

Festivals, Carnivals and Celebrations and Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

July, 2023.

On the return voyage from Memel Edward thought of little else but the foreign lands he had visited and the welcome he had received, the kindly gentleman but perhaps most of all the lovely Alexandra. As the "Black Swan" entered the Thames estuary the accommodation ladder was swung out and lowered for the river pilot to come aboard and thus they proceeded upstream to the royal docks. No sooner had the ship been secured alongside the quay than one of the company's directors accompanied by a payroll clerk came aboard. The clerk preceded to pay the crew their wages whilst the director repaired to the captain's cabin to obtain the officer's verbal report of the voyage meanwhile stevedores commenced unloading the ship's cargo.

The clerk announced to Edward that there is a letter for him and somewhat too his consternation those crew members within earshot commenced ribbing him with observations that his trouble and strife was catching up with him or else it was the girl in the house of ill repute that the others had visited in Memel. The letter was from Edward's mother suggesting that if there would be a few days to spare between arrival and his next voyage that he should visit her sister and her brother-in-law, Edward's Uncle and Aunt whose residence at Greenwich is maybe easy travelling distance for him. To guard against Edward not remembering or not having details with him his mother also confided her brother-in-law's name and address, Gerald Turnbull of Navigator's House, Maze Hill, Greenwich.



Greenwich Hospital from the River, circa 1870.

It was fortunate for Edward that the "Black Swan" was berthed at the western end of the Victoria Dock, and thus it was a relatively short walk for the strong and healthy young man from the dock gates to the road which crossed Bow Creek and the East India Dock Basin. As the river swung southward and entered Blackwall reach, the road Edward was following led into Cubitt Town and shipbuilding yards along the eastern side of the Isle of Dogs. The river now flowed along Greenwich Reach and on the opposite bank Edward observed a fine building or rather two fine buildings of "L" shape plan, the shape complimenting each other (see note 2). These stood out against the rather dilapidated surrounding structures which had clearly seen better days. It was here on the southern side

of the Isle of Dogs that our young seafarer obtained the services of a Thames boatman to row him across to the southern shore of the river, and on enquiring of the boatman, who seemed to be about sixty years of age, but may in reality may have been no more than in his forties, after the grand building he was informed "I thought you weren't from hereabouts by yer accent young sir, that be Sir Christopher Wren's Royal Naval Hospital. Likely you'll see a few of the inmates walking 'bout". Finding the boatman helpful Edward enquired the direction to Maze Hill. "Yer go down yer frog 'n' toad, passed yer ba'll cruiser, yer can't miss i' right 'cross the park, up near Black 'eath" stated the cockney as Edward paid the boatman who promptly vouched the opinion "Mind 'em apples 'n' pears as yer go, can be right slippery with the tide." Edward stepped ashore near the "Crown and Sceptre" tavern.

