

Commander John Townsend RN [622]

**John and his wife Marianne [5D16]
Circa 1857**



John much later in life



Transcript of Love Letters between John and Marianne Oliver Townsend [5D16]

September 5 1856.

White Lion Hotel, Tenby,

Dearest Minnie,

It would not be right or honourable in me to permit myself to continue any longer the extreme itinerary that subsists between us, without this communication.

Let me at once say that I regard you with the truest love and affection, and that I feel the deepest concern for your happiness. I cannot help feeling that there is a presumption in my so expressing myself. You have youth and accomplishments, neither of which do I possess. Indeed so much older am I than you, (41 last March), that it almost appears like folly to ask you if you regard my unworthy self with any tender feeling than a mere cousinly one. I have not even wealth to assist me to offer you a comfortable home, such a one as wealth alone can procure. Indeed in this latter respect I do not possess altogether more than between three and four hundred pounds a year.

In spite of all these drawbacks however, I cannot help feeling that you will not be altogether surprised at the receipt of this letter.

I have always admired the womanly delicacy of your conduct towards me, but could not help believing that you appear pleased whenever you saw me, and that you seemed happy when I was with you. Your pointing out to me those beautiful lines of Tennyson P.145 of the "In Memoriam", assuming it possible that such could be your feelings towards me, has greatly affected me.

If I thought it were more for your happiness that I should never see your face again, such should be the case. I have often asked myself whether I ought not to avoid you altogether and let you be attracted by some one more nearly your own age, and who might be better off in the world in regard to fortune. But you have looked so kindly on me at times and I have felt so drawn towards you by congeniality of tastes and other circumstances, that I have permitted myself to continue much associated with you until now that this letter is the result.

Pray let me have even so few lines in reply. You can send by post, as getting a Messenger may be inconvenient to you.

Believe me to be dearest Minnie. Ever, yours with sincerest affection,

John Townsend.

Written on Sunday evening Sept'r 7. 1856.

1 The Paragon, Tenby,

My dear, kind, John,

What am I to say? Your noble straightforward letter has so taken me by surprise that I feel quite bewildered & scarcely able to write, tho' in justice to you I must do so at once as otherwise you may think I have not received yours, and I want you to have this before we meet at the picnic to morrow.

I did not get yours till we were sitting down to dinner having come home after the Sacramental Service, and since then I have been endeavouring to commune with my own heart & beseeching of Our Father in Heaven to guide me aright. They are all gone to Penally Church now & having been poorly I am not expected to go, & so I have this quiet time.

And now that you have gone so far as to offer me the love of a true & generous & tender heart, for such I know is yours, I must in all truth and honesty to you as well as my own heart acknowledge that since you were staying with us in September. 1855 I looked up to you in a way I never did to any one else & liked you better than any one I can but before. My feelings are easily seen. I may have shown them too plainly, but I did not mean to do so. I could not tell that you cared for me more than others. I thought you liked Lily Poole as well or better & often thought what a good wife she would make you. But by degrees I came to the conclusion that you never would marry, & since you have been here, placed in the position of an elder brother (which you so kindly took, seeing the rather intimate terms on which we were thrown with the young men) I have looked on you so much as a protector that I felt more than ever at home with you & have talked more openly to you than ever, not for a moment imagining that you looked on me in any way but as a cousin - perhaps a favourite cousin.

I don't know why I showed you those lines of Tennyson's - they are special favourites with me, but I never thought of the possibility of such an allusion occurring to you. Now you know something of my feelings tho' I fear they are miserably expressed.

Will you believe that I am most deeply grateful & thank you from my inmost heart. I know full well the value of true love and should feel it almost a sin to reject such love.

I cannot say all I think - but I know that in writing as you have done you have paid me the highest compliment & honour that man can pay to woman & I do indeed appreciate it.

