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SOME OLD FIOTT PAPERS.

The Société has acquired a trunk of papers that belonged to the Fiott family. Hundreds of these are of no interest :—"I shall be obliged by your sending the enclosed package to Mr. Dent ; he has sent the wrong key, and the clock cannot be wound by it." "I have taken the liberty of sending a little pig, which I hope you will find good." But some conjure up a vivid picture of three robust old Jerseymen, Nicholas Fiott, merchant of St. Helier's, and two of his sons, Edward, captain of the *Tartar*, and John, merchant of London.

The Fiotts were a family of forceful personalities. The papers that deal with the father are concerned with an almost incredible family feud. It began in 1758 with the caning of a small boy in St. Mannelier Grammar School. We have the story in a letter written by the culprit himself later. Ned Fiott, aged nine, asked to leave the room. Instead of returning he remained outside to play. The Master caught him, and to hurt his dignity tried to whack him back into the schoolroom with the cane. But with true Fiott stubbornness Ned refused to budge. "This put the Master out of temper, and he used his cane with great violence ; but I would not run, and stood under the blows of the most inhuman being that ever existed, for, instead of calming his temper, and finding some other punishment, he got annoyed, and laid on me with his cane in such a violent manner, that I fell to the ground, and had to be carried to bed."

Charles Lemprière, Seigneur of Rozel, was then Lieutenant-Bailiff, and his brother Philip the Attorney General. Nicholas Fiott, a sailor who on his marriage had settled on shore as a ship-owner, and had now nine vessels in the Newfoundland trade, was friendly with them both. He mentioned his small son's caning to the Attorney General, who urged that the Master should be prosecuted. But, before the case was tried, Fiott and the Lemprières quarrelled. Fiott had visited the camp of the French prisoners-of-war, and protested against their treatment. The Lieutenant Bailiff took offence, and when the caning case came before him, disallowed most of the evidence, and exonerated the Master. Fiott was furious. Three years before he had bought a farm from the Lemprières, and accepted an old measurement. He now had the land remeasured, and found he was four vergées short. He called Lemprière a thief, and demanded the return of his money ; but Lemprière too had got his back up, and refused to refund a penny. The case was fought right up to the Privy Council.

Meanwhile in the days of their friendship Fiott had taken a share in one of the Lemprières' privateers. To get rid of him they decided to sell the ship, and Fiott was summoned to appear in Court, if he wished to dissent. The case was hurried on before he arrived, and, as no objection was lodged, the sale was ordered. Fiott promptly sued Lemprière for selling his property. When this was tried, he challenged the right of four of the Jurats to sit, and was told to put his objections in writing. This he did in such outspoken quarter-deck language, that he was fined 300 livres tournois

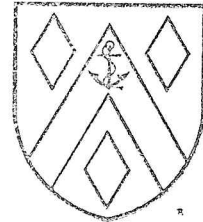
(about £21) for contempt of Court, and dismissed from his post as Centenier. He refused to pay, and was sent to prison, where he remained for two months, till the Privy Council ordered his release. He was a Captain in the Militia, and his men turned out to welcome him home with a feu-de-joie. This was reported to the Privy Council as an attempt at armed insurrection ! It was clear that he would be back in prison soon on some new pretext ; so he left the Island, and went to Westminster to superintend in person his suits before the Privy Council. The original two, concerning the land and concerning the sale of the ship, had now swollen into an amazing number, unutterably boring to modern readers, but all-absorbing to the stubborn men who fought them point by point. Some he won ; more he lost. And a pretty penny they cost him. We have his lawyer's bill for one quite minor case. The last item was :—" To an Infinite Number of extrajudicial Attendances for upward of 4 years, Coach hire, Porters, and Petty Expenses, 20 Gs, wh wd have been 30 Gs, had I printed a Case, so I really saved you 10 Gs." The total was £96.

