

Chapter 2.13

THE VOYAGES OF CAPT. JAMES GOFFEY

1839 - 1856



The brig *Stavros S. Niarchos* entering the River Mersey, New Brighton, 2008. This ship is a modern replica of the type of vessel sailed by Captain James Goffey on his voyages between West Africa and Liverpool in the mid-nineteenth century.

Chapter 2.13. The Voyages of Capt. James Goffey

The purpose of this chapter is to record the location, and summarise the content, of records concerning James Goffey held by various “official” bodies. These records are all held in manuscript form and can be difficult to read either because of the handwriting, the state of deterioration of the paper, or the phraseology of the period. In particular this applies to the journals written by James, in which commas are almost non-existent and even full stops are few and far between. This makes them difficult to interpret. Quotations from original documents are shown in italics, in order to distinguish them from notes or text.

The official records concerned are located at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Albert Dock, Liverpool, under reference no. B/GOF Accn. No. MMM 1989.137 and at the Public Records Office, Ruskin Avenue, Kew, under reference BT98-4559 (Ta). All the documents held at these locations can be inspected by the public, subject to the requirements of the library concerned, charges, opening hours, etc..

Merseyside Maritime Museum.

Documents held in the MMM archives comprise various categories, the most interesting being journals of voyages under B/GOF/1, private letters under B/GOF/3 and miscellaneous under B/GOF/8. There are also notebooks of navigational calculations and commercial documents - none of which have yet been studied.

Much of the information is in hardbacked notebooks which would not photocopy easily. The letters could possibly be photocopied if required, although some are in a poor state and in any case only the originals would be of real sentimental value. I have therefore extracted what I consider to be of the most interest from (a) all the letters and (b) a selection of the journals, where a picture of sorts could be built up of the life and character of James. The identity of the collector is not known, however the fact that he/she possessed such personal items as the Master’s Ticket and letters from the family suggest the source of the documents was probably Sarah, James’s widow.

Letter from sister Martha dated 15 Sept 1839.

This letter has been endorsed “*received 19 Jan 1840*”, presumably by James, which reflects the difficulties of long-distance communication before the invention of the telegraph. As with most of the letters it recounts the family watching the departure of the ship (the *Gannet* in this case) from Liverpool dockside and gives news, nothing very exciting, of the family including mention of their mother. Significantly, there is no mention of their father, nor of any other brothers or sisters. The voyage of the *Gannet* to Bonny in 1839 was James’s first as master and the letter is full of sisterly advice, reminding him of his responsibilities for the safety of his crew and includes a strange and unexplained passage “*....it has been your misfortune in life to meet with a good deal of unmerited suffering so remembering your own feelings under it, endeavour so to act that no one can accuse you of causing it in others.*” Presumably James had suffered under masters who did not take their responsibilities as seriously as his sister would have liked.

However the letter is not all such serious stuff and includes news that Polly is in good health and her speech is improving. On further reading it appears that Polly can now say “*scratch Poll’s head*”; so Polly was clearly not the daughter James might have liked to add to his family of five sons.

Letter from son William dated 28 June 1850.

This is a very touching letter, received three months later, from William then aged 13. Written in immaculate handwriting it gently chides his father for his absence of seven months with no news having been received by the family.

Letter from Joseph Cuthbertson dated 12 May 1855.

It appears as though Capt. Cuthbertson was resident in Calabar and is mentioned a number of times in the journals. Possibly his function was as forwarding agent in Calabar, or the nineteenth century equivalent. This is, however, supposition as Capt. Cuthbertson is shown in Lloyds Register as master of the *Africa*, a ship commanded by James Goffey in 1853. Possibly Capt. Cuthbertson was simply a senior captain with Wilson & Co. This letter, or more correctly scrap of paper, instructs the company (Wilson & Co., the shipowners) to pay Capt. Goffey £10 “....if he arrives one day or one hour” ahead of the vessel *Abeona* (a competitor’s vessel, not owned by Wilson & Co.) in the River Mersey and charge it to the company’s account.

Letters from E. Goldstone, about 1850.

Addressed to Capt. James Goffey of the *Orezaba* these two undated letters refer to James’s illness and recommend Mr. Goldstone’s bottle of quinine medicine “....*three wining cupfulls a day*” to get him back to fitness. Who Mr. Goldstone was is not clear; whether he was a doctor or just a crew member on another ship, or even whether he was in Liverpool or Africa. While it is also not clear whether James was suffering from malaria at the time, Mr. Goldstone obviously thought he was. The *Orezaba* is not in the list of ships in which James served, nor can it be found in Lloyds Register for the period 1849-1853, suggesting it was a foreign-registered vessel.