There is nothing in the world I would rather avoid than giving you pain - it would grieve me more than I can say to do so, and were I perfectly certain that the decision rested with me I think I could only say "If I can indeed make you happy, let me do so." That is, one thing considered - Do you love God first & best? - Would you seek to serve him truly the rest of your life & to give up your time & talents to his Service & glory in any way that you could, not for love to me, but for love still greater, to him who first loved us? Dear John have you thought of this? I have never said much to you on this subject but I feel strongly - I could not be the wife of any man who was not "of the same mind in Christ Jesus". - I want to be led onward in the right way too.

I don't think I can be wrong in saying that I believe you feel far more on these subjects than anyone knows or thinks, but that is not enough.

Tell me another thing - Would your dear Mother have liked it? I thought she rather wished to avoid intimacy with your cousins. Have you thought of what my Mother & Grand-Mother will say?

I doubt not they will object most strongly if they do not positively forbid it. - You must have seen as well as I have, that they never welcomed you warmly to the house, & threw cold water on our intercourse whenever they could. I am sure at first they feared the result of the intimacy (Latterly I think the possibility of cause for fear vanished from their minds).

Grandmama even forbade my writing to you, & don't you remember their stopping our music one night. - I am of age and therefore you may say, am at liberty to act for myself, but I cannot feel that I should be justified in doing so. I think the decision ought to rest with them. - I don't know very much of money matters but I know it takes several hundred a year to live comfortably in England. - I have very little - less than a thousand pounds.

I think you must know that; but I value love far, far more than money and I think people may be just as happy with a sufficiency as with a large fortune. Still it is only right to think of what may be. - My health is far from strong, & poverty & sickness do not agree. But as I said before I do not think the decision will be left in my hands.

We must trust in God to do whatever is best for each of us. It is not a comfort to feel that he has already ordered it all, & that nothing can happen except what He permits. So let us leave it with Him & pray to be guided by Him in all things. Now I must stop - But again let me thank you with my whole heart for your love to me & desire for my happiness.

I never can think of you but with true gratitude & affection.

May God bless you -

Ever believe me

y'rs most affectionately

M.O.Townsend.

Friday Sept 12. 1856.

6 Rodney Place, Clifton,

Dearest darling Minnie,

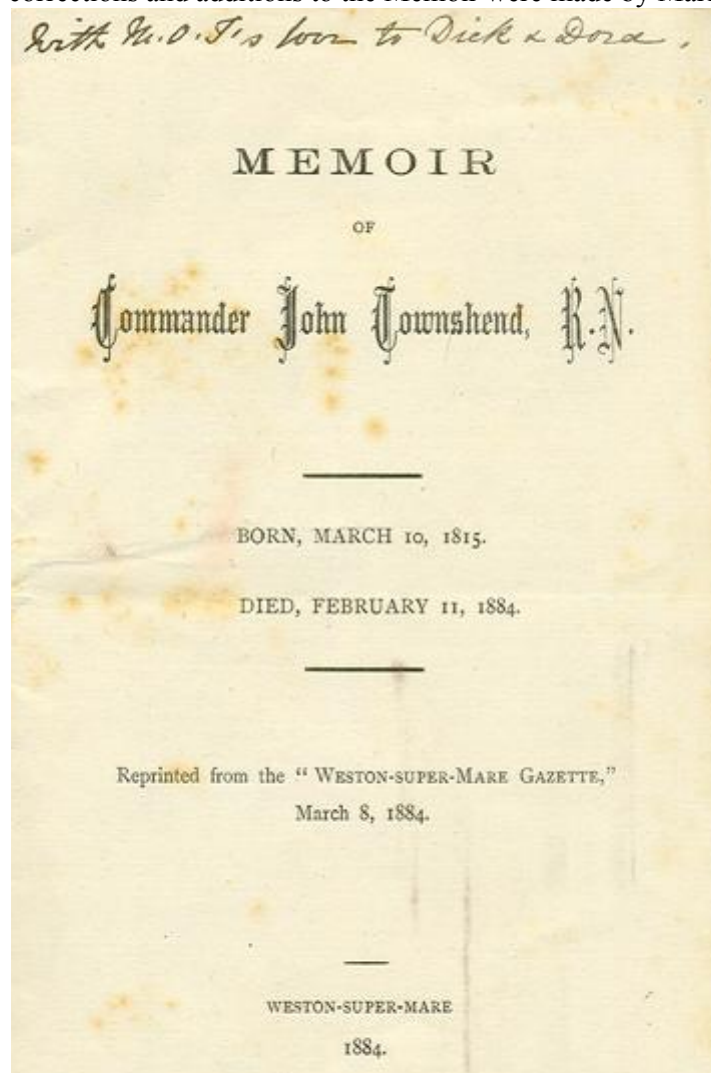
I hardly know whether this letter will reach you at "Tenby", or whether it will have to be forwarded to you after leaving. Before I say anything further let me tell you the result of my interview with your Mother and afterwards with Mrs. Oliver. Your Mother has received me most kindly and affectionately, and has given her free consent. She said there was no one she would sooner have for a son in law than me, & then she shook hands with me and kissed me. Mrs. Oliver was very cordial, but expressed to me her surprise. She also asked about pecuniary matters. On this latter head I believe I have satisfied her. It now only requires your own personal satisfaction of all I have said about you. Your sister Kate, as you know before this, is perfectly satisfied and pleased. She has taken a view in my favour most

