

NOTES ON THE LIFE OF WILLIAM CALLOW (1816-1903)

Canterbury fellmonger

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The author is happy to acknowledge that much of the content of this note, including newspaper references and images of William Callow and of his silver medal, has been generously provided by descendants of William Callow: Tony Goodenough, Delia Wyers and Ron Pepper. Much of the original genealogical research has been carried out by Tony Goodenough, and readers with further information who wish to get in touch are invited to email him at goodenough@tesco.net



*William Callow (centre) around 1890s at St Nicholas' Harbledown almshouses
wearing his two Royal Humane Society medals*

courtesy of Tony Goodenough

Background

The Royal Humane Society was formed by two London doctors in 1774 to promote techniques of resuscitation. In an age when very few children were taught to swim, deaths by drowning were common. A young Canterbury fellmonger, William Callow, achieved the rare feat of receiving both silver and bronze medals of the Society¹.

In the 1830s five Canterbury men made their livings working as fellmongers². Their work involved preparation of skins from sheep, goats, lambs, even dogs; washing them in warm soapy water; processing with lime and sodium sulphate to ease the removal of hair; removal of wool etc in the Pulling Room; rubbing with Fullers Earth and warming to remove remaining fat; bleaching in chloride of lime; and pickling in acid pits; before sorting the resulting skins for use as pelts, parchments, vellums and chamois leathers³. Such workers included William Callow senior (1781-1846) and his son William Callow junior (1816-1903)⁴. James Callow (1823-1880), another son, is recorded as a parchment maker⁵ and later as a wool stapler⁶.

William Callow senior was born in Tenterden in 1780 - his baptism entry (5 November) shows that he was the illegitimate son of Elizabeth Callow. Following the death of his first wife, William (then known as William Caller) married Sarah Gray (1789-1872) at St Mary Bredman Canterbury. Their marriage record shows this took place on 28 April 1811. William and Sarah went on to have eight children⁷, including William Callow junior⁸.

The image shows a handwritten baptismal record from a church register. It is organized into three rows, each representing a different baptism. The entries are as follows:

1816. May 5 th No. 45.	Catharine Hannah D ^o of Hannah	William & Goulden.	King's Bridge.	Cabinet Maker.	Francis Curate
1816. May 26 th No. 47.	Jane D ^o of	John & Sarah Giles.	Lamb Lane.	Waiter.	Francis Curate
1816. June 23 rd No. 48.	William Son of	William & Sarah Callow.	Best's Lane.	Fellmonger.	Francis Curate

baptism of William Callow (junior) in 1816 at All Saints Canterbury (church demolished in 1938) - note 'Best's Lane' rather than the modern Best Lane in their address

¹ I first learned of the Callow story through references in *Victorian Canterbury* by Audrey Bateman (Barracuda Books 1991) pg 55

² see 1831 census Abstract of the Answers and Returns (1833) available through Google books

³ see <http://www.caerleon.net/archive/literature/glh/39fellmonger.htm>

⁴ the location of the Callow's fellmongering works was the site of the modern Friends' Meeting House near Friars Bridge

⁵ 1851 census

⁶ 1871 census

⁷ Charlotte born 1811, Elizabeth 1813, William 1816, Sarah Ann 1818, Elizabeth 1820, James 1823, Ellen 1826, and Henry Richard 1828

⁸ the family address is given as Best Lane at the time of the baptism of William junior - they later moved to King Street

Heroic deeds

During the first 33 years of his life, William junior was to save others from drowning on six separate occasions. These are summarised below⁹:

- in 1829, aged only 13 years, he saved William Grace age 11 years at Cold Harbour bridge¹⁰
- in 1834, aged 18 years, he saved a blacksmith with cramp at Bingley Island
- in 1836, aged 20 years, he saved Martha Pitt who had slipped into the Stour on horseback (location unknown)
- in 1837, aged 21 years, he saved George Lacey aged about 10 years, who fell from Friars Bridge and drifted downstream to the Abbot's Mill weir
- in 1841, aged 25 years, he saved John Coppins aged 5 years, near Friars Bridge by jumping from his workshop window¹¹
- in 1850, aged 33 years, he saved George Lappet aged 4 years in river near Blackfriars¹²

