

THE POWDITCH & LORD FAMILIES:

Economic Migrants Who Helped Build Modern Southwold

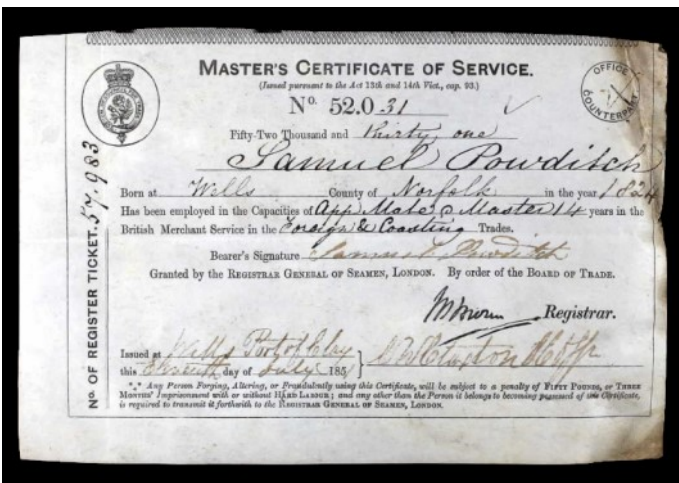
This is the story of two North Norfolk mariner families who relocated to Southwold in the middle of the 19th century. Brother and sister, Richard and Maria Lord hailed from Wells-next-the-Sea. William Powditch and his brother and sister, Samuel and Eleanor, were from Brancaster, 10 miles away. All five of them were in their twenties or early thirties when they made their move.

Like many on that stretch of coast, both families had long associations with the coastal cargo trade, carrying grain up to the north east of England and returning with coal, and sometimes coasting down to London. Operating sail-powered cargo boats in the unpredictable German Ocean was a high-risk business so it is not surprising that insurance was often out of the question and the investment was frequently spread very widely with local people from all walks of life owning a few shares in a vessel or two in the hope of making a typical 5% return... so long as 'their boat came in'.

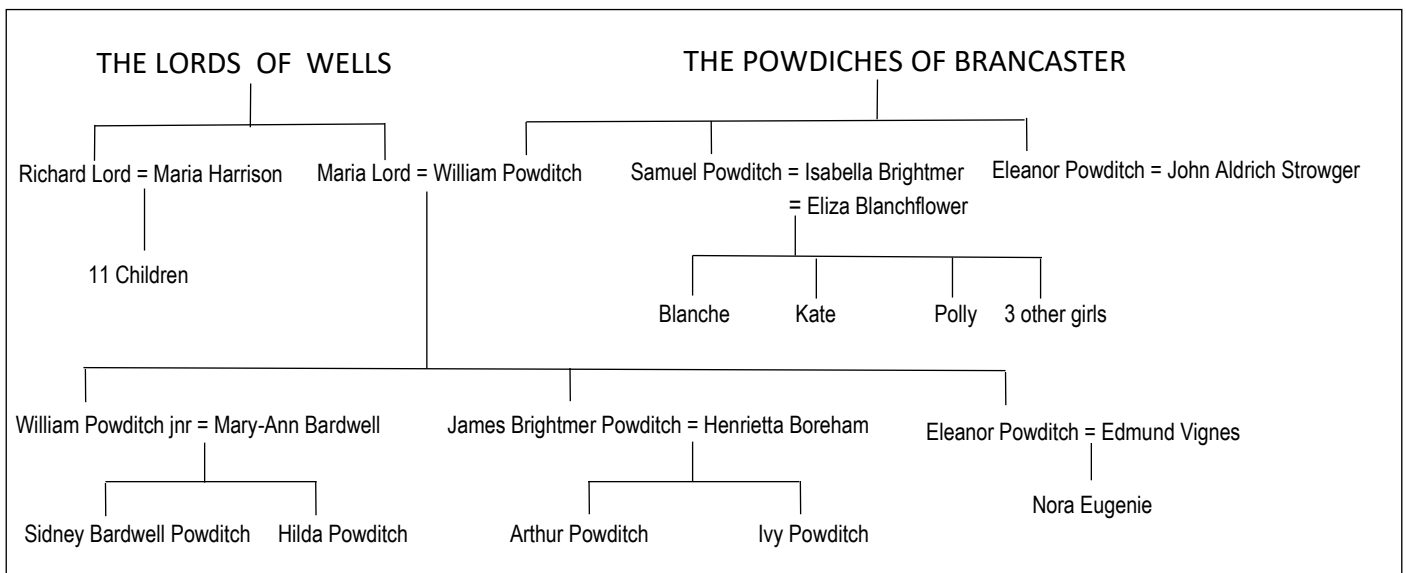
In the early 1850s the Lords and Powditches had become connected by more than the sea. William Powditch had married Richard Lord's sister, Maria, and Richard had married another Maria – Maria Harrison. They seemed to be relatively affluent folk with majority shares in several cargo boats. Richard Lord called himself a coal merchant and owned three: the *Lapwing of Wells*, a schooner, the *Wells Packet*, a sloop, and the *Katherine Fraser of Wells*, a serious 198 ton sailing ship built in Canada and sporting a female figurehead! William Powditch owned a coal and grain ship, *The Good Intent*, while his elder brother, Samuel, a Master Mariner, is recorded as having owned four ships at various times, among them a little, 40 ton 'Billy-Boy' sloop called '*The Mariner's Hope*' which he owned outright and which plays an important part in this story.

