

Chapter 3.19

**SEMPLÉ & CO.**

**44 St. Anne's Street, Liverpool**

and associated companies:

**MacInroy, Semple & Co., New Amsterdam**

**Murray, Parker & Co., Glasgow**

**MacInroy, Sandbach, McBean & Co., Demarara**

**MacInroy, Parker & Co., Glasgow**

**Sandbach, Tinne & Co., Liverpool**

**MacInroy, Sandbach & Co., Demarara**

### Chapter 3.19. Semple and Co.

Semple and Co. was the Semple family business, believed to have been started by John Semple (Chapter 3.13). Some records indicate the name to be Robert Semple & Co. or R. Semple and Co.; it is not known whether this indicates that Robert Semple started a new company, or re-named the company started by his father. For the time being, until I find evidence to the contrary, I have assumed Semple & Co., Robert Semple & Co. and R. Semple & Co. to be the same company. Starting from a position where very little is known about the company, other than its business addresses in Liverpool in the 1830s and 1840s and the information in the family concerning the ships owned and operated by Semple and Co., we can summarise the known information on the company as follows :-

Semple & Co. of Liverpool, operated three sailing ships, each one bearing the name of one or more of Robert and Adriana Semple's daughters. The four daughters who lived in Liverpool were recognised in this way; the fifth daughter, Eliza, was living in Berbice with her aunt Jane McBean and so presumably was not included for this reason. The ships were :-

The "*Adriana*", a barque of 213 tons with a copper-sheathed hull, built at Yarmouth in 1833; this vessel had changed ownership by 1839.

The "*Ann and Jane*", a barque of 301 tons with a brass-sheathed hull, built at Whitehaven in 1836. Strangely this vessel was still shown in Lloyds Register in 1852 as being owned by "R. Semple" and on a voyage from Liverpool to Singapore although Robert had died in 1850.

The "*Sarah*" was not owned by, but was believed to be on charter to, Semple and Co.

Thus the two ships owned by Semple and Co. were built after Robert Semple and his family returned to Liverpool in 1830 and we should perhaps assume that the "*Sarah*" was chartered about the same time. However this would be guesswork; it is quite feasible that the "*Sarah*" had been chartered by Robert's father, John Semple, much earlier, with the name taken as that of his daughter Sarah who had been born in Demarara in 1800. At this stage we cannot say for sure when the "*Sarah*" started operating on behalf of Semple and Co.; in 1839-40 there were approximately 120 vessels named *Sarah* listed in Lloyds Register, making it almost impossible to determine which one (if any) was being used by Semple & Co.

A number of companies appear to have had links to either John Semple, Semple & Co., or Robert Semple & Co., or both, or all three. Note the intertwining of intermarried families and businesses and of names associated with the Clan Donnachaidh, thus:

James MacInroy, Duncan McBean and Robert Semple became brothers-in-law by marrying the Moore sisters Elizabeth, Jane and Adriana. Samuel Sandbach, was a Liverpoolian and mayor of Maghull who married George Robertson's daughter Elizabeth. Robertson of Struan is the name of the chiefs of the Clan Donnachaidh, of which MacInroy of Lude is a sept. Of Samuel Sandbach's two sons, Henry Robertson Sandbach was William Semple's godfather and William Robertson Sandbach together his brother Henry were Robert Semple's executors.

Charles Stuart Parker was related to the Tennant family, Scottish brewers to this day, and was the godfather of Robert and Adriana Semple's daughter Sarah.

**MacInroy, Sandbach, McBean & Co.** This name appears in the *Essequibo and Demarary Gazette* in 1804 in connection with John Semple, but in general the title “*MacInroy Sandbach and McBean*” is used. After 1807 it is referred to as “*the late firm of MacInroy Sandbach and McBean*” To date I have found no record that this was a UK incorporated company so its status is unclear and it may have been simply a useful name for the activities of three other related companies in the Stabroek area. It is clear however that there was a web of inter-related companies which were the family businesses of the three named proprietors' families: James MacInroy, who later became Robert Semple's brother-in-law, Samuel Sandbach, the father of Henry Sandbach, and William McBean, father of Duncan McBean.

**MacInroy, Parker & Co., Glasgow.** James MacInroy, a Perthshire farmer, acquired an estate in Demarara soon after his arrival there in 1782, which suggests John Semple may have been involved with him in some way as his arrival is estimated to have been at about the same time. Samuel Sandbach, Charles Stuart Parker and George Robertson joined James MacInroy in 1790 and the company was formed in Glasgow in that year. In 1799 George Robertson died but the family connection continued when Samuel Sandbach married George's daughter Elizabeth in Glasgow in 1802. In 1804 a branch of MacInroy Parker & Co. was opened in Liverpool and this later became the company's headquarters. The company operated as importers and exporters, shipping and estate agents mainly concerned with trade in slaves, sugar, coffee, molasses and rum.

