet has made family history accessible in a way that was impossible for earlier generations. I was able to call up a series of census returns that helped me match the child of the sampler with the aunt my grandfather called Annie, Hester's oldest sister. Of course. The affectionate diminutive would have avoided any confusion with her mother, who was born Johanna Woolcock and married Sharrock Dupen, of Hayle in Cornwall.

I never knew my grandfather, who died in 1948, two years before I was born. He survives only in a handful of letters and photographs, but I imagine him as a quiet, unassuming man, like his son, my father, with an enquiring mind and a keen sense of the ridiculous. In the 1930s, the Scottish writer Lewis Grassie Gibbon, who was a close friend of my grandparents, put him into a novel as one of the founder members of a 'Politico-Social' society called the Secular Control Group. A single sentence paints a vivid picture:

lean, rakish, and middle-aged, with grey-streaked brown hair and grey-streaked blue eyes, a gold-framed pince nez and a gold-mounted petrol lighter, [he] would arrive from Berkshire in a large and impressive touring-car.

The car is a significant detail. Gibbon named his own small car 'Harold' after his friend, who at that time owned a garage business and taught him to drive. I hope my grandfather enjoyed his brief appearance in print and was not too dismayed by having such radical views ascribed to him as the abolition of marriage and enforcement of birth control. I am fairly sure that he would have been content to endorse the secularisation of education and the disestablishment of churches. An admirer of H. G. Wells, he too believed that the world would be saved by science.

Harold Baxter inherited his Aunt Annie's house in the spring of 1918, after the death of her surviving sister, Salome. Cornubia Cottage had been the Dupen family home, one of a terrace of similar dwellings built in the 1830s to meet the growing need for housing at a time when Hayle was a boom town at the heart of England's Industrial Revolution. Situated at the centre of a complex network of waterways where three rivers, the Hayle, the Penpol and the Angarrack, flowed out through a muddle of pools, creeks, and sandbanks to the coast at St Ives, it was the main port for the tin and copper mines of west Cornwall. Home for a time to the great engineer Richard Trevithick, Hayle boasted a shipyard and the two biggest iron foundries in the world. It was not a textile manufacturing centre like Manchester or Leeds, nor a major trading port like Bristol; it was smaller than Birmingham or Sheffield. But like the great cities of the north and midlands, its growth was driven by the power of iron and steam. Harold had spent holidays there as a boy, but by then the town had subsided into a forgotten backwater, its great industrial heritage crumbling away, hidden in plain sight by banks of ivy and a kind of collective amnesia. My grandfather sold his aunt's house, but held onto her sampler and a handful of other relics of the Dupens, enough to spark my curiosity but not sufficient to tell me their story. That was something I was going to have to uncover for myself.

For a long time I thought I might write a novel about my Cornish family. I had a few pieces of the jigsaw but many more were missing and there was no box with a helpful picture for me to follow. Surely this story had to be told as fiction. But when I started to research the facts behind my inherited objects and anecdotes, I realised that they had a different power when assembled into a nonfiction narrative. In an environment where the daily news was becoming more and more fictitious, I had a growing appetite for the tangible, the real. My Victorian ancestors, like almost everyone else's, were ordinary people who lived through extraordinary times, when the world was transformed by the power of steam and Britain's expanding empire. By recovering their story I was rescuing a forgotten version of the past. The events that I write about are documented, the people and places are real. And yet, the more I discovered about my grandfather's mother and her dozen siblings, the more I found myself imagining them back to life, which makes them, in the end, invented characters. The result is a narrative that uses both fact and fiction to get at the truth – or my version of it, at least.

In seeking out my grandfather's forebears I am of course also looking for him, for the boy who loved engines and spent his childhood holidays in Hayle. As I struggle to decipher Victorian handwriting, masters' certificates, naval service records, and smudgy newsprint, I wish I could turn to him and say: 'Look, I've filled in the blanks in your mother's family and added more names that you never realised were missing, the dead babies that no one remembered to mourn. This is the truth behind the myths that surrounded your sailor uncles, and this is what life was like in the port of Hayle in the heyday of the Industrial Revolution.'

Hayle, July 1896

From the front window of the house in Penpol Terrace, Harold can see the ships loading and unloading at the quay. Each tide floats them in and cautiously back out again, over the treacherous sandy bar and into the wide open bay of St Ives. When the children go to bathe from the beach behind the dunes, they watch the puffing black funnels of the steamers disappear over the horizon, bound for the Mediterranean, the Bosphorus, and the Black Sea. Is it really black? Harold wonders. One day he will see for himself. He has decided to be a sailor, like his uncles, his grandfather, and his unimaginably distant great-grandfather, whose miniature hangs on the parlour wall.



Every summer he and his sisters come to stay with the aunts in Hayle, in the house where his mother grew up. The sea breeze will blow the smoky London air from their lungs, says mama. But today is the first Sunday of the holiday and Aunt Annie has forbidden them to go to the harbour.

'You can sit quietly and read a scripture book,' she said when they came back from chapel.

Harold kicks his legs against the unyielding edge of the sofa. Beside him, his sister Lulu squawks in annoyance. Once again she has jabbed her needle into her finger instead of the slightly grubby linen rectangle that is destined to become a tray cloth for her mother. Harold sees her glance up resentfully at the framed sampler that hangs above the piano. Aunt Annie stitched it when she was only seven years old and she fails to comprehend why Lulu, aged nine, struggles to make all her crosses go in the same direction. Harold is sure that his sister too would rather be

down at the quay, where sometimes a friendly sailor shows them how to tie a bowline, or the correct way to push waxed thread through heavy canvas to mend a sail. A much more useful kind of stitching, thinks Harold.

'Look Lulu,' he says in a conciliatory tone, showing her his book, which is open at an image of white-robed men in a desert landscape. There are palm trees, flat-roofed houses, and in the distance, a donkey.

'Do you remember I told you that Uncle Ernest saw houses in Arabia just like one of the pictures in his scripture book? Maybe it was this one.'

His most treasured possession is the journal his uncle gave him before he returned to India last year. It logs the three voyages he made as a young engineer, before Harold and Lulu were born, even before their mama was married. Harold has pored over every word, imagining what it would be like to be tossed about in the Bay of Biscay, to fly through the surf to land at Madras, or swelter in the heat of the Red Sea (the red hot sea, his uncle calls it). You wouldn't think to look at him now that Uncle Ernest was an adventurer. He is, not to put too fine a point on it, short and stout, and ill at ease with his young nephews and nieces, having no children of his own. But he is the only brother that mama has left, and she wept when he said goodbye. Who knows when they will see him again?

There were once four brothers – no, five, Harold corrects himself. He mustn't forget Uncle Sam, who died. 'Poor Sam' the aunts call him. Uncle John was a ship's engineer like Uncle Ernest, but he joined the navy and went to war with his gunboat in the Malay States. Then there was Uncle George, who started the family business in India. He sailed as mate of a windjammer but quarrelled with his captain and prosecuted him when the ship reached Madras. He won his case and jumped ship, knowing that his life was at risk. While stranded in India he met a man who offered him a job on the coffee plantations of Cochin State. The area was virgin jungle and Uncle George was the first European to work there. Harold imagines him sleeping with his gun beside his bed, ready to leap up and defend himself from snakes, panthers, and wild elephants. Harold's orphaned cousin Vivian is the latest to go out to Palghaut to join Uncle Ernest. Vivian's mama died when he was born and nobody speaks of his father, Harold's uncle Sharrock, who was also a sailor. Mama and the aunts change the subject whenever the children try to find out more. Harold loves his own papa, of course, but he sometimes wishes he had a more exciting profession. Papa's tailor's shop in London's West End is very smart and he counts Sir John Tenniel amongst his customers, but not even this connection to the man who drew the pictures for *Alice* is enough to compete with the glamour of the seafaring Dupens.

CHAPTER 1 A SEAFARING HERITAGE

The story of the Dupens begins on the south coast of Cornwall. It is rumoured that in the early years of the eighteenth century a sea captain of French descent was shipwrecked off Marazion and settled in Mylor, marrying a local girl, although somewhere down the generations we appear to have carelessly mislaid the proof: a ship's charter and cargo manifest in old French bearing the Dupen seal. It is the grandson of this captain who is pictured in the portrait miniature that I found wrapped in tissue paper at the bottom of a dusty cardboard box. I took it out and hung it on my dining room wall.

The face of a young man in his twenties looks out from a gold-rimmed oval set in a rectangle of glossy, black-painted wood. His short brown hair is parted to one side and he has fuzzy sideburns. Under his arched brows his eyes are hazel, and his nose is straight with a slight hook at the end. He wears the clothes of a gentleman: a dark brown coat over a white shirt. His collar rises high to touch his ears, making it impossible for him to turn his head by more than a few degrees, and his narrow black tie is knotted firmly under his chin. This man, the image of the Regency heroes of my teenage reading, is, according to the handwritten label on the back, my father's great-great-grandfather John Dupen.



All large towns had competent practitioners who produced these portable tokens. Unlike oil paintings, they were private items designed to be realistic rather than flattering; this is my ancestor as he really was. John Dupen's image is protected by glass and held in place at the back by a spiky border of triangular metal strips. These are fragile and snap easily when bent, so I am reluctant to remove the picture to check if it is painted on ivory, but I am fairly sure it is. Similar examples appear in antique dealers' catalogues labelled 'portrait of an unknown gentleman', priced at a few hundred pounds. My however many times great-grandfather may have commissioned the miniature as a gift for his future wife, a keepsake for the long months when he was away at sea.

I grew up largely unaware of my Cornish seafaring heritage. It was crowded out by the Scottish story told by my grandmother Jean. Perhaps this is what happens in

any family, that one lineage is preferred, one narrative prevails. Jean had the advantage of being a writer, who dealt robustly with her husband Harold's family history. 'He claims it is much more romantic than mine,' she declared as she embarked on her own autobiography, 'but I won't let him speak.' Harold's mother and her host of siblings were, he said, descended from Huguenot refugees who fled France for Cornwall in the seventeenth century. He had fallen under the spell of the Dupens and so, a hundred years later, have I. It is a well-known if inexplicable condition amongst family historians, wanting to be Huguenot. I suspect most amateur genealogists are looking for a hint of the exotic in their family tree, something to confirm that sense we all have of being special. There was for a time a small Huguenot church in Falmouth and Dupen is a French name, but beyond that all is rumour and legend.

When I learned as a teenager that I had Franco-Cornish sailors in my family tree I thought, like my grandfather, that it was delightfully romantic. I had been reading *Frenchman's Creek* and had a bad case of Daphne Du Maurier. We went, one chilly Easter holiday, to the Fal estuary and spent a fruitless afternoon poking around the churchyard of St Just in Roseland, a village as pretty as its name suggests. By then every other cottage was a second home and expensive yachts crowded the small harbour where fishermen once eked out a precarious existence. We were searching for long-lost headstones, but there was nothing to see. We did not go to Hayle.

A distant cousin, the last of the name to live in England, wrote, 'The Dupens appear to be a family of merchant venturers, mariners and engineers of Huguenot origin with a propensity to wander far over the earth.' From childhood I too yearned to see the world, experiencing an emotion the English have failed to put a name to, but that the Germans call *Fernweh*, a vaguely melancholy wanderlust that can never quite be satisfied. During my childhood we drove all over Europe, to Vienna, Florence, and one memorable summer, across the Iron Curtain to Prague. I had no sense that we were doing anything unusual. As soon as I graduated I set off for French Canada and five years later, when I was offered a job on a remote Pacific archipelago I accepted without a second thought, throwing away an alternative, more humdrum life that would have offered financial and emotional security. It is obscurely comforting to know where my restlessness comes from: that although none of us bear the name, my grandfather, my father and I are all Dupens.

My older self acknowledges the equal and opposite force of a need for roots, for a homeland that I was never going to find in the home counties where I grew up. Many of us, as we grow older and our remaining years accelerate past us at ever-increasing speed, seek a kind of immortality by resurrecting the forgotten lives of our ancestors. Irrationally, we hope that unlike them we will not disappear into a mist of garbled memories. We want to anchor ourselves in time and space before it is too late. During the first twenty years of my life I lived in five different places. It made it hard for me to say where I was from. I had no cluster of streets where grandparents, aunts, and cousins lived in close proximity. In seeking out the Dupens I was looking not only for my ancestors but for a place where I could belong. I was convinced that it had to be by the sea, that saltwater ran in my veins. Perhaps it would turn out to be Hayle. My DNA, I have discovered, is 40% Scottish, but also very markedly Cornish.

The John Dupen of the portrait belonged to Mylor, a small port on the great Fal estuary, but his second son, Sharrock, was baptised in 1802 in St Just in Roseland, the home parish of his mother, Hannah Sharrock. My great-great-grandfather Sharrock's childhood was spent at war. A younger brother, born just after the battle of Trafalgar, was christened Horatio Nelson. During the twenty hazardous years that the British fought the French, press gangs roamed the streets of Falmouth, snatching unwary lads from their families and carrying them off to serve in His Majesty's navy. These were pugilistic times when boys attacked each other with stones and fists while men gathered to watch boxing matches, dog and cock fights, or badger baiting. Whenever a crowd of intoxicated miners arrived, the cry went up, 'The tin men are coming!' and the shops were hastily closed and shuttered.

Falmouth now feels like a distant provincial town but in those days it was a buzzing hub of news. It had been a Royal Mail packet station for over a hundred years, home to the ships that carried mail and passengers across the globe. Local people were better informed than Londoners about the latest events in distant ports, from Lisbon to the Leeward Islands. The fast, armed brigs that carried His Majesty's mails sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar to Malta and Corfu, crossed the Atlantic to Nova Scotia, Cartagena, and the islands of the West Indies, and made their way south as far as Rio and Buenos Aires. The commanders were the aristocracy of Falmouth. They lived in fine white houses overlooking the harbour and their jackets bristled with gilt buttons and embroidery designed to ape the uniforms of naval

captains, much to the irritation of the Admiralty. These men too served in the front line of the wars with the American colonies and the Emperor Napoleon, fighting off attacks by enemy warships, and privateers attracted by their cargoes of gold and silver bullion. Their duty was to protect at all costs the leather portmanteau containing sensitive government despatches. It sat on deck weighted with heavy pigs of iron, ready to be jettisoned overboard rather than captured.

Sharrock Dupen was thirteen and quite old enough to go to sea when peace was finally signed with the French in 1815. I would like to believe that he began his life as a sailor on board one of the famous Falmouth packets, squeezed with some two dozen other crew members into a dank, unventilated space beneath the main deck without even a hammock to sleep in, proud to be part of this historic service. But I have to admit that it is more likely, if less romantic, that he sailed as crew on his father's single-masted cutter. John Dupen, who traded between Falmouth, Spain and Portugal, was not one of the grand commanders who strolled through the town doffing their gold-encrusted hats to the ladies, but he too lived with danger on every voyage. His small vessel could all too easily be swamped by heavy seas, especially if the cargo was not well secured. He may well have been a smuggler too, making extra money from the illegal trade in tobacco, spirits, and lace. Public opinion held it to be no crime; even the packet service captains were involved.

The wars had brought high taxes, inflated prices, and hardship for the common people. The years that followed were no less difficult, even with the threat of invasion lifted. Too many soldiers and sailors were left without employment, the economy was depressed, and food continued to be expensive. I don't know if John Dupen left the sea to become an innkeeper or if he took on the business to supplement his income, but in 1814 he held the lease of the Lord Nelson, a humble ale house in St Mawes. Dealing in food and drink was to become as much a family tradition as seafaring.

In 1822 John's son Sharrock Dupen married for the first time, but seven years later his wife died, leaving him alone with two young daughters. Widowed and grieving, he must have wanted to keep his children close and the only way to do so was to marry again. Abandoning the precarious life of a mariner, where he had to compete for a berth with the many sailors paid off from the navy, within the year he took Johanna Woolcock as his second wife and set himself up as a confectioner in Penzance. By exchanging the salt air of the Bay of Biscay for the sweet scents of

cinnamon, rosewater, and vanilla, he was giving up the hardship of the sea for a softer existence, but a less exciting one. It was probably a choice that his new wife approved of.

My two times great-grandmother, the admirer of Hannah More, was born of yeoman stock in 1807 in Kenwyn, a parish of farmers and miners on the outskirts of Truro. She married Sharrock Dupen in 1830 when she was 23 years old and their first child arrived some two years later. Joanna Woolcock Dupen, known as Annie, was born on 31 March 1832 and baptised in the Wesleyan chapel in Penzance. She was followed a year later by a sister, Catherine Sharrock Dupen, or Kate, and on Christmas Day 1834 by a brother, Sharrock Semmens Dupen. These first three children bore the family names of their mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, a strong cord attaching them to their roots. In those days, women's names were not so easily lost.

The confectionery trade provided a steady living but with a growing family Sharrock Dupen was never going to get rich selling comfits and lozenges. Stirring a boiling vat of sugar was not without risk but hardly offered sufficient challenge to a man used to reefing sails in a force ten gale. He was on the look out for a job with more prospects and when the opportunity arose he did not hesitate to move his family to Hayle, a place where all things were possible for a man of energy and vision.

CHAPTER 2 MOVING TO HAYLE

The town of Hayle had doubled in size over the previous twenty years, with a population that was approaching 4,000, two thirds that of the nearby cathedral city of



Truro. Harvey's foundry, shipbuilding business, and ropewalk employed nearly 800 men while several hundred more were employed by the Cornish Copper Company. The two businesses were long-standing competitors, who had disputed territory and access rights for years, more than once mustering mobs of

labourers on the river bank to shout insults and brandish shovels and other improvised weapons at each other. Although they never actually came to blows, there was bad blood between the two sides that persisted long after a legal settlement was reached. Granite boundary stones marked with H on one side and CCC on the other still demarcate territory belonging to the two companies, a reminder of a bitter rivalry that gave the town a lawless edge. Cornwall was in many ways still the wild west.

The first full census (of 1841) tells me that most of the inhabitants of Hayle were natives of the county. They were miners, mariners, carpenters, and masons. Others were employed in the new trades of iron founder, boiler maker, mechanic, and engineer. There were large numbers of apprentices; an apprenticeship at one of the foundries was much sought after. Shipwrights worked in the shipyard, sawyers in the timber mill that supplied the yard, ropemakers in the rope works that produced the rigging. The western end of the town, home to Harvey's works, was known as Foundry, while the eastern side, where the Cornish Copper Company had their business, was called Copperhouse. This was the commercial centre, where tailors and shoemakers lived, alongside numerous dressmakers and milliners, as well as a staymaker, a hatter, and a Jewish watchmaker born 'in foreign parts'. It was still a time, I realise, when most people had a job that involved making something, on a

relatively small scale and using specialist skills. The men employed in the engineering works never spoke of their factory; it was a workshop and like the blacksmiths of an earlier age, they were artisans.

The sailing ships that tied up at the curious scalloped quay, two-masted brigs and schooners and single-masted sloops, brought Welsh coal for the foundries, timber from New Brunswick and Norway for the shipyard, and hemp, tar, and linseed oil for the ropewalk. On their return voyages they carried copper ore for smelting in Wales, and iron goods of every description: massive boilers to power steamships and small portable engines to drain the silver mines of Peru, shovels for the navvies at work on the new railway lines, new-fangled kitchen ranges, and weights for sash windows. Other vessels brought sacks of salt to preserve the slippery silver shoals of pilchards that were landed in Newlyn and St Ives, and then carried the fish to the Mediterranean to feed the insatiable demand in Naples and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The Hayle fleet traded across the Atlantic to North and South America, often staying away for years, picking up cargo where they could and delivering it to whatever destination the charterer required. The captains kept up a regular correspondence with their owner, Mr Henry Harvey, who was also the proprietor of the shipyard and one of the foundries.

Harvey had inherited his business from his father John, a blacksmith who, at the end of the previous century, had turned himself into an iron founder and mine merchant, manufacturing the pipes, pumps, and engine parts needed by the nearby copper mines, and shipping in supplies of coal, timber, ropes, and other necessities from Bristol and South Wales. Two images survive of Henry Harvey's portly figure seen in profile. In one he is dressed for riding in long pantaloons, a high-fronted coat with cut away tails, and dandified boots with pointed toes. He is bareheaded and carries a riding crop. In the other he is clad in the tailcoat, knee breeches, white stockings and low black shoes reserved for evening wear. A natty stovepipe hat is perched on his full head of hair. His Humpty Dumpty silhouette gives the impression of a jovial Dickensian character; he should really, I feel, have been called something more rotund – Pumblechook, perhaps. But it would not do to under-estimate him.

In 1833 Hayle had been designated an official stannary town; a coinage hall was established on Harvey premises and Harveys made the weights needed to check the tin and copper ingots that were brought for assaying, stamping, and the payment of

duty to the Duchy of Cornwall.¹ In the face of ferocious opposition from the Cornish Copper Company, Henry Harvey had constructed a new wharf along the Penpol river and now he acquired land to create a sluicing pool. In December 1834 the 37-acre Carnsew pool was inaugurated, releasing a great wave that scoured the accumulated silt from the shipping lanes and quay. The event was celebrated with a dinner at the White Hart, where Harvey's sister, the widow of the great engineer Richard Trevithick, presided as hostess.² By 1835 Henry Harvey could describe himself as 'a Merchant, Founder, Shipbuilder, Grocer, Draper, Ironmonger, Miller and Baker'. Around his foundry clustered other enterprises. He built a smelter to smelt tin from the great Wheal Vor mine, and a lime kiln. He had stables for more than 50 heavy horses that were used to transport machinery from the foundry to the mines and docks. His workers were paid in Harvey's shillings, which they spent in Harvey's emporium on everything from groceries to chamberpots.

A few years earlier, in 1831, a consortium led by Henry Harvey had been formed to establish a regular passenger service between Hayle and Bristol. Captain John Vivian was sent to Glasgow to commission a wooden paddle steamer to replace the unreliable sailing vessels in use on the route. As a young naval officer in 1803, Vivian had steered Richard Trevithick's road engine down Tottenham Court Road at the heady speed of eight miles an hour, and like Trevithick he was a giant of a man, well over six feet tall. He later made his name as captain of the Falmouth packet *Little Catherine*, which was captured by the French in 1813. Held captive on board a frigate manned by elderly veterans, he was set free on parole in order to assist the captain during a gale. His honourable behaviour was recognised when the French captured another English vessel and handed it over to their prisoner so that he could return safely to Falmouth with his crew. This was the man who was entrusted with command of the new steam packet, the *Herald*.

The newspaper article that accompanied the first advertisement for the service was effusive in its praise:

¹ The corner or 'coign' cut off for this operation is said to be the origin of the word 'coin'.

² When Trevithick disappeared to the silver mines of Peru leaving his wife to fend for herself, Henry Harvey built the hotel to provide a living for his sister and her six children – something that was necessary even after Jane's errant husband returned home with, so legend has it, no more than the clothes he stood up in, a gold watch, a compass, and a pair of silver spurs.

Royal Cornwall Gazette 1st October 1831

The new steam-packet “Herald,” recently built at Greenock for the Hayle, St Ives and Bristol Steam Navigation Company, has taken her station. She performed the voyage from Greenock to Bristol, against a strong head wind, in admirable style; already she is spoken of as a first-rate steam-packet, for strength, beauty & rapidity.

The *Herald* needed a ship’s steward, a position that was one of many new roles created by the age of steam. Even by 1841 there were still only about a hundred of them listed in the entire census, compared with 100,000 tailors and nearly as many blacksmiths. It offered a man of entrepreneurial spirit ample opportunity for profit: the steward was responsible for providing food and drink on board, buying and selling his own supplies in addition to pocketing a share of each passenger’s fare as his fee. Sharrock Dupen had proved he could manage a business as well as a set of sails and Captain Vivian offered him the job of steward of the *Herald*. They sealed the bargain over a tankard of ale at the Royal Standard in Hayle. That, at least, is how I interpret the available evidence – which does not include the beer.

From the birth records of his children I deduce that Sharrock moved his family to Hayle in 1835 or 1836, hoping perhaps to emulate the success of Henry Harvey. I suspect that his wife was not best pleased, but I can only imagine the feelings of a yeoman farmer’s daughter at being uprooted to the dirt and clamour of a rough, industrial port. The family most probably came from Camborne, where Kate and young Sharrock were christened, but I decided that if I was going to recreate this critical moment in the family’s history I would bring them from Penzance, on a bright spring day, along a route that takes Johanna and my readers through the whole town. Her reaction is invented but the sights, sounds, and smells of Hayle are as close as I can get to the reality of the past.

Hayle, March 1835

The big wooden cart rumbles and creaks its way along the rutted, muddy track. Johanna sits uncomfortably wedged amidst the jumble of boxes and baskets, gazing over the hedgerows dusted with creamy white blossom and yellow primroses, to where a few chestnut-coloured cattle are grazing in the fields. She cradles her new baby son on her lap, while her daughters Annie and Kate perch beside her, eyes wide with anxiety, their short legs sticking straight out in front of them. Her husband walks beside the cart with his other two girls, Johanna’s stepdaughters Hannah and

Lizzie. Leaving behind the market gardens of Penzance, green with the promise of an early vegetable crop, they pass into open countryside. Away in the distance the stone chimneys of the tin and copper mines puff out their black smoke. Wheal Neptune, Wheal Friendship, Wheal Providence, and Great Wheal Alfred: the names are the stuff of myth. Johanna recalls as a child hearing tales of the immense wealth buried beneath the tall granite towers. She used to imagine there were captive dragons to guard this treasure, pumping water from the shafts and straining to lift the heavy buckets of ore to the surface, filling the air with their hot, steaming breath. She knows better now, of course, but still she feels that there is something monstrous about the great iron engines.

Johanna looks down at the two older girls and wonders how much they remember of the first time they were uprooted. Hannah was six and Lizzie just three years old when their father closed the door of the cottage in St Just for the last time and they left the village where their mother and sister were buried. In the churchyard they also left behind their brother William. Does Lizzie have any memory of her twin? From time to time she gets a blank, far-away look in her eyes, as if she is gazing at something no one else can see. She is doing it now. When Johanna married their father, she knew she would be assuming a heavy responsibility, but she was eager to escape a life spent at the beck and call of her older brothers and sisters. And Sharrock talked with such anguish of the loss of his wife, of his desperate attempts to save the tiny, mewling baby Sarah, and his sorrow when she gave up her fight for life. He was worried that his older daughters, sad and quiet, were growing pale and weak. They needed a mother. Johanna prayed for guidance. In the end the message was clear: it was her Christian duty to accept Sharrock's proposal. He said he would give up the sea and start a business in Penzance, so much more respectable than the rough villages around Falmouth. But now they are moving to Hayle. They have left behind the comforting sweetness of their shop, where sugar sticks and nut-filled comfits sat on the counter alongside the glass jars of lemon drops and herbal lozenges – elderflower for the stomach, soporific poppy to sooth a cough. Johanna's future and that of her children lies in a harsher place, one built on the power of steam.

Late in the afternoon they reach the north coast and smell the ocean again. On the left the river estuary stretches away towards the open sea. Flocks of gulls swoop noisily over the shallow pools and small waders potter on the sands, industriously dipping their beaks in search of worms. A harmless, even a pleasing sight. But Johanna knows how often an unwary horse and rider has foundered here. Before the raised causeway and bridge were built, travellers who wanted to avoid the long

journey round by St Erth had to take a ferry boat across to the Royal Standard inn at high tide or risk the long ride across the sands. If a horse carried too much weight, it would sink and stick fast; a rider who mistimed his passage was lost. John Wesley himself, it was said, had by the grace of God narrowly escaped the incoming tide. But today the carthorses trudge steadily over the causeway, safely out of reach of the water, until they reach the outskirts of the town.

From the right comes the clattering and hammering of Harvey's foundry and engine workshops – loud enough, thinks Johanna, to deafen the men who labour there. Her husband has explained that it is where they build the high-pressure pumping engines, the fiery monsters of her childhood dreams. Cornwall is still the biggest copper producer in the world. The acrid chemical fumes from the chimneys and the tin smelter smother the fresh salt breeze from the bay and catch at Johanna's lungs, making her wheeze and cough. She covers her baby son with her shawl and looks accusingly at Sharrock. She remembers the bitter argument of a few weeks before.

'Do you want your children to grow up breathing soot and all kinds of filth?' she asked.

'It's the future,' he told her. 'A bit of smoke is a small price to pay for everything steam can do. Just you wait and see. In a few years paddle ships will have completely taken over from the old sailing vessels.'

'But you'll be leaving me alone for half the week.'

'I wouldn't do it if I didn't trust you to manage,' he said. 'You're quicker at totting up the bills than I am.'

He thinks he can flatter me into agreement, she thought. It was true that she liked the feeling of being in charge of her own household but she wasn't ready to concede defeat just yet.

'That's all well and good, but the children need a father's guiding hand.'

'They need new shoes as well. Think of the extra money I can earn. And it's not as if I'll be away for months at a time. My own mother had to cope with much longer absences when my father was off to Lisbon or Cork.'

His sainted mother, of course, as if that was a clinching argument. She could tell from his sheepish expression that he recognised his mistake. But he said no more to persuade her.

'I've made up my mind and that's that,' he declared firmly.

Johanna sometimes she wonders if her marriage was a mistake. She had always dreamed of becoming a farmer's wife, with her own chickens and a clean, scrubbed dairy. But then she remembers the odd feeling in the pit of her stomach when she

first met Sharrock. He was different from any other man she knew, not tall, not handsome, but there was something that drew her eyes to him. He didn't boast or swagger but smiled with an air of quiet confidence that convinced her to trust him. That smile can still make her feel like a girl again, even now she is a respectable wife and mother. And truth be told, she is quite looking forward to being her own mistress in his absence.

He is speaking now. She cranes to hear what he is telling the girls.

'Look at the quay,' he says, pointing at the rows of ships, tight-packed along the scalloped edge, their bows pointing outwards. 'Never in all my seafaring days have I seen another such design, not in Cork or La Coruña, Lisbon or Gijon.'

Johanna can hear the eagerness in his voice when he names the foreign ports he has sailed to. How could she ever have imagined he would be content to live a small-town shopkeeper's life, with its petty rivalries and the gossip that accompanies every purchase? She watches as he waves an enthusiastic arm towards the steam packet *Herald*, tied up at the end of the wharf, the reason why he has insisted on moving his wife and children to this brash, smoky port.

The slow-moving cart trundles on over the granite setts of Penpol Terrace, where high on a bank Johanna sees a row of smart new houses, some double-fronted, some not, sitting back from the road behind their strips of garden. They are not big, but nor are they cramped labourers' cottages. They are surely intended for the families of skilled artisans and professional men. From the front windows, thinks Johanna, there must be fine views over the estuary. The residents will be able to see everything that happens on the quayside, which ships are in port and what they are loading and unloading.

'This,' her husband calls up to her, 'is where we will rent a house, next door to Captain Vivian himself, when we have saved some money.'

He walks on at a steady pace while Johanna frets to herself. What if the *Herald* fails to attract enough passengers? The steam packet business is still very new and not always safe; there have been some terrible accidents. They have seven mouths to feed now.

They round the corner by the Royal Standard, passing the iron swing bridge that closes off the Copperhouse Pool. Johanna sees with dismay that the dozens of new houses being built here have turned the ground into an expanse of rust-coloured mud. But then the open land gives way to the respectable shop fronts of Fore Street and she is reassured to see everything here that the family might need: a butcher, a grocer and even a draper. In the distance, across the reed beds of the tidal pool,

she catches sight of the stone tower of Phillack parish church. That reminds her and she calls down to her husband:

‘Where is the famous brass chapel? The one Mr Wesley praised? Do you remember what the minister told us? That he declared nothing could destroy it, till heaven and earth pass away.’

‘I believe Mr Wesley was mistaken,’ says Sharrock. ‘It has been replaced with a larger building now, more fit for the size of the congregation. You will see how many people attend on Sunday.’

Johanna finds it hard to believe that Mr Wesley could ever have been in error about anything but this is not the moment to start another argument.

The smell in the air now is of roasting malt from the brewery. Barrels are stacked by the road and hammering sounds come from inside the cooperage. Sharrock signals to the carter to turn right by Hooper’s inn. They have made good time and will reach their destination before sunset, which is just as well. Although Harveys manufactures the iron lamp standards and retorts needed for street lighting in other towns, Hayle has as yet no gas light.

Johanna knows that her husband has chosen one of the double-fronted residences on the south side of Bodriggy. They are considered more desirable because they are set on high ground away from the noise and fumes of the foundry, but the streets still have a rough, unfinished air.

‘Why is our house that strange rusty colour?’ asks Lizzie as they stand hesitantly outside their new front door.

‘It’s the copper,’ says her father. ‘They make bricks from the waste after they’ve smelted the ore. A lot of the houses round here are like that. You’ll get used to it.’

Johanna tilts her chin and sniffs in disapproval. As Sharrock helps her down from the cart she can see him watching her with an anxious eye. He knows she will soon let him know if the house is not to her liking. He opens the door and the girls run in to inspect their new home. Downstairs is a front parlour, a large kitchen and behind that a scullery.

‘See the kitchener,’ Sharrock says to his wife, pointing at the cooking range. ‘And there’s a water pipe on the corner of the street.’

‘I should hope so too,’ snorts Johanna. ‘We don’t want to live like savages.’

But she is pleased about the range; many housewives still have to cook on an open fire. The girls have opened the back door and rushed into the garden. It is long, and backs onto open fields.

‘Come and see,’ Sharrock coaxes, and Johanna follows him outside, clutching her small son firmly to her.

'Plenty of space to grow vegetables,' he says. 'And we can plant a few fruit trees. There's a good drying breeze for the laundry up here too. We're upwind of the foundry most days.'

'Well it's better than I thought,' Johanna admits. 'But I'll need help. You're going to be away for days at a time and I can't do everything. Now let's get a fire going and unpack the kettle.'

CHAPTER 3 DOING BUSINESS IN BRISTOL

Sharrock Dupen was never going to be content with what he could earn from his steward's fees. He was on the look out for other business opportunities and soon found one that was to live on into the next century as a family legend. The past acquires the fuzziness of half-remembered myth within a surprisingly short space of time. Parents and grandparents tell us bedtime stories that begin 'When I was a child', but as adults we come to believe that these half-remembered anecdotes have no more reality than the fairy tales that started 'Once upon a time'. Just occasionally we are able to disentangle the recorded facts from the Chinese whispers of memory.

This particular example begins prosaically with a vegetable. Broccoli, introduced from Italy in the early years of the eighteenth century, is acknowledged to be a puzzle: while greengrocers and their customers can easily distinguish it from cauliflower, botanists apparently cannot. But I was interested in it for a completely different reason. It was one lunchtime in the 1960s when I first heard the story. My little brother, a fussy eater, was complaining about the vegetables.

'I don't like broccoli,' he declared, pushing it to the side of his plate.

'Well, you'd better learn to like it,' our father told him with a grin. 'Your French ancestors introduced it to England, you know.'

My brother was unimpressed and the broccoli remained uneaten but I was intrigued. It was the French ancestors that excited my teenage imagination. This could explain my obscure sense that I did not belong in suburban Hertfordshire but in some more cosmopolitan setting – a belief I had started to nurture by listening to the songs of Charles Aznavour, reading *Astérix* in the original French, and crossing my sevens in the Continental way. I wanted to know more but there was apparently, in those pre-internet days, no more. And although my father was fond of his broccoli anecdote, the grin betrayed his scepticism.

His own father had been equally disbelieving. It is easy to imagine a similar scene from the 1920s, where my father is viewing the same vegetable with suspicion.

'Eat it up,' says my grandfather Harold with a sidelong glance at his wife. 'Your great-grandfather Dupen brought it from France in his ship. The English had never seen it before. It made him famous.'

Thirty years previously, in the 1890s, Harold and his sister Lulu had also no doubt raised their voices in protest.

‘Do we have to eat the broccoli, mama?’

‘Of course you do,’ said Hester Dupen. ‘Your grandfather Sharrock introduced it to England, you know. It made his fortune.’

My great-grandmother Hester was telling a version of the truth but her son, a scientifically minded boy, suspected it was simply a trick designed to encourage him to eat his greens. As an adult he wrote to the editor of the *Morning Post* to say so:

Mr Dupen’s Grandchild on a Family “Fairy Story”

Sir – With regard to your announcement about the Cornish Broccoli industry in Saturday’s issue of the “Morning Post”, as children we were often told that our grandfather – the Mr Dupen mentioned – first grew Broccoli in England, but I’m afraid we rather regarded this as some subtle kind of fairy story to encourage our appetite for the vegetable! From the announcement it would appear that he really was interested in the broccoli plant, but are there any records to show that he did actually introduce the plant into England, and if so, from where?

H. H. Baxter Aboyne, Sandhurst Road, Wokingham.

I have no idea if my grandfather received a reply to his enquiry but the online archive of nineteenth-century newspapers now allows me to search for the origins of the story. A commemorative article in the *Bristol Mercury* of 19 March 1859 tells me that my great-great-grandfather was not the first to grow the plant but the first to transport it from Hayle to Bristol in the 1830s. An initial shipment of four dozen became fourteen dozen the following week and eventually hundreds of heads were being sold in both Bristol and Bath. Sharrock Dupen had a virtual monopoly of the local trade until the growers themselves cut him out. By the time the article was published, the steamer from Hayle was transporting 860 baskets containing fifteen to eighteen dozen heads of broccoli each, destined not just for Bristol but onwards by rail for London, where they would compete with similar shipments from Guernsey.

It was a story that appealed to the imagination of others outside the family. In 1933 the *Cornishman* carried a report of the annual dinner of the Bristol and District Cornishmen, where the Lord Mayor attributed the prosperity of Cornwall to its vegetable trade. In this version, Sharrock Dupen became a sea captain who transformed the economy of his native county:

The Cornishman and Cornish Telegraph 19th January 1933

CORNISH "EXILES" IN BRISTOL

In 1837 frost destroyed the cabbage crop in the Bristol district. An old Cornish captain came to Bristol and asked for some greens with his dinner at an hotel. None was forthcoming, and that gave him a "brain wave".

"I am not surprised" said his Lordship, "as Cornishmen are alert to passing possibilities. This man went back to Cornwall and the next time he sailed to Bristol he brought fifteen dozen broccoli and sold them at 1s each. Next time he brought sixteen dozen and sold them.

He went back to Cornwall and said, 'You grow broccoli and I will sell them.' That idea of Capt. Dupen and the gullibility of the citizens of Bristol brought about prosperity in Cornwall."

The mayor's picturesque ancient mariner may have been an invention but the economic impact of the trade was a matter of fact, described in the *Cornishman* in December 1936, in another anniversary article that conjured up a vision of a fresh green landscape replacing the rusty slag heaps of the past:

The Cornishman and Cornish Telegraph 24th December 1936

CORNWALL'S GROWING INDUSTRY

Many of the older inhabitants of the towns and villages of Cornwall will clearly remember the days, less than fifty years ago, when the livelihood and prosperity of the county of Cornwall, and particularly the "western district", was dependent upon the production of tin and copper. The younger generation know of this but cannot recall the days when mining was the chief industry – they can remember seeing only field upon field of broccoli. The unused mines are there to bear witness to the other days, but today the scene has changed and practically on top of many of the now disused tin and copper mines are fields of broccoli.

As another article put it, 'The miner has become the broccoli grower' – a fate that seems preferable to that of the northern coalminers fifty years later.

Newspaper coverage continued, although some confusion grew up about the date of the centenary. The *Western Morning News* fixed on 1937, recording that in the last season the dozen or so special express trains dedicated to the trade transported 30,000 tons, more than double the quantity carried in 1928, with more than 580 wagons making the journey to London every night. Six years later, at the height of the war in March 1943, the same newspaper informed its readers that 3,000 acres were under cultivation – making, I assume, an important contribution to feeding the population.

The unlikely tale that I heard as a child turns out to have its origins in fact, although much to my disappointment Sharrock Dupen was not French, and he only introduced broccoli to England if you consider Cornwall in those days to be a different country. In some ways of course it was. The map of England shows the county as nearly an island: surrounded by sea on three sides, the river Tamar divides it from Devon to the east. In the early nineteenth century, according to one historian, there were Cornish people 'who would tell you they had *never been to England*'. There was limited road traffic between Cornwall and the rest of the country until Brunel's bridge over the Tamar opened in 1859, but you could travel by water: from Falmouth along the south coast to London, and from Hayle on the north coast to Devon, South Wales, and Bristol.

Bristol, where Sharrock Dupen spent time every week, had been England's second city until it was overtaken by the new manufacturing towns of the north. Much of its wealth derived from the deceptively neat triangular trade that exported manufactured goods to Africa, shipped cargoes of slaves to the plantations of the Americas, and imported sugar grown by slave labour in the West Indies back to Bristol. The fine Georgian houses in tranquil Queens Square had been built on the profits from this traffic in human misery. After years of fierce campaigning, in 1807 the slave trade (if not the use of slaves) formally ended, but Bristol remained a commercial hub for goods from across the world. It had never been the easiest of harbours to access. The expression 'all shipshape and Bristol fashion' originated in the days when any ship making its way up the Avon needed to have all its contents well-secured; if it was caught in the river when the tide went out it would ground and tip over on the muddy bed, sending everything that was not fixed in place crashing to one side. But in 1809 the Floating Harbour was opened, bypassing the river and its notorious tides of 70 feet or more. The entrance to the new Cumberland Basin was safely protected by a sturdy set of lock gates and once ships passed through, the water level never changed by more than six inches. The port continued to thrive throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, despite increasing competition from Liverpool and Southampton, which had direct access to the open sea.

'Footstepping' is what biographers call the process of following the trail of their subjects to the places where they lived and worked. Family historians do the same for their ancestors, walking the streets of distant towns, mentally demolishing buildings, trying to visualise a bygone world. But to see through the eyes of an

earlier generation we sometimes need to do more, to make a disorienting shift in perspective from land to sea. In this redrawn map of the early nineteenth century, London is no longer the central point for a starburst of radiating road and rail lines. Instead, shipping routes spin out from western ports like spider's silk thrown across the oceans, while a fine web connects Bristol, Cardiff, Dublin, and Liverpool, servicing the new manufacturing centres with coal and raw materials, and transporting consumer goods to market. The Irish steamers brought oats, potatoes, salmon, and fragile Waterford glass to Bristol, along with squealing pigs, bales of linen, and barrels of Guinness. But it was a young man's game; none of the old merchant ship owners were prepared to invest in the new steam packets. It was too much of a gamble for them. The ships were owned by partnerships of multiple shareholders, who pocketed the dividend if the year ended in profit but were personally liable for any losses. In moving to Hayle my great-great-grandfather was abandoning his allegiance to the old trade routes out of Falmouth to make his way in this brave new world.

When Sharrock Dupen first started work on the Hayle to Bristol service, travel by steamship was an uncertain and risky experience. Thirty years after the launch of the first commercial steam-powered vessel in 1802, there were some 500 paddle steamers conveying goods and passengers on short journeys around the coast of Britain or up and down its major rivers. Although most journeys passed without incident, accidents could happen and when they did, they were often dramatic. Sharrock may well have read an account of one such disaster. The boiler of the *Union* steamship, which plied the route from Gainsborough along the River Trent to the Humber estuary, exploded just before the vessel left Hull, blowing half the 150 passengers into the air. The death toll was estimated to be at least sixteen, with many others suffering broken limbs, gashed heads and ripped clothing. The passengers in the cabin, mostly ladies, were drowned before they could escape:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 16th June 1837

Many persons were blown on shore. One young man was blown on the roof of premises, three stories high. Several persons mounted to his assistance, but he was quite dead. Another man was blown on board the steamer *Albatross*, and literally smashed to pieces.

Space in the four-page newspaper was always at a premium and the editor decided that there was no need to include the names of all the victims since they would hardly be of interest to his readers. More lives not only lost, but lost to history.

But despite the risks, Sharrock was no doubt grateful for steady employment. For most of the country, 1837 saw the start of a depression that lasted until 1844 and led to the death from starvation of an estimated one million British people. In the year when *Oliver Twist* was first serialised, reports from the factory cities of the north and midlands told of depressed trade, scarcity of employment and low wages. The desperate economic situation was given a human face in the story of a labourer from Smethwick who, at his wits' end after losing his job, stabbed his two young sons and then hanged himself. The children had been crying for bread.

Sharrock Dupen was not going to let his children starve. The *Bristol Mercury* carried regular advertisements for the *Herald* and from these I picked a likely date of 18 April 1837 for the launch of his new business.

COMMUNICATION

BETWEEN BRISTOL & CORNWALL.

THE Public attention is respectfully called to the facility and economy with which the Land's-End, the Mining Districts, and the most picturesque parts of the County of Cornwall, may be visited; and also to the certain and early Conveyance of Goods, from every part of the United Kingdom, to ST. IVES, HAYLE, CAMBORNE, PENZANCE, MARAZION, HELSTON, PENRYN, FALMOUTH, TRURO, RED-RUTH, also calling at ILFRACOMBE going and returning.



That Fast Sailing Steam-Packet,
HERALD,
With Engines of 100-Horse power,
JOHN VIVIAN, Commander.
A Stewardess on Board.

WILL SAIL

From Cumberland Basin, Bristol:
FRIDAY, ... April 21 ... 6½ morning.

From Hayle and St. Ives.
TUESDAY, ... April 18, ... 2½ afternoon.

Cabin Passage, including Steward's Fees, £1. 5s.; Deck ditto 10s. 6d.; Children under 12 Years of Age, Half-price. Large 4-wheel Carriages, £8. 3s.; small and 2-wheel ditto, £1. 15s.; Horses, £1. 10s.; Dogs, 6s.

Horses, Carriages, Luggage, and General Merchandize, carefully conveyed.

Refreshments of the best description may be had on Board.

Further Information may be obtained of Messrs. T. and W. BOLITHO, Merchants, 26, Lime-Street; Mr. JOHN ROGERS, Commercial Agent, 84, Lombard-Street; Messrs. LLEWELLYN, TRUMAN, & Co., 83, Wood-Street; the QUEEN'S ARMS TAVERN, Cheap-side; SWINBORNE'S LODGING HOUSE, Falcon-Square, Falcon-Street; GEORGE INN, Aldermanbury, London; Mr. W. HICK, China Warehouse, Bath; Mr. J. PEARCE, Fortescue Hotel, Barnstaple; Capt. Amos FRY, Packet Hotel, Ilfracombe; and at the

STEAM-PACKET OFFICE, 60, QUAY, BRISTOL.
Mr. JOHN HARVEY, Agent.

No claim for loss or damage allowed, unless made within 3 days.

I also had a much later newspaper article that I was longing to use. It was written in 1856 by a commercial traveller who weathered a terrifying storm on the same route under the stewardship of ‘portly, rubicund and courteous Dupen’, in company with a ‘falling to pieces young man’, a brave, sunburned missionary, and a child-like Frenchwoman with her sickly-looking husband (referred to as ‘*mon cher Edouard*’). But I could find no way to improve on the drama of the original, which concludes with the passengers falling to their knees on the rain-soaked deck as the clergyman heroically declaims a psalm. So I abandoned the French couple and the missionary, and allowed just a few elements of the real-life scene to inform a fictional portrait of my great-great-grandfather at a turning point in his career.

Hayle to Bristol, April 1837

The wind is whistling in the rigging as Captain Vivian casts an assessing glance towards the west, where dark clouds are rolling in over the bay. It is 2.30 on Tuesday afternoon and the *Herald* will be leaving Hayle with the tide. Sharrock Dupen reassures the doting mother of young gentleman entrusted to his care, who is returning to Rugby school,

‘Have no fear, we shall have a voyage as calm as a sail in a duck pond.’

The lad looks somewhat disappointed.

An older man totters on board asking everyone around him if there is going to be a gale. He confides that he has never been to sea before.

‘I won’t go if there’s to be a storm,’ he declares.

‘One of those,’ thinks Sharrock, smiling courteously as he escorts his passengers down to the saloon. Their fare includes the services of the steward, but he sometimes wonders if it is sufficient to compensate him for the aggravation.

‘Even if we have a bit of a blow there’s nothing to fret about sir. We do this run every week come rain or shine. The *Herald* is a good, modern vessel and Captain Vivian one of the best.’

The crew hurry to finish stowing the cargo and passengers’ luggage in the hold, swing the winches away, and swiftly cast off the ropes mooring the ship to the quay. A shout of ‘Go ahead’ to the engineer rings out. The paddles start turning and the *Herald* steams slowly past the wharves and into the channel marked by buoys that will take her safely over the sandy bar and into the bay.

In the saloon, the nervous gentleman who has never been to sea before is dozing on a sofa until the movement of a great wave jerks him awake. He cries out, ‘Oh no! Steward! Help me! Help me!’

Sharrock is there at his elbow, calmly assisting him to settle himself once more.

'Let me fetch you a tot of brandy, sir. We'll soon be past the worst.'

'How much longer will this continue?' groans the traveller.

'Not too long, sir. It'll be smooth sailing once we're past Hartland Point. Would you like a rug, perhaps, to make you more comfortable?'

Sharrock does not explain that the treacherous, rocky shore of the point is still some hours away. It is going to be a long night. He thinks back to his early seafaring days and wonders how some of these people would have managed in the Bay of Biscay. But his expression remains imperturbable as he hands out refreshments and reassurance.

At midday on Wednesday, 150 nautical miles later, they are approaching their destination. They have made good time, hugging the coast of Cornwall and north Devon, turning east after Ilfracombe into the wide estuary of the river Severn, and finally making the tight right-hand turn into the mouth of the Avon. The little paddle steamer, her single funnel puffing out acrid smoke, churns her way up the winding river towards the port of Bristol. A chill spring breeze ruffles the muddy brown waters. They are passing through the wooded gorge where Mr Brunel's suspension bridge is to be built; the foundation stone was finally laid last year but there is as yet nothing more to be seen.

Standing amidst the clutter of baskets and bundles belonging to the deck passengers, the young schoolboy grins cheerfully.

'That was something like, wasn't it steward?'

'I'm glad you enjoyed it, young sir,' replies Sharrock. 'But I'm not sure all your fellow travellers would agree.'

Indeed, the cabin passengers in his charge did not stop complaining all night. Made queasy by the smell from the hold, where the cargo of fish was being slowly kippered by the heat from the engines, they slept little, continuing to be anxious and fretful. The steward will be relieved to see the back of them. His mind is on other things. He has invested money he can ill afford in a new venture. His friends have mocked him, but the boxes stacked in the hold will, if all goes well, enable him to supplement his income and help provide for his growing family.

Sharrock Dupen helps his charges gather their belongings and prepare to disembark as Captain Vivian brings the *Herald* carefully into the lock. It is a long wait while the men slowly wind the heavy paddles that open the sluices to bring the ship up to the level of the inner harbour. To the left the basin is lined with small shops and public houses while on the right stand the open-sided wood-drying sheds of the Canada wharf. If the passengers care to look up beyond the trees on Clifton

Hill, they can admire the fine white curve of Royal York Crescent where the wealthy merchants of Bristol have their houses, well away from the stench of the docks. Finally the ship draws up to the quayside. The crew make her fast with ropes, the ramp is lowered, and the steward holds out a steadying hand as the passengers make their way cautiously onto the muddy bank, the ladies in bonnets and warm shawls holding up their skirts to avoid the puddles, the gentlemen keeping a wary eye on the ragged boys who flock to carry bags and valises in the hope of earning a penny.

The crew will spend Thursday in Bristol and leave again for Hayle with the early morning tide on Friday. They start unloading the cargo of tin plate, rolls of copper, and iron bars from Harvey's foundry. There are boxes of shovels too, bound for the navvies at work on the new railway track that will link Bristol to London. On the return journey the *Herald* will carry supplies for the shopkeepers of Hayle: chests of coffee and kegs of lard; firkins of butter and boxes of soap; needles, buttons, candles, bales of feathers, and sacks of beans. It is too early for summer visitors in search of the salubrious air and picturesque scenery of St Ives, but there will doubtless be one or two mining engineers or businessmen on their way home.

Sharrock steps back onto the ship to collect his own cargo. He inspects his boxes nervously; a lot depends on the freshness of the contents. He beckons to a lad with a handcart to come and help him and they set off for the St Nicholas market. Their route takes them past open pastureland to the wharves where dozens of sailing vessels are moored. A faint aroma of treacly molasses pierces the thick sewage stench of the river, underlaid with the resinous scent of Baltic timber, and the occasional sharp topnote from the oranges and lemons that are carried from Marsala along with barrels of sweet Sicilian wine. There are emigrant ships too, big copper-bottomed brigs taking on passengers for New York and Quebec, shabby men with an air of determined cheer, anxious-looking women hugging their children to their sides. Sharrock wonders if he would ever uproot his family and cross the ocean in order to save them from penury. He is determined that he will never have to face that choice.

He quickens his pace. There is no time to stop at the shipbuilding yard where Mr Brunel's *Great Western* is taking shape, its galley fitted out by Harveys of Hayle with the most up-to-date iron cooking range. Like the *Herald* she is a wooden hulled paddle steamer but she is big, some 235 feet long, and broad too. She is going to prove that it is possible for a steamship to cross the Atlantic without running out of fuel. If Sharrock were ten years younger, before Johanna and the children, he might have been tempted to sign on for that voyage. But he has other business in mind.

He crosses the wide, green space of Queens Square, where ladies stroll and children bowl their hoops under the watchful eye of their nursemaids. It is a peaceful scene but the building work on the north side is a reminder of a time six years earlier when the elegant Georgian terrace was reduced to rubble during the Reform Bill riots. Sharrock has no time for politics; he would rather have hard cash than a vote. Votes don't feed a family. Beyond the square he comes to the Welsh Back where the ships from Swansea and Cardiff dock with their cargoes of coal. He turns the corner into the High Street and finds himself in front of the stone pillars of the covered market. Picking up one of his boxes, he signals to the boy to follow with the others and goes inside. Under the high glass roof with its brightly painted plaster decoration, the meagre offerings of potatoes, turnips and cabbage look unappetising. A late frost has spoiled the early vegetable crop in Gloucestershire and Sharrock Dupen is hoping to fill the gap with fresh Cornish produce. The local housewives will pay good money for his four dozen heads of bright green broccoli.

CENSUS 1841

The first complete census of the population of England and Wales was taken in 1841. It was an exercise that was to be repeated every ten years, offering family historians a regular snapshot of their ancestors, briefly fixed in time and space. Now that it is searchable online you don't even need to leave your own home to summon up the records that tell you who made up the household on that one night in March: the family members, lodgers, servants, and assorted hangers on. By examining the surrounding entries you can also start to build up a picture of the neighbourhood. Sharrock and Johanna Dupen are living in the Bodriggy area of Hayle. There is no street address but I imagine they are renting one of the 200 new dwellings constructed by the Cornish Copper Company in the early years of the century, on land that ran from the old manor house down to the waterfront. Sharrock's occupation is given as 'Steward of Herald', the use of the vessel's name an indication of its importance to the town. The presence of two female servants aged 15 and 55 tells me that the family is doing well. Their neighbours are miners, engineers, sawyers, and blacksmiths, members of the skilled upper-working and lower-middle class.

There are new additions to the family. Salome Emma was the first baby to be born in Hayle, in 1836. Little more than nine months later, Rhoda Louise was born, lived for two short months, and died two days after Christmas 1837. She lies in the churchyard of St Felicitas, high on the hill across the bay, but no headstone marks the place. Baby Rhoda had disappeared so completely from my jigsaw puzzle that for ten years or more I was not even aware of her as a missing piece, but I am pleased she can now take her place in the emerging picture. It is impossible to know how long and how deeply her family grieved for her. I don't even know if her death at Christmas was more painful than it would have been at any other time of year. We cannot project our emotions back into another time but it is false to imagine that the high rate of infant mortality meant parents were less attached to their children than we are. When another baby girl was born in 1840, she was given her dead sister's second name: Ellen Louise. Rhoda's burial details and some simple arithmetic help me to date the birth of Salome, who seems to have slipped through the net of all the online parish records. It is at times like this that a fascination with family history shades into an obsessive compulsion to find unimportant facts that will not change

the shape of the story. Although I don't need to know Salome's birthday it remains an uncomfortable gap that niggles like a missing tooth.

Johanna's oldest stepdaughter, Hannah, has left home by 1841, while sixteen-year-old Elizabeth is working as a draper's assistant, a job that required a good standard of literacy and numeracy to be able to measure lengths of ribbon and lace, count out buttons, and calculate change. The girls of the family are being educated to earn their own living. It is the beginning of a new age, one that, although the family did not know it, would come to be defined as Victorian.

In June 1837, shortly after Sharrock carried his first cargo of broccoli to Bristol, came news from the court in London. The king, who had been suffering from intermittent attacks of inflammation of the lungs accompanied by a teasing cough, had started to display more worrying symptoms that made his doctors advise him to 'abstain from conversation on topics of an exciting description'. His planned removal to Brighton was postponed and the health of his devoted Queen, who was spending each night in a chair in the ante-room, was also giving cause for concern. Two weeks later William IV, the jovial red-faced sailor king, was dead. The *Royal Cornwall Gazette* published the 'particulars relative to the illness and death of his late most gracious Majesty', gave a short outline of the king's life that tactfully ignored his early nickname of 'Silly Billy', and concluded with appreciative words for the 'promptness, courtesy and decision displayed by our late monarch'.

It was unsettling for William's subjects to realise that his successor was a half-foreign, eighteen-year-old girl. The next column, headed 'Accession of Queen Victoria', reprinted in full the 'gracious declaration' of the new queen, who made sure to emphasise that in spite of having a German mother and governess, she was British to the core: 'Educated in England, under the tender and enlightened care of a most affectionate mother, I have learned from my infancy to respect and love the constitution of my native country.' She presented a touching picture as, attired in deepest mourning, she appeared at a window in St James's Palace:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 30th June 1837

The spectacle at that moment was singularly beautiful and affecting. In the centre stood a female monarch of tender years suddenly summoned to assume the difficult and perilous office of earthly ruler and preserver of interests of a great nation – in this position stood a youthful Queen bathed in tears, and nearly overwhelmed by the circumstances of her station.

The young queen's new subjects would have been understandably anxious about what the future might hold. The Jacobite rebellion was after all still a living memory: in that same issue of the *Gazette* the death was reported at the age of 104 of a Chelsea Pensioner who had been a drummer boy at Culloden in 1745.

A year later, on 16 June 1838, the *Bristol Mercury* carried a full account of the arrangements being made for the coronation, together with a portrait of Victoria especially engraved for readers of the paper, who would have had no other way of knowing what she looked like. Immediately below her image was an advertisement for Brunel's *Great Western*, which had been successfully launched in March and was sailing every month between Bristol and New York for a fare of 40 guineas. ('Children and servants half price. No Second Class or Steerage passengers taken.')

On 28 June the young queen was crowned in London and in Hayle, Harvey's workers were treated to a celebratory feast where a whole ox was roasted on a spit at the foundry. The *Bristol Mercury* filled three columns with a description of the coronation procession and the illuminations. Public buildings, the gentlemen's clubs in St James, and private residences competed to display the brightest and most elaborate designs, which included crowns, laurel leaves and the initials V. R. This time one of the advertisements that appeared alongside the news was for the steamship *Herald*, reassuringly equipped 'with New and efficient Boilers, constructed on the safest and most approved principle'. National politics and steamship services were both of critical importance to the men who had access to newspapers. These were not only members of the professions and gentlemen, who could afford to buy their own copy, but also artisans and tradesmen with aspirations, who read them in coffee houses, taverns, and the public reading rooms that proliferated in every port, men like the steward of the *Herald*, Sharrock Dupen.

CHAPTER 4 A METHODIST INHERITANCE

By the summer of 1843, the world looked very different. The queen, married in 1840 to her gifted and intelligent cousin Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg Gotha, had settled into her role. She had given birth to three children and survived three bungled assassination attempts. Her much-loved Prime Minister and mentor, Lord Melbourne, had been voted out of office and Sir Robert Peel had finally formed a Tory government. In the world of steam, Brunel was preparing for the launch of the *S. S. Great Britain*, the largest ship in the world. Twice as powerful as the *Great Western*, the huge iron-hulled vessel was described as ‘the greatest experiment since the Creation’, since she was driven not by inefficient paddle wheels but by new technology in the form of an Archimedes screw. On land, railway mania was beginning; the Great Western railway between Bristol and London, another of Brunel’s projects, had opened in 1841, and in May 1843 the line linking Hayle and Redruth was inaugurated:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 26th May 1843
OPENING OF THE HAYLE AND REDRUTH RAILWAY FOR PASSENGER TRAFFIC – On Monday last, this important line, the benefits of which have hitherto been exclusively confined to the carriage of ore and coal for the mines in its neighbourhood, became for the first time available as a conveyance for passengers through the populous districts with which it communicates. This desirable result is we understand attributable to the enterprise of an individual at Hayle, who has at his own expense fitted up two convenient railway carriages, holding from twenty to thirty persons each, to start twice a day from each of the termini, and we hope the result will be such as to repay him for his trouble and risk. The principal benefits arising from this arrangement are the increased facilities it affords of communication between the important districts of Truro, Falmouth, Hayle and Penzance, between which the mail and stage vans have hitherto been the only conveyances. To persons sailing by the Hayle steamers it will be found extremely convenient, the difficulty of the journey to Hayle having been in many cases the chief objection to that route to London.

Two weeks later, on Whit Monday, 1,500 people were transported to Redruth in four trains to enjoy the annual preaching at the Gwennap Pit.

Cornwall was an early stronghold of Methodism. It was a hundred years since John Wesley first rode across the empty expanse of Bodmin moor towards Redruth, heading for St Ives, where he had heard of a religious meeting. The members were to become the first Methodist society in the county. This was just five years after the

spiritual experience that convinced Wesley of his salvation through Jesus Christ, a revelation that he wanted to share with the world. But his intention was not to break away from the Church of England: he wanted to revitalise it. Wesley continued going to church and encouraged his followers to do the same, as well as holding meetings in their own homes. There were 4,000 Methodists in Cornwall at the time of Wesley's final journey there in 1789 and 50 years later the number had grown to 26,000. In this, as in other ways, the county set itself apart from the rest of England.

I cannot be sure that the Dupens attended the Whit Monday preaching in 1843, but it seems likely that Johanna, who had named her latest baby John Wesley, would have wanted to be there. She would have been a young woman at the time of the last great Methodist revival, and could have experienced the ecstasy of conversion at a love feast, a version of the early Christian *agape* that had been reintroduced by Wesley. I imagine her joining other youthful worshippers at a service where they sang, clapped, and jumped for joy, bearing witness to their faith before sharing water from a distinctive two-handled cup. And I keep other evidence of her Methodist inheritance on the shelf above my desk.

The miniature volume, measuring no more than three inches by four and a half, is small enough to be tucked into a pocket. It is bound in faded leather the colour of oxblood and stamped with a gold border. Printed in Oxford at the Clarendon Press in 1824, the title page declares that the text, 'translated from the original Greek', is 'Appointed to be read in churches'. It is the New Testament of my childhood, of every school assembly and Religious Education lesson – or 'Divinity', as it was called in the timetable, hinting at its transformative powers. We were not a churchgoing family but I attended a Church of England high school, and can still recite passages of scripture by heart. Two years after I left school, the New English Bible was published. It was intended to make it easier for everyone to read and understand Christ's teaching, but as an unbeliever I retain an attachment to the language of the King James version, which over the course of more than three centuries was woven into the fabric of our lives, and connects us directly to a time when a life without faith was inconceivable.



