

## CHAPTER 4

### RETURN TO THE THAMES

Henry Castle finally returned to London in 1837. According to information given to us, he left Sydney in the barque *Wave* and sailed back via the Philippines, where certain interesting developments were taking place in the timber trade. The Philippines had become open to trade at this time after a long period of civil strife. The voyage would have taken about four months using this circuitous route back home. However, we next learn of Henry and family living at 11 Lucas Street in Rotherhithe not far from where he lived previously with his father prior to going to Australia.

Allowing some time for the family to become settled once again in London Henry's activities are not visible until 1838. Henry is often referred to at this time as a ship owner and as a ship builder but he was also involved in the field of shipbreaking as correspondence with the Admiralty in October 1838 confirms. He was interested in purchasing the *Rainbow* as set out in the attached letter.<sup>1</sup>

	<i>11 Lucas Street Rotherhithe London</i>
	<i>October 1838</i>
<i>Sir</i>	
<i>Understanding the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Admiralty have determined on selling the ship Rainbow now in the Dockyard Portsmouth. I beg you will inform me if such be their intention, and if I am at liberty to tender for the purchase of the same previous to her being advertised as I am in want of such a vessel if at my price.</i>	
	<i>I am, Sir Yours Henry Castle</i>
<i>To the Secretary The Admiralty</i>	

The following notes were also noted in the Admiralty records regarding the *Rainbow*.  
10<sup>th</sup> Oct 1838 (No 193)

*"This ship has not been offered at one of the public sales at this office:-  
I am of the opinion that if it should be their Lordships intention to accept a tender for her purchase, it would be preferable to do so by general advertisement for competition, than from a private individual and which might include in addition the following two vessels to be sold - viz*

*Goldfinch of 237 tons lying at Plymouth  
Royalist 10 Gun Brig 231 tons lying at Plymouth  
Also the Rainbow 28 Guns Ship 503 tons lying at Plymouth"*

*Approve of this  
12th October*

Henry was not successful in buying the *Rainbow* and following this enquiry nothing further is known until 1841 when Henry had moved into the King & Queen Dry Dock, Rotherhithe, presumably to pursue his by now increasing activities in ship building as well as shipbreaking. However, despite these encouraging signs of growth and working on the

assumption that he was not short of capital after his return from Sydney it is with considerable surprise that we learn of his bankruptcy at the end of that year – see the following notice advertised in 1841.

THE LONDON GAZETTE -TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1841. ISSUE NUMBER 20151

*WHEREAS a Fiat in Bankruptcy is awarded and issued forth against Henry Castle, of Lucas-street, Rotherhithe, in the County of Surrey, Ship Owner, Dealer and Chapman, and he being declared a bankrupt is hereby required to surrender himself to Edward Holroyd, Esq. a Commissioner of Her Majesty's Court of Bankruptcy, on the 24th day of December instant, at twelve at noon precisely, and on the 25th day of January next, at eleven of the clock in the forenoon precisely, at the Court of Bankruptcy, in Basinghall-street, in the City of London, and make a full discovery and disclosure of his estate and effects; when and where the creditors are to come prepared to prove their debts, and at the first sitting to choose assignees and at the last sitting the said bankrupt is required to finish his examination, and the creditors are to assent or dissent from the allowance of his certificate. All persons indebted to the said bankrupt or that have any of his effects are not to pay or deliver to the same but to Mr Edwards No 7 Frederick Place, Old Jewry, the official assignee, whom the Commissioner has appointed and give notice to Messrs Heschen and Bischoff, Solicitors, No 8 Copthall-Court, Throgmorton Street.*

Why this happened is not at all clear as the existence of an insurance policy<sup>2</sup> covering goods for a significant sum show that his activities were not insubstantial, but evidence of disputes following his departure from Australia has also emerged.

“In the Supreme Court of New South Wales.<sup>3</sup>

Between RICHARD DAWSON, *Plaintiff*

AND

HENRY AUGUSTUS CASTLE, *Defendant*

*WHEREAS an Action has been commenced in this Court at suit of the above-named Richard Dawson against the above-named Henry Augustus Castle, to recover the sum of sixty pounds fifteen shillings and nine pence, for money paid by the plaintiff for the use of the defendant, at his request; and it being alleged that the said Henry Augustus Castle does not reside within the Colony or its Dependencies, a Writ of Foreign Attachment has been issued, returnable on the nineteenth day of January instant, wherein Robert Augustin Clarkson, of Sydney, is Garnishee; - Notice is hereby given thereof, and that if at any time before final judgement in this Action the said Henry Augustus Castle (or any person on his behalf) will give the security and notice, and file the appearance or plea required by the Act, intituled [sic] “An Act to consolidate and amend the Laws relating to Actions against persons absent from the Colony, and against persons sued as Joint Contractors,” the said attachment may be dissolved. – Dated this 10<sup>th</sup> day of January, A. D., 1842.*

JAMES NORTON

*Plaintiff's Attorney*

Whilst the sum involved is not large, at sixty pounds fifteen shillings, there was further evidence of more problems, as on the same day a John Lord and Edward Haslington also sued Henry Castle in order to recover five hundred and seven pounds eight shillings and five pence under the same reference as above, being an amount due on a certain bond given by Henry to the plaintiffs. The notice was also placed by James Norton as attorney for the plaintiffs.<sup>4</sup>

We do not know the outcome of the above proceedings as they took place after Henry had become bankrupt, but it is clear that Henry's financial affairs at both home and abroad had become too much for him and that consequently he was unable to meet his debts.

