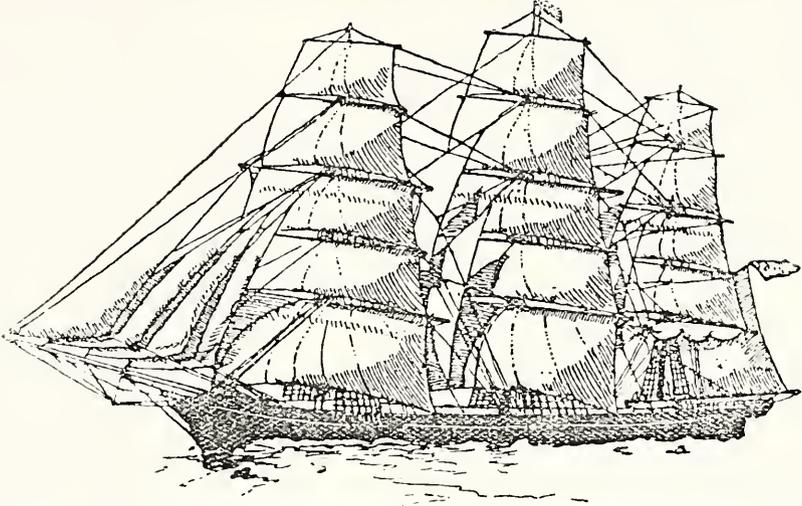


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The Aberdeen Clippers.



THE THERMOPYLÆ.

A famous class of sailing ships, the clippers, is recalled by the "passing away," in somewhat dramatic fashion, of one of the most famous of them, the Thermopylae, formerly of the Aberdeen Line. She made many brilliant performances as a fast sailer, taking a leading place in the races from China with the new season's teas that used to be the great sporting events of the maritime world. But with the supersession of sailing vessels by steamships the clippers were completely effaced, and for several years past the Thermopylae had been doing humble duty as a training ship at the mouth of the Tagus. She became too old, as well as too small, for even this service, and so was discarded about six months ago. The Portuguese Government, however, did not like to sell a vessel with her reputation, and, actuated by a sentiment similar to that which inspired Oliver Wendell Holmes's verses on "Old Ironsides—"

"Oh, better that her shattered hulk
Should sink beneath the wave,"

decided recently to give her a "naval funeral." She was accordingly towed out to sea and sunk by two Portuguese men-of-war. "So ended," says the Australian newspaper which chronicles the incident, "the career of one of the finest

and fastest sailing ships that ever sailed the ocean."

CLIPPERS.

The clipper has been characterised as "the highest development of the wooden sailing ship in construction, speed, and beauty." However much or little there may be in the suggestion that the name is derived from an old meaning of the word "clip," to run or fly swiftly, a clipper was at any rate a ship built expressly for speed, though latterly it was so constructed as to combine the greatest carrying capacity with the form best adapted for speed. Speaking generally, and avoiding technical terms, the clipper was longer and narrower than the ordinary sailing ship, was very sharp at the bows, and was gracefully fined away towards the stern, "altogether presenting the contrast of the racehorse to the beast of burden." British supremacy in shipbuilding has existed so long that it is difficult perhaps to realise that in the matter of wooden ships the Americans were once our rivals, and very formidable rivals too. In the early years of last century they made very considerable strides in the construction of vessels specially designed for speed. In the war of 1812 conspicuous service was rendered by a number of swift privateers built at Baltimore, which came to be known as Baltimore clippers. Many of them were subsequently employed as African slavers, and clipper-shaped vessels of small size also engaged in the opium trade conducted with China. "The clipper ship

era," however, really dates from 1845, when the *Rainbow*, of 750 tons, was launched at New York. Other vessels of the same build, and of ever-increasing dimensions and an augmented expanse of canvas, were rapidly added, and these clippers were able to beat, in point of speed, any vessels then afloat.

THE CHINA TEA CLIPPERS.

