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Extract from Owners in the British Southern Whale Fishery

Over the 85 years of the British Southern Whale Fishery some 300 families or individuals owned south sea whaleships. Initially, the trade was driven forward by two groups, American owners engaged in the trade as a consequence of their loyalty to Britain in preference to support for the American revolutionary cause and secondly, a group of London based owners who had previously been involved in the trade as importers of oil or oil products. A consequence of the war and its aftermath was that the American owners never exerted the sort of political and trade influence that the London based owners were able to elicit in support of the trade but the influence of the Americans, particularly as many Nantucket whalemens commanded British whaleships should not be underestimated.

British shipowners engaged in the British Southern Whale Fishery

Daniel Bennett & Sons. (1786 – 1844) Daniel Bennett (1760–1826)

Throughout the 18th and early 19th century, London was the leading port in Britain for Southern Whaling, and Bennett & Co. were one of its principal operators. Of the 300 owners in the British southern whaling and sealing trades during this period, Bennett & Co. were one of the few that lasted more than twenty years and they were the largest. The trade was based at Wapping, Limehouse and Rotherhithe, on both sides of the River Thames, many ship-owners regarding the risky South Seas trade as one part of their overall business activities.

Daniel Bennett was one of seven children born to Thomas Bennett (c.1725–1800) and his wife Elizabeth (née) Chambers (c.1727–). He began his working life following in the footsteps of his father, a brazier at Wapping, where many trades connected with shipbuilding, boat building and the entrepôt trades were located, close to the Port of London.

By 1781, aged 21 years, Daniel had established his own business as 'Ironmonger & Brazier' at 242 Wapping, near Execution Dock. Daniel was related to the Bennett family of Wiltshire, where his grandfather (Daniel) was a prominent gentleman farmer, holding Leasehold Estates and owning various properties in Westport, Malmesbury and the surrounding areas. A small monetary bequest Daniel received on the death of his grandfather in 1778 may have contributed to the large fee demanded for starting a business in a highly capitalized trade in London.

As a skilled tradesman whose work was connected to shipping, Daniel Bennett clearly saw that ownership of a few vessels could help to extend his business and provide market security.

Within six years, in 1786, he was able to purchase his first ship, the ship-rigged, 150-ton Lively, built during 1777 in America. Lively sailed for the Southern Fishery under Captain Barnett and returned in 1787 with a full cargo. Adding a second vessel, the Active, to his fleet, Bennett operated with only two ships for a number of years. By investing his profits back into the business he was able to purchase more vessels and increased his tonnage substantially. Bennett's operating fleet in 1796 numbered fifteen vessels, with an aggregate tonnage of 1 354 tons, making him the 'leading owner' in the South Seas trade.

As his wealth increased, Bennett changed the description of his main occupation in London directories and documents from 'brazier' to 'ship owner' and 'merchant'. Unlike his main competitor in the whaling trade, Samuel Enderby, the political promoter of whaling, Daniel Bennett has been described as a 'low profile operator', paying little attention to 'fame, political influence or the activities of the Royal Geographical Society'—which was keen to promote new discoveries made by whaling masters, among them Bennett's employees Captains Robert Rhodes, George Powell and Peter Kemp.

This characterization perhaps explains his success in the business, and the reason why little information about the firm and its operational management survives. In 18th-century England, for those who did not farm, there was the equivalent need to acquire a craft practice or trade to earn a living, seek opportunities for advancement and achieve prosperity.

Creating strategic alliances or 'networks of opportunity' was an important part of business strategy. In the City of London, coffee shops were important centres of social and business activity. Merchants, underwriters and those associated with shipping would frequent those in the vicinity of the Royal Exchange (the headquarters of Lloyd's from 1774) and the Thames where relevant news was exchanged and marine

business including ship auctions and marine insurance was transacted. Such meeting places would have allowed Daniel Bennett to keep up to date with shipping news and gossip, create new acquaintances and establish useful business contacts.