## The *Temeraire*

It is appropriate at this juncture to review first an interesting connection between the Castles business and the "*Fighting Temeraire*" of Trafalgar fame, as this ship's connection with Castles is an intriguing story which occurred around the year 1838 the date of the breaking up of the *Temeraire*.

When a ship like the *Temeraire* is prepared for disposal it is stripped of everything that could be re-used and there are records of this work being done on the *Temeraire* at the Sheerness dockyard. In consequence, when it was ready for delivery to the shipbreaker the ship was virtually a hulk with all the masts, yards, rigging, anchor, guns and stores having been removed. It was therefore in this state that the *Temeraire* was towed from Sheerness to the yard of the shipbreaker John Beatson, whose wharf was located in Rotherhithe at the Surrey Canal Wharf adjacent to the Bull Head Dock <sup>5</sup>

Since that time several writers have connected the firm of Henry Castle with the *Temeraire* and to the shipbreaker John Beatson who purchased her in 1838 for £5,530. In his book History of Charlton, J.G. Smith proposes that Castles was founded in 1838, as Henry Castle and Son, when the old established business of 'Bateson's' of Rotherhithe was acquired. It is presumed that the writer is actually referring to the shipbreaking firm of Beatson since his next sentence describes how 'Bateson's' were then engaged in breaking up the old '*Fighting Temeraire*'.

Similarly in his article 'Shipbreaking at Woolwich' Philip Banbury clearly states that the firm of Castle & Sons succeeded John Beatson who had begun to break up the *Temeraire*.<sup>6</sup> However Bertram Bousfield writing for the Treasury in May 1914 omits John Beatson completely and describes how the *Temeraire* was being towed to Messrs. Castles Yard at Rotherhithe. Finally, correspondence dated 1931 in the Company archives and written by Sidney Castle, Henry's grandson, claims that his father Sidney Nash Castle was born in 1838, the year that Henry Castle acquired the Beatson business. Therefore nearly a hundred years later a direct descendant of the family firmly believed that Castles bought the Beatson business at the time the *Temeraire* was acquired for breaking up.<sup>7</sup> Yet exactly where and why these theories originated is not clear, although it is coincidental that the Castles business was itself founded in 1838 by Henry Castle who was then living at 11 Lucas Street, Rotherhithe. The company's own brochures produced between 1900 and 1938 may have led to some confusion as the following extracts reveal.

*"The business was established in 1838".*

*"The stern figures of the Temeraire, second in line in the battle of Trafalgar, can be seen with other interesting naval relics in the company's showroom at Baltic Wharf".*

*"Turner's picture the "Fighting Temeraire" tugged to her last berth may be seen in the National Gallery, Trafalgar Square".*

The writing style employed in the brochure could easily be mistaken to construe that the *Temeraire* was broken up by the company and that was how the ship's stern figures, two statues of Atlas, came to be housed in the showroom at Baltic Wharf. In fact these figures formed part of a chimney piece known as the "Temeraire Mantelpiece" as shown in the picture (right) from a Castles Archives.

If Henry Castle had purchased the business of John Beatson or entered into a partnership then it is likely that the sums involved would be indicated in the Beatson records during 1838 or earlier. A purchase of a share in the *Temeraire* is also possible but here again the funds involved would likely have been revealed in the ledger. Consequently, there is no tangible evidence to support the theory that Castles took over the Beatson business or that

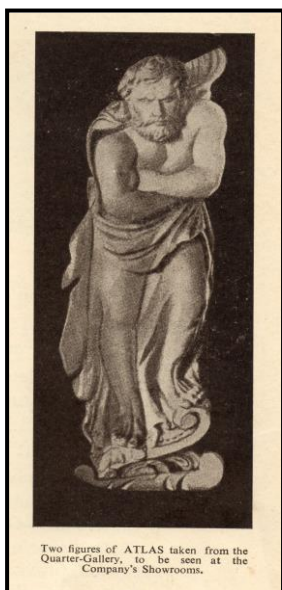


the *Temeraire* was being towed to Castles Yard at Rotherhithe.

According to Bousfield the fireplace was actually made from the wood of many famous ships. The mahogany mantelpiece was made from wood taken from the *Royal Albert*, which was launched by Queen Victoria in 1856 and broken up by Castles in 1884. The two statues of Atlas taken from the *Temeraire* formed the supports for the mantelpiece.

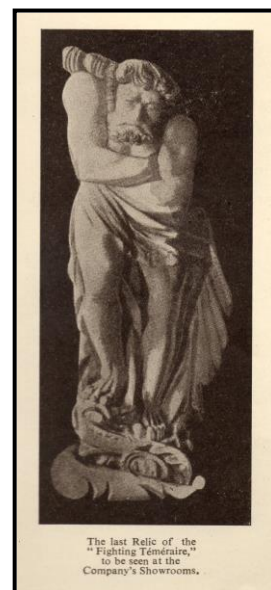
In 1995 the *Temeraire* immortalised in Turner's famous painting was the subject of a major exhibition in the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery at which certain Castles artefacts were on display including a picture of the *Temeraire* Mantelpiece and which attracted much attention.