With the discovery of gold in California an improved class of clippers sprang into existence, which, not content with voyaging to San Francisco with goods to the mining population, raced across the Pacific to China, and, owing to their speed, lifted the bulk of the tea cargoes, conveying them to British ports, not only in face of British ships but at double the rates of freight that British ships could command. British merchants and British ship-builders speedily set themselves to reverse these conditions—to build vessels of a like speed and so secure the trade. Before then, however, the construction of vessels on clipper lines had begun on a small scale. A number of traders in Aberdeen had formed themselves into a company to build a superior class of sailing vessels to compete with the paddle steamers to London, and Messrs Alexander Hall and Sons, local ship-builders, constructed for them a schooner of 142 tons, experimenting in the substitution of a sharp cut-water bow for the broad, bluff bow that was then common. This was in 1839, and the vessel—the first of its kind in Great Britain—was called the *Scottish Maid*. The experiment was successful—though to-day we smile at a 49-hours' voyage from Aberdeen to London being reckoned "quick." Other three schooners were built on the same model, and the "Aberdeen clipper bow" became celebrated. In 1845 the Messrs Hall built a clipper schooner, the *Torrington*, 144 tons, for Messrs Jardine, Matheson, and Company, to compete with the American opium clippers. She was the first British clipper engaged in the China trade, being sent out as a test; and she answered the test so well that other schooners of the same build but of larger dimensions quickly followed. When the competition in the conveyance of tea cargoes was at its height it was discovered that, while the American vessels were superior in speed, they were inferior in strength, some of them landing their cargoes in a damaged state. Messrs Hall were thereupon commissioned by Jardine, Matheson, and Co. to build a ship "with lines as sharp as those of any American, but of superior strength." They produced, towards the close of 1850, a vessel of 506 tons—the first real clipper ship built in this country—which was named the *Stormoway*, after Stormoway Castle, Lewis, then owned by Sir James Matheson, one of the partners of the great trading firm of the East. Messrs Hall built another clipper, the *Chrysolite*, 471 tons, in the following year, and followed this up in 1853 by building—again for Jardine, Matheson, and Co.—a clipper twice as big, the *Cairngorm*, 1250 tons,

which "proved equal in speed to any of her foreign competitors, and, by delivering her cargo in superior order, obtained a preference." But while Aberdeen thus took the lead, it soon ceased to have a monopoly of clipper-building. The *Lord of the Isles*, built on the Clyde, was a very noted clipper in her day, and other prominent Clyde clippers were the *Sir Lancelot*, the *Taoeping*, the *Taiting*, the *Ariel*, and the *Serica*, the last four taking part with the *Fiery Cross* of Liverpool in a remarkable ocean race in 1856. This was the last of the races at which premiums for first arrival were awarded, and with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the development of steam shipping the halcyon days of the clippers came to an end. The clippers by that time, however, had thoroughly accomplished the purpose for which they were designed, and had rescued the China freight trade from American dominance.

THE THERMOPYLE

Clipper-built vessels were not exclusively employed in the China tea trade, however. They were for many years a feature of the shipping service between this country and Australia, particularly of the Aberdeen Line, owned by Messrs George Thompson and Co., a firm founded in Aberdeen in 1825 by Mr George Thompson, subsequently Lord Provost of the city and its representative in Parliament. The firm's connection with Australia began towards the close of 1843, the pioneer of the fleet, known as the *White Star* clippers—which were the first regular traders to Australia—being the *Phœnician*, a barque of 418 tons. Additional clippers followed rapidly, all built by Messrs Walter Hood and Co., Aberdeen. They included the *Patriarch* (which accomplished the quickest passage ever made between Sydney and London, 63 days), the *Salanis*, *Aristides*, *Miltiades*, *Pericles*, and other fine ships well known in the Australian trade. These vessels performed many wonderful trips, but the pride of the line was the *Thermopylæ*—the clipper which has just "sunk beneath the wave" in the picturesque manner mentioned. She was of composite construction, and was launched from Messrs Hood's yard in 1863. On her maiden voyage to Melbourne she dropped anchor in Hobson's Bay 61 days out from London Docks—a record never beaten by any sailing ship between these ports. On one day she logged 336 knots in the 24 hours, and on her second trip to Melbourne she did even better by reefing off 342 knots in 24 hours. She was intended expressly for the Australian and China trade, and rendered good service in it. In her first race from Foochow to London (1869) she did the voyage in 91 days, beaten only by *Sir Lancelot*, of the Clyde, which scored with 89 days. The *Thermopylæ* enjoyed the reputation of being in her prime the fastest sailing ship afloat, but was ultimately withdrawn from the Aberdeen Line, the company substituting steamers for sailers. Her highly-honourable name, however, was transferred to one of the steamers.

The Aberdeen clippers, it may be added, were remarkably immune from disaster; but one of the largest and very best built, the Schomberg, 2600 tons, launched in 1855, was lost on her first voyage, being wrecked on the rocks at Cape Otway, 150 miles west of Melbourne.—"R. A." in "Glasgow Herald," April 26.