An advantage of Bennett's trade as an ironmonger and brazier was that it enabled him to keep his ships seaworthy and in better condition than Enderby. He extended the life of his older vessels by strengthening them with new iron beams or coppering the hulls to protect the timber from teredo (shipworm) infestation. Well aware of the risks involved in coppering iron-fastened ships he carried out his own experiments over more than ten years, advising the Admiralty of his methods and results in a letter dated 21 September 1808 from his home in 'Vanburgh Fields, Blackheath'.

By 1801, Bennett's fleet was three times the size of Enderby's, and he managed to keep them regularly employed, departure and arrival dates indicating a rapid turn-around, for which Bennett was noted. With a reliable income he was able to re-invest his profits in land-based assets to increase his 'social overhead capital' (i.e. 'fixed capital'). About 1802, he purchased the Oil Wharf by the King's Mill, Rotherhithe, at the entrance to the Grand Surrey Canal, and for more than 40 years had warehouses, cooperage sheds, a house, cottage and gardens nearby.

As the oil trade expanded, so his business flourished. Operations were maintained at both Wapping and Rotherhithe, and he moved his home to one of the best residential districts of Blackheath—a location where a concentration of shipping interest in the Pacific existed. This network provided Bennett with a financial opportunity to access eastern Australian waters for whaling, and the East India trade, by transporting convicts to Botany Bay.

Bennett was a cautious purchaser of ships, preferring to invest in cheap prizes rather than risk expensive new vessels in speculative ventures. Indeed, he only commissioned the construction of one new vessel throughout his career.

Fractional ownership of ships declined with the advent of marine insurance and Bennett preferred to maintain sole management of his fleet, using 'sleeping partners' only where there was a strategic need to raise extra capital and spread the risk of a voyage, or be involved in trades that could assist in the operational management of his vessels, such as ship's chandlers, grocers and so on.

Bennett's part sale of the Hillsborough in 1802 to Sir Charles Price, a merchant, Lord Mayor of London and politician, and the former naval vessel Recovery to Charles Price & Co., all influential and wealthy City gentlemen, were notable examples.

An American vessel purchased in 1815 was renamed Sir Charles Price, clearly an acknowledgment of his benefactor.

The Morning Star, purchased in 1813, also had a third owner (or partner) who was not a family member. In this instance it was John Clark Spence, Bennett's Manager of his Rotherhithe operations, and a long-serving master of several of his ships including the Duke of Portland, chartered to carry convicts to New South Wales in 1807. As a sole owner, Daniel Bennett would have had independent control over the management and operation of his fleet, and decisions concerning his enterprise.

During his whaling career, Bennett was fortunate to have lost very few of his ships at sea. One notable loss was that of a second whaler named Lively, a 240-ton French prize purchased in 1798. Remains of a shipwreck discovered in the early 1980s on Mermaid Reef in the Rowley Shoals, about 160 nautical miles off the coast of North-West Australia, were investigated and identified by maritime archaeologists from the Western Australian Museum, Fremantle, as being Bennett's Lively (Stanbury 2015). Exactly how the ship met its demise, and members of the crew—at least the Captain, Joseph Whitehouse (or Whiteus)—made it safely back to London is yet to be conclusively determined.

Daniel and his first wife Elizabeth (née Ball) (b. Abt. 1756 d. 24 Nov. 1815) had two children: a daughter Sarah (b. Abt. 1779 d. 1858) who married John Goodwin (b. Abt. 1773 d. 1810) in December 1801 in Greenwich and had a daughter, Sarah, who married the Reverend Maximilian Geneste, the first incumbent of Holy Trinity Church, Cowes; and, a son William (b. 7 July 1788 d. 18 Jan. 1844) who married Marianna (née Dunkin) (b. 19 Mar. 1795 d. 24 Feb. 1840) in September 1817 and had six children.

William joined his father in the ship-owning business about 1811, the firm trading as Daniel Bennett & Son. Gradually, Daniel Snr. took a less active role and moved to Faringdon House, Berkshire, in 1818 to become a 'country gentleman'. Two years later he married Ann Elizabeth Boughton (b. 1780 d. 26 July 1838) of Bath.