There is little doubt the *Temeraire* Mantelpiece was carved from mahogany and oak taken from ships broken up by Castles around 1884 and that the stern figures of Atlas taken from the *Temeraire* and incorporated into the mantelpiece were in the possession of the Henry Castle & Sons business.



The favourite explanation as to how the figures of Atlas came to Castles is based on the close connection and partnership established from 1860 onwards between Henry Castle & Sons and William Philip Beech. Pictures from Castles Archives.

It is worthy of note that Beech however had occupied the former Beatson premises at Surrey Canal Wharf, in 1859<sup>8</sup> and that he moved there from either Pageants Wharf or Upper Globe Wharf further downstream.<sup>9</sup> This move more or less coincided with his decision to form a partnership with Henry Castle. It is also believed that Beech's father Thomas Beech was a foreman at Beatsons for many years earlier in the century.



John Beatson died in 1858 and his will instructed his trustees to dispose of his wharf and business and it was almost certain that this occurred in 1859 and the presumption is that Beech acquired the wharf from the trustees. A search of the Southwark Rates Books showed that Beech stayed in occupation there until 1875.<sup>10</sup>

Wood remnants and relics from the *Temeraire* could therefore have logically been passed to Beech when he took over the Beatson business, including the wharf, where the *Temeraire* was broken up. Consequently, Beech probably gifted the Atlas figures to Castles around 1875 as he appears to have retired from the shipbreaking business at that time. Alternatively, he may have gifted them to the Henry Castle & Sons partnership at any time from 1860 onwards.

The *Temeraire* Mantelpiece survived the bombing at Baltic Wharf in 1941 as it had previously been moved to Plymouth. Unfortunately, further bombings of Plymouth in 1944 destroyed this important historical artefact.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, we know that as late as 1893 Castles were still in possession of wood remnants from the *Temeraire* when the beautiful gong-stand made from the ship was presented in that year to the Duke of York (the future King George V) on his marriage to Princess May of Teck.

Carved on the oak arch from which the bronze gong is suspended is the motto "NEMO ME IMPUNE LACESSIT" (No one provokes me with impunity)<sup>12</sup> the motto of the Order of the Thistle, of which the Duke of York had been made a Knight the day before his marriage.

The upright sides are carved with replicas of the all-enduring Atlas-like caryatids (Plate 80) which had begun their service on the *Temeraire's* stern galleries. The stand of the gong carries two inscribed shields. The upper one reads: <sup>12</sup>

“THE TEMERAIRE GONG STAND A SOUVENIR OF THE WOODEN  
WALLS OF OLD ENGLAND AND GRACIOUSLY ACCEPTED BY  
H.R.H. CAPTAIN THE DUKE OF YORK RN ON HIS MARRIAGE WITH  
THE PRINCESS MAY 1893 FROM THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES MOST  
HUMBLE AND OBEDIENT SERVANTS H. CASTLE & SONS.”

## Beatsons

In view of the claim that Castles acquired the Beatson business in 1838 or thereabouts we outline at this stage the family history of the Beatsons; how they came to London and finally entered the shipbreaking business.<sup>13</sup> The possible connections with the Castle family are also mentioned in this part of the chapter in order to complement what has been said above about this intriguing story.<sup>14</sup>

David Beatson born 1775, died 1859, was the son of Lieutenant John Beatson R.N. second son of David of Vicarsgrange and succeeded on the death of his Uncle Robert as head of the family. However, Robert had previously sold the estate and David left Fife between 1790 and 1795 to join John and William Beatson, frequently referred to as cousins of David. John Beatson born 1765 and his elder brother William born 1753 had previously settled in London and subsequently became timber merchants and shipbreakers.

John and William were the sons of John Beatson, born 1708. The brothers were born at Leith near Edinburgh and both became ships' captains. They were later involved in sailing from London in the annual Atlantic convoy to Quebec until 1793. John Beatson is thought to have been the commander of the ship *Beaver* in the Quebec trade. John was also admitted and sworn a Younger Brother of Trinity House in July 1797.

John is known to have later settled in London at Peckham and around that time he set up in business together with his brother William as a timber merchant and shipbreaker at the Bull Head Dock (including Surrey Canal Wharf). As both brothers were reputedly involved in the Quebec trade until around 1793 it is therefore likely that their Rotherhithe business was not started before that date. If this was the case then David's departure from Fife was probably not prior to this date either and the favoured date of 1795 for his move south to London seems more probable.

It is often stated that the three Beatsons were distant cousins and an examination of the family pedigree indicates that David's father, John RN, was a first cousin of John and William Beatson as their grandfather was Robert of Vicarsgrange. Consequently, as David was the next generation down his relationship with William and John appears to be that of first cousin, once removed.

The Beatson brothers appear to have been in partnership with a Brodie Augustus McGhie shown as occupying the site and yard late Woolcombes in 1810. The Woolcombes had previously occupied the whole Bull Head site for some forty years but appear to have left in 1805. By 1815 William Beatson had dropped out of the picture and we know that he had died in 1810.

