

The Mewburn Voyage to Canada, 1832

*Ian G Macdonald*¹

Introduction

In April 1832 the surgeon Dr. John Mewburn, then 44, set out for Canada in the *Columbus* from Whitby in North Yorkshire where he practised. He took his wife and all ten living children.

The journey was to take some six weeks by sail. Within the first few days three of the children had died of scarlet fever. John, however, organised divine service twice daily and encouraged bible study in the hours between. These activities strengthened everyone's resolve and helped them through the early difficulties.

John kept a Journal of his voyage to Canada. It is an important piece of social commentary. It illuminates the difficulties of early travellers and the real danger they all faced when committing to such a journey. It also provides a significant insight to attitudes, aspirations and mores among the professional classes or minor gentry of the time – the Mewburns were much the most distinguished of the 240 or so passengers.

The whereabouts of the manuscript is unknown. All that survives is a typescript, itself prepared from an earlier typescript. At the end is the comment:

"The above document was retyped from a nearly illegible copy – though not the original. Nothing of the spelling, sentence structure or punctuation has been changed. Mary Gordon, August 2003."

Mary Gordon is of a line of Mewburn descent that moved to the USA in the 1860s.

This paper provides scanned images of Mary Gordon's typescript, with her permission, with notes by the present author (who is not related to the Mewburns, but is a genealogist and family historian, with a close friend in the UK who is descended from the Canadian Mewburns).

There has been no further transcription to avoid any possibility of additional error. That allows pagination from the Gordon typescript to be retained and enables links to notes and references to be added below each typescript page, thus retaining immediacy and relevance. There are a few spelling errors, which have been listed,¹ but their origin cannot be determined.

There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the Journal. The facts match all that is known of these Mewburns from both their history in England and their subsequent history in Canada. The language used by John is contemporary and his concerns are very much as would be expected of someone of his class at the time.

A short passage on the genealogy of John Mewburn has been added to provide additional context.

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The Journal

A JOURNAL OF DOCTOR JOHN MEWBURN TO HIS SISTER-IN-LAW OF HIS VOYAGE TO CANADA WITH HIS FAMILY IN 1832

April 9th, 1832.

To my dear Sister Eliza Ann Chilton of Whitby, Yorkshire, England -

Believing I could not give you a more acceptable present than a Journal of our proceedings from leaving England, I will endeavour as far as in me lies to accomplish my intention – by giving from time to time such accounts as may prove interesting – though the committing to paper will revive many painful recollections of the joys we have left and the sorrows we have found during the first melancholy week of our voyage.

Shortly after the Pilot left the Vessel, died our noble boy Arthur. I did not hint at the probability of such an event to your poor Father as it would wound your feelings still more acutely – this we endeavored to bear as Christians, hoping yet fearing more as shortly after dear Rebecca showed evident signs that she would not be long behind. Yesterday morning she entered into eternal peace – now my beloved child Eleanor Margaret is fast hastening away – Thus in life they grew up lovely together – In death they were not divided. Our passage till today has been indifferent. April wind compelled us to beat up to windward – the ship rolled much. Dear Ann was very sick. Harry, Frank & John very bad, Henrietta tolerable. Thomas and lovely Isabel quite well: Poor Mama very sick indeed though at times was able to attend upon the dear children in wonderful manner. I, with the exception of a little nausea and home sickness, in good health, able to sit up and watch them in my own way. Today the weather has been lovely. Capt. Muir, a most kindhearted man, had us all moved up on deck betimes where we dined and took our coffee. Thus far his attentions have been great indeed and his respectful manner to my dear wife and daughters demands my warmest praise. I have made the boys exert themselves in walking, pulling at ropes and otherwise making themselves useful, and we have devoted

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Notes and References:

- Eliza Ann Chilton²
- Death of children,³ *The Times* report⁴

much of our time to the perusal of the Bible, which has afforded us much and sincere comfort in this hour of trial and affliction, which we believe is laid upon us for a wise purpose. We dare not murmur nor complain lest a worse evil befall us, but God has not failed us in sorrow and all gave vent to our feelings on so heartrending an occasion. Those who knew us as the happy parents of the most beautiful family and witnessed our affectionate attachments will be able to form some idea what our sufferings were like, and I will not harrow up your feelings, my dear sister, by a recital of all we have undergone in being bereft of these darling children, for whose sakes with their elders we were induced to sacrifice all our own attachments at home and brace the perils of the deep, but God's will be done – though we find it hard to part with those we loved so tenderly and so dearly, to give way to grief is inanity but oh, my dear lovely babes, how dearly I prized you – no tongue can tell, no pen describe – now I have lost you – what sufferings are mine, but you are happy and we must smile.

April 10 -- My fears are realized – my sweet cherub Eleanor Margaret, the pride of my heart, died this morning. Oh, what we have endured – no tongue can tell and I forbear to harrow up your feelings – but we repine not, we are resigned – for we have considered the case of poor Mr. Ripper of York and the affliction, and we earnestly pray that God will sanctify this awful dispensation to our eternal glory – believing that the same might have happened even in dear Whitby. We are comforted by the kind endearments of our remaining children who vie with each other in alleviating our real distress and cheer us up by the assurance that nothing shall be wanting on their part to make up our loss, but who shall compensate for my sweet lovely darlings: nature will give way in spite of all we can do.

Ten o'clock – We are now in the Pentland Firth, a dangerous passage – very thick all day – two vessels ashore on each side and we narrowly escaped the Island of Stroma. It was our intention to have gone to “Long Hope” but the dangers were too great to allow our entering and we were driven back six miles. We have taken therefore the lower direct passage and

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Notes and references:

- The children's bodies?⁵ Record of burial⁶
- Long Hope⁷

perhaps the Captain may venture tomorrow to go into Stromaess in some Bay on the Main Land. We took a fisherman pilot aboard and obtained a large quantity of fresh fish, very acceptable and very good. Dear Ann has been very well today. Henrietta got to her needle. The weather has been too cold to allow of being much on deck but dear Henrietta got out to see John O Groat's Home and Duncansby's Head on the Caithness shore. We have read several chapters in the Bible and testament and on the whole are more composed and orderly. Felt nothing of the seasickness and as far as possible enjoyed our appetites. Wilsons are particularly useful. I know not what we could have done without them both. Hannah Gibson is invaluable. On the whole we have many things to be thankful for and we look to the bright side "believing in hope". Dear Isabel eats all day long! Tom- hearty appetite. John improving rapidly. Francis is poorly but by care and attention he will improve. Harry ready to assist and has got over, we hope, the terrible nausea.