Memorial plaques for Daniel Bennett and his two wives, William's wife Marianna and two of their children are in the High Wycombe Parish Church, Berkshire, where William was also laid to rest.

Memorials to other Bennett family members are in the All Saints Church, Faringdon, formerly part of the Faringdon House Estate.

Three whaling try-pots made by the firm of Johnson & Son, Old Gravel Lane, Wapping, located just a short distance from Daniel Bennett's brazier's business, remain in the garden of one of the former estate houses on Radcot Road, Faringdon.

Daniel Bennett was a dynamic and successful businessman and ship-owner. He accumulated wealth through his whaling and other ship-owning activities in London, management of hereditary properties in Wiltshire, and new investments in Berkshire, West Cowes (Isle of Wight) and New Windsor.

On his death, in 1826, aged 66, the major parts of his estate were inherited by his son William Bennett and daughter Sarah Goodwin, with bequests to his widow, other family members, servants and associates. [Myra Stanbury]

A painting dated 1820 of Daniel Bennett Esq. of Faringdon House (Artist unknown) is held by Faringdon Town Council. On permanent loan to Faringdon Library since 28 June 2011.

NOTE: No genealogical information has been found to date for either Mary or Hester Bennett, Daniel Bennett's younger sisters, being the only persons other than a sister/s of his first wife Elizabeth Ball and/or second wife Ann Elizabeth Boughton who could have produced 'nieces or nephews' being the progeny of a person with the surname Wardell, as mentioned in his Will of 1820.

It is most likely that Daniel was a 'proxy uncle' to children of a Wardell business associate.

William Bennett (1790–1844) During William's partnership with his father they owned at least 50 ships, trading as Daniel Bennett & Son, or later, after his father's move to Faringdon House, as variants of William & Daniel Bennett, William Bennett, Blackheath & Daniel Bennett, Faringdon,

William & Daniel Bennett, Rotherhithe merchants, indicating that Daniel maintained a financial and active interest in the business, even though 'retired'.

William Bennett, as executor of his father's will, purchased his father's share in the jointly owned vessels and continued to manage the ship-owning and Rotherhithe businesses with the help of his second and third sons, William (1826–1848) and John Dunkin Bennett (1830–1851). Like his father before him, William changed his main occupation in the London directories from 'merchant', 'ship owner', to 'South Seas ship owner', the latter being located at 294 Rotherhithe. From 1836, some of the older ships were replaced and others used until they had to be sold or broken up.

William inherited the Blackheath and Rotherhithe estates, a house at West Cowes and Faringdon House, and was influential and acknowledged in local affairs. He was appointed High Sheriff of Berkshire in 1836, and his three sons, Daniel (1823–1887), William and John Dunkin were appointed as Land Tax Commissioners for Berkshire the same year.

In 1838, William was presented with a gold vase and cover decorated with the Bennett arms and crest, mask heads of cattle and other relief ornamentation in recognition of his contribution to the success of the Faringdon Monthly Cattle Market. At the presentation, the Chairman described him as: '*A gentleman whose modest, unassuming deportment commanded the respect of all, while his feelings were ever alive to assist the poor, needy and afflicted...*'

At the time of William's death in 1844 the firm had only five ships that were sold to other owners in the trade. To what extent William's eldest son, Daniel, was involved in the whaling business is unclear, although they are listed as owners of many of the later vessels.

Daniel inherited Faringdon House and lived there with his wife Mary Elizabeth (née Corbett) and only daughter, Marianna Katherine Bennett. He was listed in the 1861 census as a 'magistrate and landed proprietor'.

Faringdon House remained in the family until 1919 when Marianna died unmarried.

[Myra Stanbury] References Politics, Patronage and Profit: A Case Study of Three 18th Century London Merchants. Dissertation submitted towards the MA in Maritime History, University of Greenwich Cozens, K.J. (2005)

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