Awards

William Callow (junior) received acclaim for his deeds in several ways¹³:

- in 1838 he received the silver medal of the Royal Humane Society¹⁴ for his rescue of George Lacey in 1837¹⁵ - George had suffered head lacerations as he passed over the Abbot's Mill weir, and was unconscious when taken from the river¹⁶
- he received an inscribed silver watch from the mayor for same deed later that year¹⁷
- he received the bronze medal of the Royal Humane Society for his rescue of John Coppins in 1841¹⁸
- he received £40 from the Royal Bounty Fund in 1860¹⁹ - used to clear his debts and to start a shoe business

⁹ The Times 5 April 1867

¹⁰ for location of Cold Harbour bridge see page 7 - small shallow draft craft would unload goods here to be carted away along Cold Harbour Lane - the bridge and Lane have long ceased to exist

¹¹ Kent Herald 7 October 1841

¹² Kent Herald 9 May 1850 and Kentish Gazette 14 May 1850

¹³ others received awards for similar exploits, including William's brother James - see Kentish Gazette 19 July 1836 which refers to a rescuer 'age of 14' that must be James; Royal Humane Society records also refer to the rescue of 'a boy called Honniker' from the River Stour at Canterbury by a Mr Whitwell on 13 October 1836, a deed reported by editor of the Kentish Chronicle J Wrightson

¹⁴ Royal Humane Society records can be seen at the London Metropolitan Archives

¹⁵ Kentish Gazette 8 May 1838

¹⁶ Royal Humane Society case ref 13.062

¹⁷ Kentish Gazette 23 May 1837

¹⁸ Royal Humane Society case ref 13.750



*obverse*²⁰



*converse*²¹

Silver medal awarded to William Callow for rescue of George Lacey in 1838

courtesy of Tony Goodenough

¹⁹ Kent Herald 12 January 1860

²⁰ image is of a chubby young boy (known as a *putto* in classical art) trying to blow life into a dying torch; LATEAT SCINTILLVLA FORSAN can be translated 'Peradventure a little spark may yet lay hid'; below SOCIETAS LOND[ON]ENSIS IN RESVSCITAT[IONEM] INTERMORTVREM INSTITVTA/ MDCCLXXIV can be translated ' The society founded in London for the recovery of persons from a state of suspended animation 1774'

²¹ HOC PRETIVM CIVE SERVATO TVLIT can be translated 'He has obtained this prize for having saved the life of a citizen'

Later life

Alongside this glamorous life of heroic deeds and awards, William lived his daily life as a fellmonger, husband, father and family man:

- he married Eliza Stockwell from Willesborough near Ashford in November 1837
- by the time of the 1841 census he was living in King Street Canterbury with Eliza his wife and children Ann (age 3) and Agnes (1); his father William Callow senior lived nearby in the same street with offspring James (18), Ellen (15) and Henry (10); identification of these properties is problematic given post-war rebuilding and development
- William Callow senior died aged 66 years in 1846²² - for reasons that are unclear he was buried in St Stephens churchyard Canterbury whilst his headstone was erected at Harbledown St Nicholas²³
- by 1851 William Callow junior was still living in King Street, now with Eliza (33) and children Anne (13), Agnes (13), Augusta (9), Adelaide (5) and Charles (2)
- by 1859 William Callow junior (aged 42) suffered health problems that hindered his capacity to earn - the Royal Bounty award had helped but was soon exhausted
- in 1864 William Callow junior's health deteriorated further, due in part to his earlier swimming exploits, and he became deaf²⁴
- in 1867 an application for light work at the Kent and Canterbury Hospital as a porter was turned down in view of his poor health - a subscription was raised in his name²⁵
- during this period of financial problems William Callow junior moved to Caledon Terrace²⁶
- during 1867 a public fund for William Callow junior was launched²⁷ - assisted by a letter in The Times²⁸
- the fund results in donations of £76 4s 6d²⁹
- by 1871³⁰ William Callow junior was still at Caledon Terrace, with wife Eliza (53), and offspring James (19), and Arthur (9); also his father-in-law Charles Stockwell, a retired shoe maker (81)