The front and back covers and the spine of the little book are decorated with tiny gold images of the Lamb and Flag, a pairing more familiar to us these days from pub signs. Traditionally the lamb is depicted holding a banner that bears the cross of St George, but this one is carrying a large crucifix. He steps out with a military bearing that is slightly at odds with the large daisy-shaped halo floating above his head. A familiar phrase hovers at the edge of my memory and I retrieve it from the gospel of St John (I:29), where John the Baptist welcomes Jesus, saying: ‘Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ The lamb and flag was the symbol of the Moravian or ‘German’ church that had so impressed Wesley on his voyage to America in 1736 – although its members later came to be regarded with some suspicion.³ But its significance is not just religious; it is also the emblem of the town of Redruth, which adopted it from the Cornish tin mines. The ingots of tin were stamped with a lamb to indicate purity, a device possibly inherited from the woollen trade of medieval times.

On the first page is an inscription:



Sarah Wesley Sanders 1900
Given to my mother Johanna Dupen by her cousin
Frederick Trestrail on her marriage to my father Sharrock
Dupen on the 5th of July 1830

When Sarah, the tenth of their children, added this handwritten note fifteen years after her mother’s death, she ensured the survival of another fragment of family history, although it raises as many questions as it answers. It sent me off in a flurry of online research to find

Frederick Trestrail, who was indeed Johanna’s cousin, four years her senior, the son of her mother’s younger brother, and with a few clicks I find I have added another twenty people to my family tree. I don’t want them, I don’t need them, they are just so much genealogical clutter, but the website designers know how to keep us hooked. Hint after hint appears on my screen as I follow a trail that leads further and further from the Dupens, until in the National Archives I find Frederick’s son registering a patent for a carpet design in 1861. The temptation to go in search of that carpet is as irrational as it is powerful, but I resist and go back to the census returns.

³ In *Middlemarch* (p. 81) Dorothea Brooke’s disappointed suitor Sir James Chettam fears that her Methodist tendencies might lead her to run off and join ‘the Moravian brethren or some preposterous sect unknown to good society’.

Frederick Trestrail was not just an affectionate relative but a well-known minister. His family background was Wesleyan, but he was studying at the Baptist College in Bristol at the time of Johanna's marriage. Baptists were a minority in Cornwall, making up just 1% of the population, so I deduce that Frederick was a particularly committed Christian, with strong Nonconformist beliefs. After his ordination he moved around England and Ireland to various livings until he became secretary to the Baptist Missionary Society. One of the benefits of living in Oxford is that I can order up long-forgotten books from the depths of the Bodleian Library and I spend an afternoon in the quiet light of the Upper Reading Room skimming Frederick's memoirs, in the hope that he might mention his cousin. He doesn't, but he paints a vivid picture of their mutual grandmother, Mary Vincent Trestrail, a striking woman with dark, piercing eyes and a determined spirit. Women, unlike in the Anglican church, took an active part in Methodist worship, and Frederick recorded that his grandmother was a staunch Wesleyan throughout her long life. I like to think she took her children, including Frederick's father Simon and Johanna's mother, also called Mary, to listen to Wesley's message. This second Mary Trestrail, who lived to the age of ninety, must surely have held her daughter's New Testament in her hand. When I rest the little book in my palm I seem to feel, light as a dried leaf drifting across my fingers, the touch of a woman who heard John Wesley preach.

There are certain places that have an almost magical power to evoke the past. The Gwennap Pit, hidden at the end of a winding road about a mile and half outside Redruth, is one of them. On the grey autumn day when I visited the site it had a deserted, eerie feel, lost between high hedges and shrouded in light drizzle. I had a sense that I had travelled much further from Redruth than the map or the time on my watch suggested. John Wesley first preached there when it was just an overgrown sunken hollow formed by the collapse of some old mine workings. It was said that more than 25,000 people flocked to listen to him in 1773 and although the figure is physically impossible, there was undoubtedly a congregation of several thousand crammed into the amphitheatre, with more outside. In total Wesley spoke at Gwennap eighteen times, taking advantage of the natural acoustics to reach a huge audience on each occasion. But it was not until 1807, the year of Johanna Woolcock's birth, that a band of loyal tin miners and their helpers cleared the encroaching vegetation to create a grassy amphitheatre about 125 feet across and 20

feet deep at its centre. They enabled the preaching tradition established by Wesley to continue and services are still held there each summer.

Whit Monday 1843 must have been a day that, with its heady mixture of steam power and religious fervour, lived on in the memory of all who took part. The child of the embroidered sampler, Annie Dupen, would have been eleven by this time, old enough to notice and remember, still young enough to be frightened by the strangeness of it all. Sixty years later she might have described her first train journey to her nephew Harold as he drove her in his motor car. By then she would have seen the experience of travel change out of all recognition, as steam replaced horse power and was in turn superseded by the internal combustion engine. In one of those disorienting moments where time seems to telescope, I realised that the elusive ghost of my grandfather had the power to bring me within touching distance of a remote past that was, for him, just a single generation ago. It was a moment that demanded to be told from Annie's point of view.

Gwennap Pit, 5th June 1843

The Dupens are preparing to catch the train from Hayle to Redruth. The new railway has been open for two weeks and extra trains are going to run today to give the townspeople a chance to experience this exciting new mode of transport. For the first time Annie, her sister Kate, her brother Sharrock, and half-sister Lizzie can go with their mother to the annual Whit Monday preaching at Gwennap Pit. The little ones, Salome, Ellen, and George, are to stay at home with the servants. Fortunately the steam packet is not due to sail for Bristol on its regular weekly voyage until the following day so their father is free to accompany them. Annie heard her parents arguing the previous evening. She has noticed that her mother often has the last word on such occasions.

'You're not going to take the baby, are you?' her father asked.

'Of course he must come. Don't forget that my own dear mother heard John Wesley preach at Gwennap when she was just thirteen years old. She talked about it all her life. He was a great man and our baby carries his name. Besides, who is going to feed him if I leave him at home? Just answer me that.'

Annie fidgets anxiously in her Sunday frock, her hair neatly tied with white ribbons, her stout black boots tightly laced over her woollen stockings. She is not sure she wants to travel on a train; she has seen the wooden carriages rattle along the track beside Penpol Terrace and they look very unsteady. The family walks the

short distance to the terminus, jostled by the throng of people all determined to make the journey to Redruth. Annie can see nothing but boots, trouser legs and skirts as she clings desperately to Lizzie's hand. Finally they reach the second of the two carriages and she catches a glimpse of the team of heavy horses hitched to the front. Her father elbows his way forward and lifts his children in. Her mother follows and settles baby John on her lap. The girls perch on their father's knees, which are almost touching the legs of those sitting opposite. It is very warm in the crowded carriage and Annie is feeling a little dizzy. A stout lady sitting next to her takes out a handkerchief drenched in eau de cologne to discreetly wipe the perspiration from her face. The smell makes Annie queasy and she presses her lips firmly together. Her ears are buzzing with the noise; it is as if a swarm of giant bees has settled on the railway track. Her brother worms his way to the open window and cranes his head to see.

'There are four open wagons hitched behind us, and hundreds of people piling in. Some of them will have to wait for the next train.'

'Do come and sit down, Sharrock,' scolds their mother. 'And mind where you put your feet. I'm so sorry,' she apologises to the lady whose skirt he is crushing.

A shout from the driver signals their departure and the horses heave and strain until the string of wagons begins to move. Creaking and rattling, they are off. The train crawls for half a mile at a slow walking pace as far as the bridge, where it halts. Sharrock hangs out of the window.

'The horses are being unhitched. Oh I say! They're attaching the steam engine. You should just see her puff!'

Clouds of smoke drift into the carriage and black smuts settle on Annie's clean frock. The pungent, sulphurous smell from the burning coal catches at her throat. Then they are on the move again and picking up speed. They pass the great Copperhouse Pool on their left and soon afterwards slow to a standstill.

'Why have we stopped, papa? Is it a hill?' demands Sharrock.

'Yes, indeed. It's the Angarrack incline. This part of the line is so steep that they need an extra engine fixed at the top to pull the train up the slope and let it down safely on its way back.'

'How can they do that? Surely the rope will break?'

Annie shudders at her brother's cheerful question, imagining them all crashing down in a great heap of bodies and metal. But her father says,

'It's an iron rope, of course. Don't frighten your sisters like that.'

Once they reach the top, the train runs along a high embankment and Annie watches the surrounding landscape of green hills pass by at an astonishing speed.

She feels light-headed and faint and buries her face in her mother's shoulder. They may reach, says her brother knowledgeably but unhelpfully, as much as 30 miles an hour.

At Camborne the train stops to set down a handful of passengers and their places are immediately taken by as many again. It sets off once more and, after passing the massive engine house and turrets of Cook's Kitchen Mine, halts at the depot to take on coal and water. From there they pass through a succession of cuttings until they reach another high embankment surrounded by open countryside. Annie has plucked up the courage to look out again. She finds that she is becoming accustomed to the sensation of speed. At last, more than an hour after leaving Hayle, they pull into the station at Redruth.

Annie's father lifts her down from the carriage. She is hot and sticky and her hair curls damply around her ears. The family push their way to the edge of the crowd and her mother rummages in her basket to find a stone bottle of barley water. After they have each taken a refreshing mouthful they are ready for the next stage in their journey. They start to walk, following a slow-moving horse-drawn omnibus along a narrow track between high hedges. After about half an hour they arrive at the Gwennap Pit. Outside the six-foot high wall hordes of cheerful people dressed in their Sunday best cluster round half a dozen cake stalls. The spicy scent of gingerbread fills the air. Scruffy boys jostle to hold the bridles of the horses belonging to the more well-to-do worshippers. The family make their way past shabby, barefoot beggars with outstretched hands, through the gate into the great open amphitheatre, and find a space on the turf seating. Clouds scud across the sky, casting fast-moving shadows over the seated crowd.

'One, two, three ...' Annie's brother is counting. 'There are thirteen rows of seats,' he declares. 'How many people does that make? Ten thousand?'

'At least a thousand, maybe two,' says Annie, whose arithmetic is rather better than Sharrock's. She has never in her whole life seen such a big crowd. She is not sure she likes it.

Her mother is handing out chunks of bread and cheese from her basket. Baby John has started to wail and she holds him to her breast under her shawl. Suddenly the buzz of excited chatter stops. The air is still. People are holding their breath in anticipation. Suddenly the preacher appears in the centre of the grassy hollow beneath them. To Annie, struggling to see over the heads of the crowd, it is as if he has dropped from the heavens. An unassuming-looking white-haired man, soberly dressed, he begins in a soft, melodious voice, reminding his audience of John Wesley, who was the first to preach the gospel in this very place. In the hushed

atmosphere his words reach to the far corners of the natural amphitheatre as he speaks of the coming of Jesus, of sin and repentance. Then his voice rises to an ecstatic shout as he raises his arms, opens his hands and tips back his head to gaze at the sky, enjoining the congregation to turn their backs on temptation and seek salvation through the Lord. Annie half-expects him to float up into the clouds like the picture of Jesus in her scripture book. Her mother is quietly weeping and even her brother has fallen silent. Around them some of the congregation are bowing their heads while others are reaching up and calling out. The preacher draws his sermon to a close and announces that they will sing. The multitude of worshippers rise to their feet and the words of Charles Wesley's hymn ring out:

Praise the Lord who reigns above
and keeps his court below;
praise the holy God of love
and all his greatness show;

CHAPTER 5 A FREE GARDENER

Sharrock Dupen, with the safety of his immortal soul secured, could focus his energies on the path to worldly success. This involved not only hard work but the careful cultivation of influential acquaintances. In Hayle, Henry Harvey's business was continuing to thrive and diversify. Harvey was canny enough to recognise the need to protect himself from the ups and downs of the mining industry and in 1838 he sold an unwanted mine engine to provide power to the new East London waterworks, opening up a whole new market. A year later he commissioned a new boring mill capable of producing iron cylinders fifteen feet long and wide enough to drive a horse and cart through (there is a photograph to prove it). At the other extreme the foundry was turning out fancy goods, 'Hayle toys' that resembled the better known Birmingham toys: finely wrought items for personal use including snuff boxes, nutmeg graters, vinaigrettes, and children's rattles.

In 1843 Harveys won a commission from the Dutch government to construct an engine to drain the 70 square miles of Haarlem Mere and protect the cities of Amsterdam and Leiden from the risk of flooding. The Leeghwater engine was to be the biggest steam engine in the world, with a cylinder twelve feet in diameter and a piston nineteen feet long. 'It is truly gratifying to us to observe,' declared the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* on 24 March 1843, 'that Cornish engineers still keep so far in advance of all the world, and not less gratifying to see, that Foreign Powers know and appreciate their excellence.' There was considerable hostility to the plan in Holland, where people were strongly attached to the tens of thousands of windmills that had been part of the landscape for so many years, but the Haarlemmer Mere Commissioners were forward-thinking men who undertook careful research before settling on their bold and original solution.

After the success of the *Herald* another larger steam packet of 400 tons, the *Cornwall*, was commissioned for the Bristol route and built in Cowes to respond to the increased demand for the service when the Great Western Railway finally reached Bristol from Paddington. Harveys made the engines for the new vessel, which was a third bigger than the *Herald*. The two ships would continue to run alongside each other, competing successfully with a new rival, the *Brilliant*, until 1849 when the *Herald* was scrapped. Captain Vivian's son, another John Vivian, took command of the *Cornwall* when it went into service in May 1842, and Sharrock

followed him. As ship's steward and vegetable exporter he would have been a prominent figure in the economy of Hayle.

When Sharrock began his weekly voyages to Bristol, the city still bore the scars of its radical past. In 1831 only 6,000 men out of a city population of 104,000 were able to vote, for just two Members of Parliament; Cornwall, with a population no more than three times the size, elected 44 MPs. That autumn, after the House of Lords rejected the Reform Bill, which would extend the franchise, the city saw some of the worst riots in the country. The gaol burned down, as did a good half of Queens Square – the blaze fuelled by the fine wines and spirits in the cellars. A force of dragoons, the 'Bloody Blues', was called in and cut down hundreds of unarmed men and women in what was said to be the worst massacre on British soil since the battle of Culloden. The madness of the French Revolution had not yet faded into history and harsh penalties including hanging and transportation were used to deter any further incitement to rebellion. But the battle for reform had achieved an unstoppable momentum and in 1832 a bill was passed that gave one in seven Englishmen the right to vote.

It is against this background that Sharrock Dupen became active in public life. The franchise was still extremely limited; eligibility depended on property value and I doubt if the annual rent for his house in Hayle was above the threshold of £10 a year. But he acquired status and influence in other ways. Sharrock Dupen, like his father John and several of his uncles, sons, and nephews, was a Freemason, a fact that I register with intrigued dismay. My grandfather and father would, I think, have shared my disquiet. They were not Masons but my father-in-law was. After he died, we found an innocuous little briefcase stashed at the bottom of his wardrobe, and I remember being overcome with a momentary, irrational panic. The act of opening it felt like a subversive act. What were we supposed to do with the contents? However much I deplored his participation in what I understood to be a quasi-religious ritual that excluded women, it felt disrespectful to throw his regalia away. In the end we identified a member of the local Lodge, who took it off our hands to be dealt with in whatever way he deemed appropriate – perhaps there is a trade in second-hand Masons' kit, as there is for school uniform.

Public attitudes to Freemasonry were quite different in 1826 when, as a simple mariner, Sharrock was inducted into the Lodge of Love and Unity in Falmouth, one of half a dozen lodges in western Cornwall. The growing movement was a way for

the aspiring middle and upper working classes to build networks of influence in an unfair society where advancement still depended largely on birth. Naturally there was no place for women and the men who ran the Lodges would have been puzzled by any charge of misogyny. Respectable middle-class women were expected to remain within the domestic sphere and if they participated in philanthropic organisations, these were largely separate ones.

For reasons that remain obscure, the records show that in 1838 the Lodge of Love and Unity was disbanded and in that same year a new lodge, the Cornubian, was registered in Hayle. The first signatories included the landlord of the White Hart William Crotch (who had taken over from Jane Trevithick when she retired), Henry Harvey's nephew Nicholas, three others designated as 'gentlemen', and ship's steward Sharrock Dupen. My great-great-grandfather had successfully established connections to the elite of the town. But after a number of the original subscribers moved away, the Cornubian remained inactive for the next ten years while Sharrock extended his network of business contacts by joining the Olive Lodge of Free Gardeners in Bristol.

This Order is thought to have originated in East Lothian in Scotland in 1676 as a result of an interest in landscape gardening amongst owners of the new country mansions. The professional gardeners who laid out the parks around the houses came together – so the story goes – to form an association, following the example of their fellow workmen, the stonemasons, adopting horticultural names such as Rose, Myrtle, and Cedar of Lebanon for their lodges. Sharrock was not a gardener but through his trade in broccoli he would have done business with the men who ran the market gardens around Penzance. This would no doubt have been enough to recommend him to the members of the Olive Lodge.

Free Gardenry was part of a nationwide movement to create Friendly Societies, associations that provided a safety net of mutual aid to working men. In return for a small subscription, members benefited from sickness and death benefits. The very poor were of course unable to afford even a modest contribution but the percentage of potentially vulnerable families who were covered was surprisingly high. In an age when respectability (or at least its outward appearance) was a condition that both middle and working classes aspired to, Friendly Societies provided protection against the final shame of a pauper's funeral. As people moved to urban areas away from family networks and the patronage of the country landowner, the numbers joining

swelled to more than a million in the early part of the nineteenth century, with the largest numbers in the industrial north and midlands. Eventually they had four times more members than the Trade Unions. They adopted rituals, symbols and regalia that were similar to those of the Freemasons, as well as coded greetings and hierarchies, but with one crucial difference: the main purpose of Masonic lodges was the creation of bonds between members rather than mutual insurance. Like the medieval guilds of skilled artisans, the Friendly Societies shared a commitment to collective self-help, accompanied by a tradition of elaborate costumes and feasting. It was their social activities, or in the popular term ‘conviviality’, that distinguished them from other insurers. Portly, red-faced Sharrock Dupen no doubt enjoyed many a convivial evening on his overnight stays in Bristol:

Bristol Mercury 2nd September 1843

The Bristol Olive Lodge of Free Gardeners celebrated their eighth anniversary by dining together at their spacious lodge-room, Cat and Wheel Tavern, Castle-Green, on Wednesday last, when upwards of eighty of the brotherhood sat down to a plentiful board of viands consistent with the season, and which did credit to the taste and judgment of the host, Brother Hedges. The wines were of superior quality, and the dessert, part of which was presented by Brother T. Pym, was of first-rate quality. On the removal of the cloth, the R.W.G.M. of the lodge gave “Her most gracious Majesty the Queen, and long may she continue to be the choicest flower of Old England’s garden!” (Loud cheering, followed with Mr. Alford’s celebrated national song and chorus, “Huzza! May the queen live for ever”). The rest of the usual loyal toasts were given, and responded to in succession; after which the chairman addressed the brethren in a very impressive and appropriate manner, relative to the utility and propriety of adhering most strictly to the principles of the order, exhorting the company to remember that brotherly love and philanthropy have much to do with free gardenry. [...] The “Olive Lodge” having been given in the usual way, the grand master observed – he had yet another duty to perform, not less important than those already aimed at: he meant to call to their attention to another and younger subject – namely, the offspring of the Olive Lodge – her first-born- “the Cornubian Lodge of Free Gardeners, at Hayle, Cornwall” (loud cheering). The R.W.G.M. Brother Dupen, of that lodge, being present with several of his office bearers, rose to return thanks, which he did in a manner at once calculated to stamp the prosperity of free gardenry wherever he may have the opportunity to expound its principles.

Membership of Friendly Societies was almost exclusively working class but leadership positions were often taken by skilled workers and small businessmen. As

far as I can work out from this news item, Sharrock must have taken the lead in attaching the name of the dormant Hayle Freemasons' Lodge to a new branch of the Free Gardeners, becoming its Grand Master. It may be unfair of me to suspect my great-great-grandfather of joining a Friendly Society solely for the business and social advantages of membership. The Societies also played a significant role in changing attitudes towards collective action. The 1840s were an unsettled and anxious time for the ruling class, when the country was still adapting to the idea of a young female sovereign. The Chartists, not satisfied by the concessions of the Reform Act of 1832, were agitating for a 'People's Charter' that would abolish the property requirement and introduce secret ballots, annual elections, and salaries for MPs. The suspicion of trade unionism tainted any kind of independent association of workers, including Friendly Societies. It was a dilemma for the gentry. On the one hand they welcomed the notion that working men were organising themselves to keep their fellow workers out of the poor house and reduce the amount that needed to be levied by the poor rate; on the other hand they were drinking in pubs – and using their societies' funds to do so – thus demonstrating their manifest unsuitability for the task of managing themselves.

Friendly Societies defended their choice of venue on the grounds that public houses were often the only place where men could meet outside of their long working hours. Like the better-known Oddfellows and Foresters, the Free Gardeners laid claim to a biblical heritage in order to counter the charges of immorality that might arise from clandestine meetings and secret rituals. The Free Gardeners' version was based on Genesis Chapter 2 verse 15, 'And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it'. Adam, unsurprisingly, and somewhat less obviously Noah and Solomon, were acknowledged as gardeners and associated with the three degrees of membership: apprentice, journeyman, and master gardener.

I cannot be sure how far my great-great-grandfather was in favour of reform; I imagine him as a pragmatist rather than a radical. Like Henry Harvey, Sharrock Dupen seems to have been a deal maker. An ambitious man who set out to better himself, he would probably have spoken out in favour of individual self-help while making the most of the opportunities available through his business and social networks. Rather than political power he sought indirect influence. If he could not

vote or stand for election, he could still look like a community leader as he marched down the street in an elaborate costume and was applauded by the public.

The annual parades and feasts were designed as spectacles to be enjoyed by the local population as well as the participants and were reported with enthusiasm by the local press. In the same week that the Cornubian Lodge was toasted in Bristol, members celebrated its first birthday with a procession in full costume to the parish church of St Erth in Hayle, where the vicar preached a sermon, there being apparently no conflict between membership of the Order, with its eccentric interpretation of the bible, and the established church. The members then paraded through the principal gardens of the parish, where many of Harvey's foundry managers and directors lived, before adjourning to the new White Hart, a stylish white, neo-classical building with a pillared portico to rival anything to be seen in Penzance or Truro, for an excellent dinner. A year later the celebration was repeated in even more elaborate fashion.

Sometimes the possessions we most wish we could have inherited are long gone. I would have treasured the regalia of Sharrock Dupen, Master of the Cornubian Lodge of Free Gardeners. Who wouldn't want to inherit a dark blue apron embroidered with Noah's Ark and a border of flowers and foliage? Or a tiny silver watering can pinned to a satin ribbon? Despite the lack of surviving relics, my imagination was captured by the decorative symbols; it would have been a colourful scene however I chose to tell it. But this was Sharrock Dupen at the height of his success, and to invest it with an appropriate sense of pride and awe, I decided to visualise it through the eyes of his oldest daughter.

Hayle, Monday 8th July 1844

The town of Hayle, basking in glorious sunshine, is on holiday. Annie's father left the house very early that morning to join his Brothers at the railway station. Sixty-five members of the Cornubian Lodge, he said, were going to take the first train of the day to Redruth, the same train Annie remembers taking on the memorable day last year when they went to hear the preaching at Gwennap Pit. The Lodge is celebrating its second anniversary and the whole family is going to see their father lead the procession that will march the eighteen miles from Redruth through Tuckingmill and Camborne to Copperhouse and Hayle. Annie is proud of her father. When she walks with him to chapel on Sundays she sees how the men of the town

stop and salute him as the Grand Master. He knows everyone and they all know him. The Lodge is a mysterious place; in fact it isn't even properly speaking a place but a group of men who meet at the White Hart once a month. Her father comes home from those meetings smelling of beer and even redder in the face than usual. But it doesn't do to criticise. After all, the members of the Lodge are bound to take care of each other if they fall sick or are in financial need; that is its purpose, or so Annie has overheard her father declare when her mother complains.

It is mid-afternoon when the family leaves the house. Dozens of townspeople have already gathered in Penpol Terrace but Annie's brother Sharrock wriggles his way to the front of the crowd.

'Wait!' calls Annie breathlessly. 'George is following you. Catch him before he gets knocked down.'

Three-year-old George chuckles fearlessly as he darts between people's legs to reach his brother. As usual he is determined to prove that he can keep up with Sharrock. Annie is carrying John. He is getting far too heavy for her these days, but he started to cry when she tried to leave him with their mother, who is holding the grizzling new baby, Charles Wesley, in her arms. Charles is a fretful child. No one seems to know what ails him but he is not thriving like his brothers. So many babies, thinks Annie. So much worry. She knows they are precious gifts from God but she is not sure she wants to get married if the Lord is going to insist on such generosity. She has reached the front of the crowd with Kate close behind, Salome and Ellen clinging tightly to her hands. They gaze wide-eyed at the ships in the harbour, flying their colours in honour of the day. Sharrock names them one by one; he spends so much time loitering around the wharf that he knows them all.

'There's the *Nancy*, and the *Jane*, and the *William*. And see, Annie, that's the *Joanna*.'

He'll be off to sea himself just as soon as he's allowed, he says. His father has promised to take him on the *Cornwall* if he works hard at school but it has made no difference; he is as idle as ever. You would think he would be ashamed that his sisters are so much better at reading and reckoning than he is.

Annie is hot and uncomfortable. Despite the weather, she wears thick, itchy black stockings and layer after layer of chemise and petticoats. There is no escaping the obligations of respectability; the eyes of the town will be on her father, and she must be a credit to him. Standing by the dusty roadside in the heat, her arms start to ache and she sets John on his feet. He clings to her skirt for a minute and then sits down with a thump.

‘Just let me rest for a moment,’ she tells him as he raises his arms wailing, ‘Up! Up!’

After what seems like hours of waiting, but is probably less than half an hour, the procession rounds the corner from the Copperhouse Pool. Her father is in the lead mounted on a fine white charger and attended by two pages on ponies. It is just like a fairy tale; he could be a knight riding out to slay a dragon and rescue the princess. But Annie wonders if she is the only one to notice how stiffly he sits. He is no horseman and has been in the saddle for at least six hours. He is preceded by a trumpeter, also on horseback, a Brother who carries the big blue banner depicting the Garden of Eden, and two others bearing a triumphal arch of fruit and flowers. They are all wearing dark blue ankle length aprons, embroidered with colourful images from the bible: Adam and Eve and the serpent, Solomon and the gardens of the Holy Temple. There are carefully stitched vines with bunches of purple grapes, dusty green olive trees, and pink flowers. Annie can see some of her own proud handiwork adorning her father’s robe. She nudges Kate.

‘Look,’ she says, ‘those are my grapes.’

The crowd applauds the men as they pass by carrying wands, china vases of flowers, globes, a silver salver, and a bible on a rich purple velvet cushion. Miniature crossed spades and rakes hang from wide sashes worn across the chest or as V shaped collars. Annie’s father also displays the Master’s Jewel: the Order’s insignia of a square and compasses with an open pruning knife. He looks over to his watching children and acknowledges them with a grave nod. Annie holds John up to see, George jumps impatiently up and down, while Ellen and Salome loose their hold on Kate’s hands to wave, and Sharrock stands stoutly to attention. Annie hopes that Papa is as proud of them as they are of him; he looks magnificent.

CHAPTER 6 DEBT AND DISEASE

The optimism of the glorious procession was short-lived. By 1845, Sir Robert Peel's Tory government was under increasing pressure to repeal the Corn Laws that protected the interests of Britain's landowners. Politicians of all parties were anxiously watching the weather; a poor harvest would push up prices and make it harder to hold out against those who argued for the abolition of punitive tariffs on foreign imports of grain. Disaster struck when the potato blight arrived from America, destroying a staple food of the rural poor. The ensuing famine did much to change Peel's mind about free trade. The *Bristol Mercury* accused him of 'placing the barrier of unnatural laws between food and a famishing population', quoting a Wiltshire man who stated:

Bristol Mercury 15th November 1845

What our people in this parish be to do I know not, *they live on potatoes*. Some families where there are children have them three times a day – *if* they have anything three times a day; all the people have them for breakfast and supper, and the rot is getting so bad now that most of them have not many potatoes left. With bread *getting so high*, and the wages *not* getting up, and the potatoes *gone*, God above only knows what is to become of the poor people.

The following year, with support from the Whigs, the hated laws were repealed, splitting the Tory party and ending Peel's own career.

Cornwall was one of the worst affected areas. Even after the abolition of tax on imports, hard winters and bad harvests meant a doubling in the price of grain, while to the fury of the local population, wheat and barley continued to be exported from Cornish ports. During the winter of 1846–1847, bands of miners armed with picks and shovels laid siege to the towns of Redruth and Penzance. After twenty years of erratic openings and closures the mines were in decline – this time, so it seemed, for good. The 'rage for emigration' that had begun in the agricultural areas in the 1830s spread. Cornish miners also started to emigrate in large numbers to seek their fortune in Chile, Peru, and Malaya.

But it was in Ireland that the people were most dependent on potatoes and suffered the worst hardship. In Bristol, where ships continued to arrive from Dublin and Cork, Sharrock Dupen would have been made aware of the desperate situation, although it was another ten years before his oldest son's marriage created a personal connection between the Dupens and Irish politics. When the 1846 crop failed

completely, a correspondent from County Cork warned, 'I venture to predict that if large and continued grants are not made by government, or works of a large scale undertaken, the people will be in a state of starvation and insurrection.' The mayor of Bristol launched a charitable appeal for money, food and clothing to send to the destitute Irish and in February 1847 a letter was received from the commander of the steam sloop that had transported a shipment of food from the city. He painted a harrowing picture of naked, emaciated women lying in hovels on beds of straw next to the corpses of their loved ones and predicted an outbreak of pestilence since, 'They have ceased to put them into coffins, or to have the funeral service performed, and they merely lay them a few inches under the soil.'

Not everyone was as sympathetic however and on 2 April, under the heading 'What is to become of Ireland?' the editor of the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* accused the starving people of Ireland of laziness and ingratitude. The fractious relationship was to persist throughout Victoria's reign: two countries trapped like those ill-matched spouses of the period who found it impossible to live together on civilised terms but were unable to divorce. Eventually legislation was passed to allow married couples a means of escape, but the British government remained unwilling to let Ireland go, afraid of how any show of weakness might play out in the lands of the empire.

By 1848 thousands were still dying of starvation and in the rest of Europe the ever-present spectre of revolution was becoming a reality. In January Harvey's ships would have brought news from the Mediterranean that the inhabitants of Palermo in Sicily had taken up arms against their Spanish Bourbon rulers. Unrest soon spread to the north of the Italian peninsula, where Garibaldi returned from exile in South America to join the people of Milan in their fight to free Lombardy and Venice from Austrian rule. In February Louis-Philippe of France was overthrown. Uprisings spread to the German states, Prussia, Poland, Hungary and other parts of the Hapsburg empire. The British government was nervous as the Chartists continued to agitate for reform. On 10 April 20,000 of them assembled on Kennington Green on their way to petition Parliament, but they were outnumbered five to one by the police, and 85 per cent of these were special constables, an indicator of the comparatively weak level of popular support for radical action. Britain, to the surprised relief of many, did not have a rebellion and the rally marked the end of Chartism as a significant force in British politics.

By September 1849 the French had elected a new president, Louis-Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, and peace was restored to the Italian peninsula, with Garibaldi reported to be under arrest in Genoa. In August the British government judged that the time was right for the Queen and Prince Albert to make a state visit to Ireland, where they were accorded an enthusiastic reception and provided with a railway carriage that was said to have cost £5,000. Sharrock Dupen, scanning the account in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, would not have known that the population of Ireland had by that time declined as a result of starvation and emigration from over eight million to a figure closer to six million.

In Hayle, Henry Harvey was ailing, left semi-paralysed by a stroke, and his portly figure was no longer seen perambulating around the streets of the thriving foundry quarter that was his creation, but his business was still the mainstay of the town's economy. The Harvey empire was now managed by Henry's nephew (and Sharrock Dupen's fellow freemason), Nicholas Harvey. After the Leeghwater was successfully installed and tested, orders followed for two more engines, to be built by Harveys and by Fox and Co. at Perran. The size of the task was almost inconceivable. It was estimated that even when all three were in place it would take thirteen months to pump the billion tons of water from Haarlem lake. In 1849 when the Cruquis, a proud descendant of the original Newcomen beam engines used to drain the Cornish mines, was finally completed, it surpassed the Leeghwater as the biggest steam engine in the world.⁴

By the following summer there were fourteen people squeezed into the Dupen home, if you counted the maid. I do a rapid calculation to make sure I am not exaggerating. The babies kept coming at roughly two-yearly intervals; after George Semmens, John Wesley, and Charles Wesley, came Sarah Wesley. All except Charles survived. He lived for just six months and died in the autumn of 1844, one of some fifty babies and children under the age of five to be buried in Phillack that year. But the tally was no worse than that of any other twelve-month period; the mortality rate for under-fives remained stubbornly close to one in three throughout the century.

On 22 January 1848 my great-grandmother Hester Ann Rogers Dupen was born: a child, I like to think, of the year of revolution (and, of course, the Communist

⁴ The lake was fully drained by 1852 and although two of the engines were converted to oil and later diesel electric power, the Cruquis engine was maintained as a steam engine until 1933 and is now preserved in its own museum <www.haarlemmermeermuseum.nl/en/cruquius-museum--world-largest-steam-engine>

Manifesto). I wasted a lot of time trying to identify where her name came from: a family member, I assumed. I should have just googled it, and eventually I did. Hester Ann Rogers (1756–1794), who appeared at the top of the search results, was the daughter of an Anglican clergyman. She defied her parents to join the Methodist church and became a close friend of John Wesley, a class leader, and visitor of the sick. Her *Spiritual Letters*, published together with extracts from her diary, were popular devotional reading for Methodist women. Johanna Woolcock would have been familiar with the book and must have chosen her name for her youngest daughter as a change from the preceding three children, but after Hester she reverted to the Wesleys for her twelfth baby, born in the summer of 1849 and named Samuel, after the father of John and Charles.

Sharrock had to ensure the whole family was clothed, fed and educated. His oldest son was now his assistant on the *Cornwall*, Kate and Lizzie had positions at a draper's shop, and Annie was teaching, but their father was still the main breadwinner. It was an expensive business; food was estimated to take up at least half the income of an average family. But he could only be glad when his children turned out to be strong and healthy. Unlike the poor of the town, who had barley gruel for breakfast, a barley pasty for lunch, and barley cake for supper, they would have thrived on generous portions of bread, porridge, potatoes and a good meat stew on Sundays. Dressed in neatly mended hand-me-down clothes, they attended Sunday school every week. The family's position in the ranks of the respectable middle class seemed assured, living as they did amidst households of mining and shipping agents, engine fitters and shopkeepers. These neighbours, like the Dupens, kept maidservants and charwomen – although only the surgeon employed a groom and drove out in his own gig. Sharrock perhaps hoped that one day he could do the same; nothing seemed impossible to a man prepared to work hard and take calculated risks in pursuit of profit.

But cholera was once more sweeping through Cornwall. In those days the course of any illness was frustratingly unpredictable and one disease was not always distinguished from another. A cough, snuffle, or raised temperature could presage a simple cold or a deadly case of measles, influenza, typhoid, or scarlet fever. Diarrhoea was almost too common to be remarked on. The remedies at the disposal of surgeons and apothecaries were limited and sometimes downright dangerous. Sharrock and Johanna Dupen no doubt tried to be vigilant but in the end they had to

put their trust in God. They could not live their lives in a constant state of anxiety over one or other of the children. Cholera was another matter. It was alien, outlandish, monstrous.

The couple would have had clear memories of 1831, when the disease first reached the shores of Britain with an outbreak in the northern town of Sunderland. From there it spread to London and throughout the country, including Cornwall, where the first cases appeared in the parish of Phillack in August. By the time the epidemic subsided two years later it had killed 52,000 people. During the same two-year period, two major outbreaks of influenza caused the deaths of many tens of thousands more. It was commonly believed that fatal diseases were airborne and spread through the noxious and invisible miasma that hung over rivers and marshland. Henry Harvey believed the stagnant, filthy Penpol Pool next to the original White Hart inn to be the main source of infection. To his credit he wrote to the parish authorities in St Erth urging the formation of a Board of Health to tackle the problem (as had been done in London) but neither the magistrate nor the vicar was keen to intervene, apparently for fear of offending the landowner. Harvey next tried to buy the land so that he could drain the pool and fill it in but his offer was turned down. It was this refusal that led to his even more ambitious plan to construct a new tidal pool at Carnsew, the one that was inaugurated in 1834. The cholera eventually subsided as mysteriously as it had appeared and when Henry Harvey finally purchased the Penpol Pool in 1837, he drained it not, so it seems, out of concern for public health but in order to build his fine new White Hart hotel.

The latest pandemic had struck England in the autumn of 1848 at the end of a dreadful period. After typhoid carried off many victims in the hot summer of 1846, the new 'Irish fever' arrived with the poor wretches fleeing the potato famine. At the same time old-fashioned influenza and dysentery continued to claim thousands of victims. By the summer of 1849, although there were still those who tried to dismiss it as the famine fever that prevailed in Ireland, the cholera had reached Cornwall. In Hayle the disease was largely confined to the poorer parts of town, where a soup kitchen was set up to feed 250 of the most needy. A month earlier the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* had set out the precautions to be taken, although those most at risk would have no access to the newspapers and would remain unaware of the warning. Readers were recommended to wear warm flannel next to the skin, avoid getting

their feet wet, and eat solid starchy foods and meat, not vegetables that were likely to promote looseness of the bowels:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 17th August 1849

The chief causes of Cholera are, damp, filth, animal and vegetable matter in a rotting state; and, in general, whatever produces foul air.

Householders of all classes should be warned, that their first means of safety lies in the removal of dung heaps, and solid and liquid filth of every description, from beneath or about their houses and premises.

Before flush toilets and mains drainage, ash, sawdust or garden soil was thrown into the outdoor privy to help the contents rot down and control the smell. The result was either a heap that accumulated behind the open back of the privy or a bucket that had to be emptied. Both systems produced compost for the garden, unless the town had a ‘night soil’ man who would collect the euphemistically named product and take it away. Sharrock no doubt made arrangements to have the cesspit behind his house emptied, hoping this would be effective. It was to be another five years before Dr John Snow was able to prove his theory that cholera was in fact a water-borne disease.

Death from cholera could be frighteningly swift: a newspaper report told of an aged barber taken ill in the morning and dead by the afternoon. But the disease was not invariably fatal and the newspaper also reported that a young man who had been pronounced dead was found sitting up in bed just minutes before the arrival of his coffin. He was able to partake of some nourishing beef tea and was soon fast recovering. Others were less fortunate and those who assisted in caring for the sick and laying out the bodies were often the ones to be next taken ill:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 21st September 1849

REDRUTH.— Up to Saturday evening, there having been no deaths for the week, the Board of Health were in hopes the worst had passed over. During that night and following day, however, there were 7 deaths, viz., a woman known as “old Margaret”; the wife of Thomas Vincent, a vendor of fish, who had attended Redruth market on the Friday, and St. Day on Saturday; two persons, north of the town, named Broad and Maddern; a man at the western end named Rogers; John Goldsworthy, a chandler in Foundry Row; and a woman named Francis in Cocking’s-court, all of whom neglected to apply for timely medical assistance. Jenny Cocking, the nurse, who had attended “old Margaret,” and had been poorly 2 days, died on Wednesday.

It was a time when human nature was seen at its best; local people not only prayed for the sick but donated money they could often ill afford. The workmen at Harvey's foundry collected a generous financial gift for the doctor in recognition of the risks he ran.

In September 1849 just as it appeared that the epidemic was abating, Sharrock was faced with a new danger:

London Gazette 31st August 1849

WHEREAS a Petition of Sharrock Semmens Dupen, for the last fourteen years residing at Hayle, in the parish of Phillack, in the county of Cornwall, but all the above period a Steward and Provider on board the Herald and Cornwall Steam-packets, trading between the city and county of Bristol and Hayle, in the said county of Cornwall, an insolvent debtor, having been filed in the County Court of Cornwall, at Redruth, and an interim order for protection from process having been given to the said Sharrock Semmens Dupen, under the provisions of the Statutes in that case made and provided, the said Sharrock Semmens Dupen is hereby required to appear before the said Court, on the 13th day of September next, at ten o'clock in the forenoon precisely, for his first examination touching his debts, estate, and effects, and to be further dealt with according to the provisions of the said Statutes; and the choice of the creditors' assignees is to take place at the time so appointed. All persons indebted to the said Sharrock Semmens Dupen, or that have any of his effects, are not to pay or deliver the same but to Mr. Francis Paynter, Clerk of the said Court, at his office, at Redruth, the Official Assignee of the estate and effects of the said insolvent.

My grandfather's grandfather benefited from important and controversial changes to the law in the 1840s. Prior to the new legislation Sharrock would have had to be imprisoned first before he could apply to the court and his fate would have depended to a large extent on his creditors. The *Bristol Mercury*, commenting on the Insolvent Debtors' bill of 1844, was in no doubt that it was entirely proper to have ended this practice:

Bristol Mercury 31st August 1844

There are two very different classes of debtors: the honest and the dishonest – those who *cannot* and those who *will not* pay. Nothing can be more cruel and absurd than the imprisonment of the honest but unfortunate debtor, for not only is the chance of liquidating his debts thereby destroyed, but his family are frequently reduced to beggary and starvation, and numerous and shocking are the well-authenticated cases of ruin and misery which have resulted from a stretch of power on the part of the creditor.

The County Court judges tasked under the new law with examining small debtors had a large measure of discretion and a responsibility to uphold morality quite as much as the law. They took into consideration not only the behaviour of the debtor but that of his creditors too, and could write off debts if they thought credit had been extended unwisely. An ‘innocent’ man was unlikely to be gaoled, and dishonest traders who lured unwary customers into buying goods they could ill afford were publicly criticised for unacceptable business practices. There was concern, however, that in the rush to remedy injustice the balance had tilted too far in the other direction. Working and lower-middle class society functioned on credit, with shopkeepers who extended ‘tick’ to their customers owing money in turn to their suppliers. One person defaulting on his rent, grocery bill or other obligation could cause a whole row of dominos to collapse. The *Bristol Mercury* went on to paint a dramatic picture:

“Unfortunate debtor” and “hard-hearted creditor”, have become stock terms in the language. Nor is this to be wondered at, for nineteen-twentieths of our light literature creates and gives currency to such impressions. On the stage your debtor is generally a melancholy genteel gentleman, in faded black, with an angel in white muslin for a daughter, both of whom are persecuted by some “fiend in human form”, in the shape of an imperative, hard-hearted creditor [...]

Creditors, too, have families as well as debtors: and many an honest man is compelled at times to adopt apparently harsh measures, in order to support his own family, and to be able to meet his own creditors.

As a result of representations made to parliament, the legislation was amended in 1845 to reinstate the possibility of gaol as a penalty for debt. Sharrock was ineligible to take his case to the bankruptcy court, since only traders who made their living from buying and selling, or those owing more than £20, could apply to be freed from their debts in this way. Instead he must be examined by a local court and agree a schedule of payment by instalments. If he failed to convince the judge that he was not to blame for his predicament, he could go to prison. It was a perilous moment for the man who, just a few years earlier, had paraded through the town in his robes, mounted on a fine white charger. My image of the courtroom owes much to Charles Dickens, who recreated his father’s experience of the Insolvent Debtors’ court in *The Pickwick Papers* some ten years earlier, but it was not a remotely comic occasion.

Redruth, September 1849

It is a Thursday morning when Sharrock Dupen leaves his house to take the train to Redruth and keep his appointment with the court. For this journey he has dressed carefully in a plain dark coat of worsted cloth, a respectable waistcoat and a neatly tied cravat. It is important for him to look like a blameless victim and not a foolish spendthrift. How has it come to this? For more than ten years his earnings from the steam packet service grew along with the increasing numbers of passengers. His vegetable business prospered too. But now, despite all his attempts to stave off the shameful moment, his name has been printed in the newspapers in the list of insolvent debtors.

Although the court order protects him for the time being, he is still at risk of being put in gaol. The consequences are unthinkable. If he loses his job his family will have to rely on the earnings of the older children to survive. Between them they should be just about able to manage but it will be a close run thing. Under the harsh conditions of the New Poor Law, any further misfortune could see the family broken up and sent to the workhouse in Redruth. Thirteen-year-old Salome could be put out to service but that is not the life he wants for his daughters. There is no help to be had from his brothers; George disappeared from their lives when he emigrated to America, John and Horatio are dead, and Robert away with his ship. Their widowed father is himself struggling, too old now to go to sea.

As he sits on the hard bench in the cramped wooden carriage of the train, Sharrock's mind turns to his other Brothers, the ones from the Cornubian Lodge. They are at the same time a source of his difficulties and his best hope of relief; surely they will offer loans or other assistance to extricate him from his present circumstances. After ten years with no activity, the Lodge finally had finally come to life the previous year, partly thanks to the efforts of Sharrock himself. It was all very well being Grand Master of the Free Gardeners but everyone knew it was the Masons who held the real power: men like Nicholas Harvey, Henry Harvey's nephew. As one of the founding members Sharrock has a position to maintain but it costs money to entertain the gentlemen of the Lodge. His reputation as a generous and open-handed drinking companion has been purchased at a price he can ill afford. The market gardeners of Penzance no longer need him to sell their produce; they have made other arrangements that cut out the middle man. His earnings from the *Cornwall* are reduced too, reflecting the uncertainty in the local economy. People are travelling less frequently and spending less on board the steamer.

For months Sharrock has tried to juggle his financial affairs but the nature of the victualing trade makes it difficult; cash flow is always tight. Finally he has run out of both time and money. There is not enough left at home to pawn. He has filed his petition to be recognised as an insolvent debtor to avoid the imminent threat of arrest. During his journey to Redruth he goes over and over his actions of the past year. Was there anything he could have done to avoid this?

The train puffs slowly into Redruth station and draws to a hissing halt. Sharrock gets down onto the platform into a cloud of steam as dense as the fog that fills his head. He makes his way up the hill to Andrew's hotel. Unusually, that is where the county court is sitting for the two days it will take to work through the month's list of cases; the usual courtroom is out of use because the body of an unfortunate man killed in an accident lies there awaiting the coroner's inquest. The dark and stuffy hotel parlour smells of beer, stale tobacco and sweat. The judge is seated opposite the door, a small wooden writing desk on the table in front of him. He wears dingy black robes and a grubby white wig – or it may be the lack of natural light that makes it appear so. The clerk, Mr Francis Paynter, is a solicitor from Penzance, a man in his late fifties whose well-cut coat and gold pocket watch proclaim his own condition of comfortable solvency. Sharrock is directed to a wooden chair that is slightly too small for his bulky form, next to the other man who is due to be examined that day. His name, he confides in a low voice, is George Austen and he is a confectioner and grocer by trade. He is some ten years younger than Sharrock and looks anxious and underslept. A motley bunch of shabbily dressed spectators are settled in for the morning's entertainment, several of them clutching lumps of bread and cheese or a pasty wrapped in a grimy checked handkerchief.

Sharrock presents the full tally of his debts and the limited schedule of his assets.

'You must understand, sir, that my earnings as steward of the *Cornwall* are my only source of income,' he declares. 'My debts have been incurred, I assure you, through no fault of my own. I swear that I am not a gambler or a drinker. I am a victim of the hard times that are affecting so many businessmen, as I am sure you know, sir. I have to buy my supplies for the steam packet without any certainty of being able to sell my full stock of refreshments. It is very hard to predict what I will need. People are not travelling as much because of the cholera.'

'And your assets, Mr Dupen?' enquires the judge.

'I have surrendered all my personal property to Mr Paynter here. There is nothing left in my home but the necessary furnishings for my family. I have eleven children, sir, and only four of them of an age to earn. Believe me, I have no silver plate or valuable china, no fine embroidered linens. Just the bare essentials of life.'

The judge looks at him sternly and gives his instructions.

'Mr Paynter here will sell your watch and chain and other personal items to repay at least a percentage of what is owed to your creditors. You will pay off the rest at a rate of three shillings a week. And try to be more prudent in future. I will I expect to see you back here for a final hearing on Thursday 11th October.'

With a sigh of relief, Sharrock steps back and sits down. As soon as Mr Austen's case is dealt with, he will invite his fellow debtor to join him in a consolatory glass of ale.

CHAPTER 7 LAUNDRY DAY

I have always been fascinated by large families, coming as I do from a very small one. I grew up, like so many women of my generation, reading about the improbable numbers of children born to the Chalet School girls. For years I believed that two or three sets of twins were normal, even desirable, and I am still slightly surprised that my daughter is an only child. By 1850 the Dupens had moved to Penpol Terrace, the fine row of houses that overlooked the quay, where there were no other households with as many children; six or seven was a more common number, although that may have reflected a lower survival rate rather than fewer conceptions. Late marriage, prolonged breastfeeding, and abstinence were the only means available to respectable women from the lower and middle classes to limit the size of their families. Johanna Dupen must have spent the best part of twenty years either pregnant or breastfeeding. It is a physical state that I find almost impossible to imagine. The constant fatigue and interrupted sleep, the aching legs and sagging, leaking breasts, the nausea, indigestion and incontinence, all these must have taken their toll. But her constitution was robust and she was to live for another thirty years after the birth of her final baby.

I know that but she did not. In the nineteenth century death in childbirth was common, mainly as a result of infection transmitted by doctors and midwives with no concept of hygiene, but also from complications that are now unlikely to prove fatal. My daughter, monitored throughout my labour and hauled out urgently with forceps, would possibly not have survived if she had been born a hundred years earlier – and nor would I. If Johanna was afraid every time that the next baby would be the one to cause her death, she left no record to tell us. As a devout Methodist she would have submitted to the will of God and if she was ever tempted to protest we will never know. Rightly or wrongly I see her as a matter-of-fact, sensible woman who got on with the tasks of daily life without questioning her lot. It is the fate of women who cope to be underestimated; they make the difficult look easy.

I assume that like most people the Dupens were renting their house; very few men of Sharrock's class bought their own property. I have found it impossible to work out exactly which house was theirs because the census schedules do not match the current street numbers and I suspect they may have moved more than once. But none of the likely candidates has more than two rooms downstairs and three bedrooms:

one for Sharrock, Johanna and the babies, one for the girls, and one for the boys. The maid must have slept in the kitchen. Some families took in lodgers to help make ends meet but that was not a solution open to my grandfather's grandparents.

My own late-Victorian house was built with four bedrooms, two downstairs rooms, and a kitchen at the back. In my head I try to people it with another dozen family members and fail completely. Where did they all sit, let alone sleep? Could they possibly all have eaten Sunday dinner at the same table? How many pounds of potatoes and loaves of bread did they consume each week? Even families who, because of their income and occupation, counted as middle class lived in conditions that most of us would find intolerable, with beds shared between two or three children and sometimes more. It was not a problem that they would have identified themselves, at a time when occupying a whole house rather than just a room was already a marker of privilege. Personal space was not a concept that they would have recognised. I doubt if Johanna Dupen or any of her daughters ever spent a single moment alone.

Keeping everyone clean, clothed, and fed required a monotonous round of gruelling daily activity. The endless dinners cooked and dishes washed, the beds made and carpets swept, day after day in an unvarying routine, leave no trace. The stuff of women's lives is ephemeral and unconsidered. The Dupen washing would have been done by hand, quite possibly without even a mangle, and it would have taken a full day or more. With six adults and seven children there would have been unending piles of chemises, petticoats, nightgowns, babies' napkins, and the flannel binders that protected them from taking a chill in the stomach or bowels. In a family of growing girls there were no doubt bundles of bloodied rags each month too, although history has little to say on that subject.

A typical Monday began before dawn, when the housemaid, sixteen-year-old Ann Mitchell, got up even earlier than usual, to light the fire under the boiler. The water needed to be hot by the time breakfast was over. The metal cylinder that sat in a corner of the back kitchen held about twenty gallons. Made of cast iron, the 'copper' stood on the flagged floor with its own narrow chimney pipe that came out at a right angle from the back and then went straight up inside the wall of the house, passing close to the rafters of the main roof. Ann would have opened the small door in the front and lit the fire with a few bits of kindling. Once the cinders were ablaze (no one wasted best coal to heat the copper) it was time to stoke the kitchen range and put the

kettle on for breakfast. This was the only hot meal of the day because as soon as it was over, big pans of water would be put on the range to boil for the laundry; the copper could not supply enough for the quantities of linen produced by such a large family.

When the charwoman, Jane Bryant, arrived she must have gone straight to the back kitchen to take the sheets out of the water they had been soaking in overnight. Then she would have opened the tap in the side of the copper and drawn off hot water into the wooden washtub. As she rubbed and beat the heavy sodden masses of white cloth with a wooden dolly, Johanna made a soapy jelly with shavings from a big bar dissolved in hot water. Stained items of clothing were scrubbed with this slippery goo before being dunked in a tub of soapy water, wrung out, rinsed, and put into the copper to boil. Ann was kept busy refilling the copper and feeding the fire to make sure there was enough water for load after load. Finally it was the turn of the dirty cloths used for cleaning to be soaped, scrubbed, and boiled. At last the fire under the copper was allowed to go out and Jane Bryant went home. It would be all to do again the following week.

Just one laundry day in the thousands that took place in the Dupen household is remembered by history:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 27th September 1850

On Tuesday last about 12 o'clock, smoke was seen issuing from the dwelling-house of Mr Sharrock Dupen, Steward of the Cornwall steamer, at Penpoll Terrace, Hayle. Alarm was instantly given, and a large concourse of people soon assembled to ascertain from whence the smoke proceeded, when it was discovered that the back part of the roof was on fire. Fortunately it rained hard at the time, and the wind was not high; and the fire was speedily extinguished. It is supposed that the fire originated in the back kitchen by the washing furnace chimney which had been used the preceding day, taking fire, which communicated to the rafters of the dwelling house, these having been very improperly permitted by the builder to be placed so contiguous to danger.

Hayle was probably too small to have one of the new public fire engines but there was one at the foundry that could have attended the scene. Another newspaper report tells of a fire that broke out the previous September in the new boring mill engine house, situated at the very centre of the site. A fire there could have had disastrous consequences but most fortunately it was discovered in time:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 7th September 1849

[Captain West] immediately rang the fire bell for assistance, which was promptly attended to. Fortunately there is an excellent fire-engine belonging to the firm, which was soon put to use, with a plentiful supply of water, which soon extinguished the fire.

Not a week passed in 1850 without a report of a blaze somewhere destroying a house, a haystack or even part of a railway station. Flying sparks on board ship were a constant cause for concern while clothing that caught light was a regular cause of death and injury in the home. Fire, like disease, was one of the unavoidable risks of daily life.

This was a time when the notion of separate male and female spheres was taking hold. The working lives of men and women diverged as activities like weaving and spinning moved out of the home, where they had traditionally taken place alongside baking, brewing and preserving, and into the factory. Although women and children made up a large proportion of the industrial workforce, it became a badge of respectability for middle class wives not to go out to work. Disregarding the hard labour required to keep a large family clean, clothed and fed, mothers were seen primarily as guardians of morality within the home, where their role was to educate the next generation in religious faith and virtuous behaviour. The doctrine must surely, I think, have had a different force in maritime communities, where the man of the house was absent for long stretches of time. Seafaring families had no experience of the kind of cottage industry familiar to other households and could never have counted on the presence of the man of the house. There would always have been decisions to take and business to transact that could not await his return. Johanna Dupen would have shouldered responsibilities that were unknown to wives whose husbands came home each night to the sanctuary of their own fireside, learning early in her married life to deal with household emergencies like the one recorded here. It felt important for me to capture a sense of how a woman like Johanna experienced the daily burden of her life.

Penpol Terrace Hayle, Monday 23rd–Tuesday 24th September 1850

Monday is everyone's least favourite day, when the house is turned topsy-turvy and no one comes home for dinner. Johanna knows she is lucky to have help but it sometimes feels as if one laundry day is no sooner over than the next one begins. The men's shirts quickly become filthy with the soot from the ship's engines and it

would not do for the steward to appear with soiled linen, while Lizzie and Kate have to be neatly turned out with clean collars and cuffs for their work measuring out dress fabric and ribbon, and cutting lengths of lace. When it rains, as it is doing today, there is damp washing hung all over the kitchen. But at least the clothes stay relatively clean when they are dried indoors; on fine days when they are taken outside they quickly become covered with smuts from the foundry chimneys if the wind is in the wrong direction.

The house has never been more full, and although Lizzie is planning her wedding for the spring and will move away with her young engineer, Johanna is already swollen under her stays with the unmistakable signs of another baby on the way. She uses both hands in the small of her back to straighten from bending over the washtub, and wonders if it will ever end, this constant cycle of weaning and births, or if this next will be the death of her. It is unlike her to be morbid but her arms and legs ache at the end of another long day of scrubbing and wringing. She is so very, very tired.

Annie and the older children have come home from school and the boys have joined the little ones, who are playing with their peg dolls in the dining room. It is too wet to go in the garden so they take out their wooden blocks and the precious box of lead soldiers.

‘No, Sam,’ she hears John saying sternly. ‘Not in your mouth. See, here are the blocks. Let’s make a tower.’

Such a kind brother, her John, she thinks. It’s wrong to have favourites but John is such an easy child compared with his brothers. Perhaps it is having Mr Wesley’s name that has kept him on the right path. With a pang she remembers Charles. Would he too have been gentle and biddable if he had been spared? Annie’s voice breaks into her reverie.

‘Let me make you a cup of tea, mama. Sit down. Salome and I will do the rest.’

Johanna sinks onto a hard kitchen chair with a sigh, ignoring the drips from the sopping fabric suspended above her head. She watches while her daughters sponge and brush the woollens and delicate coloured prints that cannot be boiled, to remove the worst of the grime.

‘I remember,’ she says, ‘when you were born, Annie, and we lived in Penzance. The air was so clean and fresh.’

‘Didn’t it smell of fish, mama?’ asks Annie. ‘I’m sure that’s what you said before.’

There is precious little sympathy to be had there. She knows why Annie is sharp with her. She is afraid – afraid of being left to care for her brothers and sisters if her mother does not survive the next birth, to be the family cook and washerwoman

instead of spending her days in the schoolroom. Who can blame her for being anxious? The lot of an oldest daughter is never easy, and Annie's work gives her no opportunity to meet eligible young men. Not that she shows the slightest interest in such things. She is too fond of her own authority to willingly relinquish it to a husband. Johanna knows how often she herself has to bite her tongue when Sharrock comes home and expects her to be at his beck and call; it is in many ways easier when he is away. She gives herself a mental shake and finishes her tea.

A little later the children are given their bowls of bread and milk and put to bed. Kate and Lizzie come home from the draper's shop when it closes at eight o'clock and the menfolk return from the wharf at about the same time. After a cold supper of bread and cheese, everyone sits wearily in the dining room. Johanna and the girls are busy with the never-ending piles of mending. Every washday shows up more ripped seams and holes that need repairing. At last it is time for evening prayers. Another Monday is safely over. No one gives a thought to the still-glowing cinders in the back kitchen.

Tuesday is sailing day for the *Cornwall* and Sharrock and his eldest son set off for the quay in good time the next morning. At home the laundry is still dripping from the airer over the kitchen range, filling the room with steam and feeding the mildew on the walls. By midday Johanna is standing by the stove, ignoring the ache from her varicose veins, stirring a pot of starch, while Ann has set the flat irons to heat, ready to begin smoothing some of the lighter items that by this time are merely damp rather than sopping wet. Jane Bryant is upstairs washing the bedroom floors. Suddenly they hear hammering at the front door and shouts of fire. Johanna rushes outside and sees their neighbour Mr Glasson standing in the rain and pointing at the back of the roof. A thin but worrying stream of smoke is rising into the air.

'Quickly, Ann,' cries Johanna. 'Run to the foundry for help.'

She hurries back indoors to collect the three little ones, who start to cry as they are herded out into the drizzle.

'Jane,' she calls on her way out of the door, 'come down! Come down right now!'

As they stand in the front garden Jane Bryant puts her arms round Sarah and Hester, who are wailing with fright, while Johanna gathers up baby Sam and hugs him to her.

'There, there, me lover,' she hears her charwoman say to Hester. 'Don't ee be frightened. Fire engine'll be here dreckly. Your brothers'll be jumpin' when they find out what they missed.'

Johanna sends Jane to her neighbour's house with the children while she waits outside, hugging her sodden shawl around her, watching anxiously for any flames.

But all she can see is the sinister plume of smoke. A curious crowd has started to gather, gawping helplessly as half a dozen of Harvey's men arrive, pushing the company's fire engine, hung around with buckets, ladder and hosepipe.

'Don't ee be feared, ma'am,' calls the foreman. 'Us'll soon have that out for you. Looks like the chimney of your copper's caught.'

'But I only skyed it just a month ago. It should still be clear. It certainly made a loud enough bang when I set the gunpowder off.'

But a spark must have flown up and ignited the soot that so easily clogs the narrow pipe, spreading flames to the rafters, which have caught and are starting to smoulder. Fortunately the heavy rain that makes the washing impossible to dry also acts to douse the fire and once a bucket of water is thrown down the chimney of the copper the worst of the danger is over.

The firemen depart, brushing aside Johanna's thanks.

'Bain't going to let Mr Dupen's house burn down,' says the foreman with a grin. 'Just you tell him to buy us a beer next time he sees us in the Royal Standard.'

In the smoky kitchen Johanna sits down heavily on a wooden chair. Where is Sharrock when he's needed? Half way to Bristol, as usual. What if no one had seen the smoke? They are fortunate that Mr Glasson has retired and is at home most days. She is wet through and chilled to the bone but Sam is grizzling and starting to cough. Before she goes to change her dress she must get him dry and give him a little warm milk with honey to stop him catching cold. He is a delicate child who needs constant vigilance. How on earth will she manage once the next one arrives? Is it wrong to hope this will be the last? I have always tried to do my duty, Lord, she thinks, but enough is surely enough.

CENSUS 1851

At the time of the next census, that of 1851, Sharrock's father John Dupen was lodging in a coffeehouse in the Foundry area of Hayle. But six months earlier, around the same time as fire broke out in Penpol Terrace, his name appears in the workhouse admissions register for Redruth. Nothing could better illustrate the harsh truth that anyone in Victorian Britain could become poor. The fine gentleman of the portrait miniature was by then 76 years old, his wife had been dead for seven years and he was no doubt unfit for work. In general a larger proportion of elderly men are listed in the workhouse records than women, who are more likely to be found living with their adult children and contributing to housework and childcare despite their infirmities. The Redruth workhouse, a long, low building of grey stone with a slate roof, big sash windows and a central archway leading to an inner courtyard, had been constructed at Carn Brea just outside the town as part of the rolling out of the New Poor Law. The fact that John was taken in here rather than Falmouth suggests that he had moved to be near his son.