Samuel, however, suffered two huge personal setbacks. He had married a girl called Isabella Brightmer in 1852 and, a year later she and her baby died in childbirth. Some years afterwards while entering London's just-built, Royal Victoria Docks, he suffered a serious industrial accident when the dock gates closed prematurely, jamming his leg between the tiller and the stanchions of his vessel. It permanently disabled him and brought his seagoing career to an end. He had no option but to ask his younger brother, William, to take over as Master of his sloop. Samuel did, remarry three years after Isabella's death. His new wife was Norfolk girl, Eliza Blanchflower, and they went on to have six daughters, including Blanche, Kate and Polly.

So why did the Lords and the Powditches decide to abandon Norfolk and move their little fleets and their families to Southwold? We can only speculate but, in the



Samuel gained his Master's Certificate in 1851. Only a decade later he would have to retire from the sea after an industrial accident.





The Marquess of Lorne in the 1890s at about the time that Richard and Maria Lord were the tenants. (Southwold Museum P273)

early 1860s the trading conditions in North Norfolk were in decline. The advent of the railway was taking trade away from traditional merchant ships. It was becoming cheaper and quicker to move coal by rail. At the same time local grain growers were losing market share to foreign imports. So there was less of that to ship up and down the coast. Southwold, however, was still a rail-free zone and would remain so for 20 more years, so it was a logical destination. What's more, the demand for coal in the town had just spiked with the introduction of its pioneering Gas Works. The Lords and the Powditches were, in a real sense, economic migrants.

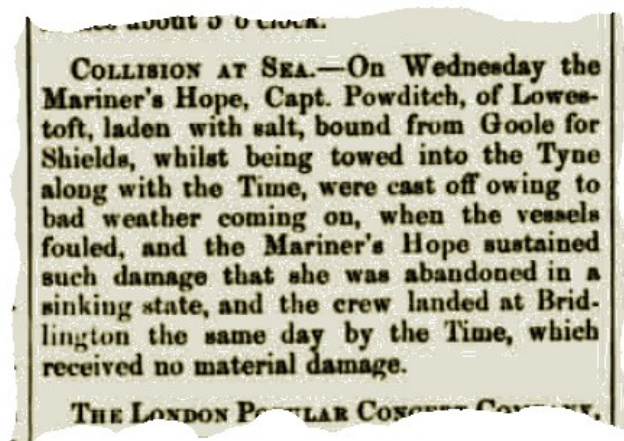
On arrival, the Powditches lodged first of all with a fellow retired mariner, John Dendy Strowger, who was the landlord of *The Fishing Buss* inn (now the *Harbour Inn*). John's son, John Aldrich Strowger quickly took a fancy to young Eleanor Powditch and in 1865, they were married. Her brothers William and Samuel went in search of a base for their trading business and lit upon a building used as a wherry sail loft in Ferry Road – the very building that has recently been appropriately renamed 'The Sail Loft' restaurant.

William and Maria Powditch set up home at No 5 Queen Street (now the RNLi charity shop) where Maria started a second-hand clothes business. Their next-door neighbour, incidentally, was Mrs Rayley who, at that time was busy supervising the building of the Sailors' Reading Room in memory of her husband.

