

AN ANGLESEY SEA CAPTAIN.

BY HUGH BEAVER.

In the Anglesey Antiquarian Society's *Transactions* of 1924 (pp. 54—76) there was an article from the pen of the Hon. Treasurer on the Skerries Lighthouse, in which reference was made incidentally to the Liverpool Corporation's Lighthouse and Pilot Station on Point Lynus and the first keeper, Mr. Robert Beaver. It may therefore be of some interest to add a few details of this Robert Beaver and his family, for though not Welsh in origin they were for about a century and a quarter identified with the Island. The writer would, however, anticipate criticism by explaining that he is unfortunately ignorant of both the language and the history of Anglesey. He only ventures to produce these notes in the hope that they will prompt some of the Society's members to bring mistakes, as well as new facts, to his notice. He is already greatly indebted to some, particularly the Hon. Secretary.

Robert Beaver, born in 1748, was the fourth child and third son of John Beaver of Aberffraw, apparently at that time and certainly for a great many years after, schoolmaster of the small school founded by Sir Arthur Owen, Bt., in 1729 and endowed—if that be the proper term—by him in his will<sup>(1)</sup> dated 20th June, 1735. The school was held, and the schoolmaster lived, in a cottage which still exists, with a stone over the door bearing the date 1729 and the initials A.O. and having an outside flight of steps leading to the upper storey. The schoolmaster's stipend was fortunately supplemented by contributions in cash and kind from the neighbours and nearby farms, at any rate wherever there was a son or a daughter to be educated. There do not seem to have been above half a dozen such schools in the Island at the time and John Beaver, if never even passing rich, was probably comfortably enough off for the time and the place and the circumstances. At any rate, for forty years he taught many hundreds of Anglesey boys in one of the small rooms on the ground level while higher up, his wife when not otherwise engaged—and no doubt in later years his daughters—dealt with the girls.

- (1) I have not been able to trace the will, but the Charity Commissioners' Report (Vol. 26, 1833, p. 686) states that Sir Arthur Owen by the said will "devised the yearly rent or sum of £4 to be yearly issuing for ever out of the tenement by him purchased from Mrs Wynne of Ty'n Llwydion .... To be paid to such fit person or persons as should be from time to time appointed by his heirs for ever, as an encouragement for Keeping a school for teaching and instructing of youths in the Welsh language, at the house by him lately built on a piece of waste ground in the town of Aberffraw,"

How an Englishman came to be selected to give instruction in the Welsh language at a time when nothing but Welsh was ordinarily spoken in the Island is unexplained. One may imagine that the chance of picking up at least a smattering of English was the real draw. The circumstances of his existence in Anglesey at all have never been quite clear. He belonged to London<sup>(2)</sup> or at any rate it was from London that he journeyed north. His father, another John Beaver, seems to have married for a second time when the son was just growing up and it may be that he quarrelled with his step-mother and ran away from home. A family tradition that he ran through some sort of a fortune, was rather a ne'er-do-weel, was eventually turned out and told never to come back is possibly little more than an old wives' tale. But the addition that he became tutor to the young heirs of Berw may enshrine some part of the truth, for he does seem to have been companion or attendant to Thomas Holland, the younger of the Rev. Thomas Holland's two sons and of the same age exactly as John Beaver. When Thomas died suddenly while still at Oxford John Beaver joined the father. He married about 1743 or 1744 and it must have been then that he was given the Aberffraw school.<sup>(3)</sup> There he spent the rest of his life with a large family and there in 1786 he was buried at the age of 83 years, as the heavy slab of slate that marks his grave still testifies.