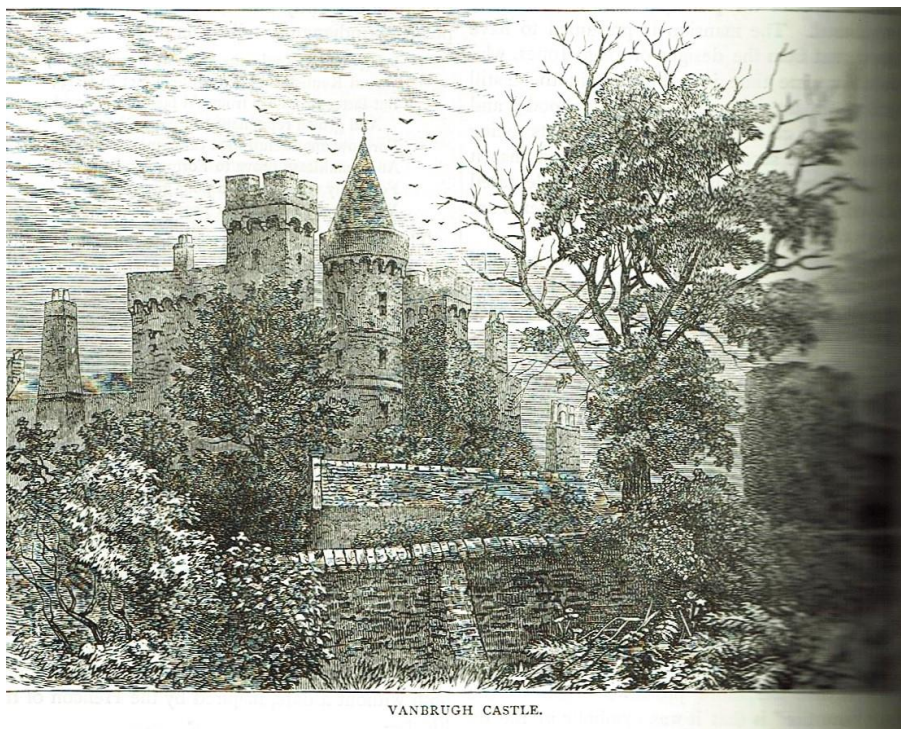


Edward now entered a maze of narrow streets and in the jumble of buildings he soon lost his sense of direction, but coming across a group of three elderly gentleman strangely dressed in the style of some hundred years earlier with tricorne hats he again enquired the way to Maze Hill, and he was directed to the entrance to Greenwich Park and then advised to cross the Park diagonally. On asking after the name of the house he was seeking, Edward was informed to make for the top of Maze Hill, with knowing looks.



The three Greenwich Pensioners Edward met.

As Edward crossed Greenwich Park past One Tree Hill, he observed ahead what appeared to be an ancient medieval castle, but unlike most other fortresses of such antiquity this one appeared to be in near perfect condition whilst from its lancet windows a splendid view of the park, the Naval Hospital and river would be obtained (see note 3).



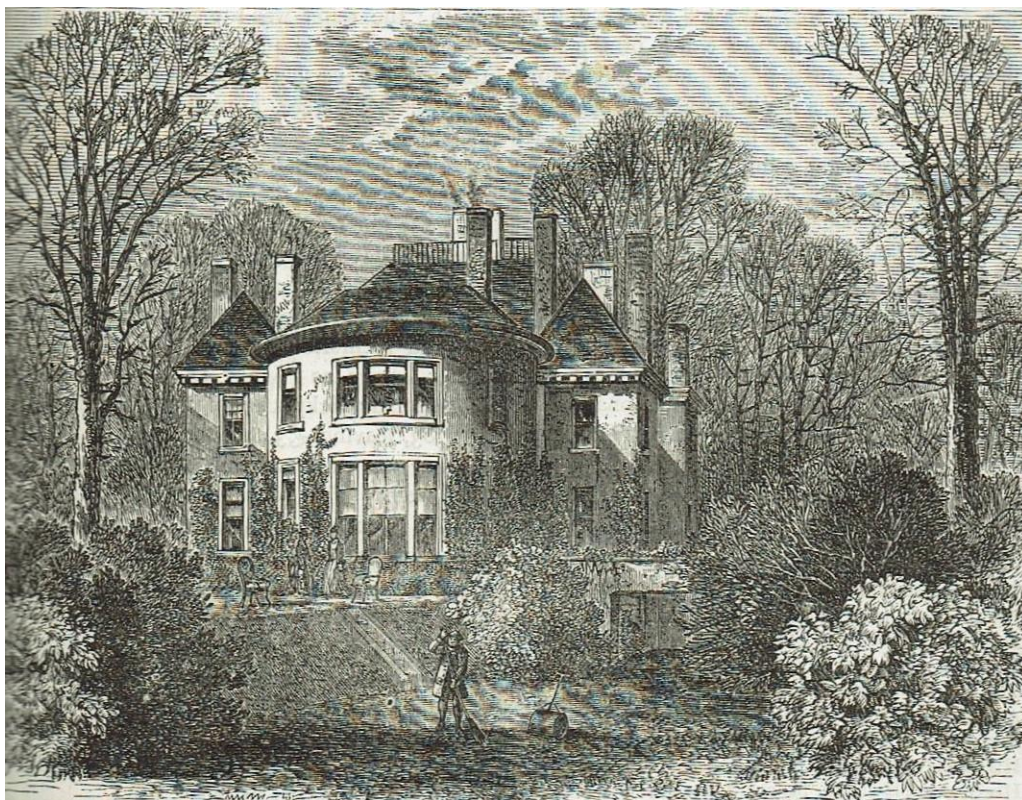
Entering Maze Hill, the road which led from near the river, uphill on the east side of Greenwich Park to Black Heath at the summit, following the Royal Naval Hospital Pensioner's instructions, Edward turned right up hill. He had now been walking all morning, and in the heat of mid-summer had become both hungry and thirsty. He had just passed Navigator's House, but being a well brought-up young gentleman he refrained

from calling on his uncle at luncheon time not wishing to give the impression that he was only visiting for free food and drink. He had now reached the summit of Maze Hill and ahead as he walked there came into view a tavern that looked far more hospitable than those he had seen near the river in Greenwich, so he wended his way towards the “Green Man” as was announced by the name written large on the fascia below the roof.