William Beatson and McGhie also appear to have been partners at the Anchor Wharf near Cherry Garden Stairs, further upstream, but John Beatson does not appear to have been involved directly in this business venture associated with the floating dock at Rotherhithe. As we know, William became bankrupt in 1800 but it may have been for reasons other than the Anchor Wharf venture outlined below.

In 1820 Bull Head Dock was occupied by Young, Hawks & McGhie, while the shipbreaking business was being run by David Beatson at the Surrey Canal Wharf. There are entries in

the Beatson ledgers detailing rent payments from McGhie and his partners in respect of Bull Head Dock after David Beatson had moved to the Surrey Canal Wharf. We can only surmise therefore that in 1820 or thereabouts John Beatson, 1765–1849, retained ownership or part ownership of Bull Head Dock and rented part to McGhie and subsequently rented, sold or gifted the Wharf to David Beatson. John's brother William had died in 1810 as aforementioned and therefore he probably inherited or acquired William's share in the Bull Head Dock site leaving him as the sole owner. There is however no record of such transactions.

The Anchor Wharf site was definitely operated by Beatson and McGhie and as explained in Chapter 2 George Castle of Hull & Rotherhithe became the tenant of the wharf and probably for the purpose of operating the floating dock. We therefore have evidence of a probable business link between the Beatson and Castle families.

David had four children. 1. John, born 1802, later took over the family ship breaking business. 2. William, born in 1807, trained as an architect and took his large family to Nelson, New Zealand in 1851. 3. Harriet, born 1811 and 4. Helen born 1819.

David eventually passed on the shipbreaking business to his son John, born 1802, however the date of transfer of ownership is not known. It is evident therefore that the claim that Henry Castle acquired the business and yard of Beatson is unlikely and as we have already discussed, in connection with the *Temeraire*, the conclusion reached is that Henry Castle had no more than a passing business relationship with the Beatson family. In fact, Beatson was still tendering for ships in 1856 shortly before his death in 1858. Furthermore an examination of the Beatson journals covering the period from 1835 to 1856 shows no trading relationship between the two men until September 1856 when a receipt of £5 is recorded for an advance at the resale of the *Fireking*. There is nothing further recorded in the journals as far as could be traced.

We now bring together the story of Baltic Wharf, its history, and the development of Henry Castle's business there up to 1860. We have decided to encapsulate this story in one section. Accordingly the reader will find an overlap in the time periods and in the narratives elsewhere in this chapter, however this is justified in order, we hope, to make the overall situation easier to understand.

## **Baltic Wharf**

During the course of researches into the history of the Castles Baltic Wharf site in Vauxhall an interesting story has been uncovered about this location from the records at the PRO and readers may be interested in this snippet about property development in the 1830s.

In 1829 a builder and developer, Thomas Hamlet, acquired the leases of the whole site consisting of seven individual lots from the Crown – the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Woods and Forests. Hamlet subsequently negotiated sub-leases with two builders Edmund Warne and John Freeman. The Crown in all their papers refers to the site as Millbank Estates.

Freeman was only interested in the site located next to the bridge itself, which later became known as Bridge Wharf and he built a dwelling house on the site between 1830 and 1833.<sup>15</sup>

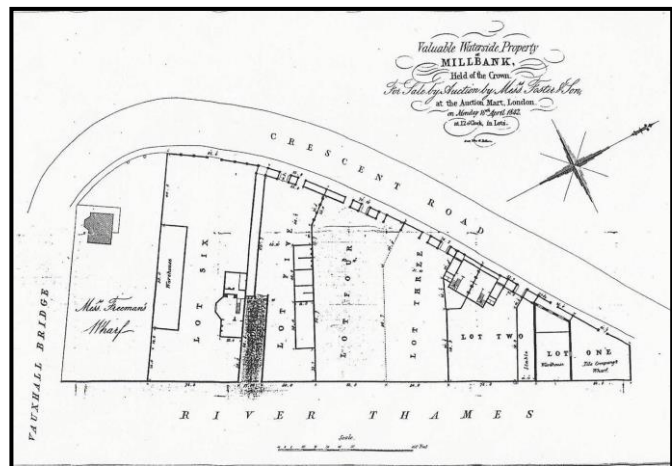
The second sub-lease for the remainder of the site was granted to Warne who wanted to erect 14 cottages thereon. However, between 1830 and 1835 he only built two dwellings, one cottage and a warehouse and a Dock. One of the dwellings was the property subsequently to be known as Baltic House and occupied by the Castle family. This dwelling cost £950 to build.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, for Warne the Commissioners did not like the development proposals for residential use and restricted their permission to only 8 cottages. The Commissioners wanted the development of commercial wharves and the corresponding infrastructure put

in place. This included, inter alia, footways, carriageways, walls, iron railings and gateways. In all Warne expended £5,400 on the development during this time. However, he was not able to afford the improvements along the wharf frontage itself and all further development came to a standstill. The position was further complicated by Hamlet's impending bankruptcy around 1837.<sup>15</sup>

Warne struggled on for a few additional years and even managed to acquire the lease of the Bridge Wharf site from Freeman. Eventually however, Warne himself became bankrupt and the Crown put up the whole site for auction on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1842. There were six lots of premises put up for sale in April 1842, but the seventh plot was Mr Freeman's premises, Bridge Wharf, and this was not included in the 1842 sale.<sup>16</sup> He had separately negotiated a new 70 year lease from the Crown in 1839.