The old parish-administered system had provided flexible payments to the elderly and incapacitated, widows, and men (but not women) temporarily out of work. Money was made available to pay doctors' bills, buy food, or support illegitimate children, while under the Speenhamland system (a kind of eighteenth-century Universal Credit) relief was granted to any man, employed or unemployed, whose income dropped below a certain level. Population growth made all this increasingly unaffordable. By 1830 the poor rate represented 20% of all national expenditure (in the Redruth area it cost an average of 4s 5d per head of population) and it was clear that something had to change. The outcome was the New Poor Law of 1834. Over 15,000 parishes were grouped into some 600 'unions' and in the five years that followed 350 new workhouses were built to accommodate an influx of paupers, who would no longer be eligible for the 'outdoor relief' that allowed people to stay at home and receive basic financial aid. This, at least, was the theory.

Thirteen unions were created in Cornwall. The one for the area of Redruth covered eight parishes, including Phillack in Hayle. In 1837 the sum of £6,000 was approved for the construction of a workhouse to accommodate 450 people. They were separated by age and gender and put to work in the kitchen, laundry or garden; they took care of the boiler and the cess pit, cared for any livestock, and maintained

the fabric of the building. They chopped wood, ground flour, wrecked their backs breaking stones to mend the roads, and shredded their fingers picking oakum from old hemp ropes to be used in caulking the hulls of naval vessels. These mindless and physically draining tasks were designed to make workhouse life so unpleasant as to deter able-bodied claimants. The principle of 'less eligibility' is today known as 'better off in work' but the mind-set is the same. For the first time a distinction was being made between the impotent (sick, elderly, and widowed) and the indolent, encouraging the popular perception of deserving and undeserving claimants that persists to this day.

Given that the buildings were more weather proof than the average slum dwelling and the diet no worse than that of the labouring poor, people were not necessarily reluctant to apply for 'indoor relief' because of the physical conditions. It was the indignity of submitting to an arbitrary regime of degrading rules that made it something to be avoided if at all possible. On arrival the inhabitants had their bundles and pockets searched, they were stripped of their own clothes and bathed; their hair was cut short and they were issued with a rough cotton uniform and ill-fitting slippers. It was a process that robbed them of individuality and self-respect.

The new law succeeded in reducing both poor rate expenditure and the number of 'outdoor' paupers but coverage was incomplete and inconsistent. Although nearly a fifth of the workhouse population was aged over 65, the majority of elderly paupers were still allowed outdoor relief. The records suggest that John Dupen went into the workhouse for just six months, from September 1850 to March 1851. The census describes him as an annuitant, which presumably means he was in receipt of a pension from the authorities. True to its outlier status in the far and sometimes wild west, Cornwall had a distinctly less generous approach to eligibility than the south and north east, and paid smaller pensions, towards the bottom end of a range that went from 3s to 1s 6d a week. Sharrock's father would have enough to cover his board and lodging but little money to spare for small luxuries such as tea and tobacco. I can only hope that the ageing sailor was able to take a daily stroll to the quay, to watch the ships and smell the sea air during the year that was left to him before he died. I imagine his grandsons sometimes came to sit with him and begged for dramatic tales of his seafaring days, of storms and shipwreck, and outrunning the dastardly Frenchies.

But there were two further casualties of his descent into penury: Esther and Charles Cleverly, the children of his daughter Hannah, who were aged ten and eight in 1850. Hannah had married a sailor named Charles Cleverly, who was serving on *HMS Delight*, a ten-gun brig-sloop that was used on the packet service. This was one of the 'coffin brigs', so-called because of the large number that were wrecked, and it is possible that Charles was lost at sea. I can find no record of his death or burial. Hannah and her daughter were living with her parents at the time of the 1841 census but she died in 1843, a year after the birth of her son. The children must have stayed on with their grandparents and appear to have entered the workhouse at the same time as their grandfather, but unlike him they did not leave. Their names appear in the sixteen long pages of paupers, twenty on each page, resident in the Redruth workhouse on the night of the 1851 census. Servants, labourers, washerwomen, housekeepers, and orphaned children, each with a story of desperation that will never be known.

Workhouse life followed a fixed routine, changing only with the seasons. In summer the rising bell rang at 6 a.m. and at 6.30 a ration of bread and gruel was served in the dining hall. Dinner was at midday and consisted of broth or pease pudding, with a meat (or meat-flavoured) stew or suet pudding at the weekend. The regulation diet, carefully calculated for the different categories of inmate, was not ungenerous but there was plenty of scope for the master and matron to falsify the accounts and skimp on the rations. Esther may have glimpsed her brother and grandfather in the dining hall but she would not have been allowed to speak to them. They were allowed at most an hour together on a Sunday after chapel. Strict segregation was enforced between younger children, older girls and boys, and men and women, to avoid moral contagion. It is unlikely to have prevented abuse, both physical and sexual, but the victims were never going to report it.

Children were supposed to have three hours of schooling each day, consisting of basic reading, writing, arithmetic and religious knowledge, although there was some debate about writing. No one wanted pauper children to be better educated than those belonging to respectable families. The teaching was of a generally low standard because no competent schoolmaster or schoolmistress wanted to live in a workhouse and earn a pittance. In the afternoon the girls knitted or did needlework and domestic chores while the boys sometimes had the rudiments of history and geography presented to them. There was no recognisable recreation period, no toys or games of

cards, and little or nothing to read beyond the bible and the occasional moral tract. Esther would have been trained for domestic service and I imagine that was her eventual fate when she disappears from the records at the age of thirteen. Hester and Esther are two variants of the same name, thought to derive from the Persian word for 'star'. The story of Hester's cousin Esther is one that in an alternative reality could have easily been hers.

I hope Esther survived. Her brother Charles did not. I could write a touching deathbed scene where a thin, pale boy lies feverish in the infirmary, at the mercy of a dishevelled and drunken nurse. But this feels intrusive and unfair to the memory of a child who was not a storybook character but a real boy, who never knew his mother and after being separated from his big sister, survived just two years of the rough and tumble of the boys' ward. Other real-life workhouse inmates have written about the teasing and bullying, the meagre portions of disgusting food, the filthy sanitary arrangements, and the brutal regime of the schoolroom. So I prefer to record simply that Charles Henry Cleverly, aged ten, died in 1852 and was no doubt buried in a pauper's grave. His uncle did not arrange for his body to be brought to the parish church in St Erth where his grandfather was buried in February of that same year; his only memorial is the official register of deaths and what is written here.

Meanwhile, in Penpol Terrace, the census of 1851 is the only time that we find the entire Dupen family at home, including Johanna's final baby, born just one month earlier and named Ernest Vincent. The household, which takes up almost a full page of the record, is made up of Sharrock and Johanna, their daughters Annie, Kate, Salome, Ellen, Sarah and Hester, their surviving sons Sharrock, George, John, Samuel, and baby Ernest, as well as a charwoman and a house servant. It was no wonder that Sharrock could not take in his widowed father, still less his orphaned niece and nephew. Although Lizzie had married the previous year and moved away to Plymouth, there was no room in Penpol Terrace to squeeze in even one more person. Sharrock is described a 'Provider on board the Cornwall steamer', and his oldest son, aged sixteen, is the assistant steward on board the same vessel. Annie is a school governess and Kate a draper's assistant. It may say something about the value the family attached to education that the others, from fifteen-year-old Salome to three-year-old Hester are 'scholars', with only the babies, Sam and Ernest described as 'children at home'.

The presence of servants in Penpol Terrace is an indication that Sharrock must have bounced back from his temporary insolvency, and indeed, the population in general was experiencing a mood of national optimism. Britain had become the acknowledged world leader in manufacturing thanks to plentiful supplies of good quality coal and the associated ability to forge iron and generate the steam that was needed to run every type of machinery. British people were more and more mobile, migrating in large numbers to the new industrial cities and taking day trips out of those cities to the equally new seaside resorts. Around a quarter of them had a family income of more than £300, bringing them well within the definition of middle class. They lived in a country that was becoming ever more connected: by 1850 the railway network extended to over 6,000 miles and Greenwich time, which had been adopted by the Great Western Railway, was soon to spread to the whole country.⁵ A reliable and frequent postal service carried twice as many letters in 1849 as in 1839 and the first electric telegraph service was established in 1846. New ways of making paper and printing brought down the cost of newspapers and increasing numbers of periodicals (often illustrated) were being launched. On 1 May 1851 Queen Victoria opened the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, in the glass cathedral that was the Crystal Palace. It was the world's first trade fair and the realisation of Prince Albert's vision, to showcase his adopted land as a politically stable industrial giant.

Britain itself occupied half the exhibition space, while the rest was filled with the greatest wonders that foreign countries could supply: an ivory throne from India, furs from Canada, French porcelain, Russian sledges, and Swiss (naturally) watches. There were some 100,000 objects, ranging in size from a massive hydraulic press to the Koh-i-Noor diamond, locked in a display case like an exotic bird in a cage. The *Royal Cornwall Gazette* published a special report of the Cornish Department on 9 May to accompany the account of the opening. There was a fine display of tin, copper and iron ore accompanied by mining apparatus, specimens of china clay, granite and porphyry, various model boats, a sample of 'maranated' [sic] pilchards and two knitted sailors' frocks from Polperro. Harveys, surprisingly, seem not to have been represented but Mr J. Pool of the Copperhouse foundry supplied a 'well executed model of a Paddle Wheel for a steamer'.

⁵ Except in Oxford, where the university allowed the railway to come no closer than Didcot and stubbornly retained Christ Church time. To this day services in the cathedral begin five minutes after the hour.

In the six months from May to October six million visits were made by up to 40,000 people at a time. They dawdled happily along the ten miles of aisles in temperatures that reached 95° F on the warmest days, wondering at the displays of art and architecture, industrial and domestic machinery, carpets, velocipedes, and stuffed kittens taking tea. For the first time ladies could literally spend a penny in private, making it possible to stay all day and safely enjoy the (non-alcoholic) refreshments provided by Messrs Schweppes. From 24 May the weekday price for the exhibition was reduced to one shilling with the aim of making it affordable to the masses, although on the whole it was still the middle and artisan classes that took advantage of the opportunity. They travelled on excursion trains arranged by Thomas Cook and were, it was reported, ‘far more critical and discriminating in their mode of examining the treasures of the Exhibition than the more wealthy sight-seers who had preceded them’. On one of these one-shilling days the queen walked unprotected amongst her subjects, stopping at the central fountain that had been constructed from four tons of pink glass. ‘It was,’ reported the newspapers, ‘in point of fact, the first extempore walk of the Sovereign in the presence of her people without other guards than themselves.’ The relationship between monarch and people had been transformed from the uneasy early days of her reign.

It is unlikely that any of the Dupen family made the journey to London to view the Great Exhibition but the boys may well have heard accounts of it from their schoolmates, some of whom were Londoners. The Hayle Mathematical and Commercial Academy, a large institution on Foundry Hill ‘in an open and elevated position, within a few Minutes’ walk of the Sea’, was where Sharrock Dupen chose to send his sons to school. Whatever the financial difficulties Sharrock had experienced, he somehow found the money to pay the fees, which must have been less for day pupils than the £20 charged for boarders, but still a significant sum. The Dupen brothers had as their companions boys from the best families in town, the sons of professional men, doctors, ship’s masters, and engineers, as well as a dozen or so boarders who came from further afield. They included Captain Vivian’s grandson John, and Nicholas James West, a great-nephew of Henry Harvey and future manager of the works. Competition was fierce but the Dupens seem to have thrived in the rough and tumble of the big schoolroom, where three classes were grouped by age. In the 1st class in June 1853, Nicholas West carried off prizes for

Grammar, Geography, History, and Mapping, but in the 2nd class it was George Dupen who took the prizes for Composition and Geography, while in the class below, his ten-year-old brother John was awarded prizes for Grammar and Scripture.

E D U C A T I O N .
HAYLE ACADEMY, CORNWALL.
 Mr. JAMES HOSKING, Principal.
 Greek Master Mr. EDWIN PETERS DAVEY
 Latin Mr. W. TAYLOR
 French, Spanish, & Italian .. Mons. THOMAZIE.
 School Duties to be RESUMED on MONDAY, July 18th.
 Cornwall has long been celebrated for the salubrity of its atmosphere. Many young gentlemen from London, Bath, and Bristol (educated at the above establishment) have derived such a large amount of benefit as to elicit from their friends the warmest expressions of grateful satisfaction.
 Only one Vacation during the year, viz., four weeks at Midsummer.
 TERMS FOR BOARDING, &c. :—
 Pupils under 10 years of age £16 per annum
 Above 10 and under 18 £20 “
 Above 18 £26 “
 These terms include Washing, Use of Books, Charges for Stationery, and Instruction in the following branches :—Writing, English Grammar, Composition, Book-keeping, Mensuration, Algebra, Trigonometry, Euclid, Use of Globes, Mapping, Drawing, Natural Philosophy, &c.
 A Quarter's Notice is required before the removal of a Pupil.
 Greek, Latin, Spanish, French, and Italian, each £2 per annum.
 Steam-packets leave Bristol for Hayle every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.—Dated, June 24th, 1853.

I imagine the Dupen boys as a boisterous bunch, full of energy and curiosity, always getting into scrapes. The quay was no doubt where they spent most of their time when they were not at school, watching the ships arriving and leaving, helping to carry boxes and bundles that gave them an excuse to go on board and explore the mysteries of the hold. They and their friends must have spent many hours in summer jumping off the dock into the harbour, ducking and splashing each other. Sometimes perhaps a friendly sailor would show them how to tie a hitch, or demonstrate the proper way wield a marlinspike. They would scramble into the rigging like a tribe of annoying monkeys or shin up the mast as far as the crow's nest – until they were shooed down by an irate master or mate. It was almost inevitable that lads from Hayle would choose to be sailors.

In 1854 the oldest of the Dupen brothers, Sharrock, left the *Cornwall* and struck out on his own, departing from London on a sailing vessel called the *Adelaide*. At least, his relieved parents must have thought, he has not gone to fight. The general air of optimism was badly dented that spring when Britain went to war in Europe for the first time since her victory over Napoleon at Waterloo. The Turks had been fighting the Russians for six months in a dispute over, ostensibly, who was in charge of

protecting the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire and their sites in the Holy Land – Catholic France or Orthodox Russia. Britain and France, anxious about what they saw as Russian expansionism, sided with Turkey and on 28 March declared war on the Tsar. The battles are remembered now in street names across both countries – Place de l’Alma, Rue Inkerman, and numerous terraces called Sebastopol. But rather than a series of glorious victories the Crimean War was in reality a sorry tale of bungling ineptitude. The troops were poorly equipped, sanitary conditions were appalling, and cholera and dysentery rife.

A joint force landed north of Sevastopol on the Black Sea in September 1854, and after defeating the Russians at the Battle of Alma, set out to take the city. The next major battle, Balaklava, which has gone down in history because of the gallant but catastrophic Charge of the Light Brigade, did little to advance the campaign. In November the British were victorious at Inkerman, where a certain General John Lysaght Pennefather made his name. The Crimean War was the first to be recorded in photographs and a contemporary portrait shows the moustachioed general seated outside a tent surrounded by his staff, his long legs in their striped uniform trousers crossed as elegantly as if he were in a polite drawing room rather than a landscape ravaged by war. Twenty-year-old Sharrock Dupen may have heard the name but he was not to know that his future was linked to that of the Pennefathers: it was another five years before he met and married the general’s niece.

The siege of Sevastopol continued through a freezing winter that led to thousands of deaths from exposure and near-starvation, until in September 1855 the Russians finally evacuated the city. Six months later peace talks concluded with a treaty that established the Black Sea as a neutral zone and protected Turkey from further Russian interference. While the Freemasons of Bristol gathered to celebrate the fact that ‘The people of all countries could now cross the Black Sea without the defiance of Russian war vessels’, the newspaper reaction was on the whole more cynical. *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post* reprinted in full a broadside from the *Sun*: ‘A war, of two years and two days, bright with promise, has ended in disaster disappointment, and shame. [...] the sad end is just like the traitorous beginning, with this proviso, that we have lost all and gained nothing.’

The label ‘Crimean’ ignores the fact that it was also a Baltic war, with significant battles along Russia’s coastline in the Gulf of Finland, where the shortcomings of the British fleet soon became apparent. The great sailing ships of the line were

ineffectual in the shallow creeks and inlets of the Baltic, a vital source of timber, pitch and cordage that must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the Russians. What was needed was a completely new design of ship: short and tubby, flat-bottomed and steam-powered, the gunboat was born out of necessity. The intention was that gunboats should rely on their engines rather than using them as auxiliary power, but there was no room to carry enough coal for a voyage of any great length, so they had a hinged funnel that could be lowered out of the way of the sails and a screw that could be lifted. 'Down funnel and up screw,' went the command. They struggled on long ocean voyages, skittering, so it was said, like tea trays over the surface of the waves, but came into their own in the Baltic, as well as the Black Sea. They operated off the shore of the Crimea and in the Sea of Azov around the mouth of the Don, where they attacked the Russian supply routes, destroying crops of wheat, boats, and fisheries. Such was their success that by 1856 when the war ended, the navy had well over a hundred of them, just three years after the launch of the first one. Nearly twenty years later they were still in use when, as a young naval engineer, John Dupen was posted to the China station.

CHAPTER 8 CUTTING FOR STONE

Shortly after the end of the war, a small item in the newspaper provided me with another domestic story about the Dupens, one that brought home the reality of illness for Victorian families:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 31st October 1856
HAYLE.—On Thursday last week, the operation of cutting for stone in the bladder was performed by James Mudge, Esq., on a child just past his seventh year, son of Mr. S. S. Dupen, of this place. The operation was completed in ten minutes, the stone weighing upwards of four drams.

The seven-year-old child was Sam Dupen. When another Sam, Samuel Pepys, was operated on, he had a special case made to display his stone, which was said to be the size of a tennis ball. There is no record of Sam Dupen's stone and I don't know if he kept it, along with a boy's collection of shells, feathers, and other curiosities, to show off to his brothers. It was certainly not one of the heirlooms that I inherited.

The age-old process of lithotomy has been practised since the time of the ancient Greeks, when wandering cutters travelled from place to place performing the operation. Hippocrates knew that it required specialist skills, writing in one translation of his Hippocratic oath: 'I will not cut for stone, even for patients in whom the disease is manifest; I will leave this operation to be performed by practitioners, specialists in this art'.⁶

Bladder stones virtually disappeared in Europe in the course of the nineteenth century, possibly as a result of the new railway networks that made milk widely available to all – stones have been linked to calcium deficiency. Now they occur most frequently in children in poor rural communities of Africa and Asia, where the diet is restricted to a single cereal and no dairy products. Boys, for anatomical reasons, are more likely to develop them than girls.

James Mudge, who performed Sam Dupen's operation, was a surgeon apothecary. There were many thousands of these, who were gradually morphing into what we would recognise as general practitioners. The Apothecaries Act of 1815 had made the licensing of dispensing practitioners the responsibility of the Society of

⁶ This version of the Hippocratic oath is quoted by Abraham Verghese in his novel, *Cutting for Stone*. He suggests that the prohibition was an attempt to prevent the spread of infection rather than because of the danger of the procedure itself
<<https://abrahamverghese.com/home/faq/#Origin%20of%20the%20Title>>

Apothecaries and a three-year apprenticeship was mandatory. Candidates generally followed the tradition of ‘going up for College and Hall’, presenting themselves for examination by the Royal College of Surgeons at the same time. This required a period of study at an approved hospital, where students studied anatomy by dissecting corpses – no longer, thankfully, supplied from graveyards by the infamous ‘resurrection men’. Mudge would have followed this dual route. There were other medical practitioners in the town, including Dr Millett, who was a member of the elite caste of physicians. As a graduate of the prestigious King’s College, Aberdeen, and brother of a landed proprietor, Dr Millett was solidly entrenched in the middle class, while Mr Mudge worked with his hands and was not considered a gentleman.⁷ But in this instance he was probably better qualified.

The operation performed by Mr Mudge was a lateral lithotomy, popularised in the eighteenth century. It was the preferred method well into Victorian times, with a mortality rate of under 10%.⁸ Pepys would have undergone a more invasive procedure in 1658, and without anaesthetic. You can see images of the instruments used on the website of the Royal Museums in Greenwich but I don’t recommend them to the squeamish. According to Pepys’s biographer, Claire Tomalin, he would have been prepared for the operation with a special diet and a series of warm baths, then on the day of the procedure he would have been trussed with linen strips to hold his limbs in place, as well as being held down by four strong men. Afterwards, the usual practice was simply to dress the wound with a plaster of egg yolk, rose vinegar and oil rather than stitching. If the patient survived the shock of the operation there was always the danger of sepsis; Pepys was fortunate not to develop an infection, perhaps because he was the first case of the day and at less risk of bacteria carried from patient to patient on the unwashed hands of the surgeon.

Chloroform and ether were both available from the late 1840s, when pain-free surgery was welcomed as a miracle by a generation who had experienced the everyday agony of tooth-drawing, bone-setting, or even, like novelist Fanny Burney, mastectomy. But the use of anaesthetic was itself not without risk. It was implicated in a number of deaths and calculating the correct dose for a child was something of a gamble. If Sam was deemed too young to be safely anaesthetised he may simply

⁷ Like Mr Hoggins, the surgeon in *Cranford* (p. 115), who smelt of the stable and drugs.

⁸ A definite improvement on the much earlier practice of a certain Dominican friar, said to be the sleepy Frère Jacques of the nursery rhyme, who operated on 5,000 patients, gradually improving his survival rate after losing seven in a single day.

have been sedated with a tincture of opium. In either case the surgeon would have had to act fast.

Becoming a parent makes you vulnerable in a way that is well-nigh impossible to imagine until it happens. The fears of Victorian mothers were more frequent and well-grounded than ours, and despite the faith that sustained women like Johanna Dupen, she must have found it hard to reconcile herself to the possible loss of a beloved child. It would have been easier for me *not* to imagine this episode in too much detail (and I have to say that the procedure also reminds me rather too vividly of the cutting and stitching of childbirth), but I felt that I owed it to the spirit of Johanna to convey something of the courage and self-discipline required for her to hold her child still under the surgeon's knife.

Penpol Terrace, Hayle, October 1856

Seven-year-old Sam has never been robust and for the past few weeks he has been in pain, clutching his abdomen and weeping uncontrollably when he tries to urinate. Sometimes at night he wets the bed that he shares with Ernest, much to his younger brother's disgust. The urine is dark in colour and stained with blood. His mother doses him with Godfrey's Cordial, which calms him for a while, but she is frightened. The memory of baby Charles is a constant reminder of the fragile thread that binds her children to this world. Sam is refusing to eat and grows thin and pale, his skin translucent over his blue veins. She knows that there is a way to end his agony, but he may not survive the procedure. Her husband says they have no choice; without intervention their son may die of the pain. On the day Sharrock finally sets out to seek help, Johanna steels herself for the inevitable decision and prays for the strength to see it through.

Mr Mudge, a medical practitioner with an impressive set of letters after his name, lives in a fine villa in Foundry.

'He is quite a young man,' Sharrock tells his wife when he returns home, 'recently married and with a baby daughter of his own, so he understands the anxieties of a parent. But he has an air of confidence about him that cannot fail to impress.'

'An air is all very well,' says Johanna grimly. 'But is it justified? That's what I want to know.'

Sharrock patiently recites once more all the reasons they have to trust Mr Mudge. Dr Millett has recommended his colleague, who studied at St Bartholomew's hospital in London and is well-versed in all the latest surgical techniques.

'He says that if he operates Sam has a good chance of a complete recovery,' concludes Sharrock. Johanna bites her lip and falls silent.

On the morning of Thursday 26th October Mr Mudge arrives at the Dupen house with his apprentice, who is introduced as Mr Wolf, and his bag of instruments. Annie's pupils have been told to stay away – they don't want anyone outside the family in the house – but she is keeping her sisters and Ernest busy with lessons in the parlour, while Kate has gone to work and John has been sent off to the academy as usual. It is a grey autumn day; in the kitchen the oil lamps on the dresser have been lit to brighten the room but the surgeon calls for extra candles. It is important that he can see exactly what he is doing. Sam's father carries his son downstairs in his nightgown and lays him on the sheet that covers the big wooden table. He has been given two large glasses of water to drink to make sure his bladder is full before the operation. Wide-eyed with fright, he clutches at his mother's hand and struggles to sit up as she smooths back the hair from his clammy forehead. Mr Mudge smiles kindly at him and tells him that his pain will soon be over. He takes out a sponge and a glass bottle. Silhouetted on the wall a dark shadow flickers, the Sandman on his way to put a child to sleep.

'I will anaesthetise the lad with chloroform,' the surgeon tells Johanna, 'just like the queen when she gave birth to Prince Leopold. It is perfectly safe.'

Johanna grips her son's wrist. She can feel his bones under the skin, light as a sparrow. Is this the day that he will fly away from her? She starts to pray:

God of Love incline thine ear
Hear a cry of grief and fear
Hear an anxious parent's cry

Charles Wesley lost five of his own children; he knew what it was to fear for the life of a beloved son.

Mr Mudge holds the sponge to Sam's face and his eyes start to close. Johanna can smell the sickly sweetness. The surgeon raises the hem of the white cotton gown and draws the bony little knees up towards the chest. He instructs the child's mother and father to hold him firmly, one on each side. It is essential that he should remain as still as possible. Mr Wolf holds a narrow, grooved stick against Sam's body to open up the space between the tiny genitals and the anus. Mr Mudge adjusts the candles, then with his left hand he pulls the skin tight and with his right uses a slender silver blade to make a horizontal cut into the bladder. Urine seeps out onto the sheet. Joanna mutters the same few lines of Wesley's prayer over and over as the surgeon inserts a narrow pair of metal forceps into Sam's bladder, removes a tiny stone and drops it into a bowl on the table. He dresses the wound,

Sam's legs are lowered to the table, and his small body is covered with the nightgown again.

The whole procedure has lasted just ten minutes, although to the anxious mother it felt much longer. Mr Mudge takes out his apothecary's scales and weighs the stone.

'More than a quarter of an ounce,' he declares. 'No wonder the child was suffering.'

He packs away his instruments and says,

'For the next week you must keep him in bed, watch for any sign of fever and check the dressing regularly. Encourage him to take a little gruel or broth. He needs to build up his strength.'

'Surely he will have pain from the wound?' asks Johanna.

'If it troubles him you can let him have a few drops of the laudanum mixture that I will leave with you. I will return tomorrow to check on my patient.'

Sam starts to stir. He is confused and says that his head aches. Mr Mudge is reassuring. Chloroform can have that effect but it will soon pass. He must be a good boy and lie quietly so as not to disturb the dressing.

Sharrock carries his son back upstairs and settles him in the truckle bed in his parents' room. Johanna sits down and takes out her testament. She reads a few verses aloud and Sam's dismal wailing dies away, quieted by the sound of his mother's voice. Although the operation appears to have been successful it will be some weeks before they know if he will make a complete recovery. On Sunday she will ask the minister to pray for him.

CHAPTER 9 STARTING AT THE FOUNDRY

The newspaper article concluded with the news that the child was doing well, with every prospect of a perfect recovery, but I have a suspicion that Sam remained too delicate to join his older brothers at school. His name certainly never appears in the newspaper as a prize winner, unlike those of George and John. John Wesley Dupen lived up to the promise of his name; he was a studious boy, and to judge by his prize for scripture, a devout one. He was also the first in the family to study engineering, leaving school at the age of fourteen to enter Harvey's foundry. It was the start of a tradition that would be followed by his youngest brother, his oldest son, his nephew Harold, and my father, who was Harold's son – all, I imagine, meticulous men who enjoyed the craft of construction, taking accurate measurements, fitting components together, recycling materials to create new solutions to tricky problems.

Sometimes our family possessions, particularly much-loved toys, survive only in memory. The model ships *Jenny* and *Snowdrop* that were part of my childhood are now long gone. I am fairly sure *Jenny* (or was it *Snowdrop*?) was painted green and cream and her sister ship black and white. My grandfather built them for his sons – and named them after the family's two chickens. Boats and hens alike featured in the bedtime stories my father told in answer to the plea, 'Daddy, tell me about when you were a little boy.' I consult my brother, who tells me that one model was steam-powered by means of an ingenious contraption that burned methylated spirit and the other had an electric battery, but he cannot remember which was which. By the time we knew them, they were rarely sailed and could not be relied upon to perform to order. Later still, they were banished to the attic and must have been disposed of when my parents moved house for the final time, retiring to the mild climate of south Devon, where my father set up a workshop in the garage and took brisk walks along the seafront. Although he had never been a sailor, he was drawn to the water in a way that mystified my mother, who was miserably prone to seasickness on the smoothest channel crossing.

The model ships are a reminder of how the power of steam transformed the experience of going to sea. Only two years separated John from his brother George, who was to choose the old world of clippers and barquentines, but in future the men of the family would have a choice, deck or engine room, two tribes that eyed one another with a mixture of respect and suspicion. Sharrock Dupen's decision to pay

for an apprenticeship for his third son was a forward-looking one, designed to allow John to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the new age. The world was coming to depend on steam power for everything from pumping London's water supply to manufacturing kitchen ranges. A young man who understood the workings of an engine had a skill comparable to the ability to write computer code today. He could take his pick of well-paid jobs in the factories, on the railways, or at sea. John's indenture as an 'Apprentice in the Art of an Engine Fitter' would bind him for four years at a wage of a few shillings a week, increasing with each year of experience – not quite enough to pay for his keep but a useful contribution to the family budget.⁹ While Harveys undertook 'by the best means that they can [to] teach and instruct', John made a solemn commitment:

The said Apprentice his Masters faithfully shall serve their secrets keep their lawful commands everywhere gladly do [...] He shall not commit fornication nor contract Matrimony [...] He shall not play at Cards or Dice Tables [...] He shall not haunt Taverns or Playhouses nor absent himself from his said Masters' service day or night unlawfully.

The working day was probably not very different from that described by Nicholas Harvey in 1841, when he gave evidence to the historic commission on the employment of children. Scandalous findings in the coal mines, where tiny children laboured half-naked, operating trap doors and pulling carts in pitch darkness for twelve hours at a time, led to changes in the law over the next ten years. The employment of under-tens was ended and working hours of older boys and girls limited. In contrast, conditions in the foundries of the west of England were judged to be largely acceptable, with little evidence of accidents or ill health. The official hours for all indoor workers were six till six in summer and seven till seven in winter and if overtime was worked, it rarely extended beyond eight or nine o'clock at night and was paid as a quarter day. Harvey assured his interviewer that if boys were required to work through the night, they took those that had not worked during the day. They were allowed half an hour for breakfast and an hour for midday dinner, when most went home to eat, and they had two annual holidays, on Christmas Day and Good Friday. Harveys had an excellent safety record, with only two fatal accidents in twenty years, thanks to the care taken by the foremen and the overseer in

⁹ The starting wage in 1841 was fourpence a day, or two shillings a week, and by 1865 had doubled to four shillings.

charge of inspecting the machinery. Most of the boys had only a Sunday school education, limited to reading and catechism, but the inspector found evidence of an active book club run by the workers. He also noted a tendency for them to spend their wages on showy clothing for themselves and their children, making it worthwhile for London tailors to travel into Cornwall on a regular basis.

All his life John would have watched the smoke rising from the foundry chimneys, heard the loud hammering, and seen the massive engine cylinders being moved to the wharf. Sometimes it took twelve great horses, working in teams of four, heaving obediently as their drivers shouted to them, ‘Steady, Daisy! Come on, Captain! Whoa there, Betsy!’ Their coats would have gleamed with sweat as they struggled to shift the massive load, their clattering hooves striking sparks from the granite setts. I imagine that John wanted to see how these iron monsters were forged, but he was even more eager to understand how steam engines worked. He would have started his apprenticeship in the deafening clamour of the casting works, before being promoted to the pattern shop, where he would study the essentials of draughtsmanship, drawing and cutting out the wooden designs used for the moulds. He would then have been taught to work with wrought iron, heating the metal and hammering it into shape, turning the lathes that cut the cylinders, until finally he was judged ready to tackle the delicate process of assembling engine components. I can’t be sure exactly when he started at the foundry; it was possibly just after he turned fourteen in 1857, but I have chosen 1858, to match the launch date not only of Brunel’s *Great Eastern* but also the new coastal steamship *Cornubia*. I wanted to capture John’s pride and excitement at becoming even a minor player in the making of history.

Harvey’s Foundry, Hayle, summer 1858

John Dupen has wanted to be an engineer for as long as he can remember. He has pestered his father to allow him on board the *Cornwall*, to observe the engines being made ready for departure and interrogate the engineers until they lose patience and send him packing. He once tried asking his brother Sharrock, but Sharrock didn’t care.

‘Just so long as they get us to Bristol,’ he says.

George too thinks he’s a fool.

‘Steam will never replace wind power,’ he declares. ‘It’s far too expensive and unreliable.’

George is in Jamaica now. Or up a mast somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic. John has never had any desire to swing on a yard sixty feet in the air. He can climb as well as any Hayle boy but he is more interested in solving puzzles than in performing acrobatics. Now at last he has been given his chance to learn exactly how engines work.

His heroes are Mr Brunel and Mr Trevithick. Captain Vivian is always willing to entertain the academy boys with tales of the glory days of the past and his friend, known as the Cornish giant. Mr Trevithick, who was brother-in-law to old Mr Harvey, was the first to use strong steam. The model boiler that he boldly tested on his kitchen fire, as if it were no more dangerous than a tea kettle, was made by Mr William West, grandfather of John’s schoolmate Nick West. The new engine turned out to be so efficient at draining the mines that the depth of the shafts was doubled. That’s what John likes about engines – they have the power to change things. Mr Trevithick invented the steam-driven carriage too. Captain Vivian had the good fortune to drive one of them himself in London, but his favourite story, one that he never tires of repeating, is of the time his cousin Andrew and Mr Trevithick set out up Camborne Hill one Christmas Eve. That, of course, is where the song comes from, the one the boys mustn’t let their mothers and sisters hear them singing.

‘But the best of it was,’ says Captain Vivian with a gruff chuckle, ‘that after the engine broke down they went off to the hotel to enjoy a fine dinner of roast goose and completely forgot about it. So it went on merrily boiling away until it blew itself to shivereens. They were lucky no one was killed!’

Then there is Mr Brunel. He built the viaduct that soars 45 feet above the foundry buildings. John remembers the day when the first railway engine steamed across the rattling wooden structure. That was when he was nine, still just a little boy. He didn’t really understand how clever it was to build it on stone pillars so that they wouldn’t catch fire. Mr Brunel’s famous screw steamer *Great Britain* was launched in the same year that John was born and now work is nearing completion on his *Great Eastern*, after her monster hull was finally floated sideways into the Thames in January. Last year his father brought home an old copy of *Household Words*, with an article that John devoured and then repeated endlessly to his brothers and sisters. The little ones were infected with his excitement but his big sisters were unimpressed.

‘A leviathan,’ said Annie dismissively, ‘is sea monster not a ship. Read the Book of Job.’

At last John is about to follow in the footsteps of these two great men. On this bright summer morning he picks up his morning crib of bread and jam, turns aside from his mother's kiss, squares his shoulders and pulls himself up to his full height of just over five feet. He is no longer a child but a working man. He walks proudly beside his father on his way to his first day as a Harveys' apprentice.

When they arrive at the foundry offices Mr Nicholas Harvey himself is there to greet them, shaking hands with John's father and nodding benevolently at John.

'Good to have one of your boys with us, Dupen,' he says. 'Here, lad, you know my nephew, young West, don't you? You do as he bids you and you won't go wrong. Now, Dupen, I wanted a word with you about the Lodge meeting ...'

The two men walk away and John is left standing in front of Nick West. He shifts uneasily from foot to foot, aware that he has been singled out by Mr Harvey's attention and unsure how his old schoolmate will react. But West grins at him in a friendly fashion.

'Come on,' he says, 'follow me.'

The two boys make their way into the dark, echoing space of the casting works, where men and boys wheel barrow-loads of coal to feed the fires, work bellows, rake out ash, pack sand around wooden patterns to make moulds, and pour molten iron into the hollow left after the pattern has been removed. The stink of sulphur catches at John's throat and his eyes start to water, but he looks around eagerly. This is where he belongs.

The morning passes in a blur of fetching and carrying. The foreman keeps his apprentices hard at work and John feels the sweat trickling down his face and soaking into his neckerchief. But there is something magical about the sight of glowing liquid being transformed into solid iron. At eight o'clock they stop for half an hour and John takes his breakfast out into the yard with the other apprentices. Hayle is still a small town and he has known many of them all his life. The talk is all of the new steamship that is going to replace the *Cornwall* on the Bristol run. The *Cornubia* is sitting at the Carnsew quay being fitted out with her last furnishings before she goes into service.

'Proper job, her be. Remember when they launched she back in February?' asks John Bawder, a neighbour from Penpol Terrace. 'Must have been five thousand people come along to watch. And they let that little girl cut the rope,' he snorts.

'I know, I was here in the foundry with my pa. Us could see everything,' replies John, trying not to sound as if he is boasting. But he can't resist adding, 'Pa was invited to the dinner, seeing as how he's going to be the steward.'

‘Just to think,’ says Bawder, ‘that her made sixteen miles an hour round to Penzance. How fast do ee reckon her’ll be to Bristol?’

‘Could do it in twelve or thirteen hours, my pa says,’ John replies. ‘It’ll be on one tide, that’s for sure.’

‘Don’t ee want to go with your pa? Could’ve got a job on board, I reckon, if ee wanted.’

‘Aye,’ admits John, ‘I could, but I wouldn’t want to do what he does. Having sixty passengers fussing around me. “Oh steward, is it going to be very rough? I’m such a martyr to seasickness,”’ he squeaks in the tones of a timid lady traveller. Then he continues in his own voice, ‘I’d go in the engine room if they’d let me. But she’s still a paddler, the *Cornubia*. Screw steamers now, them be the ones to watch.’

‘Ee reckon?’ asks another boy that John doesn’t know. ‘Her be a right beauty though. Us could go take a look at she after work.’

John is about to refuse, knowing that he will be expected home. But then he thinks, why not? I’m a working man now. I can please myself.

CENSUS 1861

When the next census was taken in 1861 the house in Penpol Terrace had emptied. Johanna is listed as a widow and head of the household. Annie is a governess, John an engineer, and Sarah, Samuel and Ernest scholars. The other brothers and sisters are missing. There are a 13-year-old boarder and a 19-year-old visitor, but no servants. I needed to trace what happened, and where everyone has gone.

Kate was the next sister to marry, shortly after her brother Sharrock had taken as his wife the well-born Julia Pennefather, niece of the famous general – a story of romance and deception that we will come to later:

Western Daily News 17th November 1859

At the Wesleyan Foundry Chapel, Hayle, Cornwall, on the 17th inst., by the Rev. Edward Watson, Mr Walter Price, of Thomas Street, Bristol, to Catherine Sharrock, fourth daughter of Mr S. S. Dupen of the Cornubia steamship.

I imagine the bride entering the light and spacious stone building that served the Methodist community on her father's arm, neatly attired in a new gown that she would be able to use for best after the ceremony. Despite the example set by Queen Victoria, a young woman from a modest Methodist background would probably not choose impractical white, but neither would she opt for one of the bright new aniline dyes that were becoming all the rage amongst fashionable ladies. Her wedding dress may have been pale blue or soft grey, with a modest crinoline. Working for a draper she had access to good quality fabric and no doubt a generous length of velvet ribbon to trim the bodice and skirt. If she wore a veil held in place with a wreath of artificial flowers, it would probably have been of tulle rather than expensive lace. Given the status of Kate's father in Hayle society, there would have been a large number of guests invited to the wedding breakfast, which must surely have been held at the neighbouring White Hart.

At the age of 26 Kate was marrying a man of her own station in life. A Bristol man and the son of a tailor, Walter Price was in trade; in 1851 when he was twenty, the census records him as a tallow chandler (making and selling the evil-smelling candles that were only just being replaced as the main source of lighting in most homes), and a grocer in 1861. Perhaps he was one of Kate's father's suppliers, or a fellow mason, or both. He may have travelled to Hayle on business and been invited to dine with the family, or it could be that the young couple met at chapel, or in the

shop where Kate worked. She would have been a very suitable match for an ambitious tradesman, who would be able to use her skills in his business.

Once Kate had moved away to Bristol with her husband, the house in Penpol Terrace was less full than it had ever been. The family was more secure financially too after John secured his apprenticeship at Harvey's foundry and his three elder sisters had all become teachers. But in September 1860 everything changed. Their father, never particularly agile, started to hobble. I imagine that he complained of a painful foot, fever and a general malaise. His foot and leg would have become red and swollen, until eventually he was obliged to take to his bed and send for the surgeon. The doctor dressed the leg, which must have been covered by then in pus-filled blisters, but Sharrock grew weaker and weaker. Eventually the doctor declared that he would have to operate to cut out the diseased tissue. On 5 September the operation took place at home, as Sam's had done all those years before, but unlike his son, Sharrock Dupen did not survive.

The death certificate tells me that he died after an 'achiropedic' operation, an adjective that does not exist in even the most comprehensive medical dictionary but probably refers, like 'chiropody', to the foot. Erysipelas, on the other hand, which was also confirmed as being present in the foot and leg, was a common cause of death. Known in the Middle Ages as St Anthony's fire, it was a streptococcal infection that would have been almost impossible to treat without antibiotics. It killed the philosopher John Stuart Mill amongst many others. Sometimes it was the result of an injury but in the case of stout, red-faced Sharrock Dupen, it could have been connected with heart disease or diabetes:

Bristol Mercury 8th September 1860

Deaths

Lately at his residence, Hayle, Mr Sharrock Dupen, 25 years in the service of the Hayle and Bristol Steam Packet Company, deeply deplored by his bereaved and sorrowing family. His end was peace.

Sharrock died intestate, leaving an estate worth less than £200, or around £8,000–£9,000 in today's money. While he had clearly restored his position after the disastrous insolvency of 1849, he had not accumulated enough savings to leave his widow free from financial anxiety. He was buried in Phillack churchyard, high on the hill between the quiet waters of the Copperhouse Pool and the drifting sand dunes that conceal the wild surf of the bay. On 12 December Johanna was granted Letters

of Administration that described her late husband as a ‘Mariner not in Her Majesty’s Service’. Whatever business ventures he launched and social status he acquired along the way, as far as officialdom was concerned Sharrock Dupen ended his working life as he had begun, a simple sailor.

The only image that I possess of my two times great-grandfather is a hand-tinted photographic print. The artist has added a soft brown colour to his fuzzy receding



hair and made his eyes light hazel. He is seated at ease, leaning slightly backwards, his roomy dark brown coat with wide lapels open over his matching waistcoat, which is carefully unbuttoned to show his gentlemanly white shirt front. His dark silk tie is knotted in a bow under his upturned shirt collar. This is the style of the 1850s, or the late 1840s. The colourist has given him rosy cheeks and pink tinted lips and although he is not exactly smiling his expression seems benevolent. It is hard to judge his age; he could be anywhere between, say, 45 and 55. He is

clean-shaven and his sideburns are modest. A gold pocket watch hangs from a chain across his substantial paunch, a display of comfortable prosperity. I wonder if this is before or after the unhappy episode in 1849 when he was made an insolvent debtor.

A photograph is a moment arrested in time, where the immobility of the sitter conceals as much as it reveals. But as Sharrock Dupen looks out of his frame at me and I look back at him, I have the illusion that in this portrait there is still life. I have endowed the man in the photograph with the same placid good humour that I have always thought to be characteristic of Sharrock’s grandson, the grandfather I never knew. Perhaps I just want him to be a man who weathered both real and metaphorical storms with grace. Twenty-four years later, a regular traveller was to record his impressions of the steam packet service in a reminiscence of the old days. It is a fitting epitaph:

The Cornishman Thursday 7th February 1884

Some mention must be made of Mr Sharrock Dupen, the steward of the Herald, who followed his officer, Capt. Vivian, into the Cornwall. He was a rather short, extremely stout man, but withall very active. He victualled the boats well and the passengers had always good reason to be satisfied with the table.

PART 2: THE WORLD

CHAPTER 10 FROM OCEAN TO JUNGLE

One by one Sharrock and Johanna's children set out from Hayle to seek their fortunes across the world. I imagine long periods without news, punctuated by an occasional salt-stained letter arriving at the house in Penpol Terrace to reassure Johanna that one of her sons was still alive, at least at the time of writing. George is a particularly shadowy figure who is missing from the census returns for thirty years, between 1851 and 1881. When he reappears, it is as a planter, with a wife born in India. His is clearly a tale of adventure and transformation, if I can just piece it together.

Searching for evidence of this unexpected connection to Britain's imperial past, I eventually found what I wanted in a pretty, glass-fronted cabinet, hidden behind my grandmother's Crown Derby coffee service: two ornate silver bangles and a pair of

brass beakers pitted with the small irregularities of hand-beaten metal. In her will, Annie Dupen left her 'Indian silver bracelet' to one of her nieces. I expect all the sisters had them, gifts from their brother George. The beakers are not mentioned in any of the wills but they also could have been brought home from India. Uneven



bands of engraved geometric patterns frame a series of images of Hindu gods, six seated figures on one cup and seven standing or dancing on the other. The only one that I recognise is Ganesha, with his unmistakable curled trunk that conjures up affectionate memories of Babar the elephant –the other figures are possibly not deities at all, but his attendants. The black outline has started to disappear in places but the design has not been rubbed away by constant handling. I doubt if the cups have been used very often, if at all.

I wonder what Johanna Dupen thought of these heathen objects that her son brought home. Holding one of the beakers in her hand, perhaps she was transported to an alien place of unfamiliar words: bungalows and bazaars, chutney and chintz, kedgerie – and coolies. To write about empire is to confront some unpleasant truths about our ancestors. George and his fellow Victorians employed 'coolie' as a blanket

term that covered not only Indian plantation workers but also Chinese dockworkers, Malay pilgrims and pretty much any non-European manual labourers. It denoted an inferior breed of men (and women), who could be treated accordingly. If I am to render the reality of my family's past, I will not be able to avoid language and attitudes that today we find offensive. I realise with a jolt that despite the growing affection I feel for my imagined characters, the Dupen siblings, I may have found these people hard to like if I had met them. But it doesn't stop me from wanting to get to know them better.

I began with low expectations of what I could find out. George's sister Hester was only seven years old when he left home and she barely saw him after that; her son, my grandfather, never knew him. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century the rage for emigration continued unabated. Miners and farmworkers were joined by boys of the lower middle class, who took up posts as merchants' clerks and government administrators across the east, from Calcutta to Singapore and Hong Kong. Nearly half of all young Cornishmen aged between 15 and 24 left the country, while another third moved to other counties of England. George was just one of countless thousands who left. And yet he was originally, according to my research, not an emigrant but a sailor, who must have expected to return.

Those of us with ancestors in the merchant navy are fortunate that it is one of the best-documented of all occupations. I enjoy the combination of logic and inspired guesswork that you need to solve a tricky crossword clue or identify the murderer before Inspector Morse reveals the truth. A similar combination of research and serendipity allowed me to follow George around the world. Once I had his certificate as second mate, I had a record of all the ships he served on, his dates of service, and his rank. Knowing the names of the vessels gave me access to the shipping registers, lists of passengers and crew, and newspaper columns full of shipping movements. Whole websites are maintained by enthusiasts who have done much of the necessary transcription of Victorian handwriting. You could spend a lifetime (and some people do) studying the different types of sailing ships and their rigging, the complex systems of trade winds, and the roles of the different crew members. But the joy of research also lies in discovering new writers. I never shared my brother's enthusiasm for C. S. Forester and Patrick O'Brien, but I now I found myself enjoying the works of Richard Dana, a well born Bostonian who went to sea in the 1830s in what sounds like a rather drastic attempt to restore his health. Seventy years later Joseph Conrad,

another novelist I struggle with, mourned the passing of the great days of sail in his memoir *The Mirror of the Sea*. I read it alongside the recollections of a former midshipman, a wealthy ship owner, and the wife of a master mariner. I am grateful to all these voyagers for the insight they gave me into their world and can only apologise to their ghosts if, despite their best efforts, I muddle up my barques and barquentines, mainsails, royals, and topgallants.

George's ocean-going world was not very different from the one his father, grandfather, and even great-grandfather would have known as young men. Although Sharrock Dupen had taken advantage of the opportunities opened up by the advent of the steam packet, the vessels built in Harvey's shipyard and others that used the port of Hayle were still wooden sailing ships: sloops and brigs, brigantines and schooners. In the early years of the nineteenth century it was by no means a foregone conclusion that the future of maritime trade lay with iron and steam: coal took up a lot of space that could more profitably be used for cargo. George was a few days short of his fourteenth birthday when he first went to sea in 1855, in a small three-masted barquentine of 150 tons, registered in Bristol and trading to and from Ireland and the Mediterranean. It was not unusual for a lad of that age to be taken on as an apprentice (whose father paid a fee for him to be trained) or simply as a 'boy' (the term for a greenhorn of any age), but the record shows George starting as an Ordinary Seaman. I wonder if he nagged his parents to let him go, or even ran away without their permission in search of adventure. Surely with his record of academic achievement his father had other hopes for him.

The young sailor must from the start have shouldered the full responsibilities of a crew member, tarring, greasing and caulking in the constant battle to control leaks; hauling on the sheets and picking up the words of the shanties the men sang to keep time – 'Cheerly men' for a slow rhythm, 'Hurrah my boys' to go faster – climbing the foremast to furl or release the square sails that lay across the line of the hull. The average crew was made up of hard-drinking, illiterate, quarrelsome men but they prided themselves on their teamwork. They depended on one another to stay safe and no one would make allowances for George's age or his size. His life depended on his ability to keep his balance. At the command 'Lay aloft and furl', the men scampered up into the rigging and hung from the yards, bare feet gripping the wire toe rope while they grappled with the folds of wet canvas. In rough seas they swung high above the deck, up and down with each roll of the ship like overgrown children on a

giant seesaw, one that dunked them into the water with every downward arc. George soon learned that he would never, ever, be completely dry, but perhaps took comfort in the old sailor's dictum, 'You can't catch a cold from salt water'.

His mate's certificate shows that he spent a year on the Bristol-registered *Esther* and then there is a gap of twelve months for which he can apparently provide no testimonial. But in 1856 he shipped out on the barquentine *Eling* from Bristol to the West Indies, returning with a cargo of sugar and rum. With each voyage George was travelling further from home. His brother Sharrock, seven years his senior, was recently back from Australia, no doubt full of the excitement of the new world. After a year on the Atlantic run, George, not to be outdone, signed on for the long passage to the Antipodes. He was not at home to see his sister Kate married because in November 1859 he was on his way back from New Zealand.

The Queen of the Avon

Wellington Independent, 16th July 1859

The barque Queen of the Avon, Captain Gilbert, from London, arrived on Wednesday last after a passage of 110 days. She sailed from Gravesend on the 23rd March, and experienced rough weather and contrary winds until she passed Madeira, when she had fine weather and light winds until rounding the Cape, when she encountered a severe gale, which carried away her mainsail yard, and she shipped some heavy seas, which washed away part of the port bulwarks, poop ladder, hencoops, &c. Shortly after crossing the Line, a seaman of the name of Painter fell off the foretopsail yard and was unfortunately drowned, although the lifebuoy was thrown overboard, a boat lowered, and every exertion made to save him. The Queen of the Avon brings 131 passengers, 70 being for Wellington, and the remainder for Nelson. There were four births and two deaths during the passage. She proceeds to Nelson as soon as the passengers for here are landed, all her cargo being for that port.

The Bristol-registered *Queen of the Avon* was a dumpy, round-hulled sailing barque of 538 tons, with a square stern and a blunt snout that butted through the waves with the dogged determination of a terrier. She was around 120 feet long (which is longer than my back garden but not by much), and 25 feet wide (which is nearly twice as wide as my narrow Victorian town house). It is only by using these everyday comparisons that I can get a true sense of scale. She had three masts, a square-rigged main mast and foremast, and behind them the mizzen, which was rigged fore and aft with triangular lateen sails in line with the hull. Sheathed in the

mixture of copper and zinc known as yellow metal to protect her wooden hull against the dreaded teredo worm, that termite of the seas, which could rapidly reduce solid planks to lacework and sawdust, she was leaky, fire-prone, and bobbed about like a cork in rough seas. But she was twice the size of George's previous ship and she was to take him safely around the world.

The *Queen of the Avon* was carrying two dozen passengers in the first and second cabins, and in steerage more than a hundred immigrants, under the system of guaranteed payments by friends. As well as her human cargo the barque was transporting tea, coffee, cheese, whisky, cases of saws and other tools, as well as a much-needed supply of books for the colony's public schools. Her captain, Charles Gilbert (this seems to be the spelling he used), was a Hayle man and inclined, no doubt, to look favourably on a youngster from his home port. Back in the 1830s when Gilbert was skippering the small coastal vessel *Amelia* and George's father had first joined the *Herald*, the two had quite possibly drunk together in the Royal Standard. Since then Captain Gilbert had sailed to the west coast of Africa, South America, and Australia; George could have confidence that the master of the *Queen of the Avon* knew what he was about.

The seventeen-year-old sailor would by then have become accustomed to the discipline of the bells, which sounded every half hour as the sand drained from the glass and it was turned once more in the endless sequence of time-keeping essential to safe navigation. He would have learned the routine of a life lived in watches, four hours on and four hours off, punctuated by the two-hour dog watches that allowed the hours worked to shift across the day and everyone to eat an evening meal. A surviving crew list for a voyage to Sydney in 1858 shows a small complement of eight Able Seamen, two Ordinary Seamen, and two apprentices. They would have been divided into two watches of six men each, headed by the first and second mates. The only other specialist crew members listed were a carpenter (essential for keeping the ship in a good state of repair), a steward to take care of the passengers, and a cook.

Prayers were confined to Sundays, and then only if the weather permitted, but George used a 'bible' and a 'prayerbook' every day: they were the nicknames of the blocks of soft sandstone used to scrub the deck clean each morning before breakfast, when the whole ship was washed down and made ready for the day. A sailor's work was constant, overhauling and replacing the rigging, spinning new rope from old, as

well as making and mending his own shirts and wide-bottomed trousers. Stitching was not despised as women's work by men who spent their lives at sea; amongst their meagre possessions they would always have a hussif, a neat housewife's roll containing needle, thread, and thimble. At home, there had generally been a kind sister to mend a rent in your breeches or a hole in your stockings but now George had to rely on his own skill to patch and repair his torn and worn out clothing. At night he slept, exhausted, in a hammock slung in the dark, damp, fetid space beneath the forecastle, his sea chest stowed beneath him. The close-packed conditions were nothing new. He can never have had a sleeping space of his own; there had always been at least one of his brothers, sometimes two, fighting for their share of the bed and bedding. But the smell was unspeakable, of foul water that swirled in the bilges, the rancid remains of old cargo, and the inevitable stench of human excrement and vomit that could never be completely washed away.

If George was tired enough to sleep soundly for the hours he was off duty, hardly noticing the cockroaches and rats that scampered beneath and over him, nibbling at the hard skin on his feet, he would have been permanently hungry. This was before the Board of Trade regulations of 1869, which laid down minimum rations for each man. The basic diet was ship's biscuit, the rock-hard squares of twice-baked bread that were kept for months if not years, until they were full of weevils that scurried from the holes when you knocked your biscuit against the wooden tub that served as a table, or floated to the surface if you dunked it in your tea. Not that you could see what you were eating half the time. The crew's quarters were lit by a single, smoky oil lamp, or sometimes just a piece of rag stuffed into a cork and set afloat in a shallow dish of fat. With the biscuit they had salted beef or pork, which was mostly bone and gristle by the time the officers had had their pick, and watery pea soup three days a week, with boiled rice on Saturday and plum pudding on Sunday. The chickens that were kept on deck to provide eggs and meat were for the passengers not the crew, so when the hen coops were swept overboard in a gale it was no great loss to George and his fellow sailors. To supplement their diet they fished for turtles, sharks, and dolphins, or trailed a baited wooden triangle behind the ship in an attempt to catch one of the great albatrosses that glided by on wings half as wide as the deck.

The *Queen of the Avon* was far too small to carry a condensing engine to make fresh water, so except when they could catch rainwater in a sail, crew and passengers

alike relied on the stagnant liquid that was carried in barrels and grew steadily more noxious as the voyage went on. Everyone was supposed to take a regular dose of lime juice to prevent scurvy but supplies were frequently adulterated or insufficient and the disease was still prevalent in the merchant marine long after it had been eradicated from the Royal Navy. Even if George escaped scurvy, he undoubtedly had lice, rotten teeth, and chilblains. Life expectancy for the average sailor was just 45 years.

Their route took them south past Madeira and the Azores, then far out into the Atlantic, passing through the windless doldrums off the coast of South America. If they were lucky they would not have spent too many days becalmed in the stifling airless heat, waiting for a breeze to spin them southwards. To pass the time, a boat was perhaps lowered for the crew to row the passengers around for a while. George may have taken the opportunity to jump into the sea to cool off. Unlike many sailors of his generation, I expect he was a strong swimmer – his brother Ernest wrote in his logbook of how much he enjoyed bathing and I imagine this was true of all the Dupen boys.

The *Queen of the Avon* was sailing the newly established great circle route, following the curvature of the earth. While a pure circle was impossible because it would have taken ships straight into the Antarctic ice, a series of arcs shortened the journey by many days, although it made it infinitely more uncomfortable and dangerous. A Captain Godfrey was the first to test the theory, making a stunningly swift 77 day voyage to Adelaide in 1850, but the route was not adopted as standard until 1857, when miners making a dash for the Australian goldfields clamoured for a faster passage than the leisurely cruise via Rio and Cape Town.

Once over the equator they swooped on ever further south. If Captain Gilbert was a confident navigator, they may have gone as far as the fiftieth parallel and almost to the edge of the pack ice. In those latitudes the waves that broke over the snow-covered deck were at times forty feet high, and the helmsman was lashed to the wheel as, fifty feet above him, the crew clung like black spiders to the frosted white rigging, slipping on the ice-covered yards as they searched with numb feet for a toehold and clutched at the iron jackstay with fingers that burned with cold. Perhaps when passing the remote Kerguelen Islands a shout came from the lookout, ‘Iceberg on the port bow’, and a great slab of dark Prussian blue, its edges fading away to

clear crystal, loomed out of the grey mist ahead of them, rearing higher than the main mast.

Leaving the ice behind them they were buffeted through the Roaring Forties along the south coast of Australia and beyond Tasmania to Wellington on the southern tip of the North Island of New Zealand, and then across the narrow strait to Nelson on the South Island. As they approached their final destination the emigrants must have wondered what kind of place they were coming to, for no houses were visible, just densely forested, uncultivated slopes and in the distance, mountains. But after they nosed their way into the harbour, a collection of modest wooden dwellings with tin roofs appeared, nestling beside the bay and cut off from the rest of the island by a range of low hills. They moored at the new deep water wharf and were welcomed with enthusiasm, since by this time the residents and shopkeepers of this raw, new town on the edge of the known world were getting desperate for the supplies that had been expected daily, especially the tea and tobacco.

On their arrival in Nelson the grateful passengers issued public testimonials to the steward, Mr Hartshorn, who also received a gold ring in thanks for his ‘kind, obliging and impartial manner’; to the surgeon, Mr Thorpe, who was praised for his courtesy and gentlemanly deportment and assured that, ‘By [his] self-denial and attention the hearts of the sick and the faint have been made to rejoice’; and to the chief officer, Mr John Jones:

Nelson Examiner 6th August 1859

Care, industry and attention have characterized your proceedings throughout the voyage, combined with that devotion to your profession, which commands our admiration and esteem. And we pray that as you have been faithful in things temporal, you may prove faithful to the grace of God which bringeth salvation, so that ultimately you may receive an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and which fadeth not away.

One of the cabin passengers, a Reverend Shaw, who was surely the author of this text, was welcomed enthusiastically by the Methodist congregation of Nelson, only to be instructed shortly after his arrival to proceed on the mission brig *John Wesley* straight to the Friendly Islands (the present day kingdom of Tonga).

The crew of the *Queen of the Avon* spent some days in the small town, which had for a year been entitled to call itself a city after an Anglican cathedral (the size of a modest parish church) was built and a bishop installed. The ship then departed ‘in ballast for Guam’, a subterfuge much used by wily ship owners who wished to keep

their trading intentions to themselves. She may or may not have sailed north into the islands of the Pacific before making her way back to England, either via the west coast of America and around Cape Horn as she had done in 1858, or possibly, as she was to do the following year, via Ceylon, where there were ample quantities of tea, coffee and spices to collect and carry to London for sale at a solid profit. Whatever the route, I like to think that when George reached home at the end of this, his longest voyage so far, he was no longer a carefree boy but a man, with a man's awareness of his own mortality.

Atlantic Ocean, April 1859

They are just over a month into the voyage and the *Queen of the Avon* is sailing like a stout and determined water fowl through a great sunlit emptiness of green water under a cloudless blue sky. The islands of Cape Verde are long behind them and although they are as close as they will get to the coast of Brazil, no land is in sight. After an initial lengthy confinement below, since Madeira the passengers have been able to sit on deck, reading, sewing, playing cards or chatting, while their children run around and get under the feet of the crew. Even so, they are bored. It has been a long and tedious month and they are barely a third of the way into their journey. But their desire for entertainment is about to be met in a most unexpected fashion. They are approaching the equator and George realises he is in for it now. His shipmates know that he is a polliwog, one of those unfortunates who have never before crossed the line of the equator, and thanks to his older brother he knows exactly what to expect.

He watches as, shortly after four bells in the forenoon, a sail is stretched out on the main deck to create a makeshift bath and filled with seawater to a depth of some four feet. Despite the fact that they are in the middle of the ocean, the call comes from the bow as if they are entering shallow waters:

'By the mark five, and a half four, by the deep four.'

All hands are piped on deck to shorten sail and the ship's progress is slowed until she is drifting in a leisurely fashion with the current. A bearded gentleman suddenly appears from behind one of the boats, having apparently clambered up over the side. He is dressed in a long robe and wears a gilded crown on his shaggy locks. In one hand he carries a rough wooden pole with pieces of iron lashed to the top to create the three points of a trident. Beneath this disguise it is not difficult for George to recognise the ship's steward, a jovial character who gives every appearance of enjoying himself tremendously.

'Pipe to grog and bring out the greenhorns,' comes the shout.

The cabin passengers assemble on the poop deck as King Neptune climbs up to meet the captain, who receives him with great ceremony. In a booming voice the royal visitor makes a grandiloquent speech.

'How does your great Queen Victoria?' he enquires finally, 'and her illustrious consort and many fine children?'