Meanwhile he secured a new weapon against his enemies. John Shebbeare was a hack writer, who had deserted medicine for political pamphleteering. He had first used his poison pen in the pay of the Radicals, and had stood in the pillory at Charing Cross, and served three years' imprisonment, for libels. On his release the Court Party bought him with a pension of £200, and he proceeded to bespatter with mud all the leading Whigs. His daughter married a Le Geyt, and he came to live in Jersey, and Fiott hired him to curse the Lemprières up hill and down dale. In quick succession there appeared anonymously *An Authentic Narration of the Oppressions of the Islanders of Jersey*, 1771 ; *Six Letters to Philip Le Hardy*, 1772 ; *An Effectual Remedy to the Complaints of the Islanders of Jersey*, 1772 ; *Tyranny of the Magistrates of Jersey demonstrated from Records of their Courts*, 1772. One sentence gives the keynote to the whole series. "The world shall perish before a Lemprière shall perform a deed of goodness." Fiott must have spent a small fortune in printing.

In 1771 however he secured the King's Pardon :—" Whereas Nicholas Fiott of our island of Jersey was adjudged by our Royal Court to be guilty of a contempt of the said Court, and sentence was passed on him to perform the amende honorable, to pay a fine of 300 livres Tournois, and to be deprived of his Office of Centenier, And whereas some favourable circumstances have been represented unto us to extend our Royal Mercy to him, Know therefore that we of our Especial Grace have pardoned the said Fiott all manner of Trespasses, Misdemeanours, and Contempts whatsoever, committed before May 18th, 1771, against us or our Royal Court, thereby restoring him in Honour, Person, Office, and Estate against any consequences whatever of the above-mentioned Sentence." He returned to Jersey in triumph. A grandson's letter says, " He was chaired ashore, and went to the Court, where all his Company of the Militia were prepared to receive him. But the L B refused to proceed, till they were all dismissed. They departed at Mr. F's request ; upon which the L B was obliged to reinstate him in all his rights and possessions."

Before his return Fiott had made another move in the game. The Seigneur of Mèlèches went bankrupt, and Fiott bought the Fief. St. Ouen's was admittedly the senior Fief in the island; but between Mèlèches and Rozel there had been long rivalry for the second place. In 1712 it had been decided that Mèlèches took precedence of Rozel. So Fiott returned Seigneur of Mèlèches, a man to whom Lemprière, Seigneur of Rozel, must play second fiddle. Lemprière at once appealed to the Council to retry the question of precedence, and this time the decision was in favour of Rozel.

But old Fiott had another shot in his locker. Whereas Lemprière had only obtained his Seigneurie by marriage, Fiott began to claim descent from the Fiots d'Arbois of Burgundy, one of the most distinguished families of the old French noblesse. If this were so, the connection must have been a remote one; for the Fiotts had been settled in Jersey for at least 150 years. A Peter Fiott of Jersey was Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford, in 1647. But the old man seems to have satisfied the Earl Marshal's department that his claim was justified; and the most ornamental paper in the trunk is the beautifully illuminated grant by the Garter King of Arms, permitting him to use the arms of the Burgundian Fiots, differenced with an anchor on the chevron.



SHIELD OF ARMS
OF FIOTT.

Azure, on a chevron
between 3 lozenges
gold, an anchor sable.

Then came the exciting interlude of the Battle of Jersey, fought actually under his windows, for his house stood in what is now the Royal Square. A grandson writes:—"When Mrs. N. F. got up, she observed some white soldiers on the Hill, and thought they might be deserters, but on looking out of the windows she perceived the streets full, and the french soldiers were in the house, cutting down the banisters to hinder anybody from coming down. Mr. N.F. had been up for some time, as it was his custom to rise early, and for four hours Mrs. F. did not know whether Mr. F. was alive or no. Major Peirson on being wounded was brought into Mr. N. F's house, being well acqd with the famy. Mrs. F. was wounded in ye arm. Upon undoing her gown the ball was found, having just grased ye flesh in ye arm. The ball came through the window shutter." That bullet is now in the Museum.

In the following year (1782) Nicholas had his greatest triumph. He was elected a jurat. Henceforth he could meet his enemy on equal terms in the Court and the States, and he did not neglect his opportunities. For the last four years of his life he opposed and obstructed all that Lemprière did. He died in 1786 at the age of 82.