The building, as Edward found, was a three-story hotel and proved to be most comfortable. The young gentleman ordered a pint of best bitter and a plate of roast beef with a small loaf of bread. Being tall at just over six feet, broad shouldered with a narrow waist, even dressed in his sailor clothes Edward cut a fine figure. He wore black polished shoes, blue serge bell bottom trousers, white shirt under a dark blue reefer jacket unbutton because of the warm weather, whilst a straw boater completed his attire, covering his blond hair and shading his blue eyes.

Whilst devouring his repass he was entertained by the establishment's servant girl who wished to know where he had sailed to, his attire declaring his occupation as a seafarer, if he was married or not and where his mum and dad lived. Edward answered all her questions truthfully until the Landlady spotting what the girl was up to called her away to wash dishes. It was now nearer to two o'clock and our young gentleman left six pence on the table and wended his way to Navigator's House where his uncle resided near the top of Maze Hill.



Navigator's House, Maze Hill, Greenwich.

It was a large house built in the romantic style of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and thus about ninety years old, which promised to be spacious and judging from the external well-maintained presentation the residence of a gentleman of comfortable means. Marching up to the main entrance with just a little tribulation, as he was unsure of the reception he would receive, he knocked on the door, doorbells, he remembered just in time, were for tradesmen not visitors. The door was opened by a smartly dressed maid wearing a black Calico dress below a white apron and mop cap. Learning from the young gentleman standing before her that he was her employer's nephew she immediately dropped him a curtsy and showed him into the breakfast room while she went off to inform the Commander as his mother's brother-in-law was known. Returning after a few minutes she asked him to follow her leading the way into the library where the Master was seated behind a large mahogany desk. The library was situated on the north side of the house with views down Maze Hill to the river, Greenwich Hospital and the shipyards of Blackwall and Millwall on the Isle of Dogs. The room was lined with bookcases in which were numerous leather-bound volumes, whilst over the chimney mantle there hung a seascape painting of several sailing ships off the coast of an Asian country. Rising immediately Edward entered the room, he greeted the young mariner with "Come in my boy, what will you have to drink, the sun is well over the yard arm so name your poison and with any luck Hodges will bring it." Edward asked for a glass of light ale upon which the Commander pulled the silk cord beside the mantle and the maid appeared after a few minutes. Bobbing a curtsy "You rang sir" she said.

"Yes" responded the Commander, "Bring our visitor a glass of the best ale, and a decanter of madeira and glasses."

Having despatched the girl to bring refreshments, the host announced that Edward's aunt would be joining them in a few minutes, adding "You knows what women are, always something extra they have thought of, but perhaps that's something for you to discover yet, never makes much dam difference though."

The Lieutenant Commander's wife, Edward's aunt, presented a neat well-dressed appearance in an afternoon dress of green cotton complete with a fashionable bussell, her once blond hair was now flecked with grey, stood, Edward judged, about five feet three inches high, whilst her husband appeared to tower over her being at least six feet tall. Nevertheless, Aunt Charlotte was every inch the mistress of the house having become accustomed to control of the household management and their financial affairs during her husband's long absences in the service of the East India Company and after 1858 that of

the Royal Navy, often on the China Station. Authority combined with a gentle kindness came naturally to her.

An early afternoon of pleasantries ensued with Charlotte, Edward's aunt, enquiring after her sister's health, and that of Edward's father and his brother and sister and her two grandsons. After about an hour she excused herself with the thought that with Edward's maritime experience the two of them must have much to discuss and having pressed her nephew to stay to dinner and at least until tomorrow morning added that Cook and Hodges would need a little supervision as they had not been expecting a house guest.

Left on their own again Edward's uncle, every bit a bluff no nonsense naval officer, though he had now been retired from service for several years spoke kindly though a little gruffly to Edward, "Now come here lad and tell me all about your travels." Once the young man had finished recalling his adventures in Lithuania, the Commander sat back in his chair studied Edward carefully and asked why with the family connections and his education at Monmouth School he had chosen to be a deck hand in the merchant marine. "You might make master mariner, but your prospects are limited, and if as the captain of the "Forfarshire" your ship is lost on the rocks of the Farne Islands because your employers sent you to sea in a vessel with worn-out boilers it will be you, they all blame."

