

# CHAPTER 1

## A TALE OF TWO CASTLES

The history of the Company spans nearly four centuries and whilst the origins of the Castles Shipbreaking story starts in the mid-nineteenth century many documents in our archives refer to an earlier era of shipbuilding by Castles, that starts in the early 1600s.

It is apparent therefore that there is a tale of two Castles to be told and it is relevant to examine the credentials of this claim which is full of interest and historical significance. The result of the examination into this claimed link is fully set out in the following chapter, which traces the family origins of the Castle firm of shipbreakers founded by Henry Castle and makes attempts to correlate this with the position some two hundred years previously. Meanwhile we describe our findings about the shipbuilding activities of the Castle family in this first chapter as it sets the scene and creates much interest in a family that was involved in the timber trade and in the building of commercial and naval ships during an exciting period in history, which is frequently itemised in the diaries of Samuel Pepys.

Although there is no earlier link with shipbuilding it does seem that the Castle family were becoming landowners and probably influential people in and around the Thames area at the end of the sixteenth century. The first we learn of the Castles occupying land on the Thames at Rotherhithe is from a map belonging to the Earl of Salisbury dated 1610.<sup>1</sup> The exact location of the Yard is not easy to pinpoint but it is known to be a shipbuilding facility which William Castle was operating. Most of the land shown on the map is located to the east of the River Neckinger thus placing it fairly close to the site of the well-known Cherry Garden Stairs.

References in documents about The Harwich Lights<sup>2</sup> mention that the Castles are first heard of in the Deptford area around 1612 and that a branch of the family established themselves as shipbuilders at Rotherhithe. However, it is noteworthy that there were a large number of Castles, many of whom were related, thus leading to the strong conclusion that different branches of the Castle families were possibly involved in the ship repairing and ship building business during this time.

Research has shown that a William Castle was born in 1590<sup>3</sup> and was probably responsible for building up the business at the Rotherhithe site, although anecdotal evidence suggests that a ship repairing business had been located at the site during the Elizabethan period. Unfortunately, an investigation of the family name has been made complicated by the repeated use of the name William, which makes it difficult to be absolutely certain that the right individual has always been identified correctly. Consequently, we have not pursued these enquiries in depth at this particular time.

It can be eventually determined that the Castle family were shipbuilders as William Castle built the first Lion's Whelp in 1628.<sup>4</sup> In addition on the 2nd July 1638 Phineas Pett certified that £566 was due for that vessel.<sup>5</sup> It was one covered by the £7,000 allocated for building ten new pinnaces. It is therefore certain that the Castles were a well-established and reputable company of shipbuilders by the middle of the seventeenth century.

In 1637, Mr. Castle of Redriffe is mentioned in the Court minutes of the East India Company when the disposal of the Bridgehouse Land at Stone Wharf Deptford<sup>6</sup> was considered. Mr. Castle, William senior, and others proposed to buy or lease a certain property there, but the offer did not proceed. This transaction is important as it links the Castle family with the site at Deptford which Captain William Castle, William junior, later leased and occupied in 1664 – see comments below. This yard, together with the Dock at Fountain's Wharf, Rotherhithe was where the Castle family's 17<sup>th</sup> century shipbuilding activities took place.

Definite confirmation of occupation of the Rotherhithe site by the Castle family comes later in the century in 1684 to be precise. The Captain Collins Survey<sup>7</sup> published in that year locates the Castle site next to Fountain's Stairs at the Fountain Dock. The site was also known as Narbrough's Yard. In this connection we believe that the Captain William Castle referred to in Pepys's Diaries, born in 1629, was the son of the William Castle referred to on the Earl of Salisbury's map. Captain Castle probably operated the yard together with his brother Robert in the period prior to 1664.

The two Castle brothers William and Robert, born in 1629 and 1633 respectively, the sons of William Castle, born circa 1590, both became well known shipbuilders - see pedigree. William is first mentioned in 1654 when the *Taunton*<sup>8</sup> was built at Rotherhithe and in the same year a Captain William Castle built the 4th rate Man-of-War *Dover* at Shoreham. Furthermore, in December 1657 Mr Castle, together with a Captain Prowd, was appointed to value the *Welcome* and its stores on behalf of the East India Company, as the ship was considered suitable for the China voyage.<sup>9</sup>

The Castle connection with the East India Company had existed for some considerable time and it is noted that in September 1647 the *Bilbao Merchant*<sup>10</sup> acquired from a Mr. James was carried into Mr. Castle's, William senior's, Dock at Rotherhithe to be fitted for her intended voyage to the coast. However, the connection with the East India Company continued for many more years. The son, Captain William Castle, was building ships for the Company in 1670 when the *Samuel & Henry* was built for them and Captain Castle's brother Robert is also recorded as building the *Formosa Frigate*<sup>11</sup> for the Company in 1675. He was paid £600 for the contract.