11, I again commence my Journal. The days preceeding have been more pleasant than we could have anticipated – the weather fine and beautiful – the ship making very little progress, not more than two miles an hour. The day we passed the Firth a heavy swell of the sea completely floored us all – nothing could be done. Dear Henrietta was terribly sick and made me very unhappy. In the even Capt. Muir, whose goodness and attention is beyond my praise, prevailed upon her to get on deck for an hour – after that she partook of a little solid meal. I had a refreshing night. Since then we have sat on deck all day long – I reading the Revd. George Young's Lectures which have afforded us much satisfaction and I hope improvement. I recommend it to your perusal. Had it pleased God that our lot had been cast happier in the commencement of the voyage, we all agree that it is impossible we could have been at sea more comfortable and agreeable and, independent of these mysterious and awful circumstances, we could have been happy indeed. Our dear Henrietta fell sick – to confess the truth she never looked well. Three days ago the rash appeared on her, filling me with the greatest alarm and dread. Today she appears very favorable, dear child, she begged to have the Bible beside her. I have two or three times a

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Notes and references:

- Stromaess and Main Land⁸
- The Wilsons⁹
- Hannah Gibson¹⁰
- George Young and his lectures¹¹

day gone down and read different portions to her and prayed each time beside her. She told me yesterday and prayed that if it pleased God she die, she might go to Heaven! How much may we have reason to rejoice in the amiability of her and the others dispositions. Today dear Harry has been very unwell, complains his throat and looks hot and red. I had been out of bed immediately. He now seems better. What a state of mind I am placed in!! but what abundant thankfulness I feel towards God that I enjoy such good health and am able so far to assist them. Dear Ann is today better. She has suffered much from sea sickness. Sweet Isabel eats beef and biscuits all day long. Frank is improving – Johnny quite hearty and Tom the best in the bunch. Oh, what a blank, but they are happy and I must not repine! We have now established morning and even prayer and service I hope regularly, at which John Wilson and his family attend with great propriety. His fair wife is very unwell and looks very ill indeed. I have much reason to be thankful for his and her services. We should have been lost without them, and Hannah Gibson, whose attentions to us can never be repaid. Wilson appears to have brought up his children with much propriety. They are well behaved and should we be spared to see the “Promised Land” he may be of the most essential benefit to me and mine and receive in return. We are much pleased with the orderly respectful behaviour of the ship’s crew – no swearing, shouting or blasphemy – all is well conducted indeed. Our goat has increased her family with two kids, a source of amusement, with dogs, kittens, kids and nanny goat running about on deck in fine weather, all in perfect merriment and fun together.

May 16th. A long dreary blank since I left off journalizing, in truth at the close of my last I became quite unable to continue my remarks much as I wished you to be informed of every circumstance relative to us on our wayward voyage. My spirits became so depressed that I felt as almost forsaken. My dear little Henrietta became alarmingly ill – my poor wife from a return of her complaint – dreadful sickness and loss of appetite and a rapid decay of contour, flesh and strength, appeared as of fast hastening to her home. In fact had we not removed her from the bed to a small cabin bed, no doubt she would have suffered. Harry

became worse. Frank looked dreadfully ill. The carpenter became dangerously ill. John Wilson and his wife were both confined to bed. My miseries seem to be arriving at their climax – but I yet never quite despaired. The Word of God comforted and supported me and I felt reason to believe God would not lay more upon me than I could bear. My affectionate partner's disorder abated – Henrietta gradually convalesced and Harry and Frank improved – the others got better – so that again our mourning was turned into joy – and I am most happy to say that hitherto “hath the Lord helped us”! We have never had six hours continuance of fair weather, the wind constantly from the north or west, driving us down south of the great Banks of Newfoundland, into the latitude of 41!! Frequently strong gales with a cross sea – kicking everything about and making us reel like drunken men. The storms have been awful to us, though the old steward, Joe, an old man-of-war's man, laughs at such cups' full of wind. During all these gales the whistling of the wind in the Rigging is tremendous and to see a dozen men on the Top sail yard, appearing every moment as just being blown away, is an awful sight!! My station is generally on the companion steps, under shelter, where I can view the mighty expanse of waters rising up and lifting our noble vessel to the skies and then dashing her into the very deeps again! It is a spectacle worth seeing, I assure you, and wonderful to tell. Neither I, Henrietta or anyone of the Family have ever expressed the slightest alarm as yet – and while passing through the Pentland Firth – old Joe let slip that we were just ashore on the Island of Stroma. It was a deep fog and a tremendous current. We had a pilot aboard – yet we neither quailed or shook. We endeavoured to show as much courage and cheer to each other as much as possible. The weather has been intensely cold. Mr. Gamble, the mate, fancied it came from icebergs coming down the straits. About four o'clock one morning Capt. Muir suddenly roused me out of bed with the astounding intelligence that we were close upon one if I wished to see it. I leaped out of bed, fancying, half awake, that we were upon one direct and ran up on deck and just caught a peep of a most magnificent spectacle indeed – a large white island, glistening in the moon with turrets, spires and pinnacles aloft.

