

Captain Woodget of the Cutty Sark & Bexwell Road.

A History by Elizabeth Howard.



Burnham Norton church. June 2015.

Richard Woodget was born on 21st November 1845 at Burnham Norton in Norfolk. His parents were Richard and Celia Woodget ; he had seven siblings at least three of whom died in infancy ; his brother William died aged 21 and his uncle Henry died in Docking workhouse in 1842 aged 51 . His mother Celia was Celia Gage and his father`s second wife. They married in King`s Lynn in 1831 . His father`s first wife had been Lydia Bensley who he married in Burnham Norton in 1823 . Although Basil

Lubbock and other sources say his father was a farmer, implying a land owning or tenancing family , in fact all the records show Richard senior was a labourer. By 1861 on census night , Richard was living aged 16, with his older brother Charles who was 26 and a bricklayer . Charles and Emily (Thirtle) were recently married and had a baby daughter Emma . Richard was still described as an ag lab. Richard senior had been born in Burnham Norton in 1797 the youngest child of eight children of William and Susanna . In places in the Bishop`s Transcripts and the registers it says William Woodgatt aka Woodgate aka Woodgett . The name seems to have morphed from Woodgate to Woodget between 1780 and 1810 . He was bapt as Richard Burcham Woodgett his mother Susanna`s maiden name being Burcham . She and William were married at Burnham Norton in 1779. After her death aged 52 in 1807 he remarried to another Susan (Brown) a widow in 1810. William was buried in Burnham Norton in 1812 aged 62, a married man .

In 1861 also on census night at Burnham Overy Staithe , living one door away from the young Woodgetts , was the family of John Raven, head, marr, 48, ag lab and his wife Maria . They had a daughter Maria aged 18 , who was born in Brancaster and was a dressmaker. And with them was a young grandson Frederick G. aged 7 months born Downham . (Frederick George Harper) . Ten years later in the 1871 census, John Raven is now a widower , his daughter Maria now Smith and now a widow aged 27 and with them is Frederick George aged 10 . From a descendant of Frederick George , his mother was Mary Ann Raven , the older sister by 2 years of Maria , who went on to marry Frederick Charles Harper , a journeyman carpenter born and living in Downham Market. In the 1871 census Mary Ann and Frederick are living in Howdale Lane with their two sons .

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In 1866 Maria Raven married James Smith at Burnham Overy Staithe ; by 1871 she is a widow, and there is a death registered of a James Smith aged 23 in freebmd in the same March ¼ 1866 as the marriage. Without getting the certificates it is only guesswork that this James is Maria`s husband.

Richard Woodget during this time has been apprenticed to various ships of Bullard , King and Co, firstly on the billiboy Johns 80 tons in 1861 , the Johns was a river barge and traded along the coast from Seaton Sluice to London with small cargoes . In 1862 he was still an apprentice , this time on the Peace , a schooner which also plied a coastal trade. He finished his apprenticeship in 1865 aboard the brig British Ensign 196 tons and sailing from Bristol to London via Egypt and Ireland and then on to Trinidad and back to Greenock , with cargoes of sugar . It seems likely that once he was qualified he worked for various masters and owners including Jock Willis , known as Old White Hat, who named his ships after his Scottish heritage and the novels of Sir Walter Scott . In the year of his marriage 1871 Captain Woodget was Mate in the brig Nina to the West Coast of Africa and back . Although slavery was abolished by this date , the Nina a mahogany built brig of 183 tons had been a notorious slaver in her day . She had been over worked and was held together by strengthening bands , and as Basil Lubbock says " though she leaked like a bucket , she sailed like a a witch ."

The final ship in which he was Mate , was the Copenhagen , 876 tons, which in the years 1874-1880 sailed to India during the famine and was in the coolie trade to Mauritius. The coolie trade succeeded the slave trade . The shortage of labour caused by the abolition of the slave trade created a very similar trade transporting , often in dreadful conditions, a new Asian workforce . Basil Lubbock says that Capt Woodget took the Coldstream , 756 tons, out , as Captain , in March 1881 and brought it back in January 1885 after a most successful voyage financially . This again was to Africa and included three coolie passages to South Africa and Mauritius.

The success of this voyage in the years 1881-1885 landed Captain Woodget his most famous command , the Cutty Sark Between 1885 – 1895 , he and Cutty Sark made ten voyages to Australia in the wool trade , several of which were record breaking and all of which were faster than any other ship on the Australia route . He was also noted for breeding collie dogs and latterly took one or more on board on his Australian voyages . Their descendants made headlines in the Australian show rings.

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80 Bexwell Road , Downham Market.

Whilst he commanded Cutty Sark , the Woodgets , Capt Woodget and his wife Maria and their sons, lived in Downham Market . The 1891 census shows the family being Capt Woodget, his wife, his mother Cecily, aged 81, his niece Edith , 22, and sons Richard, Harold and Albert , his daughter Celia Maria Finis was born and died in 1882. At this point he is living in Mount Pleasant, 80 Bexwell Road, having previously lived in Howdale Lane and

Bridge St , according to the electoral register . It is possible that the family lodged with Mary Ann Harper (nee Raven and Maria Woodget`s sister) in Howdale Lane when they first arrived in Downham , between 1888 and 1889. In 1890 they moved to Bridge Street, again possibly with the Harpers .

Of his four sons , the three with him in Bexwell Road , all qualified as Master mariners, Richard John in 1897 aged 23, Harold Groom at 22 , and Albert Sydney also aged 22 in 1901 . The last of his sons Edgar Raven became a watchmaker . In the 1911 census Edgar and his wife and 3 sons are living at Burnham Overy and he is a watch and clock "seller" and she is a shopkeeper.



This photo of Cutty Sark was taken by Capt Woodget in 1888 from two boats with a plank lashed between them holding his plate camera .

Unaccountably Jock Willis sold Cutty Sark to the Portugese in 1895. Maybe she was getting too old , needing too many repairs. He gave Capt Woodget the Coldinghame a 1,059 ton ship also in the Australian trade , but it cannot have been to his liking and he chose

this year 1895/6 to retire .

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In retirement he is said to have bought a farm in Burnham Overy Staithe. The 1901 census shows Capt Woodget and his wife living "near the Quay" and this may well be Flagstaff house, also known as East View. Basil Lubbock says "he filled his farmyard with pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys and rabbits, and it was a sight to see the old man (in 1901 only in his mid 50s) his snow white hair and beard blowing in the wind, as he marched sturdily across a field followed by a trail of quacking ducks and clucking hens, and perhaps a foal and a calf and a pig or two." At the age of 75 he was thrown from a colt and sustained no more than a black eye. Basil Lubbock paints a bucolic portrait of this most skilled mariner.

Maria Woodget died in December 1914 aged 72. All four of their sons were settled to life at home and at sea and at the time of her death Richard her eldest son was married, as was her watchmaker son Edgar. Harold married in 1918 and Albert in 1921. Also in 1921 Captain Richard Woodget married again to Winifred Basham Parker the dau of the Rev Richard Parker of Dorset. She had been an Infant school teacher and was born in 1891 and was one of 9 surviving children. Their marriage lasted until his death in 1928 at Burnham Overy Staithe.



The grave of Capt Richard Woodget .

Two of his sons are buried alongside him at Burnham Norton churchyard .



Burnham Overy Staithe church