It was at this juncture that Samuel Nash, Henry Castle's brother-in-law took over the Baltic Wharf site, which was adjacent to Bridge Wharf and consisted of Lots 5 & 6 as advertised<sup>17</sup> - see map from Castles Archives. Henry's name is subsequently noted in 1843 as a joint tenant of the Wharf with Samuel. At first sight it appears that Samuel acquired the lease of the premises for himself but it is fairly certain that he took over the lease and allowed Henry to occupy it for his own use including the private dwelling house on Lot 6. This situation probably would have been caused by Henry's then current bankrupt status as previously explained and until all his debts were discharged he would not have been permitted to acquire any lease in his own name. However, by 1843 the position had changed and Henry was able to jointly own the tenancy. Henry had therefore likely been discharged from bankruptcy. It is not clear if Henry was in occupation as a tenant or by way of a sub-lease and no documentation has been uncovered to show the arrangements made, whether by way of a new sub lease or an assignment of the original.



As a result of further complications with the Crown Leases the Baltic Wharf site came up for auction again in 1845<sup>18</sup> and it was at this point that Henry Castle took over as the sole occupier of both wharves.<sup>19</sup> Up to that point in time the record shows however that the main lease from the Crown was actually held by a J Matthews and not Samuel Nash and/or Henry Castle. The yards were then used by the Castles businesses right through until 1913 and in part until 1941, the business being subsequently known as Henry Castle & Sons, Henry Castle & Sons Limited from 1894 and as Castles Shipbreaking Ltd from 1906. The leases granted by The Commissioners of Her Majesty's Woods and Forests in 1845 were granted again to Mr John Matthews on a seventy year term from 1839<sup>20</sup> and the Castle family presumably continued as occupiers on a tenancy basis only until the original 1839 leases were assigned to Sidney Nash Castle and Abercrombie Castle many years later in 1872 and thereafter to Sidney Nash Castle alone.<sup>21</sup> There is no further information available regarding the details of the agreements prevailing during this period of time.

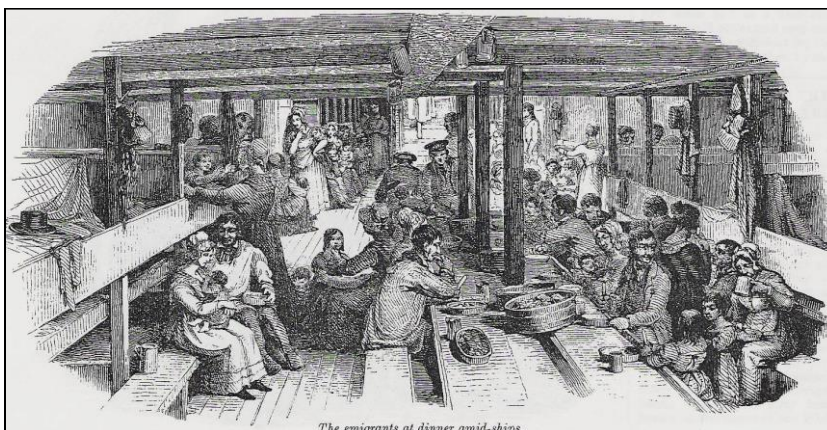
Lot 5 had a river frontage of about sixty-eight feet including offices and a draw-dock of easy ascent. The particulars specify that the dock was suitable for a barge or vessel that could safely lie unloaded and from whence coals and other merchandise may be transported. There was a counting house with rooms for a wharf keeper and water connected thereto. There was also a cart house and loft, a two stall stable and a range of excellent buildings used as a sawing house and deal shed. The front of these buildings was enclosed by an open rail fence and wall. In addition, considerable expense had been incurred in making proper foundations on the edge of the river wall for the erection of a landing crane. The whole lot was enclosed from the road by gates and piers. The annual rent was estimated at £250.<sup>22</sup>

Lot 6 had a spacious wharf, which had a frontage of about 76 feet and was enclosed from the road by a dwarf screen, iron railing and folding gates. There was also an excellent and extensive range of warehouses, two storeys high with a cellar under and water closet. There was also a gig house, a one stall stable, a cooper's workshop and a spacious open yard. The river frontage was enclosed with piers and a shifting railing for the use of a crane. The annual rent was estimated at £320. At the time of the auction the wharf was known as The Oil Wharf, Millbank, where whale oil had previously been refined. Lot 6 also included a new brick and well-planned dwelling house, subsequently named Baltic House. The name Baltic was not used for either or both wharves until the Castle family were in occupation of the site and dwelling house. The latter was a spacious detached dwelling and the auction details in 1842 describe it as stuccoed all round and with a slated roof. On the ground floor there was a drawing room, elegantly fitted and finished, with a veranda and communicating, by folding doors, to a dining room with a bayed window – both with expensive marble chimneypieces. The woodwork was painted maple and the ceilings, cornices and doors finished in the best taste. On this floor there was also a dressing room and a morning room. On the first floor there was a sitting room and two bedrooms. There was also a basement with two kitchens, a wine cellar, coal and beer cellar, a larder and two water closets.<sup>23</sup>

Mr Freeman's Wharf and dwelling was subsequently acquired by the Castle family. The date of acquisition is not known. However, the three sites together formed the Castles land mark buildings so famously depicted in many drawings and paintings during the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to the bombings in 1941. It would appear that the site had not much changed from the original description given in 1842 and the foregoing narrative sets out in clear terms how it might have looked and felt to be within the premises and along the wharfs, the dock and in the dwelling house.

