

MARITIME ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY

INFORMATION SHEET 59

LIVERPOOL AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

Introduction

Liverpool, the Wirral, Lancashire and most of the surrounding area, had strong political, emotional and financial connections and sympathies with the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War (1861-1865). Indeed, so strong were these connections that it has been quoted that at one time "more Confederate flags fluttered above Liverpool than over Richmond" (the Confederate capital in Virginia).¹

One of the main reasons for the link was economical, based on the importance of cotton, upon which both the Southern States and the Lancashire mills depended. However, the ties were much deeper and emotional than purely economical ones, and the history of this relationship is still able to raise controversy and argument even today.

The outbreak of hostilities in 1861 found the Southern States in the worst position with the North having more manufacturing, arms production and industrial power. The South, because of its lack of resources, was forced to look to Europe. The already strong links from the cotton trade, made Liverpool the obvious choice for organising supplies and aid for the Confederacy. It was also important to keep open the supply line for cotton upon which the South and the Lancashire cotton mills depended. A fleet of Confederate blockade-runners and naval cruisers were built on Merseyside to keep this vital supply line open.

James Dunwoody Bulloch, a Confederate naval officer, arrived in Liverpool on 4 June 1861 with orders to buy or have constructed 6 steam vessels suitable for use as commerce destroyers against the Union, to be delivered, unarmed, under the British flag at any Southern port. In addition, he was to purchase and blockade run arms for the cruisers. He was assisted by Fraser, Trenholm & Co., foreign bankers to the Confederacy (see below).

His first contract was with Fawcett & Preston Engineers (see below) and W.C. Miller & Son, Ship Builders, to build a steam sloop, *CSS Florida*, which was delivered in 1861. The second contract was signed in July 1861 with Laird Brothers, for number 290 (known as *Enrica*). On the 29 July 1862, *Enrica* sailed to Anglesey for trials with various dignitaries on board, and after putting them off by a tug, quietly sailed off for the Azores to take on armaments and ammunition from the *Agrippina*, and to begin life as the *CSS Alabama*.

Alabama had mostly British and mainly Liverpool crew on board, as when she had left Liverpool under secrecy, after being given the choice, most of her c.30 Liverpool crew signed on for the Confederate Navy. We hold a certificate of competency of George Freemantle, Quartermaster in the archives collection. (DX/1841)

Captain Raphael Semmes took command of the *Alabama* on the 13 August, and from that time until June 1864, she captured and burned 55 Union merchantmen worth \$4,500,000 and bonded ten others to the value of \$562,000.² On the 19 August, the *Alabama* met the USS *Kearsage* off Cherbourg, France, and after a spectacular battle watched by thousands on the French coast, the *Alabama* was sunk. Fortunately the steam yacht *Deerhound* (also built at Laird's) and owned by Englishman John Lancaster, saved a number of crew,

including Captain Semmes and a number of officers, who were given a hero's welcome at Southampton.

The *Alabama* is known to have been photographed only twice in her brief career, once when at Singapore (a profile distant view) and once in Table Bay, off Cape Town on 12th August 1863 when a photographer was allowed on board. Cape Town photographer Arthur Green, took a series of photographs of Captain Semmes, 1st Lt John Kell and several of the crew on deck, and seven of the surviving images are held at Cape Town Archives, US Naval Historical Center, George Eastman N York or in private collection. The Merseyside Maritime Museum acquired three of these photographs in 2005.

James Dunwoody Bulloch ordered several more ships from Laird's including the "Laird's Rams" (Nos. 294 & 295) which were impounded by the Government and later sold to the Royal Navy. The rams took their name from the iron piercer, which protruded six to seven feet from the prow and was used for striking opposing vessels below the waterline.

After the end of the war, Bulloch remained in Liverpool, and died in 1901. He is buried in Smithdown Road Cemetery, Toxteth. In 1873, the United States Government's demand that the British Government should pay compensation for the damage caused by the Confederate ships was settled. Known as the "*Alabama* Claim", because she had caused the most damage, and together with the *Florida* and *Shenandoah*, had accounted for half of the total number of Union vessels captured. It resulted in the British Government paying £3,000,000 compensation for allowing the Confederate Government to purchase the ships in England and allowing them to use British ports.

