

## William Potter and Family

William Potter was an important person in the development of Oxton and indeed of Birkenhead as a whole. He was greatly involved in the promotion of the docks, housing, the church and local politics. However until recently little was known about his personal and financial life, save some basic information, some of which tended towards the critical. This history has revealed that this perception is inaccurate.

William Potter was born on 28 August 1791 and baptised on 16 September 1791 at Liverpool, Saint Nicolas. He was the son of William Potter a surgeon and Jane of Bevington Bush, an area of Liverpool north of Scotland Road which was at that time in beautiful countryside. There is a burial record for one Jane Potter, age 78 years of West Derby (buried 1849) – this may well be Jane.

William married Anne Livingston on 19 March 1833 at Saint Mary, Walton on the Hill by license. George Monk was the Surrogate. The Livingstons were a local Everton family, living just across the road from William Potter in 4 Netherfield Road.

A son of the family Edward Terrell Livingston, William's brother in law was later (1851 Census) recorded as a visitor to William's house at 21, Edge Lane, Liverpool. (Address also listed in Gores Directory 1853)

Edward appears in the 1881 Census as living in Kensington, London and having the designation of East India Merchant, perhaps following in his brother in law's footsteps.

In 1825 and 1827 William is listed as a merchant, living at 9 Netherfield Road North, Everton, Liverpool (Gores Directories) William and his friends and associates seem mostly to have lived in the Everton area, which was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries not dissimilar from Oxton. It was on a hill commanding views of the river and was studded with mansions in a green and pleasant landscape, away from the growing city of industry, an influx of people, pollution and "thick smoke and foul vapours".

William and Anne married in March 1833 and soon after a son named William was born (1833). In October 1838 Anne died soon after having given birth to another son.

By 1853 (Gores Directory) William was in partnership with Thomas Taylor of Taylor, Potter and Company, which was listed at 5 High Street (Netherfield Road North) Everton, while William's home address was 21 Edge Lane. (Kelly's Directory 1853)

Thomas was also a near neighbour of William. In fact the network of friends, relatives and business associates that existed in a very small area of Everton was undoubtedly an important part of the social and commercial life of Liverpool.



The company was a shipping agency, engaged in the East India and China trade. The company also came to be involved in shipping insurance, which was often at that time subject to catastrophic losses. An example of their commercial activity is shown in the advertisement for the sale of the Viscount Sandon, a 540 ton sailing ship in 1853.

On Thursday next, the 11th instant, at One o'clock, at the  
 Brokers' Sale-room, Derby-buildings, Fenwick-street,  
 The well-known Liverpool-built Ship  
**VISCOUNT SANDON;**



540-514 ton register, built in 1842, and classed  
 twelve years A 1 at Lloyd's; sheathed with yellow  
 metal in 1850; lying in Prince's dock. This ship  
 has twoon decks laid, and is well suited for the Australian or  
 passenger trade, having carried troops to India, being properly  
 ventilated, or any trade her size may warrant; she carries a  
 very large cargo, having discharged upwards of 750 tons mea-  
 surement, of 50 feet to the ton, and 180 tons of dead weight;  
 sails very fast, and only requires provisions to send her to sea,  
 her present sheathing being quite equal to an outward Indian  
 voyage.

For further particulars apply to Messrs. Taylor, Potter, and  
 Co., merchants; or to **TONGE, CURRY, & CO.,** Brokers.

William was clearly an enterprising and successful business man with a wide portfolio of interests, shipping, insurance, land ownership, building, and committed to works to improve and safeguard the prosperity of Birkenhead. In 1846 records show he owned more than 140 acres of prime building land in Oxtou, ready for development and huge expected profits.

He also became involved in banking, being one of the founders of the Royal Bank of Liverpool.

William's considerable financial and commercial empire began to crumble after the so called Panic of 1847, when changes to the banking system caused the widespread collapse of business houses.

At this time William still held important positions. He was the Chair of the Birkenhead Dock Commissioner and charged with negotiations, along with John Laird and William Jackson, in respect of the sale of the docks to the Liverpool Dock Trust.