John Beaver had ten children by his wife Ellin<sup>(4)</sup> of whom the eldest, William, born in 1744, was for over 40 years an officer

- (2) Mr. J. E. Griffiths of Bangor has a note to the effect that John Beaver may have been a Manxman, but he was unable to lay his hands on the evidence. It affords a strange coincidence that there were for a while two persons of the name of John Beaver in this part of Anglesey, entirely unconnected as far as can be ascertained. The other bearer of the name seems to have been an itinerant glover, married perhaps at Heneglwys in 1739, living certainly at Aberffraw in 1742 when he had a son Hugh baptised, and three years later at Bwyran when his daughter Margaret was baptised in Llangeinwen church. The glover's elusive figure then disappears. This may have been the Manxman, if indeed either was.
- (3) A description of the school somewhat more than half a century later is to be found in the -Report on the State of Education in Wales, 1847, . . . . . Although called a Church school and supported by subscriptions and endowment, it resembles more a private-adventure school of an inferior description. The master has the reputation of being a good scholar, but his method of teaching is very antiquated. He has no books except one or two Bibles, a church catechism and a copy of Walkingham's Arithmetic. None of the children can read with ease. They understand nothing of what they read in English and are unable to translate the simplest English words into Welsh. The master assured me that they knew nothing of what they read in English ; that it was impossible for them to do so, seeing that at home they never heard a word spoken in English, and considering the utter worthlessness of his materials for translation. The master does not attempt to assist them by any system of interpretation *viva voce* or by any kind of explanation in Welsh of what is read or learned. Under such circumstances it is difficult to understand how any ideas can be communicated between a master and his scholars. The object of the foundation certainly seems to have been quite lost to sight by the Inspector !
- (4) This Ellin was the daughter of John Ellis of Tai Croesion in the parish of Llechylched ; born 1722, died 25th January, 1778,

of the Customs at Holyhead,<sup>(5)</sup> leaving no male representative but a number of descendants through one of his two daughters, his great grand-daughter still living in Anglesey. Alice, the second daughter of John Beaver, married Hugh Roberts described as a mariner of Holyhead<sup>(6)</sup> the son of Hugh Roberts of Penybryn near Holyhead. There were many children of this marriage, of whom most died young but one, a third Hugh Roberts, subsequently married Miss Ann Hughes of Chester, amassed a fair fortune, built Glan-y-Menai on the Straits and was the father, among others, of the late Mr. Hugh Beaver Roberts of Bangor and Frances Susannah, wife of Mr. Richard Rathbone of Liverpool<sup>(7)</sup> The third, but second surviving, son of John and Ellin was Robert, born in 1748. He went to sea at an early age and commanded his own ship by the time he was 28 years old. That was the period of the greatest prosperity of the Slave Trade out of Liverpool, and Robert like the rest traded linens and the usual goods to the west coast of Africa, where he filled up with slaves and eventually returned with cotton and sugar from the Colonies and the West Indies. The round journey often took two years and more. Up to 1778 he had escaped the hazards of the war which had already broken out some time. In that year, however, he received his first commission of Letter of Marque<sup>(8)</sup> against the French and Americans, a usual precaution to prevent an armed ship from being treated as a pirate. His ship was the *Juno* of the burthen of 100 tons and the property of Messrs. Andrew White and Co. It carried " 14 carriage guns taking shot of 4 and 3 lbs. each and 10 swivel guns, 40 men, 36 small arms, 24 cutlaces, 30 barrels of powder, 30 rounds of great shot and

(5) The limitations of time and space prevent further reference to William, but his epitaph in Holyhead Church merits Quotation:—

" Rough in his manners, in his language blunt,  
Reckless a Lord or lacquey to affront,  
He passed through life more independent far  
Than many a wearer of a glittering star.  
Yet when the needy, the distressed drew near,  
He stopped, he sighed, he dropped the silent tear ;  
Nay more, with instant adequate relief,  
Their cares he soften'd and allay'd their grief.  
Let us (illiberal, still inclined to blame)  
His virtues owning imitate the same.  
Let us his blemishes no longer known,  
Detest, rescind and deprecate our own."

(6) The table on p. 134 of Griffith's *Anglesey and Carnarvonshire Pedigrees* thus requires correction. That great work, however, could scarcely hope to escape all error.

(7) William Beaver's wife was Ellinor Williams of Holyhead, through whom his children were connected with the Eliases of Plas y Glyn.

