

Marrington – Donnison

A Sunderland historian, Mr. James W. Corder, spent a lifetime compiling records of births, marriages and deaths from diaries, interviews, and parish registers of Sunderland, Bishopwearmouth, and other nearby Anglican churches. The Corder MSS or Manuscripts, as they are known today, are unique to Sunderland. Corder notes that he received some conflicting information from the records, and diaries, of the major members of this family. The Corder Manuscripts have been an invaluable resource to more recent researchers.

The 38 hand written volumes contain pedigrees and family history of Sunderland area families. Some of the volumes give detailed histories of individual streets and houses. Corder records on pages 207 and 208:

“Marrington and Merrington, intermixed.

“Taken to try to trace John Marrington, partner with Kirkbride, Carruthers, shipbuilders, Ayres Quay, < 1830 and later with Geo. Frater and Company launching small boats to 1840 and then gone. I cannot find him. ? if son of Peter b. 1792, shipwright or mariner.”

Then follows a page and a half of information. The following is a best effort record of what I have

assembled to date based on the Corder MSS and supplemented with actual church records and census records. Other records such as ship lists and Trinity House records have also been consulted.

There were three Marrington or Merrington families in the mid-1700s in this area. An older mother named Catherine – a widow who died in 1779 aged 71 appears to be the matriarch of two sons and one daughter: John, Peter, and Catherine.

John had a large family of six sons and two daughters with two of these sons and one daughter living to maturity. The oldest son, Matthew, would indicate that Matthew's paternal grandfather was named Matthew if the naming conventions were followed. This would also indicate that Matthew's maternal grandfather was named George.

John's wife, Margaret Park, died at or following the birth Ralph, her eighth child.

Catherine married Thomas Garnet in 1769. I have not attempted to trace descendants of this Catherine.

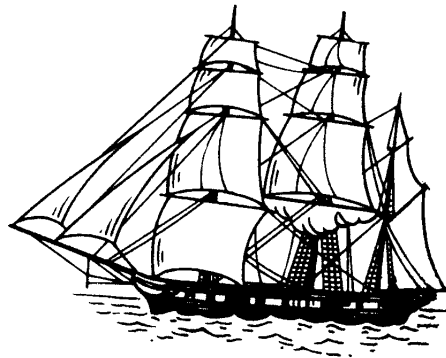
Peter married first Elizabeth Hall in 1791. She was buried in November of 1807 aged 49. Nearly fifteen months later Peter married Elizabeth Wynn the end of January in 1809.

The only known child of Peter and Elizabeth Hall is John Merrington, born in 1792 and who became a "keelman." This John appears in the Sunderland Holy Trinity parish registers as the father of John Donnison Merrington.

“John Donnison Merrington was born 25 September 1818 and baptised 11 October 1818, the son of John Merrington, keelman, and Elizabeth Donnison, of Spring Gardens, Sunderland.”

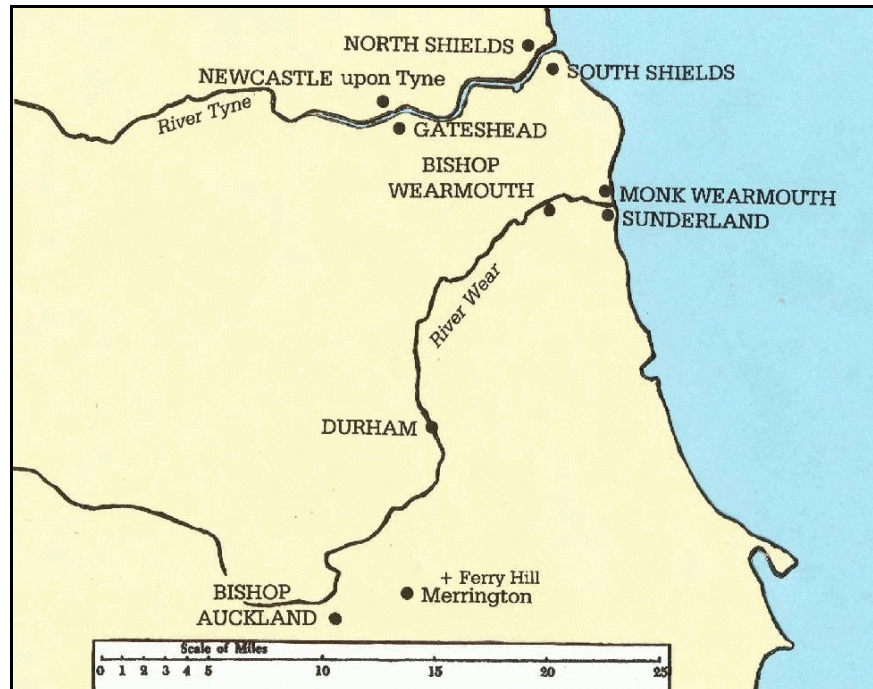
This record is important for two reasons. First it states that John Merrington was a keelman and second it identifies Elizabeth Donnison as being of Spring Gardens. (The Elizabeth Donnison of Spring Gardens was christened on 12 November 1799 at Spring Garden Lane Presbyterian church in Sunderland).

