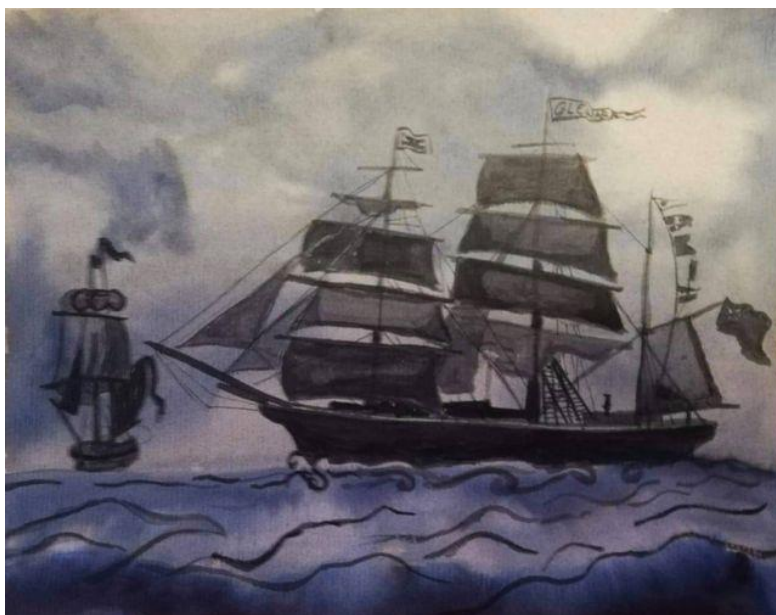


The Barque Glenara



Glenara in inks ©Harriet Chapman.

Inspired by a contemporary painting by J.J Atkinson now in Trinity College, Dublin.

‘Why Glenara?’ many people ask when passing Portland House. This is the name we have given to the restored garden floor apartment of the house. We took this name from one of a number of ships associated with Portland House. The barque Glenara was captained by Ben Davies, son-in-law of Portland House’s first owner, and resident here with his wife on those rare occasions when he wasn’t at sea.

The *Glenara of Aberystwyth* was a 424-ton barque built in New Brunswick and registered in Aberystwyth in 1859 to the owners Evans & Co. She was 127 feet long with a 27.5-foot beam and could carry 700 tons of coal. She was certainly well travelled with shipping records showing her regularly exporting goods to Egypt.

In March of 1865 she was found in the Malta channel, waterlogged and de-masted. She had left Alexandria in January of that year under the command of a Captain L. Evans carrying cotton seed to Hull. It seems she was driven ashore off the coast of Africa and plundered by locals before floating off to sea. She was towed into the Grand harbour by a royal naval vessel. And this is where Portland House’s Captain Ben enters the picture. An experienced and highly regarded captain, he was sent out to Malta by the owners to oversee the substantial repairs to the wrecked ship.

The newspaper article below provides a report of the wreck and the ship’s restoration.

THE WELSH BARQUE "GLENARA."

This fine barque, belonging to the port of Aberystwyth,—which our good readers will remember was found derelict by H. M. S. Magicienne, and afterwards restituted to the owners by decree of the Judge of the Vice-Admiralty Court of Malta (the Admiralty having generously waived all claim for salvage)—left this port on Saturday last, for Alexandria, with a fair wind, and the hearty good wishes of many friends.

Those who first saw the hull of this vessel, or rather her *shell*, when towed into the Grand Harbour as a derelict, were greatly surprised to see the excellent trim and first-rate manner in which she was *turned out* of the French Creek, by the Maltese shipwright, Joseph Saliba. We may state that whilst the proceedings on the claim for restitution were pending, Capt. Benjamin Davies, agent for the owners, applied to the Judge of the Vice-Admiralty Court, Sir A. Micalleff, for permission to begin the repair of the barque, and the learned Judge, with that care and promptitude which distinguish him, acceded to the request, and thus enabled Capt. Davies to commence the repair of the vessel without delay, and save much valuable time. An agreement was entered into with Mr. Saliba for the repair of the "Glenara" from keel to truck, in a substantial and workmanlike manner, for the sum of £1,450; and, in justice to Mr. Saliba, we can safely affirm that the whole of the work has been completed and finished in a first-rate manner—most creditable to himself and to the port of Malta,—and to the entire satisfaction of Capt. Davies, who, it must be known, actively and ably superintended the repair and refitting of the vessel during a *most trying* Malta summer. But he has had the high gratification of seeing the barque alive again, really neat and seaworthy, ready for peaceful action, and fit to continue the good work for which she was built.

There can be no mistake about the "Glenara" having a sound bottom, for she has weathered a heavy storm; and now, with the aid of an able Maltese shipwright, and under the command of an active Welsh master, we have no doubt but that she will do honour to the English flag she carries, and, by fortunate winds, make up for the lost time. We understand that the "Glenara" is chartered to carry a cargo of coal to Alexandria, and from thence a cargo of cotton seed to England. Success to the *Glenara!*
—*Malta Observer, Oct. 23rd.*

Ben then went on to captain her for three years. His first voyage on this ship was taking coal to Alexandria, returning with cotton seed to England. In May 1866 he married Jane Evans of Portland House, bringing together two of Aberaeron's most respected families; the son of the first Harbourmaster and daughter of the first Postmaster. The wedding was the cause of

much celebration in the town with flags and bunting in abundance and 5 triumphal arches spanning the streets. According to the Aberystwyth Observer, *'the firing of firearms and shouts of admiring friends was almost deafening.'*



Ben & Jane

'Almost immediately afterwards', twelve days later in fact, Ben set sail on the *Glenara* from Grimsby to Ajaccio in Corsica. From then on, he was to see very little of his new bride. Leaving Corsica, he went straight to Constantinople and Odessa, then back to Britain via Malta, where he sailed into Falmouth and Cardiff before getting to Belfast for Christmas. In 1867 he captained the ship to Bari in Italy, Constantinople and Shanghai. Shortly after that he went on to captain the *Olivia*, a brand new and much larger vessel.

An unlucky ship perhaps, having been rescued by Captain Ben, in October 1872 the *Glenara* disappeared with her new captain and all hands after leaving Redondo, California for Garston. No trace of her was ever found.

There is more about Captain Ben along with other captains who lived in Portland House in a separate article on this page.

Siân Stewart
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