(8) *Letters of marque*, a licence or extraordinary commission granted by a government to a private person to fit out a privateer or armed ship to cruise at sea and make prize of the enemy's ships and merchandise. The ship so commissioned is sometimes called a *letter of marque*. The great majority of such ships were still primarily traders and only casually privateers.

about 2 hundredweight of small shot." She was victualled for 12 months and carried a cook and a surgeon !

So the *Juno* set sail for Africa with linens, woollens and hardware and almost at once fell in with and captured an enemy ship. But her success was short-lived, for while she was busy completing a cargo for the West Indies in March, 1779, two French frigates and a brigantine appeared suddenly off the windward coast of Africa when they were least expected. The enemy ships went into Sierra Leone where they found, totally unprepared and at their mercy, the *Providence* with 350 slaves on board, the *Juno* with 90 slaves, the *Hereford* and several others. The French took them all, blew up the Fort and all the buildings and, replenishing their own stores, set sail.

Robert Beaver thus found himself home again that summer without a ship. He determined to give up trading, which had all the risks and few of the rewards of war, and he forthwith made his way to the West Indies, as offering then probably the most promising field for privateering.

The history of privateering remains to be written and it is a pity that it has never yet been done. It has been the custom to look on the letter of marques and privateers as thinly-veiled pirates. There is no doubt that some very discreditable affairs are to their account, but it is safe to say that there is none which cannot be paralleled in the Royal Navy of those days. The officers of the latter were as keen as any of the privateers to fill their pockets with loot, on which the two equally depended for any hope of even moderate wealth. It would perhaps be ungenerous to refer further to the fatal dereliction from duty, all through 'loot.' of our then greatest admiral at the most critical time in the American War, except to show how deep was the spring of that almost ceaseless friction between the regulars and the irregulars, nothing less in fact than greed, jealousy and envy. Thus the latter have never had justice, and yet the privateers were an important part of the intelligence system—so far as any such system existed ; they did a large amount of patrolling ; they carried despatches ; they formed part of convoys and in some cases they took their share in active operations. But little of all this will be found in any admiral's despatches, although that was probably the last thing to worry them. They played their game alone for the most part, a game of adventure and hazard from start to finish. Some few were very successful; there was the famous Captain Fortunatus Wright, but for the most part there were more blanks than prizes. For the ordinary captain's share was something like a sixteenth or a twentieth, the venture being financed and the profits being taken by all sorts of persons, merchants, society ladies, syndicates of gamblers, politicians and government officials,

Robert Beaver's first ship was the letter of marque, schooner *Lady Parker*, of .10 guns and 40 men, a well-known ship which had been in many hands and was then under a cloud because her previous captain had put a period to his existence one Sunday morning in the captain's cabin. Perhaps there was some difficulty in getting anyone to take her over. At any rate the young untried and newly arrived Beaver was soon in command, and the *Lady Parker* became famous among the many privateers in and out of Port Royal.

He must have taken at least 20 prizes between the late autumn of 1779 and the spring of 1780, one cruise alone bringing eleven. During it he had two engagements with a Spanish guarda-costa of 16 guns and 160 men which was eventually so shattered as to be forced to run for shelter under the guns of Porto Cavallo. The *Lady Parker's* losses in these two fights were only 2 killed and 3 wounded, but in a later action with a sloop she lost 10 killed and wounded and, having expended all her shot, was obliged to break off the battle. On another occasion she fought for half an hour two French sloops with a combined armament of 26 guns, but the odds were too great and she had to sheer off and was lucky enough to escape.

With the end of spring Robert Beaver gave up the *Lady Parker* and went commander of the letter of marque *Sir Peter Parker*, and his luck certainly still held. A cyclone in October of that year, wrecking Sir Hyde Parker's flag-ship and doing tremendous damage to the shipping generally, drove the *Sir Peter Parker* ashore, "just fitted out at a large expense." She was given up as a total wreck but was in fact salvaged and refitted and, before the end of the year was out again, had taken a Spanish sloop off Cape St. Romain on the Main, the crew of which before taking to their boats laid a trail of gunpowder to the magazine. Fortunately for the boarding party it failed to go off.