A Keelman (or Keeler) ran a keelboat, a shallow draft boat that could navigate far up the shallower parts of the river. Some keelboats were used to haul away the sand ballast that was brought in by the early seagoing sailing ships, The sand keels could carry between 50 and 60 tons of sand. Other keelboats were used to haul coal from far up the river down to the waiting brigs, two-masted square-rigged ships. Each coal keel, by law, should carry 21 tons of coal.



A Brig

The ancient vicarage of Merrington was located approximately 4 miles east of Bishop Auckland. Bishop Auckland was located at the



Part of Durham, England

confluence of the Wear and Gaunless Rivers and 23 miles south of Newcastle upon Tyne. As early as 1343 the Merrington Church records mentions tithes of the coal mine at Ferris Hill. With a population of only 223 in 1801, most likely John Merrington or Marrington knew his ancestral home and the river Wear running to Bishop Auckland very well.

John is most likely the John Marrington that is the subject of Corder's research. This John was listed as a "pilot" on his son John's marriage certificate to Ann Lacey in 1844. Both John Marrington and Ann Lacey posted their "mark" on their marriage certificate indicating that they were not literate.

The 1851 census lists a John Marrington, Trinity House pensioner, aged 59. Born in 1792 this would certainly make him the John Marrington, the keelman son of Peter Merrington and Elizabeth Hall.

The fact that John Marrington who married Elizabeth Donnison was later to become a "pilot" indicated that he knew how to read and write. Being first a keelman would indicate that John Marrington worked both the River Wear and the River Tyne and knew the rivers very well. He was most likely an up-river or down-river Pilot by 1844.

The Pilots were governed by Trinity House of Newcastle. "Pylott's" have been regulated by Trinity House since 1536. They consisted of up-river men, down-river men and had sea branches. North sea pilots must be members of Trinity House and took charge of ships up and down the East Coast and also the Orkneys. They sailed as far as the Mediterranean, Continental ports, Norway and the Baltics. The duties of the Shields or "Barr" pilots were confined to conducting ships in and out of the harbor and "over the Barr," as it is always called in the old records. The term "crossing the bar" no doubt originated by this activity. Pilots paid dues, kept regular turns, and were exempt from bearing arms, serving on juries and impressment into the navy. Being a pilot also required the ability to read and write. A pilot is now a master mariner.

Elizabeth Donnison was a Presbyterian. She was christened at the Spring Garden Lane Presbyterian Church in Sunderland in 1799 the

daughter of Peter Donnison and Agnes Metcalfe. In England during this time it was not lawful to be married in any church other than the Anglican church, so Presbyterians had to go to Scotland to be married. Unless the local Presbyterian church performed marriages in a manner that would somehow get around this law.

The records do not indicate that John Donnison Marrington was a “natural-born” or “base-born” or “illegitimate” child of John Marrington and Elizabeth Donnison. The terms refers to an out-of-wedlock birth and one or more of these terms have been found in the Sunderland church records. This would indicate that the parents were married. Elizabeth Donnison, the mother of our John Donnison Marrington, was a Presbyterian and outside the Church of England or Anglican Church. Elizabeth would naturally want a Presbyterian marriage. It is my belief that Elizabeth Donnison and John Marrington or Merrington were married – its just that their marriage record has not yet been found.

I suspect that the Donnison family may have come from a family location and church in Scotland which will have to be found before a marriage record can be found. Or perhaps they eloped to Gretna Green, which is just to the north of Sunderland and which is where people went that did not want to get married in the Church of England.