Let us turn now to his son Edward, the hero of the caning episode. He too lived a life that was anything but humdrum. In a letter to a nephew he confesses that he was a troublesome boy. "I was always in mischief. Playing with some boys of my own age, which was then eight, at what was called "Castles," making heaps of stones for the tide to surround, while we stood on them, a collier boy came up desirous of driving us from our castles. A scuffle ensued, in which I got a blow by means of which I lost all my front teeth and was other ways much injured." It was this fight

that led to his being sent as a boarder to St. Mannelier. When his father removed him from there, he made arrangements to send him to school in the Isle of Wight ; but Master Ned ran away to sea. "The season arrived when the Newfoundland ships, of which my Father was a considerable owner, sailed on their voyage to the Fisheries. Captain Nicholas Fiott of La Hague, my Father's nephew, having the charge of seeing them to some little distance out of the Harbour, by way of indulgence took me with him on board ; and on board was a hundred men passengers going out to carry on the Fishery. I, having a great inclination to go on the voyage and no consideration for the feelings of my Dear Parents, put my little brain to work, and went down between the decks, where all the men's chests were stored, and, observing one of them open, I took out all the clothes, and threw them behind, and put myself in the chest, and let the cover down ; and there I remained at great risk of being suffocated. The time came for all who did not go on the voyage to get into the boats to return, and Captain Fiott, who had been fully employed, began to inquire for Ned ; but no Ned was to be found, Ned being snug in the chest, hearing the whole outcry, some asserting that he had quitted the ship in such a boat. Captain Fiott, much disconcerted, and not altogether satisfied, had every part of the ship searched, but to no effect ; and having stayed much longer than usual on board, and indeed being out a great way, there was no other step to be taken than to quit the ship, which he did very reluctantly." After some time the boy was discovered by the owner of the chest, and the captain put in to Plymouth, and left him there with a merchant, who undertook to send him back to Jersey.

So the little scamp had to go after all to school at Newport. But his heart was set on the sea, and, when he was twelve, his father allowed him to go on a nine month's trading voyage on one of his ships to Venice. He then spoke about the boy to Admiral Durell, who promised to take him into the navy on his own ship ; but, on the voyage to Halifax to join it, the Admiral ate dolphin and died, and Ned lost his chance. He then served on one of his father's boats, the *Willing Mind* ; and at seventeen was made Master.

When thirty, with his brother John's help, he bought a captured French frigate of 600 tons, which he renamed the *Tartar*, and fitted it out as a privateer with 40 guns and a crew of 230. After victualling at Guernsey he captured two Dutch merchantmen, and sent them into Falmouth, and then set sail for Rio de la Plata to intercept the plate-ships. He met however the French fleet, which chased him into Lisbon. Here gaol fever broke out on board, "which proved very mortal to almost the whole crew, and myself so very ill as to be given over by 2 Physicians." A British warship lent him men to work his boat back to Dartmouth ; but the venture had ruined him. He sold the *Tartar* to the East India Company, who retained him as Captain.

On his first voyage a strange incident occurred. Off the Island of St. Thomas the boatswain and thirty men without his knowledge tried to capture an anchored Spanish frigate, "in which they failed with a loss of 14 killed and 12 wounded." He

sent the survivors in irons to London. On his return the boatswain sued him for false imprisonment, and he was fined one shilling. In 1767 he was in command of a new East Indiaman, the *Hartwell*, which he wrecked on her maiden voyage, on the island of Bonadi. That ended his sea career. For three years he managed his father-in-law's brewery at Portsmouth. After the Peace of Amiens he visited France, and was caught there, when war was resumed, and kept prisoner for two years. "He obtained his release," writes a nephew, "in a singular way. A French cutter was captured and sent in to Jersey. A gentleman on it staked a sum of money which he was to pay, or else in a certain time procure ye liberty of an English prisoner of war. My uncle being well known in Jersey, he was fixed upon. The gentleman returned to France, and interested himself for my uncle. He had two sons, Generals, whose influence with ye Consul was exerted, and at length he had permission given; but it was with great difficulty they let him go. But not till ye time specified was expired, and consequently ye gentleman had forfeited his money, but it was given him on my Uncle's arrival." In his last letter the old sailor complains that he is "left wandering on this wild world, living on the small pittance remaining from my shattered fortunes."

