American Material from
the Tarleton Papers

in Liverpool Record Office

Introduction to the
microfilm collection
by
P.D. Richardson
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1974
1 PROVENANCE

The Tarleton Papers held at the Liverpool Record Office were presented to the record office in 1949 by Mrs. Henrietta Charlotte Tarleton who apparently inherited them from her husband, Captain Alfred Henry Tarleton, the only son of Admiral Sir John Walter Tarleton, KCB. Sir John was the grandson of Thomas Tarleton whose annual profit and loss accounts of Messrs Tarleton & Backhouse, 1786 to 1810, are included in the microfilm collection.1

The collection had been handed down through the male heirs of the family to Captain Tarleton who had no male issue though he had three daughters. This tradition of bequeathing the papers is perhaps reflected by the fact that the collection has grown in size over a period spanning roughly two hundred years as each generation added new items to the existing body of material. Not all of the Liverpool collection is included on the present film, nor in fact are all of the Tarleton family papers deposited at Liverpool. Jane Tarleton's correspondence is available on microfilm in the Local History Department of the Liverpool Central Library. In addition, documents relating to the former family property at Breakspear's, Uxbridge in Middlesex, which Captain Tarleton inherited in the late nineteenth century, have been deposited at the Middlesex Record Office. However, this material has little immediate relevance to the microfilmed papers which are concerned primarily with the family's trading interests at Liverpool in the eighteenth century.

1 See the family tree in George Ormerod, The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester, 2nd ed., 3 vols., London, 1882) II, pp.677-8
Liverpool's overseas trade expanded remarkably in the eighteenth century and the Tarleton family of Liverpool contributed to and benefited substantially from this expansion. The microfilmed papers relate primarily to the careers of John Tarleton IV and his sons, who belonged to the junior or Bolesworth branch of the Tarleton family, after Bolesworth Castle in Cheshire which was purchased about 1790 by Thomas, the eldest son of John IV. This residence remained in the family's hands only until 1826 when it was sold. At the time that Bolesworth was first purchased, however, the family already possessed considerable property in north-west England and the West Indies.

The Tarletons came originally from Fazakerley and Aigburth, near Liverpool. Aigburth Hall was the family seat in the early seventeenth century, though how it came into the family's possession is uncertain. In the late seventeenth century, failing a male heir in the senior branch of the family, Aigburth Hall passed into the Harrington family as a result of the marriage of Dorothy Tarleton to John Harrington of Huyton Hey. During the next century the ownership of this estate changed several times until it was ultimately repurchased on the eve of the War of American Independence by John Tarleton IV and his son, Thomas, members of a junior family line which had settled at Liverpool during the seventeenth century.

This junior line which is our primary concern derived from John Tarleton I who was the second or possibly third son of Edward Tarleton I. Edward died at Aigburth in 1626 and, significantly perhaps, John was not mentioned in his father's will. John died shortly after his father and was apparently survived by only one son, Edward II, born in 1628. Edward had certainly been residing at Liverpool for some years before his death in 1690, by which time the family had achieved a position of some importance within the local merchant community. Edward had in fact been mayor of Liverpool in 1682 - the first of several of his line to achieve this distinction - and as well as being a shipowner was at the time of his death the owner of more than one residence in the town, the most notable of which was Church Stile house in the Chapel Yard, a fish house in Chapel Street and a rope house on the Heath.

Edward Tarleton II might be properly regarded, therefore, as the founder of the Bolesworth Tarletons' fortunes. And in the first half of the eighteenth century his children seem to have at least consolidated the family's position. Edward's eldest son, John II, became a physician of repute at Lancaster and later at Fenwick Street, Liverpool, while his second son, Edward III, also became mayor, in 1712. By careful marriage, the family was widening its connections at this time within the local trading community. In 1705, Anne, daughter of John II, married Ralph Williamson and their sons, John and William, became very prominent slave traders and West India merchants during the mid-eighteenth century. Through marriage the family was also developing closer connections in these years with the Clayton and Houghton families, both of which had strong Atlantic trading interests.