On being reassured of the good health of the royal family he picks up a tankard and proposes a toast to the queen, God bless her. The men on the poop deck raise their mugs of grog and the toast is echoed by the whole audience, including the steerage passengers and the crew, who are crowding around the foot of the ladder to watch the spectacle. Neptune makes his way down to the main deck, where he takes his seat, regarding the assembled throng with an air of regal benevolence. The chief officer, Mr Jones, walks forward holding an impressive-looking scroll. Next to the 'bath' a powerfully built sailor called Amos, the acknowledged leader in the forecastle, is standing by with a foot-long 'razor' made from an old iron hoop, a tin bucket of suds, and a large paintbrush, while another sailor dressed in the long black robes of a doctor brandishes a bottle labelled 'PILLS'.

Mr Jones proceeds to read out, one by one, the names of those who are to be initiated.

'Dupen,' he calls and George walks forward. The 'doctor' feels his pulse and jabs him painfully under the nose with his 'smelling salts' – a cork stuck with pins. George then takes his seat in front of the barber, who starts to lather his chin with the greasy, tar-coated brush.

'This will smarten you up for the ladies,' he says. 'Got a girl back home have you? Where do you call home, young feller-me-lad?' he enquires innocently.

George considers keeping mum but fears that it will go harder for him if he refuses to play the game, so he replies,

'Cornwall, sir.'

His words are stifled by the filthy, soapy brush that is stuffed into his mouth. Choking and spluttering, George grins to show no hard feelings and pretends to struggle as two brawny seamen grab him and tip him backwards into the water-filled sail. As he comes up for air he is cheered by his audience and allowed to move away to make room for the next victim. It is Painter, a quiet young man a year or two older than George. Having seen what happened to his shipmate he clamps his mouth firmly shut at the barber's questions. It is not a wise move; a bucket is emptied over his head and the brush forced between his teeth. He is tipped into the

bath and George notices a look of terror on his face as the water closes over his head.

Once the crew have been dealt with, Mr Jones calls out to the passengers and a few of the hardier young men come forward to take their turn, while others slip him a coin to be let off. 'What a lark!' chuckles young Mr Hackett, one of the first class travellers, while his sisters squeal in dismay as he is dunked unceremoniously into the makeshift bath. In the heat of the afternoon sun he will soon dry off. That evening an extra ration of grog is dispensed to the crew, they bring out a fiddle, fife and drum, and sing shanties and dance as the passengers look on.

It is only a few days after the jollity of the Crossing the Line ceremony that the first death of the voyage occurs. It is a young child, the daughter of one of the steerage passengers, who had been ailing for some time. George watches with his head bowed respectfully as the body is stitched into a shroud made from an old sail and weighted with lead to ensure it sinks. The child's mother is distraught, cradling the pale face in her hands and kissing it as if she cannot bear to let it go.

'Not even to have a grave, my poor sweet darling. What sin have I committed to be punished thus?'

She is drawn away by Mrs Shaw, who puts her arms around her.

'Don't watch, my dear,' says the minister's wife, as two grave-faced sailors pick up the child and move towards the rail.

'Your cup is indeed full but God's will be done. His ways are not our ways. Remember that His angels will surely welcome your little one into His mansion and she will wait faithfully for you there.'

The mother buries her face in Mrs Shaw's shoulder, weeping hysterically as the Reverend Shaw reads from the burial service.

'We therefore commit her body to the deep, to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body when the sea shall give up her dead, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

George observes the body as it is tipped over the side and sinks rapidly from sight. What was she called? Eliza, was it, or Clara? She must have been just a year or two younger than Hester, but so thin and wasted compared with his bright, lively little sister. He wonders when he will see his family again. It is not that he misses them particularly, but he likes to think of the house in Penpol Terrace carrying on without him, his sisters practising the piano, or sewing as their mother reads from the New Testament, a safe and unchanging harbour. It is sad, he thinks with vague sympathy, that a mother has lost her child. At home they rarely speak of the missing babies: Charles, who he is too young to remember, and Rhoda, dead before he

himself was born. He knows his mother still prays for them, but it is not something that he has ever paid much attention to.

The next day George is aloft, sitting on the foreyard with his back to the foremast, scanning the empty sea for a passing sail, or the fin of a whale; it is one of his favourite places. He learned to climb when he was still too young to know fear, clinging to the rigging of the ships in Hayle harbour. He would slither back down, pursued by angry shouts from the mate or boatswain, and skip quickly away to avoid a thrashing. After years at sea he has developed powerful arm and shoulder muscles that do much to compensate for the short stature he has inherited from his father. His hands have grown horny and cracked. He can hold his own in a fight and defend himself against insults with language that would have horrified his older sisters, although he generally finds ways to sidestep a confrontation. His shipmates mock his facility with the art of reading and writing, calling him 'the schoolmaster' on the rare occasions when he can find a quiet perch on deck and take out his bible or a small volume of poetry. They eye him with respect, mingled with mild suspicion, as they sit mending their clothes, knitting, or smoking their foul-smelling pipes. But the teasing is good-natured and they are not above asking for his assistance when they want to write a letter to send by a passing home-bound ship. George knows that he has proved himself to be a competent deckhand so he is forgiven the peculiarity of his education.

Perched high above the waves, moving easily with the pitch and roll of the ship, smelling the clean salt air, George reflects that he would be happy to stay up here all day, away from the noise and hubbub of the deck. He doesn't understand his brothers. The role of steward has never interested him; on this voyage he has observed the servile manner of Mr Hartshorn, at the beck and call of the first class passengers, and wonders how Sharrock can stand it. But then, thinks George scornfully, he is only interested in making money and chasing after girls. He'll get himself in trouble one of these days. And as for John and his beastly engines. George finds it incomprehensible that anyone would prefer the noisy, filthy vibration of a steam ship to the soaring grace of a barque under sail, but there is John, serving out his apprenticeship in the foundry just so that he can go to sea as an engineer when he's older.

A stiff breeze gets up and the order is given to get aloft and furl. He shins neatly up to the foretopsail yard with Painter and third man from his watch, while another team of three do the same on the main mast.

'Watch what you're at,' George calls as, out on the yard, Painter fumbles with the heavy folds of canvas. He will never afterwards be sure but he thinks Painter

glances down at the deck just as the sail billows under his hands, and that is when he loses his balance and falls with a terrible cry into the sea.

'Man overboard,' shouts George and his call is echoed from below, 'All hands ahoy! Man overboard!' He watches horror-struck as a lifebuoy is thrown towards the place where Painter fell, but there is no sign of him. Of course, the man can't swim, he realises. George slides at top speed down the mast, careless of the burning sensation as the skin of his palms is torn, and pushes towards the group of men who are preparing to lower one of the ship's boats.

'Let me go after him,' he says, preparing to climb onto the bulwarks and jump.

'Nay lad,' says Amos, 'we don't want to lose you too. You'll do more good coming with us.' So George climbs in as the boat is lowered into the water and takes an oar. They begin to row towards the spot where Painter disappeared but it is already far astern. The task is surely hopeless. George is suddenly aware of the unimaginable depths beneath him. He remembers the child in her shroud and wonders in surprise why he never thought about how long it would take her to reach the floor of the ocean, miles below. Painter's bloated, unweighted body won't sink, though. He will rise to the surface and drift with sightless eyes turned to the sky until the circling sharks turn and devour him.

They row and row until the ship is hidden by the towering waves and their boat starts to ship water.

'That's it lads. Time to turn back,' says Amos. 'Here,' addressing the one man wearing seaboots, 'give us your boots.'

He hands one to George and one to another man and they start to bail. When they finally sight the *Queen of the Avon* again it has been two hours since they set out but George, grimly bailing and rowing, thinking only of the task at hand, is unaware of time passing. A rope ladder is lowered for the men to come on board and the boat is hauled back up on deck. Grave-faced, Captain Gilbert thanks them for their efforts.

'Thank God you are safe, men. We were beginning to fear we had lost you too. Painter's gone. You did your best. His cruise is done. Let us pray for his soul.'

George turns to the Reverend Shaw with a set expression.

'Why, Mr Shaw? Why? If I had been just a couple of feet closer I might have caught him.'

'It is not for us to question the mysteries of the Lord,' replies the minister quietly. 'Painter knew his work and did his duty and now he is with his maker. Remember this, my boy: without God we cannot live, but without God we dare not die.'

He begins to murmur the familiar words of Psalm 107: 'They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.'

The loss of Painter from their small, tight-knit crew is like the loss of a limb; his absence leaves a painful, phantom ache that George resolutely ignores as he continues to climb and jump with the same confident agility. A few days later when Captain Gilbert auctions off Painter's kit, George watches with a face as impassive as that of old Amos.

The Blackwall Frigates

George missed his sister Kate's wedding but he seems to have been ashore and quite



possibly at home in Hayle when his father died. Three months after the funeral, in December 1860, he signed on as an Ordinary Seaman again, but this time on the *Dover Castle*, one of the crack Blackwall frigates that competed for business between London and Australia.

In the seventeenth century the king's ships were built in the Blackwall Yard on the north bank of the Thames and a century later it was where the vessels of the East India Company, the backbone of England's merchant marine, were constructed. A young apprentice called George Green, the son of a Chelsea brewer, by a judicious combination of hard work and marrying his employer's daughter, became a partner in the business. On the death of his father-in-law he went into partnership with a Robert Wigram, but when this arrangement expired in 1843 the yard was divided, with Green taking the east side and Wigram's sons the west. The two companies traded side-by-side, building ships to high standards of comfort and efficiency and with a superb safety record. George Green's son Richard, the owner of the *Dover Castle*, was also a noted philanthropist in Poplar, funding the construction of a sailors' home, schools, a chapel, and almshouses.

Even after the ending of the East India Company's stranglehold on India in 1858, the Blackwall ships still sailed to Indian ports, but the Australian gold rush of the 1850s brought a surge in demand for superior passenger accommodation on the

Melbourne route. The two firms of Green and Money Wigram were well placed to offer suitable first and second class cabins.¹⁰ They recruited masters who were not only known as some of the best navigators afloat, with a rare ability to sail by the stars, but often also keen amateur naturalists, who made observations and collected specimens that advanced scientific knowledge. A Blackwall captain was entitled to call himself ‘esquire’, and could be paid up to £5,000 a year at a time when it was possible to live like a gentleman on £150. He ruled as ‘master under God’, and under him a typical Blackwaller carried a crew of sixty or more: four mates, a surgeon, a dozen midshipmen (trainee officers whose fathers paid £60 for the privilege of sending their sons to sea), a boatswain (who was effectively the foreman of the crew), a carpenter, a sail-maker, a donkeyman to operate the winch, and three quartermasters to steer the ship. There were two cooks, a butcher, a baker, and eight or nine stewards to attend to the needs of the cabin passengers.

With three square-rigged masts, twenty Able Seamen were required to keep the sails trimmed in immediate response to every change in the wind. And at the bottom of the heap were the four Ordinary Seamen, who were responsible for all the general maintenance while having a chance to quite literally learn the ropes, and four ship’s boys. George had gone from being a junior but essential member of a small team where everybody needed to turn their hand to everything, to a lowly member of a large hierarchy, where tasks and status were much more sharply delineated, but where at the same time he had the chance to learn from the very best in the business. He would return from this voyage equipped with all the necessary skills in mending sails and rigging, wielding a marlin spike, and helmsmanship.

The *Dover Castle*, was, at 1,000 tons, twice the size of the *Queen of the Avon*, and built for speed, with sleeker, sharper lines. With her deck guns, painted gun ports, and immense topsails, she could easily be mistaken for a man of war. Along with her five sister ships belonging to Greens of Blackwall, she made the run from London to Melbourne once a year, transporting cargo and passengers to the colony of Victoria and bringing back Australian wool and gold. She was officially a ‘ship’ (the name used for the biggest type of sailing vessel), but was referred to in advertising as a ‘splendid A1 clipper’, with very superior accommodation and an experienced

¹⁰ I am tempted to suggest that the son who inherited Robert Wigram’s business was named to encourage a talent for profit-making.

surgeon. Fares ranged from £65 to £90 in the first cabin, £35 to £40 in the second, £25 in the third, and £19 5s in the open berths of steerage.

The outward voyage seems to have passed without incident. They would have celebrated Christmas soon after their departure, with amateur theatricals or a concert, and then, a month into the voyage, when the crew had worked out the advance on their pay (which they mostly spent as soon as they were given it), it was time to 'bury the dead horse'. On a smart ship with plenty of cabin passengers this was an opportunity for the men to put on a show in the hope of receiving a few generous tips to supplement their drinks kitty.

During the second dog watch, while the older members of the crew sat around smoking and spinning yarns, the younger ones were singing or dancing hornpipes when a sailor appeared on deck straddling a rather lumpy stuffed sack, its mane and tail made of oakum.

'Gee up, old feller,' the jockey cried, but the crudely fashioned horse quickly collapsed onto the deck in a lifeless heap of canvas and straw.

'What's wrong with the old nag, doctor?' the rider asked another sailor.

'You rode him too hard and wore him out,' pronounced the 'doctor', prodding at the sorry carcase lying at his feet. 'Nothing to be done, I'm afraid. Now where's the auctioneer?'

A crewman stepped forward and called for silence.

'What am I bid for this fine horse?' he cried.

The cabin passengers threw coins to the men, who attached a rope to the sack and pulled it the full length of the ship. They hoisted nag and jockey up so that they hung from the yardarm and then, as the rider dropped neatly to the deck, the dead horse fell into the sea to the sound of loud cheers. The crew then sang the traditional shanty:

They say my horse is dead and gone
And they say so and they hope so
They say my horse is dead and gone
Oh poor old man.

The crew of the *Dover Castle* undoubtedly also celebrated Crossing the Line in the usual fashion but this time George would have been spared a shaving. On a ship with a bigger crew perhaps he had more time to watch the schools of porpoises and

flying fish that leapt across the bow, and to wonder at the silvery, phosphorescent glow of the waves at night as they neared the equator.

At last, after successfully navigating the treacherous waters of the Australian Bight, they arrived in Hobson's Bay in March 1861. George's first impression of the wealthy city of Melbourne, home to half a million people, would have been of an unprepossessing, flat, muddy swamp, with a haze of mountains away in the distance, but when a steam tug took the *Dover Castle* in tow for the nine miles up the Yarra Yarra river, the landscape changed to one of lush greenery, where tall greenish-grey eucalyptus shaded ferny undergrowth and reddish-brown cattle grazed in open fields, while in the distance rose an imposing skyline the equal of anything in Europe. It was the height of the gold fever that attacked so many otherwise reasonable men in the 1850s. The population of the state of Victoria trebled in just twenty years after gold was discovered at Ballarat, and on arrival in Australia some shipping companies had their crews arrested on trumped up charges to prevent them deserting to go and join the diggers. After docking in Melbourne, where George experienced for the first time the Blackwall tradition of discharging cargo to the tune of a fiddle, he would have been paid his wages of around £3 or £4 (minus the month's advance received and spent in London) and been at liberty to visit the city.

In April 1861 the *Dover Castle* was cleared for departure to London, carrying in the first class cabin eight families and their unnamed servants. There were in addition five gentlemen travelling alone, perhaps successful prospectors who could afford to spend the equivalent of a year's earnings on the fare home. One of them may have purchased his cabin furniture at auction the previous month, when the complete fittings of a Gentleman's Cabin from the incoming voyage were sold, comprising, 'a double sofa bed, cushions and pillows, a mahogany table, washstand and furniture, chest drawers, baths, swing lamp, chairs, carpeting, sodawater machine etc.' It was an acknowledged difficulty that rough characters, who were clearly not true gentlemen, could afford the trappings of wealth and expected to sit at the captain's table with their well-born fellow passengers. Diplomatic incidents threatened and were not always averted.

A further 197 anonymous passengers travelled in the second and third cabins, and in the hold were 22,156 ounces of gold, 653 bales of wool, 161 casks of hide, 37 bales of sheepskins, 125 casks of tallow, 61 bales of leather, 1,037 bags of bark, 4 bales of glue pieces, 3,157 bags of copper ore, and 1,119 cakes of copper. The

newspapers commented admiringly that: ‘The strict punctuality with which these vessels are despatched prevents a great deal of inconvenience to passengers, and reflects the greatest credit on all concerned.’

Soon after his arrival back in London, and without even enough time to visit his mother and sisters in Hayle, in July 1861 George transferred to another Blackwall frigate, the *Yorkshire* owned by Money Wigram, to return to Melbourne. Gruesome stories have attached themselves to this fine ship like barnacles. There was the Irish Italian driven mad by pain in his head, who appeared one day on the poop brandishing a knife and a bible. He proceeded to preach a lengthy sermon to the terrified passengers and dance a jig before he was lassoed by the mate and taken safely into custody. Then there was the sad case of the lady passenger so weakened by constant seasickness that, on arriving in Hobson’s Bay, she disembarked into the arms of her waiting husband and expired. Most tragic of all was the tale of a child who was buried not in the usual weighted canvas shroud but in a wooden coffin, a flimsy box that was broken open by a shark and the body devoured under the very eyes of the grieving mother.

There is nothing to say if George was present at any of these events but he must surely have witnessed many less melodramatic but equally sad instances of sickness, madness, and death. The long voyage has been compared to a nauseating prison sentence for passengers and crew alike, but despite the many hardships, it offered adventurous, ambitious young men the chance to work their way up to the exalted rank of master, some of them commanding their own ship by the time they were thirty. After serving the obligatory four years as an Ordinary Seaman George had qualified as an Able Seaman, capable of taking a bearing, carrying out all the work associated with the rigging, and sometimes entrusted with the helm. I like to think he became one of the fabled topmen, spending most of his time aloft and ready at a moment’s notice to race up the ratlines to furl the topgallant that hung above the mainsail.

Like the *Dover Castle*, the *Yorkshire* was advertised as a ‘favourite’ passenger ship. On 27 November 1861 she arrived in Melbourne after a swift passage in weather so fine that, ‘not once have the topgallant sails been in for twelve consecutive hours’. She brought some three dozen cabin passengers and 100 more in steerage. Among the new arrivals was a Mr George Wells, who was to umpire the first test match between England and Australia at the Melbourne ground on New

Year's Day 1862, a tour arranged as a substitute for a lecture series by Charles Dickens, who was the organisers' first choice of entertainment. The newspapers reported his arrival:

Among the passengers by the *Yorkshire* [...] was Mr George Wells, the well-known English cricketer, who is, we believe, going to take up his residence permanently with us. He is one of the chosen Eleven to play against our Twenty-two. Mr Wells paid a visit to the Melbourne ground, and expressed himself highly satisfied at its appearance and good order.

The whole city came out to enjoy the warm sunshine and festivities. A quarter of the total population went to watch the cricket, marking the start of a national obsession, while others took trips along the river or used the new railway to travel to the seaside, where they strolled along the shore and admired the ships in the bay. The *Yorkshire* rode at anchor dressed with flags of all nations, dwarfed by Brunel's massive iron steamship the *Great Britain*, which lay alongside her. Sharrock Dupen may well have seen Prince Albert launch the *Great Britain* into Bristol's Floating Harbour in 1843, just two years after George was born, and now George himself could admire the famous vessel. She had by this time been converted, for reasons of economy, from her original ground-breaking design as the first screw-driven passenger liner to a four-masted sailing ship that used her engine as back up. The 'Eleven of all England' had travelled out on her as first class passengers from Liverpool, practising their skills by playing deck quoits and Aunt Sally on deck. It is puzzling that Mr Wells was reported as arriving on the *Yorkshire*, but unlike his team mates he was believed to be coming out with the intention of settling in Australia so perhaps he arranged his own passage. Even if George was not given shore leave to attend the match, he may have had an opportunity to play quoits with the illustrious sportsman, whose first act was apparently to present his hosts with a cricket ball 'appropriately inscribed in gold letters'.

After the excitement of the cricket match, the *Yorkshire* made ready to sail once more for London. She had offloaded her cargo, ranging from 3,333 railway chairs (not seating but the cast iron fastenings used to attach the rails to the sleepers) to butts of wine, cases of butter and cheese, currants and raisins, tobacco, seeds, boots and shoes, and a piano, and advertised for passengers wishing to make the return voyage:



Messrs Money Wigram

and SONS' (of Blackwall Yard, London), LINE of PACKETS, comprising the Kent, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, and other well-known clipper ships, which have been built expressly for the Australian passenger trade.

FOR LONDON DIRECT.

To Sail with the Strictest Punctuality,
On Saturday, the 11th January,
The celebrated clipper ship
YORKSHIRE,
1200 tons, A1 at Lloyd's,
E. A. Reynell, Commander.

The above-named favorite passenger ship, which was built at Blackwall, expressly for this trade, is appointed to sail punctually on the 11th January, and intending passengers are invited to inspect the superior accommodations available in all departments of the vessel.

On each occasion of the ship's arrival at this port the passengers by the Yorkshire have cordially acknowledged the kindness and attention of Captain Reynell, whose name is now favorably known to a large number of colonists.

SALOON.

In this department the accommodations are of the same superior description as those on board the other well known vessels which compose the fleet to which the Yorkshire belongs; and for comfort and convenience are unsurpassed by those of any ship trading to these waters. The cabins are lofty, spacious, thoroughly ventilated, and are calculated to meet the requirements of families in all particulars. A milk cow will be placed on board.

SECOND CLASS.

The cabins in the second class are fitted up with roomy and comfortable berths, the space allotted to each passenger being unusually extensive; and the arrangements generally being of a nature to promote the convenience of families, as well as that of single persons. In this class provision will be made for supplying the usual articles of cabin table requisites, and the attendance of stewards. The articles referred to in the dietary scale will be furnished to the passengers by the stewards, and will include a weekly allowance of wine to adults.

THIRD CLASS.

The cabins in the third class are spacious, and fitted up with extremely comfortable berths. The dietary scales are likewise most liberal, and the greatest care will be taken that all articles supplied are of the best quality.

A surgeon accompanies the ship.

The Yorkshire is lying alongside the Railway Pier, Sandridge, and her accommodations may be inspected at any time.

The date of sailing will be adhered to with strict punctuality.

Fares:

Cabin, according to accommodation required	
Second Cabin	£32 to £35
(Including steward's attendance)	
Third Cabin	£16 to £20

For plans of cabins, and second and third class dietary scales, apply to

W. P. WHITE and CO., 10 Elizabeth street south, Melbourne.

PASSAGES FROM ENGLAND. - On application at the head office, Melbourne, orders may be obtained for the passage from England of persons anxious to join their friends in the country.

They undoubtedly sailed via Cape Horn, for the following year, with the experience of eight such passages behind him, Captain Reynell put up a spirited defence of the route in a letter to the editor of the Melbourne *Argus*. He argued that if a ship kept within the 48th parallel until near Cape Horn, the risk of meeting ice was very slight, and, 'Even when ice is encountered at night, provided the ship is placed under such canvas as will allow of her being manoeuvred in any way that may be necessary, and a good look-out kept, there is no difficulty in avoiding danger.' He went on to point out that the alternative of returning via the Cape of Good Hope also meant encountering gale force winds, but they were westerlies, driving the ship in the wrong direction, so the storms of Cape Horn were to be preferred to those off southern Africa. In conclusion he stated, and this is borne out by the records of the time, that there were fewer casualties on the passage to Australia than to India or North America.

The *Eastern Empire*

At the end of April 1862 George Dupen travelled to Bristol to take the examination to qualify as a second mate (a requirement that had been introduced in 1845), and then started the hunt for a suitable berth. This meant leaving the Blackwall frigates, where competition was fierce and most mates were selected from former midshipmen. He had to be satisfied with being taken on as third mate on a government-chartered emigrant ship bound for Sydney. Under Captain George Jury were three mates, a carpenter, a sailmaker, a steward and assistant steward, a cook, a baker and two assistants, nineteen able seamen, two apprentices, four ordinary seamen, and an engineer to run the water-distilling engine. At 1,014 tons the *Eastern Empire* was around the same size as the *Yorkshire* but carried no cabin passengers. Instead, crowded into the steerage accommodation were 35 married men, 41 married women, 157 single men, 81 single women, 33 boys, 26 girls and 14 infants. They were mostly Irish farm labourers, housemaids, dairymaids, washerwomen, and dressmakers. There were a few miners from Durham, Scotland, and Cornwall, a silk weaver from Warwickshire and another from Nottingham, a blacksmith or two, a couple of policemen, and a cluster of Scottish wives coming out to join their husbands. To look after them all a surgeon superintendent was employed, a Dr Newbold, who was assisted by a matron. He was apparently both competent and lucky, since they arrived in Sydney on 29 November 1862 after a passage of 99 days

from Plymouth with an unblemished record: no sickness, no deaths, and no births. He would have earned his gratuity, a bounty of up to £1 for each live passenger landed.

The government ships were on the whole better regulated than those belonging to private companies, where unscrupulous cabin passengers sold liquor to the men in steerage and tried to seduce the women. They led the way in enforcing rules for sanitation and hygiene that were not yet widespread on shore, and on the whole death rates were no higher than on land, unless an outbreak of measles, scarlet fever or whooping cough carried off the infants on board. Double tiers of bunks on each side of the hull, just over six feet wide and separated by low wooden partitions, held two people each, with designated sections for families, single men, and single women, and hospital bays at each end. (The *Eastern Empire* was praised for enforcing a proper segregation of single females from the male passengers and crew.) Long tables extended down the centre with storage space underneath. There was no privacy and it was impossible for the women in particular to wash. Most of the passengers were quickly prostrated with sea sickness and the conditions below became quite disgusting. With the hatches sometimes battened down for days against the Atlantic storms the stench was overpowering, and it was not just the vomit; many of the emigrants had no idea how to use a WC even if they had the strength to stagger as far as the two overflowing privies allocated to each sex. In the heat of the tropics flies, cockroaches and other vermin multiplied and many of the male passengers chose to sleep under the stars, begging to be hosed down with seawater when the decks were washed in the morning.

The emigrants were organised into ‘messes’ of up to a dozen people, with single women allocated places with families. Each mess elected a captain, whose job it was in the morning to fetch the day’s allowance of water in the lidded tin hookpot, and at dinnertime to take the piece of meat or pudding to the galley to be boiled in the huge communal pot. For reasons of respectability the job was never given to a woman, in case she came into unsupervised contact with the crew. A sailor caught talking to a female passenger could be mast-headed, sent up to stand on the yard for hours in all weathers. As third mate George was probably appointed as purser with responsibility for handing out the food rations. He would have been glad of his berth in the cabin beneath the poop, where for the first time he slept in a bunk not a hammock, as befitted his new status. I imagine that he adapted well to his new responsibilities and

gained the respect of the crew for his agility aloft, but he would have watched them with a wary eye, knowing they could turn in a moment over some perceived slight or injustice. He was no longer one of them.

There was little for the emigrants to do except chores, a strictly enforced routine of sweeping, cleaning, washing of dishes, airing of mattresses, and laundry twice a week. (Mothers were advised, somewhat unrealistically, to bring a large stock of cloth nappies to throw overboard after use. The problem of menstrual napkins was not addressed.) They rose at seven and by ten at night they were in their berths with the lamps extinguished. Once they reached warmer waters they could sit on the main deck amidst the clutter and noise of the cookhouse, farmyard, wheelhouse machinery, distilling apparatus, and the long boat. There was always mending to do, reading from the ship's library or journal writing for the literate. The *Eastern Empire* carried a schoolmaster, who would have taught scripture and the three Rs to the children, with an evening class where the younger adults could also learn to read and write.

Most emigrants were travelling under the remittance scheme, meaning that friends or relatives in Australia had paid a deposit and nominated them for the passage. On board was another George, a lad of thirteen who was travelling with his older brother John to join their brother and sister in Goulburn, New South Wales. Young George Fife was the son of a devout Wesleyan farmer from Fermanagh. The family farm of twelve acres was completely inadequate to sustain a total of eighteen children and over a period of five years all five children by William Fife's first marriage departed for Australia. Their father grieved for them deeply and sincerely, writing to Nixon, the oldest boy, 'Recollection is ever at hand with me and when I think and think again am I never to see either of yous [*sic*] in this Life this is what wounds my heart.' Even the thought of being reunited in the afterlife was no consolation. But the family had no other choice, and as soon as Nixon could afford it he paid £10 each towards the fare for his siblings to come out and join him. The youngest boy appears to have been something of a scapegrace, described by his father thus: 'George will be a young traveller wherever it may be his lot to Go. Good sometimes comes out of Evil.' It is a description that reminds me of George Dupen. Although the crew were strictly forbidden to speak to the passengers, surely the children roaming the deck came into contact with the sailors and if they did, the young third mate would perhaps have recognised in the lively, underfed, youngster a kindred spirit. I can't

help hoping that my George, as I have come to think of him, took the Fife boy under his wing. My research has convinced me that any life story is full of unexpected connections and coincidences.

Once they reached Sydney, Captain Jury paid for the inmates of the Female Refuge in Sydney to be supplied with roast beef and plum pudding on Christmas Day in return for getting the ship's laundry done. He seems to have been of a benevolent disposition, or just filled with seasonal cheer. His chief mate, on the other hand, was a pugnacious character who appeared before the Water Court charged with common assault on the young assistant steward, a man more than twenty years his junior. The *Eastern Empire* was possibly not an entirely happy ship. And now the question of the return voyage had to be addressed. Unlike the masters of the Blackwall frigates, Captain Jury could not count on attracting cabin passengers who would pay handsomely to travel back to England. Instead he set about finding new cargo, advertising the ship as 'capacious and well-ventilated' and well suited for carrying horses to India or sheep to New Zealand. The steerage accommodation would need little adjustment to prepare it for the transport of livestock. When no such business was forthcoming, he accepted a commission to collect a less troublesome but surely also less appealing cargo: in January 1863 the *Eastern Empire* was cleared to depart in ballast for the island of Ichaboe, off the coast of Namibia, an important source of guano. Or was that, like Guam, a ruse designed to conceal their true destination?

It was not until late in my research that, by a roundabout route originating with a distant cousin in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, I acquired the story of how George left the sea. Vivian Cecil Dupen, grandson of George's brother Sharrock, was 73 in 1977 when he wrote a set of notes about the family history, believing it to be his responsibility as the last of the Cornish Dupens left in England.

DUPENS IN INDIA.

About 1860 George Semmens, the son of Sharrock Semmens the elder, sailed as mate of a windjammer around the Cape on a voyage to Chittagong. He quarreled with his Captain and prosecuted him when the ship reached Madras.

He won his case and jumped ship, knowing that his life on board was not worth much purchase. While stranded in Madras he met a Tom Stanes who offered him a job coffee plantations in the Nelliampatty Hills in Cochin State.

This typescript somehow ended up in Australia and was sent to me when I had already written most of my account of George's life. Vivian Cecil lived another twelve years; I could have heard his reminiscences at first hand. He was living in

Hampshire, a mere hour's drive away, and yet I never knew of his existence. This is how living history slips from our grasp, unnoticed until it is too late.

I decided that this particular story bore all the hallmarks of a family myth, undoubtedly true in part, but confused in the detail. Ships' masters were of course acknowledged in those days as being 'next after God'. One of them vividly described his power in his autobiography: 'A captain, when he's at sea, he's judge, jury, and everything else; he has the law in his own hands. If a mutiny starts he can shoot every man of them down to save the ship.' His crew might protest that the ship was overladen, or being pushed too hard in heavy seas and strong winds, but there was little they could do about it. The captain's main concern was to satisfy the owners' desire for profit. But the Merchant Shipping acts of 1850 and 1854 made ship's masters rather more accountable for the health and safety of their crew, and by the middle of the nineteenth century it was not unheard of for one of them to be prosecuted back on land. Most recorded cases seem to have been for particularly vicious cases of assault, sometimes resulting in death. The incident described by Vivian Cecil was possibly true, but to my frustration I realised I had little chance of uncovering the full story without the name of either the 'windjammer' or its captain.

I acted on a hunch that George was still serving on the *Eastern Empire*. I knew that she had sailed to Madras in August 1864, after transporting another cargo of 388 emigrants from Plymouth to Melbourne. Controversy surrounded the surgeon, a Dr Baker Brown, and the 'religious instructor', a Mr Lionel Stanton. Dr Brown had laughed at one of the Reverend Stanton's sermons and in return, Stanton charged him with inappropriate behaviour towards the female immigrants. The captain seems to have been unable to resolve the dispute, suggesting some lack of authority. The last that is known of Captain Jury is that he washed up in Port Adelaide in 1871, a shadow of his former self and unfit to take charge of a vessel. He was said to have suffered 'a sunstroke' in India. He seemed an unlikely candidate for the role of villain. I recalled that his chief officer, on the other hand, had been prosecuted for assault in Sydney.

George was not listed as a member of the crew in 1864 but it seemed worth paying to get hold of a copy of the *Eastern Empire*'s logbook for her previous voyage, the one that ended in London in the January. I sent off a request to have it scanned and emailed to me from Memorial University in Newfoundland, where so many maritime records have been sent for safe-keeping. If I worked in an archive I

would like to know why people ask to see apparently random documents, so I included a brief explanation of my interest. Then I settled down to wait. Shortly afterwards a reply popped into my inbox with payment instructions and a note. The logbook, said the archivist laconically, will not disappoint. He was right.

George was recorded as joining the ship in London in May 1862, and being discharged in Madras on 21 September 1863. The columns for grading his conduct and ability were blank. In Sydney on Christmas Day the log read as follows,

George Dupen 3rd officer asked for liberty and was refused as the ship was laying at single anchor and laying in the roads. At about 12 o'clock he left the ship and went on shore and on his return being asked the reason for leaving when the captain had refused him he said if he could not get liberty he would take it.

It sounds like the behaviour of a rebellious teenager (he was by now 21 years old) but there is nothing to say that he was punished for it. The same spirit of seasonal goodwill that led Captain Jury to provide dinner for the orphan laundresses may have persuaded him to be merciful.

From Sydney, where several of the crew deserted, the *Eastern Empire* proceeded not to Ichaboe but to Calcutta and Mauritius, arriving in Madras in August 1863, which is where an incident unfolded that matched the story inherited by my distant Australian cousin. It was, as I suspected, with the chief officer, a 39-year-old Irishman, that George fell out. In the log (which was customarily kept by the chief officer) the story was recorded as follows:

August 12th: J. J. B. Travers chief officer ordered George Dupen to return to duty. This he refused. I then ordered him to go and see the captain. He again refused saying my life has been threatened twice and I wish to go on shore. He was again ordered aft for the captain to decide what should be done. He still refused to go aft and on the chief officer pushing him he used the most insulting language. I have got you now I will make you pay dearly for this.

August 13th: George Dupen 3rd officer went on shore with a constable and returned again to the ship at 3 pm.

August 14th: At 6 am George Dupen being at duty was ordered to the post to receive cargo and after receiving a few bales of cotton he threw the slings overboard. On the chief officer then remonstrating with him for his negligence and want of attention he turned round in a most impertinent manner and commenced humming a tune beating time to the same with his foot. On this being reported to me I ordered G. Dupen to do no more duty until the case was decided by the magistrate.

This vivid description of a mutinous youth is one that every parent and teacher will recognise but there was surely more to his behaviour than the logbook recorded. The *Eastern Empire* seems to have haemorrhaged crew at every port, including a dozen men who refused duty in Calcutta on Good Friday, even though the ship was loaded and ready to depart. If the assault case brought in Sydney was recorded in the newspaper, perhaps the Madras papers covered what happened there. The British Library India Office catalogue listed just one source for 1863, the *Madras Times*, so fragile that it could only be consulted on microfiche. I set off for London with no great hope of finding anything – a couple of lines at best – and arranged to meet a friend for lunch so that it would not be an entirely wasted journey. But lunchtime came and I was still sitting in front of the microfiche reader scribbling urgently in my notebook. The scene that I found was so full of dramatic potential that I wanted to bring it to life in a way that just reproducing the newspaper report never could. I have simply added a few extra bloodstains and adapted some of the dialogue from the court report to make it less formal (but kept the obsolete term ‘commit’ as a way of saying compromise oneself, or expose oneself to risk). Here then is George’s version of the truth.

Madras, August 1863

It is seven o’clock on a morning that promises to be as hot and humid as the ones that have gone before. The *Eastern Empire* is lying at anchor in the roads off Madras and George is in his berth, turning over the events of the previous day and contemplating his future. He has finally made up his mind to take his chances in this foreign port rather than stay on a vessel where he has been constantly harassed and insulted, but every time he asks the captain for his discharge he has been refused or put off, as he was again yesterday, with a vague promise to consider his request. He knows why. The captain depends on his bookkeeping skills to keep track of the cargo and the stores.

With a sudden bang the door is flung open and Mr Travers looms over him.

‘Let’s see what you’re going to do now,’ he jeers.

George pushes past him and makes his way to the galley, where the captain is waiting impatiently as a pot of fresh coffee is brewed on the stove.

‘I must ask you once more, sir,’ says George, ‘to grant me my discharge.’

‘Oh, don’t bother me now,’ the captain replies, turning away.

'Then I respectfully request your permission to take my case to the authorities. Mr Travers has threatened my life twice now and you will not let me remove myself from danger by quitting the ship. I regret, sir, but I can no longer do my work without a guarantee of proper treatment.'

'Insolent puppy. If you refuse to work then you shall have no more rations,' the captain says, and walks off to the back of the galley to inspect the distilling apparatus.

'Right then!' says Travers. 'Aft you go.'

He grabs George's shoulder and gives him a violent push towards the main hatchway. Even as George stumbles to right himself, Travers throws a vicious punch that fells him to the ground. He lies there winded but the chief officer grabs him by the hair and hauls him to his feet.

'You damned little hound,' he growls.

George is yelling in pain and struggling to be free but the Irishman is too strong for him. The second officer and the ship's carpenter are watching aghast but unwilling to intervene. It is no light matter to get on the wrong side of Mr Travers.

'Mr Travers,' calls Captain Jury from the back of the galley, 'mind you do not commit yourself.'

Kicking and squirming, George is pushed towards the capstan.

'I will make you pay for this,' he gasps.

'Pay be damned. I've had my money's worth out of you,' says Travers, pushing him into a side cabin.

The chief officer's hands are round George's throat and he wonders if this is finally the end as he gasps for breath and claws in vain at his attacker. Suddenly Travers releases him and he falls to the floor. The chief officer administers a few savage kicks and hauls him to his feet again.

'Stand here,' he says, pushing him outside the cabin. 'If you move from this spot I swear I will give you a beating you won't forget.'

He strides off but a few minutes later he is back, swishing a rope end in his hand.

'I know damned well that I'll have to pay for this,' he says, a vein pulsing at his temple, 'but just give me a chance and I'll beat you again.'

George remains standing, dizzy with pain, the taste of blood in his mouth, until past eight o'clock, when the captain sends for him to make up the day's books. He has had no breakfast but he knows better than to complain. He quickly enters the figures and tots them up, and then taking a fresh sheet of paper he composes a letter:

Ship "Eastern Empire" Thursday

Sir, — I am third officer of this vessel now off duty on account of the abusive and threatening conduct of the Chief Officer. He has twice threatened my life and has this morning brutally assaulted me. The captain has refused to let me come ashore so I write this with the hope that you will be good enough to enquire into this matter. With the assurance that you will give this affair your kind attention

I am Sir

Your obedient servant

GEORGE DUPEN

He goes to find the captain on the poop deck and requests permission to go ashore.

'No, you had much better go to your duty,' is the brusque reply.

So George finds a man who is leaving the ship that morning and entrusts the letter to him.

'See that it reaches the Magistrate,' he says. 'My very life depends upon it.'

Then he goes to his berth and curls up with his arms around his aching belly.

The next morning he is still in so much pain that all he can do is lie across a chest without moving. He almost succumbs to tears of relief when, that afternoon, a policeman arrives to take him to lay his complaint before the magistrate in person. He had hardly dared hope that his letter would be delivered, let alone attended to. George clambers down into the open *masula* boat crewed by a dozen native rowers in white loin cloths. As they get close to the shore the men ship their oars, waiting for the next big wave. The boat flies through the surf and grounds on the beach, tipping onto its side as the crew leap out to secure it before it can be washed back out to sea. Bruised and sore, George crawls onto the sand and gets unsteadily to his feet. The policeman escorts him towards the line of fine white buildings that line the promenade.

Mr Campbell, the magistrate, is stern-faced but not unsympathetic.

'You must return to the ship and to your duty,' he says firmly, adding, 'Have no fear, I will send a police boat tomorrow to summon the parties to court.'

True to his word, at noon the next day a summons and subpoena are delivered to the captain, chief officer, and the two witnesses, and a date is set for the hearing of the following Tuesday, 18th August.

It is hot and close in the courtroom, the air stirred but not cooled by the big ceiling fans pulled by the squatting punkah wallah. George is sweating; he has taken care to dress neatly in a clean shirt but he can feel the wet patches spread from under

his arms across his back and chest. The big, red-faced Irishman who sits across from him looks even more uncomfortable, dabbing at his neck with his handkerchief. George is sure that if he were to come closer, he would smell whiskey fumes.

James Butters, the ship's carpenter, is the first to take the stand. He testifies that he witnessed the assault but cannot swear that the captain did so, and he is in any case, he declares, 'perfectly satisfied that the captain would not allow any man to be ill-used on board'. The second officer John Lamarquand is the next witness to be called.

'On Thursday morning about seven o'clock or so,' he says, 'I heard the chief officer order the prosecutor out of his berth and immediately afterwards my attention was drawn to an exciting scene on the aft part of the vessel. The chief officer had hold of the prosecutor by the hair and the latter was making a violent effort to get free. I saw no more.'

'But you've heard the chief officer abuse me on many occasions, haven't you?' asks George.

'Yes indeed, I've heard the chief officer abuse you often.'

'Would you say that was every day?' the magistrate enquires.

'Not daily but about two or three times a week. I've heard the defendant call him a damned hound and useless wretch. But I can't say that I ever heard him threaten his life.'

The captain then intervenes to ask a question of his own.

'Mr Lamarquand, have I ever neglected to address any complaints made by members of the ship's company?'

'No sir. To my knowledge you have always attended to complaints made on board.'

The captain is then asked to give his own evidence and states that he knows very little of the case. He did not see the assault committed but hearing the prosecutor cry out he merely told the chief officer not to commit himself. Finally Travers is called and with an air of bravado admits having committed the assault, but under what he claims was very severe provocation.

George watches anxiously while the magistrate considers his verdict. Throughout the proceedings Mr Campbell's face has given little away. He seemed to be a fair man when George first went to speak to him, but his inclination will be to side with authority. There is not long to wait. The charge against the captain is dismissed. No surprise there, thinks George.

'But with regard to the chief officer,' continues the magistrate, 'no circumstances whatever can have justified him in treating the prosecutor in the manner he has

done. The defendant is certainly liable to be fined to the utmost extent. The prosecutor has given his evidence in a very straightforward manner and his witnesses have borne him out in the main points. The defendant is ordered to pay a fine of seventy rupees, out of which fifty rupees are to be given the prosecutor as compensation.'

He pauses and looks severely at George before adding, 'And also with a view to putting a stop to any further litigation.'

'Do you wish to return to your vessel?' he enquires.

'I would rather go to jail,' replies George with some heat.

'Then, Captain, you must give this man his discharge.'

On the Indian Hills

That, then, was the truth behind the family myth. The story had proved more accurate than I ever imagined I could prove. Travers was a bully and Captain Jury weak and ineffectual. George had stood his ground and won his case but what was he to do now? If he went looking for another ship, hoping to make his way home, he would undoubtedly be rejected because of his reputation as a trouble maker. Even allowing for the optimism of youth, it must have been an anxious time until he met the man called Stanes who, according to Vivian Cecil Dupen, offered him a job on a coffee plantation.

Before I knew anything of this story, because Dupen is an unusual name I had tried typing it into Google from time to time to see what was thrown up. One such idle search produced an entry from the *Madras Revenue Register* of 1868. It told of an Agricultural and Industrial exhibition held in the southern town of Palghaut in November, where George Dupen of the Varlavchar estate in the Cochin hills had taken second prize for his coffee. According to other records available through the Families in British India website, in the August he had married Jane Tomlinson, oldest daughter of Mr J. J. Tomlinson of Palghaut, a member of the organising committee for the show. The 1881 census was starting to make sense.

Armed with this information I searched for anything that had been written on the plantations of southern India. An illustrated book about the early pioneers led me to a memoir published in 1881 entitled *On the Indian Hills*. I kept it unread on my Kindle for the best part of a year, mentally filed as possible background information. When I finally sat down to skim through it, I found it an unexpectedly good read: the author, Edwin Lester Linden Arnold, the son of a well-known journalist, went on to write

Jules Verne style science fiction with jolly schoolboy titles like *Gulliver on Mars*. Volume 1 of his travelogue took me on a voyage out to Ceylon and on to Calicut in South India, then up into the Nelliampathy hills, where just five minutes from the end of the book, young Arnold arrived at ‘Polyampara, the oldest coffee estate on these hills, under the management of an energetic Cornishman, Mr Gr D., who has been out here for some fifteen years, and may be considered the founder of the district’. Only those who share my obsession with uncovering forgotten lives will understand why at this point I shrieked. My friends and family were polite but baffled as I attempted to explain the thrill of finding evidence of a real person behind the official records. I had no idea that I was simply resurrecting a fact that had been common knowledge in the family within my own lifetime.

The first coffee plants had been imported from Mysore to the Western Ghats of southern India, where the jungle-clad mountains, rising to an altitude of 2,500 metres and more, offered an ideal opportunity to open up land for crops. From the Nilgiri district around Ootacamund (familiarily known as Ooty), in what is now Tamil Nadu, south to the Wynaad, and the Nelliampathy Hills of Kerala, European and Indian planters proceeded to chop down trees and slaughter wildlife with indiscriminate enthusiasm, making way for regimented lines of coffee bushes that would eventually generate handsome profits for both individual owners and shareholders back in Britain. By the time George arrived, more than twelve million kilos of coffee were being exported from British India each year, five times the amount recorded in 1856. There was clearly an opportunity for an ambitious man to make money.

Tom Stanes was one of three brothers, sons of a London glass merchant, who founded a dynasty that is still remembered with pride in their adopted country. The first brother to sail for Madras was James, who was so taken with the charms of the Nilgiris that he purchased a coffee estate in Coonoor and set to work to bring it into production. Tragically, he drowned two years later while bathing under a waterfall and was buried in the churchyard at Ooty. He was just 22 years old. The next brother to arrive was William, who took over James’s estate and opened up another one, and then in 1855 came Tom, who took on one of William’s properties. The final arrival was Robert, who together with Tom started a coffee curing plant, and independently set up one of the first textile mills. The family were non-conformists with a strong commitment to public service, founding schools in both Coimbatore and Coonoor. Robert was eventually knighted for his services, while a photograph of Tom Stanes

in later life shows an impressive patriarch with a long white beard, the picture of authority and respectability.¹¹

I imagine that the brothers, based in Tamil Nadu, also bought up land in the Nelliampathies. In late 1863, Tom, recently returned from a visit to London, must have been looking for a man who could open up a new plantation for him. It was possibly in a Madras hotel or club that he met George, just a year or two his junior. I imagine them dining together and after a game of billiards, settling themselves on the veranda in long rattan chairs, calling for iced brandy and soda, and lighting their cheroots. Stanes would have listened to George's story of how he challenged the bullying Mr Travers and decided that this was a man who could be trusted to tackle the dangers of the jungle with a similar display of courage and the energetic support of his Christian faith.

Edwin Arnold's book places George at an estate named Polyampara, but the *Madras Revenue Register* has him first at Varlavchar (or Varlavachen – the spelling varies). This was the earliest estate to be carved out from the virgin forest of the Nelliampathies. It also happens to be the only one where the estate records have been preserved in the India Office archives, and so it was that I found myself sitting at a desk in the British Library under the mistrustful eye of the library staff ('no photography, handle with care'), gingerly unfolding a large piece of white tissue paper. The boundaries of the 250 acre estate were marked with careful pink lines and the features labelled: grass hills to the north, Manalora river to the south, bungalow in the centre. I doubt if I will ever know the exact details of the ownership or the deal struck with George, but even by the 1870s there were only a dozen estates in the Nelliampathies and the same cluster of names recur as owners and managers. It was a very small cohort of men who opened up the land, mainly British but a few Indian, and they must all have moved around as they became more experienced and saved up money to purchase additional acreage for themselves.

Like ships' mates, the managers and supervisors worked alongside their labourers in all weathers, returning to the shelter of a tent or basic thatched hut to sleep at night. They felled and burned the trees, laid out a network of tracks, and established plant nurseries where the fragile young seedlings would spend their first year to

¹¹ Although in 1877 he was sued for divorce by his wife, an unusual and scandalous course of action just twenty years after the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act that made such a course of action possible.

eighteen months. The area to be planted was marked out into precisely measured rows some six feet apart, pits were dug at least three feet deep and the same across, and refilled with a mixture of topsoil, leaf mould and manure. Then, at the start of the monsoon rains, the young plants were transplanted in light wicker baskets into their final growing positions, where they would require constant weeding and guarding against attacks by the hungry deer known as *sambar*. It was a long wait for the fruit; the new coffee plants took anything from three to five years to reach maturity but once they were producing, the yield could be as much as 450 kilos per acre. Holdings ranged in size from just a handful of acres to several hundred, and new land was constantly being opened up. The planters paid with their health. Alternately burning and shivering with malarial fever they took refuge in Ooty until they regained enough strength to return to work, where there was always a chance that a snake lurking unseen on the path or a panther springing from a tree might bring a premature end to their discomfort. This was another side to Indian life, far removed from the class-ridden pomp and ceremony of the Raj.

When I visited Kerala more than 150 years later, I found a state with a Communist government, high levels of literacy, and a decent standard of healthcare. But many Keralans work overseas, like the Cornish before them, sending much-needed remittances to their families. I spoke to one young man who was on his way to his first job in the Arabian Gulf. He seemed heartbreakingly young, showing me photographs of people he referred to as his mummy and daddy, but he was probably around the same age as George when he arrived in Madras. I doubt if George packed family photographs in his seaman's chest at that early date, but perhaps his mother embroidered him a pincushion, a good luck mascot to keep with his sewing kit.

Like every other tourist, I enjoyed a cruise in a converted rice barge along tranquil waterways lined with coconut palms, before setting out for the mountain resort of Munnar. The road wound ever upwards past hillsides smothered in glossy, neatly trimmed tea bushes – today, coffee is a much less important crop, and is grown in smaller quantities alongside cocoa, cardamom and other spices. From the tea plantations our route took us higher still, to the grassy uplands of the Periyar national park, where a rare breed of amber-eyed goats posed smugly for photographs on outcrops of grey stone. It could almost have been the north of England, if it were not for the red roofed bungalows dotted here and there amongst the green folds of the hills and a sign in my hotel room that warned me to keep the window closed against

marauding monkeys. George's plantation was to the north of Periyar, but set in a similar landscape. On my visit to the British Library I was allowed to view a folder of watercolour sketches from the 1830s in delicate shades of green and burnt orange. One showed a broad track shaded by tall trees leading to a wide, shallow river. In my mind's eye I saw a bullock cart preparing to cross, carrying an Englishman to his new home.

Although Edwin Arnold started out from the opposite coast, I have relied on his descriptions to visualise George's journey. With much bustle and confusion, his bags, tent, and the precious tin box of coffee seeds, would have been handed over to a collection of porters as George himself set out in a *palki*, a rattan-roofed litter, for Madras station, which lay just north of the city walls, close to the beach. The new railway line was pushing further and further west every year and would soon reach Palghaut, the nearest town to the Nelliampathy district, eventually terminating at Beypore on the coast near the port of Calicut. But for now, it had only been completed as far as Coimbatore, where Robert Stanes had established himself.

I imagine a long day of jolting and swaying, punctuated by the occasional sudden stop to clear a slow-moving, supercilious buffalo from the track. George would have descended from the train as night was falling, to be greeted by an agent for the Stanes company. The streets were no doubt still lively with crowds going about their business: scrawny bare-chested men in loin cloths and women in saris carrying heavy loads on their heads, children and dogs scuffling in the dirt, chickens scratching and squawking, and cows ambling confidently past. George may have dined with Robert Stanes in his bungalow, before taking gratefully to his bed, the last time he would sleep on a mattress for many months.

The following morning I hope he was woken by a white-clad servant bearing a steaming cup of spice-scented tea and enjoyed, also for the last time, the luxury of a cool morning tub. He would have made the next part of his journey by *bandy*, a brightly painted wooden box with open sides shaded by bamboo matting. This primitive cart was perched on top of two high wheels and drawn by a pair of white, humped oxen with sharp, curved horns. After his luggage was piled onto the roof, and the essential tiffin basket produced from the kitchen, George no doubt clambered into the cramped interior and settled himself on the bed of straw feeling thankful for his short stature, which enabled him to sit in comparative comfort. A taller man (like Edwin Arnold) would have had his head wedged against the roof.

Time passed slowly in a *bandy*, as the bullocks made their leisurely way along narrow lanes lined with banana and fig trees, passing bright green paddy fields surrounded by low mud banks and stands of gently waving bamboo. Even if the driver employed the usual tactic of cursing and twisting their tails, they would not be hurried. Passengers were glad of their placidity, however, when the time came to ford a wide river and the great beasts ambled calmly through the water, which soon rose to the very floor of the cart. George must have endured several long days of cramped discomfort, in limbo between his old life and the new one that awaited him, occasionally getting out to walk beside the cart and stretch his stiff legs while he kept a wary eye open for snakes.

His final stop would have been the town of Palghaut. This was the nearest outpost of civilisation to his new home in the jungle, and the closest place of worship. Pictures of St Stephen's church with its square tower show it to have been the equal of St Felicitas back home in Hayle, but Palghaut hardly deserved the designation of town, since there was only a single shop that catered for Europeans. Like Arnold, George perhaps ordered supplies of tinned food, wine, brandy and boxes of Peek Freans biscuits to be sent up to the clearing in the jungle that was to be his home, although such luxuries may have been unavailable at this early date.

The final stage of the journey would have been undertaken not by cart, but in a hammock known as a *munchiel*. George was very familiar with hammocks but not ones that moved down the road. According to Arnold, a team of ten wiry, bare-chested, turbaned men hoisted up a long bamboo pole, from which was suspended a length of heavy-weight blue cotton cloth piled with pillows. The passenger clambered in and pulled on the ropes to adjust the awning of leaves that would shelter him from sun and rain alike. It was significantly more comfortable than the *bandy* and afforded better views of the countryside, while the men jogged along at a much greater speed than the dawdling oxen. As they zigzagged up a narrow stony path that wound its way in ever tighter curves into the mountains, the air grew cooler, a damp white mist descended, and the trees, with their tall grey trunks rising hundreds of feet towards the sky, closed in around them. The only creatures to be seen were birds, flocks of vivid green parakeets, squawking black mynah birds, pheasants, and the ever-present kites keening high overhead. Eventually the bearers would have had to turn back, so that they could reach their village again before nightfall.

After George paid them off and watched them gallop off down the mountain carrying the rolled-up hammock and poles, he would have been alone with his native guide and porter, who probably spoke little or no English, on a trail so shrouded in mist that it was hard to see more than a few feet ahead. They would have made their way cautiously over wet, slippery leaves and sharp stones. It wouldn't do to turn an ankle. George may have been used to swarming up rigging without a second thought but there is nowhere to walk on board ship once you have taken a turn around the deck so he had much greater strength in his arms and shoulders than in his legs. It was going to be a long, miserable trek to their final destination. Romantically, I imagine that it was just as the sun was starting to set that the clouds lifted sufficiently for George to see a clearing in the trees ahead: Varlavachen, the place where he hoped to make his fortune.

At this point I imagine that he was still buoyed up by the excitement of a new adventure. It would have taken some months for him to become conscious of the enormity of his decision and for its long-term consequences to sink in. Edwin Arnold paints a vivid picture of life in a planter's hut and I have used this to visualise the discomfort and anxiety of a young man who has started to worry that he may never go home.

Nelliampathy Hills, 1864

It is an evening like any other when George strikes a brass gong suspended from a nearby tree to signal the evening muster. The first six months have passed in a blur. He has replaced his canvas tent with a small hut, its walls made from the woven mats known after their place of origin as *palghaut* and with sheaves of long grass for a roof. Word spread that he was recruiting and soon fifty or more workers arrived, building themselves rough shacks where they live with their families. Under his direction the men have felled trees, cleared away undergrowth and laid out tracks across his land. He has opened up a nursery area and planted his first batch of precious seeds, which have begun to germinate.

George's coolies, men, women and children, wrapped in thin shawls or *cumbli*es against the damp chill of the evening, congregate in front of him. He calls out a long string of names, struggling with the pronunciation. He has learned enough of the language to issue commands but he is hardly fluent yet. As the workers answer, they deposit their tools on the ground, George checks off their names in his register, and they are free to go. Once the last man has been dismissed, George counts off

the tools and locks them safely away in the shed he has had built to serve as a store. Returning to his hut, he sees several people crouched in front of it. These are the workers who need medicine. Their maladies range from pus-filled leg sores to rashes, fever, and infected wounds. George hands out ointments and bandages and doses of quinine, for which basic remedies the patients seem embarrassingly grateful. George is not used to so much deference. His mother would have something to say on the subject. 'We are all God's creatures,' he hears her voice in his head.

The cook boy produces dinner prepared over the kerosene stove: curry, made from some unidentified meat, washed down with brandy. George thinks he should take his gun out to shoot a few birds again soon, or perhaps he'll try for one of the wild deer. Venison, that would be a welcome treat. He is glad he has turned out with practice to be a good shot. Alone, with no companion but his own thoughts, he finds himself repeating the same arguments that have occupied his mind for months. There has been no word as yet from Penpol Terrace in reply to his letter telling them of his change in circumstances but he hopes the family believe his confident statement that he is safer up in the hills than on the high seas. And it is a financial opportunity not to be missed. With their usual quiet determination, his mother and Annie have carried on with their lives since his father's death, making no complaint and asking for no help, but if his coffee venture does well, he will be able to send a little money to make their lives easier. 'I'm used to hard work,' he thinks, 'and I must put my trust in God.' But he longs for news from home. On board ship, when he contemplated the future of the emigrant families, he was grateful that he was not destined for a life of exile in an alien land. But here he is, facing an even more uncertain future. On board ship he used to crave solitude, but now he would give anything to hear another European voice.

Rain has begun to lash at the roof of the hut and George hears the distinct sound of dripping next to his right ear. He thinks with longing of the swinging hammocks of the Blackwall frigates, or even his cramped berth on the *Eastern Empire*. Not for the first time, it occurs to him that he is going to spend years away from the sound and smell of the sea. For a man accustomed since his earliest days to the constant accompaniment of breaking waves, it is a sobering thought. But this chance has been given to him for a reason, even if it is as yet an obscure one. In the fullness of time God's plan will be revealed and for now all he can do is set his hand to the task in front of him without complaint. He is so tired that it would take a stampeding herd of wild elephants to keep him awake and, although that has occasionally been known to happen, the night passes free from disturbance. If rats scamper over the

bed and snakes slither under it, if mosquitos whine menacingly overhead and spiders spin their webs under his nose, George remains unaware. The next thing he knows, it is five in the morning and time to sound the gong again to rouse the coolies.

The cook boy brings him coffee sweetened with sugar from his rapidly dwindling supply, and then it is time for morning roll call. George divides up the tasks: tree felling, weeding, digging, clearing away sticks and stones, all require the right tools to be collected from the store. George decides to escort a group of women and children to weed the nursery of young coffee plants. It is a job requiring the greatest care and attention and he hopes the women will be gentler than their menfolk. He has no idea how to deal with these strange, chattering creatures. He has learned to command men but he retains a chivalrous impulse to protect females, not chastise them. And yet they clearly require discipline. Progress is slow; the smallest children keep darting off into the undergrowth, pursued by their mothers, while some of the older women seem to want to stop and pray at particular trees that must have some significance for them. Once they reach the nursery, George counts his charges and realises he has lost at least half a dozen along the way. He feels himself getting hot and agitated as he turns to search for the missing members of his flock. He is not afraid of hard work but this job demands new skills, and not just in horticulture. What would his sister Annie do? Just remember how she manages her schoolroom and be firm, he thinks.

CHAPTER 11 OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN

Those of us who belong to the tribe of readers understand that to know our books is to know us. As a child I spent long hours sitting on the floor behind the sofa exploring the contents of my parents' bookcases, where orange and white Penguins sat alongside classic novels in faded bindings, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* next to that other story of transformation, Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies*. The results were sometimes unpredictable. After I discovered *Animal Farm* at the age of eleven, the livestock that lived peacefully on my brother's toy farm were sent to war with the plastic dinosaurs we collected from cereal packets. A few years later I dipped into *Lady Chatterley* but it was, deplorably, *Gone with the Wind* that shaped my ideas of romance. With the tokens that arrived every birthday and Christmas I bought school stories (that are now, bizarrely, collectors' items) and classics that sometimes disappointed. *Jane Eyre* kept me enthralled so I moved on to *Villette*, but that turned out to be a mistake. I did not deal well with unhappy endings – see also *The Mill on the Floss* and most of Thomas Hardy. I grew up in a world inhabited by the girls of the Chalet School, Jo March and her sisters, Elizabeth Bennett, and Tess of the d'Urbervilles. All these characters existed in the same amorphous, pre-war period called 'the past' that was often more real than the present – a place where I was not always particularly happy.

I wish I had inherited more clues about the literature that shaped Annie Dupen and her sisters, but apart from a gory *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, there is virtually nothing that survives from those early years. I will never know if they preferred Charlotte Yonge to Maria Edgeworth, or if they read Jane Austen and Walter Scott aloud in the evenings as they worked. My grandfather Harold is forever defined for me by his collection of the works of H. G. Wells. The small red volumes, *Mr Polly*, *Kipps*, *Tono Bungay* and their companions, went to my brother, but most of the other books that I grew up with are now stacked on the shelves that line every room of my house. I did not keep the crumbling, leather-bound works of Dickens that were too heavy and fragile to read, replacing them with modern paperbacks. The volumes of *Cornhill* magazine went too; I regret that decision now. More recently I have also reluctantly disposed of my father's science textbooks. I didn't understand them and they were out of date anyway. But a book with stained brown board covers and roughly cut pages coming away from a cracked spine, entitled *Conversations on*

Chemistry, survived the cull – out of respect for its great age and the astonished realisation that it was intended for girls.

Printed in 1822 for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, of Paternoster Row, the content takes the form of a series of illustrated questions and answers exchanged by the ever-patient Mrs B. and her pupils, studious Emily and irreverent Caroline.

EMILY

But if an atom was broken into two, an intermediate combination would be obtained?

MRS B.

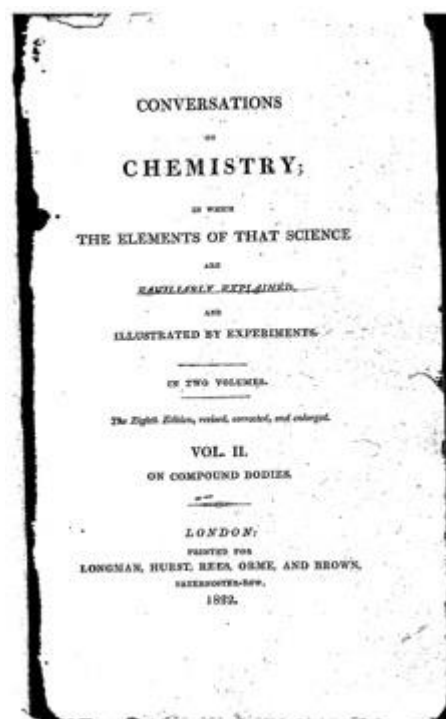
Yes; but the nature of the atom is incompatible with the idea of any farther division; since the chemical atom is the smallest quantity which chemistry can obtain, and such as no mechanical means can possibly subdivide.