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Notes and references:

- Latitude of 41¹²

The cold was more intense, it being to windward, than any I ever felt. There was no danger as a good lookout is always kept! A curious circumstance occurred the other day. Shortly after we entered the Western ocean, a large ship, the Helen of Aberdeen, was in company—towards night we lost sight of her—On Monday we passed a large vessel on the opposite Tack and hailed her, when lo, our companion, the Helen of Aberdeen, bound for Quebec! Thus showing, to our great satisfaction, that others are in similar situations to ourselves. We have been much amused with the immense shoals of porpoises sailing round us in play – birds of various kinds. Since yesterday morning the wind has been fair and steady, indeed the only time it has continued so for six hours together. The ship is now gliding along with hardly any perceptible motion, 7 and 8 knots, or miles an hour. And we have indications from the numerous land birds flying about that we are fast approaching land. We hailed an American fishing boat yesterday bound to the Grand Banks – a remarkable circumstance that we have not met or passed any other than these two with the exception of the Westminster from Hull, two days after getting through the Firth! There have been several in sight but we distanced them all – yet I had almost forgot that in our first dreadful gale or storm, the *Campion* passed us whom our Captain, putting a little more sail on, left him with perfect ease, then shortening sail laid to for him and hailing found the Master poorly. Mr. Muir's intention was to keep company till fine weather when Mr. Brewer might have the advantage of my aid, but unfortunately, tacking at night the *Campion* had not seen us or did not choose to tack with us and we have not seen him since. Till within a day my dear wife has been in much better health, enjoying her roast lamb much. I had her removed into Ann's bed cabin so that we can always be beside her and I sleep in a snug narrow birth on the opposite side. Since I left my bed and changed my quarters I now sleep all night! For four weeks I never enjoyed more than three hours sleep a night! What must my thoughts have been! We often talk of you all and remember you in our prayers. What is Aunt Mary – Aunt Eliza – doing now, is the enquiry frequently. The answer is ready, thinking of us! Yes, my dear sisters, we do believe that you continually think of us,

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Notes and references:

- The *Helen* of Aberdeen¹³
- The *Campion* and the *Westminster*¹⁴
- Aunt Mary¹⁵

talk of us and pray for us! May God bless you all! You will naturally ask – have I repented of this momentous step. No, never – Only when my dear wife seemed almost dying, I did reproach myself for hazarding her life – but now she is improving and I see my noble boys walking the deck before me, I do think I have done right and that God will bless my honest endeavours to place them in positions where success may crown our views. I have hardly named the lovely Isabel – she grows a dear child, but will you believe it, I cannot as yet take pleasure in her infantile prattle. Morning, noon and night the image of those beautiful children are before me and I cannot, cannot forget those I loved so dearly. Surely never Father was more attached than I have been. Tears are my constant companions – whenever alone – but I do not murmur or repine. They are happy and will never know care or sorrow. We may go to them but they cannot come to us.

I have been able to establish a regular course of divine service twice a day, I trust not only to my own benefit but that of my dear children. In the morning we commence with the Psalms of the day, the lessons with the interesting Psalms and Hawes' excellent commentaries, then the Church prayers – after that one or more of the Epistles with my feeble explanations, showing the boys how the Bible is a guide and a lantern to our paths and what noble directions the apostles have given us for our conduct through life! In the Evening we have again the Psalms, lessons and the manual of prayers for a Family – with a selection from the whole duty of man for our moral conduct. These lectures are at this time often attended by the second mate and carpenter when their watch is below. Capt. Muir and John Wilson's family, who join and read beautifully. Thus our time, so far from passing heavily on our hands, is spent in a manner the most agreeable and happy. We are far from those cares and anxieties which surrounded us at home and could we bring our hearts into a proper frame of mind and just resignation to the will of God – no family could have been more comfortable than we have been – a noble ship – a kind Captain, the mate respectful, and the men well behaved – with everything to make us easy – what more could we desire? Yes, to know how you all, all are at home? What anxious thoughts – what

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- Hawes¹⁶
- The whole duty of man¹⁷

fears we have about you – pray God spare all your lives! Your Father will be pleased to hear that owing to his kind and liberal arrangements – our fare is capital,- the cookery the best I ever tasted – soups delicious – roast goose delightful and Lobsouse nothing better. Our appetites are returning and we do enjoy our four meals a day well. The nanny goat is a most useful appendage to our breakfast and tea. She gives sufficient for these and a small black cup pudding for Mama daily. Saturday nights we drink health and happiness to all. Margaret is much better and dear Ann is again improving. She suffers most from her old enemy, the asthma. At these times she is never sick. I am happy to say my health is wonderfully improved of late, particularly since I slept. I was very thin, had a severe cough and dangerous looking expectoration which filled me with serious alarm lest my lungs were becoming affected. I have, however, lost all and am now getting fat again. I can take exercise now. I suffered nothing whatever worth mentioning from sea sickness but a horrid state of nausea when the wind was calm. And the sea smooth. A heavy head sea was rather agreeable than otherwise and I have within the last few days been less tired of sea than I was a month ago! Our time passes pleasantly and I should be most ungrateful did I not say that much of our comfort is owing to the kind behaviour of Capt. Muir, whose kindness must never be forgot by us all. Our old pussey cat, after being in the store-room near a month and almost hungered to death, is now a constant companion to us. Her kittens fare sumptuously and are good sailors! A rascally looking shark passed us the other day, but soon left us. We have lost all chance of getting fresh fish at the Bank. We are now going away between them and the land and hope shortly to enter the Gulph. If the wind holds on then we may hope also to find smooth water but we are not too sanguine as hitherto these are the only 36 hours where it has continued fair. I assure you we look always anxiously for the reading of the Log! And enquiries are always made how many knots and if a right course.

May 17th. This morning at 7 o'clock I heard the agreeable intelligence conveyed to the Captain of "Land in sight" – what sensations this produced it is impossible to describe.

