

Ships' Weekly Papers in the Mid-Nineteenth Century



Theatre Royal, "Thames City."

GREAT ATTRACTION!

THE MANAGER of the above Theatre has the honour to announce to the inhabitants of this 'City' that he has, with considerable difficulty and immense expense, succeeded in securing the valuable services of the following histrionic artists, viz:

CHARLES SINNETT,
GEORGE EATON,
JOHN MEADE,

CHARLES DENHAM,
HENRY J. BENNEY,
WILLIAM A. FRANKLIN,
JAMES B. LAUNDERS.

JAMES TURNBULL,
JAMES H. ELLIOTT,
JAMES DIGBY,

The Theatre has undergone considerable alterations, and every attention has been paid to the comfort and convenience of the audience. The Scenery, Dresses and properties are entirely new, and of a first class description.

On Wednesday, the 24th inst., will be produced for the first time at this theatre that laughable and interesting Farce by G. ALMAR, entitled,

"CROSSING THE LINE!" OR "CROWDED HOUSES."

Wouverman Von Broom	A Boat Builder	C. Denham
Wouter Von Broom	A Pilot	C. Sinnett
Bluffenburg	A Workman	G. Eaton
Caulkenburg	A Sailor	J.H. Elliott
Von Brent	A Lawyer	J. Turnbull
Estelle de Burgh	Ward of Wouverman	H.J. Benney
Pomona Vondertviller	An Oyster Girl	J. Meade

Leader of the Orchestra WILLIAM HAYNES

During the evening Songs and Dances will be introduced.

Doors open at 6.30 pm, performance to commence at 7 o'clock precisely.

ALFRED R. HOWSE, Manager.

From the Emigrant Soldiers' Gazette, November 1858

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In the mid-nineteenth century the Admiralty recognised the need for past-times for those sailing with the Royal Navy, to help keep boredom away during long times at sea, or when anchored for weeks with inhospitable surroundings. In the case of HMS Plover, which was anchored in Arctic winter ice in the early 1850s, the Admiralty provided a printing press.

The journal kept by Captain Rochfort Maguire of HMS Plover has the following entries:

Friday October 15th 1852:

“Our numbers for carrying out the usual theatrical amusements for an Arctic winter, are I am afraid too limited to get up anything passable in that way, and our means in stage gear and dresses is on the same scale. Notwithstanding these difficulties, we are having some talk about it, and no doubt an attempt will be made. As a small printing press formed a part of the liberal supply granted to us by their Lordships on leaving London – A weekly publication is likely to be undertaken by Doctor Simpson.”

Monday November 1st:

“Our Gentlemen connected with the press have commenced their labours, preparing the first number of the ‘Weekly Guy’ for publication on its auspicious day the 5th....”

Tuesday November 2nd:

“The Notice of the Weekly Guy’s approach was read by one of the seamen on the lower deck last night, amidst great applause and the editor informs me that his box contains three contributions.”

Although Rochfort Maguire does not inform us of the contents of this onboard publication, he does record its success:

Saturday November 13th:

“The Weekly Guy was received today with more eclat than was expected.”

Saturday 4th December 1852:

“The Weekly Guy for this week seemed, as it always does, to afford an agreeable surprise to the people on the lower deck.”

An insight of what such a publication may have contained is provided by ‘The Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette, and Cape Horn Chronicle’. This weekly publication was produced in manuscript form between 6th November 1858 and 2nd April 1859 on board the clipper, the ‘Thames City’, commanded by Captain Glover, as she journeyed from Gravesend to Vancouver Island with a detachment of Royal Engineers for service in British Columbia. The detachment consisted of 2 officers, 1 staff assistant surgeon, 118 non-commissioned officers and men, 31 women and 34 children.

This weekly gazette had regular articles on the progress of the voyage, on the natural history of the localities she was in, together with songs and poetry, jokes, charades, conundrums and advertisements. Occasional issues included a birth, marriage and death section.

In the issue of 13th November 1858 we learn of the filthy condition of the locality known as Long-boat Square in 'Thames City':

"Mrs Swine and family, living in No. 3, ground floor, excel in filth the whole street, and are in fact a disgrace to the neighbourhood; their quarrelling and fighting, more especially at their meals, calls for the constant interference of the 'Watch' or Police of the 'City.' It is a curious fact that not one of this numerous family has ever been known to die a natural death....."

"...On Monday last, considerable excitement prevailed in the vicinity of Long-boat Alley, in consequence of the discovery of the body of a middle-aged gentleman suspended by the heels with his throat cut from ear to ear. An inquest was immediately held on the body..... The name of the deceased is at present unknown. One of the witnesses said that he had formerly been known by the name of Lamb, and was about to pass as mutton."

By the time of the next edition, on November 20th 1858, the 'Thames City' was travelling south at latitude 2.54 degrees north, and near to crossing the equator. This edition included an advertisement for a performance of 'Crossing the Line' at the 'Theatre Royal, Thames City'.

The performance was subsequently delayed until Monday 29th November, and was of course reviewed in the next issue of the gazette on 4th December:

"It is our glory and pride as Englishmen on all occasions to place the fair sex foremost, and we accordingly commence by noticing the two bright stars who have just risen in the theatrical firmament, Miss Bridget Meade, and Miss Mary Benney, both of whom, by their quiet ease and elegance on the stage, and by the propriety of their diction, gave great promise of future excellence. Their acting was admirable throughout, and the young ladies were dressed for their parts in perfect good taste. We cannot more especially help noticing the rich bands of their beautiful and luxuriant hair, clustered gracefully around their blooming cheeks, and we trust these fair damsels will long continue to delight a crowded audience as on the night of their last performance. Charms like theirs cannot fail to attract admirers, and we venture to predict that many a heart-ache is in store for the young nobility and gentry amongst the play-goers of the rising generation in these realms."

Each issue contained three conundrums with the answers given the following week. The following examples give an idea of their style, the answers appear later in this issue of Quarterdeck.

- I. What is the difference between the 'Thames City' and Joan of Arc?
- II. Why is the visitor we expect at the Equator like a man looking for the philosopher's stone?
- III. What is the difference between an auction and sea-sickness?

The jokes in each issue now seem quite dated and many would not be considered 'Politically Correct' – I confine myself to one example:

An Irishman, an Englishman and a Scotchman happened one day to stop at the window of a pastry-cook's shop; behind the counter was a most lovely girl. "By the powers!" said the Irishman, "Let's go in and have a crown's worth, if its only to look at her." "I've a mind to spend half a crown, though I don't want anything," said the Englishman, "for the same purpose." "Hoot

mon.” says Sandy, “do you no ken we might all go in, one at a time, and ask for twa sixpences for a shellin’.”

The last edition of the Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette, Saturday April 2nd 1859 ends thus:

“At the close of the career of the ‘Emigrant Soldiers’ Gazette and Cape Horn Chronicle,’ we cannot but feel that it has been the means of affording us all much rational entertainment and useful information.....we bid our readers a final farewell.

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

....Published at the Editor’s Office, Starboard Front Cabin, ‘Thames City’”

ANSWERS TO CONUNDRUMS:

- I. One was made of wood, and the other was Maid of Orleans.
- II. Because he is a sea king (seeking) what never was.
- III. One is the “sale of effects” and the other the “effects of a sail.”

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