CAROLINE

And pray, what is the use of all this doctrine of definite proportions?

MRS B.

It is very considerable; for it enables chemists to form tables ...



There is no name inside and whoever owned it has not even finished cutting the pages but I am sure that Johanna Woolcock Dupen and her daughters were the only women in my family tree to have had serious schooling at that time. This fragile book has survived to hint at an education that went beyond the traditional needlework and scripture. Johanna's cousin Frederick, the one who gave her a copy of the New Testament to mark her marriage, tells us in his autobiography that he was extremely keen on chemistry. Perhaps he tried to share his enthusiasm for science as well as the word of God by giving her this volume too.

No author is credited on the title page but it was later identified as the work of Mrs Jane Marcet (1769–1858), a half-Swiss Londoner married to an exiled Swiss physician. While in her thirties, the well-educated Mrs Marcet was an early beneficiary of the popular Royal Institution Lectures, most probably Humphrey Davey's series on chemistry that began in 1802. Her husband helped her to gain a better understanding of the concepts and she decided to write her book in order to share what she had learned with other women who did not have the good fortune to

be married to a man of science. It went into sixteen editions and sold some 20,000 copies in Britain with many tens of thousands more pirated in America, where it became a set text in seminaries for young ladies.¹² Although it was written for women, it was equally appreciated by men, including the young Michael Faraday and Thomas Jefferson. Mrs Marcet was not a radical, although she became a close friend of the abolitionist writer Harriet Martineau, but her book sheds a new light on girls' education in the nineteenth century.

The girls who had access to *Conversations on Chemistry* would of course have been from the middle classes. Elementary education for five to ten-year-olds was not widely available until 1870 and those working class children who attended school often did so erratically. They were needed at home to mind younger siblings or help in the fields, or they might not have the penny fee that week. When they did go to school, whether it was a National (Church of England) or British (Nonconformist) one, they would have found themselves in a class of 70-80 or more, tracing letters in trays of sand until they were allowed a slate. A single master kept everyone occupied by using older pupils as monitors to cascade the lesson to the younger ones. In these conditions it was often Sunday school that offered the best opportunity of acquiring basic reading skills. But parents who could afford to pay had an increasing choice of where to send their sons and daughters. It is possible that the Dupen sisters were sent to some sort of girls' seminary; their father may have considered the expenditure a worthwhile investment. But it is equally possible, given what I think I know about Johanna Woolcock, that their mother taught them herself.

Bristol Mercury 8th September 1860

TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

A first-class PRIVATE EDUCATION may be secured for One or Two little Girls in a Family of the highest respectability, where unremitting care and attention will be paid to the health and happiness, as well as the religious and moral training of pupils; they will in every respect be qualified to fill good positions in society. Accomplishments efficiently taught without the aid of masters and the French language spoken during each day. This will be found a valuable home to children deprived of maternal care. Terms moderate.

The distinction between home schoolroom and school was deliberately blurred in order to reconcile the ideal of feminine domesticity with the reality of women's

¹² It was on the curriculum of Quaker girls' schools in the first half of the century and Maria Edgeworth owned a copy.

working lives, as this typical advertisement shows. The absence of masters may have been intended to underline the moral character of the school – visiting male teachers were known to pose a risk to susceptible older pupils and impressionable young governesses. An emphasis on an aristocratic fluency in French is common to all such establishments, although it can hardly have been of much practical use to the average middle-class girl. It was this requirement that led Charlotte Brontë to beg her aunt for the money to travel to the continent for six months. She believed that in order to have any chance of competing in the crowded school marketplace she must improve her command of languages: certainly French and possibly also Italian and German. Her stay in Brussels, where she fell in love with her teacher Monsieur Héger, was to inspire *Villette*.

By the time of the 1851 census there was already an exaggerated perception of a huge pool of surplus women, who were unlikely ever to marry.¹³ Professional men were delaying marriage or even choosing not to marry at all – they were said to be having far too much fun at their clubs – and more men than women were emigrating to the colonies. By 1861 the number of governesses was recorded as 21,567, with another 6,791 ‘general teachers’. While the daughters of the gentry and wealthy businessmen could be kept at home, and working class women went into factories or domestic service, there was effectively only one solution for impecunious ladies of the middle class, to ‘turn out’ as a governess or teacher. The two terms were pretty much interchangeable, serving to distinguish ‘lady’ teachers from the schoolmistresses who worked in elementary schools. While most were employed in private homes, where they occupied an uneasy place between the servants and the family and were often very lonely, some were teachers in schools like the one at Roe Head where Charlotte Brontë went as an assistant at the age of nineteen. Such posts were often less financially secure but offered a degree of companionship and independence, as well as basic training for those who joined as pupil teachers.

Governesses often moved between a resident position with a family, a visiting role as a ‘daily governess’ (like Mary Shelley’s half-sister Claire Clairmont), and a post in a private school. The subjects studied were the same and the number of pupils often not very different. While Hayle Academy offered boys instruction in bookkeeping, mensuration, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, Euclid and Natural

¹³ 30% of women aged 20-40 were unmarried and of these, 2% or around 25,000 women were working as governesses.

Philosophy (science), the curriculum for middle class girls throughout the first half of the nineteenth century resembled that of the Clergy Daughters' school at Cowan Bridge, the Lowood of *Jane Eyre*, with its heavy emphasis on sewing and domestic arts:

The system of education comprehends history, geography, the use of the globes, grammar, writing and arithmetic, all kind of needlework, and the nicer kinds of household work – such as getting up fine linen, ironing, &c.

The most popular textbook of the day was structured as a series of questions and answers. Its author, Miss Richmal Mangnall, was born in the same year as Jane Marcet but lacked her talent for lively dialogue; she invented no Emily or Caroline to engage the interest of her young readers – although she shares her unusual first name with the creator of that antidote to serious scholarship, William Brown. In her *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions*, the schoolmistress took her readers at a steady gallop through history ancient and modern, scripture, mythology, the elements of astronomy, and such useful general knowledge as ‘Whence have we the best Olives?’ ‘What are sponges?’ and ‘How are candles made?’ She ensured that pupils would be able to recognise the features of Gothic architecture and name the symbols of heraldry, and posed such brain-teasers as: ‘Which four of our British queens have given the greatest proofs of courage and intrepidity?’ (Boadicea; Philippa, wife to Edward III; Margaret of Anjou; and Elizabeth, as I’m sure you already knew.) It was material that would have been familiar to the Brontë sisters. The two oldest girls, Maria and Elizabeth, briefly attended Crofton Old Hall, where Miss Mangnall was headmistress, and Charlotte’s copy of the book is preserved in the museum at Haworth. The rote learning of questions and answers was a format well-suited to the model of education where children studied their lessons individually and took turns to come up to the teacher’s desk and recite them. This was seen as the only practical method of dealing with a class that contained a range of ages and abilities and it remained common to elementary schools and boys’ public schools as well as private seminaries for girls up to the 1860s.

Annie Dupen was listed as a ‘school governess’ in the 1851 census and a ‘governess’ in 1861 but I am fairly sure she was working as what we would recognise as a schoolteacher each time. She probably started like Charlotte Brontë as an assistant to a lady running a local private school but by 1856 she was listed in the Post Office Directory as running a seminary of her own in Penpol Terrace. There

was another seminary in Hayle Terrace and a girls' boarding school on Foundry Hill, as well as two 'daily' schools, but the market was a volatile one with rapid turnover of establishments. It was all too easy to fail, but with careful management, a school was a business opportunity that could do well. Perhaps, alongside the standard curriculum Annie offered her pupils an introduction to the rudiments of chemistry as set out by Mrs Marcet.

Sharrock Dupen's death in 1860 must have thrown the family into a state of confusion. They would be almost entirely dependent on the income from Annie's school. The two oldest boys were on the other side of the world; Ellen was working as a governess in Wiltshire but could ill afford to send money home; Salome was a teacher of infants and probably earned very little.¹⁴ John was as yet only an apprentice at the foundry and the others too young to go out to work. The loss of the main breadwinner meant their home was at risk. I turned once more to fiction to help me imagine the scene. If George's maritime story is a Conradian one, his sisters are to be found in the pages of the Brontës and Elizabeth Gaskell. Anne, the youngest Brontë sister, is the most down to earth of the three, and despite my early allegiance to *Jane Eyre*, in later life she has become my preferred reading.¹⁵ In *Agnes Grey*, the eponymous heroine sits down with her mother to discuss their future after her father dies. The strong-minded Mrs Grey refuses to become dependent on her older, married daughter and declares her intention of looking for a house, 'commodiously situated in some populous but healthy district, where we will take a few young ladies to board and educate'.

It was a scene Anne Brontë may have drawn from life, remembering the time when she and her sisters thought of taking a small number of girls to board at the parsonage in Haworth, although their home town was neither particularly populous nor healthy. Hayle on the other hand was. Why should the Dupens not start to take what were known as parlour boarders? In addition to the shopkeepers, ship's captains, and mine agents who resided in the town and sent their daughters as day pupils to the school in Penpol Terrace, there were all the families living on remote farms who wished their girls to be educated, while the mild, health-giving sea air of

¹⁴ Estimates of a resident governess's wage vary from £20 to £35 a year, out of which it has been suggested that she would need to spend £27 to keep herself clothed and pay for such items as toiletries and postage and stationery for her letters home.

¹⁵ An opinion sadly not shared by Georgette Heyer, who found 'Sweet Little Anne' unreadable and complained that 'her particular brand of piety makes me feel unwell'.

west Cornwall might attract those from even further afield. They could start in a small way, reorganising the house to make space for one or two girls and giving up the luxury of live-in servants. No significant capital investment would be required and Annie, at the age of 28 and with at least ten years' teaching experience, was well known in the town, so they had that other business essential, goodwill. By the time of the census in the following spring they already had at least one boarder, a thirteen-year-old miner's daughter from St Day, near Gwenapp Pit.

Annie's sister Ellen was one of a growing number of teachers from relatively humble backgrounds who in the 1850s and 1860s found employment in equally modest households. Fifty years earlier these families would never have thought of educating their girls in anything other than domestic skills but now the daughters of farmers and shopkeepers were being sent away to school or taught at home by governesses. Farmers in particular found it easier and cheaper to employ a young woman to take care of their children and perform other domestic duties than to pay boarding school fees for two or three girls. Ellen travelled to Box to take up a position at Cheney Court farm, the home farm attached to the big house. It was rented by a Mr Octavius Player and at 300 acres was just large enough for him to squeeze into the upper end of the middle class. But his position was more precarious than I initially realised. Out of curiosity I traced Mr Player through the rest of the century and found that by 1881 he had moved to Bath and was dealing in hay, but he seems not to have made a success of the business because ten years later he was a sub-postmaster and by the time of his death in 1900 he was the manager of a public house, with only £60 to leave to his widow.¹⁶

Twenty-one-year-old Ellen was the Players' only servant, apart from one maid of all work, who was only fifteen. There were five small children: three boys, Henry, William and Fitzroy, and two girls, nine-year-old Mary and her sister Alice, aged four. I imagine Ellen was employed to be a nursemaid quite as much as a governess and probably lived as part of the family, helping with all the household chores and working at least twelve hours a day. It would have been a way of life not very different from the one she was used to at home and I imagine that she coped better than gentle Agnes Grey, whose experiences ring horribly true to anyone who, like

¹⁶ Cheney Court itself is now a Linguarama business school but in the 1880s P. G. Wodehouse lived there as a boy with his grandmother and four aunts, perhaps inspiring his view that, 'It is no use telling me there are bad aunts and good aunts. At the core, they are all alike. Sooner or later, out pops the cloven hoof.'

me, has spent time as an *au pair* to arrogant French teenagers or cocky little Italian boys. If the Player children, like Agnes's pupils the Bloomfields, pulled the legs and wings off sparrows, rolled around on the floor, or spat and bellowed like a bull when crossed, Ellen would surely have known what to do. In the 1861 census, which was taken just before Easter, her thirteen-year-old sister Hester is listed as staying with her, a visit that must have provided a valuable insight into what awaited her when she in turn left home to earn her living.

Hester would have set out from Hayle on the *Cornubia* late one afternoon, in the charge of her sister Salome, who spent the night of the census at the Bristol home of Captain Rosewarne and his wife, former neighbours from Penpol Terrace. I have always imagined Salome as a gentler character than her older sisters, a good person to escort a nervous child on her first trip away from home. I don't suppose Hester ever thought she would travel on the Bristol packet without her father but I'm sure Captain Gill and his stewardess took good care of Sharrock's daughters. Dressed in mourning black, with their belongings packed neatly into covered baskets, they would have stood by the rail as the paddles started to churn, watching Penpol Terrace recede into the distance until it was time to go below. They would have been impressed by the magnificence of the saloon, which even on a grey day was full of light from the large plate glass windows. The ceiling was white and gold and the walls panelled in polished wood with gold mouldings. A dozen mahogany sofas upholstered in red velvet were set along the sides with velvet-covered armchairs scattered around the centre of the room. But it cost an extra ten shillings to travel in such style and the sisters probably made their way through to the less expensive berths in the forecabin.

Arriving at the Cumberland dock the next morning, Hester was perhaps met by her sister Kate, who took her to stay overnight above the grocer's shop she kept with her husband in the working class district of St Mary Redcliffe, behind the wharfs and the tobacco factory. Or it may have been her brother Sharrock, who was living next to the water in a small terraced house beyond the swingbridge, who came to collect her. Victoria Place has long been demolished to make way for a busy flyover but I discovered a website where I could call up layers of old maps that show a row of a half a dozen houses on the opposite corner to the big (and probably noisy) Cumberland hotel. How Sharrock's wife Julia adjusted to this environment after living in her grandfather's Gloucestershire manor house, I can only guess. She and

her husband had to take in a pair of lady lodgers to help pay the rent but she seems to have insisted on employing a nursemaid for her baby son, named (perhaps with an eye to a future inheritance) after his illustrious uncle, General Sir John Lysaght Pennefather.

From Bristol Hester would have travelled on to Box by train, alighting just before the famous tunnel constructed by Brunel twenty years earlier. There is no longer a station there but the two-mile long tunnel is still a feature of the main line from Bristol to Paddington. The massive archway with its stone balustrade and carved lintel looks quite out of place, as if it belongs in an elegant city like Bath not a country village. According to popular myth, at dawn on Brunel's birthday, 9 April, the sun can be seen to shine through it in a modern Stonehenge effect.¹⁷

To imagine Hester's visit to Ellen, I turned first Anne Brontë, whose vivid descriptions of a governess's life reassured me that small children in Victorian times were the same then as they are now, and just as difficult to manage. I therefore had little difficulty in describing Hester's first exposure to a life that was going to be hers.

Box, March 1861

Hester scrambles down onto the platform clutching her basket. There is Ellen waiting for her. She gives her sister a warm hug. It is six months since they last saw each other, when Ellen came home for her father's funeral.

'Tell me,' asks Ellen, 'how is everybody? And what about Sharrock and Julia? Did she look after you well?'

Hester explains about the nursemaid and the lady lodgers and how Julia was really very kind and not a bad cook, considering.

'I felt quite sorry for her,' she says, 'which is strange, isn't it?'

'I'd feel sorry for anyone married to Sharrock,' says Ellen briskly. 'Come along, I'm needed back at the house. Mrs Player can't manage the children on her own. You needn't think you're here for a holiday. There'll be plenty of work for you to do.'

The two sisters walk along a muddy track between green hedgerows for a mile or so until they reach the stone farmhouse where the Players live. Cheney Court farm is a sizeable one, Ellen explains and Mr Player employs eight men and four boys. But there is only one maid so Ellen has a lot to do in the house as well as looking

¹⁷ But after discovering that the Reverend Awdry, author of the Thomas the Tank Engine books, lived nearby, I prefer to imagine a smiling engine face looking out from the entrance.

after the children. Hester soon finds herself feeding the chickens and hunting for eggs while her sister helps to prepare the dinner.

The next morning she wakes early in the small truckle bed that has been placed in Ellen's room at the top of the house. In the grey light she lies quietly observing the plain, whitewashed walls, the pine washstand with its chipped white china, and the single hard chair where Ellen has placed her candlestick. It is smaller than the bedroom she shares at home with her sisters, and very bare, but there is something to be said for having a room of one's own. She wonders how it feels to be alone at night. Her thoughts are interrupted by a voice calling from the night nursery next door. Little Fitzroy is awake. Hester slips out of bed and opens the connecting door.

'Shsh,' she says to the sturdy two-year-old, who is staring at her in dismay.

'Where Nellie?' he demands loudly. His brothers Henry and William have also woken up and soon all three boys are chasing each other round the room and jumping on their bed. 'We're pirates,' they shout, waving imaginary cutlasses above their heads. Their sister Mary sits up, rubbing her eyes.

'Oh do make them stop,' she says, just as Ellen comes in and grasps the two older boys firmly by their arms.

'Enough,' she says. 'Now let's get you dressed and you can have a run in the garden before breakfast. Hester, go and get yourself ready and then you can help me with the girls.'

She marches her charges to the washstand, pours water into the basin, and hands Henry a cloth. 'Neck and ears too, remember,' she says, as she turns to pick up their small brother and hold him over the chamberpot.

Hester dabs at her face and armpits with a damp flannel, scrambles into her chemise and petticoats and puts on her black dress, a faded hand-me-down like all her clothes. When she returns to the nursery, Fitzroy is galloping a small wooden horse over the floor and Ellen is helping his brothers with their buttons. Seven-year-old Henry is managing well but William, two years his junior, is struggling.

'Yes I know you want to do it yourself,' says Ellen, 'but we don't want to be late for breakfast, do we?'

Once they are dressed she sends the two older boys downstairs.

'You can go onto the lawn, but no further,' she tells them. 'You won't be allowed in the dining room with muddy boots.'

She moves on to the girls.

'Can you help Mary with her hair while I do Alice?'

Hester rubs pomade through Mary's unruly curls and swiftly plaits them into neat pigtailed while Ellen does the same for her younger sister.

'At least we don't have to be ready in time for morning prayers,' she says. 'The Players are Quakers, you know, and they don't believe in public ritual.'

Hester finds this very strange. At home they come together to pray every morning.

'Should I say my own prayers, then?' she asks in confusion.

'If you like,' says her sister. 'I usually leave it until I go to bed at night, when I can be sure of five minutes' peace. Now, can you watch Fitzroy while I dress myself?'

After breakfast, which the family takes together, the children go up to the schoolroom. Mary sits quietly in a corner to learn a poem while Ellen settles Henry and William at the table with a page of sums to complete. They kick their legs, chew the ends of their pens, and gaze into space while Ellen takes Alice onto her lap to spell out the letters in her reading primer. Hester sits down on the floor with Fitzroy and a box of wooden blocks. She helps him build a tower, which he immediately knocks down.

'Again!' he shouts gleefully.

'Do you remember,' says Hester, 'when Ernest was a baby and kept interrupting our lessons?'

Lunch is brought up to the schoolroom and in the afternoon Fitzroy is settled for a nap while Ellen and Hester take the other children into the garden. The boys head straight for a muddy stream and start poking around with sticks, looking for fish. William kneels on the bank and stretches down into the water.

'He's going to fall in,' says Hester, alarmed.

'Let him,' says Ellen. 'Then I can take his breeches away to be dried and he'll have to stay in bed for the rest of the afternoon and miss tea with his mother. I am lucky that Mrs Player doesn't interfere with my punishments, otherwise I'd never be able to keep them in order.'

Hester is filled with admiration for her sister. She had no idea that being a governess was so difficult. And it's not just that the children are so demanding. She has seen the piles of mending waiting for their attention in the evening. It's no wonder that the letters Ellen sends home are so short. When does she have any time to herself? It is a woman's lot to be always sewing, she reflects. At home her mother's hands are never idle, and here is Ellen, who is supposed to be employed to educate the children, spending her time turning collars and cuffs, replacing torn ruffles and darning stockings.

But on Easter Sunday Ellen is given a whole free day after breakfast and the sisters attend the service in the Methodist chapel in the village. As they sing the familiar hymns Hester marvels as always at Ellen's soaring soprano. With a voice

like that, their brother Sharrock once said, she should have gone on the stage. But he couldn't have meant it seriously – no respectable woman would dream of performing in a concert unless it was for charity.

On the way back to the farm Ellen takes her sister to peep at the big house. Cheney Court is a great square stone building, four storeys high, with a gabled roof and a wide terrace looking out onto the extensive grounds. There are plenty of servants there, Ellen says, not like the farm. But on the other hand the Players treat her like one of the family; she is not sure she would like to live separately as she has heard governesses do in big houses, not allowed in the drawing room but unwelcome in the servants' hall too. Hester should think carefully about what sort of position she will look for when it is her turn to leave home. In any case, Ellen adds, she will soon have saved enough to start her own school. Hester could come as her assistant. She is thinking, she says, of St Ives. Near enough to visit mother but not so close that it will put Annie's nose out of joint – and Annie's nose, as Hester is aware, is rather easily put out, particularly by her energetic and musical sister Ellen.

CHAPTER 12 A NAVAL ENGINEER

Guarding the Queen

When Sharrock Dupen died in 1860, his third son John was only part-way through his apprenticeship and unable to contribute much beyond his keep to the family budget. But there would have been no question of him leaving the foundry; it was his passport to a career with better prospects than either of his older brothers. He was perhaps already thinking of the navy and the chance to serve his country in a fleet that was acknowledged to be the greatest in the world. The conflict in the Crimea had been over for four years but by 1861 the editor of the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* was amongst those much exercised by the question of the ‘internecine’ war that had broken out in America. It was possible that it could spread to the other side of the Atlantic in the fallout from the *Trent* affair. The *Trent*, a British mail packet carrying two Confederate commissioners, was intercepted by a US warship in November and the men seized and imprisoned. The British government, outraged by this violation of the laws of the sea, threatened to recognise the Confederate government and declare war on the North if the men were not released immediately. Prince Albert was the voice of reason in this major diplomatic incident, helping to avert an outbreak of hostilities.

It was with a sense of disbelief, therefore, that the country learned of the sudden death of Prince Consort. In black bordered columns, the newspaper announced:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 20th December 1861

DEATH OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE CONSORT

The country has been overwhelmed by the most unexpected death of the Prince Consort, in the prime and full vigour of his life.

He was 42 years old and had been married to the queen for twenty years. In the opinion of the editor the country had experienced no such stunning shock since the death of Princess Charlotte in childbirth in 1817.

The domestic virtues of the deceased Prince, his exemplary conduct as a husband and father, which, with the admirable example of the Queen, made the Royal family a pattern for every household in her dominions, were most certainly the most extensive cause of the popularity which he enjoyed.

Any fear of republicanism in Britain had receded by this date; people had become attached to Victoria and her hardworking consort, with their visible respectability and solid family values. With generous hyperbole, the newspaper editor went on to

declare that the queen had ‘the prayers and blessings of all her subjects, who love her as probably no Sovereign was ever loved before’, and expressed the hope that the Prince of Wales would step up to his responsibilities and learn to take his father’s place.¹⁸

The American war was to have desperate consequences for the manufacturing towns of northern England. The blockade of the Southern States by the US navy led to a shortage of imported cotton and by 1862 hundreds of mills lay idle, leaving their workers destitute. Sympathy for the South was particularly strong in Liverpool, the main port for the Lancashire cotton trade. A fleet of fast steamers was built there and on the Clyde to run the blockade via the Bahamas or Bermuda, carrying arms and ammunition to the beleaguered Confederate forces and returning with much-needed supplies of raw cotton. The profits from this illegal and dangerous trade were so great that two return journeys were said to be sufficient to fund the investment in a ship, even if the vessel was subsequently lost – and many were.

Hayle was, if only for the time being, protected from the worst of the depression. Although the Cornish mines were in decline, there was still a market overseas for pumping machinery, and the shipyard had turned to the manufacture of iron ships. At the second Great Exhibition of 1862, Harveys won the prize medal ‘For excellence and practical success of engines’, for a model of the engine they had made for the East London waterworks. But the packet boat service was finding it increasingly difficult to compete with the expanding network of the Great Western Railway, which had reached Truro in 1859, and the *Cornubia* was sold in November 1861 after just three years on the Bristol run. By 1862 she had arrived in Bermuda and was being used as a blockade runner. A year later she was bought by the Confederate government and by the time she was captured by the Federal navy six months later, she had run in and out of North Carolina 22 times.

Britain was split in its view of the war. There was strong support for the right of the Southern States to self-determination, especially amongst the Tories, but *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had been in circulation for the past ten years and a powerful antipathy towards slavery led many others to support the Union. The editor of the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* knew what to think. The young upstart nation of America had been getting too big for its boots and like the bully in the playground, should be dealt with

¹⁸ A hope that we know with hindsight to have been sadly misplaced. ‘Bertie’ continued to be a source of anxiety to his mother throughout her long widowhood.

severely. It was clear that the two sides could never more be brought together as a single nation and the war should be ended now, if necessary by outside forces. In an uncanny echo of the argument that was to be made for intervention in so many later conflicts, the editor declared:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 20th December 1861

This state of things cannot be allowed to continue; and if the Federals should not decide on war with England, it must soon become necessary, in the general interests of humanity, for those powers who, like France and England, have a right to interfere, to stop these horrors and crimes.

Britain did not, however, declare war on the United States, and a naval officer was more likely to spend his time patrolling the coasts of Africa and China on the lookout for pirates and slavers than find himself in the midst of a pitched sea battle. But John Dupen must still have thought that a naval career offered more opportunity, or perhaps more excitement, than a job in Hayle, because after completing his apprenticeship, in February 1863 he moved to Sheerness in Kent to work as a fitter in the naval steam factory.

At Sheerness the old dockyard had been extended and refitted earlier in the century, but on the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854 a steam factory was hastily added – a belated response to the navy’s need to maintain its growing fleet of steam vessels. Together with the yards in Chatham, Portsmouth, and Keyham (Plymouth Devonport), Sheerness became where future naval engineers were trained, serving their time on land before having the opportunity – if they wished – to go to sea. The normal length of an apprenticeship was five years but for skilled workmen like John, who were, as his service record stated, ‘brought up in the private trade’, this requirement was waived or reduced. Two years after his arrival in the dockyard, on 5 January 1865, 21-year-old John Dupen qualified as an Assistant Engineer 2nd class. Later that year he was posted to the training frigate *Bristol* in lieu of a chief stoker, a supervisory role that was a common way of inducting a new young engineer into life at sea. Three years later John passed for Assistant Engineer 1st class, with the encouraging assessment: ‘A good mechanic & draughtsman and promises to be a valuable officer’.

In May 1868 John was sent to the *Hector*, one of two armoured frigates designed as smaller and cheaper versions of the *Warrior*, that extraordinary battleship built for the Royal Navy eight years earlier. This historic vessel has now been restored and

lies like a great, captive whale in the dockyard at Portsmouth. The *Warrior* was the first British iron-hulled, armoured ship. Her revolutionary design consisted of a huge, floating box protected by a two-foot thick armour of teak and wrought iron. The boilers, engines and guns were housed in this central citadel and as a further safety measure, a series of watertight compartments were incorporated for the first time in a warship. It was a chilly, grey spring day when I visited her to see for myself what life was like on board, the ghost of John Dupen hovering at my elbow. Clambering up and down the steep ladders that connect the four levels, I was struck by the immense open space of the gun deck where the 700-strong crew of sailors and marines, stokers and coal trimmers lived and worked. At night, hammocks would be brought down from the storage compartments on the upper deck and strung above and between the rows of tables and benches that alternated with the gun ports. The seamen's belongings were stowed in kitbags stuffed into long lines of shelving on the lower deck; all they could keep with them was a small wooden box containing essentials like a sewing kit, a few family photographs, and a small bible. Also on the lower deck were three baths and a couple of washing tubs with mangles, where the coal-blackened stokers could attempt to get themselves and their clothing clean. In contrast the officers had individual cabins, each with a comfortable single berth, a writing desk, a washstand and mirror, and even a small Persian rug on the floor, while the captain and commander had their own spacious quarters on the half deck at the stern, with armchairs and a cosy stove. They dined separately at tables draped in spotless white linen and set with fine china and crystal.

Engineers occupied an uncomfortable position in this sharply divided world, not dissimilar to the awkward status of the governess in a large household. Described by one correspondent to the *Times* as 'a most useful class of men, but not gentlemen', their oily overalls had no place in the wardroom, or even the more relaxed gunroom, where the young midshipmen were brought up by the rough and ready methods of the chief gunner. Engineers had their own shared cabin, pantry and wash place on the lower deck next to the warrant officers – the carpenter, the paymaster, and the boatswain – and close to the hatches to the engine room. The engines themselves were at the very bottom of the ship alongside the boilers, which were fed by a set of furnaces that required vast quantities of coal to be shovelled constantly. To be a stoker you needed even more stamina than a sailor whose life was spent hauling on ropes and chains, together with the additional ability to endure extreme heat and

noise. The engineers may not have had to shovel coal, but they too worked in this dark and smoky environment in temperatures that reached well over 40° C, breathing in the black coal dust, developing a system of signs to communicate and invariably damaging their hearing and their lungs.

The squat, blunt-ended *Hector* was 280 feet in length and 56 feet wide. Barque-rigged with three masts, she had six boilers to drive her single engine and her funnel was semi-retractable for the occasions when she was under sail. She carried a total of eighteen guns but John Dupen would not have seen these in action because when he joined her in 1868 she was part of the reserve fleet. The dozen or so ships that made up the country's second line of defence were normally stationed as guard and training ships at the various home ports, rather than cruising the oceans of the world. The *Hector* was about to take up a very special role, as Queen Victoria's guard ship while she summered at her palace of Osborne on the Isle of Wight.

In her journal Victoria complained of the oppressive heat as she took breakfast on the terrace and tea under the trees. She walked and drove out in the cool of the evening and in mid-July made a visit to the naval vessel commanded by her second son, Alfred, affectionately known as Affie.

Extract from Queen Victoria's journal 13th July 1868

At ¼ p. 5 we all embarked at Trinity Pier in the "Alberta" on board which were Marie Leiningen & all the Ladies & Gentlemen. We went up to the "Galatea". There was a great swell & we danced about considerably in the barge. Affie received us on the Quarter Deck with all the usual honours. Bertie was also there, having come down on purpose. Affie took us below & showed us his cabin, then he presented all his Officers, after which we went up again, walking round the whole upper deck to see the men, & equally the lower deck, to see the remainder of the ship's company. Everything is most beautifully kept. Took tea in Affie's cabin where it was dreadfully hot. A most interesting visit, particularly as it was our son's ship. Left at 7, Affie steering us back in his barge. — Marie L. & the D^{ss} of Roxburghe dined with us. We watched from the Terrace the pretty illuminations & fireworks on the "Galatea".

Since the death of her husband the queen had become all but invisible to her subjects and was losing popular support. Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, who was to overcome his sovereign's initial hostility and become a cherished friend, would be instrumental in reversing this process, but he had only formed his first government

earlier that year. I imagine John Dupen would have been intrigued at the possibility of catching even a brief glimpse of the reclusive monarch.

Cowes, Isle of Wight, 13th July 1868

John stands rigidly to attention on the deck of the *Hector*, looking across the water towards Cowes and the Trinity Pier where the royal yacht *Alberta* is getting up steam. The band of his round, peaked cap feels tight against his forehead and he can feel the sweat trickling down his neck under his collar. It is another hot summer's day and he wishes the sun had not chosen to shine quite so auspiciously on Her Majesty as she makes her official visit to the *Galatea*, riding at anchor next to them. The frigate has recently returned from a voyage to Australia under the command of young Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, and the queen has expressed a desire to see her son's ship. Shortly after eight bells sounded for the end of the afternoon watch John was relieved of his duty in the engine room and ordered to join the men mustered on deck to cheer the queen as she passed. He quickly scrambled out of his overalls and into his dark blue trousers and woollen frock coat with its double row of brass buttons and purple engineer's band nestling between the gold on the sleeves. When they had escorted the *Alberta* across the Solent a few days earlier, carefully shepherding her to the pier at Osborne like a mother duck with her last remaining duckling, John had caught only a brief glimpse of a group of tiny, black-clad figures disembarking in the dusk. Now perhaps he was going to have a chance to see the queen.

There is a flurry of activity on shore and soon the smart little black-hulled paddle steamer with her twin, cream-painted funnels bustles out into the bay, ignoring the pleasure yachts scudding jauntily across her wake and the fishermen in their small boats piled high with nets and creels, who have shipped their oars to watch. Across on the *Galatea* John can see the crew assembled on deck, seamen in blue and white, stokers in all-white duck, and officers smart in gold braid and lace. Which one is the duke, he wonders? He has heard that His Royal Highness is a proficient sailor, and at least he has buckled down to a real job, unlike his older brother. John's mother, he knows, disapproves of the rackets behaviour of the Prince of Wales. It occurs to him that she must have had similar worries about her own oldest son, but if so, she keeps her own counsel, and Sharrock certainly seems more settled since his marriage. John knows it is wrong to be envious of the material good fortune of others, but he could not help but be impressed by his brother's fine house in Clifton last time he passed through Bristol. He wishes he could afford a similar

residence for his own dear Julia when they marry. But he must be grateful that he is able to support a wife at all. Many men have to wait much longer before they can enter into the blessed state of matrimony. Only three more months, he thinks, and then she will be his.

The wheels of the *Alberta* stop turning, there is a rattle of chains as the anchor is lowered, and a small woman veiled in deepest black is helped into the ship's barge along with a number of other ladies and gentlemen. Is that her? John wonders, straining to see while remaining completely motionless. His sisters will want a full account. The widowed queen lives in a seclusion that would be impossible for his own mother, even if she wished it. Prince Leopold, her youngest son, is a constant anxiety to her, so they say. Again, his mother would sympathise. Poor old Sam finally lost his long battle with ill health a year ago, while John was away at sea. It felt strange when he finally went home on leave not to hear his brother's soft, wheezing breath at night. Sam was the quietest of them all, but always there, an eager audience for the stories the others brought home. God's will be done, thinks John. At least he has been spared any more suffering. But how Sam would have loved to hear about the queen.

John sees the *Alberta*'s barge being lowered into the choppy water. The oarsmen pull away in perfect unison, covering the short distance to the *Galatea* in a few minutes. 'Hurrah!' comes the cry from the crew of the Duke's frigate, and 'Hurrah!' the men of the *Hector* roar in reply as they raise their caps and circle them in the air in the traditional sailor's salute to the monarch, for all the world, thinks John, as if they were polishing a window. The small black figure disappears below and John must hurry to change out of his uniform and snatch a mug of tea and a hunk of biscuit on his way back down to the engine room. It is nearly six o'clock and time for the next dog watch. As John makes his careful inspection of the boilers, his heart swells with patriotic fervour at the thought that the safety of the royal family is entrusted to his ship.

Two hours later he is again free to make his way on deck, where as night falls he sees the *Galatea* twinkling from stem to stern with strings of green and white lights. As he watches, colourful rockets shoot up into the night sky, a display of fireworks to entertain Her Majesty. John drifts into a delightful daydream where some unexpected danger allows him to show his courage and loyalty: a sudden squall that capsizes the barge transporting the queen, or an attack by a Fenian gunman like the one who shot the Duke of Edinburgh in Sydney just a few months before. How delighted Julia would be if he earned a medal, even a small one.

But no dramatic events disturb the peace of the summer and the long, hot July days drift by in a monotonous blur. Occasionally the *Hector* steams out into the Solent to test the engines and once or twice the crew are given leave to go ashore and bathe, or hire a rowing boat. But mostly they sit at anchor looking over towards the twin ivory towers of the great Italianate palace, just visible in the distance above the tree tops, knowing that Her Majesty is breakfasting in the shade, strolling in the gardens, driving out in the afternoon or dining on the terrace. Mr Disraeli arrives and spends a day with the queen but there is no sign of any Irish fanatics attempting to land on the beach where the royal bathing machine lies unused. By the time the queen leaves on 5th August John is thoroughly bored. He is glad of the chance of a short cruise across to Cherbourg as escort to the larger of the two royal yachts, the *Victoria and Albert*, which is transporting the queen on the first stage of her journey to Switzerland, but after that the *Hector* is back on regular coastguard duty in the Solent.

The time drags as John waits for his wedding day. The date has been set for 21st October and Julia's letters are full of her preparations, what the dressmaker has said, the menu for the breakfast, the embroidered linens she is working on for their first home. It is more than a year since she lost her mother and it seems to be a comfort to her that she can put off her mourning and order a new gown for her marriage. She is such a dear, sweet creature, he thinks. She deserves to have a pretty dress. He finds her girlish chatter restful, so unlike the conversation of his sharp-tongued sisters, who have no patience with a girl who has never had to earn her own living. He is a lucky man. He was just an apprentice engine fitter when he and Julia started walking out together but now he is set to have a steady career in the navy, and in the face of Julia's stubborn loyalty to her first and only suitor, her father could not withhold his consent. John wants her to be proud of him, but there is not much chance of distinguishing himself in the Solent.

Southampton Water, September 1868

It is a Saturday afternoon and four bells have just struck when John becomes aware of a commotion as he leaves the clammy heat of the engine room to come up on deck. Wiping his hands on an oily piece of rag, he looks across towards the northern shore where a black cloud of smoke is rising into the evening sky. Mr Plumbly, the boatswain, calls to him,

'We're off to fight a fire again, Dupen. Want to come with us?'

With a surge of excitement John remembers how just a couple of weeks earlier, they were called to a major incident in the docks. Despite their efforts to bring the

blaze under control, a quantity of valuable equipment was destroyed, but John had felt a sense of satisfaction that when a real crisis came he demonstrated initiative and a cool head. There were few enough opportunities in the routine of shipboard life to show what he was made of. This time he does not hesitate.

‘Yes, of course. I’m with you.’

Mr Plumbly musters a party of some forty sailors and marines and a collection of equipment including tomahawks and grappling irons. They are joined by Mr Lyne and Mr Salmon, the assistant paymasters, and set off to row to shore, crammed into two boats.

‘Put your backs into it, my boys,’ shouts the boatswain. ‘There’s no time to lose.’

After landing at the hard they cover the mile or so to the fire at a quick double pace. They can hear the crackling of the fire and the air is thick with smoke. Terrified horses are whinnying from a field where a herd of cows huddles together in a corner. Some fifteen hayricks and corn stacks are ablaze and the flames have already spread to a collection of sheds and outbuildings, but a fire engine is in place and a brigade of soldiers is tackling the conflagration, pumping water from the horse pond.

‘Must be the men from the military hospital,’ Mr Lyne says knowledgeably.

An officer who appears to be in charge calls out to them,

‘Hey, you chaps, get us some more water, and see what you can save from the yard, will you.’

Plumbly and Lyne do not hesitate. They direct their men to chop at a wire fence with tomahawks and plunge through the gap into the stifling smoke and sparks to rescue a number of carts and waggons standing in the farmyard. The heat is almost unbearable. John’s eyes are smarting and he has started to cough uncontrollably, but he runs towards the house, where labourers and maidservants are milling around in confusion and a distracted-looking lady is kneading her apron with anxious fingers and wailing,

‘Oh, what am I to do? What am I to do?’

‘Calm yourself, madam,’ says John gently. ‘Help is a hand. We are come from Her Majesty’s ship *Hector* to render what assistance we can. May I avail myself of the services of your people?’

‘Yes, yes, whatever you need.’

John turns to the servants.

‘Come on, you men, where are the buckets? Bring them here. Look sharp.’

A dozen or so pails and containers are brought out and John organises the dazed-looking crowd into a line from the scullery to the yard. He fills a bucket and passes it to the first person in the chain.

‘Send it back when it’s empty,’ he instructs.

Turning to a sensible looking woman in a smut-covered apron with the well-muscled arms of a laundress or a dairywoman, he asks,

‘Can you take charge of the filling? Just keep pumping, and shout for someone to take over when you need to stop.’

He runs off to the head of the line to make sure the water has arrived at its destination. The blue jackets are pulling down the burning sheds using their grappling irons while the marines have been sent to chop at a dried hedge. John sees that it leads to a nearby copse that must not be allowed to catch. A seaman is lying on the ground groaning, his clothing singed. Mr Salmon is beside him.

‘You’ll be fine, Ned,’ he says. ‘Here, Dupen, can you get us a pail of water over here?’

Soon after, Lieutenant Coddington and the *Hector*’s surgeon, Dr Ward, arrive and the injured sailor is bandaged and settled at a safe distance from the fire. John is kept busy chivvying the chain of water carriers and directing the water to where it is most needed, while his shipmates make a valiant but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to pull down the piggery. They can hear the dreadful squealing of the sow and her litter. With grim humour Mr Plumbly sniffs the air and says,

‘Roast pork for dinner tonight, me lads.’

At around ten o’clock the fire engine from Southampton finally arrives. It is dark by then but the fire is still glowing red. The horse pond is reduced to a puddle of mud, so a length of hose is pulled and pulled until it reaches the fishpond at Netley Abbey, some five hundred feet distant, and gallons more water are pumped onto the flames. An hour later the crew of the *Hector* are dismissed, to trudge wearily back to their boats and row out to the ship, where a double ration of grog is issued along with the inevitable biscuit and, despite the grumbling of the cook, a fresh brew of hot tea. John reflects, as he rubs at his sore, reddened eyes, that although he has of course no intention of boasting, at last he has something to tell Julia that will impress her.

The China Station

A month after the fire in the Solent, John returned home to Hayle to marry his childhood sweetheart:

Royal Cornwall Gazette 29th October 1868

Marriages

At Phillack Church Oct. 21st by the Rev. F. Hockin John Dupen RN of HMS Hector to Julia Spray, second daughter of Capt. P. B. Spray Hayle.

Julia and John had known each other all their lives. She was a year younger than him and the daughter of Phillips Bigglestone Spray, a sailor who began his career as an apprentice on Harvey's brig *Phoebe* back in the 1830s when the Dupens first moved to Hayle. Captain Spray had rapidly earned his promotion to mate and then master of a series of coastal trading vessels, but at the time of his daughter's marriage he was the harbourmaster, with a house just round the corner from the Dupen home. Julia had grown up in Hayle Terrace in a cluster of Spray uncles and other master mariners and their families. She knew what to expect as a sailor's wife, but perhaps not quite what it would be like to be married to the navy.

Three years later John and Julia were living in Plymouth, in a neat, white-painted end of terrace house close to the Royal Dockyard, with their daughter Mary and newborn son Arthur. While France and Prussia were embroiled in a bloody conflict that changed the face of continental Europe, Britain had been nominally at peace since the end of the Crimean War. When Gladstone first came to power in 1868 he not only withdrew almost half of all British troops stationed across the empire but also cut naval forces overseas from 17,000 to 11,000 men. This did not however mean an end to any chance of action. In the view of Gladstone's administration, Britain's role was that of policeman to the world, hunting down pirates and slavers and seeking to impose Liberal values of free trade and Christian civilisation. The mid-nineteenth century, a period that I had naively classified to myself as peaceful, was in fact riddled with minor skirmishes across the globe.

In June 1871, after receiving his promotion to Engineer, John was posted to the frigate *Topaze*, one of the detached squadron that cruised the world flying the flag and generally making the British presence felt in foreign ports. A newspaper report summarised the voyage of the four frigates and one screw corvette, which, for reasons of economy and a lack of coaling stations on much of their route, was undertaken mostly under sail. What the *Times* failed to note was that, in one of those

coincidences that give walk-on parts to famous names in a cast of largely unknown characters, Charles Dickens' fifth son Sydney was one of the sub-lieutenants on board the *Topaze*. He fell ill in April 1872 on the return voyage from India and died at sea, two years after the death of his father. If John Dupen and Sydney Dickens ever spoke to each other (and given the social gulf that separated officers and engineers they may not have done), it is unlikely to have been a significant moment for John. He was not to know that ten years later his youngest sister was to marry a master tailor who, as a young journeyman, had made suits for the Dickens boys.

The Times 28th September 1872

The squadron, under command of Rear-Admiral Beauchamp Seymour, C.B., left Portland on Nov. 19, 1871, and arrived at and sailed from the following ports on the dates specified:- Vigo, Nov. 24, 29; Lisbon, Dec. 2, 7; Madeira, 10, 11; Rio Janeiro, Jan. 8, 18, 1872; Cape of Good Hope, Feb. 14, 27; Bombay, April 22 and May 6; Mauritius, June 5, 20; Cape of Good Hope, July 7, 27; St. Helena, Aug. 8, 13; Ascension, Aug. 17, 20; the Azores, Sept. 13, 16. The total distance traversed by the ships is 29,414 miles, accomplished almost entirely under sail. The general health of the crews has been good. The cruise from the Cape to Bombay was very tedious, owing to the prevalence of light winds and calms the whole way. The squadron steamed from the equator to Bombay, the ships towing each other alternately, the *Inconstant* and *Volage* doing most of the work. Steam was used for one day in crossing the equator, going out and coming home, and advantage was taken of it to exercise the squadron in steam tactics.

John too fell ill on board the *Topaze* and when he returned to Devonport in October 1872 he was hospitalised for two months with fever, but unlike Sydney Dickens he recovered and spent some months at home again in a guard ship of the reserve. In the spring of 1873 came the news that he was to be deployed to the China station. Julia would have to go home to Hayle. A house was found in Commercial Road, near her recently married brother Bigglestone, the proprietor of a chandlery business. She was sadly lacking in female relatives of her own, but would not be far from her mother-in-law in Penpol Terrace. Although John would be absent for the next four years, and unable to provide the steady guidance of a loving father, his children would benefit from the moral influence of their grandmother and aunts.

John's health was still uncertain and upon his arrival in China on the flagship *Iron Duke* in August 1873, he found himself once more hospitalised, but by November he had recovered sufficiently to be posted to the gun vessel *Ringdove*, one of the Plover

class, the last all-wooden gunboats built for the Royal Navy. After their success in the Crimean War, gunboats and the larger gun vessels (generically referred to as gunboats) became the workhorses of the navy despite their lack of durability – the early models had been built in haste when seasoned oak was in short supply and the green timber soon started to rot. Britain was looking for financial savings in defence and it was cheaper to operate unsuitable ships than to build new ones. The gunboat fleet was deployed to the Mediterranean, along the west coast of Africa, to North America and the West Indies, Zanzibar and the East Indies. But the largest concentration was on the China station, with one in each consular port to keep the peace, protect life and property, and clear the waters of pirates.

It must have been a strange experience to join a small vessel like the *Ringdove* after years spent in big frigates. The 51 gun *Topaze* was four times the size of a gunboat, with nineteen naval and marine officers and eight midshipmen, as well as five engineers, three surgeons, and a total complement of 500 men. The *Ringdove*, by contrast, had just three officers besides the commander, one surgeon, and three engineers. They would all have shared the tiny, dark, stuffy wardroom next to the commander's cabin in the stern and used the same tiny washbasin and cabinet toilet in the stern. There was so little headroom below in these vessels that it was rumoured an officer had once been observed shaving with his head sticking out of the skylight and the mirror propped up on the deck in front of him. But there was none of the starchy formality of a big ship, and if young Lieutenant Kenyon-Slaney came from a home where he enjoyed the services of a butler, a coachman, and a footman, he put on no airs and graces when expected to dine with the engineer in charge, Mr Harrison, whose sister was a Manchester steam loom weaver.

The rest of the crew of eighty sailors and stokers were crammed into the forecastle or slept on deck to escape the stifling heat, taking their chances with the sudden rainstorms that could drench them in minutes. The *Ringdove* carried three guns, a seven inch muzzle loader midships and two breech-loading Armstrongs fore and aft. (The men must have hoped that they would not have cause to use the latter, which had a terrible reputation for blowing up in the face of the crew.) She had a narrow, telescopic funnel, three masts, and two engines driving twin screws. With a draught of just ten and a half feet these did not lift out of the water, making her sluggish in the extreme when under sail. On deck she also carried two gigs, a steam skiff, a cutter, and a whaler.

After some time spent cruising Chinese waters, in 1874 the *Ringdove* was sent to Japan, that mysterious society that had been forced open to western vessels in 1853 by the American Commander Perry. It was here that John received a letter that must have brought home the reality of being separated from his family for four long years, when any news, whether joyful or sad, was several months old by the time he received it.

Yokohama, April-May 1874

The *Ringdove* lies at anchor with her sister ship *Thistle* off the port of Yokohama, which serves the ancient capital city of Edo. Around them, hundreds of fishing boats with single, square sails dart backwards and forwards across the metallic grey water. The steeply pitched roofs of the wooden cottages that line the bay have weathered to a dull pewter to match the sea. John has been ashore to wander through the bustling streets lined with saloons and brothels that have sprung up to serve the hundreds of foreign seamen who are stationed in the port. Unreadable banners in the mysterious script of the country hang from the low, two-storey buildings. He is surprised to see that there appear to be no beggars or vagrants, just dozens of bare-legged workmen in wide conical hats, trotting about their business, carrying baskets on yokes across their shoulders or pushing heavy two-wheeled carts. For once, he feels tall in comparison with this strange race of wiry, concave-chested creatures. At open-air eating places customers squat by miniature charcoal stoves, eating from doll-sized bowls. Vendors of strangely-shaped fruit and vegetables display their wares next to tin tubs of glittering silver fish. Ladies with ink-black hair swept up in smooth chignons teeter by on high wooden clogs or sit with straight backs in carriages pulled by running men. There appear to be almost no donkeys or horses. Everything is transported by the power of human muscle.

John stores up all the sights and sounds to describe to Julia when he writes. He looks forward eagerly to her replies, bringing news of the children: the new baby he has never seen, Arthur, who is learning to be the man of the house, and his clever, curious Mary. She is learning her alphabet, Julia says, and soon will be able to read his letters for herself. Imagine, he will tell her, the ladies wear robes like dressing gowns, with no crinoline, and great fat sashes wound round their waists. I don't think you would like to dress like that, would you?

The latest package of mail from home arrives from Southampton on the P & O steamer *Behar*, with the *Ringdove's* new commander, Mr Corbett Uvedale Singleton. The crew watch with curiosity and a little trepidation as he is rowed out to

the *Ringdove* on one of the flat native boats known as *sampans*, propelled by two men in blue cotton jackets and straw sandals. A new commander is always an unknown quantity. Mr Singleton turns out to be an aristocratic Irishman in his late thirties, a few years older than John. With his case of guns and his gundog he seems more interested in getting some good shooting than anything else, but when he visits the engine room his questions show that he has a good understanding of steam power.

‘He’ll do,’ says Mr Harrison gruffly to his colleagues.

The time passes in routine maintenance and testing of the boilers. Towards the end of April they dress the ship in honour of the Emperor of Russia’s birthday and the next day sail out into the gulf for firing practice. On their return another package of mail is delivered to the ship. John wonders why he has a letter addressed in Annie’s unmistakable hand but nothing from his wife. Anxiously he breaks the seal and reads:

My dear brother I write with grave news. Your sweet child Mary has been taken from us and is at rest in the arms of the Lord. She was stricken with the croup and fought for her life for four long days and nights but despite the efforts of faithful Dr Mudge, who did everything in his power to ease her suffering, she breathed her last on 28th February. Julia is too distressed to lift her pen and write, but rest assured, dear brother, that we are doing all we can to comfort and sustain her in her grievous loss. Little Arthur is well and your new daughter, who we have taken to calling Lissie, is thriving. I am sure that in the fullness of time Julia will come to see that she has been blessed with the gift of a baby girl at the very moment when she has had to bid farewell to her firstborn. The ways of the Lord are mysterious indeed, but we all pray for you to be strong and resolute in the face of this letter, which gives me as much pain to write as it does you to receive. We all loved Mary dearly and will miss her bright face and affectionate ways.

It is as if he has been punched in the chest and all the air knocked out of him. He blinks fiercely and bites his lips firmly together.

‘Bad news, Dupen?’ asks Commander Singleton. Blindly John thrusts the letter into the hands of his captain.

‘Read it, sir,’ he mutters, his voice cracking.

‘Oh my dear chap, I am so sorry. It is dashed hard being away from home at times like this. But it’s what we signed up for and we must do our duty. You won’t want the men to see you like this. Come with me.’

In the commander's cabin Singleton unlocks his liquor case and pours John a large glass of brandy.

'Here. Get that down you man. We'll soon have you feeling more the thing.'

Commander Singleton's voice sounds muffled and distant and John's vision is blurred, but he gulps the brandy and realises that he is not after all going to suffer the embarrassment of a public collapse.

'Thank you, sir,' he says. 'I'll do now.'

In the days that follow John goes about his duties in a daze but he is glad to keep busy. Then on 19th May the *Ringdove* is sent to the dry dock at Yokoska for repairs and he has far too much time on his hands. One day he walks up through the woods to the tomb of William Adams, the English navigator who came to Japan in 1600 and never returned home to his family. Imagine, John thinks, never to hold Julia in his arms again, never to see Arthur grow up or meet baby Lissie. When he finally sees her she will be almost the same age as Mary was when he left. How will he bear it, he wonders? Another three long years before he can kneel at the little grave in the churchyard at Phillack and bid farewell to his darling.

He hires a *jinrikisha* to take him across the peninsula to Kamakura, where there is said to be a fine specimen of a Japanese temple (if, as Commander Singleton says, you should happen to care about such things). The route takes him up a rough, stony track to a viewpoint where the rickshawman stops and points to the perfect, white tipped cone of Mount Fuji away in the distance. The elusive volcano emerges from the pale sky as if conjured from the mist by a magician, and evaporates once more into the clouds. The words of the psalm echo in John's head:

'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.'

Then they are off again, descending through the woods to the small town.

Beside a red-painted archway John climbs down from the carriage and signals to the man to wait. He enters the temple complex over the high arch of a wooden drum bridge, and finds himself beside a tree-lined lake where ducks splash energetically and fat, lazy fish bask just beneath the surface. To one side of the path a stone tank sits under a wooden roof, long-handled brass dippers resting along its edge. John, hot from the long ride, scoops up a mug of cool water. Looking around, he notices massed banks of hydrangeas, blue as the Cornish sky, blue as a little girl's dress. His tears start to fall, mingling like raindrops with the water that trickles from the bamboo spout into the basin.

SUMMARY OF NEXT CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 12 (cont.) Send a Gunboat!

The *Ringdove* is sent to the Malay state of Perak, where the British resident has been foully murdered in his bath and a punitive expedition is under way. This will be John's first (and last) taste of battle, one of the many colonial skirmishes of the late nineteenth century that have been forgotten by history. John, along with the whole crew of the gunboat, is awarded the medal he longed for. His career thereafter will be a conventional one of steady progress up the ranks until his early death.

CENSUS 1871

Hayle is succumbing to the effects of the economic depression and beginning its slow decline. Hundreds of houses as well as one of the foundries are up for sale. This may be when Annie bought the family home. An advertisement for her school, illustrated with a degree of artistic licence, shows a handsome detached residence in its own gardens, rather than the quayside setting of the real Cornubia Cottage.

CHAPTER 13 THE BUSINESS OF SCHOOLKEEPING

The only son left at home is Ernest, also apprenticed as an engine fitter at Harvey's foundry. Ellen has started her own school in St Ives, Sarah is governessing in Cheltenham, where Miss Beale has transformed the Ladies' College into a high-achieving institution, and Hester is teaching at a small girls' school in Sherborne, a way of life that she finds more congenial than that of a governess.

CHAPTER 14 CARGOES

After taking part in a strike in favour of the nine-hour day, Ernest ships out in 1872 as fourth engineer on the *Japan*, a brand new steamship built for the Suez trade and owned by an Armenian businessman. Engineers were better respected in the merchant service than in the navy but it was a very different environment on board ship, where a small number of European officers and engineers commanded a crew of 'lascars' recruited from across the east. Ernest's logbook charts his voyages, carrying general cargo to India, collecting rice from Saigon, and tea from China. The chief engineer gets drunk, the ship runs aground and nearly sinks, but Ernest remains unflappable and ever so slightly pompous. The *Japan* is chartered to carry 1,000 Chinese workers to the goldfields of Australia and then 1,250 Malay pilgrims to Mecca. It is five years before the abandonment of the *S. S. Jeddah* will inspire Conrad to write *Lord Jim*, but Ernest describes a disgraceful business identical to the

one so deplored in British newspapers at the time. He is glad when his articles expire and he can return home. He has no desire to make his career at sea and declares that he would be happy never to travel to the tropics again. But suitable jobs must have been hard to come by in an economic depression and by the end of 1876 he is off again, to join George on his coffee plantation. Three years later a Distress Fund for Cornwall is launched and a soup kitchen is feeding the people of Hayle. In India, George has matured into the urbane and courteous gentleman admired by Edwin Arnold, but he too will die young, leaving a widow and no children. Ernest, on the other hand, irritates Arnold, who describes him as ‘a hard-working and well-meaning Cornishman, but he kept a remarkably sharp look-out for the interests of what is vulgarly called “number one”’.

CHAPTER 15 NO LONGER A LADY

The oldest brother, Sharrock the younger, working as a steward on the crossing to Ireland, meets Julia Pennefather, niece of General Sir John Pennefather, the hero of Inkerman and governor of Chelsea hospital. Her father is a barrister, an Irish nationalist, and a scapegrace drunkard, who dies leaving Julia unprovided for. When she marries Sharrock she knocks eight years off her age and he declares himself to be a ‘gentleman’. They move up the hill from Bristol harbour to genteel Clifton, where they take in lodgers to help pay the rent. One of these, a retired schoolmistress, commits suicide by throwing herself out of her bedroom window. By 1875, the couple have seven children and Sharrock has declared bankruptcy. The family move to Portishead, where Sharrock manages the elegant Royal Hotel and Julia employs a governess, the daughter of a music master from Bath fallen on hard times. One morning the governess, Ada Ashley, is found bleeding to death on her bedroom floor. She has given birth to a baby, whose body is concealed in a trunk. One month later Julia is also dead and her orphaned children are carried off to Hayle to their grandmother. Their father disappears from their lives and is last heard of running a hotel in Weston-Super-Mare, before dying in his early fifties.

CENSUS 1881

Annie and Salome continue to run their school, which provides a haven for Sharrock and Julia’s three youngest children and several of their cousins. The Copperhouse foundry is gone, demolished in 1875, and Harveys’ shipyard is now the biggest employer. Penpol Terrace is changing too, and not for the better. Residents have

started to lower the tone of the neighbourhood by building shops in their front gardens.

CHAPTER 16 A NEW FAMILY

The melodramatic fate of Ada Ashley was a highly unusual one for a middle class woman. Most governesses continued to work until they retired, often to a life of extreme poverty. The two youngest Dupen sisters are amongst the few who find suitable husbands, although they will still be caring for other people's children. Sarah marries a widowed cloth merchant with one daughter while Hester becomes a stepmother to five children after marrying a widowed London tailor. He accumulates a property portfolio that will make him extremely wealthy by the end of the century. The couple go on to have four more children, including my grandfather Harold.

CENSUS 1891

Johanna Dupen has died but her unmarried daughters continue to run successful businesses, well respected by local society. Ellen's school, in particular, according to the local newspaper, 'has for twenty years held the position of the best in the town'. They will be able to afford a comfortable old age.

CENSUS 1901

Queen Victoria is dead and the Dupen sisters have retired. Girls' schools are changing and theirs is the last generation to run the kind of small, unregulated establishment that had flourished for the past hundred years or more. In 1903, the Hayle foundry closes its doors for the last time, with the loss of 600 jobs. Cornwall has by then lost around one third of its population to emigration and is surviving on remittances from overseas. Ernest, who never marries, has remained in Palghaut, where he starts an engineering business after disease ravages the coffee plantations. He is joined by two of his many nephews: George and Vivian. Vivian's son becomes the third and final generation to work in India and is the one who leaves notes on the history of the Dupens. Ernest dies in his mid-fifties, a relatively wealthy man. The next generation of Dupens has scattered across the globe, to America, India and Australia. John's son Arthur will benefit from Admiral Fisher's reforms of 1905 and rise to become an engineer captain, eligible to command a vessel. Annie perhaps left her house to my grandfather because he was the only one of her nephews to stay in England.

EPILOGUE

In 1903, as the Hayle foundry was closing its doors for the last time, my grandfather Harold went to sea as fourth engineer on the tramp steamer *Tregantle*, part of the 'Tre' fleet owned by a family from St Ives and manned by Cornish officers. Like his uncle Ernest, Harold kept a logbook, which begins with his packing list. In his wooden box were his shoes and socks, a supply of magazines and books, a pack of cards, two boxes of biscuits and four tins of milk. In his tin box he packed his clothes and bedding, a bag of oatmeal, and his sewing case, as well as his precious photographic supplies: 8 dozen glass plates, his dark room lamp, and bottle of developer with a measuring glass. This time there is a pictorial record



to go with the logbook: photographs of the ship and her crew, including the youthful fourth engineer in his grimy suit of white duck, images of camels and date palms, feluccas on the Nile, a paddle steamer on the Bosphorus, and what looks like a double decker Egyptian train.

On 21 July the *Tregantle* sailed from Cardiff, past St Ives and out into the Bay of Biscay where, like his Uncle Ernest before him, Harold was ill for two days but managed to eat the occasional biscuit. On his first Sunday he noted that the crew spent their time washing and mending clothes, a routine not so very different from the one his Uncle George would have known. They witnessed a glorious sunset as they passed Gibraltar and then made their way into the Mediterranean and along the African coast. After calling at Alexandria, where Harold enjoyed tea with a missionary in Aboukir, they sailed through the Dardanelles to Constantinople. By 18 August they were in the Black Sea and Harold would have been able to establish its colour for himself. On arriving at Theodosia, on the Crimean peninsula, the crew were draped in white cloaks and examined for bubonic plague while their dirty clothes were steamed, the young engineer recorded, for 45 minutes at a pressure of 160lbs per square inch. Apart from that, it seems to have been an uneventful voyage, with no dramatic incidents to rival the adventures of Uncle Ernest. The *Tregantle*

carried Russian barley to Hamburg without being holed below the waterline; the chief engineer was never made incapable by drink; and no ferocious passengers threatened the crew with daggers.

Whether my grandfather was disappointed or not, I have no idea. Like Ernest, he gives no clue to his emotions in the diary of his travels. It has not turned out to be a way for me to get to know him. But after that one voyage, he settled back home in London, later travelling to install an electric plant in a mansion in Aberdeenshire, where he met my grandmother. By the time he inherited Cornubia Cottage in 1918, he was married and living in London with a newborn son, my father. He would have had no use for a home in Cornwall and I doubt if there was any room for sentiment in a world turned upside down by war. The last surviving aunt, Sarah, moved back to London and I imagine the house was sold. By the end of the year, the Armistice had been signed and the only Dupens left in Hayle lay in the churchyard at Phillack. I wish now that I had asked my grandmother more about her husband Harold, but the stories she preferred to tell were of her own childhood, before she lost so many of those closest to her. My first granddaughter, born as this book nears completion, will also grow up without her grandfather. I have made a promise that she will know who he was.