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Notes and references:

- Lobsouse¹⁸
- Provisions¹⁹

The Capt. was up, dressed and on deck in a few minutes, returning shortly below to inform me it was the much dreaded Island of St. Paul!! We had run in the last 36 hours – near 300 miles!! I was up immediately to view this Horrid Isle” which has a singular appearance – three hills, dreary and barren. What reasons we have to be thankful to Almighty God for his merciful preservation of us all from shipwreck and destruction! Immediately after breakfast our devotions commenced with the Psalms of thanksgiving for the mercies vouchsafed from so great a deliverance! It is singular but within the last two weeks, we have all become so reconciled and so happy in the voyage that the prospect of bidding adieu to the Western ocean does not bring those gratifications which you ashore would imagine from our long confinement. This I attribute to the agreeable and improving manner in which our vacant time has been spent aboard of late and the restoration of our health and its concomitant – an excellent appetite and the very best of cookery! 8 bells, morning 8 o’clock breakfast, tea and coffee with milk – beef and pickles. 8 bells at noon – dinner – Lobscouse or roast goose, boiled beef – broiled ham and bacon – puddings baked or boiled with bottled ale or porter. 8 bells, four o’clock – tea, with excellent biscuits and sweet butter, Irish roll. – 8 bells – night – eight o’clock – Toasted cheese, cold beef, sometimes a glass of Brewster and Belcher’s delightful whiskey or a little brandy. 8 bells – twelve o’clock – bed. So much for Gastronomy on board of ship. Now for intellectual – After breakfast, devotions, the Psalms, Lessons, intermediate Psalms and prayers – explanations and lectures – exercise of walking the deck. After dinner, miscellaneous readings – splicing of ropes and other little matters. After the Captain’s Tea – devotions with reading extracts from the “Whole duty of Man”, papers from the Youth and Cottage magazines, which are listened to with great attention not only by my own dear Family but by the Habituees of the Steerage, consisting of John Wilson’s family, but the second mate, carpenter and steward, who all seem anxious to hear the work of God. After the readings, conversations about our dear, dear friends at home! With best wishes for their health and happiness. Night prayers – and sound, quiet and refreshing sleep. Can it excite surprise

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Notes and references:

- *Youth and Cottage* magazines²⁰

that we should be happy and comfortable? Oh no, thus by this equal distribution of our occupations and time we never hear of any one expressing themselves tired or even desirous that the voyage was finished! I must not forget to state the value of John Wilson's family to us, though he and his wife have suffered most severely from sea-sickness, yet he has always been able to assist us in all our wants and necessities – attending my goat by feeding, milking &c. and from the very excellent manner in which he has brought up his family and from his own good qualifications as a mechanic, together with his wife's abilities as a needlewoman, able to execute tailoring &c. I am induced to hope I shall be amply repaid for what I have done but I can never be able to remunerate him and his wife for their disinterested, valuable and kind services to me in these late and never-to-be forgotten melancholy attacks. Margaret Davidson's health seems quite reestablished and Hannah Gibson quite well. I therefore trust we shall reap the fruits of our labours in the "promised Land".

May 24 – After making the Island of St. Paul and getting fairly into the Gulph – the wind slackened and a beautiful calm day succeeded – the sea smooth as glass – the wind then became adverse and we had to tack

making very little way but ultimately clearing the next "Horrid Isle" Anticosti, of which I had ever an unconquerable dread. This was passed in safely and then the wind became fair – Shortly after cloudy and thick with a severe rain with a strong S.E. breeze becoming a severe gale – looking out anxiously for a pilot, who at last was reported, a pilot schooner on the "Weather Bow". Our boat was hoisted out which brought him aboard in what I conceived some danger. More sail was then set and we sprang rapidly forward, passing headland and cape with wonderful rapidity and the floating light on the "Travene" with incredible speed at two o'clock in the morning which I sat up to see. At four anchored off the Quarantine Station, among a number of other ships at four o'clock in the morning. At noon our Captain went on shore, got his clearance from my certificate and we proceeded rapidly up to Quebec, passing every ship which had got under weigh before us. At nine

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Notes and references:

- Quarantine station and Cholera²¹
- Margaret Davidson²²
- St. Paul island²³

o'clock heard the castle guns and came in view of the Town lights, which had a pretty effect by night. Moored in the stream and retired to bed, - rose early to receive the Board of Health and then weighed anchor dropped close under the Governor's residence, and immediately after went ashore with the Captain to the Post Office and Custom House to report. The lower Town is dirty and filthy beyond description – the streets narrow, badly paved and exceedingly dangerous to pedestrians from the rapidity with which the Canadian carters drove in all directions. Every one seems engaged – Everyone has something to do. The houses are old fashioned and frenchified. The working people dirty in their appearance, but wherewithal an appearance of merriment, and a freedom from care and anxiety different from anything we have ever seen and witnessed in old England. They all jabber French and very few of the people speak English! Wishing to take a house in the suburbs, I made application for a very nice one, but as the old lady could not speak one word of English nor I one of French, we could not understand, and as I was clearly from L'Angleterre I might have the cholera, so she would not speak one word to me or allow me to shake hands. The view up the river St. Laurence is highly interesting, as far as the eye can reach – white houses, with a beautiful church every several miles are seen the whole way on the south side, - while the beautiful Island of Orleans, 20 miles in length, on the opposite side has a fine effect. Some of the villages are pretty, but there seems a great want of "English Taste" and English gardening to enliven the scene. Several small waterfalls turning mills have a pleasing effect and the air of comfort and plenty visible on all sides satisfies us that "with diligence" no man can want. The view of Quebec is very grand – the fortifications, said to be impregnable – and really they look to be so – the Governor's residence – the monument to Genl. Wolfe and Montcalm – the Cathedral – Hospital and immense rock – with the Village of Point Levi on the opposite shore – the noble ships – the grand St. Laurence – the beautiful steamers – the boats altogether form a scene so totally different from anything we have ever witnessed before that we looked with amazement on all we saw. The description by Bouchette is extremely accurate. Houses to let are not to be

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Notes and references:

- Bouchette²⁴

obtained for a week or so – we therefore remain on board where we are so comfortable and happy – that I have given up all thoughts of removing for the present. I have seen several merchants and others who all speak most highly of the upper province as the finest field in the whole world for a man with a Family and some capital. All advise me not to be in a hurry! A man was aboard us today who is returning to England – some relative having died and left him property. This man and his companion when they reached Little York two years ago had a dollar between them. He has now Sixty Pounds! A real encouragement for my man John Wilson.

June 31. On board the Chambly steamer bound 70 miles up the St. Lawrence – we bid adieu to Quebec last night and slept on board. I assure you we felt much at parting with Capt. Muir, whose kindness and attention to us all and a sincere disposition to make us comfortable and happy deserve our warmest praise and acknowledgement. Gamble, the mate, ought not to be forgot – he seemed so comfortable and happy with us, while poor old Joe, the steward, cried again. The carpenter—oh, what sensations this produces -- he came with tears to say “God bless you all, we shall never forget you all.” The crew were to a man sorry to part and I assure you I felt much for them. Their behaviour was very respectful to us indeed. All these were remembered and not with empty praise – and all were satisfied.