"If you will allow me to speak bluntly" he continued "and I mean only for your own good, with your education you could choose any profession and be the gentleman you are, not a mere deckhand."

As Edward started to protest, his uncle raised a hand to silence the objection and observed that, "If you are serious about the lass you met, Alexandra, then you had better start making your way in the world."

Edward considered this for a few moments before attempting to explain that as the second son he could work in his father's business but would never inherit, unless his brother died without issue, which seemed unlikely as he already had two healthy boys.

"Is that a reason to throw away your considerable advantages, there are many other opportunities other than building small carriages." The Commander thought for a moment before adding, "Earlier you mentioned steam ships being the future and replacing sail. Have you read what Karl Benz and Gottlieb Daimler have achieved with something called an internal combustion engine? No coal, no steam, just a tank of liquid called gasoline and away you travel, read about it in "The Morning Post" last month, been around a year now. Cost a fortune to set up the manufacturing ability, but mark my words young man, someday, not in my lifetime, more people will own these vehicles and the horse and carriage will not be wanted. Think about it, no food required when not working, no stabling to pay for, and no shoes at the farrier."

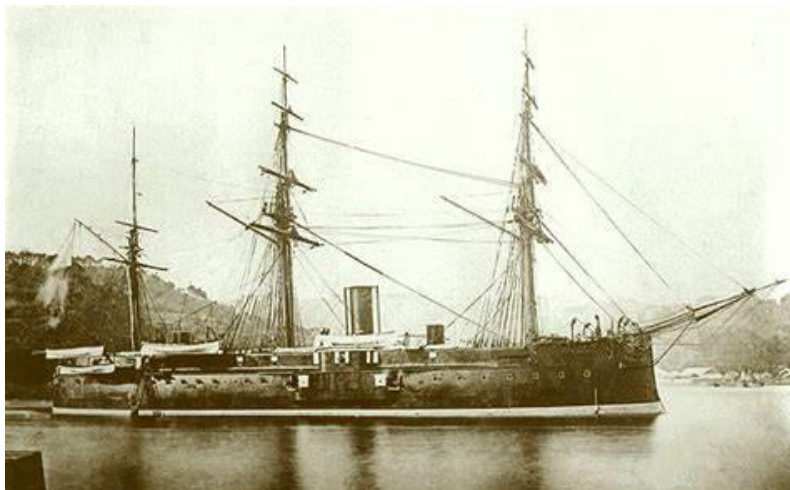
Edward thought but said little. The day was very warm, there was a gentle breeze through the open French windows wafting into the library the scent of the honeysuckle growing on the trellis and the murmur of bees. The Commander began to feel drowsy which the mid-afternoon glass or two of Madeira assisted. He closed his eyes but did not fall asleep as Edward thought likely, instead, in a somewhat far away voice, Edward heard his uncle saying, "All very different in my day boy, worked in father's business if he had one, if not we found what employment we could. More opportunity than if you looked for it mind. Rotten life here then if you didn't stand on your own two feet and take chances. London's the place, streets paved with gold – not actually gold but opportunity to make sovereigns, and plenty. Met a man in the "Crown and Sceptre" down the road by the river, captain he was of one of John Company's Blackwall Frigates, best quart of India Pale Ale I ever bought. He made me, that captain, that's how I obtained employment by the East India Company, 'corse that were before it all went wrong with the Mutiny (see note 4), them murdering sepoys, they wrecked everything."



Blackwall Frigate “Alchetron”.