Richard Lord, meanwhile, had experienced a life-changing disaster in 1863: one of his boats, loaded with coal, had caught fire at Blackshore and been completely destroyed. Although he seems to have continued to own ships, his active days as a mariner were over. Instead, with his wife, Maria, he set up as a pork butcher in a shop on

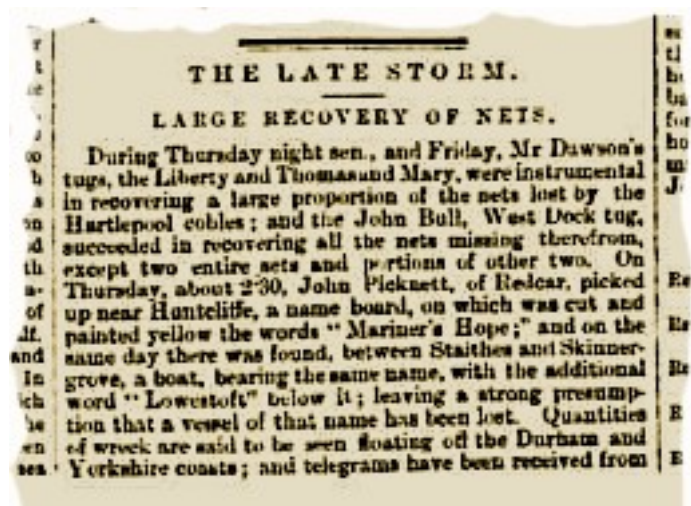
Constitution Hill. Later they took over the *Wagon and Horses* public house on North Green which became rechristened *The Marquess of Lorne* in 1871 to commemorate the marriage of Princess Louise to John Campbell, the eponymous Marquess. While Richard ran the pub, Maria looked after a little dairy herd and sold the milk. They had 11 children: Ellen, Charlotte, Richard John, Eleanor, Fanny, Thomas, William, Charles, Mary, Frederick and Margaret.

On the night of the 15 June 1869, the Powditch boys suffered their own catastrophe. William was skippering his brother's sloop, *The Mariner's Hope*, with a crew of just two men, up the coast bound for North Shields where they were to pick up a cargo of coal. They had broken their journey at



From the Bridlington Free Press 19th June 1869

Goole to take on a consignment of salt and had just set sail again when the *Mariners Hope* was caught in what William described as a 'Complete Hurricane'. The vessel was in dire trouble and it was not the only one. A schooner named 'Time' had also found itself in distress but, fortunately, had been found by the skipper of a steam tug – 'The Home' out of Goole – who had managed to get a line aboard and was struggling to tow her back to harbour. In the process she



Durham County Advertiser of 25 June 1869, reported the discovery of the 'Mariner's Hope' name board and lifeboat off the coast of North Yorkshire, "Leaving a strong presumption that a vessel of that name has been lost."

came upon the *Mariner's Hope* and, very gallantly but probably unwisely, the master of the tug offered to take the sloop in tow as well. William managed to throw him a rope and the tug was now pulling the two ships side by side. But the storm was worsening and eventually both ropes gave way. The two vessels slammed into one another, sinking the '*Mariner's Hope*' within minutes. The steam tug and her brave crew of four also went down. But William and his two crew just managed to scramble aboard their lifeboat and were taken aboard the '*Time*'. Somehow, they made port. The *Mariner's Hope* name board and its lifeboat with the word 'Lowestoft' on it were picked up on Huntcliffe beach, North Yorkshire, 10 days later.

But, although William was saved, his disabled brother Samuel – the ship's owner – was now a ruined man. He was the vessel's sole owner and had no insurance. Amazingly, the people of Southwold organised a collection for him and raised £111. Many of the donors were fellow maritime townsmen. It was an example of the Southwold community's spontaneous response to an individual's misfortune which has been recorded repeatedly over the past couple of centuries. But this was an especially

generous gesture considering that the Powditches had lived here for less than 10 years. No doubt part of their popularity was due to the way they had integrated with the Southwold community. Both brothers were talented musicians and key members of the town brass band.

Samuel and his second wife, Eliza, now had six daughters and, with the donation money, they set up home at No 8 High Street where they started a confectionery business. Brother William, meanwhile continued to captain his own ship, *The Good Intent*, running a daily postal packet service between Southwold and Lowestoft with his friend Fred Wentworth.

In the early 1880s William and his wife Maria, now in their 50s, retired from the sea to run the Sole Bay Inn. They had two sons: William Junior and James Brightmer, whose second name memorialised his tragically deceased aunt Isabella. There was also a daughter, Eleanor, named after her father's sister.