Once in occupation of the Millbank site Henry became busy developing his business as a shipbreaker and timber merchant and between 1842 and 1851 the business was quite modest in size as the census of 1851 shows that Henry only employed 10 men at the site. This compares with the larger number of 25 for example that Henry was employing in Sydney in 1833.<sup>24</sup> The breaking activity was likely to be mainly smaller merchant ships and possibly barges as we know that the dock at the wharf was eminently suitable for that type of vessel as explained in the auction details of 1842.

1851 was a year of considerable interest, being the year of the Great Exhibition, as Henry set out to exploit the market opportunity at that time and it clearly demonstrates the



ingenuity of the man, which made him quite different from many of his contemporaries. In this venture he was obviously greatly influenced by his experiences in migrating to and from Australia many years previously.

Henry decided to construct a wooden building on the Baltic Wharf site large enough to accommodate up to 200 working class men who wished to visit or possibly be involved

in work connected with the construction of the Exhibition site. The accommodation was based on the interior lay-out of a typical emigration ship which plied between England and Sydney.<sup>25</sup>

As it was a fortuitous find to uncover this information, including the Prospectus, we have reproduced it in full. It gives a vivid description of the level of activity that prevailed on the River Thames and in the Metropolis as well and showing how accessible many parts of London had become at the time. Unfortunately, we have no information regarding how successful or otherwise the venture proved to be.



## LODGINGS FOR THE WORKING CLASSES DURING THE EXHIBITION OF 1851

### PROSPECTUS

Accommodation is provided for 200 men at one time. The sleeping apartments are fitted up in the same style as Emigrants' Ships. Each man has a berth to himself, a flock bed, pillow, one blanket, two sheets, coverlet - all clean. The apartments are large, dry, clean, well ventilated and lighted by Gas. A Night Watchman is engaged to assist the men, and to prevent disputes. Accommodation for washing, with towels, and other conveniences; and the use of plates, knives and forks, together with attendance, will be supplied.

CHARGE for the above will be 1s. per head, per night. Breakfast, including meat, will be supplied in a separate Room, at the charge of 9d. per head; and Refreshments may be obtained at any time on a similar scale, for those who desire it. But as many may bring up cheese, biscuits, coffee, &c., a Store Room is also found, in which these may be kept.

No Smoking will be allowed in the Building or on the Wharf, but upon a ship now lying alongside the Wharf. The decks of this Vessel afford a good promenade; and from them a beautiful view is obtained of the river, and its traffic.

The advantage of accommodating no greater number than 200, is, that this appears to be about the most likely number that will be conveyed at a time from one establishment, and thus will be prevented the liability to disagreement, which might possibly result from having several large bodies of men together, if they were accommodated at one time in the same place. Should any persons be appointed to attend to the comfort of the men, one of the Proprietors, residing on the premises, will be able to accommodate them.

THE POSITION - At the foot of Vauxhall Bridge, on the Middlesex side, is first rate; the sewerage is good; the situation healthy; commanding conveyances by river or land to any part of London. The Royal Gardens, Vauxhall, are within three minutes' walk; and the Cremorne Gardens, Chelsea, are within ten minutes' ride by Steam Boat. It is within twenty minutes' walk of the Exhibition. Omnibuses run from the foot of Vauxhall Bridge to Hyde Park and to Charing Cross - from whence others start for every part of London, and its neighbourhood.

Steam-boats running up and down the river, call every five minutes at Vauxhall Bridge Pier; from whence to the City and Chelsea the charge is 2d. and, from which places, Steams-boats continue to run down the river to Gravesend for 9d., and up the river to Richmond, Kew, and Hampton Court, for 4d. and 6d.

The Vauxhall Station of the South Western Railway is within three minutes' walk.

Those Establishments that first make arrangements with the Proprietors will have the option of choosing their own times, and, therefore, unless answer be sent very early, the arrangement for any particular time that may be wished for, cannot be ensured.

On arrangement being made for the number to be accommodated, and for the time they may stay, the Proprietors will forward a letter to guarantee the number of beds required for the specified time. It must be distinctly understood, that when the beds have once been engaged, they are to be paid for whether occupied or not.