I first went to Hayle to look for my grandfather's family nearly a hundred years after his aunt Annie's death, hardly knowing what to expect. It was March, and like any out-of-season holiday resort it felt grey and desolate. The B & B where I stayed had slippery nylon sheets and smelled of sickly-sweet pot pourri and stale bacon fat. Penpol Terrace was dominated by a row of shops displaying half-hearted offerings of beach toys, ice cream, and random items of hardware. The air smelled of vinegary fish and chips. Number 35 turned out to be a plain, flat-fronted house with sash windows and a modern, glassed-in porch, painted a cheerful Mediterranean pink under a slate roof. Was the Dupen home pink in 1918? Surely not. Standing with my back to the house, in front of the overgrown bushes that filled the front garden, I could see the replacement for Brunel's viaduct soaring over the muddy creek where small pleasure craft and fishing boats lay beached by the tide. No more railway tracks or paddle steamers, no smoking chimneys or hammering from the foundry. Just a few melancholy seagulls wheeling overhead. If this was Cornubia Cottage, it did not feel familiar.

When I began my quest for the Dupens, I was thinking about what we lose when we no longer have a home to return to, the house where we grew up, one that has been in the family for more than a single generation. But it turns out that you can't manufacture your past. Cornubia Cottage was never my grandfather's home, nor my father's, and it isn't mine. I will always feel the pull of the sea, but not enough to move to Hayle. In exploring my seafaring heritage I have become a maritime historian of sorts, but not a mariner.

Now that I am reaching the end of the story, I have started to consider graveyards. They too are places that we have lost. Most of us will be cremated, our ashes scattered in some meaningful place, a hillside, a cliff top, a riverside meadow, our only memorial a bench with a small plaque: 'In memory of Mary, who loved this view'. Or perhaps not even that much. My parents' ashes stayed in the grounds of the crematorium in Exeter. We couldn't think what else to do. I don't visit them; the people they once were are no longer there and the soft air of south Devon does nothing to soothe my sense of loss.

My Scottish grandmother, in death as in life, has wrested control of the family history. In a small village graveyard, set amidst farmland in the shadow of an Iron Age fort not far from Aberdeen, is the Smythe family memorial. There are the names of my grandmother Jean, her parents, brothers and sister, her husband Harold and son Malcolm. She herself is not there, her ashes scattered by the RAF over the North Sea, as close as possible to where Malcolm's bomber went missing in 1943. When it came to carving my father's name in stone, the only possible choice was here on Scottish granite. There is not much space left and I'm not sure it's where I want to be when my time comes. But I don't belong in Phillack either. I know that now.

I would quite like to be scattered amongst the fritillaries by the river here in Oxford. They are Oxfordshire's flower and at the end of all this sifting through history I have come to the conclusion that this is my place. It is not my childhood home but I have made a community for myself here, of friends and neighbours. It is my present, not my ancestral past, and will be my future too. This is the city where I have worked, studied, and brought up a child. The streets of Oxford are full of people I have shared experiences with for thirty years. When I go travelling now, I have an answer to the question that baffled my younger self, 'Where are you from?' But mine is not an insular community and I do not think of myself as English. I am Cornish and Scottish by inheritance, Canadian by adoption; I have two passports and three

languages. The same is true of many of my friends. We are connected by our status as outsiders. None of us were born here but it is where we have settled.

I am sitting in my garden to write this, under the plum trees. Red kites wheel overhead, calling in eerie voices that belong to the chalk uplands, not a suburban back garden. This in the end is where I belong. Not in historic Oxford with its golden stone quadrangles and flocks of cawing students, but this borderland that is not the university city and not quite industrial Cowley either, although the church William Morris commissioned for his workers stands at the end of my road. When my house was built in 1890 the area was all market gardens. The stone walls and fruit trees survive, although the goats, pigs, and chickens have gone. I planted a quince ten years ago and each year I harvest the aromatic golden globes to make preserves. It has put down strong roots and so have I. My house has a past and eventually I too will become part of its history.

I have been back to Hayle since my first visit and observed the progress that has been made in regenerating the town as a World Heritage site, using Lottery funding to restore buildings for community use and establish a heritage centre in Harveys' old offices. The town trail takes you along a woodland path that was once the ropewalk, to a tranquil lake where ducks carefully escort their ducklings past the water lilies and into the rushes. The pool that Henry Harvey created to flush the silt from the harbour has become a haven for wildlife. You can still drink in Jane Trevithick's White Hart hotel but the Wesleyan chapel where Kate and Sarah Dupen were both married has been transformed into the Foundry shopping village, a jumble sale of knitting wool, postcards, and second-hand books. In the opposite direction, the George V Memorial walk leads you between manicured flower beds along the shore of the Copperhouse Pool towards Phillack Hill. If you turn left here and keep straight on up, you will reach the dunes where the children of Hayle, in their best Sunday suits and white pinafores, came to picnic. A series of caravan parks now overlook the vast expanse of turquoise sea. The surf thunders in, children fly kites, and seals bask on the rocks.

If you turn off before the dunes to visit the church where my great-grandmother Hester was married, the past is suddenly present again. Here in the rough turf scattered with primroses are four-year-old Mary Leslie, dearly beloved child of John and Julia Dupen, and her parents. Here too is Mary's brother George, the motor-biking district commissioner from south India. Her other brothers, the war heroes,

Trooper Cuthbert Dupen and Engineer Captain Arthur Dupen, although buried far away, are listed on the wood panel of the war memorial in the church, as well as on a stone outside. Great-great-grandfather Sharrock is hard to find, a long, low, ridged stone half hidden by the uncut grass, and the lost babies have no markers, but the last resting place of his older children stands tall, surmounted by a Cornish cross. Ernest's name is on the pillar and on three sides of the base are his sisters, any differences forgiven: Salome, Ellen, and Joanna – for the purposes of eternity no longer Annie.

My journey of discovery began with an embroidered verse and ends with a chiselled epitaph. The original American poem has an extra, penultimate line, 'Life's victory won', but I somehow feel Annie would have considered that too grandiose a claim. I have imagined her as clever, prickly, and independent, but also conscientious and modest. It seems fitting that the child whose neat stitching decorates my home is remembered in these simple words:

Life's race well run
Life's work well done
Then cometh rest



NOTES

These notes are intended to provide enough information for readers to follow up any topics they are interested in. Be warned that browsing nineteenth-century newspapers is addictive! They are deliberately not formatted as academic references.

All genealogical information is taken from the census, parish and other records available at www.ancestry.co.uk, www.findmypast.co.uk, www.opc-cornwall.org (the website of the Cornwall parish clerks), and www.fibis.org (the website of Families in British India).

See *Bibliography* for full bibliographic information including sources for newspaper articles.

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography is abbreviated to *ODNB* throughout.

PART 1: HAYLE

Prologue

1. The information about samplers is from Brooks (2011), Rana (2014) and the Victoria and Albert museum <www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/h/a-history-of-samplers/>
2. The information about Hannah More comes from the *ODNB* (Skedd 2014) and Clarke (2000). *Sir Eldred of the Bower* was first published in 1776 together with *The Bleeding Rock*, but the embroidered verse does not appear in the earliest edition, which ends:
Yet Heaven's decrees are just, and wise,
And man is born to bear:
Joy is the portion of the skies,
Beneath them, all is care.
'Yet blame not heaven...', the ballad continues in Jones's 1829 Cabinet edition of *British Poets*, followed by the lines in the sampler, emphasising that Eldred is responsible for his own misfortune.
3. The description of my grandfather comes from *The Thirteenth Disciple* (1931), a novel by his friend Leslie Mitchell (better known as Lewis Grassic Gibbon, the author of the great Scottish novel *Sunset Song*). Mitchell gives him the name Ivor L. Moxon.
4. An undated letter signed 'Jackides' (the nickname of Sir John Tenniel at *Punch* magazine) was found amongst the papers of my great-grandfather George Baxter.

Chapter 1 A Seafaring Heritage

1. The information about portrait miniatures is from Reynolds (1988 and 1998). The name 'miniature', it turns out, comes not from its size but from *minium*, the Latin name for the red pigment used to colour the initial capital letters in illuminated manuscripts.
2. Falmouth in the early years of the nineteenth century is described by Frederick Trestrail (1892).
3. The history of the Falmouth packets is taken from Pawlyn (2003).
4. John Dupen's cutters (the *Speculation* and the *Fortitude*) are listed in *Lloyds Register*. An example of the danger he ran is recorded in *Lloyds List (1824: 51)*: 'Fortitude Dupen Dublin with loss of bowsprit, cargo shifted, and leaky'.

5. The lease of Lord Nelson inn at St Mawes to John Simmons Dupen victualler dated 1 January 1814 is held by the Cornwall Records Office (WH/1/3480). I assume a bark house was essentially a shed or shack.
Parties: 1) James Buller of Shillingham, esquire, to 2) John Simmons Dupen of St Mawes, victualler. 99 year lease, lessee's wife Hannah, formerly Sharrock, Catherine, wife of John Lane of St Mawes, formerly Sharrock, and Horatio Nelson Dupen, lessee's son. Rent £1. Consideration: £50. Dwelling-house late occupation William Jordan then Nicholas Sharrock, part of Chittol tenement [as in WH1/3475 and WH1/3476], with bark house lately erected behind same premises, being commonly known as Lord Nelson Inn.

Chapter 2 Moving to Hayle

1. The history of Hayle and its foundries is told in Vale (2009), Noall (1979 and 1985), and Pascoe (1983). Another invaluable resource is the *Hayle Historical Assessment* (Cahill 2000), which includes a complete inventory of streets and buildings in Hayle.
2. The early steam packets are listed in Fenton (2009) and a history of the early coastal routes is given in Robins (2011).
3. Captain Vivian's encounter with the French is described in Pawlyn (2003: 80). Noall (1985: 43) describes his move to the *Herald* and tells us he was 'a giant'.
4. The census data for 1841 are summarised on the *Vision of Britain* website <www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/1841>
5. The incident where Wesley was nearly caught by the tide is from Noall (1985: 111).
6. According to Noall (1985: 31) and Cahill (2000: 66), Wesley said of the first Copperhouse chapel: 'I suppose such another [chapel] is not in England, nor in Europe, nor in the world. It is round, and the walls are brass; that is brazen slags. It seems nothing can destroy this, till heaven and earth pass away.' Cahill adds drily that, 'Heaven and earth apparently passed away in 1816 when a new chapel was built to the south.'

Chapter 3 Doing Business in Bristol

1. Davidson (1999: 108) calls broccoli 'one of the most puzzling members of the cabbage family'.
2. My grandfather's letter to the editor of the *Morning Post* was cut out and saved in my grandmother's scrapbook. It is unfortunately undated.
3. 'The miner has become the broccoli grower' is a quote from 'Cornish broccoli: growth of a big industry', *Cornishman* 10 December 1936. The two anniversary articles in the *Western Morning News* were: 'Cornish broccoli' 9 January 1937 and 'Broccoli industry' 27 March 1943.
4. The history of the port of Bristol and its Floating Harbour is described in Lord and Southam (1983), Morgan (2006) and Wells (1909). I also learned a lot from a guided walk led by volunteers from M Shed, the waterfront museum in Bristol.
5. 'never been to England' is a quote from Hamilton Jenkin (1934: 8).
6. The tragic story of the labourer who killed his starving children was first published in the *Birmingham Journal* and reprinted in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 16 June 1837.
7. The story of the storm at sea was published in the *Bristol Mercury* 11 July 1857 under the title 'My Western Journey'.
8. The schoolboy returning to Rugby school is from Vale (2009: 198). The cargo of the *Herald* is listed in the freight book kept with the Harvey papers at the Cornwall Record Office (H 61 Freight Book Herald/Cornwall/Express).

7. The cargoes arriving at the Bristol docks and the departures of emigrant ships were listed in the *Bristol Mercury* on a regular basis.
9. The construction of the *Great Western* is described in *Grace's Guide* <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/SS_Great_Western> Vale says her galley was fitted out by Harveys (2009: 189).
10. The Reform Bill riots are described on the website of the Bristol Radical History Group ('Queens Square Uprising').

Census 1841

1. Concern for the king's health was expressed in 'The King's Health' *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 16 June 1837.
2. The Hayle Coronation feast is from Vale (2009: 250).

Chapter 4 A Methodist Inheritance

1. The *S. S. Great Britain* is now a museum with a website that describes her history <<https://www.ssgreatbritain.org/story>> *Grace's Guide* also has details <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/SS_Great_Britain>
2. The story of John Wesley in Cornwall is told in Hamilton Jenkin (1934: 60–6) and Shaw, which is also the source for statistics about Cornish Methodism (1967: 21).
3. Love feasts are described at <www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-love-feast> and <www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/methdism/lovefest.htm>
4. The lamb and flag emblem of Redruth is explained at <www.cornwall-online.co.uk/kerrier/redruth.htm> There is an image and note about its use in tin mining in the image library of the Science Museum: <www.scienceandsociety.co.uk/results.asp?image=10304844>
5. The life of Frederick Trestrail is remembered in two books by himself and his widow (1879 and 1892). His son's carpet designs are held by the National Archives, for example BT 43/128/147459.
6. The Gwennap Pit is described in Hamilton Jenkin (1934: 64–5) and Shaw (1967: 47). A photograph can be seen at <www.methodistheritage.org.uk/gwennappit.htm>
7. The details of the railway journey are taken from the newspaper article quoted at the start of the chapter.
8. The description of the preaching owes more than a little to Chapter 2 of *Adam Bede* (Eliot 1859).
9. Charles Wesley wrote some 6,500 hymns. I picked one at random from <hymnary.org/person/Wesley_Charles>

Chapter 5 A Free Gardener

1. The Leeghwater engine is described by Vale (2009: 260–1) and Noall (1979: 26). It was also the subject of an article in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 21 July 1843. Another article (9 October 1846) describes how the commissioners overcame the 'prejudices of the Dutch in favour of their windmills'.
2. The *Cornwall* and the *Brilliant* appear in Fenton (2009: 6).
3. Freemason records are searchable at www.ancestry.co.uk and *Lane's Masonic Records*.
4. Free Gardeners are hard to find in standard histories of Friendly Societies and now persist (with a Facebook page) mainly in Australia. I found two useful sources: <<https://hanginggardensofbabylonlodge.webs.com/history>> and Powell (n.d.). Powell claims, rather charmingly, that Sam Gamgee in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* was a Free Gardener. The Garden Museum in London has an example of an apron

<<https://gardenmuseum.org.uk/collection/apron-for-the-ancient-order-of-free-gardeners/>>

5. Friendly Societies in general are covered by Cordery (1995 and 2003), Gorsky (1999), Gosden (1961), Thompson (1988) and Weinbren (2007).
6. The first birthday procession of the Cornubian Lodge is from the *Bristol Mercury* 2 September 1843.
7. The 1844 procession is described in ‘Hayle – Society of Free Gardeners’ *Bristol Mercury* 13 July 1844.

Chapter 6 Debt and Disease

1. The miners laying siege to Redruth and Penzance are from Payton (2005: 133).
2. The correspondent from Cork wrote to the *Bristol Mercury* on 22 August 1846.
3. The letter from the commander of the steam sloop was quoted in the *Bristol Mercury* 20 February 1847.
4. The Chartist rally was reported in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 14 April 1848.
5. Garibaldi’s arrest featured in the *Bristol Mercury* 22 September 1849.
6. The State Visit to Ireland was covered by *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post* 9 August 1849 and the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 10 August 1849.
7. Tannahill (1988: 287) gives the price of seven 4lb loaves as five shillings at a time when a worker’s wage was between five shillings and two pounds a week. Payton (2005: 133) says the poor ate nothing but barley.
8. Hester Ann Rogers has an entry in the *ODNB* (Graham 2004).
9. The cholera epidemic of 1830 and draining of Penpol Pool are described by Vale (2009: 202–3 and 250).
10. The soup kitchen is mentioned in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 7 September 1849.
11. The work of John Snow is described online at <<http://www.choleraandthethames.co.uk>>
12. The startling recovery of a young man is from the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 21 September 1849.
13. Sharrock’s insolvency was announced in *The London Gazette* Issue: 21014, p. 2717. The notice for George Austin appears on the same page.
14. The Insolvent Court features in *The Pickwick Papers* (Dickens 1837: 693).
15. Insolvent debtors are covered by Michael Lobban in Hewitt (2012) (Chapter 22 ‘‘Private Law’’ and the Laissez-Faire State’) and at <<http://www.victorianlondon.org/legal/insolventcourt.htm>>
16. The body awaiting an inquest was mentioned in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 21 September 1849.

Chapter 7 Laundry Day

1. The details of cleaning routines, the laundry process, and the clothes worn by Victorian adults and children are described Flanders Chapter 4 ‘The Scullery’ (2003: 93–130) and Goodman Chapter 2 ‘Getting Dressed’ (2014: 29–95). More information and photographs of surviving coppers, including one at Jane Austen’s home in Chawton, are to be found at <<https://www.1900s.org.uk/copper-water-heater.htm>>
2. For general background on women’s lives, I found Steinbach (2005) useful, and for family relationships, Davidoff (1999 and 2002) and Nelson (2007).
3. Information about working in a draper’s shop is taken from Horn Chapter 4 ‘From Draper’s Shop to Department Store’ (2006).

Census 1851

1. Information about the New Poor Law is from Brundage (2002), Digby (1982), Englander (1998), and King (2000).
2. A comprehensive website about workhouses, with an image of the Redruth workhouse, is <www.workhouses.org.uk>
3. Charles Cleverly's allotment records during his service on *HMS Delight* are held by the National Archives (1839 ADM 27/64/11 Folios 32-33 and 1836 ADM 27/49/78 Folios 305-306) (where Hannah Dupen is rather intriguingly listed as his sister).
4. The notion of 'Oxford Time' is explained at <<https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/visiting-christ-church/tom-quad>>
5. James provides income tables for 1843 and 1883 that divide those with an income of over £150 (who paid tax) and those with less, but points out that income was self-assessed so there was an incentive to understate it (2006: 257). Steinbach in Chapter 6 'Class' suggests the middle class needed a range of £300–1,000 to be comfortable but that most had only £100–£300 (2012: 113–31).
6. The Great Exhibition features in Chapter 12 of Wilson (2003: 123–50) and <<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-great-exhibition>>
7. 'far more critical and discriminating': *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 6 June 1851.
8. 'first extempore walk': *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 4 July 1851.
9. I downloaded Sharrock's merchant navy service record from www.findmypast.co.uk 'Merchant Navy seamen 1835–1941'.
10. The photograph of General Sir John Lysaght Pennefather is held by the National Army Museum and can be viewed at <<https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?q=searchType%3Dsimple%26resultsDisplay%3Dlist%26simpleText%3Dpennefather&pos=1&total=3&page=1&acc=1964-12-151-6-8>> A magnificent portrait of him in uniform as governor of the Chelsea hospital is at <<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/field-marshal-sir-john-lysaght-pennefather-17981872-governor-of-the-royal-hospital-18701872-179487>>
11. The history of gunboats is taken from Preston and Major (1967) and Padfield (1981).
12. The Bristol freemasons' celebration was recorded in *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* 10 April 1856 and the end of the war in the same paper on 3 April 1856.

Chapter 8 Cutting for Stone

1. My information on lithotomy and bladder stones comes from Vandenbroucke (2001) and Herr (2008).
2. The gruesome instruments can be viewed at <www.rmg.co.uk/discover/behind-the-scenes/blog/removing-bladder-stone-size-tennis-ball>
3. The training of surgeons and apothecaries is covered by Rivlin (1997).
4. Pepys's operation is described by Tomalin (2002: 61–5).
5. The allegation about Frère Jacques is from <www.ndm.ox.ac.uk/osg/history-of-stone-disease>
6. Godfrey's Cordial was of course, like so many medicines of the time, opium-based.
7. The Museum of the History of Science in Oxford has examples of early anaesthetic equipment <<https://www.hsm.ox.ac.uk/medicine>> but I decided to keep it simple and administer the chloroform on a sponge.
8. Charles Wesley composed the prayer when his son Isaac was sick with smallpox <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/charles-wesley>>

Chapter 9 Starting at the Foundry

1. An example of articles of apprenticeship is kept with the Harvey papers (H42/43 Apprenticeship indenture William Barnicoat Engine Fitter 6/1/1865).
2. The UK Commissioners' report of children's employment 1842 is online at www.ancestry.co.uk. Nicholas Harvey was examined on 15 April 1841 and the interview recorded on p. 754
<<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/interactive/34775/00000001?backurl=&ssrc=&backlabel=Return>>
3. The life of Richard Trevithick, which deserves its own historical novel, is recounted in the *ODNB* by Payton (2007) and by Vale. *Grace's Guide* also has a major entry <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Richard_Trevithick> and reproduces in addition the complete life written by his son.
4. The information about Brunel is taken from the *ODNB* (Buchanan 2004) and *Grace's Guide* <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Isambard_Kingdom_Brunel>
5. The testing of the engine on the kitchen fire is from Vale (2009: 73), as is Captain Vivian driving Trevithick's road carriage down Tottenham Court Road (2009: 75). The Camborne hill story is told by Vale (2009: 74) and appears in the entry in *Grace's Guide* for Andrew Vivian <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Andrew_Vivian> Anyone interested in why the boys shouldn't sing the song in front of their mothers can Google the lyrics.
6. Brunel's viaduct is described by Noall (1985: 117) and Cahill (2000: 35).
7. The *Great Eastern* is described with images at <<http://www.ikbrunel.org.uk/ss-great-eastern>> and
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/seven_wonders_gallery.shtml>
8. John Bawden was listed in the 1851 census as an apprentice engine fitter.
9. The launch of *Cornubia* was described in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 5 March 1858.
10. 'on one tide': *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 23 July 1858.

Census 1861

1. Famous victims of erysipelas are listed at <<https://www.geni.com/projects/People-who-Died-from-Erysipelas/28285>>

PART 2: THE WORLD

Chapter 10 From Ocean to Jungle

1. Masters and Mates certificates are searchable online at www.ancestry.co.uk 'UK and Ireland Masters and Mates Certificates 1850-1927'. For general help in tracing your merchant navy ancestors I found Wills (2012) a good place to start.
2. The statistics on Cornish emigration are taken from Payton (2005: 28).

The *Queen of the Avon*

1. The most comprehensive book on the merchant navy in the nineteenth century is Woodman (2009). Two earlier books are Cornewall-Jones (1898) and Bullen (1900). Foulke (1963) draws on the latter, as well as Conrad and Dana. For first-hand accounts on life at sea in the nineteenth century I read Berridge (2018), Conrad (1906), Dana (1840 and 1841), Downie (1912) and Forwood (1920). Two biographies of Conrad were also useful: Jasanoff (2017) and Stape (2007). Where no other source is given, it can be assumed that the information is taken from a combination of these.

2. Two contemporary books about travelling on merchant (container) ships were invaluable in helping to imagine the mentality of men who spend their lives at sea: Clare (2014) and George (2013).
3. Records of particular ships can be found using *Lloyds Register of Shipping* and the *Mercantile Navy List*, available online at <<http://www.crewlist.org.uk>> and <<http://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/ships.html>> There are often several ships of the same name and you need to work out which is the unique number of the one you are interested in.
4. A beautifully illustrated guide to sails and rigging is available at <<https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk/sites/default/files/rigging-types-an-introduction.pdf>> and some useful diagrams appear at <<https://maritimemuseum.novascotia.ca/research/sailing-ship-rigs>>
5. The schoolbooks were welcomed in the *Nelson Examiner* 27 August 1859.
6. The arrival of the *Queen of the Avon* in New Zealand, her cargo, passengers, etc. were all announced in numerous items in the local newspapers. Her crew list for 1858 is online at <<http://marinersandships.com.au/1858/02/069que.htm>>
7. The seaman Amos is described by William Forwood, who travelled home from Australia on the *Queen of the Avon* in 1858, as ‘a splendid man, a stalwart in physique and most estimable in character. He quickly took the lead in the forecabin and exercised great moral influence.’ (1920: 96.)
8. Information about on-board pastimes of passengers is from Crawford (1986). A shipboard diary kept by an emigrant in 1858 is reproduced on the New Zealand Yesteryears website <<http://www.yesteryears.co.nz>>
9. The history of Nelson is from <<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/keyword/nelson>>
10. Mr Shaw’s posting to the Friendly Islands was reported in the *Wellington Independent* 6 September 1859.
11. ‘in ballast for Guam’: *Nelson Examiner* 6 September 1859.
12. The Crossing the Line ceremony is described by Downie (1912: 67–9) and Berridge (ebook, no page refs). In the navy the ceremony was similar and is described in Padfield (1981: 39–41).
13. The death of a child was reported in *Wellington Independent* 15 July 1859, as were the details of the rescue attempt, including the use of a pair of sea boots to bail out the boat.

The Blackwall Frigates

1. The photograph of the *Dover Castle* is from the State Library of South Australia <<https://collections.slsa.sa.gov.au/resource/PRG+1373/2/57>>, which holds the A.D. Edwardes Collection of about 8,000 photographs, mostly of sailing ships from around the world, taken between about 1865 and 1920. She is docked at Port Chalmers in New Zealand.
2. The history of the Blackwall frigates is covered in detail in Lubbock (1950), Woodman (2009), and by former midshipman William Downie (1912).
3. Fares for the *Dover Castle* are taken from ‘Advertising’ *Empire* 3 April 1861 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article60494482>>
4. The Dead Horse ceremony is described by many travellers including Downie (1912: 50–3) and Berridge.
5. The contents of a gentleman’s cabin: ‘Advertising’ *Herald* 16 March 1861 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article244311420>>
6. The *Dover Castle*’s cargo is listed in ‘SHIPPING’ *Age* 25 May 1861 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article154890014>>

7. Her punctuality is praised in 'SHIPPING INTELLIGENCE' *Star* 30 April 1861 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article66338913>>
8. The stories about the *Yorkshire* are told by Lubbock.
9. 'not once have the topgallant sails been in ...': 'SHIPPING INTELLIGENCE' *Star* 28 November 1861 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article66343804>>
10. The description of Mr George Wells and the quote, 'a cricket ball appropriately inscribed', appeared under the headline: 'A CRICKETING NOTABILITY' *Star* 28 November 1861 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article66343801>>
11. 'THE ALL ENGLAND CRICKET MATCH': *Age* 1 January 1862 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article154844949>> and 'NEW YEAR'S DAY': *Argus* 2 January 1862 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5707686>>
12. Advertisement for the *Yorkshire*: 'Advertising' *Leader* 18 January 1862 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article196393115>>
13. '3,333 railway chairs ...': 'SHIPPING INTELLIGENCE' *Star* 28 November 1861 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article66343804>>
14. Captain Reynell's letter: 'THE VOYAGE VIA CAPE HORN' *Argus* 17 October 1862 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article6480373>>

The *Eastern Empire*

1. National Museums of Liverpool information sheet 12 provides background information about emigration to Australia <<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/sheet/12>>
2. Descriptions of life on board the emigrant ships are given in Haines (2003), O'Hara (2010), Pennington (2002) and Woolcock (1986).
3. An illustration of the layout of an emigrant ship was published in the *Illustrated London News* 13 April 1844.
4. The crew and passenger lists for the *Eastern Empire* have been transcribed and are online at <<http://marinersandships.com.au/1862/11/media/087eas.gif>>
5. 'no deaths or births': 'SHIPS' MAILS' *Empire* 29 November 1862 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article60519613>>
6. The Fife family letters are reproduced in Fitzpatrick (1994).
7. Appearance of Travers before the Water Police: 'THURSDAY' *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 December 1862 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article13070864>>
8. Christmas dinner: 'TOWN AND COUNTRY NEWS' *Sydney Mail* 3 January 1863 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article166654243>>
9. 'capacious and well-ventilated': 'Advertising' *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 December 1862 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article13070692>>
10. Departure for Ichaboe: 'PROJECTED DEPARTURES—DECEMBER 26' *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 December 1862 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article13071692>>
11. The sad story of Captain Jury's sunstroke was told in 'VIEWS AND COMMENTS' *Advertiser* 12 February 1917 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article5561110>>
12. The dispute between the Reverend Stanton and Mr Baker Brown was reported in 'THE IMMIGRATION AGENT'S REPORT' *South Australian Advertiser* 15 July 1864 <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article31839015>>
13. The log of the *Eastern Empire* for her voyage ending in 1864 is archived at the Maritime History Archive, Memorial University of Newfoundland. (Great Britain. Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen *Agreement and Account of Crew and Official Logbooks for British Empire Vessels, 1857–1942* (predominantly 1863–1938), 1951–1976.)

14. Memorial University also manages the useful *More than a List of Crew* website, which is where the captain's autobiographical extract appears
<<https://www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/articles/shipmasters/>>
15. George's court case was reported in the *Madras Times* 18 August 1863 in the Police Intelligence section. The evidence of the carpenter would have carried particular weight since he occupied a uniquely independent and respected position in the crew, being not only a speciality tradesman but also usually a veteran seaman.

On the Indian Hills

1. The most detailed source of information about coffee planting in the Nelliampathies is Arnold (1881). His memoir was also used in the illustrated book Weatherstone (1986). For more technical information about planting I used Shortt (1864).
2. George's prize is listed in the *Madras Revenue Register* (1868: 124).
3. The names of the owners and managers of the dozen or so coffee estates in the Nelliampathies are listed in Ferguson (1879). They can be matched with the initials used by Arnold.
4. The Stanes brothers are remembered by articles in *The Hindu*
<<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Coimbatore/the-stanesstory/article3609268.ece>>
and in *Madras Musings* 'A Hundred Years of the Stanes' by T. K. Srinivasa Chari (Archive) Vol. xxii No. 24, April 1-15, 2013
<<http://madrasmusings.com/Vol%2022%20No%2024/a-hundred-years-of-the-stanes.html>>

Chapter 11 Other People's Children

1. Mrs Jane Marcet has an entry in the *ODNB* (Morse 2004). She was also the subject of an article in *Chemistry World* (Rossotti 2007). Rayner-Canham (2017) says that her book was on the curriculum of Quaker schools.
2. The extract from *Conversations on Chemistry* appears on page 17.
3. The information about elementary schooling is from
<<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter05.html>>
4. The main sources of information on governesses and private school teachers, including pay and conditions and social attitudes, are Brandon (2008), Broughton (1997) and Hughes (1993). Ellis views Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) as 'the first novel to really lift the lid on the profession (2017: 157).
5. Contemporary articles include: 'The Governess Question' (1859), 'Hints On The Modern Governess System' (1844), and Martineau (1860).
6. Christina De Bellaigue is the main source of information on schoolkeeping as opposed to governessing and one of the few to suggest that it was not always a last resort. De Bellaigue (2001, 2007, 2015). A further source is McDermid (2012). Dyhouse (1981) covers the development of ladies colleges and high schools for middle class girls, and the domestic curriculum of elementary schools for girls. She states that lower middle class girls were sent to small day schools, presumably similar to the one kept by Annie Dupen, and that these were often like an extended family unit, with low standards of achievement.
7. The statistics about unmarried women and governesses are taken from Brandon (2008: 1, 17). The 1861 figures are from the *Vision of Britain* website. Kathryn Hughes quotes a slightly higher figure of 24,770 governesses (1993: 22).
8. The Cowan Bridge syllabus is reproduced in Gaskell (1857: 97).

9. Richmal Mangnall sold her manuscript to Longman in 1800 and by 1857 there had been 84 editions.
10. Mrs Grey's plan to start a school is from *Agnes Grey* (Anne Brontë 1847: 139).
11. Photographs of Cheney Court appear at
<<http://www.linguarama.com/courses#englishinengland>>
12. The *Cornubia* fittings were described in the *Bristol Mercury* 17 July 1858
13. Maps of Bristol covering a range of dates are available on the *Know Your Place* (Bristol) website <<http://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition>> and can usefully be viewed as layers.
14. Brunel's Box tunnel features in his *ODNB* entry (Buchanan 2004) and
<www.ikbrunel.org.uk/box-tunnel> The Awdry connection is remembered at
<<http://www.boxpeopleandplaces.co.uk/rev-vere-awdry-photos.html>>

Chapter 12 A Naval Engineer

Guarding the Queen

1. The Trent affair was reported as 'The Federal Outrage' *Royal Cornwall Gazette* 6 December 1861. It is further explained at:
<<https://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/uscivilwar/britain/trentaffair/trentaffair.html>>
2. National Museums of Liverpool information sheet 59 gives more details about the Confederate sympathisers on Merseyside and blockade runners
<<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/sheet/59>>
3. Information on the *Cornubia* and blockade running is from Joseph (2016) and
<<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/blockade-runners>>
4. Harveys' exhibition medal is from Vale (2009: 298).
5. Steam factories and the training of engineers are described by Barton (2018), Hill (1995) and Padfield (1981). I learned more from conversations with Commander Barton, who was kind enough to demonstrate the traditional naval salute to the Queen.
6. I downloaded John's naval records from www.ancestry.uk (Naval Officer and Rating Service Records, 1802–1919) and the National Archives (ADM 196/24/429 - *Engineering Officers. Dates of entry: 1854–1878, Latest date of discharge: 1911*).
7. Naval ships are indexed at <<http://www.pbennyon.plus.com/18-1900/Index.html>>
8. The website of HMS *Warrior* is <<http://www.hmswarrior.org>>
9. 'a most useful class of men' is quoted in Hill (1995: 275). Padfield (1981: 187) quotes another source, who called engineers 'emphatically cads'!
10. Queen Victoria's journals have been transcribed and are available online at
<<http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/home.do>> The extract *RA VIC/MAIN/QVJ (W) 13 July 1868 (Princess Beatrice's copies)* is reproduced with permission of the Royal Archives, Windsor.
11. The queen's arrival at Osborne was described in the *Hampshire Advertiser* 11 July 1868.
12. The Queen's visit to Prince Alfred and the *Galatea* was described in the *Hampshire Advertiser* 18 July 1868.
13. The shooting in Sydney was reported as 'Attempt to assassinate H.R.H.' in the *Morning Post* 25 April 1868.
14. An account of the fire appeared under the headline 'Destructive Fire at Netley Grange Farm' *Hampshire Advertiser* 19 September 1868.

The China station

1. The cruise of the *Topaze* as reported in the *Times* is reproduced at
<<https://www.pdavis.nl/ShowShip.php?id=96>>

2. The naval record of Lieutenant Sydney Smith Haldimand Dickens is held by the National Archives (ADM 196/38/351 and ADM 196/17/73). A letter from Dickens, ordering suits for Sydney's brothers Henry and Edward, was found amongst the papers of my great-grandfather George Baxter.
3. The main source of information about gunboats is Preston and Major (1967), with more in Padfield (1981), and Hill (1995). A first-hand account of what it was like to serve on one is Cox (1968).
4. The *Navy Lists* giving details of crew are online at <<https://www.hathitrust.org>>
5. My description of Yokohama is inspired by the intrepid Isabella Bird, who travelled there extensively (Bird 1879).
6. I imagined Annie's letter and John's reaction after reading Pollock (1987). Commander Singleton later complained in his logbook that he had to burst open his liquor case because he had forgotten the key.
7. It was Commander Singleton who, according to his logbook, visited Adam's grave and Kamakura by rickshaw, but my recollection of Kamakura is of such a charming town that I felt I had to send John there.
8. Mary was a precocious child, who apparently once told her grandmother that 'she could hardly love her mother, she was so foolish'. It was an opinion shared by her aunts, who repeated it to Harold and Lulu.
9. John received the India Medal 1854 with Perak clasp. The award is listed in *The UK, Naval Medal and Award Rolls, 1793-1972 for Naval Brigade personnel: expedition to the Malaya Peninsular, clasp "PERAK 1875-1876"* available on www.ancestry.co.uk

Epilogue

1. My grandfather took a qualification in civil and mechanical engineering at the Central Technical College in South Kensington, the forerunner to Imperial College, after leaving St Paul's School in 1900. Training for engineers was changing and instead of apprenticeships, diplomas were available through the City and Guilds.
2. The *Tregantle* is listed in Fenton (2009). She was part of a fleet of 87 ships belonging to the Hain steamship company, which was sold to P & O at the end of World War I. The *Tregantle* was sunk by a U boat in 1916.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

The following two journals are in my possession:

Baxter, Harold, 'Diary of a trip in *S. S. Tregantle* 1903'

Dupen, Ernest Vincent, 'Logbook, London, September 1873–May 1876'

I consulted material held in the following archives:

London, British Library

- Leases, deeds, indentures and related papers concerning the proprietors and tenants of the Varlavachen Coffee Estate in the Nelliampathi hills, Cochin, *India Office Records and Private Papers*, 1863
- *Madras Times* 1 Oct. 1860–31 Dec. 1914, Asia, Pacific & Africa SM 65

London, National Archives <<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>>

- ADM – Records of the Admiralty, Naval Forces, Royal Marines, Coastguard, and related bodies
 - ADM 27 – Register Of Allotments
 - ADM 196 – Officers' Service Records
- BT – Records of the Board of Trade and of successor and related bodies
 - BT 43 – Design Representations For Class 6 (Carpets)

London, National Maritime Museum, Caird Library

- Logbook of *HMS Ringdove*, China Station, April 1874 to 5 April 1877, LOG/N/R/31/A

Redruth, Cornwall Record Office

- Harvey and Company Limited, ship and engine builders, ironfounders and merchants, Hayle, papers
- Whitford and Sons, solicitors, of St Columb Major, papers

St Johns, Newfoundland, Memorial University

- Logbook of the *Eastern Empire* (ship no. 35170) for a voyage ending in 1864

Online newspaper archives

British Library Newspapers Gale Group <www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/historical-newspapers>:

- *Bristol Mercury*, Bristol, 1819–1900
- *Hampshire Advertiser* (previously *Southampton Herald*), Southampton, 1830–1900
- *Morning Post*, London, 1773–1900
- *Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet and Plymouth Journal*, Truro, 1811–1900
- *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post*, Exeter, 1800–1900

British Newspaper Archive Findmypast in partnership with the British Library <www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>:

- *Cornishman and Cornish Telegraph*, Penzance, 1878–1944

- *Illustrated London News*, London, 1842–2003
- *West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser*, Truro, 1810–1944
- *Western Morning News*, Plymouth, 1860–1950

Papers Past National Library of New Zealand, <paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>:

- *Nelson Examiner*, Nelson, 1842–1874
- *Wellington Independent*, Wellington, 1845–1874

Trove <<https://trove.nla.gov.au>> (Newspaper articles from *Trove* are reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Australia. The terms of use require a URL to be given for each article cited.):

- *Advertiser*, Adelaide, SA, 1889–1931
- *Age*, Melbourne, Vic., 1854–1954
- *Argus*, Melbourne, Vic., 1848–1957
- *Empire*, Sydney, NSW, 1850–1875)
- *Herald*, Melbourne, Vic., 1861–1954
- *Leader*, Melbourne, Vic., 1862–1918, 1935
- *South Australian Advertiser*, Adelaide, SA, 1858–1889
- *Star*, Ballarat, Vic., 1855–1864
- *Sydney Mail*, Sydney, NSW, 1860–1871
- *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, NSW, 1842–1954

Other online sources

Ancestry <www.ancestry.co.uk> Databases include census returns 1841–1910, UK and Ireland Masters and Mates Certificates 1850–1927, parish records, records of Freemasons' lodges, naval officers' records, ship's passenger lists.

BBC History <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/>>

Books, Boxes and Boats <<http://www.maritimearchives.co.uk>>

British History Online <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk>>

Cholera and the Thames <<http://www.choleraandthethames.co.uk>>

Cornwall Online <www.cornwall-online.co.uk>

Cornwall Online Parish Clerks <<http://www.opc-cornwall.org/>>

Crew List Index Project <<http://www.crewlist.org.uk>>

The Dictionary of Victorian London

<<http://www.victorianlondon.org/legal/insolventcourt.htm>>

Education in England: The History of our Schools <<http://www.educationengland.org.uk>>

Everyday Life, early-mid twentieth century, by people who were there <www.1900s.org.uk>

Families in British India <<http://www.fibis.org>>

Find My Past <<https://www.findmypast.co.uk>>

Grace's Guide <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Main_Page>

Hayle Heritage Centre <<http://www.hayleheritagecentre.org.uk/>>

Historical Directories of England & Wales

<<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16445coll4>>

HMS Warrior <<http://www.hmswarrior.org>>

Hymnary <www.hymnary.org>

Isambard Kingdom Brunel <<http://www.ikbrunel.org.uk>>

Know Your Place (Bristol) <<http://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition>>

Lanes Masonic Records <www.hrionline.ac.uk/lane> (2011) version 1.0, HRI Online Publications
Lloyds Register of Shipping <<http://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/lloyds-register.html>>
Lloyds List <<http://www.maritimearchives.co.uk/lloyds-list.html>>
London Gazette <<https://www.thegazette.co.uk>>
Mariners and Ships in Australian Waters <<http://marinersandships.com.au>>
Maritime Museum of the Atlantic <<https://maritimemuseum.novascotia.ca>>
Methodist Heritage <<http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk>>
More than a List of Crew <<https://www.mun.ca/mha/mlc/index.php>>
National Historic Ships <<https://www.nationalhistoricships.org.uk>>
Naval Social History circa 1793–1920 (including lists of vessels)
 <<http://www.pbenyon.plus.com/Naval.html#ships>>
Navy Lists <<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000540861>>
New Zealand History <<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/history-of-new-zealand-1769-1914>>
New Zealand Yesteryears <<http://www.yesteryears.co.nz>>
Nuffield Department of Medicine <www.ndm.ox.ac.uk>
Poetry Foundation <www.poetryfoundation.org>
Queen Victoria's Journals <<http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/home.do>>
Royal Museums Greenwich <www.rmg.co.uk>
Science and Society <www.scienceandsociety.co.uk>
Ships of the Mid-Victorian Royal Navy <<http://www.pdavis.nl/MidVicShips.php?page=1>>
S. S. Great Britain <<https://www.ssgreatbritain.org>>
Victorian Britain (British Library) <<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles>>
The Victorian Web <<http://www.victorianweb.org/>>
A Vision of Britain Through Time <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>>
The Workhouse <www.workhouses.org.uk>

Books and articles

Where relevant, date of first publication is given in brackets.

- Arnold, Edwin Lester L., *On the Indian Hills; or, Coffee-planting in Southern India* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1881)
 Austen, Jane, *Emma*, ed. by James Kinsley and Adela Pinch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1815))
 Barton, Mark, *The Engineering Branch of the Royal Navy* (London: UK Ministry of Defence, 2018)
 Berridge, Sally, *The Epic Voyages of Maud Berridge: The Seafaring Diaries of a Victorian Lady* (London: Bloomsbury (Adlard Coles), ebook 2018)
 Bird, Isabella L., *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (London: Virago, 1984 (1879))
 'The Blockade Runners', <<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/blockade-runners>>
 Brandon, Ruth, *Other People's Daughters: The Life and Times of the Governess* (London: Orion, 2008)
 Bristol Radical History Group, 'Queens Square Uprising',
 <<http://www.brh.org.uk/site/articles/bristol-1831-the-queens-square-uprising/>>
 Brontë, Anne, *Agnes Grey*, ed. by Robert Inglesfield and Hilda Marsden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010 (1847))
 ———, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, ed. by Herbert Rosengarten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1848))
 Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre*, ed. by Margaret Smith, and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1847))

- , *Villette*, ed. by Margaret Smith, Herbert Rosengarten and Tim Dolin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1853))
- Brooks, Mary M., *Micheál & Elizabeth Feller – the Needlework Collection* (Hascombe: Needleprint, 2011)
- Broughton, Trev Lynn and Ruth Symes, *The Governess: An Anthology* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997)
- Brundage, Anthony, *The English Poor Laws, 1700–1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2002)
- Buchanan, Angus, ‘Brunel, Isambard Kingdom (1806–1859)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, September 2017
- Bullen, Frank Thomas, *The Men of the Merchant Service: Being the Polity of the Mercantile Marine for Longshore Readers* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1900)
- Cahill, Nick, and Cornwall Archaeological Unit, *Hayle Historical Assessment* (Truro: English Heritage and Cornwall County Council, 2000)
- Charlwood, D. E., *The Long Farewell* (Ringwood, Vic., Australia: Allen Lane, 1981)
- Clare, Horatio, *Down to the Sea in Ships: Of Ageless Oceans and Modern Men* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2014)
- Clarke, Norma, *Dr Johnson’s Women* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000)
- Conrad, Joseph, *The Mirror of the Sea* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1906)
- Cordery, Simon, *British Friendly Societies, 1750–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)
- , ‘Friendly Societies and the Discourse of Respectability in Britain, 1825–1875’, *Journal of British Studies*, 34 (1995), 35–58
- Cornwall-Jones, R. J., *The British Merchant Service: Being a History of the British Mercantile Marine from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Cornmarket Press, 1969 (1898))
- Cox, John George, *Cox and the Juju Coast: A Journal Kept Aboard HMS "Fly" 1868/9* (St. Helier, Jersey (C. I.): Ellison, 1968)
- Crawford, Scott A.G.M., ‘Recreation At Sea’, *The Mariner's Mirror*, 72:3 (1986), 319–28
- Dana, Richard Henry, *The Seaman's Manual* (London: Edward Moxon, 1841) (Kindle edn n.d.)
- , *Two Years Before the Mast: Twenty-four Years After* (London; New York: Dent; Dutton, 1912 (1840)) (Kindle edn n.d.)
- Davidoff, Leonore, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850*, rev. edn (London: Routledge, 2002)
- , *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (London: Longman, 1999)
- Davidson, Alan, *The Oxford Companion to Food* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- De Bellaigue, Christina, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800–1867* (Oxford scholarship online) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- , ‘The Development of Teaching as a Profession for Women before 1870’, *Historical Journal* 44, 4 (2001) 963–88
- , ‘Home Education in Historical Perspective: Domestic Pedagogies in England and Wales, 1750–1900’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 2015 Vol. 41, No. 4, 421–9
- Dickens, Charles, *David Copperfield*, ed. by Nina Burgis, and Andrew Sanders (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1849))
- , *Hard Times*, ed. by Paul Schlicke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1854))
- , *The Pickwick Papers*, ed. by Robert L. Patten (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972 (1837))

- Digby, Anne, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth-century England and Wales* (London: Historical Association, 1982)
- Downie, W. I., *Reminiscences of a Blackwall Midshipman* (London: W. J. Ham-Smith, 1912)
- Drain, Susan, 'Mangnall, Richmal (1769–1820)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, January 2008
- Dyhouse, Carol, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)
- Eliot, George, *Adam Bede*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985 (1859))
- , *Middlemarch*, ed. by W. J. Harvey (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965 (1871))
- Ellis, Samantha, *Take Courage: Anne Bronte and the Art of Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2017)
- 'Emigration to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa', Information Sheet 12, National Museums Liverpool, Maritime Archives and Library
- Englander, David, *Poverty and Poor Law Reform in Britain: From Chadwick to Booth, 1834–1914* (Harlow: Longman, 1998)
- Farr, Grahame E., and Bristol Record Society, *Records of Bristol Ships, 1800–1838 (Vessels over 150 tons)* (Bristol: Bristol Record Society, 1950)
- Fenton, Roy, 'Cornish Steam Ships and Owners: the View from England', *Troze* 1 (3) (March 2009): 3–21
- Ferguson, A. M., compiler, *The Planting Directory of India and Ceylon. Comprising a list of the proprietors and managers of the coffee, tea, cinchona, and other plantations in India and Ceylon, in 1878. Also a review of the planting and agricultural enterprise in Ceylon. Compiled by A.M. & J. Ferguson, proprietors and editors of the "Ceylon Observer."* (London: J. Haddon & Co., 1879)
- Fitzpatrick, David, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994)
- Flanders, Judith, *The Making of Home* (London: Atlantic Books, 2014)
- , *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: HarperCollins, 2003)
- Forwood, William B., *Reminiscences of a Liverpool Shipowner* (Liverpool: Henry Young & Sons, Ltd, 1920)
- Foulke, Robert D., 'Life in the Dying World of Sail, 1870–1910', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Nov. 1963), 105–36
- Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn, *Cranford*, ed. by Elizabeth Porges Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980 (1853))
- , *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. by Alan Shelston (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975 (1857))
- , *Mary Barton*, ed. by Shirley Foster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1848))
- , *North and South*, ed. by Angus Easson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1855))
- , *Ruth*, ed. by Tim Dolin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 (1853))
- , *Wives and Daughters*, ed. by Angus Easson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1866))
- George, Rose, *Deep Sea and Foreign Going: Inside Shipping, the Invisible Industry that Brings you 90% of Everything* (London: Portobello Books, 2013)
- Goodman, Ruth, *How to Be a Victorian* (London: Penguin, 2014)
- Gorsky, Martin, 'Self Help and Mutual Aid: Friendly Societies in 19th century Britain', *ReFRESH* 28 (spring 1999)

- Gosden, P. H. J. H., *The Friendly Societies in England, 1815–1875* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961)
- Graham, Dorothy, ‘Rogers, Hester Ann (1756–1794)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004
- Griffin, Emma, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013)
- , *A Short History of the British Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
- Groves, Sylvia, *The History of Needlework Tools and Accessories* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1973)
- Haines, Robin F., *Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The Passage to Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003)
- Hamilton Jenkin, A. K., *The Story of Cornwall* (London: T. Nelson and sons, 1934)
- Hart-Davis, Adam, ‘Isambard Kingdom Brunel and the engineers of the nineteenth century’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, May 2006
- Hastings, David, *Over the Mountains of the Sea: Life on the Migrant Ships, 1870–1885* (Auckland, N.Z.: Auckland University Press, 2006)
- Herr, H. W., ‘“Cutting for the Stone”: The Ancient Art of Lithotomy’, *BJU International*, 101 (2008), 1214–16
- Hewitt, Martin, *The Victorian World* (London: Routledge, 2012)
- Heyer, Georgette, ‘Books about the Brontës’, *Punch*, 31 March 1954, p. 414
- Hill, J. R., and Bryan Ranft, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Royal Navy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
- ‘Hints On The Modern Governess System’, 1844, *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, 1830–1869*, vol. 30, no. 179, pp. 571–83, Hathi Trust
<<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100833674>>
- ‘A History of Samplers’, <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/h/a-history-of-samplers/>>
- ‘History of the Free Gardeners’, <<https://hanginggardensofbabylonlodge.webs.com/history>>
- Horn, Pamela, *Behind the Counter: Shop Lives from Market Stall to Supermarket* (Stroud: Sutton, 2006)
- Hughes, Kathryn, *The Victorian Governess* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993)
- ‘A Hundred Years of the Stanes’, <<http://madrasmusings.com/Vol%2022%20No%2024/a-hundred-years-of-the-stanes.html>>
- James, Lawrence, *The Middle Class: A History* (London: Abacus, 2008)
- Jasanoff, Maya, *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World* (London: William Collins, 2017)
- Joseph, Peter, *Cornubia: The Life and Times of a Hayle Steamship* (Camborne, Cornwall: Trevithick Society, 2016)
- King, Steven, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)
- ‘A Leviathan Indeed’, *Household Words* 26 May 1855 Volume XI pp. 406–8, Dickens Journals Online <<http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-xi.html>>
- ‘Liverpool and the American Civil War’, Information Sheet 59, National Museums Liverpool, Maritime Archives and Library
- Lloyd, E. M., ‘Pennefather, Sir John Lysaght (1800–1872)’, rev. James Falkner, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004
- Lord, John, and Jem Southam, *The Floating Harbour: ^{[[[}SEP] A Landscape History of Bristol City Docks* (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Ltd, 1983)
- ‘The Love Feast’, <www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-love-feast>
- ‘Love Feasts’, <www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/methodism/lovefest.htm>

- Lubbock, Basil, *The Blackwall Frigates* (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1950)
- Marcet, Jane, *Conversations on Chemistry* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1822)
- McDermid, Jane, *The Schooling of Girls in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1900* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012)
- McWilliam, Rohan, and Kelly Boyd, *The Victorian Studies Reader* (London: Routledge: 2007)
- Madras Revenue Register 2 (1868)*, Google ebook
- Mangnall, Richmal, *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions*, new edn (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1859)
- Martineau, Harriet, 'The Governess', *Once a Week*, (1860) vol. 3, pp. 267–72
- Mitchell, James Leslie, *The Thirteenth Disciple*, (Edinburgh: B & W Publishing, 1995 (1931))
- More, Hannah, *Sacred Dramas, The Search after Happiness and Other Poems* (London: Jones & Company, 1829)
- Morgan, Kenneth, 'The Bristol Chamber of Commerce and the Port of Bristol, 1823–1848', *International Journal of Maritime History* 18, 1 (2006), 55–77
- Morse, Elizabeth J., 'Marcet, Jane Haldimand (1769–1858)'; *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004
- Nelson, Claudia, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2007)
- Noall, Cyril, *The Book of Hayle* (Buckingham: Barracuda, 1985)
- , *Harveys 200 Years of Trading* (Truro: UBM Harvey, 1979)
- O'Hara, Glen, *Britain and the Sea since 1600* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)
- Padfield, Peter, *Rule Britannia: The Victorian and Edwardian Navy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981)
- Pascoe, W. H., *CCC, the History of the Cornish Copper Company* (Redruth, Cornwall: Truran, 1983)
- Pawlyn, Tony, *The Falmouth Packets 1689–1851* (Truro: Truran, 2003)
- Payton, Philip, *The Cornish Overseas: A History of Cornwall's 'Great Emigration'* (Fowey, Cornwall: Cornwall Editions, 2005)
- Payton, Philip, 'Trevithick, Richard (1771–1833)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, October 2007
- Payton, Philip, Alston Kennerley, and Helen Doe, *The Maritime History of Cornwall* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2015)
- 'People Who Died from Erysipelas', <<https://www.geni.com/projects/People-who-Died-from-Erysipelas/28285>>
- Pennington, Peter, *William Wood's Diary: A Story of Nineteenth Century Emigration on Board the Sailing Ship "Constance" in 1852* (Stansted: Ardnamona Publishers, 2002)
- Pollock, Linda A., *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children over Three Centuries* (London: Fourth Estate, 1987)
- Powell, Trevor, 'A Brief History of the Rise and Fall of the Ancient Order of Free Gardeners', <www.mastermason.com/email-masons/Free%20Gardeners.pdf> (n.d.)
- Preston, Antony, and John Major, *Send a Gunboat! A Study of the Gunboat and its Role in British Policy, 1854–1904* (London: Longmans, 1967)
- Rana, Leena A., 'Stories behind the Stitches: Schoolgirl Samplers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Textile*, 12 (2014): 158
- Rayner-Canham, Marelene F., and Geoffrey Rayner-Canham, *A Chemical Passion: The Forgotten Story of Chemistry at British Independent Girls' Schools, 1820s–1930s* (London: Institute of Education Press, 2017)

- ‘Rev Vere Awdry’ <<http://www.boxpeopleandplaces.co.uk/rev-vere-awdry-photos.html>>
- Reynolds, Graham, *British Portrait Miniatures*, ed. by Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)
- , *English Portrait Miniatures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Rivlin, J. J., ‘Getting a Medical Qualification in England in the Nineteenth Century’, *Medical Historian* 9 (1997), 56–63
- Robins, N. S., *Coastal Passenger Liners of the British Isles* (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2011)
- Rossotti, Hazel, ‘The Woman that Inspired Faraday’, *Chemistry World* (June 2007) 58–61
- Shaw, Thomas, *A History of Cornish Methodism* (Truro: Barton, 1967)
- Shortt, John, *A Handbook to Coffee Planting in Southern India* (Madras: Athenaeum Press, 1864)
- Skedd, S. J., ‘More, Hannah (1745–1833)’, *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, September 2014
- ‘The Stanes Story’, <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Coimbatore/the-stanesstory/article3609268.ece>>
- Stape, J. H., *The Several Lives of Joseph Conrad* (London: William Heinemann, 2007)
- Steinbach, Susie, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture and Society in Nineteenth-century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2012)
- , *Women in England 1760–1914: A Social History* (London: Phoenix, 2005)
- Tannahill, Reay, *Food in History* (London: Penguin, 1988)
- ‘The Governess Question’, *English Woman’s Journal* (1858–1864), Nov. 1, 1859, pp. 163–70, Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition (2008; 2018) <ncse.ac.uk/periodicals/ewj/issues/ewj_01111859/page/26/>
- Thompson, F. M. L., *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830–1900* (London: Fontana, 1988)
- ‘Tom Quad’, <<https://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/visiting-christ-church/tom-quad>>
- Tomalin, Clare, *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self* (London: Viking, 2002)
- Tosh, John, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (Pearson/Longman: Harlow, 2005)
- ‘The Trent Affair’, <<https://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/uscivilwar/britain/trentaffair/trentaffair.htm>>
- Trestrail, Frederick, *Reminiscences of College Life in Bristol During the Ministry of Robert Hall* (London: E. Marlborough & Co., 1879)
- Trestrail, Frederick, Elizabeth Ryland Trestrail, and W. Ryland Dent Adkins, *The Short Story of a Long Life: Memorials of Frederick Trestrail D.D., F.R.G.S., formerly one of the secretaries of the Baptist Missionary Society* (London: Alexander & Shephard, 1892)
- Vale, Edmund, and Harvey and Co., *The Harveys of Hayle: Engine builders, Shipwrights, and Merchants of Cornwall*, new rev. edn (Exeter: The Trevithick Society, 2009)
- Vandenbroucke, Jan P., ‘Commentary: Treatment of Bladder Stones and Probabilistic Reasoning in Medicine: An 1835 Account and its Lessons for the Present’, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, Volume 30, Issue 6, December 2001, 1253–58
- Vergheese, Abraham, *Cutting for Stone* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2009)
- Weatherstone, John, *The Pioneers 1825–1900: The Early Tea and Coffee Planters and Their Way of Life* (London: Quiller Press, 1986)
- Weinbren, Daniel, ‘Supporting Self-help: Charity, Mutuality and Reciprocity in Nineteenth-century Britain’ in *Charity and Mutual Aid in Europe and North America Since 1800* ed. by Paul Bridgen and Bernard Harris (London: Routledge, 2007)
- Wells, Charles, *A Short History of the Port of Bristol* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1909)

- Wills, Simon, *Tracing Your Merchant Navy Ancestors: A Guide for Family Historians* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Family History, 2012)
- Wilson, A. N., *The Victorians* (London: Arrow, 2003)
- , *Victoria, a Life* (London: Atlantic Books, 2014)
- Woodman, Richard, *Masters under God: Makers of Empire: 1816–1884* (Stroud: History Press, 2009)
- Woolcock, Helen R., *Rights of Passage: Emigration to Australia in the Nineteenth Century* (London; New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986)

CRITICAL ESSAY

Debatable Lands: Exploring the Boundaries of Fiction and Nonfiction through Family History

INTRODUCTION

The creative work that accompanies this critical commentary is a piece of life writing, a capacious and accommodating term that includes, but goes beyond, biography:

[Life writing] encompasses everything from the complete life to the day-in-the-life, from the fictional to the factual. It embraces the lives of objects and institutions as well as the lives of individuals, families and groups.¹

My inspiration was the group biography *Common People*, where historian Alison Light tells the story of the nineteenth-century working poor through the lens of her own family history.² In writing about my Victorian ancestors, the Dupens, I have moved up the social scale to that growing category of people who, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, were starting to acquire technical and professional skills that changed their lives.

The story begins not in the kind of northern mill town familiar to readers of Elizabeth Gaskell but in Hayle, a forgotten port in north Cornwall, which was once home to the two biggest foundries in the world.³ It tells how, within a single family and the space of a few years, the experience of going to sea was transformed by the power of steam and the expanding empire. Alongside the often dramatic exploits of my sailor ancestors runs a parallel narrative of the women they left behind. The lives of their sisters and daughters were also changed by the advent of steamships and railways that carried them away from home. They became successful teachers and businesswomen, challenging the traditional view of the downtrodden governess.⁴

¹ Oxford Centre for Life Writing, Wolfson College, Oxford, UK (henceforward referred to as OCLW) <<https://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/what-life-writing>> [accessed 12 March 2019]

² Alison Light, *Common People: The History of an English Family* (London: Fig Tree, Penguin Group, 2014).

³ For example, *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855). (See *Bibliography of Sail, Steam, and Empire* for bibliographical details of the nineteenth-century novels that formed part of my background reading for this project.)

⁴ According to one estimate, some 140 ‘governess novels’, were published between 1814 and 1865. (Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), p. 2.) While these spanned a wide range of genres, the characters we tend to remember are those like the heroine of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Jane Fairfax in Austen’s *Emma* (1815), obliged by poverty to seek uncongenial employment from which they can only be rescued by marriage.

These are not voices that have been heard before. The history of Hayle has been told through the lives of its great iron founders and engineers, not viewed through the eyes of its ordinary residents.⁵

I thought when I began this project that I would find a Whig version of history, tracing steady progress up the social scale, but it turned out to be more complex than that, akin to a game of social snakes and ladders played by characters who clamber up and slide back down in unexpected ways. I found that I was writing about journeys, both literal and metaphorical, following my characters through life and around the world with all the delays and diversions that long-distance travel involves.⁶ A theme emerged, which was the tension between a desire for wider horizons and an attachment to one's roots. These were conflicting emotions that had personal resonance for me. One reason why I write about my family is that I have inherited objects that speak to me and about me. My stories are spun from the invisible threads that connect me, through a tangle of DNA and domestic knickknacks, to my Victorian ancestors. But if my purpose is in part ontological, to interrogate my own identity, it is mainly epistemological, to describe how it is possible to start out with almost no source material and end up recovering entire lives. While my work is personal, it is not a memoir but a group biography, a genre where the focus is expected to be on the subject rather than the writer.⁷

The process of recreating past lives through a combination of research and imagination led me to question the often ambiguous dividing line between fiction and nonfiction, and to explore how those two terms relate to that slippery word *truth*. My title makes reference to the 'debatable lands', the fiercely contested border area between Scotland and England that is itself the subject of many a gripping historical novel.⁸ The boundary between fact and fiction, 'less a boundary than a borderland of surprising width and variegated topography', is equally disputed today, and with

⁵ The main accounts are Noall, *Harveys 200 Years of Trading* (1979), Pascoe, *CCC, the History of the Cornish Copper Company* (1983), and Vale, *The Harveys of Hayle* (2009). (See *Notes and Bibliography of Sail, Steam, and Empire* for more details.)

⁶ Rebecca Solnit has suggested that it is in travelling that 'our lives begin to assume the shape of a story'. Quoted in Laura Marcus *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 38.

⁷ Krista Cowman, 'Collective Biography', in *Research Methods for History*, ed. by Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 83–100 (p. 85). For my purposes, the terms 'group' and 'collective' biography are interchangeable.

⁸ For example, Dorothy Dunnett's *Lymond Chronicles*, beginning with *The Game of Kings* (1961). (Full bibliographical details of works referred to but not quoted from appear in part 2 of the bibliography.)

almost as much emotion.⁹ In this commentary I explain the choices that I have made about the use of evidence and invention.