We next start to learn a great deal more about the aforementioned Captain William Castle, William junior. In Pepys's diaries Captain Castle is the person in whom we are mostly interested in, as the link with the eighteenth century Castle family is based on the claim by a descendant of the shipbreaking family line that he was descended from Captain Castle, the shipbuilder - see below.

In 1663 Captain William Castle (34) married Martha Batten (26) a step daughter of Sir William Batten, Surveyor of the Navy 1660-67 and Master of Trinity House 1663-4. Their marriage license is dated 2nd July. William is a widower and Martha a spinster. Earlier the previous month when Pepys learned of the wedding he commented "*Much good may it do him, for I do not envy him his wife*". On the morning of the 5th July Lady Batten twice invited Pepys to go to Walthamstow in their coach to the wedding, but he lay in bed too long and therefore arrived too late for the ceremony, but in time for the dinner, and like the other guests received a pair of gloves.<sup>12</sup>

In 1664 Leases to Captain William Castle of the Deptford Strand property and mansion, including part of the Deptford Yard stated to be Bridgehouse Lands and Dock, were held in trust for Robert Castle (brother), although initially leased to William. The term of the lease was for 80 years to 1744. There are references to this site in the Pett Deeds<sup>13</sup> and it is noted that the head leases from the Corporation of London (Bridge House Estate) and others to Peter Pett (senior) descended to Sir Phineas Pett and were assigned to trustees for his marriage settlements. Eventually they were assigned to Robert Castle in 1691. In consequence the years from 1664 onwards and through to 1700 are the peak years of the Castle brothers' activity and their family's power and influence in the shipbuilding field.

It is noted that in Pepys's Diary dated 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> April 1664 that he accompanied Sir W. Batten, by water, to Deptford, calling on the latter's son in law on the way, where he visited the Castle Yard.

*"8th April 1664 - Up betimes and to the office; and anon it begin to be fair, after a great shower this morning; Sir W. Batten and I by water (calling his son Castle by the way, between whom and I no notice at all of his letter of the other day to me) to Deptford; and after a turn in the yard, I went with him to the Almshouse to see a new building which he with some ambition is building of there, during his being Maister of Trinity House."*<sup>14</sup>

Pepys's contact with William Castle was continuous for some years, but the relationship was not always harmonious and Pepys's was frequently at loggerheads with Batten as well from an early date.

*"8th April 1664 - This morning betimes came to my office to me Boatswain Smith of Woolwich, telling me of a notable piece of knavery of the officers of that yard and Mr Gold, in behalf of a contract made for some old ropes by Mr Wood. And I believe I shall find Sir W. Batten of the plot."*<sup>14</sup>

*10th April 1664 - Coronacion day. Up; and after doing something at my office, and it being a holiday, no sitting likely to be, I down by water to Sir W. Warren's who hath been ill, and there we talked long with him; good discourse especially about Sir W. Batten's knaveries and his son Castle's ill language of me behind my back, saying that I favour my fellow Traytours- but I shall be even with him."*<sup>14</sup>

*"November 2nd 1664 - Up betimes, and down with Mr. Castle to Redriffe, and there walked to Deptford to view a parcel of brave Knees of his, which ended are very good. And so back again - home - I seeming very friendly to him, though I know him to be a rogue and one that hates me with his heart."*<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of 1665 discussions with Castle were taking place over the design of a the new ship for the Navy Board.

*"11 January 1665. Up, and very angry with my boy for lying long a-bed and forgetting his Lute. To my office all morning. At noon to the Change, and so home to dinner. After dinner to Gresham College to my Lord Bruncker and Commissioner Pett, taking Mr. Castle with me, there to discourse over his draught of a ship he is to build for us - where I first find reason to apprehend Commissioner Pett to be a man of any ability extraordinary in anything, for I found he did turn and wind Castle like a chicken in his business, and that most pertinently and master-like. And great pleasure it was to me to hear them discourse, I of late having studied something thereon, and my Lord Bruncker is a very able person also himself in this sort of business."*<sup>14</sup>

At this time Pepys, as Clerk of the Acts of the Navy Board, was promoting the promising skills in naval architecture of an obscure young man called Anthony Deane. However, the Lord High Admiral in Council asked Pepys to refer the draughts (*sic*) to Trinity House. The outcome of this request is set out in a confidential letter by Pepys dated 14th March 1665, which was analysed as follows:<sup>15</sup>