Now as to Quebec – Bouchette’s description is accurate. In winter the low Town is filthy and in summer dusty. The Canadians drive their beautiful horses away at a great rate and something like London – you are in great danger. The kindness and more than civility we have met with has been very gratifying while the generous sympathy of all classes on our domestic affliction was I believe sincere. His Excellency, the Governor, treated me kindly – I had two private audiences and one public. And one at which he introduced me to Dr. Skey, Inspector, who met me as an old Friend! – had me to breakfast with all the boys and seemed delighted with them. The Governor wished me to settle in the Eastern Townships and begged, if I came to Quebec –

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Notes and references:

- Chambly²⁵
- Governor of Quebec²⁶
- Dr. Skey²⁷

to call as a Friend! Lady Aylmer sent to inform me she would have invited us to the Chateau, King's Birthday, but thought it would not be agreeable. I have dined with one or two gentlemen merchants and attorney and called on many others. They live, some of them, in a princely style! and a magnificence superior to anything I have seen in Europe. My letters at once stamped me as a Gentleman! And wherever I called I was met with a cordiality and frankness I cannot describe. The Lord Bishop received me very friendly. The Chief Justice, a fine old man, was courteous in the extreme. The Arch-deacon was a true friend. The Ladies expressed much regret that they were unable to pay Henrietta that respect her station demanded and I believe should we return to Quebec at any future time we should be spoiled entirely. From these gentlemen I have letters and strong recommendations to all the highly respectable people in the upper province. I must now draw to a close. I fear much has been scribbled which can never be read, but I dare not, can not, must not revise. I ought not to forget in this Journal of sorrow and heavy trial that our three dear children are interred in the protestant Burial Ground of Quebec – but I never desire to visit the place again. -- -- Farewell – Farewell. I shall when employed be better. Time and resignation all do much – much for me!! I have reasons to be thankful to Almighty God for his mercies – my affectionate partner is spared and my dutiful children, improved in looks, noticed by all for their excellent deportment, are treasures indeed. Should I be ungrateful or repine – oh, no – no, but a Father's feelings will have vent. Again Farewell.

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Notes and references:

- Lady Aylmer²⁸
- The Lord Bishop, Chief Justice and Archdeacon²⁹

Dating the Voyage

There is some uncertainty and discrepancies over dates for the voyage.

- Whitby museum has a poster used at the time to advertise the journey. The poster says simply that the newly built *Columbus*, of 750 tons, would leave “*about the first week in April*” and names H. Barrick as the ‘Commander’. The Barricks built the ship.
- Four other sources provide information – the Journal; a list of arrivals posted on TheShipsList website based on local newspapers; a brief note by one of the passengers, William Hewgill; a published letter by another of the passengers, J. Dixon.
- John Mewburn’s Journal starts on 09 April and refers immediately to “*the first melancholy week*” thus creating an impression of an early April departure. He makes many references to Captain Muir in charge of the ship, and appears to say that he and the captain went ashore at Quebec on 24 May. A newspaper account describes the children’s burial as taking place on the 25th which supports that view of John’s arrival.
- TheShipsList.com lists the “ship *Columbus*, 467 [sic] tons, under Captain Bagg [H. Barrick]” which is said to have left Whitby on 13 April with 240 passengers and to have arrived on 27 May. We know that Barrick was the ‘Commander’ not the Captain (Mr Muir) and it is reasonable to suppose that the “Commander’s” duties were simply to organise the event. .
- A family website, <http://hewgillfamilyhistory.blogspot.com/> quotes a brief entry from the notebook of a passenger, William Hewgill, as saying:
“*Sailed from Whitby ... on board the Columbus new ship of 750 ton further having on board 245 passengers for Quebec on Monday at 4 Clock, in the afternoon on the 16th day of April 1832*”.
He gives no date for the arrival but says it was a Sunday [which suggests May 27th].
- Then there is a letter from one of the steerage passengers, a Mr. J. Dixon, to Mr. R. Frankland of Whitby published in the *Whitby Repository and Monthly Miscellany, Volume III, February 1833*. This also gives 16 April as the start date and provides a day-to-day account (mainly of the weather). It gives Sunday 27th May as the arrival at Quebec and prior to that says:
“*26th, Strong fair wind up the river, by four o'clock in the afternoon arrived within twenty-four miles of Quebec, where we had to anchor with many other ships until our captain and doctor went on shore to the doctor's station for the purpose of filing a bill of health; we rode until seven o'clock next night.*”

The Journal and the Dixon letter are the two most informative pieces. The Mewburn Journal has few dates – being more of an atmospheric account rather than a diary; the letter has every day accounted for but was presumably written some time later based on notes that may or may not have been made on the individual dates. TheShipsList entries are derived from secondary accounts and may not be reliable.

The Dixon letter and the Hewgill note are each quite specific about departure on the 16th April (either ‘evening’ or 16.00) so is the Mewburn Journal wrong? Could transcription errors mean that 9 April was really 19 April while 10 April was 20? Dixon claims that on the 18th “*we went through the Firth about six o'clock this evening*”. Mewburn has it as ten o'clock in the Pentland Firth, apparently on the 10th. It is around 300 nautical miles so readily achieved in two days as needed by the Dixon version.

Hewgill adds that on the 27th “*we heard that Mr.Mewburn was at Quebec*” so it seems that John had left the ship and gone on ahead. Steamers did ply between the quarantine station at Grosse Ile and Quebec. This would account for the children’s burials on Friday 25th.

It seems likely from all this that April 16th was the departure date and that May 27th was the arrival date, though John Mewburn had gone ahead probably on the evening of the 24th.

Genealogical context

John Mewburn was born 25th July 1788 at Bishop Middleham, County Durham³⁰ (and baptised on the 27th)³¹ to Francis Mewburn, an apothecary/surgeon, and his wife Eleanor Johnson. John, as the second son, was educated for medicine since inheritance was unlikely to come his way.