In Chapter 1, I contrast private history with public history by examining the material available to family historians, the ‘family archive’.¹⁰ I argue that while it resembles and overlaps with collections held in museums and official archives, it has a different resonance and sometimes a different relationship with the truth. I begin with definitions of fact, fiction, and truth that situate my work in a contemporary world of fake news and ‘truthiness’. The next section makes the case for collective biography as a means of recovering forgotten lives, and for family history as a valuable partner to public history. I go on to consider the range of sources available to the family historian – relics, photographs, documents – and the interplay between the reality of the object and the often elusive nature of its meaning. I conclude by considering the two-faced Janus of family memory: myths or legends, and their obverse, secrets.

In Chapter 2, I turn to family history as a form of life writing. I compare and contrast how the different genres of biography, history, and historical fiction deal with what is known and unknown about the past and I identify three ways in which fiction and nonfiction narratives may differ. The first is making things up (events, people, places), and is something that I have on the whole avoided. But because mine are not well-known characters with an obvious appeal to the general reader, I have sometimes used invention not only to fill in gaps in my knowledge, but also to dramatise scenes where there is ample evidence, with the aim of breathing life into the protagonists.

The second distinction is interiority, or access to the thoughts and feelings of characters who are long dead and who left behind, with one notable exception, no letters or diaries. They are beyond the reach of living memory. My grandfather, who knew some of them, died before I was born. While my motivation is not to write about loss, I am nonetheless aware of a readership of ghosts, who may protest if I stray too far from the truth as they knew it. My living readers, on the other hand, will need more than the bare facts if they are to care about the fortunes of obscure people who are not their relatives. In order to bring my characters to life, I decided to

⁹ John Demos, 'Afterword: Notes from, and about, the History/Fiction Borderland', *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 329–35 (p. 329).

¹⁰ A term I have adopted from the Family Archive project described in Liz Gloyn and others in 'The Ties That Bind', *Journal of Family History*, 43 (2018), 157–76 (p. 157).

fictionalise, to put words into their mouths and thoughts into their heads, but my technique is far from the experimental mingling of reality and invention that characterises what has come to be known as autofiction today.¹¹ My narrative uses imagined episodes to illustrate factual biography, a technique more familiar from televised recreations of the past than life writing.¹²

The third potential way of differentiating fiction from nonfiction relates to narrative structure, but it is not clear-cut. I argue that nonfiction does not have a plot, but neither does all fiction. What is essential to both is a narrative arc. This can take the shape of a life story, but here collective biography presents a particular problem: it is not easy to create a single thread rather than a series of vignettes. My story is a branching one that follows the Dupen siblings as they journey across the age and empire of Victoria. It is anchored in the life arc of the Cornish town of Hayle, which went from boom to bust over the course of the century, and was eventually abandoned by the Dupens too. But each of the siblings who feature in Part 2 of my book has a story of their own. To link them together I have relied not just on their family ties but also on a historical argument, a feature that is characteristic of nonfiction narratives. What began as a straightforward comparison between the careers of the seafaring brothers, sail versus steam, navy versus merchant marine, evolved into something more complex as I came to understand the importance not only of technology but also of empire in shaping their lives. A further dimension was added through my parallel exploration of how their sisters too were able to leave home and live independently in a way that would not have been possible for an earlier generation. In the end it is the interplay between personality, upbringing, and the external environment that shaped the destinies of my characters and to show this I have leavened the facts of research with intuition and invention.

The boundary between fiction and nonfiction is, I conclude, not one that can or should be policed. By allowing the two to coexist, I am proposing one possible solution to the dilemma of how to write everyday lives in a way that gives them the interest and significance that I believe they deserve.

¹¹ For example, Olivia Laing, *Crudo* (2018).

¹² But not, I hope, of the kind featuring ‘B-list actors dressed up in sheets, saying “Do pass the grapes, Marcus.”’. (Mary Beard, ‘I Refuse Shows that Feature B-list Actors in Costume’, *Guardian*, 23 October 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/23/refuse-tv-roles-re-enactment-mary-beard-excruciating>> [accessed 12 March 2019]). Two rare examples in biography are to be found in Light, *Common People*, e.g. pp. 67–8 and Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: Oneworld, 2017), e.g. p. 7.

CHAPTER 1 THE REAL AND THE FICTIVE: SOURCES OF HISTORICAL TRUTH

1.1 Definitions: fact, fiction and truth

In a world dominated by fake news, the boundary between fact and fiction has never seemed more relevant. But what do these two words mean? One definition states that a fact is: ‘something that is known to have happened or to exist, especially something for which proof exists, or about which there is information’, while a fiction is ‘a false report or statement that you pretend is true’.¹³ It is not, however, a straightforward distinction. Although facts have an external, documented existence of their own, even in a work of nonfiction they can be remembered and interpreted in a multitude of different ways and for different purposes. As Mary Poovey puts it, ‘What are facts? Incontrovertible data or evidence marshalled to persuade?’¹⁴ This is not a new problem. She identifies David Hume as ‘the first philosopher to argue overtly that the roles theory, belief and conjecture play in all systematic knowledge projects constitute a theoretical problematic’.¹⁵ It has been claimed that because fiction is generally the work of a single author, who is in charge of the facts (setting aside the complications of the oral tradition and the multiple identity of Homer, for example), it can be better at telling the truth. According to Javier Marias:

One of the reasons why there are fictions [...] we have a need for something to be told completely and forever [...] even if it never happened. The only thing that is absolutely sure is what fiction tells. Madame Bovary died the way she did and it will be like that forever.¹⁶

The critic Janet Malcolm makes a similar point, saying: ‘In a work of nonfiction we almost never know the truth of what happened. The ideal of unmediated reporting is regularly achieved only in fiction, where the writer faithfully reports on what is going on in his imagination.’¹⁷

But ‘truth’ is another contentious word. Most definitions fall back on words like *fact* and *reality* and we find ourselves travelling round a Mobius strip from which there is no exit.¹⁸ To understand how there can be ‘truth’ in fiction, we need to go

¹³ Cambridge English Dictionary <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fact>> and <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fiction>> [accessed 22 November 2017]

¹⁴ Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xx.

¹⁶ *Open Book*, BBC Radio 4, 13 March 2016.

¹⁷ Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (London: Granta, 2012), p. 154.

¹⁸ ‘fact’: ‘a thing that is known or proved to be true’; ‘true’: ‘in accordance with fact or reality’. Oxford English Dictionary <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/fact>> and

back to the origins of the word. ‘For its first few centuries,’ according to Steven Poole, “‘truth’ meant loyalty or agreement (it shares its roots with “troth” and “truce”), and only later acquired the sense of conformity with reality.’¹⁹ A fictional truth is loyal to our instincts, it speaks to our intuition about human nature. Hayden White, writing about Primo Levi’s memoir of Auschwitz *Se questo è un uomo* (1947), has claimed with some justification that historical truth is less powerful than emotional or moral truth:

by using the kinds of literary devices employed by writers of fiction – including topoi, tropes and figures, schemata of thought, characterization, personification, emplotment, and so on – Levi manages to demonstrate to his readers the difference between a merely truthful account of an event, of the kind provided by most survivor-witnesses, and an artistic treatment of a real event in his past which transcends the truth–reality distinction.²⁰

Or as Albert Camus, according to a *Guardian* editorial, is reputed to have said, ‘Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth.’²¹

According to Richard Slotkin (who writes both history and historical novels), historians understand more than can be proved and there comes a moment when they ‘must choose between knowledge and understanding’.²² Instead of making that choice, I have added fictional scenes to help my readers understand the facts that my research has uncovered, a combination analogous to the novelist’s use of both show and tell. For example, my account of the railway journey from Hayle to Redruth in 1843 is based on an eyewitness account from a contemporary newspaper but I reimagined it through the eyes of a small girl in order to capture the wonder of this revolutionary means of transport. I added a fictional recreation of the Whit Monday preaching at the Gwennap Pit, an event that the Dupens may not in fact have attended, to convey the all-pervading religious belief that governed their lives in a way that was more powerful than a strictly factual paragraph about Cornish Methodism would have been. These are real events into which I have inserted real

<<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/true>> [accessed 22 November 2017]

¹⁹ Steven Poole, ‘Word of the Week: Truth’, *Guardian Review*, 25 August 2018, p. 4.

²⁰ Hayden White, ‘Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality’, *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 147–57 (p. 149).

²¹ ‘The Guardian view on the value of fiction: read lies and learn the truth’, *Guardian Editorial*, 28 August 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/28/the-guardian-view-on-the-value-of-fiction-read-lies-and-learn-the-truth>> [accessed 26 March 2019]. In a pleasing twist, no source is given for this quotation and it may simply have been invented by the journalist to add weight to the argument.

²² Richard Slotkin, ‘Fiction for the Purposes of History’, *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 221–36 (p. 223).

people and their imagined actions, words and thoughts, with the aim of telling a story that passes the ‘ring true test’.²³

1.2 Inherited truth: the family archive

Family history has evolved over the last fifty years or so from being, in the eyes of historians, ‘the province of the amateur, probably cranky, certainly lacking in objectivity’, to something closer to a position of academic respectability.²⁴ Alison Light was something of a lone voice amongst academic historians in her attempt to demonstrate the value of genealogy. ‘Solipsistic, myopic, “comfort-zone” history – genealogy has taken a lot of flak. Academic historians usually give it short shrift, treating it as history’s poor relation’, she says.²⁵ Like Light, I aim to demonstrate that to dismiss family history in these terms is both misguided and patronising. Anne-Marie Kramer believes it is both under-researched and under-theorised. The huge success of the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* with its focus on celebrity and the big emotional reveal, has probably not helped. But Kramer sees genealogy as ‘an imaginative and performative memory act, which simultaneously offers the possibility of identification and distancing with historical characters and experience’.²⁶

Tanya Evans has also identified the potential of family history for the study of ‘experience of’ as well as ‘ideas about’ the family in the past.²⁷ She promotes the radical potential of family historians (as opposed to historians of the family), who collect and analyse evidence to challenge ‘the state’s and other people’s versions of the past’.²⁸ Their work is open to all the same debates about how we reconstruct events, people, and places that no longer exist, but it also has a unique relationship with the past because of the power of what I have chosen to call ‘inherited truth’.

The researchers undertaking the Family Archive project make a case for the value of the family archive, not as some sort of ‘poor cousin’ of the formal one but *because*

²³ Demos, p. 333.

²⁴ Norma Clarke, ‘Family Matters’, *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018), 315–21 (p. 318).

²⁵ Light, *Common People*, p. xxvii.

²⁶ Anne-Marie Kramer, ‘Mediatizing Memory: History, Affect and Identity in *Who Do You Think You Are?*’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14 (2011), 428–45 (p. 433).

²⁷ Tanya Evans, ‘Secrets and Lies: The Radical Potential of Family History’, *History Workshop Journal*, 71 (2011), 49–73 (p. 54).

²⁸ Tanya Evans, ‘How Do Family Historians Work with Memory?’, *History Workshop Online*, (6 February 2019) <<http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/how-do-family-historians-work-with-memory/>> [accessed 12 March 2019]

of its ‘fluid, chaotic, and informal nature’.²⁹ They suggest that it may be undervalued because ‘material culture is matrilineal’, that it is the women of the family who undertake the emotional work of preserving things, allowing long-dead family members to ‘speak’ to their descendants while at the same time preparing messages for the unborn next generation. In phase 2 of their project, the researchers ran focus groups, where there was general agreement that ‘material possessions of all kinds, including often fairly mundane objects, were used to narrate and recall stories and memories’.³⁰ They argue that since museums cannot undertake to preserve all this material, members of the public should be encouraged to recognise the value of what they have in their attics, garages, and cupboards in contributing to social history.

Penelope Lively did this in *A House Unlocked*, her memoir of her grandparents’ house:

Objects had proved more tenacious than people – the photograph albums, the baffling contents of the silver cupboard, the children on my grandmother’s sampler of the house – but from each object there spun a shining thread of reference, if you knew how to follow it. I thought that I would see if the private life of a house could be made to bear witness to the public traumas of a century.³¹

Or to quote historical novelist Philippa Gregory, ‘My family history, like that of any other family, is an interweaving of the personal choices with the social possibilities of the time.’³² In trying to get under the skin of my characters, my aim is to shed light on what it felt like to be a Victorian, and in particular an ambitious, socially and geographically mobile Victorian. Hermione Lee quotes Virginia Woolf, who, in an autobiographical essay, compared herself to a fish in a stream. *Biography*, says Lee, ‘has a duty to the stream as well as the fish’.³³ My characters are comparative minnows but in telling their story I aim to show how they were carried forward on a current of change, in an experience shared by many others.

At the heart of family history lies collective biography, an ‘ancient genre’ according to Lee, that has been recently revived to act as ‘a challenge to the

²⁹ Gloyn, p. 158.

³⁰ Anna Woodham and others, ‘We Are What We Keep: The “Family Archive”, Identity and Public/Private Heritage’, *Heritage & Society*, 2019, 1–18 (p. 9).

³¹ Penelope Lively, *A House Unlocked* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. xi.

³² Philippa Gregory, ‘Born a Writer: Forged as a Historian’, *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), 237–42 (p. 240).

³³ Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 13.

dominant discourse'.³⁴ In particular, socialist and feminist historians have identified it as 'one way in which they could restore the marginalised lives of workers, women and children to the historical record'.³⁵ Juliette Atkinson, in her study of more than 200 Victorian biographies, describes how bereaved family members liked to commemorate their relatives in hagiographic accounts that were often privately printed and circulated. It is tempting therefore to see them as being of little or no interest to a wider audience but Atkinson points out that to dismiss the domestic is to risk ignoring the lives of women, since 'most biographies of women were also domestic biographies'.³⁶ The source material available tended to be scant and mundane, which accounts, she believes, for the large number of female group biographies rather than single-subject works. Family history can adopt a similar solution to the dilemma of how to compensate for a lack of written evidence: one of my characters alone would not have merited an entire book, but half a dozen of them together do.

It would also be a mistake to assume that domestic biography is of interest only to those doing 'women's history'. As Anne Whitelaw reminds us, since the 1980s:

historians of gender have forcefully argued that an attention to the domestic and the private sphere not only permits an expansion of the sphere of history to include women but also deepens our understanding of the experiences of men across both the private and the public spheres.³⁷

This is why I was determined to write not only a maritime history that followed my sailor ancestors across the globe but also a story that, without imposing a contemporary viewpoint on my characters, did justice to the experiences of their womenfolk. Philip Carter, a former editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, suggests that in order to make a marginal life meaningful you need to move from thinking solely biographically to thinking historically.³⁸ This is the approach of historian Jenny Uglow in her survey of lives during the Napoleonic Wars, *In These Times* (2014). But it would be a mistake to imagine that such lives

³⁴ Lee, *Biography*, p. 126.

³⁵ Cowman, p. 83.

³⁶ Juliette Atkinson, 'Victorian Biography and the Representation of "Obscure" Lives' (doctoral thesis University of London, 2008), p. 65.

³⁷ Anne Whitelaw, 'Women, Museums and the Problem of Biography', in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 75–86 (p. 82).

³⁸ Philip Carter, *Constructing Lives*, ODNB discussion panel, OCLW (29 November 2016).

remain anything other than marginal. As Carolyn Steedman warns, ‘I think that central stories are maintained *by* the marginality of others.’³⁹

Alison Light has claimed that, ‘Family history worth its salt asks [...] big questions about economic forces, political decisions, local government, urban history, social policy, as well as the character of individuals and the fate of their families.’⁴⁰ Daniel Miller makes a similar point about anthropology, which uses the minutiae of everyday life to understand humanity as a whole. The guiding principle of anthropology is relativism, he says, which can easily lead to parochialism.⁴¹ Good anthropological work ‘reveals the particular as a manifestation of the universal’.⁴² So, I would argue, does good family history.⁴³

I have attempted to situate my characters against a backdrop of the century, so that their private history becomes, like that of Light’s ancestors, public history.⁴⁴ Where it differs is in the patina that it has acquired of inherited truth, of memories and myths, objects and photographs, family papers and diaries. A *patina* implies both a rubbing away to the essential object and an additive process.⁴⁵ In Chinese and Japanese culture, where it is much admired, it describes ‘a polish that comes of being touched over and over again, a sheen produced by the oils that naturally permeate an object over long years of handling – which is to say grime’.⁴⁶ The authors of *The Ties that Bind* group it with the other physical traces of age, the folds, breaks, and repairs that connect the object to its owners through time.⁴⁷ It is a profoundly tactile

³⁹ Carolyn Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992), p. 46.

⁴⁰ Light, *Common People*, pp. xxvii–xxviii.

⁴¹ Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p. 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴³ There is clearly an overlap between family history and microhistory, which also studies obscure lives. Light appears on the reading list for a module on microhistory at Birkbeck, alongside historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis. <<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/history/current-students/documents/module-outlines/To%20See%20The%20World%20in%20a%20Grain%20of%20Sand%20-%20Reading%20and%20Writing%20Microhistories.pdf>> [accessed 17 July 2019]. It has been suggested that microhistory focuses on the history rather than the person: ‘If biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual’s life and his contribution to history, microhistory is founded upon almost the opposite assumption: however singular a person’s life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness, in how that individual’s life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.’ (Jill Lepore, ‘Historians Who Love Too Much’, *Journal of American History* 88 (1) (2001), 129–44 (p. 133).)

⁴⁴ Light, *Common People*, p. 255.

⁴⁵ Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2010), p. 349.

⁴⁶ Jun’ichirō Tanizaki, Thomas J. Harper, and Edward G. Seidensticker *In Praise of Shadows* (London: Cape, 1991), p. 20.

⁴⁷ Gloyn, p. 163.

word that leads me to a discussion of the role played by inherited objects in constructing a true story about the past.

1.3 The truth of objects

When we inherit possessions, we acquire a whole vocabulary of ‘stuff’ that connects us to our forebears and creates the outline of a story. Referring to such items, although giving them the more scholarly label of *artefact* to emphasise their cultural and historical interest, historian David Lowenthal writes that, ‘Because artefacts are at once past and present, their historical and modern roles intersect.’⁴⁸ To my mind, they are a kind of tangible present perfect tense, an unbroken line from the past to the present that provides us with a grammar quite as much as a vocabulary. Some objects have ceased to perform the function for which they were intended: we may keep a collection of buttons in an old silver cigarette case, for example. Others continue to be used in a similar way, although the experience has subtly changed: we still knit with knitting needles but as a leisure pursuit rather than a necessary chore.⁴⁹ In either case, when we say of something, ‘it has been in the family for a hundred years’, we are creating a visible link to accompany the hidden genetic material that we inherit from our ancestors. The present perfect is a present tense; it always tells us something about now.

Historians have traditionally been suspicious of things, viewing words as their most trustworthy source.⁵⁰ It is relatively recently that they have started to work with objects as what Karen Harvey calls ‘a route to past experience’.⁵¹ Harvey identifies two different approaches to material culture: object-centred and object-driven.⁵² The primary focus of the first is on the physical attributes of the item being studied, its manufacture, appearance, and use. The second, object-driven, approach goes further in connecting the item to its context, to people and their lives, using it as evidence of complex social relationships. It is the starting point for a narrative that is not centred

⁴⁸ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 392.

⁴⁹ Carla Nappi points out that there is no such thing as a ‘trans-historical object’. ‘Even if there is a stable material entity that persists over time, its meaning, identity, and thing-ness change, sometimes dramatically, in different (historical, geographic, epistemic) contexts.’ (Carla Nappi, ‘Surface Tension: Objectifying Ginseng in Chinese Early Modernity’, in *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories 1500–1800*, ed. by Paula Findlen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 31–52 (p. 33).)

⁵⁰ Leora Auslander, ‘Beyond Words’, *The American Historical Review*, 110 (2005), 1015–45 (p. 1015).

⁵¹ Karen Harvey, *History and Material Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 7.

⁵² Harvey, p. 2.

on the object itself but on the associations it triggers, from Neil MacGregor's radio series *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (2010) to the eighteen items that shape Paula Byrne's biography of Jane Austen.⁵³

I would describe myself as object-driven, like Penelope Lively, who compares her grandmother's house to a mnemonic device: 'I can move around my memory house and focus upon different objects. The house itself becomes a prompt – a system of reference, an assemblage of coded signs. Its contents conjure up a story.'⁵⁴ While I may begin by describing the physical attributes of my objects and making deductions about their use, I am not telling an 'it narrative' like those eighteenth-century histories of a guinea, a lapdog, or a sedan chair.⁵⁵ I am concerned with the lives of the people who owned or made them and the world they lived in.

As we age and begin to contemplate our inevitable extinction, many of us relate more closely to the past as a category. Margaret Atwood suggests that perhaps all writing 'is motivated deep down by a fear of and a fascination with mortality – by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead'.⁵⁶ Genealogical research is not just about interrogating the past but about establishing who we are; we hope to identify the inherited traits that explain the trajectory of our lives. David Lowenthal says the past is 'integral to our sense of self'.⁵⁷ Siân Busby makes a similar point in her memoir of her great-grandmother: 'Perhaps the only reason we bother with the past at all is because we are egotistically looking for clues about ourselves.'⁵⁸

My selection of objects began with choosing the family members I wanted to write about, rather than the other way round. Of my eight great-grandparents I have taken just one, Hester Ann Rogers Baxter (née Dupen), and followed her, together with her parents and siblings, over a period that is approximately coterminous with the life of Queen Victoria. Why Hester? I must admit to a degree of wishful thinking in selecting my Huguenot ancestors over all the others. As Deborah Cohen argues, contrary to popular belief you can in fact choose your family, 'at least the extended

⁵³ Paula Byrne, *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* (London: HarperPress, 2013).

⁵⁴ Lively, p. x. Joanne Begiato also writes of the 'mnemonic assemblages' of homes. (Joanne Begiato, 'Selfhood and "Nostalgia": Sensory and Material Memories of the Childhood House in Late Georgian Britain', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 42, 2 (June 2019), 229–246 (p. 231).)

⁵⁵ Alison Booth, 'Houses and Things: Literary House Museums as Collective Biography', in Hill, pp. 231–46 (p. 232).

⁵⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 140.

⁵⁷ Lowenthal, p. 94.

⁵⁸ Siân Busby, *The Cruel Mother: A Family Ghost Laid to Rest* (London: Short, 2004), p. 11.

and mythical version of it'.⁵⁹ Rather than *discovering* our identity through genealogical research, we can use family history to *create* a self by picking the forebears that we want to acknowledge and ignoring the ones that do not fit the story we want to tell about ourselves. In doing so we are shaping a narrative that is no longer strictly factual but is loyal to our sense of self.⁶⁰ Often, we are also looking for somewhere to call home. 'Keepsakes substitute for surrendered sites', writes Lowenthal.⁶¹ I grew up in the bland, anonymous suburbs of south-east England with no sense of belonging anywhere. The objects that inspire my stories connect me to a more dramatic setting: my embroidered sampler, leather-bound New Testament, and sailor's logbook create links to my grandfather's seafaring, Methodist, Cornish heritage.

Lowenthal identifies three sources of knowledge about the past: memory, history, and *relics* (choosing once more a historian's word for an object of interest, but one that also carries for the lay reader an undercurrent of reverence). Relics, he claims, suffer greater attrition than do memories or history; on the whole it is not the everyday items that endure but those that were kept for best and barely used.⁶² It is true that my small collection of objects is but a fraction of the stuff that I could have inherited. What happened, I wonder, to everything listed in Annie Dupen's will? Where are her gold-mounted spectacles, her velvet back rocking chair and her writing desk? My narrative will not be the same as the one she constructed for herself by the inclusions and exclusions in her list.⁶³ As Edmund de Waal says, 'How objects are handed on is all about story telling. [...] There is no easy story in legacy. What is remembered, what is forgotten?'.⁶⁴ I am working with what I have, ending up with a collection of what Sherry Turkle calls 'evocative objects'. There is, she says, an inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things: 'We think

⁵⁹ Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: Living with Shame from the Victorians to the Present Day* (London: Viking, 2013), p. 246.

⁶⁰ Begiato writes of the 'mutable nature' of family identity and how different family members could construct the family that they preferred from selected artefacts. (Begiato, p. 230.)

⁶¹ Lowenthal, p. 95.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁶³ Giorgio Riello makes a similar point in discussing household inventories, 'a form of fiction [...] seldom uncontaminated by narrative'. (Giorgio Riello, "'Things Seen and Unseen': The Material Culture of Early Modern Inventories and their Representation of Domestic Interiors', in Findlen, pp. 125–50 (p. 135).)

⁶⁴ de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 17.

with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with.’⁶⁵ She reminds us of Levi-Strauss’s concept of *bricolage* – a way of combining and recombining a closed set of materials to come up with new ideas: objects that are both ‘goods to think with’ and ‘good to think with’.⁶⁶ The story that I spin from my Indian brass beakers is bound to be, at least in part, fiction, even if the beakers themselves are fact.

Paula Byrne structures her biography of Jane Austen into eighteen thematic chapters inspired by the same number of objects, shedding new light on a life that has been told many times before by setting it in its historical context. ‘Both her [Austen’s] world and her novels can be brought alive through the texture of things, the life of objects’, says Byrne.⁶⁷ Like me, she is limited in the range of personal possessions that are available to her. Some of her items are genuinely small and personal, such as the topaz crosses bought by Jane’s brother Charles with his prize money and given to his sisters, allowing Byrne to discuss the naval careers of Charles and Frank Austen. Some are substantial and linked to the novelist only by association: the barouche that illustrates Austen’s enjoyment of travel, or the bathing machine that stands for her love of the sea. But Byrne recognises their power to evoke feelings: ‘The intense emotions associated with love and death are often refracted through objects.’⁶⁸ The relationship is a complex one. The very word *feeling* is ambiguous, referring both to the ‘tactility of the object – its shape, form, substance, and size – and to the reciprocal ways in which contact with an object conditions feelings in human subjects’.⁶⁹ There is a shared semantic vagueness in the words *thing* and *emotion* that make them a good match for one another.⁷⁰

The connection is even stronger when the objects are part of one’s own family history. As Susannah Walker says: ‘We all believe that some part of a person resides in their possessions and can remain there after death. Why have family heirlooms otherwise?’⁷¹ *The Hare with Amber Eyes* was inspired by Edmund de Waal’s

⁶⁵ Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2007), p. 5. Tanya Evans also draws attention to the way family historians ‘often evoke powerful attachments to objects’. (Evans, ‘How Do Family Historians Work with Memory?’.)

⁶⁶ Turkle, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Byrne, p. 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, ‘Introduction’ in *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History*, ed. by Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 1–7 (p. 2).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷¹ Susannah Walker, *The Life of Stuff: A Memoir about the Mess We Leave Behind*, (London: Doubleday, 2018), p. 11.

inherited collection of Japanese *netsuke*. Similar collections of these delightful carved toggles can be seen in museums but his are family heirlooms and as such have acquired another layer of meaning, what he calls ‘a resistance to the sapping of memory’.⁷² My objects too resonate in a way that similar items removed from their past and preserved behind glass in a public space do not. The vitrine where de Waal keeps his *netsuke*, unlike a museum case, is meant to be opened, the contents picked up and handled. Johanna Dupen’s New Testament has been in my family for more than a century and a half. It has changed, aged, degraded; but its ownership remains in a direct line of descent from the woman who was first given it. When I take it from the shelf above my desk, I am touching the same book my two times great-grandmother carried with her in 1830; there is a genetic link that allows us to touch hands across time.

It is a different sensation from dressing up in historical costume, an experience that some museums do offer, inviting visitors to put on a crinoline and take a selfie. Few historians have been as willing as Ruth Goodman to live the physical reality of the past. She tells us that she has worn several styles of Victorian corset for extended periods of time is therefore well-placed to adjudicate on replicas: ‘If you want to know what it truly felt like to wear Victorian clothes, you have to commit yourself fully, [...] It also means wearing all the layers, not just the few that show.’⁷³ Goodman is committed to authenticity of manufacture, but even that cannot recreate the experience of touching the real thing. Replicas may look exactly like the originals but they ‘lack their history of felt relationships’.⁷⁴ As David Olusoga writes, ‘History, to me, is all about those shiver-down-the spine moments. When you hold in your hands an object created hundreds of years before your birth and feel the vague presence of the hands that held it in the past.’⁷⁵ He is not alone. Lulah Ellender recalls the occasion when she tried on a fragile Dior gown belonging to her grandmother, making her feel ‘as if I am stepping into Elisabeth’s skin’.⁷⁶ And she reflects on handling Elisabeth’s book of lists, ‘it is as though she has become part of

⁷² de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 279.

⁷³ Ruth Goodman, *How to Be a Victorian* (London: Penguin, 2014), pp. 91–2. See also Amber Butchart’s recreations of historical costume in *A Stitch in Time*, BBC4, 2018.

⁷⁴ Lowenthal, p. 293.

⁷⁵ David Olusoga, ‘First Person’, *Observer*, 31 December 2017, p. 25.

⁷⁶ Lulah Ellender, *Elisabeth’s Lists: A Family Story* (London: Granta, 2018), p. 3.

it, as if she is still present. I wonder if tiny skin motes have remained lodged in the margins for all these years.’⁷⁷

Downes, Holloway and Randles write of ‘the emotional experience, described by many historians and curators, which occurs around objects in archives and galleries; the frisson of “feeling”, touching, or holding that past, or of catching sight of one’s own reflection in the glass’.⁷⁸ The requirements of conservation mean that most museums do not allow visitors to handle the objects on display. We are fortunate then if we have inherited items that we can keep at home and hold in our hands. In the next section I will look in more detail at the different ways that families and museums preserve the past.

1.4 Family history, museum history

Genealogy is personal, museums are public spaces, but they are connected through a concern for identity. Throughout history an important element of personal and group identity has been lineage, preserved in myths and sagas from the Ancient Greeks to the Vikings and beyond. Instead of itinerant bards we now have static museums that seek to substitute for collective memory but in so doing they immobilise behind glass something that was previously fluid and mutable. Joanne Begiato describes family memory as ‘an intermediary between individual memory and larger forms of collective remembrance and national identity’.⁷⁹ Historian Susan Crane views the transition in the nineteenth century from private collections to public museums that expressed group or national identity as a moment when the individual became subsumed in the collective.⁸⁰ She claims that, ‘Museums deliberately forge memories in physical form to prevent the natural erosion of memory, both personal and collective.’⁸¹ Steffi de Jong describes how the process of collecting and recording oral history transforms ‘communicative memory’, which is created by people talking about the past, telling stories and creating a shared group identity (and has, she claims, a life span of perhaps four generations at most), into ‘cultural memory’.⁸² Objects too, once they are donated to a museum and curated alongside similar items,

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 226.

⁷⁸ Downes, Holloway, and Randles, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Begiato, p. 230.

⁸⁰ Susan A. Crane, ‘Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory’, *The American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 1372–85 (p. 1375).

⁸¹ Susan A. Crane, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 9.

⁸² Steffi de Jong, ‘Who is History? The Use of Autobiographical Accounts in History Museums’, in Hill, pp. 295–308 (p. 299).

are transformed from personal possessions, a treasured tea set or a wedding dress, into cultural artefacts.

In her introduction to *Museums and Biography*, Kate Hill highlights the similarities between the two undertakings: ‘Biographies and museums both lie in a grey area of knowledge and affect; they tell us about what happened, but also form emotionally compelling and satisfying narratives.’⁸³ They share the ability to express movement through time but they also freeze it. She suggests that both have moved away from celebrating ‘great’ men and women and that the use of autobiographical accounts in museums can be seen as ‘an attempt to democratise history, and to give a voice to ordinary people’.⁸⁴ But as de Jong says in her contribution to the same volume, we need to be wary; such material is often there to promote institutional messages about war, social change and so on. Who then, she asks, has the last word?⁸⁵

Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk makes the case for a more radical approach on the website of his Museum of Innocence in Istanbul, a project that accompanies his novel of the same name, which I discuss in more detail below.⁸⁶ In his manifesto he argues for the capacity of everyday objects to tell stories about individuals that can counter the aim of big, state-sponsored museums ‘to represent the state’, which is in his view, ‘neither a good nor an innocent objective’.⁸⁷ He says this:

Point 8. The resources that are channelled into monumental, symbolic museums should be diverted to smaller museums that tell the stories of individuals. These resources should also be used to encourage and support people in turning their own small homes and stories into “exhibition” spaces.

Point 11. *The future of museums is inside our own homes.* [my italics]⁸⁸

David Olusoga made the same point about his 2018 television series *A House Through Time*, which followed the inhabitants of one house in Liverpool through decades of social change, saying, ‘If walls could talk, it would be our homes – not our grand public buildings – that would have all the best stories.’⁸⁹ Julie Myerson

⁸³ Kate Hill ‘Introduction: Museums and Biographies – Telling Stories about People, Things and Relationships’, in Hill, pp. 1–10 (p. 1).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸⁵ de Jong, p. 305.

⁸⁶ Also referenced in Gloyn, p. 157.

⁸⁷ Orhan Pamuk, ‘A Modest Manifesto for Museums’ <<http://en.masumiyetmuzesi.org/page/a-modest-manifesto-for-museums>> [accessed 12 March 2019]

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Olusoga, p. 25.

earlier attempted something similar in *Home: The Story of Everyone Who Ever Lived in our House* (2004), and I have discussed Penelope Lively's memoir of her grandparents' home above. A space has opened up that family history can help to fill. A house is a useful framing device but I do not have one. What I have is a random collection of inherited possessions and anecdotes. But by writing about them I am in a sense welcoming visitors into my home in order to tell a personal story about the past, one that I hope will resonate with others.

There is an underlying linguistic ambiguity in the word 'object', which is defined in traditional grammar as being 'directly affected by the action of a transitive verb': it is that to which something is done.⁹⁰ Kate Hill states that 'biographies have subjects, while museums have objects'; and yet the subject of a biography is also its object, the one who is written about not the one who writes.⁹¹ Downes, Holloway and Randles argue that the idea of a reciprocal object-subject relationship is central to the 'material turn' in recent historical scholarship.⁹² In its simplest interpretation this can mean that objects have the power to protect, to frighten, or to comfort.⁹³ But more than this and contrary to linguistic theory, anthropologist Daniel Miller believes that 'material culture matters because objects create subjects much more than the other way round'.⁹⁴ A simple example is our clothing. Miller writes about how the wearing of a sari influences the behaviour and identity of an Indian woman: it is not just a marker of gender but also a means of shaping it.⁹⁵ The fact that I come from a family that has stuff – books, silver, paintings, and bone china handed down through the generations – gives me a different identity within the inescapable British hierarchy of class from that of Alison Light, who had no such possessions to shape her or weigh her down.

Miller suggests that 'the closer our relationships with objects, the closer our relationships are with people'.⁹⁶ We lay down what he calls a 'sediment' of

⁹⁰ Definition of 'direct object' in *Fowler's Concise Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, ed. by Jeremy Butterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
<[http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref:9780199666317.001.0001/acref-9780199666317-e-992](http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199666317.001.0001/acref-9780199666317-e-992)> [accessed 18 January 2018]

⁹¹ Hill, p. 1.

⁹² Downes, Holloway, and Randles, 'A Feeling for Things, Past and Present' in Downes, Holloway, and Randles, pp. 8–26 (p. 9).

⁹³ Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, 'Introducing Objects' in *The Object Reader*, ed. by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1–18 (p. 11).

⁹⁴ Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p. 287.

⁹⁵ See also Renata Ago, 'Denaturalizing Things', in Findlen, pp. 363–8 (p. 365).

⁹⁶ Miller, *The Comfort of Things*, p. 1.

possessions that support us in time of loss. ‘Houses,’ he declares in a memorable phrase, ‘are the elephants of stuff.’⁹⁷ My writing has emerged from the experience of clearing my parents’ house after they died, uncovering the deposits they had accumulated, sifting and pruning to create a sediment of my own. Miller contrasts consumerism and ‘shopping to accumulate’ with the way in which we divest ourselves of objects at a time of death or break up, ‘to maintain a control over the process of separation, which is less violent and sudden than death itself’.⁹⁸

Pamuk pushed this notion to its extreme in his novel *The Museum of Innocence* (2010), where the protagonist Kemal amasses a collection of everyday objects associated with Fusul, the woman he has desired and lost: a hair slide, cigarette stubs, a china dog. As a final act of devotion he creates, in the museum of the title, a shrine to his obsession. Pamuk published his novel in Turkish in 2008; in 2012 he opened the Museum of Innocence in Istanbul, where visitors can see the objects for themselves. Pamuk explained how he conceived of the book and the museum at the same time:

I kept walking, searching for old crockery, kitchen utensils, liquor bottles, keys, clocks, cigarette holders, and photographs of everyday scenes – objects that I imagined as part of the lives of the characters who had lived in the building I’d bought [in 1998].⁹⁹

Pamuk’s objects are real and they belonged to real people (with some exceptions such as the 4,213 cigarettes ‘smoked’ by machine), but he has divorced them from the truth of their history to create an imaginative truth of his own. He has created a fictional backstory for a collection of factual objects but the website of his museum also invites people to supply for temporary display objects of their own that carry genuine, personal memories.

Pamuk’s museum is not alone in playing with the boundary between the real and the fictive. James Grasby, the curator of Elgar’s birthplace, believes that all National Trust properties are best seen as theatre: no longer homes but stage sets waiting for the Duke or the parlour maid to enter from the wings.¹⁰⁰ House museums that commemorate their previous occupants, Dickens or William Morris for example,

⁹⁷ Miller, *Stuff*, p. 81.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁹⁹ Orhan Pamuk, ‘Exhibition at the Pictures’, *Guardian*, 23 January 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/exhibition-at-the-pictures-orhan-pamuks-museum-of-innocence-on-screen>> [accessed 12 March 2019]

¹⁰⁰ James Grasby, *Lives of Houses*, Colloquium, OCLW (25 May 2017).

work in much the same way. Alison Booth describes them as ‘a kind of biography or narrative that uses factual evidence to represent lived experience’ and has called them ‘haunted’.¹⁰¹ The Dennis Severs house in Spitalfields is perhaps the most atmospheric example; as you walk around by candlelight you hear recordings of ghostly voices, as if the Huguenot inhabitants have just slipped away into the next room.

Susan Crane compares her reaction to the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles with her feelings about the novels of Borges, ‘where I am never sure which elements are fictional, since I recognise some but not all of the references’.¹⁰² Reading the works of W. G. Sebald can have the same hallucinatory effect. Are they fiction, history, memoir, or something else entirely? Sometimes he draws explicitly on other texts. ‘Less obvious – to the casual reader at least – is the extent to which Sebald weaves unmarked quotation and allusion into his texts.’¹⁰³ There are intriguing similarities between this literary sleight of hand and Pamuk’s museum. A later addition to his multi-faceted project was Grant Gee’s film *The Innocence of Memories* (2016), an enigmatic documentary about Istanbul, Pamuk, and his museum. It is no coincidence that Gee is also the creator of an equally dream-like film, *Patience: After Sebald* (2012), inspired by Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), a novel that uses ghostly black and white photographs to baffle its readers about the borderline between the real and the fictive.

I too have played with this boundary but I have not set out to deliberately confuse. I have stayed faithful to the known facts that appear in the official record. If I say that George Dupen was in Madras in December 1863, it is because I have evidence in the form of a newspaper clipping and the captain’s logbook. I know from other official records that after he jumped ship he became a coffee planter in India. I have guessed that the brass beakers that I use to begin George’s story are Indian because of their design. They are real, in the sense that I can hold them in my hand. But I do not know for certain they were his. They might equally have come from his brother Ernest, or (less likely) from another side of the family entirely.

In this way they start to resemble items in a cabinet of curiosities. The name plays on the double meaning of curiosity, as both an object of curious interest and the

¹⁰¹ Booth, p. 232.

¹⁰² Crane, *Museums and Memory*, p. 63.

¹⁰³ Ann Pearson, “Remembrance ... Is Nothing Other Than a Quotation”: The Intertextual Fictions of W. G. Sebald, *Comparative Literature*, 60 (2008), 261–78 (p. 261).

interest itself. Its contents were both intimate and universal, ‘somewhere between the infinitely small and the infinitely big’.¹⁰⁴ Such cabinets sit at the ‘fuzzy boundaries between hoarding and collecting’, closer perhaps to the omnivorous hoard than the selective collection.¹⁰⁵ Susan Crane discusses them as the forerunners of the museum. She distinguishes between the historical object, which ‘participated in a narrative uniting location and experience’ and the curiosity, which ‘represented a transferable story’.¹⁰⁶ The objects in the cabinet often came with curious narratives attached. Over time many of these were discredited but the objects themselves remained on show, ‘because the desire for the story remains, even if the desire for the object has subsided’.¹⁰⁷ In his Ark in Lambeth John Tradescant displayed the hand of a mermaid. This has now been identified as the bone of a manatee and can be seen at the Museum of the History of Science in Oxford, where its role is to bear witness to a past when people believed in mermaids and other fantastic creatures.¹⁰⁸

As I wander round my house, picking out items that will say something about the Dupens, I am creating a cabinet of curiosities that echoes my theme.¹⁰⁹ Some items attach me to my roots while others evoke the urge to travel to distant lands. Objects, says de Waal, are a kind of palimpsest, with layers of stories accumulating over time.¹¹⁰ He begins the story of the *netsuke* with his great-uncle, ignoring the fact that even before then they had a life in other families, in another land, and those stories have now been lost. My beakers too had a past in the workshop of the Indian metalworker who made them, perhaps even in his home. I have not tried to trace their provenance but have simply used them as an emblem of empire, the jumping off point for the story of George Dupen’s life.

1.5 Still lives: the meaning of family photographs

Photographs, which are often the only keepsakes to survive the dislocation of emigration, war, or family breakdown, are a special category of inherited object that

¹⁰⁴ Christine Davenne, *Cabinets of Wonder* (New York; London: Abrams, 2012), p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, p. 211.

¹⁰⁶ Crane, *Museums and Memory*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁸ Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, UK, Narratives, ‘The Hand of a Mermaid?’ <<http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/collections/imu-search-page/narratives/?irn=14986&index=0>> [accessed 12 March 2019]

¹⁰⁹ Although there is an inherent paradox, as Auslander points out, that in writing about objects, or even reproducing images of them, I am still not allowing my readers their own contact with them. (Auslander, p. 1045.)

¹¹⁰ Edmund de Waal, *Breathturn: Families, Objects, Stories*, talk, St Peter’s College, Oxford, UK (11 February 2019).

embody a particular kind of truth. Marianne Hirsch uses the word ‘postmemory’ to describe their function, which is ‘distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection’.¹¹¹ Elizabeth Edwards writes that, ‘Photographs belong to that class of objects formed specifically to remember, rather than being objects around which remembrance accrues.’¹¹² Uniquely, they offer what she calls ‘two ontological layers in one object’: the image captured and the photograph as object.¹¹³ Or as Susan Sontag describes them, they are ‘miniatures of reality’, not so much statements about the world as pieces of it.¹¹⁴ They bring us back to the ambiguity of subject and object. Roland Barthes has remarked on how photography transformed subject not only into object, but museum object.¹¹⁵

With the invention of photography in the 1830s it became possible for the first time to fix the past; in that sense any photograph is a still life. It is a quality that is not shared by the modern moving image, despite the apparently greater realism of the latter. According to Edwards, ‘Stillness invites evocation, contemplation, and a certain formation of effective memory in a way that film and video, with their temporal naturalism and realistic narrative sequence cannot.’¹¹⁶ de Waal makes the same point about his vitrine: it pauses the objects it contains, stills them, creates a caesura in the poetry of the display.¹¹⁷

Yet we are mistaken in ascribing some sort of special truthfulness to photographs, even without the modern trickery of Photoshop and airbrushing. In his novel *Austerlitz* (2001), W. G. Sebald included images that he had found and repurposed, deliberately having them copied and recopied to create the degraded, grainy quality that mimics age. William Boyd’s fictional biography of an artist he called Nat Tate (1998) used found photographs to shore up the illusion that this was a factual narrative. The intention may not even be deliberately to deceive. As John Berger has pointed out:

Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a

¹¹¹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22.

¹¹² Elizabeth Edwards, ‘Photographs as Objects of Memory’, in Candlin and Guins, pp. 331–42 (p. 332).

¹¹³ Edwards, p. 340.

¹¹⁴ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 13.

¹¹⁶ Edwards, p. 334.

¹¹⁷ de Waal, *Breathturn: families, objects, stories*.

photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights.¹¹⁸

The sitter too makes choices about the image to be captured. Photographed in military uniform, his hand grasping the hilt of his sword, helmet and gloves on the table beside him, dumpy Ernest Dupen, my great-grandmother's youngest brother, cuts an intentionally manly figure.¹¹⁹

The portrait conjures up the illusion of a person capable of returning my gaze. Marianne Hirsch writes of the 'familial look', where instead of a subject looking at an object, it is a mutual exchange.¹²⁰ But I am not sure that it brings me any closer to knowing what sort of person Ernest was. What day was it when he was photographed? I know he was in India on a coffee plantation in the Nelliampathy Hills; that much is recorded on the back of the print. I have no idea who took the photograph, or why it was taken then and at no other time. What happened to it after it was printed? Was it sent home to his sisters in Cornwall as a memento? Where was it displayed? Who looked at it and what did it make them think? The answers to these questions can only be guessed at. If it is a window on the past, it is a very opaque one.



A photograph preserves an identity however shifting and ambiguous, up to the moment when it becomes part of 'the currency of the remembrance industry', a collectors' item or element of interior design that has no connection with the person who displays it on their walls.¹²¹ But even if the name of the subject has been lost, it functions, as Susan Sontag has identified, as a *memento mori*: 'Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.'¹²² According to Roland Barthes, 'If photography is to be discussed on a serious level, it

¹¹⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 10.

¹¹⁹ This photograph, like some of the other objects and evidence that I discuss, comes from a chapter of my book not included in this thesis. See *Summary of next chapters* for more information.

¹²⁰ Hirsch, p. 9.

¹²¹ Lively, p. 5.

¹²² Sontag, p. 15.

must be described in relation to death.’¹²³ He famously distinguished between what he called the *studium* of a photograph, its cultural interest, and the *punctum*, the needle-sharp prick of emotion that we may feel when we look at it (although not all photographs have a *punctum* for everyone). The *studium* represents ‘a general, and so to speak, *polite* interest’ and ‘is of the order of liking not loving’.¹²⁴ The *punctum* provokes a sharper sensation; it pierces, it bruises. The *studium* of my photograph of Ernest is the colonial context, what it tells us about the British in India. The *punctum* for me is to see the baby of the family, the youngest of them all, posing as an independent grown up, thousands of miles from home. I experience something approaching a maternal pang and wonder if his big sisters felt the same.

Barthes came to believe that the *punctum* was a function of time; ‘the tense of the Photograph is the aorist’, he says, while for a memory it would be the perfect (as I have suggested previously is the case for inherited objects).¹²⁵ Barthes describes the image of a young man waiting to be hanged, where despite the illusion of life created by the photograph, ‘the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*’.¹²⁶ Dizzily, the past that we are looking at in the present contains within it the future.

Annette Kuhn suggests that ‘the family album produces the family’ and notes that it tends to be compiled as a linear, chronological narrative, while Edwards notes that early albums looked like bibles and it was in the family bible that traditionally births, deaths and marriages were recorded.¹²⁷ My photographs are not in an album, nor do I have the Dupen bible, so my family narrative is a jerky, incomplete one that I have attempted to smooth out with invention. Michael Ignatieff describes photographs as ‘the freeze frames that remind us how discontinuous our lives actually are’.¹²⁸ The pictures are facts that feed my fiction. Susan Sontag observes that the family album appeared around the same time that the nuclear family was replacing the extended household of an earlier age: ‘Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives. A family’s photograph album is generally about the extended family – and often is all that remains of it.’¹²⁹ I am very aware of how

¹²³ Barthes, pp. 15, xi.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 91.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 96.

¹²⁷ Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, new edn (London: Verso, 2002), p. 19 and Edwards, p. 335.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Marcus, p. 100.

¹²⁹ Sontag, p. 9.

small my family is now, compared with the sprawling Victorian network of Dupen siblings, their spouses, cousins, and children. My photographs reinforce my theme, one that transforms the family, in less than a century, from a tight-knit community centred on the Cornish port of Hayle into a global diaspora, sending images home from India, America and Australia.

1.6 Finding truth in the archive

As well as china tea sets and photographs, family history leaves a paper trail of evidence. ‘The past is made of paper’, says Margaret Atwood, although of course today much of it is digitised.¹³⁰ She pays tribute to archivists and librarians, the ‘guardian angels of paper; without them, there would be a lot less of the past than there is, and I and many other writers owe them a huge debt of thanks’.¹³¹ I too in the course of my research have amassed piles of documents in both hard copy and electronic form, what Aida Edemariam calls ‘the facts of officialdom’: marriage and death certificates, census returns, and so on.¹³² They create the illusion of a collection of reliable facts. But we need to beware of the temptation to treat such material as ‘the truth’. Carolyn Steedman lists the several ways in which there is distance or separation between the researcher and the archive material. It was written at a different time and in a different place, often by someone who was not the subject of the information (the census taker not the householder, for example). We may be viewing it through a different medium, on screen rather than on paper.¹³³ And yet an official document feels so real. There is an immediacy to the ship’s log of the *Eastern Empire* that made me believe it, until I found the newspaper report of George Dupen’s court case and realised that the chief mate would have written the log entries to reflect his own version of events.

Atwood, with reference to the research for her novel *Alias Grace*, explains that she found multiple versions of Grace’s story. As she says in her afterword to the novel, ‘I have not changed any known facts, although the written accounts are so contradictory that few facts emerge as unequivocally “known”.’¹³⁴ Or as Siân Busby says, of her great-grandparents’ marriage certificate, ‘Sometimes these pieces of

¹³⁰ Margaret Atwood, ‘In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction’, *The American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), 1503–16 (p. 1513).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Aida Edemariam, ‘A Family Affair’, *Guardian Review*, 10 February 2018, p. 36.

¹³³ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 214.

¹³⁴ Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 466.

paper, these slivers of information that survive the years, raise far more questions than they answer.’¹³⁵ This was brought home to me when I was researching the story of my great-grandmother’s oldest brother Sharrock Dupen and his wife Julia. I had the census for 1861 so I knew how old they were – or so I thought. But then I found the date of Julia’s baptism and knew that someone, somewhere, was not telling the truth. Immediately I had the beginnings of a story. As Atwood says, stories: ‘are about human nature, which usually means they are about pride, envy, avarice, sloth, gluttony, and anger. They are about truth and lies, disguises and revelations.’¹³⁶ I also had a marriage certificate for the couple, where Sharrock Dupen identified himself as a gentleman. His merchant navy record contradicts that statement; so does the census. I am more inclined to believe the merchant navy, but if he lied, why and for whose benefit? Thus my story began to grow. Like Atwood, ‘When in doubt I have tried to choose the most likely possibility, while accommodating all possibilities wherever feasible. Where mere hints and outright gaps exist in the record, I have felt free to invent.’¹³⁷ The historian Beverley Southgate suggests that we work as far as possible ‘on the basis of varying degrees of probability’, which feels intuitively correct to me.¹³⁸

As well as official documents, personal papers such as letters and diaries are invaluable for the record they provide of daily life, of journeys, illnesses, visitors, and dinners. Sometimes they offer almost too much material. But they need to be read with an appropriate degree of scepticism. Maya Jasanoff argues that, ‘Even when diaries or letters seem to “tell all”, historians typically treat what happened as one thing, and what somebody made of it as another.’¹³⁹ They can offer us reported speech and thoughts, but with the necessary caveat that we are not necessarily any more honest with ourselves than we are with others.

Some of the stuff that I keep in boxes consists of dusty faded papers, both official and personal: stiff, crackly wills stamped with official seals, letters in the elegant handwriting of those who were taught penmanship in a way that has been lost in my own lifetime. The most complete paper record that I have inherited is the logbook kept by the youngest Dupen sibling, Ernest, during his three voyages to Australia and

¹³⁵ Busby, p. 161.

¹³⁶ Atwood, 'In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction', p. 1516.

¹³⁷ Atwood, *Alias Grace*, p. 467.

¹³⁸ Beverley C. Southgate, *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2009), p. 175.

¹³⁹ Maya Jasanoff, *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World* (London: William Collins, 2017), p. 10.

the Far East. It is a beautiful object: inside the leather binding his handwriting streams in fluent sepia curls across the thick cream pages. It tells me where he was on almost every day of 1873, 1874, and 1875. Even if nothing much happened that day he records the most important information for a sailor: the weather. It cannot be faulted as a factual narrative – although it is a classic example of too much information. But Ernest virtually never tells us anything about his interior life. There was no privacy on board ship and even if he had wanted to write down his feelings (which he probably did not) he would have thought twice about the wisdom of doing so. The paper past has to be supplemented with invention to arrive at an emotional truth. I have never felt that I know Ernest better than his brother George, who kept no logbook – or not one that has survived.

But if Ernest's journal is lacking in emotional life it can still provide an invaluable insight into the attitudes of a young Victorian traveller, for example how he perceived foreigners. He is spectacularly rude about the French, well-disposed towards the Turks, who were Britain's allies during the Crimean War, and dismissive of anyone he classes as a 'coolie'. Quoting his words in context helps me to convey, but not condone, how very different the world looked at the height of the British Empire, the essential understanding that 'it would not have been possible to be racist, sexist or elitist, because hierarchies of race, sex, and status simply organised [people's] understandings of society and the world'.¹⁴⁰ The logbook entries make uncomfortable reading but they are a faithful record of how men like Ernest Dupen thought and I would be doing history a disservice to pretend otherwise.

1.7 Family myths, family secrets

The family archive is also full of unwritten stories; de Waal calls them 'a kind of thing too'.¹⁴¹ Not everyone has a tangible inheritance of possessions but most of us have inherited at least one or two family myths. Handed down through the generations as a source of pride, they may sound like fabrications but surprisingly often prove to have their origin in fact. Journalist Frank Gardner, for example, inherited a family legend that his family 'came over with the Conqueror'. In an episode of *Who do you think you are?* he approached this claim with understandable

¹⁴⁰ Poovey, p. 23.

¹⁴¹ de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 349.

scepticism only to discover that he was a direct descendant of the Norman king.¹⁴² The broccoli story that appears in chapter 3 of my book is my favourite example of how the truth can be embellished, not entirely deliberately, to make a better story.

It is a matter of record that in 1837, after a cold spring, the vegetable harvest in Somerset and Gloucestershire was both meagre and late. It is a recorded fact that my grandfather's grandfather, a steward on the steam packet that sailed between Hayle and Bristol, carried a few baskets of fresh Cornish broccoli to sell in Bristol market. It is again a historical fact that much of west Cornwall was subsequently given over to fields growing broccoli and potatoes and that this helped mitigate the effect on the local economy of the closure of the tin and copper mines. But when the Lord Mayor of Bristol came to retell the story in 1933 he needed a more recognisable central character and so he turned Sharrock Dupen into a hoary old sea captain. He also needed causation for his plot, so he imagined a dramatic moment when the brainwave struck and invented 'Captain' Dupen dining alone at a hotel in Bristol, unable to obtain greens for his dinner.¹⁴³ I am inclined to doubt that a stout Victorian mariner would have cared one way or the other about maintaining the vitamin content of his meal. By the time the story reached me in the 1950s it had become entangled with the Huguenot heritage of the Dupens. This additional embroidery can probably be attributed to a generalised desire for exotic forebears: the story was enfolded into the romantic idea that the Dupens were French, and so the broccoli was imported from France.

Family secrets are the obverse of the coin, the stories that have been kept hidden rather than retold with pride. In setting out to write about my Victorian ancestors I was initially under the same misapprehension as Alex Graham, creator of *Who do you think you are?*. He too had conceived of a project that used family history as a way of encapsulating the broader social history of a given time. What he discovered, in producing his first show about Bill Oddie, was that, 'Secrets are crucial to the enterprise, for it is the shadowy and suppressed, the mysteries of previous generations, which unlock the clue to the family.'¹⁴⁴ Statistics from 2013 show that more than a third of Britons have researched their ancestors online and one in six has

¹⁴² *Who Do You Think You Are?* Series 12, episode 7, BBC1, 24 September 2015.

¹⁴³ 'Bristol and Cornwall', *Western Daily Press, Bristol, and Bristol Mirror*, 16 January 1933, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ Cohen, p. 264.

found ‘something that a previous generation had sought to hide’.¹⁴⁵ Siân Busby grew up with the terrible knowledge that her great-grandmother had drowned her babies, but Busby thought they were boys when in fact they were girls, and she had no idea that there had also been a third, stillborn, triplet. Yet this was within living memory and a matter of newspaper record.

The extraordinary boom in family history (5–6 million viewers of *Who do you think you are?* a programme that has been cloned in a dozen other countries) seems to be fuelled by a desire to know more about ourselves and ‘for many, a need to tell’.¹⁴⁶ Deborah Cohen links this to the growth of the confessional culture. She claims that, ‘Telling the family’s secrets works for us moderns in much the same way as keeping them did for the Victorians: it forges the bonds of kin.’¹⁴⁷ In her analysis, middle class Victorians were able to live their lives more and more privately, and with privacy came secrecy. The 1930s saw the rise of talking therapies and counselling, the 1960s brought women’s liberation and gay rights, and people ‘came to believe that secrets were better off out’. Now, in the twenty-first century, ‘privacy is not the ability to hide but the right to tell without cost’.¹⁴⁸

‘Secrets and lies about the past are an emotional and psychological inheritance’, says Alison Light.¹⁴⁹ But it would not do to overstate the case. I was astonished to discover in the newspaper archive the story of the tragic death in childbirth of Ada Ashley, the governess who worked for the oldest Dupen brother Sharrock, and his wife Julia. It explains, I believe, why Sharrock was written out of the family history, and yet I am not convinced that it unlocks any great secrets about the wider family. It provides me with an intriguing mystery that I have tried to handle sensitively, and adds a real-life ‘fallen woman’ (reminiscent of Gaskell’s fictional Ruth Hilton, heroine of her eponymous novel of 1853), to balance my account of the Dupen sisters as positive examples of the Victorian governess, enjoying their independence and prosperity. But I find it difficult to argue for any profound emotional resonance, given the distant connection of the protagonists to my branch of the family. There are other stories that I would tell to illuminate my own life, but it would be a different book.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 243.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 241–2.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁴⁹ Alison Light, ‘Family History Is No Poor Relation’, *Guardian*, 11 October 2014, p. 21.

CHAPTER 2 WRITING FACT, WRITING FICTION

2.1 Making things up: the role of invention

The first chapter of this commentary focused on family history as history and looked at the various forms of evidence that we use to construct true stories about the past. In Chapter 2, I intend to discuss family history as a form of life writing. Many people have a very real desire to tell their life story to an audience, but not necessarily one that extends beyond their own family. I am interested in reaching a wider readership and although I write about my relatives, I describe my work as collective biography – a genre that ‘takes us closer to its subject matter than does other historical writing’.¹⁵⁰ Biography sits alongside history within the wider genre of nonfiction, another problematic word. The eminent biographer Michael Holroyd suggests that, ‘Good biographies are “re-creative works” [...] forget that ugly and inaccurate term “nonfiction”.’¹⁵¹ If only we could. It pervades the debate to such an extent that it cannot be ignored. There are limitless possibilities contained in the term, which has been compared to ‘an online dresser labelled *nonsocks*’.¹⁵² In an attempt to pin it down, I argue that there are three main ways in which narrative nonfiction differs from fiction: it does not invent people, places, or events; it does not enter into the consciousness of a character by imagining thoughts or speeches; and (more debatably) it does not rely on plot for its narrative drive. I will explore each of these in turn.

Historian Hayden White has identified both history and fiction as forms of literary writing, as distinct from purely utilitarian or communicative works such as instructions and textbooks.¹⁵³ In this analysis novels become one type of literature alongside others that include biography, travel, and anthropology.¹⁵⁴ What they have

¹⁵⁰ Steedman, *Past Tenses*, p. 163. I prefer to avoid the term ‘prosopography’, sometimes used as an equivalent to collective biography, which is about large-scale quantitative analysis, and is uninterested in the motives and life experiences of individuals. (Cowman, p. 85.)

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Sally Cline and Carole Angier, *Life Writing: A Writers' and Artists' Companion: Writing Biography, Autobiography and Memoir* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 121.

¹⁵² David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Hamish Hamilton (an imprint of Penguin Books), 2010), p. 385.

¹⁵³ Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), pp. xi–xii.

¹⁵⁴ White excludes genre fiction such as science fantasy and chicklit from the literary, making a value judgement that others would dispute. In the view of critic John Searle, it is a mistake to overlook the existence of ‘bad’ literature, claiming that, ‘the literary is continuous with the non-literary. Not only is there no sharp boundary, but there is not much of a boundary at all.’ (Quoted in Paisley Livingston, ‘Literature’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. by Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 536–54 (p. 537).)

in common is that they all use *narrativisation* to engage the reader, a subjective process of selecting, sequencing, guessing, and interpreting. Novelist and historian of the American Civil War Shelby Foote takes a similar view:

So you're working with facts that came out of documents, just as in a novel you're working with facts that came out of your head [...] Once you have control of those facts, once you possess them, you can handle them exactly as a novelist handles his facts.¹⁵⁵

I disagree. In focusing on form, both Foote and White avoid addressing the underlying question of make-believe – only recognising it obliquely in a comment about the fictionalising of ‘history as spectacle’ by the heritage industry.¹⁵⁶ Cushing Strout identified the sleight of hand in his response to Simon Schama’s experimental book *Dead Certainties* (1992). As he points out, the functions of selecting, commenting, and interpreting are inventive, but not in the way fiction is ‘when it makes up characters, events, places and times’.¹⁵⁷ Fiction puts imaginary people into real events (for example, in *Tombland*, C. J. Sansom’s invented lawyer Matthew Shardlake takes part in Kett’s Rebellion) or real people into invented scenes (for example, in the same novel, Shardlake has a meeting with William Cecil).¹⁵⁸ It creates imaginary worlds (Middle Earth, Narnia) and creatures (hobbits, talking beavers). As Maya Jasanoff (a historian) puts it, somewhat disingenuously, ‘novelists make stuff up, historians don’t’.¹⁵⁹

The critic Maria Margaronis raises a number of important questions in this regard:

To write a historical novel is to enter a no-man’s land on the borders of fact and fantasy. All fiction is written on this territory, but when the work explicitly engages with historical events – when it is part of the writer’s project to reimagine them – the ground becomes a minefield of hard questions. What responsibility does a novelist have to the historical record? How much – and what kinds of things – is it permissible to invent? For the purposes of fiction, what counts as evidence?¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Carter Coleman, Donald Faulkner, and William Kennedy, 'The Art of Fiction No.158: Shelby Foote', *The Paris Review*, (summer 1999) <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/931/shelby-foote-the-art-of-fiction-no-158-shelby-foote>> [accessed 19 March 2019]

¹⁵⁶ White, *The Practical Past*, p. 69. Lowenthal too has little time for what he calls ‘factional docudrama’, comparing it to postmodernist fiction in the way that it smudges distinctions between history and fiction. (Lowenthal, p. 374.)