Trade, as one might expect, was the basis of the Tarleton fortune in the eighteenth century. This was a period of rapid expansion of Liverpool's overseas trade in general. This fact is reflected partly in the rise of dock dues paid at Liverpool and partly (and more especially) in the number and tonnage of vessels clearing overseas from the port. As indicated in Table I, the tonnages of vessels clearing overseas from Liverpool multiplied approximately twentyfold during the eighteenth century and grew especially rapidly in the second half of the period.
In fact such was the rate of growth of the port's trade that in 1793 it was felt necessary to order a more strict enforcement of by-laws prohibiting the stacking of timber on piers and quays, a habit which threatened to disrupt business and thereby undermine Liverpool's reputation for turning ships round quickly, 'to which so much of its growing consequence may justly be attributed'.

Fundamental to Liverpool's general prosperity – and more specifically the rising wealth of the Tarletons – were the Atlantic trades. Traditionally the African slave trade has been regarded as the foundation of Liverpool's rise in this period; Ramsay Muir wrote that 'beyond a doubt it was the slave trade which raised Liverpool from a struggling port to be one of the richest and most prosperous trading centres in the world'. More recent opinion has tended to qualify this belief. It has been argued that this particular trade was less lucrative than is sometimes pictured – though this need not deny its importance to Liverpool merchants – and at the same time that the port was developing other, possibly equally valuable, trades in other directions. The most notable of these was the highly localised triangular trade founded on the coal of south-west Lancashire and the salt of mid-Cheshire. This trade in particular also bore witness to the expanding hinterland of the port in this century, spreading itself through Lancashire, Cheshire, Staffordshire and the West Riding and impinging increasingly on Bristol's commerce with the West Midlands.

Nevertheless, the Atlantic trades still remained very important to Liverpool's prosperity in this period. Indeed the expansion of the port's hinterland was probably as much a consequence as a cause of Liverpool's growing prominence in these trades. For instance, assuming that vessels trading to Africa from Liverpool were owned largely by residents and traders of the town, it would appear that during the last sixty or seventy years of the eighteenth century between fifteen per cent and thirty per cent of Liverpool-owned shipping tonnage was employed in this trade alone. The proportion engaged in the African trade seems to have reached a peak in the third quarter of the century, as is shown in Table II.

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11 See 920 TAR 4/63.
15 This assumption seems justified in view of the evidence of ownership of African vessels presented in 'Short description of Liverpool', pp.113-15 and BPP, 1792, XXXV. Lists of owners given in these sources can be checked against contemporary Liverpool directories, notably that of John Gore.
TABLE II

CLEARANCES OF VESSELS FROM LIVERPOOL TO AFRICA, 1730-1791,
COMPARSED WITH TOTAL CLEARANCES OF VESSELS BELONGING TO LIVERPOOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>To Africa</th>
<th>All vessels owned at Liverpool</th>
<th>African vessels as percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nos.</td>
<td>Nos. Tonnages</td>
<td>Nos. Tonnages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,111</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1737</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2,756</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1744</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2,698</td>
<td>188*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751-55 av.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5,579</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1756-62 av.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6,222</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1763-75 av.</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>9,088</td>
<td>305**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776-82 av.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4,603</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1783-91 av.</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>13,701</td>
<td>505***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*cf 225 vessels, LRO, 942 HOL X, 11
**figures averaged 1763 to 1771 only
***figures averaged to 1788 to 1791 only
Sources: LRO, 942, HOL X, 361, 363, 365; X IX, 69, 71

Furthermore, Liverpool seems to have employed at least as much tonnage during these years in the direct trade with the West Indian islands. Consequently, it may have been that from about 1730 onwards Liverpudlians found employment for over half of their shipping in the African and West Indian trades and even this figure might well be on the low side in view of the longer voyage times of vessels engaged in such trades compared to the Irish or European trades.

During the eighteenth century successive generations of Liverpool Tarletons participated in the African and West Indian trades. Around 1720, for example, Thomas Tarleton I in company with others fitted out several ventures for Africa. And, indeed, along with his brother, John III, he appears to have commanded voyages to Africa himself at this time. However, with the premature deaths of both Thomas and John, the family's trading activities possibly declined temporarily during the 1730s and early 1740s, reviving as Thomas's son, John IV, reached maturity. John's computations of his affairs have survived to give a firmer picture of his trading interests in the third quarter of the century and in fact these computations are perhaps the most revealing part of the whole collection. As was the case with probably the great majority of outport merchants in the eighteenth century John was concerned in several areas of overseas trade at the same time. In his computations he is revealed as trading at times to Ireland, Rotterdam and Hamburg and on occasion he even seems to have shared in ventures to the Greenland whale fishery. However, John traded most regularly with Africa and the West Indies. The years covered by his accounts were ones of relative prosperity for British sugar planters, the period from 1763 to 1776 having been described by one authority as 'the silver age of sugar'. The profitability of sugar production at this time encouraged planters in old-established colonies like Jamaica, or colonies gained in war like Dominica and Grenada to rapidly expand output of sugar. In turn this expansion created pressing demands in the islands for labour and provisions of many kinds, thereby giving fresh impetus to both slave trade and West Indian trade alike.