Letters from son Thomas dated 27 Oct 1855 and 23 Nov 1855.

Thomas would have been 21 years old at the time these letters were written and go into some detail about the forthcoming milestone in his career - the end of his seven year indenture - and possible upheavals in the firm of solicitors which could work out in his favour. Both letters contain some general family news, while the November letter contains a more interesting commentary on the prevailing political situation at the time. Neither letter has been endorsed with a date of receipt. Sadly it is unlikely that his father ever saw them.

In the October letter there is a long description of a boat trip in which nearly everybody was seasick and this appears to have been a trip, accompanying his father’s boat (the *Tapley*) on its departure, as far as Holyhead.

In the November letter, family news includes “....*the two youngsters* (Arthur, aged 13 and Alfred, aged 11) *are in first rate feather, never better and William and James. Your humble servant ditto. Grandmother and aunt* (Mary and Martha) *are also very well altho’ they feel the cold rather much*”.

In an interesting passage Thomas describes tension between Britain and Russia at the time of the Crimean War “....*Duke Constantine revising a project for the invasion of Britain - if he can get out of the Baltic. Last night week about eleven at night the inhabitants of this commercial emporium* (Liverpool) *were alarmed by the firing of heavy guns and many made sure the Russians were coming ! I believe in Rock Ferry* (near the mouth of the Mersey) *some of the inhabitants prepared for the fight by getting ready their arms etc..*” The reality was that some artillery officers at an army fort had been trying to see how quickly they could muster if the Russians came. “....*they were ready in three minutes and fired 21 rounds. Sharp work*”. The Northern Times newspaper records Thomas Goffey, a private in the 2nd Dragoons, having been one of the casualties among the troops under the command of General Lord Raglan (of the

infamous charge of the Light Brigade) at the battle of Alma in the Crimea on 25th October 1854. This is almost certainly a different Thomas Goffey and not Capt. James Goffey's second son who was nineteen years old and in an apprenticeship in Liverpool at the time.

Master's Journal (MMM ref. B/GOF/1/2a)

Voyage of the brig *Cora* from Liverpool to New Calabar, 9th February to 10th April 1843

The *Cora* was a small barque (235 tons, owner's name: J. Garner, captain named in Lloyds Register 1843 as "Gaffey") registered in Liverpool, on the Liverpool-Africa run. This voyage was James's first in the capacity of (flag) master of the vessel. It is a daily diary completed a.m. and p.m. with weather and wind information, together with latitude and longitude measurements taken at noon. As such it is rather tedious, but becomes interesting on arrival in the Calabar River; however all entries are very brief indeed. The voyage appears to have been uneventful, with records kept of other vessels seen, other vessels with which they sailed in company and brief details of any work going on in the vessel, e.g. coopers preparing casks, people cleaning the hold. On arrival at Calabar the haggling over the cargo started, apparently conducted by a Mr. Smith (position unclear) who kept going ashore to negotiate terms - unsuccessfully. Eventually they weigh anchor and proceed to Jew Jew Point and the serious business gets under way :-

4th April. Jew Jew Point. Jew Jew King's brother on board. Cleaning the hold for salt, setting up casks.

5th April. King Amacree came on board to break trade. People employed cleaning hold, making the house (keeping the books ?) and coopers setting up casks. Received from King Amacree two puncheons (casks holding between 70 and 120 Imperial gallons) of oil.

6th April. At 8 weighed and dropped down to Jew Jew Point. Experienced a tornado, came in 6 fathoms with 30 fathoms chain. People employed as yesterday. Received 12 puncheons of oil. Mr. Smith put the chief mate off duty and ordered him to deliver the log book up to him. Landed 18 empty casks and 30 shakes (unidentified, may be a form of barrel).

7th April. ...people employed cleaning the hold, receiving oil and making the house. Coopers setting up casks ... received 22 puncheons of oil, landed 2 empty casks and 149 shakes.

8th April. ...people employed cleaning the fore hold, paying salt and tradesmen at their own work. Received 160 puncheons of oil, landed 7 puncheons of salt, 25 shakes and one empty cask. Paid 48 tubs of salt. P.M. ...started oil filling in the hold 1 puncheon.

8th April (Sunday). ...people employed cleaning the hold, paying salt and received 18 puncheons of oil. Landed 3 casks of salt. P.M. moderate breeze and fine. Carpenter John Frederick sick. Filled in the hold 5 casks.