However William's affairs were overwhelmed and he filed for bankruptcy in 1847, leading to complex, drawn out and no doubt harrowing hearings in the courts for several years to come. There are repeated listings of court appearances recorded in the Liverpool Mercury well into the 1850s. His partnership with his friend John Taylor was dissolved on January 3, 1860.

16 . THE LONDON GAZETTE, JANUARY 3, 1860.

**N**OTICE is hereby given, that the Partnership hereto-  
 fore subsisting between us the undersigned, Thomas  
 Taylor, William Potter, and Jervis Roberts Wardley, as  
 Merchants, in Liverpool, under the firm of Taylor, Potter,  
 and Co., is this day dissolved by mutual consent, so far as  
 regards the said Jervis Roberts Wardley.—Dated the 31st  
 day of December, 1859.

*Thomas Taylor.  
 J. R. Wardley.  
 Wm. Potter.*

116, Fenchurch-street, E.C., London,  
 December 29, 1859.

**T**HE Partnership hitherto existing between Joseph  
 Beubrick Foley, Alexander Aikman, and William  
 Charles Aikman, is this day dissolved by mutual agree-  
 ment, as far as regards William Charles Aikman.

*Jos. B. Foley.  
 Alex. Aikman.  
 Wm. Chas. Aikman.*

**N**OTICE is hereby given, that the Partnership hereto-

J.R.Wardley was involved in shipping insurance and, amongst other things, was an insurance agent for the Scottish Union Fire and Life Insurance Company at 1, Rumford Place Liverpool.

By 1860 William had relocated to Birkenhead, living in St Aiden's Terrace, recorded then as being in the parish of Claughton, Bidston Parish (1861 Census and Gores Directory 1860)

He was by this time a widower. Anne Potter of Netherfield Road, Everton died and was buried at St George's, Everton in 1838 at the age of 30.

William returned to Liverpool and it was there that he himself died on 31st May 1866 in Huskisson Street. A simple notice of his death appeared in the Births, Marriages and Deaths Column of the Liverpool Mercury on 1 June

**Church, Chapel-street, Wem.**

**POTTER—May 31, at his residence, Huskisson-street, aged 77, William Potter, Esq.**

**ROBERTSON--At Philadelphia, U.S., suddenly, aged 58,**

and a more detailed account appears saying that “*Yesterday the flag was displayed half-mast high at the Town Hall, as a mark of respect to the memory of the late William Potter, Esq., a gentleman well known in commercial circles, and a magistrate for the borough of Liverpool, as well as a justice of the peace for the Hundred of the Wirral.*”

The official register of his death reveals a potential cause of confusion – about his age. This was explained by a professional family researcher as follows “Civil Registration did not commence until September 1837 so no other official record of birth was registered, the only exception being a baptism record. Many of them might not have known their exact age.”

A long and complimentary eulogy appeared in the Liverpool Mail, here recorded in full.....

## THE LATE MR. WILLIAM POTTER.

One of the elder generation of enterprising and honourable British Merchants, WILLIAM POTTER, Esquire, departed this life last Thursday morning, in a green old age and whilst his faculties were yet comparatively clear and vigorous. As a magistrate of the Borough of Liverpool and also one of the county magistrates for Cheshire, every token of public respect was paid to his memory, and the flags were displayed halfmast high at the Liverpool Town Hall and the principal Police-offices. Mr. WILLIAM POTTER was connected by family ties and relationships with several of our old Liverpool families, such as the Lowndeses and the Livingstons. In earlier and middle life, he was the most active member of the once eminent firm of Messrs. Taylor, Potter, and Co., very extensively engaged in the East India and China trades. They were not merely great merchants and shipowners, but were largely embarked in business as Underwriters. But, until recent years at least, Marine Insurance in Liverpool was anything but a uniformly prosperous business—indeed, two large local Marine companies, the "Ocean" and the "Marine," had successively to succumb and collapse under gigantic losses. But Mr. WILLIAM POTTER retained almost to the last the sanguine elasticity of his younger days. He never lost heart. And he was ever ready to embark in any promising enterprise,—

until he decided at length quietly to spend "the calm evening of his days," free from the anxieties and losses inseparably attendant upon large commercial speculations.