The third quarter of the century was, therefore, a promising era for African and West Indian merchants and John Tarleton took apparently full advantage of the situation. He became manager and part-owner of several slaving vessels, including the Swan and the Tarleton in the 1750s and the John in the 1760s; these vessels...
discharged their cargoes of slaves at Jamaica in the main.\(^{24}\) At this time he also held shares in West Indian traders. During the 1750s he appears to have traded largely with the Leeward Islands, notably Antigua,\(^{25}\) after the Seven Years War he expanded his trading activities to Jamaica and the Ceded Islands.

Within three years of the cessation of Grenada by France to Britain in 1763 John owned a house and store at St. George's, Grenada, presumably to facilitate business, and before his death in 1773 he had become owner of Belfield Estate at Dominica. This eagerness to exploit new opportunities for trade was reflected further in his willingness to trade to foreign colonies in the Caribbean if the chance should present itself. By some accounts, Liverpool merchants were said to be foremost in trying to promote commerce with the Spanish and to a lesser degree the French colonies in this area throughout the eighteenth century\(^{26}\) and John Tarleton proved typical of his kind in seizing the chance to trade with foreign colonies such as Cuba and Martinique during the Seven Years War.\(^{27}\)

Between 1748 and 1773 John Tarleton's computed fortune apparently grew from about £6,000 to around £80,000. In view of his participation in Irish and European trades as well as his involvement in privateering ventures during the Seven Years War, it is difficult to estimate how much John's African and West Indian voyages contributed to the growth of this fortune. It is quite clear, however, that through the successes of John Tarleton IV the Tarletons emerged as one of the most prominent Liverpool merchant families in the second half of the eighteenth century. John conducted his business from Water Street, said to be 'a favourite place of residence for the higher class of Liverpool merchants'.\(^{28}\) In 1764 he succeeded to the mayoralty and three years later was asked to stand as a parliamentary candidate for the Liverpool constituency, his candidacy being underwritten by the most prominent West Indian and African merchants of the day. However, while admitting that he had 'a better Estate than the law requires', in order to qualify as a parliamentary candidate, he eventually declined this and another request to stand at Newcastle-under-Lyme.\(^{29}\) Nevertheless in itself the request that he should stand reflected John's rising social status in the town. This was also reflected in other ways. He sent three of his sons to Oxford colleges to study law and in the ten or so years before his death the composition of his fortune changed markedly. During the 1750s his wealth lay primarily in ships and goods but the purchase of a sugar house in Castle Street towards the end of the decade signified the beginning of a new era, an era of purchasing estates, both at home and abroad. In the West Indies he came to own estates at Carriacou and Dominica as well as stores and houses at Grenada and Grand Anse, Carriacou. In England he added to his houses in Liverpool, bought Fairfield Estate near Buxton and tenements at Algburth near Liverpool, and finally secured part of Algburth Hall Estate – the old family house – about 1770. Thus at the time of his death in 1773 a significant proportion – apparently about one-third – of John's computed fortune lay in real estate, most of which had been acquired after 1763.

John Tarleton IV was survived by five sons and three of his sons continued in business at Liverpool. William, the fourth son, died at an early age in 1778 while Banastre, the second son, does not seem to have shown much inclination for business. After a short uninspiring career at Oxford and the Inner Temple, Banastre eventually made his reputation as a cavalry officer during the War of American Independence. Returning to England, he soon gravitated towards the coterie round the Prince of Wales and, having failed in 1784, he successfully contested the parliamentary election at Liverpool in 1790. He retained this seat in 1796 against his brother, John, who stood as a Tory. Yet though Banastre had divorced himself from the family business, he continued nonetheless to serve closely both his family's and his constituents' interests particularly during the 1790s when he emerged as an outspoken critic of William Pitt's and William Wilberforce's plans to abolish the slave trade.\(^{30}\)