In June, 1781, Robert Beaver was commander, and it would appear owner, of probably the largest letter of marque in the West Indies, the *Hero* mounting 28 guns. In the next month he ran ashore and destroyed a Spanish xebec of 21 guns and immediately afterwards sighted a Dutch convoy of 9 sail from Curajoa bound to Cape Francois. He gave chase and succeeded in cutting out two sloops and a schooner, an exploit which is commemorated by a picture (which the writer has) executed by the first lieutenant or mate, one Atwood a relation.<sup>(9)</sup> It has,

(9) William Beaver's eldest daughter, Ellinor, married, sometime about 1790, Edward Atwood then described as a tea merchant of Dublin, of whom the first lieutenant was some relation. It is possible, however, that the two families had an earlier and closer connection.

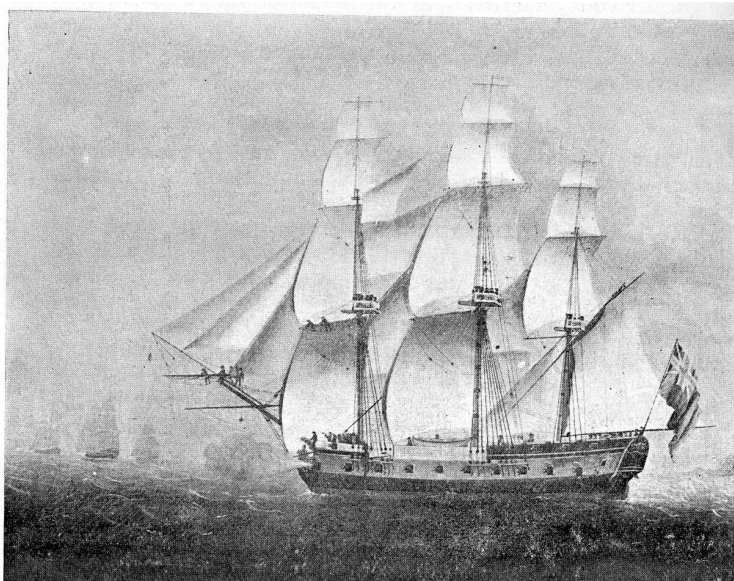


FIG. V. LETTER OF MARQUE, HERO, OF 28 GUNS, 1781.

perhaps, no great merit except as a contemporary record, and in this is interesting that the captain is shown wearing some sort of cocked hat and uniform ; the crew are clearly divided into seamen and marines and both have a sort of uniform too.

Having secured the three prizes and put crews on board to see them into port, the *Hero* set off in pursuit of the rest of the convoy. That night she fell in with another ship and the two fought fiercely at pistol shot for an hour and a quarter before the enemy was discovered to be His Majesty's Frigate *Licorne* of 36 guns. By that time the *Hero* had lost 3 killed and 7 wounded and the *Licorne* 7 killed and 9 wounded. But whereas the latter was able to continue her cruise, the *Hero* had to put back into port to refit. She was out again in the early autumn and almost at once was caught in a great cyclone, which wrecked 30 ships in Port Royal alone. The *Hero* lost her masts and four of her crew, but in December she was apparently out again, for she was then reported as co-operating with His Majesty's ship *Fox*. The two chased and attacked a French convoy of 20

sail under the protection of the French frigate, *U I-phiyenie*. Each secured a prize but the remainder of the convoy escaped after a chase of more than 24 hours.<sup>(10)</sup>

This was almost the last success. The war was petering out; Cornwallis had surrendered and our naval direction was at its lowest ebb. Robert Beaver's health was affected too, and indeed there were few who kept their health long in those days in the West Indian seas. The appalling condition of the French and Spanish fleets was as much a reason for their unsuccess as our skill. So Robert started for home. He transferred to the brig, *Mermaid*, and early in May, 1782, rendezvoused at Port Royal to go escort to the homeward bound convoy. Its despatch was delayed and finally did not leave until July. It then met with heavy storms and was scattered and many ships lost. The *Mermaid* eventually reached Liverpool in October.