²² Kentish Gazette 29 September 1846

²³ King Street is an extension of Best Lane - St Stephen's church (over a kilometre to the north) lies in Hackington parish, often known as St Stephen's Canterbury

²⁴ Kent Herald 12 January 1860 and The Times 5 April 1860

²⁵ Kent Herald January 1867

²⁶ reference to 'now living at 1 Carlton Terrace' in Kentish Gazette 26 March 1867 probably arose from a typing error; the move took place despite that fact that it meant an end to All Saints parish support that he had been entitled to, and had been receiving

²⁷ Kentish Gazette 26 March 1867

²⁸ The Times 5 April 1867

²⁹ updates in Kentish Gazette 2 April, 9 April, 16 April, 23 April, 4 June 1867

- Sarah Callow, mother of William Callow junior, died at Harbledown St Nicholas in 1872
- by 1881 William Callow junior had moved to Harbledown St Nicholas- he lived here with wife Eliza (63) and their son Arthur (a printer/compositor age 19)³¹
- in 1890 William Callow junior was invited to attend an award ceremony where the Mayor (Mr W W Mason) presented a bronze medal of the Royal Humane Society to Edward Rigden, who had jumped from a second floor window to save a child in the River Stour³²
- for two later census 1891 and 1901 William Callow junior is living alone
- he died at St Nicholas 1903 of senile decay and was buried in the churchyard (see page 10)

Local papers at the time of his death failed to record that this was the end of a remarkable life³³.

This note goes some way to acknowledging this fact.³⁴

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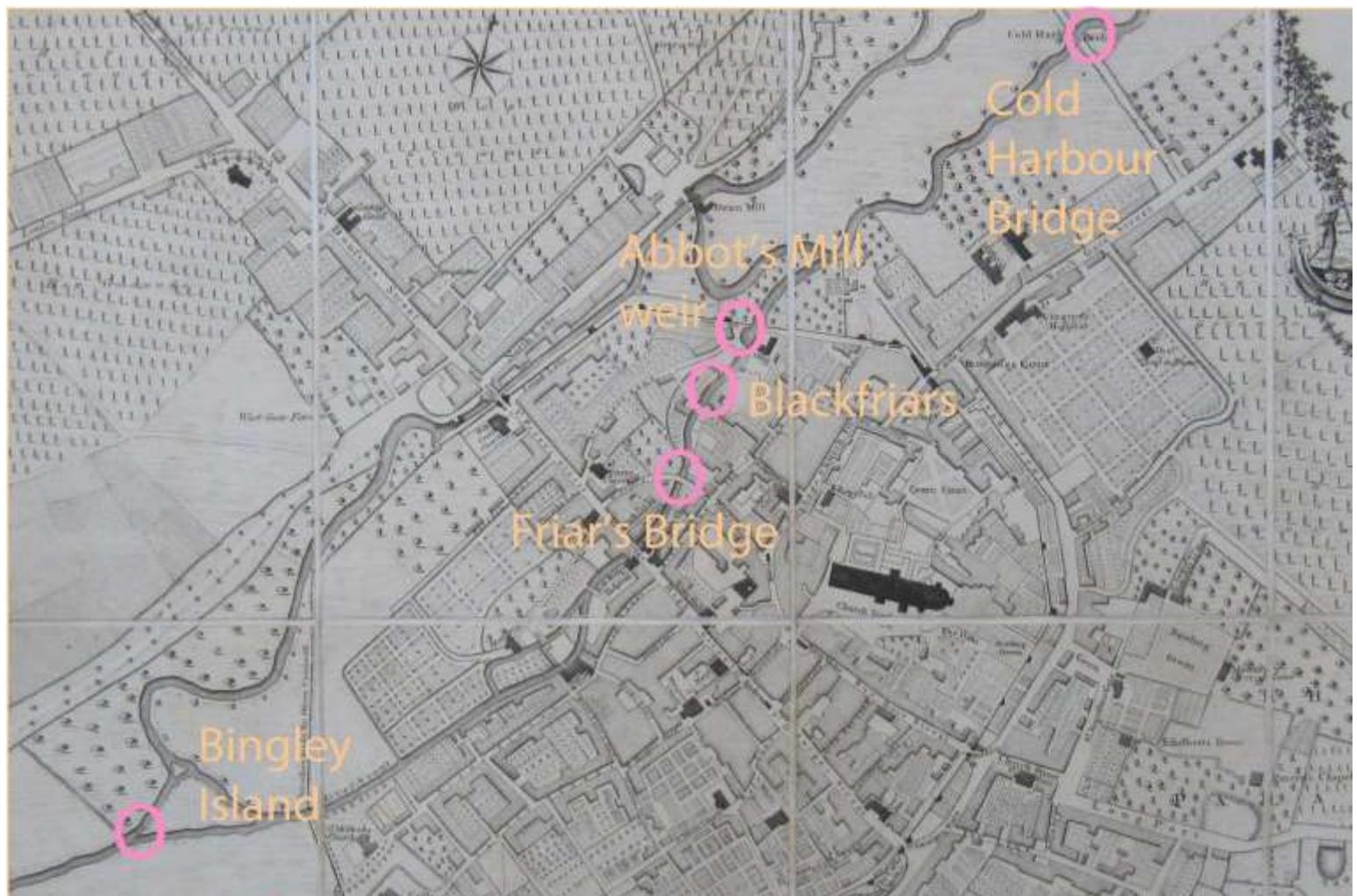
³⁰ records for the 1861 census make no mention of William junior or of his wife Eliza - an unresolved puzzle (their 12 year old son Charles is recorded at the Blue Coat School, now the city Heritage Museum)