warmly and affectionately.....My brother Aubrey has acted in such a kind manner. He is ready to do anything that rests with him to assist us. I need not now trouble you with all the details. He certainly is the best and most generous of brothers. In the evening your Mother went to church, so I contrived to have an interview with her in the drawing room by herself on her return. At first she was a little excited but that soon wore off and she became quite calm and listened to all I had to say most attentively. I spoke to her very quietly and deliberately, and I believe with some firmness. She quietly assented to all I had to say, telling me that she thought you were quite old enough to judge for yourself, & that she should not oppose your wishes. I was certainly surprised at the readiness, and facility with which I upset all her preconceived ideas. By her own express desire I at once went to speak to Mrs. Oliver. Mrs. Oliver was less ready to realise the nature of my communication, and expressed great surprise, whereas your Mother said she had for a long time suspected something of the sort. She even adverted to her having tried to throw cold water on the matter. The only objection Mrs. Oliver raised was about money. All this of course will have to be gone into. At present all that is wanted is your own sweet presence here. Thus you see dearest Minnie that difficulties have disappeared in a most unexpected manner.....It does truly seem to me like a dream, that with in these few days I should have proposed to you, been accepted by you in so tender & affectionate a manner, and that the difficulties which appeared so great with reference to your Mother and Mrs. Oliver should have disappeared so easily. Pray our union dearest Minnie be not only for this world, but for eternity also. It is now late and so I will say goodnight & God bless you, & send you safe home. Ever dearest Minnie your most affy & truly attached **John Townsend.**

‘Memoir of Commander John Townsend’

This copy sent by his wife Marianne Oliver Townsend [5D16] to her brother Richard Baxter Townsend [5D15], editor with his wife, Dorothea, of the book ‘An Officer of the Long Parliament – Being an Account of the Life & Times of Colonel Richard Townesend of Castletown (Castletownshend) & a Chronicle of his Family’.

The corrections and additions to the Memoir were made by Marianne.



Commander John Townshend, R.N.

It was with deep regret that we had to announce the sudden death the 11th of last month, in his sixty-ninth year, of Commander John Townshend, R.N., F.R.G.S., who during his residence among us for 13 years, from 1860 to 1873, had been so deservedly respected and esteemed. Many of our readers who remember his unsparing devotion to the best interests of Weston-super-Mare, will, we doubt not, be gratified by our giving a few particulars of his life, for which we are indebted to one who both knew and loved him.

Commander Townshend was born in London the 10th of March, 1815, and was the youngest son of Horatio Townsend, Esq., of Bridgemount, near Macroom, in the county of Cork, barrister-at-law. His paternal grandfather was the Rev. Edward Synge Townsend, rector of Clondrohid, in the County Cork; his maternal grandfather was Lieutenant-General Samuel Townsend, aide-de-camp to King George III., and Inspector General of the Forces.

