

Eliza Bunt's Diary

1817-1819



Sunday August 15th
Thus does week after week and month after month pass away it is now nearly ten months since I bid farewell to my Son and best friend not a line or single line have I had from either of them since that period but left to conjecture and think every thing perhaps but what is really right - interrupted by Brother Joseph calling for me to go to Portree to take tea -
Since the above has been wrote I have been into Menck Street taking tea with the family afterwards Brother Joseph little Mary Ann and myself took a walk Round South Sea how calm were the waves how serene looked the Water oh could I have beheld the Banks that would convey my friend to his native shores my heart rejoiced indeed - but how long

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Original pages from Eliza Bunt's Diary

The frigate Trincomalee was launched on 19th October 1817, with 38 guns and the tonnage of 1065. She was fitted with temporary masts, yards and rigging, and four 12 lb carronades ready for her journey to England being escorted by HMS Towey. The ships stopped at the port of Trincomalee in Ceylon, present day Sri Lanka, to embark guns, ammunition and stores for the long voyage ahead. Additional passengers came in the form of persons for repatriation to the United Kingdom from the British Squadron based out there.

One of those for repatriation was a widow, Eliza Aricha Bunt.

The Friends of HMS Trincomalee are very fortunate to have access to a resource such as Eliza's diary. It offers us an intimate insight into the daily domestic happenings on board the ship during her maiden voyage of almost 5 months from Ceylon to England.

Eliza wanted to keep this record in order to share the experience with her 'best friend' when they met again at later date. Her friend was Thomas Craven, foreman house carpenter at Trincomalee dockyard. We will hear his name mentioned many times throughout the journey!

People who are part of our story in the passage to India.

Eliza Hudson lived with John Bunt from 1812 to 1816. John was working as boatswain in the Royal Navy on HMS Victory whilst that famous ship was laid up in ordinary at Portsmouth dockyard.

In June 1816 John was appointed Boatswain of the Yard at Trincomalee dockyard, Ceylon, and was discharged from HMS Victory. As was normal in such cases William, John's son, and servant, on



HMS Minden

HMS Victory was also discharged with his master. John's first wife and William's mother had died in 1805 leaving William in the care of his maternal grandmother, Rebecca. Boatswains at that time were allowed a servant, so it was natural that William joined his father on HMS Victory. John drew both his own pay and that of his servant.

On 10th July 1816 John married for the second time. His wife on this occasion was Eliza Hudson.

On 14th June 1816, one month before he boarded HMS Minden, John Bunt together with his wife Eliza and the two children, William, aged 13, and Charlotte aged about one year were entered into the muster book of HMS Minden (a 74 gun ship-of-the-line) for a passage to Ceylon. The muster books show that John, Eliza, William and Charlotte were discharged from the Minden at Trincomalee on 11th March 1817.

The Minden's log shows she was out in the South Atlantic off the coast of the Cape of Good Hope at that time.

In June 1817 William's name is entered in the paybook of the Trincomalee Yard as Storekeeper's Clerk. His pay was £6 a month. He remained at Trincomalee working in the Storekeeper's Office until 5th February 1852 when he was discharged at his own request.

HMS Minden sailed from Portsmouth on 14th June 1816 with a squadron under the command of Sir Edward Pellew, Lord Exmouth, to curtail the activities of the Barbary pirates who were interfering with British trade in the Mediterranean.

The Bunt family and all the other passengers were put ashore at Gibraltar while HMS Minden took part in the bombardment of Algiers. The campaign concluded, the Minden picked up the passengers on 20th October 1816 and continued towards Ceylon.

The muster books show that John, Eliza, William and Charlotte were discharged from the Minden at Trincomalee on 11th March 1817, however, by that time, the family had increased by one, for on or about 29th December Eliza's son was born. He was named John Hope Bunt. John probably after his father and Hope after the Cape. Hopefully, for Eliza's sake, it was an easy birth as a man-of-war doesn't appear to be an ideal place for childbirth.