**Sandbach, Tinne & Co., Liverpool.** In 1813 Philip Tinne, a son-in-law of Samuel and Elizabeth Sandbach, became a partner in MacInroy Parker & Co. and the company traded as Sandbach Tinne & Co. in the U.K. and as MacInroy Sandbach & Co. in the West Indies. Sandbach Tinne & Co. survived up to the 1960s as part of a larger group, Jessel Securities, before being wound up in 1972. Jessel Securities later went into liquidation.

**MacInroy, Sandbach & Co., Demarara.** This was the name used for the trading arm in the West Indies of Liverpool-based Sandbach Tinne & Co.

Considerable records for all these companies are held by the Senate House Library (Univ. London) (ref. GB 0096 MS 677), by the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ref. GB 0101 ICS 70), in the Liverpool and Glasgow Records Offices, the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Guyana University and other places. The Liverpool Records Office also holds records of Semple & Co. (not seen).

Old colonial records indicate that MacInroy Sandbach and McBean was closely involved with the Semple family and in all probability commercially with Semple and Co. The first indication of a connection between the two dates from an announcement in the *Essequibo and Demarary Gazette* of September 8<sup>th</sup> 1804 in which John Semple seeks information regarding timber lost from the premises of MacInroy Sandbach McBean & Co. and requests people to contact him at the Plantation Brothers, Great Courabanna, just outside Stabroek (see Chapter 3.13) in Demarara colony.

Several other announcements can also be seen in the *Essequibo and Demarary Gazette* up to late 1807, after which date the company is referred to as the “late firm of MacInroy Sandbach and McBean” :-

**May 18<sup>th</sup> 1805**, two announcements in the *Essequibo and Demarary Gazette*:-

“MacInroy Sandbach and McBean will on Tuesday the 21<sup>st</sup> instant Expose for Sale at their store in front of Plantation Werk en Rust – 233 Prime Gold Coast Slaves. Imported in the ship Sarah, Capt. McClune.”

“FOR LIVERPOOL

The ship Sarah, John McClune, Master, carries sixteen 9-pounders and is well manned, and will sail in Company with the ships Brilliant and Ariadne, about the middle of next month. For freight or passage apply to the Captain on Board or to MacInroy Sandbach and McBean”.

**November 28<sup>th</sup> 1807**. Further imported goods were advertised by MacInroy Sandbach and McBean for sale at their store at Werk en Rust.

**August 20<sup>th</sup> 1808**. Goods advertised for sale being property of the “late firm of MacInroy Sandbach and McBean”. This appears to be the last occasion when the name MacInroy Sandbach and McBean appears in the Gazette, but the McBean name reappears from 1810 onwards as Kingston and McBean, again offering shiploads of imported goods for sale – but no slaves.

**October 13<sup>th</sup> 1810**. The following cryptic announcement appeared in the Gazette. It would appear that it was illegal to import slaves and sell them, but that existing slaves could still be traded :-

*On Monday the 18<sup>th</sup> November, at the Vendue Office, by order of John Semple Esq. q.q. – Hedges deceased – Four Excellent Field Negroes. October 13<sup>th</sup> Kingston and McBean.*

It might be construed from reading the above in chronological order that, while clearly associated in September 1804, John Semple and *MacInroy Sandbach and McBean* had come to the parting of the ways, with the company moving to Werk en Rust by May 1805. This is not the case. Although no connection with John Semple is indicated, an announcement was made in the *Essequibo and Demarary Gazette* on February 25<sup>th</sup> 1804 by a company called Walcott and Forrester concerning a sale “at the store of MacInroy Sandbach and McBean in the foreground of Plantation Werk en Rust. 218 Prime Gold Coast Slaves; say Chantees, Fantees and Coromantees, Imported in the ship Minerva, Capt. Silcock, from Cape Coast”. Clearly MacInroy Sandbach and McBean were keeping their timber in a stelling at Plantation Brothers at the same time that they were operating a store at Plantation Werk en Rust.

There are several points of interest here. The ship “Sarah” has the same name as the ship which the Semple family believe was on long-term charter to Semple and Co. in Liverpool. Whether the “Sarah” was on charter to Semple and Co. in 1805 is not known, but the