*"He took the draughts in question to his own house and summoned to his aid Mr Castle, a well known builder of ships. He put before Mr Castle two designs, withholding all names and other particulars. The first of the two was by the eminent Mr Furzer; and this was immediately acclaimed by Mr Castle as a first class piece of work. Hoping for confirmation of his judgment he made bold to say that it must be by Mr Munday. Mr Pepys shook his head and rolled out the sheer-draught of young Anthony Deane. Mr Castle's jaw dropped. He roundly rated the whole composition as an impudent imposture and declared that its author had never built such a ship in his life and by the grossness of his ignorance condemned himself as unfitted for the task. Mr Pepys recognised the fact that the critic, who was dashing his hopes to the ground was an accepted authority and a master builder."*<sup>14</sup>

Despite the foregoing outcome Deane became involved in the design and building of the fourth *Defiance*. However, later in 1666 the Diary indicates that Castle was ultimately involved in the building of the new third rate ship the fourth *Defiance*.

*"9th March 1666 - Thence by water down to Deptford by agreement, where I met my Lord Brouncker and Sir. W. Batten by agreement, and to measuring Mr. Castles new third-rate ship, which is to be called the Defyance. And here I had my end, in saving the King some money and getting myself some experience in knowing how to measure ships. Thence I left them and walked to Redriffe, and there taking water, was overtaken by them in their boat, and so they would have me in with them to Castle's house, where my Lady Batten and Madam Williams were, and there and a deal of doings. I had a good dinner and counterfeit mirth and pleasure with them."*<sup>14</sup>

Despite the importance of the shipbuilding work Pepys remains on bad terms with Castle.

*"2nd May 1666 - Thence by water to Redriffe. There I met with Mr Castle and was forced against my will to have his company back with me. So we walked and drank at the Halfway house, and so to his house, where I drank a cup of Syder; and so to home."*<sup>14</sup>

The fourth *Defiance* was launched at Deptford in February 1666 by the Shipwrights Sir Anthony Deane and Messrs. Shish, Johnson & Castle.<sup>16</sup> She was a third-rate of 890 tons, and had a complement of 390. She had 64 guns, so arranged that the lower tier were 4 1/2 ft above the water. She was a copy of Dutch and French vessels and had a length, beam and draught of 117 ft, 37 ft, and 18 ft. Another important characteristic of this ship was that she carried provisions for six months.<sup>17</sup> In 1666 the fourth *Defiance* was one of the English grand fleet which was assembled off the mouth of the Thames by July 22nd, under the Duke of Albemarle, "Admiral and General" at sea.

Despite the apparent animosity between Castle and Pepys it is noted that there was evidently a high regard for Captain Castle in the shipbuilding fraternity. For example on 3rd May 1696, Sir Peter Pett wrote a letter to Mr Pepy's, in which he mentions that:

*"Many years ago I gave Sir Christopher Wren the draught of an old-fashioned ship, and another of the frigate fashion, that he might see the difference of them; and he afterwards desiring me to bring him into the company of some excellent shipwright, who might resolve many of his questions,<sup>18</sup> brought to him Captain William Castle, the famous loyal Tory, who was an expert mathematician, and who resolved all the questions Sir Christopher put to him."*

The depth of activity of the Castle brothers is further illustrated when it can be established that they were rebuilding armed ships for the Virginian Trade in 1677.<sup>19</sup> In the same year William Castle and Henry Johnson were the only firms considered capable of building third rates for the Navy.

Capt. William Castle died in 1681 aged 54<sup>20</sup> and his son John continued the business in partnership with his uncle Robert who died in 1698 aged 65. Whilst the number and identity of the ships built by them between 1690 and 1696 have been recorded - see appendix - we have very little information about either of the two partners as individuals or of their other activities. Robert undoubtedly enjoyed a fine reputation.

Unfortunately, William's son, John Castle, also died not long afterwards in 1700 thus bringing to an end the substantial activity in shipbuilding of the partnership during the 1690s. It is at this point that the continuing connection of the Castle family with the future generations of either shipbuilders or shipbreakers becomes difficult to ascertain.

John Castle had four sons and reference to two of them John & Robert is found in "The Tavern Row Deeds"<sup>21</sup> where property inherited by them is gifted to the Greenwich Hospital in 1718. Thereafter no active trace of the family can be found. Eventually the yards were vacated in the early 1700s as any known shipbuilding activity there had ceased by that time.