In conjunction with his partner Mr. John Taylor, and their friends the late Mr. John Bibby, and Mr. Jonas Booker and other enterprising townsmen, Mr. WILLIAM POTTER was one of the founders of the Royal Bank of Liverpool. Mr. WILLIAM POTTER was also intimately associated, some twenty years ago or more, with our enterprising neighbours who were the Founders of that "City of the Future,"—Birkenhead—and its world-renowned Docks. When we had the honour of accompanying the Officers of the Channel Fleet on their inspection of the Birkenhead Graving Docks at the upper end of the Great Float, we heard one after another exclaim with delighted surprise "there is nothing like them in the world!"—a tribute reflecting high honour on the sagacity and public spirit of the gentleman who has just been removed from our midst. He was hopeful, enterprising, and sagacious. In this respect Mr. WILLIAM POTTER was "before his time." For he was not only a large Birkenhead bondholder and resident, when Birkenhead was at its worst period of depression and virtual insolvency; but he had also largely embarked in land speculations there. In fact, he may be ranked as one

of the Founders and Benefactors of Birkenhead ; for he sank on Birkenhead and on its marvellous Docks many more thousands than he could scarce retrieve of hundreds when the monetary difficulties and commercial Panic of 1847 suddenly and severely pressed on his extensive firm, and wholly annihilated many other old and extensive firms, not only in Liverpool but in London also. Even since then, he earned and lost what would have made two or three fortunes for many smaller men. But whether in success or in failure, in seeming affluence or merely in modest competence, he was always held in highest estimation by his brother merchants on 'Change alike for his commercial integrity and his high and genial personal qualities. For a long series of years and up to his decease, he continued to take a lively interest in the welfare of the shipping community, and he remained President of the Liverpool Marine Society up till his death. He was one of the original promoters of the Collegiate Institution, and of the Sailors' Home, and was for many years chairman of the Pil tage Committee of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board.

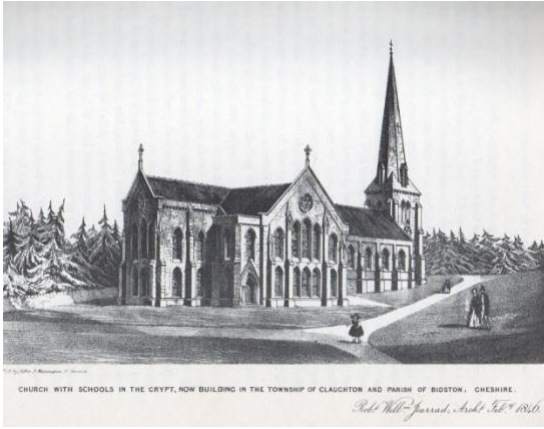
He was a good staunch Tory, and a zealous but moderate-minded Churchman. When in 1857, Lord JOHN MANNERS contested Liverpool, Mr. WILLIAM POTTER and Mr. R. C. NAYLOR, now of Hooton Hall, were selected by our local leaders to be his lordship's proposer and seconder, respectively, at the hustings. Mr. POTTER was habitually, and according to his ability, a steady promoter of the extension of churches and church-schools. In conjunction with three other former residents of Everton—two of whom are long since deceased, and one long left the town—Mr. POTTER and ourselves formed the five Original Trustees for those Mill Lane National Schools which originally served as a School-Church in connection with St. George's, Everton, during the incumbency of the Rev. R. P. Buddicom, and which were afterward conventionally, though not formally, annexed to St. Chrysostom's; and which again are temporarily used as a School-Church in connection with the congregation forming for the new church now being erected in West Derby Road by the sole munificence of another ex-resident of Everton, Mr. T. D. ANDERSON : and we can safely say that it was always a pleasure to transact trustee matters with Mr. POTTER ; for he was always kindly and courteous and considerate ; always just-minded and fair and dispassionate, and especially amid all the angry controversies and public disputes which unfortunately arose about those large and valuable "schools," after the Rev. JOHN MACNAUGHT left St. Chrysostom's. In connection also with the extensive property he once held in Birkenhead and its vicinity, Mr. POTTER had largely, if not exclusively to do with originating the erection of more than one or two of the new churches in Birkenhead ; if we rightly recollect, the fine church of St. Ann's, in Birkenhead Park, was individually