We will first proceed to mention his naval services, which, if they record nothing that was especially remarkable, may yet give an idea of the education of circumstances which tended to develope that versatile intellect and practical capacity for various kinds of work (especially such as required powers of organization),—which his large and varied experience enabled him to apply to the voluntary tasks, so many and so various which he undertook and carried through at Weston, with such success. The following details will present a brief outline of his naval services:—

Commander John Townshend entered His Majesty's navy as "Volunteer of the First Class" in 1829, on board the *Britannia*, at Plymouth. As midshipman he served in the *Druid* from 1831 to 1833 on South American stations and the coast of Portugal, being present during the insurrections at Monte Video and Rio Janeiro, and was also present at the siege of Oporto by Don Miguel. From 1834 to 1836 he served as midshipman on board the *North Star* (Captain O. V. Harcourt) in the Pacific, on the coast of Brazil (in the Rio de la Plata), when all on board suffered great hardships from the unusually severe weather when rounding Cape Horn. From 1837 to 1840 he served as mate in

the Talavera on Lisbon and North American and Mediterranean stations, also on the east coast of Spain during the civil war. He served as mate in the Revenge (Captain Hon. W. Waldegrave, C.B.), from 1840 to 1842 on the Mediterranean and Lisbon stations, and assisted in operations on the coast of Syria under Admiral Hon. Sir Robert Stopford, G.C.B., commander-in-chief, including the bombardment and capture of St. Jean d'Acre, and the blockade of Alexandria. He was afterwards employed by Captain Waldegrave on a mission to the insurgent Greeks on the island of Candia. He served as mate in the Agincourt (Captain H. W. Bruce) flagship of Sir T. Cochrane, from 1842 to 1844, on the China station. ~~X~~ He received his lieutenant's commission in February, 1844, and served as senior lieutenant of the Plover (Captain R. Collinson, C.B.) till 1846, surveying the coast of China, in which the Plover was repeatedly on shore, and once nearly wrecked. He remained on the China station in the Vestal (Captain C. Talbot) until 1847, when he returned to England. He was appointed senior lieutenant of the Pantaloon (Commander L. de T. Prevost) 1848, and was employed in the suppression of the slave trade on the West Coast of Africa. He afterwards served as second in command of the naval station at Ascension until 1853. In 1854 he went through a course of scientific study at the steam-factory at Woolwich and the Royal Naval College, Portsmouth, obtaining the usual certificate of proficiency. His last service was during the Russian war, from January to July, 1855, as senior lieutenant of the Himalaya (Commander Priest), employed in conveying troops from England and Egypt to assist in the siege of Sevastopol. ~~X~~

He retired in 1867 with the rank of Commander, in which he is equivalent to that of Lieut. Col. in the Army.

Commander Townshend served under three Sovereigns, and for 37 years, 22 of which were spent in active service at sea in various parts of the world including the unhealthy climates of China and the West Coast of Africa, and was entitled to wear four medals for war services.

During the above period Captain Townshend collected a variety of valuable curiosities from foreign lands; many of these he often kindly lent for Exhibitions in this town, specially on the occasion of the great Art Exhibition, held in the Townhall in 1863, to the success of which he greatly contributed by his exertions as secretary to the School

He tried to obtain command of a frigate but failed & was appointed to the Himalaya instead.

Although he passed the Lieutenants' exam: in 1837, & was fully qualified & recommended for promotion, he had to wait seven years before he was made lieutenant. Shewing how entirely