coincidence is striking. Some 32 vessels named *Sarah* in 1804-5 can be found in Lloyds Register - a source riddled with spelling errors. In 1805 a Liverpool-registered ship *Sarah*, 386 tons, owned by Penny & Co. is shown on voyage to Africa under the command of a Capt. Cannall. In 1804, the same ship, recognisable by its weight and construction data, is shown on voyage to Africa under a Capt. T. Connell, with the name of "J. McClane" appended, presumably one of the captains was flag captain (for explanation of the term flag captain, see Chapter 2.12 on Capt. James Goffey). It is not unreasonable to assume that by the time handwritten data reached Lloyds in London, transcription errors would be common and that Capts. Cannall/Connell were the same person, as were Capts. J. McClane/John McClune. Similar spelling errors occur in Lloyds Register for Capt. James Goffey/Gaffey (see Chapter 2.13). Of the other vessels in the convoy of June 1805, nothing definite has been found about the *Brilliant*, of which there are eight listed in Lloyds Register. There are also eight vessels named *Ariadne* listed in 1805 of which the most likely is a 219 ton 14-gun ship listed as being employed on the route from Greenock to Demarara. As Scotland to S. America was not a slave trade route, the *Ariadne* is presumed to be an armed merchant ship going about its legitimate business, not a slave ship.

The Plantation Werk en Rust was one of the plantations originally owned by Johannes Heyliger who in 1764 was appointed Governor of Berbice by the Dutch authorities (see Chapter 3.10). Who the Werk en Rust plantation belonged to in 1805 we do not know, although a member of the Heyliger family would appear to be one possibility, while corporate ownership by MacInroy, Sandbach, McBean & Co. would seem to be another. Since Johannes Heyliger (b.1713) was an uncle of Johannes Heyliger (b.1739) and thus a great-uncle of Adriana Heyliger, William Moore's wife, it is possible that the Werk en Rust Plantation was the link between the expatriate Scottish trio, James MacInroy, Duncan McBean and Robert Semple and the Moore/Heyliger family of St. Eustatius into which all three married.

The date of 1807 for the last announcement under the name of MacInroy Sandbach and McBean is significant as it coincides with Parliament in London passing an Act for the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. This act made the importation and sale of slaves illegal in the British colonies, while still leaving plantation owners free to continue with the use of the slaves they already owned before that date, i.e. it cut off the supply but did nothing for the existing slaves. It was normal practice for slave ships to carry merchandise on their return to England but it is difficult to imagine why anybody would want to sail from South America to Liverpool as a passenger in a returning slave ship. These ships were notorious for their poor conditions and could reputedly be smelt from several miles away, meaning other ships would always give them a wide berth. The fact that merchant ships needed to be armed and to sail in convoy in the Caribbean in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century indicates the high risk of piracy in the West Indies at the time. It is also perhaps relevant that James MacInroy was later to be nicknamed "*the pirate*" in his home town of Blair Atholl after his return to Scotland, having allegedly made his fortune as a privateer in the West Indies. As piracy and privateering are not synonymous, this could well be an unfair nickname. A connection between the "*Sarah*" and James MacInroy is thus a strong possibility, i.e. was the *Sarah* a privateer rather than a slave ship? Lloyds Register is not a great help in this regard; apart from showing the owner's name (Penny & Co.), it simply shows the destination of the ship on

leaving its home port. In the case of the *Sarah* it is shown as being employed on the Liverpool-Africa route. What it does not show is whether the ship returned directly to Liverpool or whether it returned via the Caribbean on the triangular slave trade route as the *Sarah* appears to have been doing in 1804-5.

A number of records in the archives of the Merseyside Maritime Museum in Liverpool give some insight into the business of Semple & Co. towards the middle of the nineteenth century. These are records of the Fawcett Preston Engineering Co. Ltd. and are held under references B/FP/5/3/2/152, /159 and /176. They are records of goods consigned to Robert Semple & Co. and clearly illustrate that the business being conducted by (Robert) Semple & Co. after retreating from the sugar/coffee/indigo plantation trade in 1840 was in the nuts and bolts end of the sugar industry, i.e. supplying machinery from Great Britain - crushers, evaporators, boilers etc..

Dated 1848. *For Robert Semple & Co., Materials for Spring Hall Estate, per the "Mary Ray" for Demarara.*

Dated 1848. *For Robert Semple & Co., Repairs for condensing steam engine and cane mill (original supplied 1826) for Bellfield Estate, Demarara.*

Dated 1849. *For Robert Semple & Co., A mouth piece for a coker per the "Leonora" for Demarara.*

In each case engineering drawings can be viewed – of particular interest to anybody who wants to know what the mouthpiece of a coker looks like!

**MacInroy, Semple & Co. and Murray, Parker & Co.** These two companies filed for bankruptcy / insolvency in 1826. It is likely that the closure of these companies was related to the death of James MacInroy the previous year. In an advertisement in the Law Advertiser, 1831 edition, the partners/directors of Murray Parker & Co. of Glasgow on 31st December 1826 are listed as:-

Charles Stuart Parker  
James MacInroy  
James Murray  
Robert Semple

while the directors of MacInroy, Semple & Co. of New Amsterdam, British Guiana, on the same date were listed as:-

James MacInroy  
Robert Semple