The three children all made their mark on Southwold. Eleanor became a skilled dressmaker, James a carpenter, builder and occasional undertaker and William an engineer.

THE LOSS OF THE 'MARINER'S HOPE'

William's log book somehow survived and inside it a three-page handwritten account of the disaster. This has been transcribed below by Carol Stone, William's great-great granddaughter. Illustrated is the final page of the original.

Mariners Hope. Log of her leaving Goole to her being lost on the night of Tuesday June 15/69. Mariners Hope, William Powditch Master sailed from Goole, June 13 Wind SW fresh at 1 P.M. Steem boat let go of our rope in Hull Roads. Turned into Whitboath roads, Wind westered. Sailed down to

Hurricane sea running very high the steem boat let go both vessels tow-roops at one time causing the Time Schooner to be have broad side onto the Mariners Hope. Doing her Damage as to cause her to fill & go down instantly we had only just time to launch our boat at great risk we got on board the Time saving nothing but what we stood in 12 o'clock midnight of 15 of June 1869. We proceeded to Burlington whar we was landed at 10 AM of the 16/69. The steem boat, Horne, was lost and all her crew 4 men. This was the fate of my favoured Mariners Hope. Thanks be to god that watched over us and saved us from a watery grave on that dismal night when so many was snatched away leaving friends to morn their losses for great was the loss that night. Prais the Lord O my soul an all that is with in me. Prais his holy name Amen.

Bull Light over the flood. Wind light at 5 P.M let go the anchor in 6 Fathom water at 9 P.M tide done. Wind NE Drisling with rain every appearance of a dirty night. Weighed anchor and reached over into the Hawk at 2 A.M. Brought up in Five Fathom Water. June 14 wether squally during the day 6 P.M moor moderat, 8 P.M calm squals rising on the land 10 P.M fresh breeze at SW. Weighed anchor and worked out of the Humber 12 oclock midnight.

Passed the outer Bink bouy shaped our cours for the Head at 4 A.M of 15 made the Head Light. Wind SW squally with rain 6 A.M. Rounded the Head 8 A.M moor moderate 12 at noon wind light & varebal of North Cheek of Robenhood 4 P.M off Whitby, wind light & varable 6 P.M Whitby Baring SSW. Dist about 8 miles the, Horne, steem. Tug of North Shields spook me. Did not engage her at this time Horne steemed to the Time of Goole at 7 P.M the Horne came along side towing the schooner Time gave him our rope he comenced towing both vessels for the Tyne The Dock Shields Wind NNE light Drisling with rain 10 P.M wind increasing all appearance of a Dirty Night 11 P.M Wind increasing with squals sea making 12 oclock midnight blowing a compleat Hurrican sea running very high the steem boat let go both vessels tow-roops at one time causing the Time Schooner to be have broad side onto the Mariners Hope. Doing her damage as to cause her to fill and go down instantly we had only just time to launch our boat and at great risk we got on bord the Time saving nothing but what we stood in 12 oclock midnight of 15 of June 1869.

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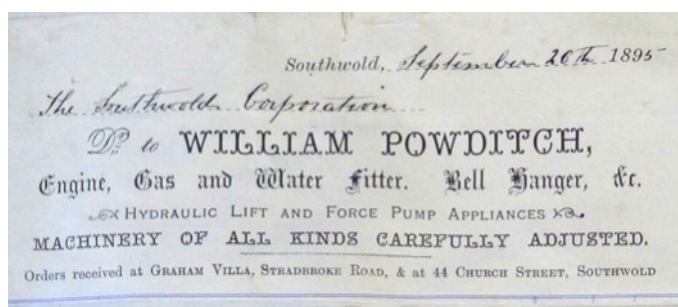
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Amen



Left: William Powditch Snr. with his wife, Maria and daughter Eleanor. Centre and right: James Powditch and his wife, Henrietta (nee Boreham)



Part of a bill head dated 1895 addressed to Southwold Corporation. From the Southwold Museum archives.

Like their father, both young men became talented musicians, playing cornet with Southwold's Town Band and regular performers at civic functions and concert parties as solo singers, violoncello players and brass players.