of Art, when he applied for and obtained the loan of many valuable works of art from South Kensington. His own collection remains a tacit reminder to his family of his many travels and adventures, including, besides things of value, such small relics as coins from the plain of Marathon, pieces of marble from Athens and Troy, a fragment of stone from Napoleon's tomb at St. Helena, a piece of bomb-shell discharged at the great siege of Gibraltar, and a portion of grape-shot picked up while riding through the "Valley of Death" at Sevastopol, with shot and shell pouring down on every side of him;—together with a horse-shoe nail from plague-ridden Damascus, when nothing else could be safely brought away in remembrance of his visit, on the ride to which place, past the ruins of Baal-bec and over the Anti-Lebanon, he and his companions encamped unconsciously at night upon the flat roof of a house close against a hill, tying up their horses to a chimney pot mistaken in the dark for a post. From the siege of St. Jean d'Acre, where his ship was the first to engage the enemy, he brought a huge $6\frac{1}{2}$ foot Syrian rifle, a pair of bronze candlesticks, four feet high from the mosque, and other interesting spoils. Afterwards, when in China, he ~~added~~ ^{made} a complete collection of Chinese musical instruments, to which may be added many ancient Chinese coins, a gold-plated joss, and a superb set of ivory chessman. Other valuables he gave away, and among them a beautiful and rare collection of South American butterflies. While stationed at the Island of Ascension he made an extensive geological collection, which has lain for some years at the Albert Memorial Museum in this town, awaiting classification and distribution, though this, alas, he can no longer oversee and direct. If some among us have only the energy to take advantage of whatever share of these interesting specimens may ultimately be given to us, it will be the least we owe to the memory of their donor that they should be named and catalogued as "The Townshend Collection." At present those which he gave to the Museum are not even distinguishable by bearing his name.

We have alluded to Captain Townshend's adventures, of some of which we could give a graphic account did space permit. One was such as only a very active sailor accustomed to dizzy heights could

promotion depended in those days upon interest rather than merit. —

safely have dared to attempt, namely, climbing on the cross above the ball of St. Paul's Cathedral, when a midshipman, at the time of the meteorological survey. Still more dangerous were his adventures at the Island of Ascension, climbing for hours by tracks along the edge of precipices where only goats could usually find a footing. He once went down over a precipice of some thousand and more feet at the end of a noosed rope. At Hong Kong he and his friend, the late Admiral Sir R. Collinson, K.C.B., climbed outside a Chinese pagoda to take observations while surveying the coast of China. His favourite reading place when a lad on board ship used to be on the truck (or top) of the mast head. These and many other humorous, as well as thrilling anecdotes he took delight in relating to his children in the family circle or during pleasant country walks at Weston. Whenever his ship was stationed anywhere for a time he invariably organised a cricket club and other athletic sports on shore. He was celebrated for possessing uncommon muscular strength, and was known to be one of the strongest men in the Mediterranean fleet, carrying weights on one little finger which not everyone could lift. At Hong Kong he horrified the ship's surgeon during the prevalence of fever in the rainy season by starting off with a number of other young men in "flannels" across country at "follow my leader," returning, with the perspiration streaming, to enjoy a refreshing bath—about the healthiest thing they could have done. The surgeon, who lived by routine, soon caught the fever and died. It seemed, indeed, as if the subject of this sketch led a charmed life wherever he went, for throughout his thirty-seven years of service he never had an illness, although exposed to the infection of fever, cholera, and small pox, many dying of the two latter diseases on board. At Hong Kong, in the most trying part of the hot season, he would sleep on the bare deck for coolness, only covering his face from the moonbeams, so brilliant in that part of the world on a clear night, beneath which it is dangerous to sleep.

Captain Townshend held high rank as a Freemason, and was a member of the St. Kew Lodge in this town. He was a Royal Arch Mason and a Knight Templar of the Order of St. John of Malta, which body he joined when at Malta some forty years ago. He was also a member of the Rose Croix.

His love of art in general, and especially of music and architecture was a leading feature in his character, and the aptitude he shewed in everything that required mechanical ingenuity or engineering skill was such that, had he been educated for an engineer or an architect, he would undoubtedly have made a name for himself in either profession. One of his greatest enjoyments latterly when living in London was to watch the progress of every public work that was going on, which an order from Sir Joseph Bazalgette enabled him to do with facility, whether the carrying out of the great system of sewers or the wonderful raising of the Egyptian obelisk into its place on the Embankment. To Captain Townshend's exertions we owe in great measure the presence of the band of superior Italian musicians, whose harmonious strains have for so many years formed one of the greatest enjoyments of both visitors and residents in this town, and to whom he was never tired of listening.