1. *Merseyside Connections With The American Civil War*, by John Townley (see below for further details).
2. *Ghost Ships of the Mersey*, by K.J. Williams, p. 18. "Bonded" meant that the captain of the captured ship signed an agreement that at the end of the war the value of the ship would be paid to the Confederacy.

Archives

The Maritime Archives & Library holds many significant items and collections relating to the American Civil War.

Jones, Quiggin & Co, Shipbuilders

Jones, Quiggin & Co., was founded in 1855, and built composite and iron ships including sailing vessels, paddle and screw steamers. Much work was for customers abroad, and included commissions for the Confederate Government, arranged through Fraser, Trenholm & Co. Ships built at this time include five blockade runners, one of which, the *Banshee*, became the first steel ship to cross the Atlantic in 1863.

Records

Specification Book (includes several Confederate Blockade runners)
(photocopy available in the Searchroom)
DX/154/1 1855 - 1865

Engraving of 5 ships launched from the yard of Jones, Quiggin & Co.,
Illustrated London News
DX/287/34 February 1865

See below for specifications for the *Rosine* and papers relating to their other blockade running ships, and also for records relating to the construction of the *Banshee*.

Fraser, Trenholm & Co, Cotton Merchants

This unique collection consists of correspondence and other documents of Fraser, Trenholm & Co., Cotton Merchants of 10 Rumford Place, Liverpool (1860-1866), and a branch of John Fraser & Co., Merchants of Charleston, South Carolina, USA. Fraser, Trenholm was a prominent commercial house in Liverpool. The firm's manager and senior partner, Charles Kuhn Prioleau, was a naturalised Englishman, who had been brought up in Charleston, South Carolina. The senior partner of the English branch of Fraser, Trenholm & Co., based in Charleston, George A. Trenholm, became Secretary to the Confederate States Treasury in 1864. The Liverpool firm made an enormous contribution to the war effort of the South, acting as banker to the Confederate Government and financing the supply of armaments in return for cotton.

Fraser, Trenholm also participated in blockade running, organising the building of ships such as the CSS *Alabama*, and assisted in the floating of Confederate loans and generally encouraged support in Europe for the South. The collection provides a unique insight into these activities. Many of the major protagonists in the Civil War are mentioned in the letterbooks and correspondence. The firm's role in the reconstruction of the South and involvement in world trade, especially in armaments, is also revealed.

Of the fourteen letterbooks in the collection, c.1860-1877, the first, produced in Liverpool between 1862 and 1865, is by far the most important. It contains the correspondence of C.K. Prioleau with leading Confederates, references to blockade running and to other aspects of the war and business. Equally important are more than one hundred loose autograph letters which were sent to Prioleau between 1860-1869. These contain crucial correspondence with G.A. Trenholm, J.D. Bulloch (agent for the Confederate Navy), Major Caleb Huse (principal Confederate Army purchasing officer in Europe) and General C.J. McRae (C.S.A. treasury agent in Europe). Personal correspondence of C.K. Prioleau includes letters from his wife, Mary, and many from civilians living in the South whose lives were being affected by the course of the war, including eye-witness accounts of the shelling of Charleston. There are also items relating to work undertaken by the Merseyside firms of Jones, Quiggin & Co. (shipbuilders) and Fawcett, Preston & Co. (engineers), the surviving archives of which are also held by the Maritime Archives & Library (see above and below for details).

In 1867 Charles K. Prioleau set up in business in London after the defeat of the Confederate States and the bankruptcy of his old firm, and took the letterbooks and other records dating from 1860 with him. These, with some records of his London business, Prioleau & Co. (1867-1877) and many personal letters form the Fraser, Trenholm archive. The financial and operational records, ledgers, accounts, cash books, contracts, etc., may well have been hastily destroyed, as has been widely believed. However, the surviving material is of great importance. It has been published on microfilm as *Civil War & Confederacy: The Business Records of Fraser, Trenholm & Company of Liverpool and Charleston, South Carolina, 1860-1877*, by Adam Matthew Publications, 8 Oxford Street, Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 1AP.

Records

200 letters to C.K. Prioleau, many from key characters in the Confederate States, with a few photographs, 1860-1869.

Letters and telegrams sent to/from C.K. Prioleau. Wide variety of subjects, over 600 documents, 1870-1876.

Letters, re mainly financial matters, cheque book stubs, 1871-1877.

