



Docklands History Group meeting Wednesday 2nd February 2011 **Captain Cook's Executors (the solution to a 230 year old problem).**

By Derek Morris, who is a retired geophysicist.

Derek started by asking whether we had all made wills. He then explained that in the eighteenth century it was the same as today, at least two executors were required.

Together with Cliff Thornton, President of the Captain Cook Society, he had looked at hundreds of wills of Wapping seamen. Many left money to their dear friends Marcus Shutz or Godfrey Smith, tavern keepers or to the Adamsons, shopkeepers, to whom no doubt they owed money. When Marcus Shutz died he left in his will £4000 in Bank of England annuities, his estate was worth half a million pounds and he lived in Mile End near to Captain Cook.

Cook had two executors, Thomas Dyall, who was around at the date Probate was granted, and Richard Wise, gentleman of Romford, Essex, who was out of town at that date. Who were these executors and how did they know Captain Cook? In the 1990s Alan Smith, a member of the Thomas Cook Society, decided to trace Richard Wise but drew a blank in the Essex, Guildhall and London Metropolitan Record Offices. In the list of 7,000 taxpayers of Mile End, both names were included. Derek had been helping to index the Sun Insurance policies for 1707 to 1866 and among the policies he had found one taken out by Captain Cook, but there were many years still to cover.

The first break through in the search for the executors came from the will of a John Fawcett who left £10 to his friend Thomas Dyall of the Victualling Office. The Land Tax records for East Smithfield showed that Thomas Dyall joined the Victualling Office in 1737 at a salary of £40 and worked there for nearly 40 years, up to 1776. The Sun Insurance records showed that a Thomas Dyall of Mile End insured timber at a yard in Rotherhithe between 1762-1779. The Cook family were in Mile End until 1779.

A further development had been an email Derek had received from a Dr. Banford, a dentist in Western Australia, saying he was a descendant of Thomas Dyall who originated in Coventry. He claimed that in 1756 Thomas Dyall of Mile End had been granted a coat of arms. On investigation it turned out that Steven Martin Leek, Garter King of Arms had been involved in the grant. He was the landlord of Elizabeth Hayes, who became Thomas Dyall's second wife, after his first wife died. It was also found that Thomas Dyall's grandfather had been illegally using the Coat of Arms.

Three or four years ago an auctioneer in Sydney had auctioned a document with Captain Cook's signature on it and underneath that the signature of a Richard Wise was spotted. He was described as "purser". Both men were at that date on the *Pembroke*, Cook as sailing master. Richard Wise had been purser on the *Oxford* and transferred to the *Pembroke* in 1757. This was the time of the *Louisburg* and *Quebec* triumphs. Cook then went on to the *Northumberland* and Richard Wise returned to England and moved to Mile End where he appeared in the Land Tax

Records, one year before Cook settled there. Richard Wise's will is at Kew drawn up and signed when he was purser on the *Cumberland*, many years after the earlier signature, but the signatures look very similar and it seems almost certain to be the same man. Unfortunately the naval careers of pursers are not recorded at Kew.

When new ships are commissioned four standing officers are appointed, one of them being the purser, to oversee their fitting out. Richard Wise was shown to be paid for four or five years before in 1777 the *Cumberland* was commissioned and off to sea. From Richard Wise's will it can be seen that his first wife was Catherine and that he had had three children, two of whom were named in the will, his second wife, Agnes, was left his estate in Portsmouth and his house and estate at Wickford in Essex. The Land Tax Records for Wickford show that Richard Wise had a farm. A local Rector one hundred years ago wrote a book on the history of Wickford in which he said

that in 1750 there were two principal land owners, one of whom was Richard Wise. There is a gap in his life story between 1761 and 1777 which perhaps someday will be filled in. Richard Wise fell ill and died in his late 50s in 1784, at sea on the Cumberland sailing to India with his new wife. On the way to India the Cumberland was involved in battle of Cape St Vincent and on board was Francis Holman, the marine painter, who painted the battle.

Derek, with Ken Cousins, had discovered that Thomas Dyall was the officer responsible for pursers' accounts at the Victualling Office. Richard Wise's executors were John Williams, who was also at the Victualling Office, and Edward Le Pine. John Williams in his will left gifts to his good friend Elizabeth Cook of Mile End. This was the only bequest to Elizabeth Cook which Derek had come across. Elizabeth Cook destroyed all personal papers, as the children had died and there was no family to pass them on to.

Captain Cook was away nine out of the last ten years of his life. No doubt choosing an executor who remained ashore and lived in Mile End was an advantage, as that executor would be available to deal with the estate if Captain Cook died and his other executor was away. Further, the executor who was ashore could keep an eye on Captain Cook's family while he was away.

Note taken by Sally Mashiter 2 February 2011