When he was just 14 in 1873 William jnr was indentured as an apprentice to George Edmund Child, the brilliant iron founder and engineer in the Market Place. Although the Child Foundry was a financially ailing and rather diminished business by that time, William joined them in the year when they began to fabricate and erect their most famous



The engineering team engaged in rebuilding Southwold Harbour. William Powditch Jnr is second from the right wearing what looks like a school cap! Inset: the date stone set in the wall of William's workshop in Church Street.



Above left: mariner brothers Samuel and William Snr (front row, left) with the Southwold Brass band. Estimated date 1870s. William's two sons inherited the Powditch musical talent and both eventually joined the band. Above right: William Powditch Jr posing with his cornet and, below: the next-generation band. Only James is featured here—minus his instrument—fourth from the right, next to the base drum.



It may seem odd that William lists 'bell hanger' as one of his occupations. How much bell-hanging is there to be done in Southwold? Interestingly, though, the archives of St Edmund's bell tower record that the church bells were indeed re-hung in 1897 so it seems more than likely that William was the man who did the job.

William became much in demand as a consulting engineer a couple of years later when work began on rebuilding Southwold Harbour with the aim of

piece...the Town Pump. It proved to be a great start to William's career and gave him a grounding in all the skills he later excelled at – pipe work, hydraulics and fluid engineering. He was a man with precisely the right set of skills for Southwold at that time. The town's service infrastructure was being completely revolutionised. More and more households were now on the gas main, piped water supplies were replacing wells and the town's sewage system was already among the most sophisticated in the land. By the 1890s William had his own business as a gas and hot & cold water fitter, general engineer, whitesmith, repairer of pumps and bell hanger. His first workshop was at No 44 Church Street in a building that has now been completely replaced, adjacent to the current Co-op car park. When he became more successful, his brother, James built him an impressive, purpose-designed workshop at the other end of Church Street – the building that would later house Southwold Press and, today, the Spring design and advertising agency. William's initials, 'WP' and the date '1896' can still be seen proudly displayed high on the wall.

reviving it as a major herring port. Although there is no documentary proof that I have yet found, there is anecdotal evidence that William, as well as being deeply involved in the new harbour project, was almost certainly engaged as an engineer in the rebuilding of Might's Bridge in 1898.

Brother James was just as active in the development of 'modern' Southwold. The town's Northern boundary had until the late 19th century been effectively marked by the Lighthouse and his parents' pub, The Sole Bay Inn. Now the



Brightmer Villa built by James for himself and Henrietta as their marital home and Brancaster Villas built as two adjacent lodging houses which Henrietta managed.

whole of the North Cliff area was under construction to meet the growing demand from the thriving seaside holiday industry.

James who had been living with his parents and sister at the Sole Bay Inn, became engaged to Henrietta Boreham. His first priority was to build them a home. It was an end-of-terrace house in newly fashionable Stradbroke Road which he called *Brightmer Villa* after his own middle name and the maiden name of his dead aunt, Isabella. The new house was ready for them to move into on their wedding day in January 1891 and, in due course they had two children – Arthur and Ivy. The name Brightmer Villa may still be seen over the front door. James built several other houses in Stradbroke Road and its neighbourhood. Brancaster Villas, named after his family home town, were two houses on the corner of Stradbroke and Salisbury Roads, built specifically as serviced apartments for summer visitors which Henrietta managed.

The couple spent less than 10 years living in Brightmer Villa. William Senior had died in 1890, aged 58 and Maria and daughter Eleanor were now running the Sole Bay Inn by themselves. By the turn of the century it was getting too much for them and James decided to give up his carpentry and building work to take over the pub full time. He and

Henrietta left Brightmer Villa and moved into the pub with their children Arthur and Ivy and they remained there until around 1924. Eventually they moved back to Brightmer Villa. James died in 1941, His brother William in 1945.

This story came together through the help of Neil Moran, Richard Lord's great, great grandson and Carol Stone, the great granddaughter of James Brightmer Powditch. Carol also supplied the family photos and the first-hand account of the foundering of 'Mariner's Hope' by William Powditch. Carol and Neil found each other through the website www.southwoldandson.co.uk and it was this that enabled them and us to make the connection between the Lord & Powditch families.

Other sources include: 'Victorian North Norfolk Sailing Ships' by Michael Stammers, published by Milepost Research, Southwold Museum & Historical Society, the census returns, and contemporary reports from The Bridlington Free Press, Durham County Advertiser and Suffolk Chronicle.



William Powditch jnr. on an outing with his daughter, Hilda and niece Ivy, probably in the 1920s