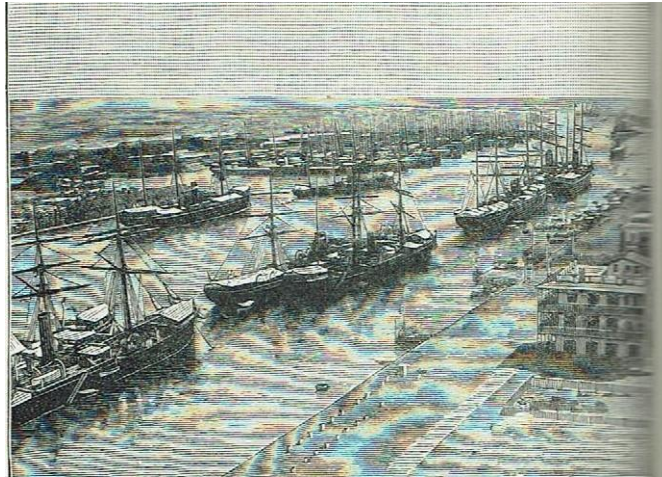
As Edward listened to his uncle’s musings, he wondered how much of the man’s life history he was about to hear, at home his parents had always been rather in awe of Uncle Gerald, a remote and wealthy relative of whom they heard very little and met even less frequently. Now it seemed he would be the best informed on the subject of Uncle Gerald and Aunt Charlotte. The Commander opened his eyes and looked up at Edward as though expecting to see someone else, then muttered “Oh! It’s you my boy, where was I up to, no one to talk to these days, your aunt doesn’t understand, stayed here to look after matters in London.”

“What was I telling you, Lad?” asked Uncle Gerald, “Ah yes, good to have someone interested, great opportunity the East India Company, a man could make the rank of major by twenty-five years of age, major general by thirty-five, promotion on merit, no need to buy you commission, not like the army here. Despised by the Regular Army chaps off course, just like poor Captain Nolan at Balaclava. Same in the Company’s navy, I soon made first lieutenant, captain by thirty-one of my own ship. ‘Course all that was before ’57. The profit we made, trading on our own account, all with John Company’s approval (see note 5), paid for this house it did, and a lot more besides.” Uncle Gerald sat quietly for a few minutes and Edward wonder what he should do when his uncle spoke again.



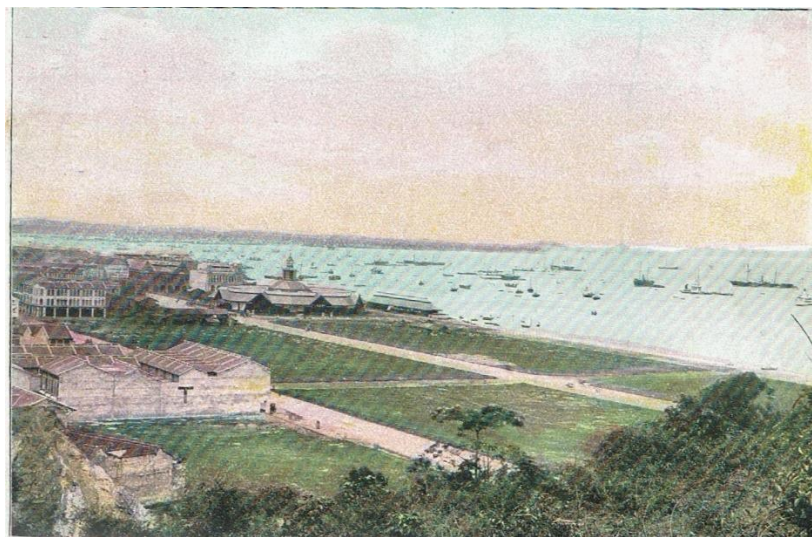
The ironclad Fusco in Japanese waters, mid 1880’s.

“After the Mutiny most of us were incorporated into the Royal Navy, and those in the Company’s army, the Regular Army. Not an easy transfer, had to follow regulations, not much scope for individual action, but I was lucky, only dropped rank to lieutenant, then worked my way up again. We took the “Fusco” to Japan, that was ten years ago, just before I was retired.” The Commander no longer had that far away look in his eyes, but became much more alive at the fairly recent memory. “She is a central battery ironclad, first ship we built for the Imperial Japanese Navy. I seem to remember she was launched just across the river at Cubitt Town in April of 1877, and I was second in command, all Royal Navy officers and crew. We sailed for Japan on the 22nd March, 1878, remember the date as it is your aunt’s birthday and she was not too pleased, missed a visit to a West End theatre and dining out, but even so she came to wave us off. Fine ship she was, an iron clad, double screw propulsion and sails with central gun turret.



Port Said on the Mediterranean coast, entrance to the 78 miles of the Suez Canal.