Thomas, the eldest son, inherited most of his father's property and became a noted sugar refiner; his brothers, John and Clayton, appear to have made good profitable marriages. John, for instance, married an heiress, Isabella Collingwood of Unthank, Northumberland, and apart from a dowry of £2000 there was settled on the marriage the reversion of her father's estate in Northumberland, worth £1600 per annum.\(^{31}\) At some point in the

\(^{24}\) Based on the Jamaican Naval Office Shipping Lists for these years (also available from Microform Academic Publishers on microfilm). The accounts of the sale of a cargo by the Swan at Jamaica in 1756 can be found in LRO, Case & Southworth Records, 380 MD 33, pp.255-7 et seq.
\(^{25}\) 'Short description of Liverpool', pp.115-17.
\(^{26}\) [James Wallace], A general and descriptive history of the ancient and present state of the town of Liverpool (Liverpool, 1795), pp.214-15; Muir, History of Liverpool, pp.182-4.
\(^{27}\) Between 1759 and 1763 when Guadeloupe fell into English hands, Liverpool merchants seized on the opportunity to develop an extensive trade in slaves with the island. See Richard Pares, War and trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936; Cass, 1963), pp.188-9.
\(^{29}\) See 920 TAR 3, especially pieces 6 and 11. The quotation is from 920 TAR 3/8.
\(^{30}\) Stewart-Brown, 'Tarleton', p.63; Robert D. Bass, The green dragoon: the lives of Banastre Tarleton and Mary Robinson (Alvin Redman, 1958) pp.316, 358. Cf Averil Mackenzie-Greve, The last years of the English slave trade: Liverpool 1750-1807 (Putnam, 1941; Cass, 1968), p.210 He [Banastre Tarleton] was totally unfitted to represent Liverpool, entirely ignorant as he was of mercantile matters ... he had neither the ability to further Liverpool's interest, nor even the doubtful merit of being able convincingly to defend the slave trade'.
\(^{31}\) See 920 TAR 4/10.
late 1780s and early 1790s all three brothers were in partnership with Daniel Backhouse in the African and West Indian trading firm of Tarleton & Backhouse. Clayton, the last to join the firm, was also the first to leave in 1791, perhaps in order to join with William Rigg in a new firm, Tarleton & Rigg; this partnership was short-lived, evidently dissolving when Clayton became mayor in November 1792. Just prior to this John had probably quitted the older firm of Tarleton & Backhouse after ‘a very violent quarrel’ with Daniel Backhouse over the renewal terms of the partnership. In spite of such fundamental changes Thomas apparently continued in partnership with Daniel Backhouse and may indeed have only wound up his financial commitments in the firm in 1805.

Whether in partnership or not all three sons continued to follow lines of commerce similar to their father's. Much of Clayton's correspondence in the 1790s, for instance, is concerned with the prospects in England for West Indian produce, notably cotton. At the same time it provides evidence of the family's continuing participation in the African slave trade, with both the British West Indian islands and the foreign, especially French, colonies. Particularly interesting in this respect is a letter in 1788 to Clayton from John, one of the principal spokesmen on behalf of Liverpool before the committee investigating the African trade. John's letter related an interview with Pitt, during which he had tried without apparent success to defend the trade; Liverpool merchants, he felt, would have little chance of maintaining the trade 'on its present footing except we can prove that it is not carried on with that shocking inhumanity that is imagined by all ranks of mankind out of doors.' At this time John was defending not only Liverpool's interests but those of his own family. In March 1790, investment at Liverpool in ships and their outfits and cargo for Africa totalled over £1 million, of which the firm of Tarleton & Backhouse accounted for £85,000. In terms of investment Tarleton & Backhouse was the third largest firm engaged in the Liverpool slave trade at this date.

The very fact that John Tarleton represented the interests of Liverpool merchants in 1788 on the great issue of the African trade signifies perhaps as much as anything else the powerful social and political position of the Tarletons within the late eighteenth-century Liverpool mercantile community. The stature of the family was founded not only on its trading concerns but also on its growing property interests in and around Liverpool and the north-west of England as well as in the West Indies. In particular Thomas, who had inherited all of his father's estates, added considerably to his property interests during the 1790s and 1800s. Possibly Thomas may have been conforming to the not unusual pattern of transferring during the third or fourth generation capital earned from trade and associated business enterprises into somewhat more secure and prestigious land and property holdings. In view of the shadow hanging over the slave trade and the generally uncertain international outlook at this time, the incentive to place capital in more secure outlets than trade was probably greater than normal in this period; this was possibly indicated by Thomas' holdings of three per cent consols during the last decade or so of the century.