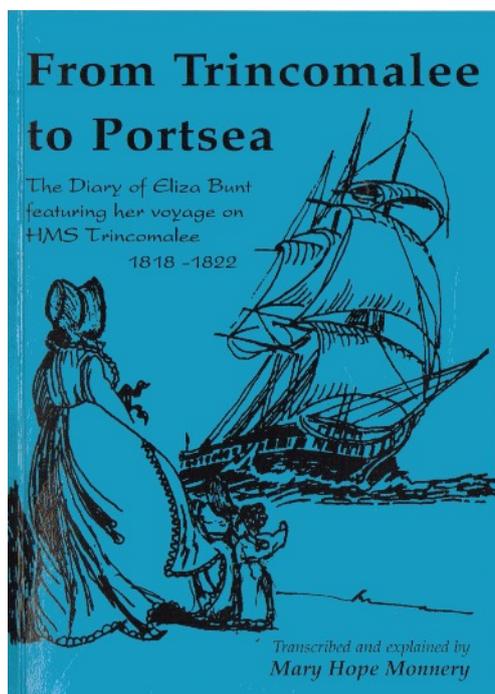
John senior immediately started work in the dock. His salary was £250 a year plus housing allowance. He was now employed by the Naval Board and Eliza would have been overjoyed with their new prosperity. Her stepson, William, was working too. In June 1817 William's name is entered in the paybook of the Trincomalee Yard as Storekeeper's Clerk. His pay was £6 a month. He remained at Trincomalee working in the Storekeeper's Office until 5th February 1852 when he was discharged at his own request.

Unfortunately, this happiness wasn't to last for in June 1818 John was taken ill with fever and in spite of moving north to Jaffna, where the air was better and cooler, John died on 3rd July 1818. He was 48 years old and had been in the navy for 28 years. Eliza was left a widow with two young children and a stepson in a strange country miles from home.

John's funeral was held and his body laid to rest close to the sea that had been so much of his life. Young Charlotte, her mother and a few friends followed John's body to his grave, then Eliza had to make ready to leave on the first suitable ship to return the family to England. Luckily, Eliza was legally married and it was the Navy Board's responsibility to get them a passage to England. The first available ship was the newly built HMS Trincomalee. Built in Bombay she was to take her maiden voyage from Trincomalee to Portsea and Eliza, Charlotte and John sailed into history when they joined the ship on 27th October 1818. William, however, remained in Ceylon and was to return to England some years later.

Eliza now starts to write her journal and it soon becomes apparent that between the death of her husband and joining the ship she had fallen passionately in love with the foreman carpenter of the dockyard, Thomas Craven. He appears to have befriended Eliza and her family and led her to believe that on his return to England they would marry.

Mary Hope Monnery, who is a direct descendant of Eliza has transcribed the diary, wishing it to be left as Eliza first wrote it with its odd spelling and grammar and lack of punctuation. To make it easier Mary has included many footnotes to the transcription arising from the research she has carried out.



Mary Hope Monnery's
transcription of the Diary

Available as ebook via
FriendsofHMStrincomalee.org.uk

I can describe to you various happenings during the voyage, that Eliza writes daily about, but, to appreciate the depth of feeling that there is from Eliza for the “dear friend” Thomas Craven, who was left behind at Trincomalee; to understand the grave hardships that the little family and those occupying the ship endured during the return home; the camaraderie of the officers and the crew and the fatherly consideration shown by the Captain, it is recommended that you read the book.

Eliza starts her diary with a report of John's burial on 4th July 1818 at Jaffna on the northern coast of Ceylon, naming all his friends and colleagues from Trincomalee dockyard who attended. She then describes her last night at her “dear cottage” with her family and “best friend”, and how she left Trincomalee with regret at gun fire the next morning, 27th October, boarding HMS Trincomalee for England.

Her “dear Tom” sailed with her for 4 miles out, breakfasted with them, then took his leave at eight. She was quite emotional as she watched the boat carrying him away, and prayed that he would prosper and be protected until, in due time, they would be restored to each other.

The first day Eliza had many visitors from the ship's compliment, including Captain Bridges who behaved “with great politeness”, and introduced her to a gentleman passenger going to Columbo. He offered them a liqueur drink of rum and fruits.

On the evening of 30th October a strange sail in sight proved to be a merchant ship sailing to Pont de Galle at the southern end of Ceylon.

Diary – the first two months

28th October 1818

It appears that most days Eliza arose reasonably early, and on this day a sheep was killed and shared between the Captain, the gun room and for the young gentlemen and Eliza's own use. She was feeling too low to do any needlework that day. She walked out on the Quarterdeck to clear her mind where she found Mr Welshman who was very ill, he was an invalid from HMS Minden for passage to England. She was introduced to Mr Dinsford, Second Lieutenant on HMS Trincomalee.