But it was his peculiar aptitude for personal supervision in every detail that made him so successful in whatever he undertook. A notable instance may be named where his wise counsel and foresight, had they been followed, would have saved a heavy loss to this town in the purchase of the water works at Ashcombe. Some twelve years since he urgently recommended the purchase for £30,000, but his advice was set aside, and we have since been obliged to purchase them for nearly double that amount. Had Captain Townshend been allowed his way in another public matter, our new sea front (on a smaller scale) would have been carried out many years ago, and the Royal Hotel Field would ere now have been a public pleasure ground. In connection with the sea-frontage and the new esplanades we ought to mention that when he visited Weston last autumn for his health, after an absence of ten years, one of his last remarks, embodied in a letter to a contemporary, and signed "Invalid," was the want of protection from the wind which would be occasioned by the proposed substitution of iron railings in place of the present dwarf wall at the back of the Esplanade.

One "improvement" which Captain Townshend succeeded in carrying out has certainly not been utilized as he had hoped. We allude to the Alexan-

dra Promenade at the entrance to the town. It was he who, by the exercise of much tact in private interviews with the Manager and Chairman of the old Bristol and Exeter Railway Company, secured the gift of that property to the town for use as a "people's recreation ground," and which, if laid out as had been intended for purposes of recreation, would present a much more attractive and creditable appearance. Might we not well do something to render it a more worthy memorial of one who gave us so heartily his best help during the years he lived here, by making it now at last what he hoped to see it—a place of recreation and resort for the poorer inhabitants of our town, who need fresh air and amusement even more than their wealthier neighbours who throng the fashionable promenades and esplanades, where the poorer classes do not care to be seen? The site is a good one for the purpose, and could easily be made more picturesque and less painfully bare if enclosed by a low railing, substituting grass and flower beds within for the unattractive asphalt, and having plenty of comfortable seats, where, as on the London embankment, many of the poor and sick folk might be seen enjoying the purer air and the sight of flowers, for that short hour forgetting unhappy homes and carking care.

In sanitary matters Captain Townshend ever took a leading part. He was in frequent communication with the London Board of Health, and when a visitation of cholera was seriously anticipated he organized a Health Committee and made with some of its members a strict house-to-house inspection of drains and insalubrious surroundings, with the result that ever since then increasing attention has been paid to the subject of sanitary improvements. His principal success was, perhaps, that which has most of all conduced to the health of this place—the carrying out and completing the great sewer for general drainage of the town, in which he took such special interest, and which he succeeded, when Chairman of the Board in carrying through. We believe we are correct in saying that it was through Capt. Townshend's influence that Sir Joseph Bazalgette's invaluable aid was obtained to plan and accomplish this very important work. He also took a specially active interest in the Fire Brigade, often going out with the men, and personally superintending their manœuvres when practising with the fire escape.

To give any adequate idea, however, of the extent and arduous nature of the work Captain Townshend contrived to accomplish here is more than can be stated in this article. This may readily be imagined when we say that on leaving Weston he had to resign engagements on as many as twenty-seven committees on which he sat either as member, ~~or~~ secretary, or chairman, and where his attendance was unintermitting. He occupied the post of a Town Commissioner for nearly twelve years, and also ~~ful-~~filled for a time with signal ability the office of Chairman of the Local Government Board.