As the final stage in his schooling, from 1801, he attended a private school in Whitby, run by a Mr Routh.³² A fellow pupil at Routh's was William Scoresby Jr. the whaler, Arctic explorer and cleric. Scoresby recollected³³ that:

"Towards the close of the autumn of this year (1806), a school-fellow of mine made a preparation for a journey to Edinburgh, with a view to studying physic." ... "In my fellow student, whom I accompanied from Whitby (Mr John Mewburn), I had an agreeable and intelligent companion."

They shared lodgings in Edinburgh for a time, but Mewburn spent only one year there and did not take a degree.³⁴ His father's accounts then mention the next stage:³⁵

"John Mewburn went to London Tuesday 12 O'clock 25th Aug^t. 1807 & arrived there Monday Morning about six O'clock & admitted the Day following a Dresser at St. Thomas's Hospital under Mr. Birch"

He was examined for the Diploma at the Royal College of Surgeons of London on 06 May 1808,³⁶ paid his £16 10s fee, and is listed as a Member (MRCS) thereafter.³⁷ At that point he was 20 and had apparently been studying for only 18 months. However, he volunteered to deal with Peninsular War casualties from the Battle of Corunna as an assistant surgeon at Haslow Hospital, Southampton in early 1809.³⁸ Later that year, further training at Guys Hospital, London gained him certificates in physiology and midwifery under John Haighton and surgery under 'Asttley Coopers'.³⁹

In May 1809, John entered into a partnership with his father at the practice in Whitby,⁴⁰ thereafter known as Mewburn & Son.

He married Sophia Moore at Wyberton in Lincolnshire on 16th April 1810.⁴¹ Sophia, however, died on 30th March 1811.⁴² On 27th April 1813 John then married Henrietta Chilton at Whitby.⁴³ The Chiltons were prosperous local merchants and ship-owners and their name has been carried through many generations of the Mewburn family as a given name.

John practised at Skinner Street in Whitby.⁴⁴ He was active in antiquarian circles as a committee member for the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society from 1824 to 1829; curator of the museum from 1830 and contributor of *"an Alligator, a Seal, a Bat, two Bears Heads"*⁴⁵ and then *"a valuable collection of petrifications and rock specimens from Kent."*

In Canada, the family settled first at York (which in 1834 became the City of Toronto) in the Niagara area of Upper Canada. John took an active role in local affairs. Within a year he was a magistrate⁴⁶ and by 1846 he also held a post as coroner.

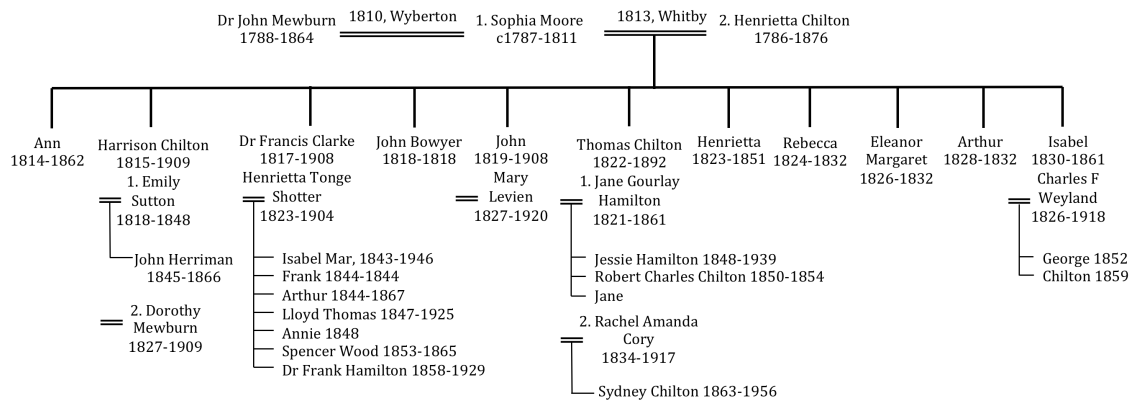
Attractively priced land grants were a feature in Upper Canada at this time and John applied for one in 1834.⁴⁷ This was successful and he settled at Stamford, Welland County on lot 56. He was listed with his wife and three children at Stamford in the 1852 census.⁴⁸ Much later, in the agricultural census of 1861, John was still occupying a 3-acre portion next to 100-acres being farmed by his nephew Francis. Son Harrison was farming another 100-acres on lot 55.

Things were going well and after his first year John was even inspired to write a piece about the benefits of Canada. Entitled *"A Letter to Mr Stickney⁴⁹ of Holderness"* it was an open letter intended for publication and to encourage emigration, though notionally offering a candid view of the situation there. He had no doubt that Canada could offer almost all that England did (apart from decent accommodation in taverns!) and for much less money. Interestingly he quantifies this:

*"No labouring man or mechanic with a large family, should venture here without £10 to £20 after landing at Quebec; a farmer, one of our smaller class, £200, the better sort, £500; and a gentleman who has a family to maintain, from £800 to £1000, together with a permanent income of from £50 to £150 per annum."*⁵⁰

We can assume he fell in the last category.

John was sufficiently notable⁵¹ that his career was sketched out in Caniff's (1894) *The Medical Profession in Canada*.⁵² He died of apoplexy in 1864⁵³ but had certainly achieved his aim of creating a new life for the family when uprooting them in 1832.



Dr John Mewburn, his children and grandchildren

Notes and References

- Probable typographical errors:
 - page 3, line 1 – 'Stromaess' is 'Stromness'. See note 8
 - page 3, line 4 – first 'to' should be 'too'
 - page 3, line 14 – 'find' should be 'fine'
 - page 5, line 2 – 'miscries' probably 'miseries'
 - page 7, line 25 – 'Caption' must be 'Captain'
 - page 11, line 14 – 'work' should be 'word'
 - page 12, line 9 – 'June 31' must be 'May 31'
- Eliza Ann Chilton (b. 1808) was a sister to John's wife Henrietta. She was the youngest child of Harrison Chilton (1758-1838) of Whitby, John's father-in-law.
- The children must have fallen ill before they embarked and John clearly knew that death was likely for some of them. In the days before antibiotics there was no realistic treatment. Staying at home would not have affected the outcome.
- Obituaries. *The Times*. 03 July 1832. London.
- John tells us that the bodies were interred at Quebec (note 6). He says nothing though about how the bodies were kept for the six weeks or so before they got there. There were deaths also among steerage passengers but they were immediately buried at sea.

