

## Chapter 8.

### Thomas Major Roe, Master Mariner 1803 - 1839 and his brothers and sisters.

Thomas Major Roe was born in 1803, the first son of Thomas and Susannah Roe. Brought up in a seafaring family he became an established Master Mariner in Poole by his early twenties having learned much from his father who made a settlement upon him when he came of age.

He married Jane Maslen from Salisbury, at St. James Church Poole on 17th January 1826. The couple were to have four children, two girls Susannah born in 1828 and Harriet in 1832, and two boys, George Maslen Roe named after his mother on 6th April 1836 and Thomas Major Roe named after his father on 17th October 1838.

The career of Thomas Major Roe, senior, as a ships captain can be traced through the columns of the Dorset County Chronicle and supplemented with information from Lloyds List and Lloyds Register of Shipping.

His first captaincy was of a small brig of 147 tons named "Columbus" built in Poole in 1811 and owned by Harrison Slade & Co. of Poole. Thomas sailed her on a round trip to Newfoundland in 1824.

The job of sailing a small brig was a skilled one in the highest sense. Everything depended on the master, given identical conditions the same ship could leave one man bankrupt, while for another she could make a tidy fortune and a reputation as something of a clipper.

## Chapter 8 Continued

Sons of shipowners or shipping families began their careers at 12 or 14 years as boys in a ship belonging to their family or friends. A great number of them were young men who had shown more energy and intelligence than their fellow seaman, had earned a good name and eventually won command of a brig in which they often had shares. They reached these responsible positions at an early age even though they had no paper qualifications. Thomas would need some knowledge of stellar navigation and the insurance authorities would have to have confidence in his ability to make the passage. The master was often the only man on board with any knowledge of navigation, and on an ocean voyage, the ship and her crew were absolutely dependent on him. Not only did the master sail the ship he was often her broker and agent as well. He would fix his own ship, pay for everything, draw freight, pay insurance, wages, food, port charges, stores, brokerage, towage. The master was the whole ship's office. Each 6 months he would settle with the other owners. He would pay the crew monthly. Such a system could be very rewarding to a careful master, and even more rewarding on ocean voyages when the master was sometimes out of touch with his owners for months at a time. Careful management could find a fortune, augmented by the proceeds of ballast sales, which in some ports were traditionally the masters'.

Thomas obviously satisfied his employers because in 1825 he was given a larger brig the "Syren" 201 tons, an American prize which he captained on the Poole - Newfoundland run for the next seven years.

Brigs could sail from Newfoundland to Poole in two to three weeks. All the fast passages were made from west to east, the same ships sometimes taking months to cross in the opposite direction.

## Chapter 8 Continued

His last voyage on the Syren was possibly his most distressing and the Dorset County Chronicle of January 6th 1831 reported "On Friday last Syren, Captain Roe arrived here from Newfoundland, in the morning at about half past two o'clock. In a violent gale off Portland, she shipped a heavy sea, which cleared the decks of boats etc. and washed six men overboard, two of them regained the vessel again, but we are very sorry to say the other four were entirely lost, three of them were married men and left large families".

His next ship in which he made just one voyage to Newfoundland in 1831 was "Mercury", a 168 ton brig built in Dartmouth in 1802 and used by Harrison Slade & Co. on a run from Liverpool to Newfoundland. Thomas returned to Poole from Cork at the end of that years Newfoundland voyage on September 10th in time for William IV's coronation celebrations. "Flags were flying all day from the Town Hall, the church, the Custom House and from all the vessels in the harbour, some of which were arranged with colours in a very pleasing manner".

In 1832 he left the employ of Harrison Slade and took over a small 182 ton snow "Earl of Selkirk" a ship built at Prince Edward Island in 1813 one of the first boats to come from this renowned ship-building country. She was owned by Spurrier of Poole and used on trips between London and Hamburg.

He was back on the Newfoundland run in 1833, however, this time with another snow, the "Perseverance" owned by Slade & Son. Unfortunately this was not to be a happy association and in October 1833 he left Poole for Newfoundland on a ship fraught with trouble.

## Chapter 8 Continued

The Dorset County Chronicle reported on December 19th "The Perseverence, Roe, Master of this port, which sailed hence for Newfoundland some time since and after putting into Brixham left that port on 29th October encountered such heavy weather on her voyage that she was unable to proceed further than long.34 where she was obliged to bear up and return to this port, which she reached Friday last, leaky much strained and with her bowsprit sprung".

During his returns to Poole much of his time was still spent on business as already mentioned. However, he did find time to spend with his wife and family and would, one should like to think, have taken his wife to one of the socially important outings to the Theatre. The Theatre in Poole was attended by all the towns important citizens and the go ahead manager produced various plays and musicals such as "Black Eyed Susan" which was particularly well received.