Eventually the yards must have been disposed of as the Dock at Rotherhithe is noted as being in the possession of Smith & Co. during the 1790s whilst the Deptford Green Yard<sup>22</sup> lease was assigned to Mr. William Barnard of the well known family of shipbuilders from Christmas 1773. The East India Company originally leased the Deptford site in 1607 and the building yard and dock was first leased to John Tailor before 1636 and from 1652 to Peter Pett. The lease and occupation of the yard by the Castles appears to have ended not later than 1713 when the site was leased to Edward Popley. Thereafter it progressed through the West family until taken over by William Barnard in 1773.

The Harwich Lights records also confirm this impasse regarding the details of the family tree. The Harwich Lights were first built by Sir William Batten in 1667. The various shareholdings in the related company were later split between different parts of the Castle family and eventually also appear to have become untraceable in the early 1700s.

In addition no subsequent Castles descendants could be accurately traced beyond 1718 as similarly proved to be the case with the Harwich Lights records.<sup>23</sup> In consequence the family tree of Castles, the shipbuilders, presented us with a major challenge in trying to establish the links between two different families, shipbuilding and shipbreaking, spanning different eras.

We shall investigate the case in more detail in the ensuing chapter. As previously mentioned it is the connection with the *Defiance* that was the claimed link with the Castles Shipbreaking companies. In 1931 the twelfth *Defiance*, the last sailing ship to fly the white ensign afloat, was purchased by Sidney Castle junior, the grandson of the shipbreaker Henry Castle, and broken up at the Company's yard in Plymouth, Devon. The link is stated in company brochures at that time and for example we quote below from the 1933 brochure: <sup>24</sup>

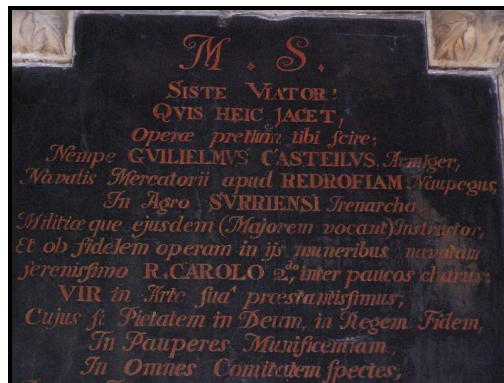
*"CASTLES' association with the Navy is centuries old. In 1666, William Castle built the fourth "Defiance" for King Charles II at Rotherhithe and today his descendant, as General Manager of CASTLES, is breaking up the twelfth "Defiance" in the world famous Naval Port of Plymouth"*

## **SHIPS BUILT BY CASTLE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

### **J. J. COLLEDGE**

- 1647** - *Bilbao Merchant* fitted out at Castles Dock, Rotherhithe
- 1654** - *Dover* - William Castle, Shoreham - 48 gun ship
- 1654** - *Taunton/renamed Crown* 1666 - William Castle, Rotherhithe
- 1666** - *Warspite* - Johnson & Castle, Blackwall
- 1666** - *Defiance* - Johnson & Castle, Deptford
- 1666** - *Monmouth* - Castle, Rotherhithe, Yacht
- 1666** - *Navy* - Castle, Rotherhithe, Yacht
- 1675** - *Formosa Frigate*, Robert Castle for East India Company
- 1678** - *Hope* - Robert Castle, Deptford
- 1678** - *Dartmouth* - Re-fit at Capt. Castle's Dock, Rotherhithe
- 1679** - *Elizabeth* - Robert Castle, Deptford
- 1687** - *Assistance* - Re-built Castle, Deptford
- 1681** - *Mordaunt* - William Castle, Deptford
- 1690** - *Griffin* - Rolfe & Castle, Rotherhithe
- 1690** - *Vulture* - Castle, Rotherhithe
- 1690** - *Plymouth* - Castle (hulk purchased from Robert Castle)
- 1690** - *Wolf* - Castle, Deptford
- 1691** - *Phaeton* - Castle, Deptford
- 1691** - *Hart* - Rolfe & Castle, Rotherhithe -
- 1692** - *Kitchin* - Castle, Rotherhithe
- 1693** - *Bristol* - Robert & John Castle, Deptford
- 1693** - *Norwich* - Robert & John Castle, Deptford
- 1694** - *Swann* - Castle, Deptford
- 1695** - *Grenada(doe)/Granobe* - Robert & John Castle, Deptford
- 1695** - *Harwich* - Robert & John Castle, Deptford
- 1695** - *Pendennis* - Robert & John Castle, Deptford
- 1695** - *Thunder* - Castle
- 1696** - *Warwick* - Robert & John Castle, Deptford
- 1696** - *Nonsuch*, Robert & John Castle

## MEMORIAL TABLET IN THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY MAGDELEN, BERMONDSEY



This plaque is on the north wall of the chancel and is the oldest in the church dating from the time when the church was rebuilt.