Master's Journal (MMM ref. B/GOF/1/9a)

Voyage of the *Elizabeth Bibby* from Old Calabar to Liverpool, 11th July to 28th August 1854

Two excerpts from this journal may shed some light on James's state of health :-

18th July. Fresh breeze at S.W. and cloudy weather, myself laid up with rheumatism - not able to stand on my feet.

15th August. A.M. light airs and calm with rain at times, myself scarce able to write on account of rheumatism, or even to walk having it very bad in both legs and arms since leaving Fernando Po.

Master's Journal (MMM ref. B/GOF/1/9c)

Voyage of the *Tapley* from Liverpool to Bonny River, Africa, 24th October 1855 to 29th July 1856

- 24th October. *Departed Liverpool and passed Bardsey Island P.M.*
25th October. *Stormy gales W.S.W. Nish lightship in sight.*
27th October. *Passed St. David's Head 7 a.m.*
29th October. *Met the "Militiades" from Liverpool and proceeded in company.*
30th October. *Ship labouring and heavily in squalls, taking much water with a strong smell of spirits coming up with the water from the pumps.*
2nd November. *Several ships in company. (Ships frequently kept company without identifying each other)*
4th November. *Two vessels in company. Spoke 6 p.m. with the barque "Waterwatch" of and from Newcastle outward Newcastle - Shanghai 11 days. Location 37-43N, 17-53W. (250 miles NNW of Madeira)*
5th November. *Two vessels in company. 35-20N, 18-21W. (150 miles NNW of Madeira)*
7th November. *Saw boat bearing NNW (they altered course) found to be American wreck about 200 tons long time in the water, masts gone, bowsprit standing, decks complete, hatches all off, no name on stern. Position 30-16N, 18-31W (75 miles NW of La Palma the most north westerly of the Canary Isles, about 50 miles W. of Tenerife). Brig in sight to S.W.*
8th November. *Nearing Palma.*
9th November. *Anchored off Cape Palmas in company with ship Garland.*

This is the last entry; the journal ends abruptly on 9th November 1855 at Cape Palmas (the southerly extremity of the Ivory Coast) It is difficult to see how the *Tapley* got there in less than two days from the Canary Islands, a distance of about 1500 miles - possibly the date should be 19th November or there may be another Cape Palmas in the Canary Islands? To find out what followed after November 9th it is necessary to consult the official Ship's Log, a document which was required under the Mercantile Marine Act of 1850 to be kept by the masters of all foreign-going British vessels to be handed in for inspection by the port authorities at the return port in the U.K. within 48 hours of arrival.

National Archives.

Ship's Logs of the period are kept by the National Archives in Kew under reference BT98; ref. 4559 covers vessels with names starting Ta.. to Tu.. Under BT98-4559 can be found the crew list (Account of Crew for Foreign Going Ship) and the ships log (Official Log Book) for the *Tapley's* voyage to Bonny in 1855-56.

Account of Crew for Foreign Going Ship.

This document, the Crew List, is a large form which had to be filled in by the ship's Master within 48 hours of his ship's return to its home port from a foreign-going voyage. It shows the crew of the *Tapley* who joined the ship at Liverpool on 19th October 1855, believed to be the day before sailing. It lists the crew individually, their age, home town, their last ship and port of discharge and records contributions owing to and payments due from the Seamen's Fund. It shows also their positions on the date of departure and it records transfers of crew to and from other vessels :-

Master	James Goffey	Certificate No. 71366	Died 16.1.1856., New Calabar
.	Richard Cornish (32)	Certificate No. 70766	Joined May at Bonny.

Mate	Robert Fulton (42)	Transferred 4.5.1856 at Bonny to "Mount Washington"
Carpenter	John Elliott (24)	Transferred 20.3.1856 at New Calabar to "Loodianah"
Steward	John Lakey (35)	Transferred 4.5.1856 at Bonny to "Tremont"
Seaman	John Luce (20)	Died from disease of the heart 27.5.1856
Cooper	Joseph Cooke (27)	Transferred 27.12.1855 to "Tremont"
Seaman	Peter Curry (37)	Died 4.5.1856 at New Calabar from African Fever
Seaman	Henry Peterson (34)	Died 3.4.1856 at New Calabar from disease of the heart
Seaman	William Shaw	Died 12.3.1856 at New Calabar from African Fever
Seaman	Thomas Cash	Died 8.5.1856 from natural decay

plus the remainder of the crew, against whose names nothing is recorded and some names of erstwhile crew who joined the ship on the 19th but left before the ship sailed. Of the ships to which some crew members were transferred, the *Loodianah* was a Liverpool-registered ship owned by Moore & Co., on a voyage to Australia in 1856, but the *Tremont* and *Mount Washington* cannot be found in Lloyds Register for 1855-6, suggesting they were both foreign-registered vessels. This suggests that a cooperative effort was being made by several shipowners to contain an outbreak of disease.