Robert Beaver thus left the sea for ever. In less than three years he had captured over 50 prizes, had made a name as a daring and successful commander and collected a pleasant fortune for himself. He settled at Maes y Llwyn<sup>(11)</sup> near Amlwch, a small property which came to him with his wife.

In the excitement of his exploits on the Spanish Main, his marriage has gone unchronicled. This took place at Hawarden, in 1773, by license from the Peculiar of Hawarden. His bride was Margaret Hughes, the daughter of Hugh Rowland<sup>(12)</sup> or Hugh Rowland Hughes, described as of Rhydwigir and Brwynog, both in Anglesey.

Margaret was not yet eighteen at her wedding<sup>(13)</sup> and in a timid hand she has signed her name " Margreat " in the register.

(10) The papers of the Vice-Admiralty Court at Kingston still exist, but they seem never to have been looked at since the Court was abolished over a century ago and are, I am told, in a hopeless state of confusion.

(11) Maes y Llwyn. The old house was pulled down sixty or seventy years ago and the present one built on another part of the estate.

(12) This Hugh Rowland opens up an interesting problem as to which I hope to have more to say at a later date. Here I would only quote from the *Annual Register* for 1784—5 (p. 182) :—

" Died at Llan Vair y Medd (sic) Anglesea, Hugh "Rowland Hughes gent, aged 114 years 11 months 27 days. He was born March 1st 1670, married in the year 1700, and had nine children ; he was married the second time in 1734, and had five children ; he was married the third time in 1744, and had two children, viz., Hugh Evan Hughes the Welsh poet and a daughter ; and in the year 1748 he married his fourth wife, whom he left a widow with seven children, all men and women now alive. Eighty-four of his offspring were at his burying in Amlwch Church on St David's Day last."

I am aware that the story has been dismissed as pure fiction but my investigations so far are to a great extent corroboratory. However, the question may stand over for the present.

(13) The wedding is noteworthy as having been what is, I believe, known as a " riding wedding." Exactly what happened I am not sure, but according to the account bride, bridegroom and groomsmen all raced on horseback from the church to the house. The bride was given a start and the first to catch her claimed her, but by skill or arrangement there was no room allowed for error.

Her old father naturally was not there but her eldest brother Hugh Hughes and Samuel Boydell, brother of the well known engraver, were the witnesses. She had eleven children and died while still comparatively young in 1806. She was buried at Llanelian and there is a touching reference on her tombstone to the love and affection in which she was universally held.

Robert Beaver and his family lived, as has been said, at Maes y Llwyn, for many years in considerable comfort. It appears from Mr. H. R. Davies's account <sup>(14)</sup> that he took charge of the Lighthouse and Pilot station from the very first. Point Lynus became an important place with the growth of Liverpool, for it is there the flood stream sets towards the Mersey and the reverse on the ebb. So the Liverpool Corporation established their pilot station and light there. Just at first the pilots seemed to have been responsible for the control themselves. With Robert Beaver's arrival he was appointed—or at least is always referred to as—Governor of the Lighthouse, the duties of which office he carried out honorarily ; but he seems to have received many tokens of appreciation—coal landed free for him, muslins and cloths off the home-coming East Indiamen and a cask occasionally, which was none the worse perhaps for having escaped the notice of Brother William at Holyhead.

By 1796, however, his resources began to run low. Maes y Llwyn was mortgaged and an appeal to the Liverpool Corporation secured him a yearly allowance for the work he was doing, and had done for many years, for the Corporation. After Margaret's death the house was sold to John Paynter of Amlwch and Robert himself died a few years later. Whether he was ever much loved by his children is doubtful, but at least he set them well on their way in life.

Robert, the eldest, was a doctor and M.R.C.S. who practised at Caernarvon and Liverpool, where he died at the age of 50 in 1827. Hugh Beaver, the third son, became a wealthy and very well-known cotton spinner in Manchester's early days, when the business was in the hands of a few families and correspondingly profitable. He kept a hospitable bachelor house at The Temple, Cheetham Hill. Subsequently he rented Plas Llandegfan for a while and then built Glyn Garth oil the Straits, later Gothicized by a subsequent tenant and finally, the much criticized Bishop's Palace. He was High Sheriff of Anglesey in 1837—8. <sup>(15)</sup> At the age of 56 he married Isabella Janet, the beautiful daughter— then but 18 years old—of Sir Duncan Campbell of Barcaldine

(14) A.A.S. and F.C. *Transactions* (1924), p. 68.

