

'I have no doubt the first British Ensign to be hoisted in a sailing vessel above 2,100 miles up the river Amazon.'

(George Malzard, February 1864)

The *Prospero* of Jersey

In August 2006 Mr D Hill presented the Jersey Maritime Museum with a figurehead that for many years had been fixed to the side of Prospect House on Mont Fallu, St Peter. The property had been the home of a well-known Jersey sea captain and ship owner, George Malzard¹, and the figurehead is reputed to be from his vessel the *Prospero*.

According to an entry for 20 September 1862 in the Jersey Shipping Register, the *Prospero* was a 198-ton brig whose official number was 45273 and whose code letters were VCPF. She was 108.55 ft long and 22.4ft in the beam. She had been built in FC Clarke's yard at West Park in St Helier, although in the report in the *Chronique de Jersey* of Saturday 30 August 1862 the shipyard was referred to under its old name of Mont Patibulaire.

The launch was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 26 August, but the vessel juddered to a halt halfway down the slip. The problem was caused by the people who were in the habit of swimming in the area of Clarke's shipyard and using the beams of the launch cradle to jump into the sea. Sand from their feet fell onto the greased slip below, which meant that the whole thing had to be cleaned down and re-greased before the vessel could be successfully put into the water. As the newspaper said: *'This carelessness was sufficient to cause the builder great inconvenience for (they) have cost Mr Clarke the salaries for an extra day's work for about 100 men.'*

The vessel was described in the newspaper as a 259-ton brig, bound for the Mexican trade and to be commanded by the owner himself. The *Nouvelle Chronique* of Saturday 30 August reported that the vessel was to be taken around to St Helier harbour to be rigged and it was hoped that she would leave the Island in mid-September bound for Liverpool, where it was planned she would take on cargo. There must have been some delay, as she finally cleared St Helier on 8 October in ballast. And plans had been changed because she was bound for Swansea, where she arrived three days later. By the end of the year Island newspapers reported her to be in the Brazilian ports of Fernambuca and Paraibo.

This first voyage ended in Jersey on 20 April 1863, when she arrived back in St Helier from the German port of Bremen. Within a fortnight Malzard was back at sea and once again traded between Wales, South America and Europe, before returning to Jersey in October.

It was the *Prospero's* third voyage that ensured she would be remembered in the Island, for in December of 1863 she left Jersey for London where she loaded material and equipment for building a wharf and a floating dock in the Peruvian river port of Iquitos – 2,000 miles up the Amazon. Including Captain

Malzard, the *Prospero* had a crew of ten – 24 year old John Osment of St Helier was mate, the captain's nephew William R Malzard, also aged 24, was bosun and the youngest member of the crew was 15 year- old Philip A Le Couteur of St Peter. Two other ships were also loading cargo for Iquitos at the same time – the *Teresa* and the *Arica*.

This part of South America was experiencing an economic boom because of the exploitation of rubber² trees. In late January the ships reached the Brazilian port of Pará (the modern day city of Belém) on the southern shore of Maraja Island in the Amazon delta, 60 miles from the Atlantic. Here they were met by two Peruvian naval vessels, the 500-ton paddle steamer *Pastaza* and her sister ship the *Morona*. The *Prospero* was to be towed upriver by the *Pastaza* and the *Teresa* by the *Morona*. The convoy was expected to cover between 100 and 150 miles a day and the journey was expected to take four to five weeks.

In his log, Malzard noted the frequent stops for refuelling and estimated that the cost of each tug would have been about £100 per day. As well as describing the daily events of the journey in his log, such as the ever-present danger of running aground and the parting of the tow rope, he also noted the character of the Peruvian Navy crew members and wrote about the wildlife and customs of the people, both native and settlers, of the Amazon.