During the years 1834 to 1838 he joined the shipping company James Manlaws of Fish Street Poole and was Master of the newly built (1831) Poole brig "Alarm" 220 tons. He sailed this brig on the Poole/Quebec run together with a mate and up to ten hands. The seaman lived in the forecastle which, in small merchant sailing ships, was the part of the vessel below deck that lay between the forward bulkhead and the ceiling at the bows. The Master lived beneath the compass and swinging oil lamp in his cabin beneath the helmsman at the rear of the ship.

At the end of 1838 Thomas agreed to take on the 203 ton brig "Favourite" built in Poole in 1827 for the London company Griffiths and Co. This was to be a disastrous decision.

## Chapter 8 Continued

He sailed from Liverpool for Genoa on 7th January 1839 and Lloyds List reported on the 8th "It blew very hard from S.S.E. to S. during the early part of the night; a little before midnight it veered S.W. and W.S.W. and blew a most terrific hurricane, which has continued with very little moderation throughout the day; it is now (5 pm) blowing a very heavy gale from N.N.W. The North West Lightship has been driven from her moorings and it will be impossible to replace her tonight. The Telegraph at Bidston has been blown down". The report then goes on to list 23 ships wrecked. On the 9th January the gale continued with little abatement until 3 in the afternoon after which it calmed rapidly.

Lloyds List of the 9th reported 6 ships wrecked the previous day, on the 10th a further 21 were listed and on the 11th another 8 including the "Favourite".

"The Favourite, from hence to Genoa, is supposed to be lost near Blackpool; her register, and some tobacco believed to be part of her cargo have been washed on shore at that place".

This bitter news for the family was later confirmed and the following report appeared in The Dorset County Chronicle on January 23rd 1839 "We have deep regret in announcing the total loss of Favourite of Liverpool, Roe, Master with all hands during the violent storm of the 7th inst. Mr. Roe was a native of this town, and highly esteemed for his many good qualities, and the news of his premature death in the flower of his age, has excited much sorrow amongst all who knew him. The following account is from the Liverpool Paper. The Favourite of London 200 tons which left Liverpool on Sunday last has all gone to pieces, Master and crew all drowned. Her register and cockets were picked up by the Customs on the beach, also a board painted 'Favourite for Leghorn and Genoa' this is followed by details of the ships cargo, tobacco, cottons etc."

## Chapter 8 Continued

At the time of her husband's death, Jane was living in a small house in West Street with a rateable value of £8.10.0. The house was situated three houses down from Adelaide Place, between Adelaide Place and Fowlers Lane. Her neighbours to the north were a brickmaker, shipwright and baker. On the other side was a house rented by William Damon, a sailor, and his family. A few doors away lived Ann Spurrier, widow of the shipowner, with two servants.

At this time Jane was 32, and the children were aged - Susan 11, Harriet 7, George 4 and Thomas 1. The children could possibly be being educated at the small school run by Thomas Lamport in West Street. Jane was granted administration of her husband's estate and was financially independent with an income from her various investments.

As the family grew up they moved to a larger house in North Street and in 1851 the census shows

Jane Roe 44 annuitant  
Susannah Roe 22  
Harriet Roe 19  
Thomas Roe 11 Scholar

## Chapter 8 Continued.

George who would have been 16 appears to have left home and working probably as an apprentice in his chosen trade.

There is no trace of the family in Poole in the 1861 census and it is known that George had already moved to London, and was followed shortly by Thomas

A little is known of the brothers and sister of Thomas Roe. George Gardiner Roe, the youngest brother born in 1814 was to take up the grocery trade. In 1841 he was leasing a house and grocers shop in Market Street, living with him was his brother William and his mother, now aged 66. In 1846 the Poole Electors Register shows him as living at Ringwood Road, Longfleet and in Piggots 1849 Directory he was the Clerk to the Water Witch Steam Packet Company.

The other brother William Edmunds Roe born in 1813 was recorded as a brewer in 1841 living in the house of his brother George and mother. He travelled to London shortly afterwards and on 10th September 1843 he married Elizabeth Jane Selby the daughter of a Wiltshire farmer at the Parish Church in Clerkenwell. They lived at 1½ Eliza Place, Clerkenwell and William was trading as a tobacconist. The couple moved back to Dorset in 1845 and their first child Emily was born at Lytchett that year. The family were on the move again in 1846, this time to Gosport in Hampshire and on 23rd September a son was born early in the morning and named after George's deceased brother, Thomas Major Roe. They were living at 122 High Street, now and George was trying his hand as a poulterer.

They were still in Gosport in 1851 now living at 83 North Street, but George was back in his old trade as a brewer.

The only sister, Jane born in 1815 never married and was still living with her mother in 1851 at Wimborne Road, Poole.