By virtue of apparently successful investments in overseas trade, notably the Atlantic trades, the Tarletons became a very prominent family in the eighteenth-century Liverpool mercantile and business community. On the whole it appears that this position was achieved from small beginnings, though the family's status in the late seventeenth century should not be under-estimated. It is also true, however, that the family only figured greatly in Liverpool's merchant community in the century and a half after the Restoration, for very quickly during the nineteenth century the Tarletons seem to have extinguished their business connections with the port. Paradoxically this may have been attributable in part to their business successes in the earlier period. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the investment and occupation patterns of members of the family began to change significantly, more in keeping with their rising wealth and social position. Relatively more capital was invested in land and property and beginning it seems with Banastre the family increasingly entered the professions, particularly the armed forces and government, both at home and abroad. Thus in the nineteenth century the Tarletons were typically landed gentry, soldiers or government administrators rather than merchants.

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32 This interpretation is suggested by lists of owners of slaving vessels clearing Liverpool between 5 January 1788 and 5 May 1792 (BPP, 1792, XXXV). See 920 TAR 4/41. The firm of Tarleton & Rigg was still trading to Africa in 1799 (Williams, Liverpool privateers, pp.681-4). Possibly John was a partner in the firm; Clayton had died in 1797. See 920 TAR 4/26.
33 See 920 TAR 5, especially 11 and 12. Tarleton & Backhouse was still trading to Africa in 1799 (Williams, Liverpool privateers, pp.681-4).
34 Evidence of the Tarleton's trade with the West Indies in slaves and general merchandise can be found in the naval office shipping lists for the various colonies.
35 See 920 TAR 4/5. John gave evidence before the committee investigating the African trade; see, for instance, the committee's Report (1788) part IV, account 3. For his troubles he was granted in 1788 the freedom of Liverpool (Williams, Liverpool privateers, p.611). BPP, 1790 XXX, 500 et seq. See also BPP, 1792, XXV.
36 In 1798 the firms in which members of the Tarleton family may have been concerned possessed, it would seem, about seven per cent of Liverpool's carrying capacity for slaves. The complement for Liverpool vessels in this year was over 52,000 slaves. See Williams, Liverpool privateers, pp.681-4.
37 See the family tree in Ormerod, County Palatine, II, pp.677-8.
3 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

i) The Tarleton Family

Compared with writings on the military and political activities of Sir Banastre Tarleton little has been written about the family's business interests. This is reflected in the following, very brief, selection of readings, the most important of which in the present context are the short pieces by Serjeant and Stewart-Brown.

Robert D. Bass, The green dragoon: the lives of Banastre Tarleton and Mary Robinson (Alvin Redman, 1958)


ii) Eighteenth-century Liverpool trade


Averil Mackenzie-Grieve, The last years of the English slave trade: Liverpool, 1750-1801 (Putnam, 1941; Cass, 1968)

John E. Merritt, 'The Liverpool slave trade from 1789 to 1791, MA thesis, University of Nottingham, 1959


Cyril N. Parkinson, The rise of the port of Liverpool (Liverpool UP, 1952)

James Wallace, A general and descriptive history of the ancient and present state of the town of Liverpool (Liverpool, 1795)

Gomer Williams, History of the Liverpool privateers and letters of marque with an account of the Liverpool slave trade (London, 1897; Cass, 1966)
This major series of microfilms, which began in the 1960s, includes over 100 titles and covers many aspects of American history. Material ranges in time from the colonial period to the twentieth century and in place from Quebec to the West Indies. The series includes records relating to trade, industry, plantations, agriculture and ranching, immigration and settlement, the anti-slavery movement, politics and military affairs. There are personal papers and diaries as well as state documents and the records of industrial and commercial concerns. Primary printed material (newspapers, pamphlets, bibliographies, etc.) as well as manuscript collections are included. Each title is accompanied by a printed guide which contains a short introduction to the microfilmed collection along with a contents listing. A digital version of the guide is also available on our website.

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