Should any of the men, during their stay in London, require medical attendance, a Gentleman upon the spot, interested in this, will give advice gratis.<sup>26</sup>

H. CASTLE & Co., Proprietors,  
BALTIC WHARF, MILLBANK, WESTMINSTER

Henry marketed the facility to various organisations as evidenced by the copy letter shown below addressed to the Preston Guardian.<sup>27</sup> He also advertised the project in the newspapers and magazines.<sup>28</sup>

*LODGINGS FOR THE WORKING CLASSES DURING THE EXHIBITION OF 1851 at the Working Man's Home, Baltic Wharf, Millbank, foot of Vauxhall Bridge. Situation the best in London.*

*This establishment is particularly adapted to afford accommodation for the members of Clubs, and mechanics from the manufacturing districts, being arranged for receiving 200 men at one time. Charge for a clean, comfortable bed, use of dining room, utensils &c., one shilling per night. Breakfast provided at a moderate charge.*

*HENRY CASTLE & Co.*

After 1851 the business at Baltic Wharf started to grow much more rapidly. It was the sole base of operations for Henry during the 1850s and whilst there still remains a paucity of detail about the actual split between different shipping activities we do learn that Henry is by then breaking up larger vessels than just barges and other small ships. It is noted that a large vessel was berthed at the Wharf during the 1851 Exhibition where smoking was permitted and we also know that during the 1850s contacts and business was undertaken with the Royal Mail Lines and at least three ships from that company are recorded as having been broken up at Castles of Millbank.

The *Magdalena*, the *Orinoco* and the *Great Western* are all specifically mentioned in various source documents including the history of the Royal Mail Lines Company and it is interesting to note that in order to pass under the Thames bridges to reach Millbank the ships had their funnels removed at Victoria Docks.<sup>29</sup> The latter docks were newly constructed in the early 1850s and represented one of the largest dock construction projects undertaken up until that time all in response to a huge increase being generated in Thames shipping traffic. We know that Henry Castle & Sons Ltd. had an office or base at South Shore, Victoria Docks in 1896 as indicated by the Company's letter heading. We have not been able to verify the exact nature of their presence at that site.

It is also noted that in 1856 there is evidence from the Beatson journal of some negotiations with Henry Castle which enabled a Royal Naval vessel, the *Janus*, to be purchased by Henry Castle.<sup>30</sup> This vessel would also have been broken up at Baltic Wharf. A second naval ship the *Flamer* followed in 1858<sup>31</sup> and this development indicates that the business was by then known and involved with the Admiralty. Certainly, during the period of the Crimean war and subsequently an increasing awareness of the problems with wooden ships and their armaments were being highlighted at the highest level of government.<sup>32</sup> - see below.

Henry was slowly and surely beginning to accumulate wealth from his activities and he must certainly have benefited from his previous experiences both profitable and adverse and this was placing him in an excellent position to benefit from the remarkable transition in ship design that was to develop over the ensuing ten to twenty years.

An amusing but pertinent example of some of the difficulties encountered while living as well as working on the River Thames is illustrated by the experience Henry encountered in 1860 regarding a nuisance caused by a neighbour, using part of the former plot 5 under a temporary license. Several letters were written about this and are set out below. The contents are largely self-explanatory, nonetheless it must have been an unpleasant experience bearing in mind the existing and growing level of pollution during that particular period of rapid industrial and trading growth in the economy.<sup>33</sup> The great stink of 1858 was a prime example of the problems the River Thames faced around that time.<sup>34</sup>

Baltic Wharf, Millbank  
Westminster SW

26th January 1860

Sir,

*I respectfully beg to call your attention to the wharf adjoining this, which has and is now being used as a dung wharf, to the great injury to my Houses opposite, on the Crown Estate - the nuisance arising from the shipping of all sorts of decayed matter is at times almost unbearable. I feel assured that it only requires to be called to your notice to ensure its speedy stoppage.*

*I am, Sir  
Yours most respectfully  
Hy Castle*

*J. Pennethorne, Esq.*

7 Whitehall Yard

26th January 1860

Sir,

*Referring to my Report of the 9th April 1858 - and to previous reports - respecting the License to W.H. Hooper Esq. for alterations made on the Wharf No.5 Crescent Road, Millbank. I beg leave to lay before you a letter I have this day received from Mr. Henry Castle of Baltic Wharf, Millbank; and have to state that from the representations made to me, I believe the complaint made by Mr. Castle to be well founded.*

*I have the honor to be,  
Sir Your obedient Servant*

*James Pennethorne*

*The Honble Charles Gore*

Baltic Wharf, Millbank  
Westminster S.W.

2nd April 1861

*To the Honble C. Gore*

Sir,

*In reference to the complaints I have made to you respecting the shipping off of dung at the Whf at Millbank I beg to acquaint you that I have this morning been most positively assured by the Tenant, that the same will not be carried on any longer & that I will (on the faith of this assertion) beg to withdraw my complaint. Thanking you for your prompt interference.*

*I am Sir  
Your most obedient Servant  
Henry Castle*

The family of Henry Castle were mainly brought up at Baltic Wharf and some were born there during the first ten years at that address.<sup>35</sup> Henry George Castle, the eldest son was born, as we know, in Sydney Australia and the next two sons Sidney Nash Castle, born 1838, and Abercrombie Castle, born 1840, were destined to become involved with their father's shipbreaking business. They would have been brought up in the middle of the Wharf's daily activities, as Baltic House was in the centre of the yard. They must have been familiar from a very early age with all aspects of building and breaking ships of different classes and also observed the growth in the timber merchanting business. Whilst specific apprenticeships for both Sidney and Abercrombie cannot be found they were almost certainly trained by their father at the Baltic Wharf site.