As the journey upstream progressed the nature of the river changed, and there was a greater chance of running aground and a greater level of discomfort caused by the heat, mosquitoes and sand flies. This also affected the crew, as tempers frayed: 'Benjamin Godfray³, one of my able seamen got swearing, and became saucy when I had to interfere,' the log recorded. By the time the *Prospero* reached Iquitos on Friday, February 26 1864, a third of the crew were sick, the mate was ill with pains in his chest and Malzard was suffering from dysentery. The cargo⁴ was offloaded and the *Prospero* made her way down river, but Malzard's illness caused him to stop writing his log, the last entry being on Sunday, 6 March 1864.

The *Prospero* continued trading, and in late June she left the Caribbean island of St Vincent bound for London, returning to St Helier on 8 August.

George Malzard was obviously keen to prosper, and following three voyages on the South American trade route he decided to test the waters of the Far East – China was opening up and Australia offered opportunities – and so, on 27 August 1864, less than three weeks after returning from the Americas, the *Prospero* cleared for Rockhampton,



A ship's figurehead that saw the world on trading voyages from Jersey during the 19th century has now been laid to rest at the Maritime Museum. Doug Ford looks at the working life of the vessel to which it belonged.

The figurehead – possibly carved by James Alexander.



Captain George Malzard (1818-1893)



The *Prospero* entering Sydney Harbour, 1903 (courtesy Queensland State Library)

Queensland. However, poor health forced Malzard to hand over command to Captain John Le Couteur, and on 15 October the *Prospero* left London bound for Australia, never to return. The Malzards continued serving on board, with George's nephew William as mate and his 19-year-old son George⁵ serving as crewman.

Records from New South Wales show that on 26 February 1866 the *Prospero* arrived in Sydney from Foo Chow Foo⁶ in China. It was about this time that Malzard empowered James Robin, a merchant and shipping agent in Port Adelaide, South Australia, to sell the ship if a buyer could be found. The certificate of sale instructed Robin 'to sell the ship for not less than £3,200 at any port in Australia within 12 months'. In May 1867 the *Prospero's* registry was moved to London, probably in a move to avoid paying the owner's contributions into the Jersey Merchant Seamen's Benefit Fund. However, the vessel continued to be insured in the Island with the Jersey Mutual Insurance Society until 1869, when Malzard moved his business to Jersey Lloyd's Insurance Society.

The *Prospero* was finally sold to Joseph Storm of Adelaide for £3,000 in late 1869 and her registry closed in London on 7 January 1870. She was used on the Australian coastal trade and records show her running between the port of Warrnambool, which served the agricultural hinterland of the State of Victoria, and Sydney. In 1876 she was registered to a Mr P Pridmore of

Adelaide. Although John Jean believed her to be broken up in 1903/04, there are descriptions of her in the Mercantile Navy List of 1922 as being registered in Sydney, New South Wales, to Charles G Warburton of Ryrmont, and this is repeated as late as the 1930s. However, she does not appear in any Lloyd's register.

Further reading:
Sea Breezes October 1961
A Jameson, *A People of the Sea* (1986)
J Jean, *Jersey Sailing Ships* (1982)
J Jean, *Stories of Jersey Sailing Ships* (1987)

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¹ George Malzard was born in 1818 and died in January 1893. He is buried in the cemetery at St Peter's Church.

² Because rubber was indigenous to the area, and at the time was one of the most valuable commodities in the world, Iquitos enjoyed prosperity during this rubber boom. Unfortunately, rubber tree seeds were smuggled out of Peru, so the wealth did not last and the monopoly enjoyed by Iquitos ended.

³ Benjamin Godfray, is described in the Jersey Seamen's Benefit Society books as aged 36, born in Shields and as 'first pay'. However Malzard's description of him as an able seaman would suggest that it actually meant that it was the first time he had served on a Jersey-registered ship.

⁴ The floating dock was not completed until April 1868.

⁵ A plaque in St Peter's Church shows that George Malzard, jnr died in Foochoofoo, China (modern-day Fuzhou), one of the five treaty ports opened up after the Opium War, on 15 October 1871.

⁶ Fuzhou.