The delay of about four months between the death of James Goffey and his replacement by Richard Cornish suggests that the shipowners had to send Mr. Cornish from Liverpool; in the interim the vessel appears to have been under the command of Robert Fulton, the First Mate. With the exception of Richard Cornish, neither the reason for the transfers nor the ages of transferees is given, which prevents us from finding out in the case of Thomas Cash at what age a mariner in Victorian times could be considered to have decayed to the point of expiry. The Master, Richard Cornish, has endorsed the document "*Captain's Certificate No. 71366 was mislaid see letter attached*". Unfortunately the letter has become detached at some point, but it is apparent that a member of the crew retrieved for safe keeping James Goffey's Master's Certificate as well as some of his personal papers, his journal and letters from his family. These items, including the "mislaid" certificate, reappeared 130 years later when they were acquired by the Merseyside Maritime Museum in 1987. However since many other, older, items were acquired at the same time by the Museum it seems reasonably certain that whoever took the items from the *Tapley* did it to ensure their safe return to James's family.

The Liverpool Shipping Master in 1856, Mr. A. Rackman, has also endorsed the document "*The causes of the deaths herein stated I have no reason to doubt*". While the records of all the deaths, with the exception of that of Thomas Cash, have been countersigned in the ship's Log Book by a surgeon, that of Thomas Cash was signed by the Master and First Mate only, presumably because the vessel was at sea rather than in port at the time. One is led to assume that a shore-based Shipping Master would probably have automatically endorsed such reports in this way and it is difficult to see that he would have had any reason to do otherwise.

Official Log Book.

The ship's log shows the *Tapley* departing Liverpool 20th October 1855, rather than 24th as in the master's journal. The ship's log was required to list the crew's positions, all illnesses, deaths and misdemeanours on board and all crew coming and going from the ship. There are very few entries considering the voyage lasted nine months. Strangely, the entries in the original are not in chronological order :-

*TAPLEY Official No. 25783 459 tons
Voyage commenced 20.10.1855 returned 29.7.1856*

27th December 1855 - New Calabar River, Africa

Jos. Cooke - cooper Transferred to brig Tremont

Signed: Robert Fulton (mate) John Nicoll (boatswain) (N.B not Capt. James Goffey)

16th January 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa.

James Goffey - commander of the Tapley died from exhaustion, the result of long continued intemperance - after an illness of 12 days, attended with incessant and incurable vomiting.

Signed: J.C. Rogerson (surgeon) Robert Fulton (mate)



The Piermaster's House, Albert Dock, Liverpool, 2008. This building dates from the construction of the Albert Dock in the 1840s; it may even be the building where the Shipping Master, Mr. Rackman, was working on 29th July 1856 when Richard Cornish brought Capt. James Goffey's ship, the *Tapley*, back from Calabar.

16th January 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa.

John Paul, seaman - found lying in an insensible state of intoxication - he was immediately put in irons and made fast to the wheel but making too great a disturbance on board and while the corpse of the late master was lying on board and refusing to desist he was gagged and made fast to the main rigging.

Signed: J.C. Rogerson (surgeon) Robert Fulton (mate)

17th January 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa.

Interred the remains of Captain James Goffey this morning at Snake Island and inventory of his effects taken.

Signed: J.C. Rogerson (surgeon) Robert Fulton (mate)

11th February 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa.

Sold by auction the effects of the late James Goffey as undermentioned..... (There follows a long list of James's effects and the prices they fetched, the most notable of which :-

2 pairs flannel drawers 3/6d
2 pairs worsted stockings 3/-
24 pairs of trousers in linen, drill and duck at 8/- to 12/6d per 2 pairs
4 pairs blankets at 9/- to 15/- per pair
3 pair braces and 1 comforter 2/6d, in all 7 pairs of braces
24 shirts 6/- to 12/- for three
books, hats, fish hooks, sail needles, thread and buttons
3 shoe brushes and 4 bars soap 4/6d
2 razors, strop, shaving box and brush 14/-
brace of pistols 7/6d
sextant 80/-
quadrant 20/-
parallel ruler and pair of compasses 2/-
charts of N. Atlantic, W. Africa, St. George's & English Channels, Canaries, Azores 27/-
etc., in all raised the sum of £36 15s 9d)

17th February 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa

Peter Corry and Samuel Williams left this vessel to be transferred to the brig "Tremont" in Rio Bento.