It was during this time that her feelings were disturbed by something the Captain said about Tom which hurt Eliza deeply, and caused doubts concerning Tom to set in. She rallied round and played cards hiding the dismay she felt. She had a sleepless night.

8th November

There seemed to be a great change in the weather, which caused the ship to roll and pitch in the increasingly high winds.

Charlotte and Eliza became very sick and restless all night. It was at this time that they crossed the line.

Unfortunately, one of Eliza's pigs drowned by the amount of water coming in at the scupper holes. Later she was informed that one of her turkeys had broken its leg. The Captain informed Eliza that Captain Hill of the accompanying ship HMS Towey had made a signal enquiring after their health, and hoped the weather would soon improve.

The following day Eliza was upset again as a man was being punished with 18 lashes for mutinous language.

17th November

The weather continued to be unsettled, but an invitation from the gentlemen of the gun room to dine with them was a diversion to be accepted. At 5 o'clock a man fell overboard from the Towey – they let a boat down and also one from the Trincomalee. The man was picked up and saved by another man jumping overboard with a lifebuoy.

18th November

Eliza met Captain Bridges' future father-in-law, Colonel Young and was invited to have tea with them and play cards.

19th November

Eliza was angry when a woman belonging to the ship charged her a dollar for washing 12 bed-gowns for the children. Betsy was making handkerchiefs for the Captain.

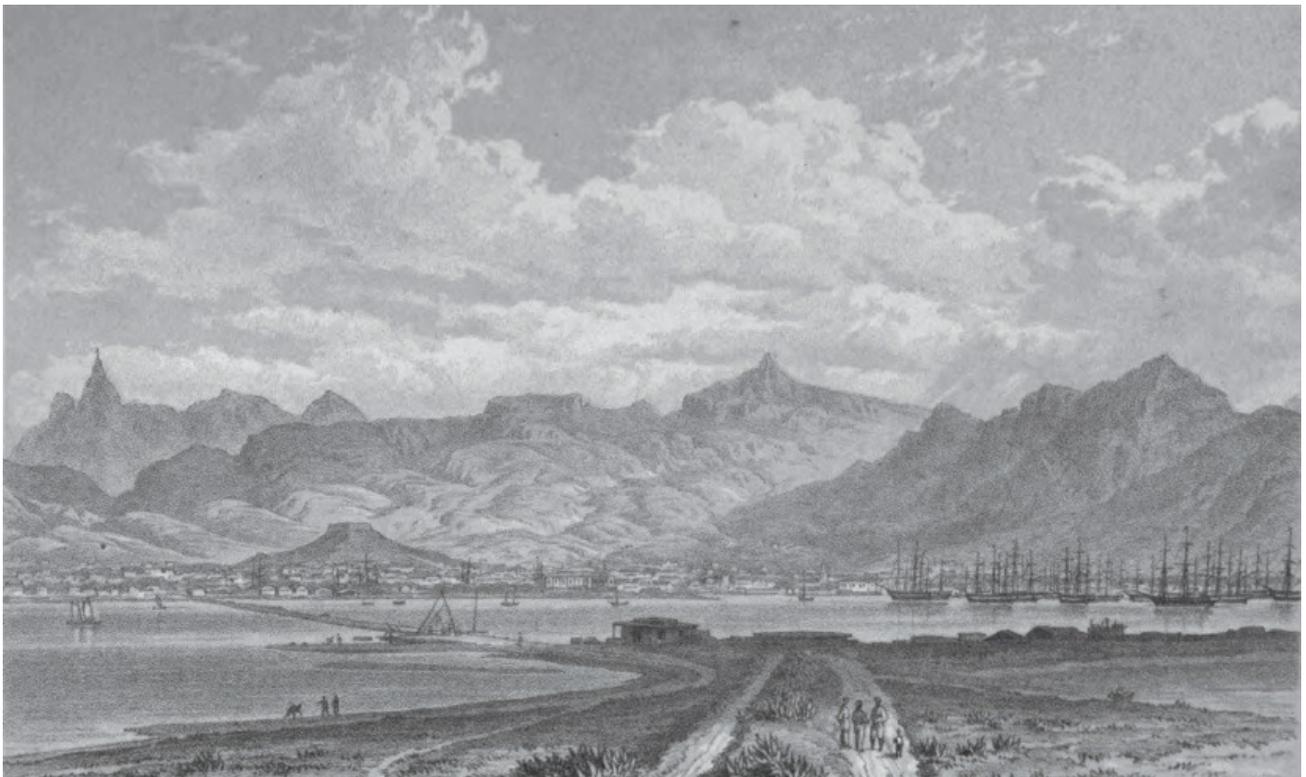
(On this date the Captain's log of HMS Towey records: "Punished William Brown, seaman with 60 lashes for insolence and contemptuously jumping overboard!")