Called in at Malta where fresh water and provisions were taken on board, then on to Port Said for the Suez Canal. Hot as hell it was through the canal, temperature rarely below one hundred degrees (Fahrenheit). Bad luck there, we ran aground, and temporary repairs were effected before we departed from the canal zone. After the canal we were into the Red Sea with the heat increasing every day. At Aden our store of coal was replenished, and the ship’s course was altered to the southeast, into the India Ocean, making for Colombo on the west coast of Ceylon for more fresh water and provisions. Where possible we made use of the sails and with a good wind, they proved more reliable. Also, the crew could be put through their paces, up into the rigging to set sails or furl them, good practice and keeps the hands occupied. After Ceylon it was southwards for the Malacca Straits between the Dutch island of Sumatra and the Straits Settlements (see note 6) then Singapore for more fresh food and water. Don’t keep fresh long in the humid weather out there, even at sea.”



Singapore

Edward sat still enthralled, scarcely daring to breath lest any interruption would break the spell and Uncle Gerald would cease his intriguing reminiscence. Edward wanted to know more.

“Marvelous times they were, plenty to get on with and a man made his own decisions. Passing Sarawak on the starb’d beam the masthead lookout spotted a fast pirate boat, with the gang paddling like fury after a private schooner. Gave chase we did, captain ordered full speed ahead on the engine room telegraph and once we were in range we opened fire. Didn’t stand a chance the evil murderous savages, one well aimed shot destroyed their boat. Those not killed instantly the sharks soon devoured. Nice work, and the captain ordered an extra tot of rum all round. Anyway, we crossed the South China Sea sailing northeast and approached Tokyo Bay from the east with the sun rising astern, now those new to the far east understood why the country we were making for is known as the land of the rising sun.

We took her into Yokohama on the 11th June and on the 17th we moved to the Naval Arsenal for permanent repairs. Then there was a formal ceremony attended by the Meiji Emperor and the Japanese Court and naval senior officers for the receipt of the ship by the Imperial Japanese Navy held on the 10th July. It was a great event with much excitement and people travelled from miles away to see the navy’s first major vessel. After the ceremony the “Fuso” was opened for the nobility to visit, while we remained on board to conduct the visitors around the ship whilst the crew were kept busy answering questions, and three days later the ordinary people were allowed to visit for a week.”



Yokohama.

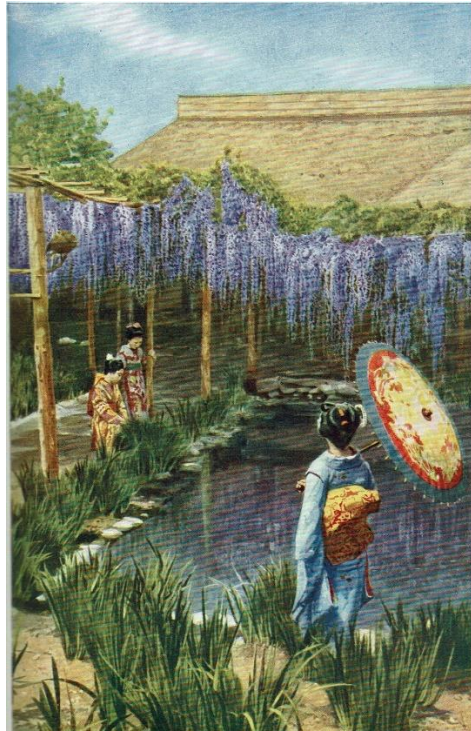
(The hump in the Lady’s back is not a deformity but a form of dress, see next picture)

Uncle Gerald suddenly looked up and seemed mildly surprised that his nephew was still by his side and listening.

“Am I boring you, lad?” he enquired. In the garden, being mid-summer, the sun was still quite high in the heavens, although it was approaching seven o’clock.

“It’s most fascinating”, said Edward, “Please tell me what happened next, and how did you come back home,”

“Not much more to tell really, but there is a big festival in Japan in July, so out of gratitude a group of officers took us, or rather those who wished to go, to Kyoto for the ancient Shinto celebration of Gion Matsuri (see note 7). A Major festival which goes on for days. There are great big, decorated vehicles which are moved through the streets, all very polite and respectful. As far as I could make out it’s been going on for over a thousand years and to do with warding off evil, disease, earthquakes, tidal waves, and other unwelcome events.” They sat in silence for a few minutes while Edward wondered how he could ask his uncle how to pursue his career when Aunt Charlotte entered with a rustle of taffeta to announce that dinner would be served at eight o’clock. She was elegantly dressed in a shimmering blue evening dress which pleasantly matched her bright blue eyes whilst her hair was drawn up in a bun.



Japanese Garden in Kyoto visited by Uncle Gerald.

“Thank you my dear” said Uncle Gerald, whilst turning to Edward and addressing him said, “Better dress for dinner now, lad.”