On the plaque, Redrofiam is the word for the modern Rotherhithe, also recorded as Redriff Road (London SE16), and "R Carolo 2<sup>nd</sup>" is King Charles II. "Siste Viator" means something like "Attention, traveller!"

### Sacred to the Memory (Translation) <sup>25</sup>

HALT, TRAVELLER!

HE WHO LIES HERE

Is worthy of your attention

To wit WILLIAM CASTLE knight

Shipwright of the Merchant Navy at ROTHERHITHE

Justice of the Peace in the County of Surrey

Also Instructor (known as Major) of the Militia there

And by reason of his faithful labours in these offices, diligently performed

Prized as few others by His Most Serene Highness KING CHARLES II

A MAN outstanding of his kind

Whether for his piety towards God or his Fidelity towards the King

His Munificence towards the Poor

His Courtesy to All,

You will scarcely find his Equal among the living

There is nothing more to say

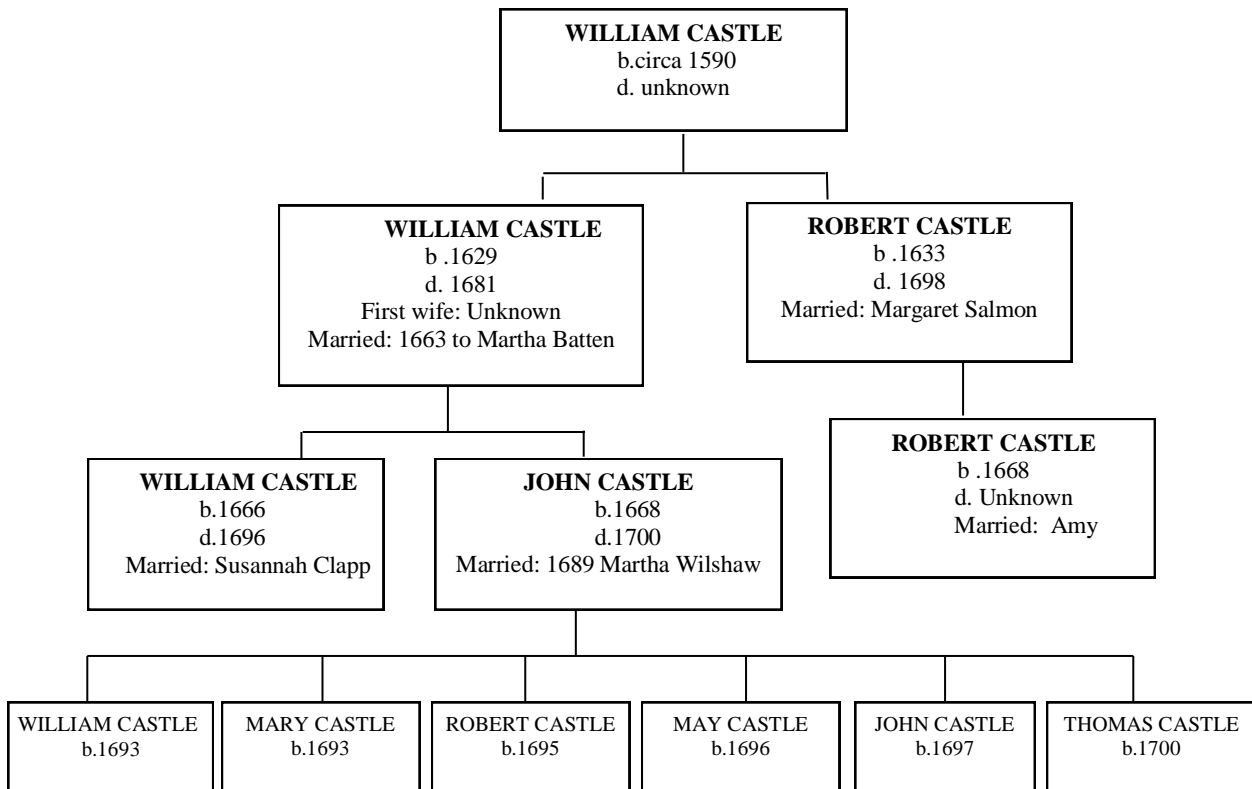
Go and Do Likewise

Deceased 26 June 1681 ...

in his 54<sup>th</sup> year (lit: His summers were 54)

AD (lit: in the year of human salvation)

## 17th CENTURY FAMILY PEDIGREE



## CHAPTER 1 - REFERENCES

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