³¹ the reason for the move to Harbledown is unclear - he would have been familiar with the almshouses there as his mother had lived in one

³² Dover Express 29 August 1890

³³ late in this study my attention was drawn to an article by Ron Pepper (another Callow descendant) which appeared in the Canterbury Times on 18 May 2000 - this gives a useful summary of William Callow's life

³⁴ genealogical details of the Callow family can be seen in Public trees lodged with Ancestry.com - some are more accurate than others



Early map (Andrews and Wren 1779) with locations of exploits of William Callow junior marked. Cold Harbour Lane and Cold Harbour bridge no longer exist



Abbot's Mill weir - George Lacey was swept through these sluices on 1 October 1841



View downstream from Friars Bridge - John Coppins fell from the bridge here in 1841



Back gardens of properties in Blackfriars - George Lappet fell into the river here in 1851



1 Caledon Terrace - on the night of the 1871 census William Callow lived here with his wife Eliza, sons James and Arthur, and father-in-law Charles Stockwell



Almshouses at St Nicholas' Harbledown. William Callow junior lived here for the final decades of his life - in 1881 with his wife Eliza and son Arthur who worked as a printer/compositor; in 1891 and 1901 living alone. He died here in 1903. External features match those of the photograph on page 1.



Churchyard at St Nicholas' Harbledown

Stone A is to Eliza Callow (born 1817 died 1884), wife of William Callow junior; and to William Callow junior 'a brother of this hospital' who died 8 June 1903.

Stone B is to Sarah Callow, mother of William Callow junior, 'sister of this hospital' who died 13 June 1872 aged 81 years; also to her husband (father of William Callow junior) who died 19 September 1846 but was buried at St Stephen's Hackington. (Note: the reason for the choice of St Stephen's is unclear). Children are named as William Hopkins, Charlotte, William, Sarah Ann, and Henry Richard.

The stones are becoming difficult to read - weathering is taking its toll.