[A correspondent, writing subsequently to the "Glasgow Herald," corrected the statement relative to the maiden voyage of the Thermopylae. The vessel, he said, left Gravesend on November 7 at 5 a.m., and anchored in Port Phillip Harbour on January 9 at 7 p.m. The actual time, after making the necessary deduction for difference in longitude, was 63 days 4 hours 20 minutes. The distance was 13,865 nautical miles. For downright sensational running, however (this correspondent added), perhaps the American clipper Lightning takes first place. Coming from Boston, in 1854, this vessel ran 436 nautical miles in one day. Running down to the "Horn" from Melbourne, she is said to have done 3712 knots in 10 consecutive days. She covered the distance from Port Phillip Heads to the "Horn"—not far short of 6000 knots—in a trifle under 19 days. It does not seem to be generally known that in 1833 the Maulesden, built by Stephen at Dundee, ran from Greenock to Maryborough—fully 15,000 knots—in 69 days.]

The Mar Estates.

When John, the 6th Earl of Mar (of the Erskine family) was attainted of high treason, for the rising of 1715, his estates were forfeited to the Crown and sold in 1724. An abstract of the rental while the estates were in the hands of the Crown gives amusing and instructive particulars of the values of grain and other commodities about 200 years ago. The abstract contains nothing to show whether the values were fixed under the charters and leases, nor the dates of these, or whether they were fixed according to the current prices of the time.

The estates lay in the counties of Stirling, Aberdeen, and Ross, and yielded a total net rental of £1468 17s 10d, made up of money, grain, and kain rents. It may be noted that the boll of grain (including wheat) was valued at Stirlingshire, at 6s 11½d, and at Bothkinnar, also in Stirlingshire, at 10s. The rents included:—

From the lordship of Alloa—

1040 Bolls of grain and oatmeal @ 6s 11½d p boll.

4½ pecks of mustard @ 2s 6d p. peck.

Geese, 79 @ at 1s 6d each.

Capons, 484 @ 7d each.

Hens, 856½ @ 5d each.

Ducks, 42 @ 5d each.

Turcs of straw, 159 @ 1s 1½d each.

1 Miln sow @ 11s 1½d.

Butter, 1 stone @ 6s 3d.

Salmon fishing, being casual, @ 5s.

The chief rents (or feu-duties) of Mar included—

Poultry, 109½ @ 2d each.

Loads of peat, 181½ @ 2d each.

The chief rents of Kilkenny included—

Wethers, 17 @ 3s 10¾d each.

Geese, 60 @ 10d each.

Capons, 45 @ 5d each.

Hens or poultry, 275 @ 2d each.

The farm rents included—

1½ bolls barley and oatmeal @ 6s 11½d p boll.

Wethers, 5 @ 3s 10¾d each.

Geese, 6 @ 10d each.

Capons, 18 @ 5d each.

Hens, 180 @ 2d each.

1 Sow @ 11s 1½d.

4 Ells linen @ 6¾d p. ell.

The rents of Corgarriff included—

Wethers, 15 @ 3s 10¾d each.

Butter, 14 stone @ 6s 3d p. stone.

The rents of Braemar were all in money, as also the rents of the lands in Ross-shire. The chief rents of Bothkinnar included 80 bolls wheat at 10s p. boll.

Bannerman Papers.

The following paragraph appeared in the Aberdeen newspapers, 17th March, 1900:—

"In January last, Mr David Littlejohn, Sheriff-Clerk of Aberdeenshire, gave official notice that there was in his custody an iron box, with the following inscription:—

"The said box containing MSS. of the deceased Sir ALEXANDER BANNERMAN of Elsick, Baronet, has been placed in the custody of the Sheriff-Clerk of Aberdeenshire, to be preserved by him and his successors in office unopened till the year One Thousand Nine Hundred, and then, and not till then, to be delivered to the head of the Bannerman Family, agreeably to interlocutor of date 27th May, 1842, pronounced by the Sheriff of Aberdeenshire in the cause Sir Alexander Bannerman's Trustees against Mr Thomas Bannerman."

Mr Littlejohn also intimated that delivery of the box was claimed by Sir George Bannerman, Bart., of Elsick, East Hill, Braekley, Northants; and as, after due notice, no objection has been taken to the delivery of the box, it was yesterday handed over to the agents of Sir George Bannerman, Messrs Paul and Williamsons, advocates, Aberdeen. The box is securely clamped and bound, and has been delivered upon an interlocutor by Sheriff Crawford.

Gordons as Masons.

I am indebted to Mr Adam Muir Mackay, Edinburgh, for the following list of Gordons who were admitted members of (Masonic) Lodge St David, Edinburgh, the date of their admission being given on the left hand side:—

1st April, 1754—John Gordon, W.S., of Balmuir, Aberdeenshire.