His younger brother John had a very different career. He entered the office of two Jerseymen established as merchants in London, the firm of Le Breton and De Gruchy. At first it seemed as though he was more intent on pleasure than business. His personal Accounts for the first few months consist largely of items like these:— Fencing lessons £7. 7. 0; Supper and Ball at the Nagg's Head Tavern 13/-; a Wager Lost 10/6; Expenses at Ranelagh 7/6; Expenses to Vauxhall 16/6; Expenses at Review on Wimbledon Common and Supper at Tavern £1 5. 0. Evidently a young man with money to throw about! But he settled down. When Le Breton died, De Gruchy took him as partner. When De Gruchy died, Fiott took as partners Philip Gavey and a young De Gruchy, and the firm became Fiott, De Gruchy & Co.

He evidently prospered. He fell in love with Harriet Lee, an heiress of 19 with a fortune of £10,000. When her guardian asked about his financial position, he replied:—"The House in which I am a partner is an old-established Jersey house. Henry Durell was chief of the House fifty years ago, and was succeeded by Mr. James Pipon, to whom succeeded Mr. De Gruchy. Our chief business consists in purchasing Ships and Goods by orders of our different correspondents to be consigned as they direct, in making their Insurances on Ships and Goods, in buying and selling Stock for them, and receiving their Dividends. Our connections are with the principal people in Jersey, from which Island by our family connections we have the chief of the business. With several of our Friends we take a share in their Ships. Another Branch of our Business is with Norway. We are connected with the Chief House in that Kingdom, receiving all their cargoes of Deals, Masts, etc., to the amount of £50,000 per annum. The Danish Ambassador now receives through our hands his yearly Salary from the Court of Denmark. We have besides Correspondents at Ostend, Hamburg, etc., with whom we do business on Commission. Our Commission Business alone

(exclusive of the concerns we occasionally take in Ships with our friends) has for these three years past amounted to £2,000 p.ann; this Year it has exceeded it."

One example of his business enterprise is given in an extract from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, preserved in the trunk :—"To his exertions England owes the proudest day this century has witnessed—the victory of Admiral Rodney. Aware of the slowness of contractors Mr. Fiott chartered two ships with provisions for the Fleet. They came to Sta Lucia on the 7th of April, and enabled Rodney to follow De Grasse with such signal advantage." And by getting in first he made no doubt a handsome profit for his firm. Dr. Valpy, the famous Headmaster of Reading, another Jerseyman with whom he kept up a correspondence, tells this story about him :—"He had long asserted that, while the Old Shipowners charged £22 a ton for building East Indiamen, £17 would afford a fair profit. Wearied with his perseverance the Directors gave him permission and a settled time to build two ships. He then found all the slips on the coast engaged by the old owners, determined to show the impossibility of defeating their monopoly. He at last found a creek on the coast of Sussex adapted to his purpose. Here a new difficulty arose. No sooner had he made dispositions for building on the spot, than all the timber within 20 miles was bought up by his rivals. He ordered timber to be cut down, where it could be found, hewn, fashioned, and seasoned on the spot, and then brought to the slips. To the chagrin of the Old Interests the Hartwell and the Belvedere were finished within the time, and approved by the surveyors." John, like the rest of the family, dearly loved a fight. The Hartwell was the ship that his brother wrecked.

But he had his losses. Foreign trade was ticklish business during the Napoleonic wars. And all Jerseymen were not honest. The trunk contains a letter from E. Le Breton, one of his clerks, written in 1796, confessing that he had embezzled £323 of the firm's money. In the same year came another letter from De Gruchy, the junior partner, announcing that he had been gambling in the Funds, and was absconding to America. Perhaps at this time Fiott had been rather neglecting his business, for he was hoping to get into Parliament and had been accepted as candidate for the safe Whig seat of Marlow. But twelve days before the election (1797) he died at the age of 48. A few years after his death his firm went bankrupt.

One tiny link with the Battle of Jersey came into his life. One day a negro was brought to him, who claimed to have been Major Peirson's servant, and to have shot the man who shot his master. Fiott took him into his service; but the man proved an incorrigible drunkard and had to be discharged. Later he turned up in York, trying to find the parents of Major Peirson, and the local banks made a collection to send him back to Jersey.

Fiott's son John maintained the family reputation for enterprise, for as a midshipman he climbed the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, sat astride on the vane, and carved his name there.