Specifications for vessels including steel screw steamer *Phantom* (Fawcett, Preston & Co., Liverpool), 1862, and paddle steamers *Rosine* and *Ruby* (Jones Quiggin & Co., Liverpool), 1864-1867.

Drawing of proposed alterations to *Colonel Lamb* (Jones, Quiggin & Co.), 1864.

Correspondence, re "small arms", and tracings of torpedoes, 1862-1875.

Assorted bills, receipts and accounts, re cotton and military stores, etc., 1869-1875.
Legal documents, re cases held in the New York Supreme Court, the Admiralty and Chancery Courts. Various subjects including the purchase of cotton, ownership of vessels, and Fraser Trenholm's role as agents to the Confederacy, 1862-1870.
Parliamentary papers including extracts from correspondence with the US Government and with the Customs Commissioners, re *Alabama*, 1861-1864.
Printed list of members of the Southern Independence Association, Manchester, 1862.
Telegram codebook belonging to G.A. Trenholm and lists of trade codes, c.1870.
Letterbooks of Charles Kuhn Prioleau with various correspondents, subjects include cotton, the *Alabama* and other vessels, blockade running, Confederate loans, etc., 1862-1877. (The first letterbook is available on microfilm in the Searchroom.)
Letterbooks of J.R. Hamilton (Prioleau & Co.), 1868-1874, 3 Vols.
Account Book Sales No. 1, Prioleau & Co., 1869-1876.

B/FT

1860 - 1877

13 Boxes & 1 Roll

Rigby Research Collection

Photocopies of documents, articles and extensive notes regarding the naval aspect of the American Civil War (see also D/LNRS).

D/RIG

Career papers of George Freemantle Quartermaster of CSS *Alabama*: Letter of Discharge from CSS *Alabama*, 1864. Letter of Discharge from the Indian Navy, Certificate of Competency as 2nd Mate, photograph of a print of the *Alabama*, 1855-1877
DX/1841

Black & white albumen prints taken on board the Confederate commerce raider '*Alabama*'. Taken by Arthur Green, Table Bay, Cape Town, August 1863. The *Alabama* in her brief two year life was only photographed twice, once when at Singapore (a profile distant view) and once in Table Bay, off Cape Town on 12th August 1863 when photographers came on board, this was the only one occasion when photographers were allowed on board the *Alabama*- these three prints were taken on this occasion.
PR.469.1-3

Jones, Quiggin & Co, Shipbuilders

The *Banshee* was built by Jones, Quiggin & Co., and engines by H.N. Lawrence & Co., both Liverpool firms.

Records

Agreement for building paddle steamer *Banshee*, 1862.
Agreement for constructing engines and boilers of *Banshee*, 1862.
Invoice for extras for steamer *Banshee*, 1863.
D/B/115/S 1862 - 1863

Copy plans of CSS *Alabama* (including a possible contemporary sail plan) and other Confederate vessels can be found in our ship plan collection

Archives held in our Reserve Store

These are only available strictly by prior appointment only.

Fawcett Preston Engineering Co, Ltd, Arms & Engine Builders

Founded in 1758, the firm built up an international reputation for engine building, including those for the *President*, the largest ship in the world in 1840. They also supplied guns and armaments, and the engines for the first Confederate steam sloop, CSS *Florida*, in 1861.

Records

Engine Books, 1813-1962 (3 Vols.).

B/FP

1778 - 1967

38 Boxes

Bryson Collection:

Cobham Family Records displaying a Union viewpoint

Correspondence of George A. Cobham of Warren County, Pa., with his nephew, John Cobham of Liverpool.

D/B/2/2-9

1862 - 1865

Memoir of Colonel George A. Cobham, Jnr., died 20 July 1864 (Battle of Peach Tree Creek).

D/B/1/10/1

Alsop, Wilkinson (Solicitors) Collection

Papers, re steamer *Pearl* (cotton seized in the State of Alabama).

B/AW/70

1861 - 1872

Danson Family Records displaying a Union viewpoint

Letter (printed in *North American and US Gazette*) to Henry C. Carey Esq., of Philadelphia (printed anonymously but in fact written by J.T. Danson, Founder and First Secretary of the Thames and Mersey Marine Insurance Company), arguing against the practicality of the Civil War, 1861.

D/D/111/12/7a

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Useful Addresses

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Archive sources available on the American Civil War, can be located in the A2A database, containing details on archives held throughout England dating from the 1900s to the present day: www.a2a.pro.gov.uk