By 1859 Sidney Nash would have reached the age of 21, the then age of majority. Abercrombie was 21 some 20 months later in 1861 and it was at this time that Henry decided to bring both sons into partnership with him in the business. The foregoing heralds the commencement of the main activity in shipbreaking by Henry Castle and his sons in partnership and also in the parallel partnership with William Philip Beech which is described in the next chapter. However, before we embark on this fascinating part of the history we first of all describe the background circumstances that made this time one of the most opportune in which to enter the field of shipbreaking.

## Historical Background

In order to better understand the background to the story of Castles involvement in shipbreaking it is essential to set out the principal maritime developments, which probably influenced the family's decision to enter this market in a major way and how the connections with the Admiralty were developed.

The events of maritime history in mid-nineteenth century England moved swiftly in comparison with earlier centuries and it is clearly evident from a study of the material available that the Castles shipbreaking activities were almost all involved with the era of the last of the wooden walls.

Prior to the Battle of Navarino in 1827 naval battles had been fought by sailing ships, thereafter steam began to appear as a means of propulsion at sea, however the Admiralty would only use it in a small way for harbour purposes, as long experience of success at sea with sailing ships made them instinctively regard with disfavour this new invention. Up to 1827 therefore no steamers were attached to naval squadrons. By 1830 however, the important part steam would play in future naval activities was recognised and consent was obtained to build paddle wheel war steamers and soon these vessels were attached to all naval squadrons.<sup>36</sup>

The Admiralty had not intended that their existing two and three decker sailing ships of the line could be used for any other purpose and for some years longer they continued to build sailing line of battleships. Gradually the application of the screw propeller progressed after 1841, although it did not happen in a major way until 1850, when the process of conversion and altering of vessels laid down as sailing ships was initiated. Over a period of time therefore a steam wooden fleet was being built up until the Crimean War came in 1854.<sup>36</sup>

At the close of that War in 1856 the Navy was in the transition stage from sail to steam, however it had learnt that shells were so destructive to wooden ships that the need for greater protection was needed. Accordingly, an alteration in naval construction became inevitable and trials proved that 4½ inches of iron would keep out the projectiles from the heaviest gun then in use. In order to secure the plates and deaden the blow of a shot a thick wooden backing was placed between the armour and inner iron skin of the ship. These new vessels were the first wooden armoured sailing ships and were introduced from 1861. They were also known as broadside ironclads. It was significant that in the building of these ships more wood was actually required than for a sailing line of battleship.<sup>36</sup>

Although the Admiralty was not prepared to abandon masts and sails the value of steam now received full recognition and often ships had to be lengthened to accommodate all the new machinery. Such was the progress made that soon 4½ inches of iron proved insufficient to keep out the projectiles from the new guns and it became necessary to provide even thicker plates, up to 12 inches thick, for succeeding ships.

Following this period of development another method of carrying heavy guns at sea was introduced during the 1870's which seemed likely to supersede the broadside principle and this was the system of revolving turrets advocated by Captain Cowper Coles. With the introduction of these ships sail power was abandoned.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout this time of rapid change in sailing ship design a further development of significant background importance concerned the availability of seasoned timber after 1850. A considerable amount of decay and rot occurred on many sailing ships, particularly on conversions effected during the decade of the fifties, a problem that was further exacerbated by the events of the Crimean War.<sup>37</sup>

By 1860 the problem of finding sufficient timber became the dominant concern of the surveyor's department and considerable shortages occurred.<sup>38</sup> In 1860 the Admiralty spent £460,000 on timber. In addition, as previously mentioned, the actual amounts of timber required to build a battleship increased dramatically with the adoption of steam and costs increased accordingly. The move to iron was therefore inescapable as it was cheaper to maintain. This subsequent development finally sealed the fate of the wooden warship.

Nonetheless the advantages to the shipbreaker must have been clear and the market opportunity available from the recycling of seasoned ships timbers was ready to be exploited. In 1861 Henry Castle, together with William Beech, was successful in breaking into this market. From this time on the Castles family dominated the shipbreaking industry on the River Thames and their activities span the period from the final years of the sailing ships of the line right through to the introduction of the metal ship for breaking in the early 1900's. However wooden ships continued to be available for breaking until the mid 1930's.

The Castles history of shipbreaking therefore starts with the disposal of sailing ships, paddle steam vessels and the early screw conversions in the 1860's and 1870's followed by the breaking up of the armoured wooden battleships and frigates - the first ironsides in the 1880's and 1890's and finally to the metal turret ship by 1904.

The availability of wooden vessels for breaking was therefore at its height during the second half of the nineteenth century and it would have been apparent to the astute businessman that the rapid developments taking place would create a large and abundant supply, for breaking, of obsolete wood built vessels. This in turn would release a large and permanent supply of seasoned timber for recycling purposes. So it proved to be and the period, particularly from 1860 to 1904, but also through to 1941 provided Castles with a unique niche in British Maritime history.

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