¹⁵⁷ Cushing Strout, 'Border Crossings: History, Fiction, and Dead Certainties', *History & Theory*, 31 (1992), 153–62 (p. 155).

¹⁵⁸ C. J. Sansom, *Tombland*, (London: Mantle, 2018), pp. 3–8.

¹⁵⁹ Jasanoff, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ Maria Margaronis, 'The Anxiety of Authenticity: Writing Historical Fiction at the End of the Twentieth Century', *History Workshop Journal*, 65 (2008), 138–60 (p. 138).

Hilary Mantel addressed the same issues in her Reith lectures. She views historians and novelists as both engaged in ‘a common struggle with evidence’, 99% of which, including what was actually said, is no longer available. History, she says, is not the past but ‘a method we have evolved of organising our ignorance of the past’; the difference is that a historian confronted with a document will ask ‘tell me what it means’, while a novelist says to herself, ‘tell me what *else* it means’.¹⁶¹

Few contemporary historians other than Niall Ferguson (in an acrimonious discussion with American novelist Jane Smiley on BBC Radio 4) would claim ownership of the territory of truth for history alone, while dismissing novels as ‘mere’ invention.¹⁶² Anyone who writes about the past uses not only research but also imaginative empathy to build a world where the reader can dwell in the temporary security of an alternative reality. Philippa Gregory has summarised this position neatly: ‘I cannot help but be a story-teller, it is my way of describing the world; but I have learned to be a historian, it is my way of understanding the world. I am both.’¹⁶³ Smiley, in her response to Ferguson’s attempt to mansplain history to her, pointed out that literary forms do not exist in a hierarchy and that a history book is just as much a construct as a novel is.¹⁶⁴ But to reject a value judgment that places history above fiction does not mean ignoring the differences in the way the two forms handle facts, which are not limited to invention. In fiction, for example, characters living in 1837 do not know that the *Great Western* will cross the Atlantic safely, Victoria will marry Albert, cholera will be found to be a water-borne disease, and the Crimean War will break out in 1853. Historians know what happens next and are allowed to tell their readers.

Lowenthal contends that the difference between history and fiction is more one of purpose than of content.¹⁶⁵ A nonfiction narrative seeks to inform, to demonstrate, potentially to prove, while the primary purpose of a novel is to entertain and persuade, to create, as John Gardner puts it, ‘a vivid and continuous fictional dream’.¹⁶⁶ When historians, in order to engage their readers, incorporate some of the

¹⁶¹ Hilary Mantel, ‘The Day Is for the Living’, *Reith Lectures 2017*, BBC Radio 4, 17 June 2017.

¹⁶² *Start the Week*, BBC Radio 4, 12 October 2015.

¹⁶³ Gregory, p. 242.

¹⁶⁴ Jane Smiley, ‘History v Historical Fiction’, *Guardian Review*, 17 October 2015

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/15/jane-smiley-niall-ferguson-history-versus-historical-fiction>> [accessed 19 March 2019]

¹⁶⁵ Lowenthal, p. 374.

¹⁶⁶ John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), p. 97.

techniques of entertainment and persuasion, they are aware of the dangers. A factual writer who is caught out in an invention risks losing credibility, as is demonstrated by the disillusionment experienced by readers of Ryszard Kapuściński's *The Emperor* (1983), when they realised he could not have witnessed everything he wrote about.¹⁶⁷

Turning now specifically to life writing, Carole Angier proposes a paradigm that extends from research-based biography at one end through autobiography to the short personal memoir at the other extreme.¹⁶⁸ It is potentially a common-sense solution to a complex problem. There is never just one version of a story to be told. Interpretations are multiple and change over time: Elizabeth Gaskell's Charlotte Brontë (*The Life of Charlotte Brontë* 1857) is not the same as Clare Harman's (*Charlotte Brontë: A Life* 2015). Biographies, as Hermione Lee has said, are better seen as historical moments in interpretation rather than definitive accounts.¹⁶⁹

In this context it is relevant to consider the question of reader expectation. Carole Angier states simply and unequivocally in her advice to aspiring authors: 'Life writers are free to tell a story – but they have a contract with the reader not to invent, to tell as far as possible what actually happened.'¹⁷⁰ The risk is that if they do decide to invent, the reader ends up, as Ina Schabert has said, in the position of Mr Boffin in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, deciding to believe half of Plutarch but not knowing which half.¹⁷¹

The alternative is of course to write a novel. There is a certain freedom that comes with choosing a genre where fact and fiction have from the start been seen as perfectly compatible. Manzoni quite happily inserted large chunks of history into his novel *I Promessi Sposi* (1827), as did Louis de Bernières a couple of centuries later in *Birds without Wings* (2004), where chapters about the life of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk alternate with chapters about fictional villagers. John Searle states quite simply: 'Whether or not a work is literature is for readers to decide; whether or not it is fictional is for the author to decide.'¹⁷² The corollary is that presumably, once the

¹⁶⁷ Geoff Dyer concludes that Kapuściński 'remains a great writer – just not the kind of great writer he was supposed to be'. ('Based on a True Story', *Observer New Review*, 6 December 2015, pp. 8–13 (p. 9).)

¹⁶⁸ Cline and Angier, p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ Hermione Lee, introducing *Richard Ellman lecture*, OCLW (9 May 2017).

¹⁷⁰ Cline and Angier, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ Ina Schabert, 'Fictional Biography, Factual Biography, and Their Contaminations', *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 5 (1982), 1–16 (p. 12).

¹⁷² Quoted in Peter Lamarque, 'Fiction', in Levinson 2003, pp. 377–91 (p. 378).

author has made their decision, it is incumbent on them to label their book accordingly, and if they do not, their publisher will. There is no category in the average bookshop for ‘books that might or might not be fiction’. This is not to say that authors do not write them, it is just that they tend to label them as novels; the marketing is simpler that way. Truman Capote tried to get round the problem by describing *In Cold Blood* (1966) as the first ‘nonfiction novel’, conveniently ignoring the rival claim of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which Defoe described two centuries earlier as ‘all historical and true in fact’.¹⁷³ What did Capote mean? Historian Beverley Southgate attempted an explanation: it is fiction ‘inasmuch as it is an imaginative construction written to hold the attention of its readers’, but history ‘inasmuch as the author’s endeavour is [...] to reconstruct a past event [...] on the basis of reliable evidence’.¹⁷⁴ Personally, I find it hard to see the difference between that and any decently researched piece of historical fiction.

I have been scrupulous in not inventing names, dates, places, or public events. Even characters with walk-on parts in my narrative appear under their real name, age and place of origin, as far as the historical record (census returns, masters’ and mates’ certificates, etc.) can be trusted. The events I describe, from the fire in the laundry copper to the small war in Perak, are recorded in the newspapers of the time and often in other documents too. But whether I have just a couple of sentences (the fire) or an entire captain’s log, several volumes of memoir, the *Illustrated London News* and more (the Perak incident), I have fictionalised to breathe life into my characters. This brings me to the second of my distinctions: interiority.

2.2 ‘Granite and Rainbow’: the biographer’s dilemma

‘Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s novel.’ This directive, from Richard Holmes’s ‘Ten Commandments for Biographers’, highlights a real temptation for life writers.¹⁷⁵ Inevitably they envy the novelist’s access to all the techniques that take us inside a character’s head: interior monologue, dialogue, and free indirect speech. Ruth Scurr’s life of John Aubrey (*John Aubrey: My Own Life* 2015), written in the form of a diary kept by her subject, is a rare exception, but she would claim that she was simply repurposing Aubrey’s own words from his correspondence and other

¹⁷³ Southgate, p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁵ Richard Holmes, *Richard Ellman lecture*, OCLW (9 May 2017).

sources, not inventing.¹⁷⁶ I would like to suggest, with grateful acknowledgement to David Lodge, that it is essentially interiority that distinguishes a novel from a biography or work of history.¹⁷⁷ Maya Jasanoff calls it a difference in points of view: ‘Historians don’t go where sources don’t lead, which usually means they stop at the door to someone’s mind [...] Novelists walk right in and roam freely through a person’s feelings, perceptions and thoughts.’¹⁷⁸ To me, the impact of that freedom is fundamental.

Hilary Mantel suggests that the biographer downs tools quicker than the novelist because they reach a frontier beyond which they cannot know. ‘The novelist’, she says, ‘goes to work when the facts run out.’¹⁷⁹ And yet what we want from biography, according to Hermione Lee, is ‘a vivid sense of person’.¹⁸⁰ The difficulty arises from the slippery nature of the subject, its profound otherness that evades any attempt at faithful representation – Hilary Spurling’s ‘mysterious dark secret underlife of another human being’.¹⁸¹ Virginia Woolf, in her essay ‘The New Biography’, creates a metaphor that shimmers with the illusion of truth. She opens with a quotation from the long-forgotten biographer, Sir Sidney Lee, who said, ‘The aim of biography is the truthful transmission of personality.’ Woolf comments that:

On the one hand there is truth; on the other there is personality. And if we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one.¹⁸²

Woolf praises Harold Nicolson for his book *Some People* (1927), which ‘is not fiction because it has the substance, the reality of truth. It is not biography because it has the freedom, the artistry of fiction’.¹⁸³ Woolf proceeds subtly to shift her ground. *Truth* and *fact* are no longer equivalents. *Truth* is reserved for a broader meaning: there is truth of real life (the hard granite fact of her metaphor) and truth of fiction, which is needed if we are to glimpse the intangible rainbow of personality. Yet

¹⁷⁶ Ruth Scurr, talk, OCLW (10 May 2016).

¹⁷⁷ David Lodge, in conversation with Bethany Layne, Postmodernist Biofictions Conference, University of Reading, UK (25 March 2017).

¹⁷⁸ Jasanoff, p. 10.

¹⁷⁹ Hilary Mantel, ‘Adaptation’, *Reith Lectures 2017*, BBC Radio 4, 15 July 2017.

¹⁸⁰ Hermione Lee, *Body Parts: Essays in Life-writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005), p. 3.

¹⁸¹ Cline and Angier, p. 148.

¹⁸² Virginia Woolf, *Granite and Rainbow: Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), p. 149.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

ultimately the two are antagonistic. ‘Truth of fact and truth of fiction are incompatible’, she concludes.¹⁸⁴

Plenty of contemporary biographers agree. Hermione Lee calls biography a process of ‘making up or making over’, implying ‘some form of alteration or untruth’.¹⁸⁵ But if that process involves both imagination and empathy, she believes that it should not extend to invention.¹⁸⁶ In her review of Colm Tóibín’s novel about Henry James, *The Master* (2004), she says, with reference to Ackroyd’s biography of Dickens, ‘Biographers don’t (unless they’re Peter Ackroyd) invent their subjects’ conversations, or take their clothes off and put them into bed, or fantasise their secret memories and unacted desires.’¹⁸⁷

Readers understand when they pick up a historical novel that they will be reading about people who really existed, Thomas Cromwell or Lucrezia Borgia, and real events, the battle of Culloden or the tulip fever that gripped the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. The historical figures may or may not be at the centre of the story and may or may not be surrounded by fictional characters, but readers trust the writer to have researched the facts as carefully as a historian and sometimes in even more detail.¹⁸⁸ Hilary Mantel has famously said that while she would be happy to make up a man’s inner torments she would not invent the colour of his drawing room wallpaper.¹⁸⁹ Lindsey Davis writes about a fictional Roman detective, Marcus Didius Falco, but her recreation of ancient Rome – what people ate, what they wore, how they lived and died – stands up to the most expert scrutiny.¹⁹⁰ In the case of a fictional character like Falco no one can question his personality; he is the man Davis has created, no more, no less. The real Thomas Cromwell may or may not have experienced the thoughts and emotions that Hilary Mantel attributes to him in *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring Up the Bodies* (2012). Other writers of both fiction and nonfiction, Philippa Gregory (*The Other Boleyn Girl* 2001), Robert Bolt (*A Man for*

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁸⁵ Lee, *Body Parts*, p. 28.

¹⁸⁶ Hermione Lee, introduction, University of Oxford Faculty of English Life Writing Day, Weston Library, Oxford, UK (9 February 2019).

¹⁸⁷ Hermione Lee, ‘The Great Pretender’, *Guardian Review*, 20 March 2004

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/mar/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview17>> [accessed 31 October 2016]

¹⁸⁸ James Goodman makes a distinction between ‘fictional history’ about real people, and ‘historical fiction’ about invented characters. Both, he claims, stand or fall by their success as a work of fiction, a test that the former often fails. (James Goodman, ‘Fictional History’, *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 237–53 (pp. 244–5).)

¹⁸⁹ Mantel, ‘The Day Is for the Living’.

¹⁹⁰ Her series beginning with *The Silver Pigs* (1989) runs to 20 titles.

All Seasons 1960), Diarmaid MacCulloch (*Thomas Cromwell: A Life* 2018) have over the years viewed him quite differently. Diaries, letters and contemporary accounts can suggest interpretations but ultimately they are just that, interpretations.

The art of the true historical novel (unlike a romance or detective story that has been dressed up in historical costume) is to enable us to experience what the past felt like from the inside, something that biography struggles to do. The fact that it is likely to be an alien world view makes it a challenge; it is hard to avoid anachronistic attitudes, however carefully you research the wallpaper. Richard Slotkin believes that writing fiction is a useful exercise for a historian because there is ‘no better mental exercise for training historians to appreciate the difference of the past’.¹⁹¹ Novelist S. J. Parris suggests, on the other hand, that ‘it’s impossible to consider a historical character’s motivation without imposing contemporary sensibilities on them’ and that in any case the modern reader needs help in identifying with characters from history.¹⁹² I recognise that in writing about George Dupen, it was tempting to pretend that he became a more enlightened plantation owner than he actually was. In a novel where he was the hero, the temptation would have been even greater. But I tend to agree with Slotkin: while empathy enhances our understanding of past lives, so does an appreciation of how these people were different.

This is perhaps why Mantel claims that it is impossible to write an intelligent historical novel that is not also a historiographical novel that examines its own workings.¹⁹³ It is a statement that echoes de Groot’s view that all historical novels are infused with ‘the indeterminacy of history’ and that the form ‘is obsessed with pointing out its own partiality, with introducing other voices and undermining its authority’.¹⁹⁴ Graham Swift’s *Waterland* (2002) is a favourite example, examined in some depth by Beverley Southgate amongst others.¹⁹⁵ In *HhHH* (2009), a novel that tells the true story of the assassination of Nazi commander Reinhard Heydrich in Prague in 1942, Laurent Binet examined the inner mechanisms not only of history but of fiction too. His apparently robust view of what he was doing was neatly demolished by critic James Wood in his review:

¹⁹¹ Slotkin, p. 225.

¹⁹² S. J. Parris, ‘Don’t Tell Me What Happens’, *The Author*, Autumn 2017, p. 97.

¹⁹³ Mantel, ‘The Day Is for the Living’.

¹⁹⁴ Jerome de Groot, *The Historical Novel* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ Southgate, p. 153.

[Binet believes] invented facts—invented characters, for that matter—have no place in historical fiction, and weaken it both aesthetically and morally. [...] There are at least two difficulties with this purism. First, it would abolish most fiction; second, Binet has written a historical novel of sorts, a book that, if not quite full of invented details, certainly uses invention. That Binet's solution seems obvious is testament to the brilliant ease and fluency of his book: his historical novel makes use of novelistic invention while apologizing for doing so. Binet has his cake and eats it, and gets to cry over the spilt crumbs, too.¹⁹⁶

Binet was lauded in France for his innovative technique but I would argue that he was simply pursuing to its extreme a model that had existed in English language fiction for many years. As well as Swift, A. S. Byatt in *Possession* (1991) and Julian Barnes in *A History of the World in 10^{1/2} Chapters* (1990) are amongst the many novelists who have introduced an element of self-reflection into their narrative that subverts the reality of their fictional world. It is a potentially dangerous technique, to refocus the reader's attention away from the story towards the act of writing. It can distract, undermine the reader's suspension of disbelief, and defuse dramatic tension, but it is a cultural shift that in the late twentieth century made *historiographic metafiction* 'the dominant genre'.¹⁹⁷ Such works mix past and present, imagination and reality, while at the same time reflecting on the nature of both fiction and history.

In a parallel development, novelists are increasingly drawn to nonfiction for their inspiration. David Lodge believes this accounts for the recent dominance of what is known as biofiction.¹⁹⁸ In the early years of the twenty-first century, Lodge (*Author, Author* 2004), Colm Tóibín (*The Master* 2004), and Emma Tennant (*Felony* 2002) all wrote fictional accounts of Henry James that offered quite different versions of his thoughts and feelings. Biofiction, with its echoes of the cinematic biopic, has become the preferred term to describe such novelised versions of real lives, although it is not always clear in what way they differ from the historical novel. Michael Lackey has traced the evolution of the genre, criticising the established approach of 'analyzing and evaluating biofiction primarily in relation to biography rather than

¹⁹⁶ James Wood, 'Broken Record', *The New Yorker*, 21 May 2012
<<http://www.newyorker.com:magazine:2012:05:21:broken-record>> [accessed 12 March 2019]

¹⁹⁷ Hutcheon quoted in White, *The Practical Past*, p. 7.

¹⁹⁸ Lodge, Postmodernist Biofictions Conference.

fiction'.¹⁹⁹ He claims that this is problematic because most authors 'explicitly claim that they are not doing biography'.²⁰⁰ He reminds us that as far back as 1937 Lukacs in *The Historical Novel* acknowledged 'the popularity of the biographical form in the present-day historical novel'.²⁰¹ The distinction may be one of emphasis: biofiction, like biography, focuses on a central character while a historical novel takes in the broader sweep of history, although I have not, for example, seen Hilary Mantel's novels about Thomas Cromwell referred to as biofiction. Or it may be something to do with the kind of subject, that writers and artists are more likely to be the subject of biofiction than kings and queens or politicians.

On several occasions I contemplated writing my story as biofiction. What held me back was, ironically, my lack of first-hand testimony. If a writer has recorded stories from an older generation, they can draw on oral history, defined in social science as 'the collection of autobiographical data from living informants to illuminate the recent past'.²⁰² This can allow family history to be framed as something much closer to a novel, introducing dialogue, thoughts and feelings. Aida Edemariam's *The Wife's Tale* (2018), based on 50 to 60 hours of tape of her grandmother talking, and Richard Benson's *The Valley* (2014) are recent examples. But my starting point is a set of characters who are too distant to have memories or oral history attached to them. If I had written a novel it would, or so it seemed to me, have lost the value that comes from being honest about my scant knowledge of the Dupens.²⁰³

Another option would have been to write family history as memoir. There are numerous examples, particularly where the subjects are parents or grandparents. As Frances Wilson put it in her review of Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood* (2000), 'In a sense this is what autobiography is about: the ways in which your own story is not really yours at all, but a version of the tale of your parents or grandparents.'²⁰⁴

Autobiographers do not have the same problem with interiority as biographers,

¹⁹⁹ Michael Lackey, 'Locating and Defining the Bio in Biofiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 31:1 (2016), 3–10, (p. 4).

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁰² Paul Sturges, 'Collective Biography in the 1980s', *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 6 (1983), 316–32 (p. 322).

²⁰³ Emma Darwin on the other hand says of *This is Not a Book about Charles Darwin* (2019) that it was the over-documented lives of her family that made it hard for her to turn them into a novel. (Emma Darwin, 'Historical Fiction and the Perils of Family Story', *History Workshop podcast*, Season 2, Episode 1, 12 February 2019.)

²⁰⁴ Frances Wilson, 'What the Blood Remembers', *Guardian Review*, 9 September 2000 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/sep/09/biography>> [accessed 14 March 2019]. Richard Benson's *The Farm* (2005) and Michael Holroyd's *Basil Street Blues* (1999) are other examples.

although they cannot necessarily be trusted. Novelist Edmund White shares Angier's belief in a contract, saying, 'For me the essential difference is the one between fiction and autobiography, which starts out as a different implicit contract with the reader.'²⁰⁵ Not everyone would support his position. Human memory is fallible and even honest attempts at autobiography may fail the test of historical accuracy. Most of us are familiar with the well-documented phenomenon of conflicting witness statements.²⁰⁶ Indeed psychologists have demonstrated that a memory is constructed over multiple retellings. As David Lowenthal says, 'It is hard to distinguish primary from secondary memories, remembering things from remembering remembering them.'²⁰⁷ Furthermore, we may have reasons for wanting to present our past in a certain way, to create a particular image of ourselves, one that may not tally with the way that other people remember or perceive us. This renders autobiography a fraught enterprise when other family members dispute the accuracy of the account or resent the exposure of emotions, relationships and events that they would prefer to keep private – as witness the well-known falling out between sisters Margaret Drabble and Antonia Byatt over, of all things, a tea set.²⁰⁸

Carole Angier's co-editor Sally Cline claims that, 'Distinctions between fiction and nonfiction which still hold true for biography have recently become more blurred in autobiography as authors discover that writing about themselves may not be entirely or necessarily a nonfiction adventure.'²⁰⁹ Journalist Alex Clark has written about the recent explosion of autofiction. From Delphine de Vigan (*D'après une histoire vraie* 2015) to Olivia Laing (*Crudo* 2018), writers are playing with the details of their own lives 'to disrupt and complicate our experience of story and subjectivity, to find a new way to describe reality'.²¹⁰ I would suggest that it is not so much the blurring of boundaries that is recent but the acknowledgement that it is happening. Edmund Gosse was certainly not remembering every word of the dialogue he quotes in his memoir *Father and Son*, published in 1907.²¹¹

²⁰⁵ Cline and Angier, p. 151.

²⁰⁶ Examined in detail in Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London: Penguin, 2012), Chapter 7 'A Machine for Jumping to Conclusions'.

²⁰⁷ Lowenthal, p. 312.

²⁰⁸ Margaret Drabble, *The Pattern in the Carpet: A Personal History with Jigsaws* (London: Atlantic, 2009), p. xi.

²⁰⁹ Cline and Angier, p. 66.

²¹⁰ Alex Clark, 'Keeping It Real', *Guardian Review*, 23 June 2018, pp. 8–11 (p. 8).

²¹¹ Shields, p. 36.

Today, according to Amanda Craig, contemporary fiction is judged on its ‘authenticity’; if a novel is to be of any interest it must be autobiographical.²¹² The issue of cultural appropriation is becoming an ever more prominent feature of literary criticism. Craig finds it chilling that, ‘writers come under fire for stepping outside their own race, gender and abilities’. She holds the press responsible, at least in part: ‘Journalists [...] want fiction to be journalism; it’s the flip side of an era in which so much journalism has become fiction.’²¹³ Richard Holmes foresees the same difficulty for biography, imagining an impoverished future where, as a woman, Claire Tomalin would not be allowed to write about Pepys (*Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self* 2002).²¹⁴ In 2018, an entertaining Twitter thread suggested that, taken to extremes, you can no longer write about Marie Antoinette or Anne Boleyn if you still have a head on your shoulders. Perhaps I am more confident in fictionalising the lives of my characters because I feel entitled to do what I like with my own family history.

My purpose is not, however, autobiographical; although I am intrigued by my genetic inheritance I am aware that I share only a tiny fraction of DNA with these people. To write about them is only tangentially to write about myself. But writing a collective biography presents its own challenges. My characters made no significant mark on history; they left behind almost no first-hand testimony and not much in the way of personal records. As Krista Cowan puts it, when Virginia Woolf laments her lack of material on Roger Fry (‘How can one make a life out of six cardboard boxes full of tailors’ bills, love letters and old picture postcards?’) there are many historians of women’s lives who would retort that it is at least five more boxes than they have.²¹⁵

Philip Carter has pointed out that easy online access to genealogical resources such as census returns has transformed the ability of the editorial team at the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* to produce comprehensive entries for even minor historical figures.²¹⁶ I know where the Dupen siblings were born and baptised, married and buried; I can trace where they were living and what they were doing every ten years at least. But Carter also identified the risk of ending up with a character like Henry Croft, the original Pearly King, who is all documents and no

²¹² Amanda Craig, ‘Not I?’, in *The Author*, Spring 2017, pp. 3–5 (p. 3).

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Holmes, *Richard Ellman lecture*.

²¹⁵ Cowman, pp. 84–5.

²¹⁶ Carter, *Constructing Lives*.

voice. I want my characters to have a voice, even if it is not one that speaks through a tape recording or the pages of a diary. The fictional episodes that punctuate my narrative are intended to evoke atmosphere, to allow glimpses of interiority, and to add a layer of emotional truth to my facts. In imagining them, I have used the literature of the time to help me understand what it felt like to be, for example, a governess or a sailor. As Nathalie Zemon Davies says, such sources at least ‘show us what sentiments and reactions authors considered plausible for a given period’.²¹⁷

In turning to fiction I foresee two dangers. The first is akin to the dilemma of the memoirist – I am by no means the only descendant of these people. What if my distant cousins in Canada and California have inherited different stories and take offence at my portrayal of their great-grandparents? I think I can live with that possibility. The second, and more important, is that by adding fiction to a nonfiction narrative, I may be transgressing Woolf’s rule and breaking the implicit contract with my readers. It is for this reason that I have made it clear when I am moving into an imagined scene, introducing it explicitly, and using a text break and change of tense to signal the shift.

2.3 Losing the plot: narrative structure

Turning now to the third of my possible dividing lines, after invention and interiority comes structure. Throughout this commentary I have been reflecting on *narrative nonfiction* as distinct from nonfiction designed to inform or instruct. It is a label that avoids the value-laden adjective *creative*, which can be problematic when applied to biography: ‘What histories and biographies share with novels is temporal organization; but whereas the novelist *constructs* a narrative of imagined events, the biographer and historian aim to *reconstruct* a narrative from real-life past events.’²¹⁸ The debate has often been framed in somewhat elitist terms of *art* versus *craft*: Carole Angier suggests that ‘sublime beauty [...] requires invention and steals attention away from its only proper centre in nonfiction [...] the subject’.²¹⁹ Virginia Woolf too saw biographers as craftsmen rather than as artists.²²⁰ The result of their labours is attractive but above all functional, literary but not Literature. In Bloomsbury terms biographers could perhaps be seen as designers of furnishing

²¹⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 1.

²¹⁸ Michael Benton, 'Towards a Poetics of Literary Biography', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 45 (2011), 67–87 (p. 69).

²¹⁹ Cline and Angier, p. 89.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

fabric rather than painters of landscapes – although of course it is entirely possible, like Vanessa Bell, to be both. I am content to let Michael Benton settle the matter when he declares that ‘to argue the toss about labels is a fruitless exercise’.²²¹ But having settled on the term *narrative*, I decided to look more closely at the structure of historical fiction and nonfiction to see whether there is a meaningful difference. According to E. L. Doctorow (well known for mixing fiction with fact in novels such as *Ragtime* 1975), and with an additional caveat by David Shields: ‘There’s no more fiction or nonfiction now, there’s only narrative (is there even narrative?).’²²² Like most sweeping statements, this is surely open to dispute.

In medieval times it was enough to compose a chronicle, recording for posterity an open ended series of events, but by the Romantic period historians had started to address the need to hold the reader’s attention and keep them reading. Their vehicle was narrative, where the drama was heightened through stylistic devices familiar to the novelist.²²³ Hayden White sets out the development of historical narrative from chronicle to story. Narrativisation allowed the writer to produce something that, unlike a chronicle, had a shape: at its simplest a beginning, a middle, and an end. Stories, he contends, ‘have a discernible form which marks off the events contained in them from the other events that might appear in a comprehensive chronicle’.²²⁴ Over the years, novelists such as those cited above in Chapter 2.2, and others including Virginia Woolf (*Orlando* 1928), Angela Carter (*Nights at the Circus* 1984), and Italo Calvino (*Il Barone Rampante* 1957), have all played with the conventions of narrative, but they still tell stories. Even B. S. Johnson, when he published *The Unfortunates* in 1969 as 25 loose leaf sections to be read in any order, still had opening and closing chapters that could not be moved.

Story, however, is not the same as plot, something that according to E. M. Forster derives from adding causation to a story.²²⁵ When Christopher Booker identified seven archetypal plots (rags to riches, overcoming the monster, and so on), it was an updated take on the work of Soviet scholar, Vladimir Propp, who in the 1920s

²²¹ Michael Benton, 'The Aesthetics of Biography – and What It Teaches', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 49 (2015), 1–19 (p. 2).

²²² Shields, p. 307.

²²³ Michael Bentley, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 26.

²²⁴ Hayden White, 'Introduction to Metahistory' in *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. by Dennis Walder, 2nd rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Open University, 2004), pp. 444–9 (p. 445).

²²⁵ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Arnold, 1949), p. 60.

claimed that folktales contained only seven possible characters and 31 narrative functions.²²⁶ Plot has therefore been seen as a potential constraint, a formula that inhibits creativity. Nonfiction avoids the problem since it does not, as a rule, use plot as its structuring device. But neither does all fiction.

It is thirty years since critic Lynda Hutcheon first asserted that the artificial divide between history and fiction ‘is now being challenged in postmodern theory and art’.²²⁷ Postmodernism is, says Jerome de Groot, ‘notoriously difficult to define. In general it might be characterised as a set of ideas and practices that reject hierarchy, stability and categorisation.’²²⁸ Postmodernist writers, as exemplified by the kind of historiographic metafiction discussed in the previous section, tend not to construct plots. The world has moved on, and a recent article by Alison Gibbons suggests that writers of fiction and autofiction are choosing moral and psychological complexity, and engagement with real-life problems in a way that feels more attuned to a post-truth world than the tricksiness of historiographic metafiction, while Hutcheon herself has suggested that ‘the postmodern may well be a twentieth century phenomenon, that is, a thing of the past’.²²⁹ But the debate about plot has not gone away.

In 2017 novelist Tim Lott provoked outrage when he published an article accusing literary fiction of having quite literally lost the plot.²³⁰ He claimed that ‘the form of storytelling and literary novel writing has [*sic*] become largely divorced’, to the detriment of the novel. It is a criticism that sits at the heart of David Shields’s question quoted above: ‘is there even narrative?’ Lott recommended that novelists learn the forgotten craft of constructing a plot from screenwriters, who do virtually nothing else. They may then, he said, start to write books that people want to read. While I believe that there is much that any writer of fiction or nonfiction can learn from screenwriters about constructing scenes that work, it is worth considering what would be lost if all novels were written simply as screenplays. When everything has

²²⁶ Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum, 2004).

²²⁷ V. Propp and others, *Morphologie du Conte* (Paris: Seuil, 1970 (1st Russian edn 1928)).

²²⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988), p. 10.

²²⁹ de Groot, p. 109.

²³⁰ Alison Gibbons, 'Postmodernism Is Dead. What Comes Next?', in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 June 2017 <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/>> [accessed 14 March 2019] and Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 165.

²³⁰ Tim Lott, 'Why Should We Subsidise Writers Who Have Lost the Plot?', *Guardian*, 2 January 2018, p. 27.

to be shown and not told, the audience can only rely on the quality of the acting to guess at what is going on inside the characters' heads, and there is no scope for the writer to reflect on events. Sam Leith came to the defence of so-called 'difficult' books in an article where he suggested that while a plot-driven book wants the reader to keep turning the pages, there are other books that deliberately slow you down, because, for example, they want you to pay attention to a voice or an atmosphere.²³¹ It is, I find, a helpful distinction that makes Lott's criticism feel a little simplistic.

Stephen King would take issue with Lott for a different reason. His answer to the question 'Where is plot?' is simply 'Nowhere'.²³² He distrusts the concept firstly because people's lives are plotless and secondly because 'plotting and spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible'. He believes stories are there to be excavated 'like fossils in the ground'; if you put characters into a situation you will start to uncover a narrative.²³³ Hayden White has argued that the difference between history and fiction is that historians find stories whereas novelists invent them, but his theory of 'emplotment', or 'the way in which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind' (that is a tragedy, a comedy, a romance or a satire) suggests a contrary view, that stories are not found but imposed.²³⁴ Michael Benton suggests there is merit in Barbara Hardy's compromise, that a writer may find the 'cells' of a narrative but these then require shaping, in order to move from story to Story.²³⁵ Or in other words, to create a narrative arc, something that is essential to both fiction and nonfiction. As Halle Rubenhold says:

Writing narrative non-fiction is about finding a way not just to sling facts at people but to look for a narrative arc in a life. This is done by finding where the moments of drama are, and using those as touchpoints to tell their story – not disregarding other things, but looking for that arc that will carry a reader through.²³⁶

The Canadian novelist Carol Shields also once made a similar point to King, saying that plot is not interesting but the arc of a life is.²³⁷ But when fiction takes a

²³¹ Sam Leith, 'Why We Need Difficult Books', *Guardian*, 10 November 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/10/anna-burns-milkman-difficult-novel>> [accessed 12 March 2019]

²³² Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (London: New English Library, 2001), p. 188.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ White, 'Introduction to Metahistory', p. 446.

²³⁵ Benton, 'The Aesthetics of Biography – and What It Teaches', p. 5.

²³⁶ Plampin, Matthew, 'Historia Interviews: Halle Rubenhold', *Historia*, 1 April 2019 <<http://www.historiamag.com/historia-interview-hallie-rubenhold/>> [accessed 14 August 2019]

²³⁷ Quoted by Alice Jolly, talk, OCLW (1 November 2017).

life story as its structural framework, another boundary is blurred. (Julian Barnes's novel about Shostakovich, *The Noise of Time* (2016), is a good example.) William Boyd has described it as 'a clear act of colonisation – by fiction – of what we now call life writing', although he also claims that novels which follow a character from cradle to grave are surprisingly rare.²³⁸ Even the great nineteenth-century novelists, he says, 'for all their compendiousness and range, always offered only parts of a life'.²³⁹ It is true that biographical novels such as *David Copperfield* (1849) and *Jane Eyre* (1847) follow their central characters from cradle to marriage, but it seems to me that Boyd is ignoring many other more recent examples, including Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* (1922) and Jane Smiley's *Last Hundred Years* trilogy (2014–2015). Perhaps Boyd, himself an advocate of the 'whole life' approach, wanted to distinguish his work from that of other writers, having written five such novels. He asserts that his readers have tended to identify with the central character in 'a different, more engaged way,' and speculates that the appeal lies in how the reader can construct a 'parallel novel' of their own existence.²⁴⁰ While I am not entirely convinced by this argument (I don't remember thinking much about my own life while reading *Any Human Heart* (2002)), I have seen how my narrative has triggered a response in readers to start telling me their own family history.

It is ironic that at the same time as Boyd is championing the cradle to grave approach for novels, biographies are becoming less likely to follow that format. Novelist Tessa Hadley has suggested that we have started to accept that instead of a clear trajectory, life is episodic in nature.²⁴¹ Sometimes a slice of a life can be just as compelling, as in Claire Tomalin's biography about Dickens's relationship with his mistress Ellen Ternan, *The Invisible Woman* (1990); or a thematic approach can illuminate a well-known figure from a different angle (Paula Byrne's biography of Jane Austen discussed earlier). 'To start with the birth or even the death feels increasingly generic and stale', says Kathryn Hughes in her review of a new

²³⁸ William Boyd, 'The Whole Story', in *Guardian Review*, 29 September 2018, p. 36.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Quoted by Alex Clark, 'Great Nonfiction Expels the Fake and Trivial', *Observer*, 12 November 2017, p. 36.

biography of Nietzsche.²⁴² Or as Diana Middlebrook says, ‘The life of the subject begins with birth; but where does the *story* of the subject’s life begin?’²⁴³

The basic building block of any narrative whether it is fiction or nonfiction is time. You can speed it up or slow it down, moving from a bustling 12/8 time signature to a stately 2/4. Ian McEwan in *Saturday* (2005) filled 300 pages with a single day and while most classic biographies cover a whole life, in *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (2005) James Shapiro limited his to just one year. You can syncopate the rhythm or, in John Gardner’s phrase, ‘jazz it up’ by running it backwards (Sarah Waters in *The Night Watch* 2006), or restarting it again – and again (Kate Atkinson in *Life after Life* 2013), but one way or another events take place over time. To use Gardner’s term a story must have ‘profluence’ or an onward flow of events.²⁴⁴

There are however ways in which a fictional narrative works differently from a biography or history. Forster lays down as a condition for a plot to work that it needs a conclusion, adding tongue in cheek, ‘If it was not for death and marriage I do not know how the average novelist would conclude.’²⁴⁵ Novels tend to be complete in themselves, a device that works less well in the writing of history, which is as we have seen earlier, by its nature incomplete. Carolyn Steedman, for example, believes that, ‘historians do know and acknowledge that the story they tell isn’t over, doesn’t have an end’.²⁴⁶ The Turkish writer Elif Batuman agrees: ‘Endings are fake, because nothing in real life ever ends.’²⁴⁷

A novelist can take control, kill or marry off their hero, solve the murder, find the lost child. A writer of nonfiction often finds it harder to wrap up the loose ends into a neat and final package. The Victorian true crime narratives *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher* (2008) and *Mr Briggs’s Hat* (2011) have endings that are faithful to the historical record and therefore inconclusive in a way that a Sherlock Holmes story or a novel by Wilkie Collins is not. I had always planned to finish my book with the death of Queen Victoria, or perhaps the outbreak of World War I, by which time

²⁴² Kathryn Hughes, ‘Biography: The Love Affairs, Lost Trousers and Bullying Younger Sister that Shaped a Philosopher’s Thinking’, *Guardian Review*, 24 November 2018, p. 16.

²⁴³ Diane Wood Middlebrook, ‘The Role of the Narrator in Literary Biography’, *South Central Review*, 23 (2006), 5–18 (p. 14).

²⁴⁴ Gardner, pp. 53, 55.

²⁴⁵ Forster, p. 66.

²⁴⁶ Steedman, *Past Tenses*, p. 48.

²⁴⁷ Elif Batuman, ‘Diary’, *London Review of Books*, 7 June 2012, p. 39.

most of my main characters were dead. But their children would persist in continuing to do interesting things, like being buried in a landslide in Newfoundland. I had to impose what felt like an artificial conclusion in order to complete a narrative arc.

Another fundamental difference is that the novelist has complete control over their events while in history they tend to occur in inconvenient clumps. Michael Benton sees the main structural difference between a novel and biography as the ‘respective degrees of control over the order, duration, pace, juxtaposition, and consequent significance given to the narration of events.’²⁴⁸ There is, as Richard Holmes has said, a tension between facts and shape: they are rarely in harmony.²⁴⁹ I was faced with this problem when my narrative reached 1875: John Dupen was with his gunboat on his way to war in Malaya, while his brother Ernest was carrying a cargo of pilgrims to Mecca, and in Portishead the family governess was having a secret baby. I would not, in a novel, have chosen to have three such big stories happen simultaneously. But they did and I had to find a way of managing my chronology. My solution was to abandon chronological order in 1861 and follow each of my main characters separately from that point onwards, even if it meant returning to an earlier year to begin again. If my theme was the diaspora of a Cornish family, it was appropriate to give each of the scattered siblings their own story.

But more than that, I was drawn to John Gardner’s helpful distinction between the ‘event-sequence’ that lies at the heart of fiction and the ‘logical progress of an argument’ that defines nonfiction.²⁵⁰ Michael Benton, citing Janet Malcolm, fastens on the image of the biographer as lawyer, noting that they both ‘employ the arts of rhetoric to tell their stories and make their cases’.²⁵¹ As I reworked the first draft of my book I realised that I needed to make my historical argument more explicit. With such a large cast of characters, I was faced with the challenge of a shifting focus as I followed John to Malaya, George to India, Ernest to Arabia, and their sisters to Wiltshire, Dorset, and London. More than once I was asked (and asked myself)

²⁴⁸ Benton, 'Towards a Poetics of Literary Biography', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 45 (2011), 67–87 (p. 69).

²⁴⁹ Richard Holmes, *This Long Pursuit: Reflections of a Romantic Biographer* (London: William Collins, 2016), p. 6.

²⁵⁰ Gardner, p. 55. Although Norma Clarke has argued that, ‘Historical fiction almost always has an agenda of some kind – perhaps having an agenda is even intrinsic to the genre.’ (Norma Clarke, ‘Turning Facts into Fiction’, *TLS online*, 19 May 2017.)

²⁵¹ Benton, 'Towards a Poetics of Literary Biography', p. 79.

whether I should just pick one or two of them, but that seemed to me to negate the spirit of my project.

I wanted to show how life was transformed for the lower middle classes in the course of the nineteenth century by steam engines, education, and the empire, but to recognise also that these opportunities did not always result in an improved quality of life. Human nature and happenstance will always play a part in success or failure. John Dupen's structured career path as a naval engineer was very different from the random sequence of events that saw his brother George jump ship to become a coffee planter. But they both made steady progress, acquiring not only money but also social status, unlike their erratic brother Sharrock. The governess Ada Ashley should have married her respectable fiancé in a traditional happy ending not dissimilar to that of Agnes Grey, or my schoolmistress great-grandmother Hester Dupen. But for reasons that are now lost to us, it was not to be. These were real lives, in all their untidiness and ambiguity, and as such they can give us valuable insights into past experience.

CONCLUSION

In writing my book I have used real objects and photographs less as sources of factual information and more to access emotional truth. The act of touching them telescopes time and brings the past alive again in the present. The items are real, but not everything I say about them is a verified fact; I have allowed myself to speculate. This makes my personal relics different from museum objects. In the course of my research I discovered falsehoods in official records and facts in what seemed at first to be fanciful stories. I have come to believe that the truth we inherit combines the real and the fictive in ways that are unique to family history and set it apart from any other kind of historical undertaking.

When I started my project, I considered the option of writing a novel. I thought I did not have enough information about my characters to write a nonfiction book about them. But once I began my research into their times, the places where they lived, and the events that they lived through, I understood that I had more than enough material. The question then became: why would I make things up when what really happened was so interesting? I found myself in agreement with Stephen King: life has no plot but once you start digging, you find stories.

This is my family and the objects I describe are in my possession. I am involved in a way that a professional historian is not, and yet I have deliberately not written a memoir. Stephanie Merritt suggests that the best nonfiction writers ‘will broaden your knowledge of their subject with references that go beyond a purely personal take’.²⁵² Novelist Neel Mukherjee has been quoted as saying that, ‘the world is divided between two kinds of writers’: those who focus on themselves and those who focus on the outside world, or in other words ‘fiction as mirror versus fiction as window pane’.²⁵³ I would argue that the same applies to nonfiction.

My story of the Dupens attempts to recover some of the less well-known aspects of the Industrial Revolution and present an alternative to the great industrial novels of the nineteenth century, such as Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855) or Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854), with their legacy that still colours the lay person’s understanding. It also portrays an empire far removed from the splendour of the Raj, where isolated plantations were carved out by hard physical labour and minor wars ended in anti-

²⁵² Stephanie Merritt, ‘Desperate for Nuance, No Wonder We Are Turning to the Nonfiction Shelves’, *Observer Comment & Analysis*, 11 November 2018, p. 57.

²⁵³ Leo Benedictus, ‘Would American Psycho be Published Today?’, *Guardian Review*, 4 May 2019, pp. 35–7 (p. 36).

climax. But because I was not writing about famous people, who are interesting simply by virtue of their achievements and reputation, I needed to bring my characters to life, and the way to achieve that turned out to be by writing not a novel but fictional episodes. These are, however, window pane scenes. My aim when I open the curtains is to show the lamp-lit room behind the glass, not my own reflection.

I am aware that in switching between fact and fiction I am, like Binet, attempting to have my cake and eat it too. To extend the culinary metaphor, unlike Mantel's version of the historical novel, which she describes as combining fact and fiction like mayonnaise that can no longer be reconstituted as egg and oil, my cake is a Victoria(n) sandwich where you can see the fictional jam in the middle of the factual sponge.²⁵⁴ For the most part the boundary between fact and fiction remains clear but there will always be times when no one can tell for certain which is which, not even me. I do not think that is important. What matters is that the story rings true.

²⁵⁴ Hilary Mantel, 'The Dead Have Something to Tell Us', *Guardian Review*, 3 June 2017, pp. 2–3 (p. 3).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works cited

- Ago, Renata, 'Denaturalizing Things', in *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800*, ed. by Paula Findlen (Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon, 2013), pp. 363–8
- Atkinson, Juliette, 'Victorian Biography and the Representation of "Obscure" Lives' (doctoral thesis University of London, 2008)
- Atwood, Margaret, *Alias Grace* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996)
- , 'In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction', *The American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), 1503–16
- , *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (London: Virago, 2003)
- Auslander, Leora, 'Beyond Words', *American Historical Review*, 110 (2005), 1015–45
- Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993)
- Batuman, Elif, 'Diary', *London Review of Books*, 7 June 2012, pp. 38–9
- Beard, Mary, 'I Refuse Shows that Feature B-list Actors in Costume', *Guardian*, 23 October 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/oct/23/refuse-tv-roles-re-enactment-mary-beard-excruciating>> [accessed 12 March 2019]
- Begiato, Joanne, 'Selfhood and "Nostalgia": Sensory and Material Memories of the Childhood House in Late Georgian Britain', *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 42, 2 (2019), 229–46
- Benedictus, Leo, 'Would American Psycho be Published Today?', *Guardian Review*, 4 May 2019, pp. 35–7
- Bentley, Michael, *Modern Historiography: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999)
- Benton, Michael, 'The Aesthetics of Biography – and What It Teaches', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 49 (2015), 1–19
- , 'Towards a Poetics of Literary Biography', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 45 (2011), 67–87
- Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008)
- Booth, Alison, 'Houses and Things: Literary House Museums as Collective Biography' in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 231–46
- Boyd, William, 'The Whole Story', *Guardian Review*, 29 September 2018, p. 36
- 'Bristol and Cornwall', *Western Daily Press, Bristol, and Bristol Mirror*, 16 January 1933, p. 7
- Busby, Siân, *The Cruel Mother: A Family Ghost Laid to Rest* (London: Short, 2004)
- Byrne, Paula, *The Real Jane Austen: A Life in Small Things* (London: HarperPress, 2013)
- Candlin, Fiona, and Raiford Guins, 'Introducing Objects' in *The Object Reader*, ed. by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1–18
- Carter, Philip, *Constructing Lives*, ODNB discussion panel, OCLW (29 November 2016)
- Clark, Alex, 'Great Nonfiction Expels the Fake and Trivial', *Observer*, 12 November 2017, p. 36
- , 'Keeping It Real', *Guardian Review*, 23 June 2018, pp. 8–11
- Clarke, Norma, 'Family Matters', *History Workshop Journal*, 85 (2018), 315–21
- , 'Turning Facts into Fiction', *TLS online*, 19 May 2017
- Cline, Sally, and Carole Angier, *Life Writing: A Writers' and Artists' Companion: Writing Biography, Autobiography and Memoir* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)
- Cohen, Deborah, *Family Secrets: Living with Shame from the Victorians to the Present Day* (London: Viking, 2013)

- Coleman, Carter, Donald Faulkner, and William Kennedy, 'The Art of Fiction No.158: Shelby Foote', *The Paris Review*, summer 1999
 <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/931/shelby-foote-the-art-of-fiction-no-158-shelby-foote>> [accessed 19 March 2019]
- Cowman, Krista, 'Collective Biography' in *Research Methods for History*, ed. by Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 83–100
- Craig, Amanda, 'Not I?', *The Author*, spring 2017, pp. 3–5
- Crane, Susan A., *Museums and Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000)
- , 'Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory', *The American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 1372–85
- Darwin, Emma, 'Historical Fiction and the Perils of Family Story', *History Workshop podcast*, 12 February 2019
- Davenne, Christine, *Cabinets of Wonder* (New York; London: Abrams, 2012)
- de Groot, Jerome, *The Historical Novel* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010)
- de Jong, Steffi, 'Who is History? The Use of Autobiographical Accounts in History Museums' in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 295–308
- de Waal, Edmund, *Breathturn: Families, Objects, Stories*, talk, St Peter's College, Oxford, UK (11 February 2019)
- , *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2010)
- Demos, John, 'Afterword: Notes from, and about, the History/Fiction Borderland', *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 329–35
- Downes, Stephanie, Sally Holloway, and Sarah Randles, *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions through History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)
- Drabble, Margaret, *The Pattern in the Carpet: A Personal History with Jigsaws* (London: Atlantic, 2009)
- Dyer, Geoff, 'Based on a True Story', *Observer New Review*, 6 December 2015, pp. 8–13
- Edemariam, Aida, 'A Family Affair', *Guardian Review*, 10 February 2018, p. 36
- Edwards, Elizabeth, 'Photographs as Objects of Memory' in *The Object Reader*, ed. by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 331–42
- Ellender, Lulah, *Elisabeth's Lists: A Family Story* (London: Granta, 2018)
- Evans, Tanya, 'How Do Family Historians Work with Memory?', *History Workshop Online* 6 February 2019 <<http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/how-do-family-historians-work-with-memory/>> [accessed 12 March 2019]
- , 'Secrets and Lies: The Radical Potential of Family History', *History Workshop Journal*, 71 (2011), 49–73
- Forster, E. M., *Aspects of the Novel*, (London: Arnold, 1949)
- Gardner, John, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985)
- Gibbons, Alison, 'Postmodernism is Dead. What Comes Next?', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 June 2017 <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/>> [accessed 14 March 2019]
- Gloyn, Liz, and others, 'The Ties That Bind', *Journal of Family History*, 43 (2018), 157–76
- Goodman, James, 'Fictional History', *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 237–53
- Goodman, Ruth, *How to Be a Victorian* (London: Penguin, 2014)
- Grasby, James, *Lives of Houses*, Colloquium, OCLW (25 May 2017)
- Gregory, Philippa, 'Born a Writer: Forged as a Historian', *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), 237–42
- Harvey, Karen, *History and Material Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009)

- Hill, Kate, 'Introduction: Museums and Biographies – Telling Stories about People, Things and Relationships' in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 1–10
- Hirsch, Marianne, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997)
- Holmes, Richard, *Richard Ellman lecture*, OCLW (9 May 2017)
- , *This Long Pursuit: Reflections of a Romantic Biographer* (William Collins: London, 2016)
- Hughes, Kathryn, 'Biography: The Love Affairs, Lost Trousers and Bullying Younger Sister that Shaped a Philosopher's Thinking', *Guardian Review*, 24 November 2018, p. 16
- , *The Victorian Governess* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993)
- Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York; London: Routledge, 1988)
- , *The Politics of Postmodernism* 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Jasanoff, Maya, *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World* (London: William Collins, 2017)
- Jolly, Alice, talk, OCLW (1 November 2017)
- Kahneman, Daniel, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (London: Penguin, 2012)
- Kaufmann, Miranda, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: Oneworld, 2017)
- King, Stephen, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (London: New English Library, 2001)
- Kramer, Anne-Marie, 'Mediatizing Memory: History, Affect and Identity in *Who Do You Think You Are?*', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14 (2011), 428–45
- Kuhn, Annette, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, new edn (London: Verso, 2002)
- Lackey, Michael, 'Locating and Defining the Bio in Biofiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 31 (2016), 3–10
- Lamarque, Peter, 'Fiction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. by Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 377–91
- Lee, Hermione, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- , *Body Parts: Essays in Life-writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005)
- , introducing *Richard Ellman lecture*, OCLW (9 May 2017)
- , introduction, University of Oxford Faculty of English Life Writing Day, Weston Library, Oxford, UK (9 February 2019)
- , 'The Great Pretender', *Guardian Review*, 20 March 2004
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/mar/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview17>>
 [accessed 31 October 2016]
- Leith, Sam, 'Why We Need Difficult Books', *Guardian Review*, 10 November 2018
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/10/anna-burns-milkman-difficult-novel>> [accessed 12 March 2019]
- Lepore, Jill, 'Historians Who Love Too Much', *Journal of American History* 88 (1) (2001), 129–44
- Light, Alison, *Common People: The History of an English Family* (London: Fig Tree, Penguin Group, 2014)
- , 'Family History Is No Poor Relation', *Guardian*, 11 October 2014, p. 21
- Lively, Penelope, *A House Unlocked* (London: Penguin, 2002)
- Livingston, Paisley, 'Literature' in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. by Jerrold Levinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 536–54
- Lott, Tim, 'Why Should We Subsidise Writers Who Have Lost the Plot?', *Guardian*, 2 January 2018, p. 27

- Lowenthal, David, *The Past is a Foreign Country – Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Malcolm, Janet, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (London: Granta, 2012)
- Mantel, Hilary, 'Adaptation', *Reith Lectures* 2017, BBC Radio 4, 15 July 2017
- , 'Can these Bones Live?', *Reith Lectures* 2017, BBC Radio 4, 8 July 2017
- , 'The Day Is for the Living', *Reith Lectures* 2017, BBC Radio 4, 17 June 2017
- , 'The Dead Have Something to Tell Us', *Guardian Review*, 3 June 2017, pp. 2–3
- Marcus, Laura, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)
- Margaronis, Maria, 'The Anxiety of Authenticity: Writing Historical Fiction at the End of the Twentieth Century', *History Workshop Journal*, 65 (2008), 138–60
- Merritt, Stephanie, 'Desperate for Nuance, No Wonder We Are Turning to the Nonfiction Shelves', *Observer Comment & Analysis*, 11 November 2018, p. 57
- Middlebrook, Diane Wood, 'The Role of the Narrator in Literary Biography', *South Central Review*, 23 (2006), 5–18
- Miller, Daniel, *The Comfort of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008)
- , *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009)
- Nappi, Carla, 'Surface Tension: Objectifying Ginseng in Chinese Early Modernity', in *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800*, ed. by Paula Findlen (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 31–52
- Olusoga, David, 'First Person', *Observer*, 31 December 2017, p. 25
- Open Book*, BBC Radio 4, 13 March 2016
- Pamuk, Orhan, 'Exhibition at the Pictures', *Guardian*, 23 January 2016
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/exhibition-at-the-pictures-orhan-pamuks-museum-of-innocence-on-screen>> [accessed 12 March 2019]
- , 'A Modest Manifesto for Museums' <<http://en.masumiyetmuzesi.org/page/a-modest-manifesto-for-museums>> [accessed 12 March 2019]
- Parris, S. J., 'Don't Tell Me What Happens', *The Author*, Autumn 2017, p. 97
- Pearson, Ann, 'Remembrance ... Is Nothing Other than a Quotation: The Intertextual Fictions of W. G. Sebald', *Comparative Literature*, 60 (2008), 261–78
- Plampin, Matthew, 'Historia Interviews: Halle Rubenhold', *Historia*, 1 April 2019
 <<http://www.historiamag.com/historia-interview-hallie-rubenhold/>> [accessed 14 August 2019]
- Poole, Steven, 'Word of the Week: Truth', *Guardian Review*, 25 August 2018, p. 4
- Poovey, Mary, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998)
- Riello, Giorgio, "'Things Seen and Unseen": The Material Culture of Early Modern Inventories and their Representation of Domestic Interiors', in *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800*, ed. by Paula Findlen (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 125–50
- Sansom, C. J., *Tombland* (London: Mantle, 2018)
- Schabert, Ina, 'Fictional Biography, Factual Biography, and Their Contaminations', *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 5 (1982), 1–16
- Scurr, Ruth, talk, OCLW (10 May 2016)
- Shields, David, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Hamish Hamilton (an imprint of Penguin Books), 2010)
- Slotkin, Richard, 'Fiction for the Purposes of History', *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 221–36
- Smiley, Jane, 'History v Historical Fiction', *Guardian Review*, 17 October 2015
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/oct/15/jane-smiley-niall-ferguson-history-versus-historical-fiction>> [accessed 19 March 2019]

- Sontag, Susan, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 2008)
- Southgate, Beverley C., *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2009)
- Start the Week*, BBC Radio 4, 12 October 2015
- Steedman, Carolyn, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001)
- , *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992)
- Strout, Cushing, 'Border Crossings: History, Fiction, and Dead Certainties', *History & Theory*, 31 (1992), 153
- Sturges, Paul, 'Collective Biography in the 1980s', *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 6 (1983), 316–32
- Tanizaki, Jun'ichirō, Thomas J. Harper, and Edward G. Seidensticker, *In Praise of Shadows* (London: Cape, 1991)
- 'The Guardian View on the Value of Fiction: Read Lies and Learn the Truth', *Guardian Editorial*, 28 August 2015
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/28/the-guardian-view-on-the-value-of-fiction-read-lies-and-learn-the-truth>> [accessed 26 March 2019]
- 'The Hand of a Mermaid?', Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, UK, Narratives,
 <<http://www.mhs.ox.ac.uk/collections/imu-search-page/narratives/?irn=14986&index=0>> [accessed 12 March 2019]
- Turkle, Sherry, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT, 2007)
- Walker, Susannah, *The Life of Stuff: A Memoir about the Mess We Leave Behind* (London: Doubleday, 2018)
- White, Hayden, 'Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality', *Rethinking History*, 9 (2005), 147–57
- , 'Introduction to Metahistory' in *Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents*, ed. by Dennis Walder, 2nd rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Open University, 2004) pp. 444–9
- , *The Practical Past* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014)
- Whitelaw, Anne, 'Women, Museums and the Problem of Biography' in *Museums and Biographies: Stories, Objects, Identities*, ed. by Kate Hill (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp. 75–86
- Who Do You Think You Are?* Series 12, episode 7, BBC1, 24 September 2015
- Wilson, Frances, 'What the Blood Remembers', *Guardian Review*, 9 September 2000
 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/sep/09/biography>> [accessed 14 March 2019]
- Wood, James, 'Broken Record', *The New Yorker*, 21 May 2012
 <<http://www.newyorker.com:magazine:2012:05:21:broken-record>> [accessed 12 March 2019]
- Woodham, Anna, and others, 'We Are What We Keep: The "Family Archive", Identity and Public/Private Heritage', *Heritage & Society* (2019), 1–18
- Woolf, Virginia. *Granite and Rainbow: Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1958)
- Zemon Davis, Natalie, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1985)

Other works referred to

Dates of first publication where relevant are given in brackets.

- Ackroyd, Peter, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990)
- Atkinson, Kate, *Life after Life* (London: Doubleday, 2013)
- Barnes, Julian, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (London: Picador in association with Jonathan Cape, 1990)
- , *The Noise of Time* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016)
- Benson, Richard, *The Farm: The Story of One Family and the English Countryside* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005)
- , *The Valley: A Hundred Years in the Life of a Family* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)
- Binet, Laurent, *HHhH* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 2009)
- Bolt, Robert, *A Man for All Seasons: A Play in Two Acts* (London: S. French, 1960)
- Booker, Christopher, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum, 2004)
- Boyd, William, *Any Human Heart* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2002)
- , *Nat Tate: An American Artist 1928–1960* (Cambridge: 21 Publishing, 1998)
- Butchart, Amber, *A Stitch in Time*, BBC 4, 2018
- Byatt, A. S., *Possession: A Romance* (London: Vintage, 1991)
- Calvino, Italo, *I Nostri Antenati: Il Visconte Dimezzato; Il Barone Rampante; Il Cavaliere Inesistente* (Torino: Einaudi, 1960)
- Capote, Truman, *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and its Consequences* (London: H. Hamilton, 1966)
- Carter, Angela, *Nights at the Circus* (London: Chatto & Windus; Hogarth Press, 1984)
- Colquhoun, Kate, *Mr Briggs' Hat: A Sensational Account of Britain's First Railway Murder* (London: Little, Brown, 2011)
- Darwin, Emma, *This is Not a Book about Charles Darwin* (Newbury, Berks: Holland House Books, 2019)
- Davis, Lindsey, *The Silver Pigs* (London: Macmillan, 1996)
- de Bernières, Louis, *Birds without Wings* (Secker & Warburg: London, 2004)
- Defoe, Daniel, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, ed. by Thomas Keymer and James Kelly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (1719))
- Doctorow, E. L., *Ragtime* (New York: Random House, 1975)
- Dunnett, Dorothy, *The Game of Kings* (London: Century, 1961)
- Edemarian, Aida, *The Wife's Tale: A Personal History* (Fourth Estate: London, 2018)
- Galsworthy, John, *The Forsyte Saga* (London: William Heinemann, 1922)
- Gosse, Edmund, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974 (1907))
- Gregory, Philippa, *The Other Boleyn Girl* (London: HarperCollins, 2001)
- Harman, Claire, *Charlotte Brontë: A Life* (London: Viking, 2015)
- A History of the World in 100 Objects*, BBC Radio 4, 2010
- Holroyd, Michael, *Basil Street Blues* (London: Little, Brown, 1999)
- A House through Time*, BBC2, Series 1 October 2018, Series 2 April 2019
- The Innocence of Memories*, dir. by Grant Gee (British Film Institute, Irish Film Board, 2016)
- Johnson, B. S., *The Unfortunates* (London: Panther in association with Secker & Warburg, 1969)
- Kapuściński, Ryszard, *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat* (London: Quartet, 1983)
- Laing, Olivia, *Crudo* (London: Picador, 2018)
- Levi, Primo, *Se questo è un uomo* (Einaudi: Torino, 2014 (1947))

- Lodge, David, *Author, Author* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2004)
- Lukács, György, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1962 (1937))
- MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* (Allen Lane: London, 2018)
- Mantel, Hilary, *Bring up the Bodies* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012)
- , *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009)
- Manzoni, Alessandro, *I Promessi Sposi: Storia milanese del secolo XVII* (Milano: A. Mondadori: 1966 (1827))
- McEwan, Ian, *Saturday* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005)
- Myerson, Julie, *Home: The Story of Everyone Who Ever Lived in our House* (London: Flamingo, 2004)
- Nicolson, Harold, *Some People* (London: Constable, 1927)
- Pamuk, Orhan, *The Museum of Innocence*, trans. by Maureen Freely (London: Faber, 2010)
- Patience: After Sebald*, dir. by Grant Gee (Artevents, 2012)
- Propp, V., and others, *Morphologie du Conte* (Paris: Seuil, 1970 (1st Russian edn 1928))
- Sage, Lorna, *Bad Blood* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000)
- Schama, Simon, *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations* (London: Granta, 1992)
- Scurr, Ruth, *John Aubrey: My Own Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015)
- Sebald, W. G., *Austerlitz* (London: Penguin, 2002)
- , *The Rings of Saturn* (London: Vintage, 2002)
- Shapiro, James, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)
- Smiley, Jane, *Golden Age* (first volume of *The Last Hundred Years* trilogy) (London: Mantle, 2015)
- Summerscale, Kate, *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher; or, The Murder at Road Hill House* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008)
- Swift, Graham, *Waterland* (London: Picador, 2002)
- Tennant, Emma, *Felony: The Private History of the Aspern Papers, a Novel* (London: Vintage, 2003)
- Tomalin, Claire, *The Invisible Woman: The Story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens* (London: Viking, 1990)
- , *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self* (London: Viking, 2002)
- Tóibín, Colm, *The Master* (London: Picador, 2004)
- Uglow, Jennifer S., *In These Times: Living in Britain through Napoleon's Wars, 1793–1815* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014)
- Vigan, Delphine de, *D'après une histoire vraie* (Paris: JC Lattès, 2015)
- Waters, Sarah, *The Night Watch* (London: Virago, 2006)
- Woolf, Virginia, *Orlando: A Biography*, ed. by Brenda Lyons and Sandra M. Gilbert (London: Penguin, 2005 (1928))