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- ⁶ TheShipsList.com (<http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/Arrivals/1832a.shtml>) provides the following quotation (from the *Quebec Gazette*, Monday May 28th) relating to the children's burial:
- "Died:— At sea, on their passage out to Quebec, Rebecca, Eleanor, and Arthur, children of John Newton [*sic* Mewburn], Esq. surgeon, late of Whitby. Their remains were interred in one grave in the Protestant Burying ground, Quebec, on Friday noon, May 25th 1832. The funeral service was performed by the Ven. the Archdeacon."
- ⁷ Longhope is a port on South Walls, on the south of Orkney only a short way north of the island of Stroma.
- ⁸ On line one, the place must be Stromness, in Orkney. They had already passed Stroma in the Pentland Firth at the top of Scotland and Stromness was then not far north on Mainland, Orkney.
- ⁹ At least half a dozen John Wilson's were born at Whitby within a reasonable time frame. Much the most likely candidate is the John who married Ann Foxton at Whitby in 1814 and whose three youngest children were Mary Foxton Wilson (1820), William Foxton Wilson (1822) and John Foxton Wilson (1829). A John Wilson did travel on the *Chambly* at the same time as the Mewburns, with a wife and four children (one was over 12 but no baptism has been found). Later, in 1837, John Mewburn sold a quarter acre from Lot 56 at Stamford to a John Wilson (Niagara Settlers Land Records, Settlers Records "W", Stamford Township, Welland County, 'Wilson, John (2)', 06 Dec 1837. <https://sites.google.com/site/niagarasettlers2/stamford-settlers-13> : 27 February 2014].
- ¹⁰ Three Hannah Gibson's were baptised at Whitby between 1790 and 1809, any of whom could have travelled on the *Columbus*. There is no unmarried Hannah Gibson in the 1852 census who might be her.
- ¹¹ The Reverend Dr. George Young (1777-1848)¹¹ was a Scot from Kirknewton, Midlothian. He lived in Whitby from 1805 and must have been well known to John being also a member of the Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society. Many of his writings and sermons were published and he was a noted geologist. The book mentioned may well have been:
- Young, Rev. George. (1832) *Lectures on the Book of Jonah, designed chiefly for the use of seamen*. London: F. Westley and A.H. Davis.
- ¹² Some way south of where they needed to be to get through the Cabot Strait and then into the Gulf of St Lawrence. Level with the New York/ New Jersey border.
- ¹³ The bark *Helen* arrived at Quebec on 23 May with 18 settlers, having set out on 08 April from Aberdeen.
- ¹⁴ The *Campion* and the *Westminster* from Hull were presumably not bound for Quebec and do not appear among arrivals there.
- ¹⁵ Mary Chilton (b. 1790), sister to Henrietta and Eliza Ann.
- ¹⁶ Hawes's commentary on the Psalms has not been found, but the name may be mis-transcribed. There is a well-known work – Horne, George. (1776) *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* – that may be the reference.
- ¹⁷ A highly influential and popular protestant devotional work, possibly by Richard Allestree but attributed to many others.
- Anon. (1659) *The Practice of Christian Graces, or The Whole Duty of Man*. London: T. Garthwait.
- ¹⁸ Lobscouse is a meat stew, generally made with mutton, and notable as a shipboard item based on salted meat. That link with the sea and sailors led to Liverpoolians becoming known as 'scousers.
- ¹⁹ Provisioning for the journey was provided by John's father-in-law Harrison Chilton who had been a Captain in the Honourable East India Company service and was a shipowner at Whitby

Strand. Ship's fare was notoriously poor but the Mewburn's seem to have dined extremely well. To have had their own livestock is remarkable.

See the article on the Mewburns and the Chiltons by noted musicologist John Mewburn Leven:

Leven, John Mewburn. (1929) 'Two Distinguished Whitby Families', *Whitby Gazette*, Friday, Nov 8th, 1929.

- ²⁰ *Youth's Magazine* ran from 1805 to 1867 and provided informative and uplifting articles for children; *Cottage Magazine* (1812-1832) was otherwise known as *Plain Christian's Library* and that fairly summarises its content.
- ²¹ Cholera was much feared at the time. The island of Grosse Île had been opened that year to be the quarantine station yet the *Columbus* was barely delayed since John's authority as a surgeon sufficed. The Mewburn's were fortunate to escape, in that a major outbreak occurred at Quebec just days after their arrival. Though this is often linked to the arrival of the *Carricks* from Ireland at the beginning of June, cases had been arriving for some weeks before then.
- ²² Margaret Davidson was a servant in the Mewburn household. She was still with them (aged 64) in the 1852 census at Stamford.
- ²³ Saint Paul Island – a small island in the Cabot Strait just north of Cape Breton Island beyond which (to the west) is the Gulf of St Lawrence. It belongs to Nova Scotia. The other, north, side of the Strait is Newfoundland.
- ²⁴ Bouchette, Joseph. (1815) *Topographical Description of the Province of Lower Canada*. London: W. Faden.
- ²⁵ The *Chambly* was a steamship plying the St Lawrence between Quebec and Montreal. TheShipsList.com has the Mewburn's shipping on 30 May 1830 and arriving on 01 June. It seems likely that the typescript is in error in giving 31 June as the date of departure.
- ²⁶ The Governor of Quebec at that time was Lord Matthew Whitworth-Aylmer (1775-1850), 5th Baron Aylmer (an Irish title) – see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/whitworth_aylmer_matthew_7E.html.
- ²⁷ Dr. John Skey was chief military medical officer then Deputy Inspector of Hospitals for Quebec, and President of the Quebec Emigrant's Society.
- ²⁸ Despite John's pleasure at being noticed, Lady Aylmer's excuse has all the tone of an aristocratic brush-off. Perhaps three meetings with her husband had been enough to cover the social niceties? Lady Aylmer was Louisa Anne Call (c1777-1862).
- ²⁹ Of the other meetings with senior members of society:
- the Lord Bishop of Quebec was the Right Reverend Dr. Charles James Stewart (1775-1837) – see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/stewart_charles_james_7E.html;
 - the Chief Justice was Jonathan Sewell (1766-1839) – see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/sewell_jonathan_7E.html;
 - the Archdeacon of Quebec was Dr. George Jehoshaphat Mountain (1789-1863), later to be Bishop of Montreal – see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mountain_george_jehoshaphat_9E.html.
- ³⁰ Mewburn, Francis. (1782-1823) *Account & Note Book, 5 Vols*. Archives of Ontario, F958-10. Toronto: Archives of Ontario, Vol 1, image 37.
- This is an unpublished and not fully catalogued set of documents discovered by the present author who commissioned a scan.
- ³¹ Baptisms (PR) England. Bishop Middleham, Durham. 1788, MEWBURN, John. Source film no: 962690. Family Search transcription. Collection: *England Births and Christenings, 1538-1975*. <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/J7HV-X2L> : accessed 7 June 2011.