Aunt Charlotte informed her husband that they have an extra for dinner, that Commodore Russell will be gracing their home with his company.

“Absolutely marvellous, couldn’t be better”, beamed the Commander, “But how did you manage his coming, I don’t remember extending the invitation.”

“You did not,” said Aunt Charlotte, “I sent the boy with a note requesting his pleasure, and fortunately he accepted, now you had both better change, can you find something suitable for young Edward, my dear.”

The household of Commander Turnbull consisted of the maid Miss Tina Hodges, cook sometimes addressed as Mrs Rodgers, especially when compliments were in order, and the boy who was employed as a gardener and for general maintenance and errands.

Uncle Gerald took Edward upstairs to his dressing room and managed to find an old evening dress which, with the help of some pins, was made to fit reasonably well, complete with white bow tie while the maid Edward had met when he arrived was summoned to polish Edward’s shoes. Now both suitably attired the pair descended to the dining room.

Over dinner Edward was introduced to the Commodore who on being informed of Edward’s relationship to his host and the young gentleman’s attendance at Monmouth School, he asked a few questions himself and looked thoughtful. Before leaving, taking the Commander aside he said he would see what he could do for the lad.

Meanwhile, in Lithuania, Alexandra quickly realised that she had no idea where the nice young man lived, other than his name, and then only “Edward”, not his surname and definitely not his home address. She pestered her father to find more detailed information. To appease his daughter, he called at the harbourmaster’s office in Memel, but it took a few visits and just a little persuasion with the contents of a schnapps bottle to elicit the information that Edward was probable on the “Black Swan”, a British steam ship. Their search would continue.

Acknowledgements:

Engraved prints of London from “Old and New London” published by Cassell & Co. Ltd., early 1880’s.

Port Said from “Geography for Junior Classes” published by Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1925.

Picture of Singapore from “Over Land and Sea”, Asia published by William Collins, Sons, & Co. Ltd.

Yokohama and Japanese Garden from Peoples of All Nations, volume II, published by Educational Book Co., Ltd, early 1920’s.

Notes:

1. Reference to Edward Ashbourne, the Ashbourne family including Lieutenant Commander Gerald Turnbull, and Navigators House are entirely fictional although all other matters are historically accurate.
2. The original wing of Greenwich Hospital was built under the direction of Sir Christopher Wren, but the complimentary east wing was constructed by Sir John Vanbrugh.
3. Vanbrugh Castle in Maze Hill was built to the plans of the architect Sir John Vanbrugh to provide accommodation and an observation point during the construction of the additional wing of Greenwich Hospital.
4. Blackwall Frigates. so named as they were built at Blackwall on the River Thames for the East India Company, they were larger, stronger, and more heavily armed than Royal Navy frigates.
5. The East India Company reserved ten per cent of space in the hold of their ships for officer’s private shipments.
6. Straits Settlements, now Federation of Malaya. From 1826 until 1858 territory controlled by the East India Company, then part of the Raj until 1867 when the area became a Crown Colony, until 1946.
7. The Gion Festival originated during an epidemic as part of a purification ritual to appease the gods thought to cause fires, floods, and earthquakes. In 869 during a plague attributed to vengeful spirits the Emperor Seiwa ordered prayers to be said to Susanoo-no-Mikoto, the god of the Yasaka Shrine. This practice was repeated wherever an outbreak of plague occurred. By the year 1000, the festival had become an annual event and it has since seldom failed to take place. During the Onin War during the Ashikaga Shogunate central Kyoto was devastated, and the festival was abandoned for thirty years in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Later in the 16th century, it was revived by the shogun Oda Nobunaga.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



**Another post card from
the Author's private collection.**

The bathing costumes are the product of artist's licence not a reality, and was posted in Portslade to an address in Richmond. Date of posting indistinguishable but between 1901 and 1911 as the postage stamp is of King Edward VII.

Trailer for next month.

In August, to continue the saga of the Ashbourne family, Alexandra in Memel discovers more of Edward through an unexpected source and there is good news tinged with sorrow, plus a visit to China in time for the Yu Lan Jie festival.

Historical Talks.

In addition to writing these articles or “blogs” for the Chimes, I am available to give illustrated power point talks on a variety of historical subjects. To see the complete list please email to me at brockswoodfs@yahoo.co.uk, or telephone 01989 780634.

Dorian Osborne

1st July, 2023.