21st November

Eliza records her continuous discomfort due to the bad weather, with frequent hurricanes. Her servant was very dirty and slothful after being accused of breaching a pipe and stealing 50 gallons of wine from Captain Hill. One man was put in irons for this action.

26th November

Everyone on board was rejoicing today at the sight of land and as they arrived at Port Louis, Mauritius.



Port Louis, Mauritius

27th November

10 slave girls came off for the washing – Eliza sent 80 pieces.

The horses were sent on shore – all the gentlemen were getting excited about it. In the evening Eliza walked on the quarterdeck for two hours.

28th November

Eliza writes: “Got my large chest up out of the hold and unpacked it, found everything dry and safe ... Invited to a large party of French and English ladies on board by Captain Bridges, to take a morning repast. Busy all day getting ready.”

29th November

It was all bustle and confusion as grand preparations were made for the expected party. The Ship was dressed in colours.

11 o'clock: The visitors entered – Eliza had to smile and appear gay: “Captain Bridges and Captain Hill introduced me to Captain Roye and Lady Miss Kennington English and Mr Pemburton.” There were four French ladies and as many French gentlemen; 21 in the party “all pleasant and agreeable but I do not like the French manners.”

In the evening she went on shore with a party, took tea then walked on the Champs de Mars parade ground at Port Louis ...“I do not like Port Louise at all.”

Over the following weeks many health problems occur and Eliza finds it difficult to keep cheerful. She finds that young Betsy is receiving attention from Mr Hele which Eliza will not entertain, and lets him know that she will have none of it. She strictly forbids any communication between her and Mr Hele. Captain Bridges asks if she is ill or if he could be admitted as she had kept her door shut against anyone for three days. Eliza made evasive answers.

The Diary – mid-journey 1819

Soon after Eliza became seriously ill and couldn't get out of bed.

January 1819

For six weeks there are no entries in the diary but only a few jottings stating that she wrote to Tom Craven at the Cape of Good Hope, and that on 6th January Captain Bridges was married to Miss Young at the Cape of Good Hope.

“Captain Bridges gave Betsy and me a ring each in honour of his marriage.”

February 1st 1819

Eliza feels able to use her pen again and continues writing regularly. She is affected again by various ailments and accidents but continues with her diary.

February 6th

The ship visited the Ascension Island which Eliza thought was a dismal place and wished she was in England.

She reports that little Charlotte was taken with the fever (probably malaria). A week later John becomes ill.



Cape of Good Hope 1801

March 12th

Water and stores were becoming scarce and there was a good breeze so the ship was going very fast.

Her ink bottle was upset twice – both children fell down and Betsy and Eliza were flying from side to side of the cabin.

The servant was too drunk to put their cots down, and Eliza was obliged to sit on deck to save servant from being flogged.

March 15th

The weather was becoming worse, and they were unable to make any way. The Commodore sent a signal to put into one of the western isles (probably Pico). Island of the Azores.