Signed: J.C. Rogerson (surgeon) Robert Fulton (mate)

18th February 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa

William Shaw transferred from the "Loodianah" in Bonny River, joined this ship.

Signed: J.C. Rogerson (surgeon) Robert Fulton (mate)

12th March 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa

William Shaw died from exhaustion produced by a relapse of African fever - while recovering from the primary attack - ill 16 days.

Signed: J.C. Rogerson (surgeon) Robert Fulton (mate) John Nicoll (2nd mate)

19th March 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa

Edward Ellis - carpenter - transferred from "Loodianah", Bonny River, to this ship

20th March 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa

John Elliott- carpenter - transferred from "Loodianah", Bonny River, to this ship

3rd April 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa

Henry Peterson - seaman - died suddenly of illness of the heart.

Signed: J.C. Rogerson (surgeon) Robert Fulton (mate) John Nicoll (2nd mate)

7th April 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa
Peter Curry rejoined this ship.

9th April 1856 - New Calabar River, Africa
4.30 p.m. sold by auction the effects of William Shaw deceased as follows :-
5 pairs trousers 5/6d, 2 shirts 1/6d, 4 pairs socks 1/-, 1 pair trousers 2/6d
bag containing needles, thread, buttons, etc., etc., 1/10d
1 pair old shoes 1/-, 1 pair new shoes 1/6d.
Total 18/10d.

5 p.m. sold by auction the effects of Henry Peterson deceased
1 pair boots 4/-, 1 pair oilskin trousers 2/-, total 6/-

4th May 1856 - Bonny River
Peter Curry died from a relapse of African fever while recovering from the primary attack
Signed: H. Cole (surgeon) Robert Cornish (master)

4th May 1856 - Bonny River
John Lopez - steward - transferred from this ship to "Tremont" near Calabar
R. Fulton - mate - transferred from this ship to "Mount Washington" near Calabar as master
Thomas Geo. Faucet - 3rd mate - transferred to this ship from "Loodianah"

Transfers	Name	Trade	From
	John Wilson	Boatswain	Tremont
	James Carroll	Seaman	"
	Thomas Cash	"	"
	John Pierce	"	"
	P. Myers	"	Loodianah
	John Lindon	Cooper	"

Signed: Richard Cornish (master) John Nicoll (mate)

5th May 1856 - Bonny River
Sold by auction the effects of Peter Curry deceased £3/4/6d
Signed: Richard Cornish (master) John Nicoll (mate)

8th May 1856
Thomas H. Cash - A.B. seaman - died this day at 11 a.m. after a lingering illness of natural decay. Sold by auction his effects this day £2/14/6d
Signed: Richard Cornish (master) John Nicoll (mate)

27th May 1856
John Luce died this day at 9 a.m. after a lingering illness of a disease of the heart. Sold by auction his effects this day £1/9/-.
Signed: Richard Cornish (master) John Nicoll (mate)

25th July 1856 - Off Point Lynah (?)

At (time illegible) I ordered the steward to give J. Nicoll "mate" a glass of spirits and in a short time afterwards it was remarked by the crew he was the worse of liquor. I called him and questioned him and to my great surprise I found it be actually the case - for which I put him off duty and sent him to his cabin until such time as the ship was docked

Signed: Richard Cornish (master) T. G. Faucet (3rd mate)

It appears that the requirements of the Mercantile Marine Act were not followed too closely on board nineteenth century sailing ships. The ship's log was supposed to record illnesses, deaths, transfers and disciplinary offences on board ship. If the master was unwell, his illness should have been recorded in the ship's official log and if the master was too ill to maintain the ship's log, then the responsibility would have fallen on somebody else's shoulders - as happened after his death on 16th January 1856. In every case there appears to be no record of illness, only of death. In particular two of the crew, John Luce and Thomas Cash died of "lingering" illnesses which were not recorded. In two cases the length of the illness is recorded with the record of the death, i.e. James Goffey (12 days) and William Shaw (16 days). After a voyage such as this one, it is perhaps not surprising that John Nicoll helped himself to more rum than Capt. Cornish had intended. It is strange that while a misdemeanour such as hitting the bottle merits the longest entry in the log, crew members laid low by (very likely fatal) diseases get no mention unless they die.