In 1873, when nearly sixty years of age, an offer from the great firm of Parliamentary solicitors, Messrs. Baxters and Co. (the much-respected head of which was a connection of Captain Townshend's), resulted in his leaving Weston to undertake the arduous post of financial manager to the old firm, at the time of its division into two distinct firms. This position involved much that was very trying to a man whose whole previous life had been spent chiefly in the open air. For six years, however, he filled it successfully, working through the usual office hours from ten till six, or even later, and only taking one month's holiday at the dull season of the year, in order to let his clerks enjoy the finer weather. At last this heavy routine work, added to many anxieties and cares, proved too much for even his iron frame and will, and an all but fatal illness in September and October, 1879, compelled him to resign. With rest and home-nursing he recovered to a considerable extent, and when visiting this neighbourhood last year his health improved so much that it was hoped he might have been spared for several years to his family and friends. But such was not to be. Sudden and severe illness, apparently caused by a chill, seized him upon the 5th February, after coming home from a lecture which he had attended with some of his family, and he never afterwards left his bed. His strength was not sufficient to struggle with illness any longer, and he quietly and peacefully breathed his last and departed to his home above without any suffering, on the 11th of February, being the seventh day from the date when his illness commenced. He has passed away sincerely lamented, and honoured most by those who knew him best. His manly uprightness, lively humour, and clear

intellect never forsook him, despite the most distressing anxieties up to the day of his fatal illness, and as a Christian gentleman, a loyal servant of his Queen and country, and an earnest promoter of everything useful and philanthropic within his reach, his memory will long be cherished, and his death deeply regretted.

It was contrary to his nature to make any great religious profession or to express all that he felt upon sacred subjects; but that religion truly influenced his life and conduct there can be no doubt. His great self-command and control of temper were remarkable; his *soubriquet* of "The Peacemaker," bestowed on him by some of his messmates because of his success in making up quarrels, speaks for itself, and is that by which those who loved and admired him will like to think of him. He was somewhat reserved in outward mien, and could at times be stern when he disapproved of anything objectionable, while his habitual reserve prevented him from being on intimate terms with many, but there was a current of intensely deep feeling underneath for which he did not always get credit. He had the deepest reverence for the public worship of God, and never permitted any want of respect for it or for the Bible to pass in his presence without commenting upon it. He invariably discouraged the use of bad language. He never smoked himself, and held the opinion that it induced a tendency to drink, from the effects he had witnessed in his long seafaring experience. For many of the latter years of his life he was almost a total abstainer. His remains were interred on the 15th of February, at the Lower Norwood cemetery, and, in accordance with what was well known to be his feeling as to the ordinary paraphernalia of funerals, both hearse and mourning coaches were dispensed with. His remains were carried to their last resting-place in an unpretending glass carriage filled with evergreens and flowers—no black pall, no crape hatbands or black trappings being made use of. Three private carriages conveyed the mourning relatives and friends, the coffin (of plain English oak) being covered with wreaths of immortelles and other flowers at the conclusion of the Burial Service, thus testifying to the belief in a joyful resurrection and presence with his Saviour in the heavenly home for ever. "So He giveth His beloved sleep."—Psalms, cxxvii., 2.

by

Terry Baldwin



This letter with a Six Pence embossed stamp 105 was sent in June 1855 from Bath to Lieutenant John Townsend RN aboard *HMS Himalaya* in Balaklava Harbour, the British base during the Crimean War.

The letter was most probably sent by John's brother, the reverend Aubrey Townsend, curate of St Michael's Church in Bath until July 1856 and a regular letter writer. John's mother had died the previous February, and he did not marry until 1857.

The *Himalaya* was a steam and sail troopship.



HMS Himalaya (to the right is HMS Royal George)

Lord Cardigan, colonel of the 11th Hussars and the commander of the Light Cavalry Brigade led the famous charge of the brigade at the Battle of Balaklava. He was on board the *Himalaya* with his staff as it sailed from Varna in Bulgaria to the landfall in the Crimea, at Kalamita Bay, in September 1854.

Also on board the *Himalaya* was Fanny Duberly who accompanied her husband, the paymaster of the 11th Hussars, to Bulgaria and the Crimea. In her book about her adventures *Journal kept during The Russian War* she mentions that she sailed from Varna to Kalamita Bay aboard the *Himalaya* in the company of Lord Cardigan, but she then went down the coast to Balaklava in a different ship.

Lieutenant John Townsend did not join the ship until 1855. It was, at that time, engaged in transporting reinforcements to the Crimea.

See the acknowledgement at page 186



The harbour at Balaklava in 1855.