(15) Hugh Beaver was Comptroller of the Anglesey Hunt in 1839 and his portrait is to be seen in the Bulkeley Arms Hotel at Beaumaris.



and Glenure, Argyllshire, Bart., by whom he had a large family. Rowland Owen, another son, was a surgeon practising at Ruthin where he died at the age of 24 and John Atwood<sup>(16)</sup> the youngest child, also a cotton spinner, made a fortune and lost it through the burning of his mill in Miller Street in some disturbance during the troublous forties. He was laying out his country residence at Didsbury when disaster overtook him; the lodge gates, which were the only part built, still stand. He married Charlotte Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Christie of Liverpool and left issue, and the name was for two generations well known on 'Change. Of Robert Beaver's daughters one—Ellen—married James Harrison of Manchester, whose sister Ann was the mother of Harrison Ainsworth the novelist.<sup>(17)</sup>

Hugh Beaver sold Glyn Garth in 1850 and the family's direct connection with the Island ended. He and his wife and three of their children are, however, buried in the little church\* yard at Llandegfan.

Whether it was something they brought with them or something of the wild air of Anglesey that is to blame I cannot say, but the Beavers were wanderers almost to a man. If ever a whole family was afflicted with a wander-lust, it was theirs. Three of them were drowned at sea. The only two sons of William to survive to manhood died in foreign countries, the one at Cape Mount Africa in 1791 and the other at Martinique in 1796. Captain Robert's second son died in the West Indies

(16) It is curious that John Atwood's son should have come into prominence over another American War, for it was he that was responsible for revictualling the *Alabama* when she arrived off Singapore on her famous cruize—an action that was cited as one count in the indictment against this country. It was the boast of Admiral Semmes that nothing was saved, when the *Alabama* was sunk off Cherbourg by the *Kearsage*, that might be a trophy for the victors. In fact his boat's flag was saved and that he presented to Rowland Beaver in return for his hospitality at Singapore. The flag still exists, probably the only tangible relic of one of the great raiders in naval history. It is a large white flag, the top corner next the flagstaff being red with a St. Andrew's cross of blue imposed on it. On the cross are thirteen white stars, representing the original thirteen United States.

(17) It was owing to this connection that Dickens on his visit to Manchester in 1839 stayed with Hugh Beaver. "My dear Beaver," writes Ainsworth, "I don't know whether I ought to tax your hospitality so far as I am about to do, but at alt events I trust that the peculiarity of the case will plead my excuse. I am about to visit Manchester in company with my friends Mr. Charles Dickens, the author of the *Pickwick Papers*, and Mr Forster the author of the *Life of Cromwell*. Now would it be consistent with your arrangements to receive us .... I shall not propose their staying at . . . , as being young men I know they would not like the restraint, necessarily imposed in the mornings by female society—and I really know no house where there is so much ease and comfort combined with hospitality as yours ... I can confidently predict that you will be pleased with your visitors—for they are both particularly pleasing, well-informed, gentlemanlike persons—and Dickens is the greatest lion of the day." Heedless to say the flattery secured its object !

too, and another was a midshipman, against whom in the old Bible there is a note "starved at St. Paul's Island," in circumstances unknown to the writer. Of Hugh Beaver's five sons one lies buried in South Africa, one in India who died before the recommendation for the V.C. which was sent in for him could be approved ; two lie in South America and one still lives in Australia. Hugh Rowland Beaver, the actor in the *Alabama* episode, died at Singapore.

Truly as the writer has sometimes watched the curlews whirling and crying in the fierce Atlantic gales that sweep over the Island, he has thought that scarcely less wild must have been his ancestors to whom Anglesey gave birth.