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- 32 Mewburn, Francis. (1782-1823) *Account & Note Book, 5 Vols.* Archives of Ontario, F958-10. Toronto: Archives of Ontario, Vol 3, image 50.
- 33 Scoresby-Jackson, R.E. (1861) *The Life of William Scoresby M.A. D.D. FRSSL&E.* London: T. Nelson and Sons, pp. 32-34.
- 34 Centre for Research Collections. (2011) 'Newburn, John', *Students of Medicine, 1726-1826.* Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.
<http://www.archives.lib.ed.ac.uk/students/search.php?view=individual1&id=11543> : accessed 19 May 2011.
- 35 Mewburn, Francis. (1782-1823) *Account & Note Book, 5 Vols.* Archives of Ontario, F958-10. Toronto: Archives of Ontario, Vol 3, image 90.
- 36 Royal College of Surgeons. (1808) *Court of Examiners of the Royal College of Surgeons in London, Vols 1 & 2, 1800-1820* [known as the *Examination Books*], p. 190. London, Lincoln's Inn Fields: The Royal College of Surgeons Library.
- 37 Royal College of Surgeons. (1808) *A List of the Members of the Royal College of Surgeons in London, Who do not reside or practise in or within seven miles of the City of London.* London, Lincoln's Inn Fields: The Royal College of Surgeons Library.
- 38 Browne, H.B. (1946) *Chapters of Whitby History, 1823-1946: The Story of Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society and of Whitby Museum.* Hull and London: A. Brown & Sons Ltd., p. 320.
- 39 John Haighton and Sir Astley Cooper were both Fellows of the Royal Society.
- 40 Mewburn, Francis. (1782-1823) *Account & Note Book, 5 Vols.* Archives of Ontario, F958-10. Toronto: Archives of Ontario, Vol 3, image 105.
- 41 Marriages (PR) England. Wyberton, Lincolnshire. 1810. MEWBURN, John and MOORE, Sophia. Source film 508079. Family Search transcription. Collection: *England Marriages, 1538-1973.* <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/J7HV-X2L> : accessed 7 June 2011
- 42 Mewburn, Francis. (1782-1823) *Account & Note Book, 5 Vols.* Archives of Ontario, F958-10. Toronto: Archives of Ontario, Vol 3, image 118.
- 43 Marriages (PR) England. Whitby, Yorkshire. 1813. MEWBURN, John and CHILTON, Henrietta. Source film 919086. Family Search transcription. Collection: *England Marriages, 1538-1973.* <https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/J7HV-X2L> : accessed 7 June 2011
- 44 Pigot and Co. (1828-9) 'Whitby, Surgeons', *National Commercial Directory.* London: J.Pigot & Co. <http://www.historicaldirectories.org/hd/d.asp> : accessed 09 Feb 2014.
- 45 Whitby Literary and Philosophical Society. (1824-1846) *Report (1824)*, p.15.
<http://www.archive.org/details/reportofwhitbyli25whit> : accessed 29 June 2011.
- 46 MacKenzie, W. L. (chairman) (1835) *The Seventh Report from the Select Committee of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada on Grievances; To whom were referred Lord Goderich's Despatch to His Excellency Sir John Colborne, of the 8th November, 1832. To which is added the Report from the same Committee, on the Petition of William Forsyth, late Proprietor of the Niagara Falls Pavilion,* p. 306. Toronto: M. Reynolds.
http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=TbwNAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA306&dq=John+Mewburn+Niagara+1833&hl=en&ei=CZQhTtmbOsqX8QOx-_S4Aw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CDQQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=John%20Mewburn%20Niagara%201833&f=false : accessed 16 July 2011.
- 47 Library and Archives Canada. (2011) *Upper Canada Land Petitions (1763-1865).*
http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/upper-canada-land/001097-119.01-e.php?person_id_nbr=44646 : accessed 23 June 2011.
- 48 Census. 1852. Canada. Stamford, Welland, Canada West. MEWBURN, John. Ref: 382 p. 10d, 11a, 21. <http://www.automatedgenealogy.com/census52> : accessed 17 February 2014.
- 49 William Stickney (1764-1848), yeoman of Ridgmont, Holderness, North Yorkshire.

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- ⁵⁰ Mewburn, John (1833) *A Letter to Mr Stickney, of Holderness, on emigration to Canada*. Darlington, Ontario: Coates and Farmer, p. 8.
- ⁵¹ However, Canadian histories sometimes refer to him as John Mewburn M.D. He never did take a degree so this is inaccurate.
- ⁵² Caniff, William (1894) *The Medical Profession in Upper Canada, 1783-1850: an historical narrative, with original documents relating to the profession, including some brief biographies*. Toronto: William Briggs. http://archive.org/details/cihm_00470 : accessed 14 August 2013.
- ⁵³ Death announcements. (1864) *The Gentleman's magazine*. 12 April. MEWBURN, John. p. 806.