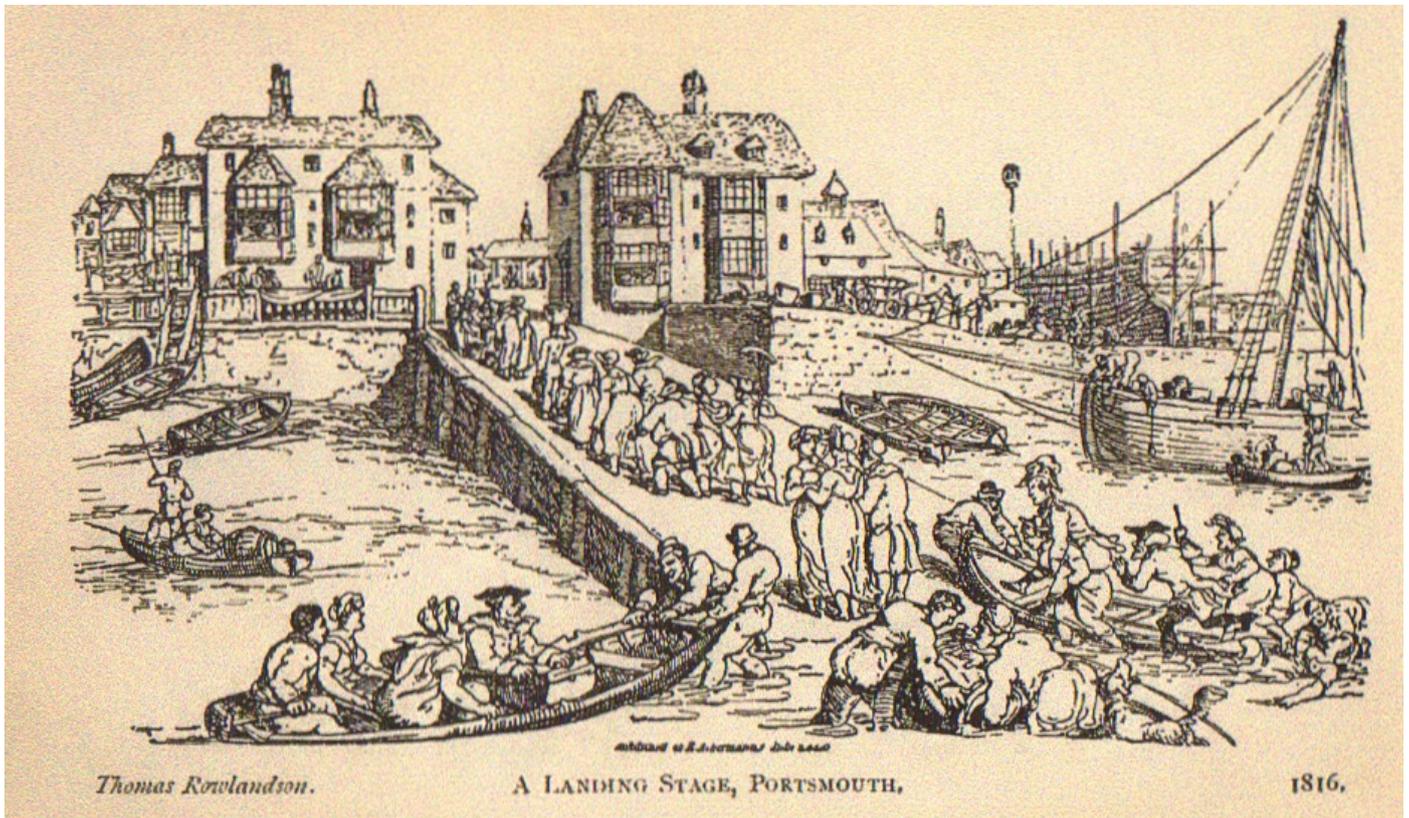
March 21st

By now the sea was calm and Eliza was anxious to get home. The next few days there was a good wind and a fair breeze causing the ship to make good progress – the hope was to be in England by the following week.

March 27th

It is now five months since Eliza left Trincomalee, “the sea mountains high”, “blowing hard a poor man fell overboard and lost in an instant”. The cabins were floating and there was not a dry space in the ship.

“Sea washing over the quarterdeck ... the children completely washed out of their beds.”



A Landing Stage at Portsmouth - 1816 by Thomas Rowlandson

Eliza records how they were on the quarterdeck bidding Adieu to their ship friends who had assembled for that purpose with smiling faces, and “after an absence of two years and nine months we again set our foot on English ground.” The luggage was put in a cart and taken to the Custom House where they were “accosted by a gentleman and a little lady who proved to be my Tom's brother, Joseph and our dear little Mary Ann Craven”, Tom's daughter by his first wife. Eliza was expecting to become her stepmother.

She was soon introduced to other members of Tom's family, Miss Mary, Tom's sister, and his mother, who “received me with much kindness.” It appears that Tom had made adequate arrangements for Eliza and her family to be made welcome on her return to England, and his family were soon to take her to their home and show her the house they had picked for her.

Ruth Turner

**QD059: Originally appeared in the “Quarterdeck” magazine
Ref: 2017 issue 2 (Summer) pages 28 to 38**

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