erected, if not completely finished, by him; whilst he had much to do with the erection of the new church at Claughton, if not of one or two others. In a word, so long as he held large interests and possessions in Birkenhead, he laudably and practically recognized the axiom that "property has its duties as well as its rights." Peace to his ashes! He had been long a widower. He leaves behind him only one son,—the present Mr. WILLIAM POTTER, who was some years ago married to an amiable daughter of our old and valued friend, the Rev. T. F. REDHEAD, incumbent of St. Peter's, Rock Ferry. After his University course, the present Mr. POTTER became a barrister, and settled in London: And as he is a remarkably active and persevering man, we are not surprised to learn that he is amongst our most rising barristers, and already enjoys a large and growing practice, particularly in the Admiralty Courts in Shipping cases,—that Shipping interest in which his late father cherished such a warm concern to the last. May he be the inheritor of all his large-hearted father's virtues, and of much more than all of his worldly successes!

William was buried in the churchyard of St George's, Everton on 4 June 1866.

Letters of Administration in respect of his estate were granted to his only child, his son William, in 1867, though it is recorded that he died intestate and left less than £20, explained by the enormity of his debts. His fortune it seems were wiped out but his reputation was intact. Nonetheless a Huskisson Street address may well have been desirable and comfortable for him in which to end his life.

His obituary in the Liverpool Mail 2 June 1866 lists a catalogue of admirable qualities, such that not only was the flag at the Town Hall flown at half mast but also at all principal police offices. He was considered to be "one of the founders and benefactors of Birkenhead". His interest in shipping was lifelong and to his death he was the President of the Liverpool Marine Society. William held extensive property and land in Birkenhead. He invested time and money in the erection of churches namely St Anne's Highfield Road, Birkenhead and Christchurch, Claughton (now considered to be part of Oxton). William was clearly a man of deep and devout beliefs and this was expressed in his considerable financial involvement in the building. It was also thought that the erection of the large church near the centre of Oxton (which was not formally attached to a church denomination until some years after it was completed) served to attract buyers for the properties that he was planning to build in the prosperous and burgeoning Oxton area. For no one would move to an area which lacked a suitable place for worship. And the spire could be seen as a beckoning beacon for miles around. He was after all a business man as well as a philanthropist.



Christchurch, Oxton built when it was surrounded by fields....

St Anne's Church in Birkenhead, near the Park.



His only son William visited a family of the name Redhead as a boy. He was at their home in Rock Lane, Rock Ferry when the 1851 Census was taken. William's son is not listed in any of the available census records as living with William his father, and it is not known where he resided or with whom, when he was a boy, after his mother died.

Thomas Fisher Redhead was a clergyman, one time incumbent of St Peters Rock Ferry. The family lived in Rock Lane, Higher Bebington. On the day of the Census his daughter Eliza Jane was 14 and some two years older than William. However the bond between the Potter and Redhead families was strengthened when William the son married her and she became Eliza Jane Potter.

The year after the birth of William Jnr, Eliza gave birth to a baby girl that they called Jane. There is a burial record at St George's Church in Everton of one Jane Potter, age 11 years of Birkenhead buried 1845, which could well be her.

In 1861 William was listed as a law student and they were living together in St Mary's, Lambeth. It would seem they had no more children.

They returned to Liverpool by the time of the 1871 Census living in Princes Road, 10, Alexandra Terrace, for William was by then a practising barrister.

It is recorded in the 1891 that William Potter, the son, lived in Kensington Gardens Square in the County of Middlesex, and he was a Barrister at Law. The Census lists him as living at 5 Paper Buildings in Farringdon in The City of London.

By this time William was a widow as Eliza Jane had died in 1890 at the age of 57.

William died in on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1893 at 5 Paper Buildings leaving £6523.(£750,000 in 2019 money)

## OBITUARY.

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The Press Association learns that Mr. William Potter, Q.C., bencher of the Inner Temple and Conservative candidate for East Northamptonshire, died yesterday morning from influenza. Mr. Potter was called to the Bar in 1861, and was attached to the Northern Circuit.

There are many other strands to the Potter family, a family, which has one member named William Potter Livingston of Bold Street. Liverpool. He died in 1882 leaving £15,543...that's about £1,800,000 in today's money. But that's another story.

Bob Knowles  
Oxton History Research Group