

Francis Hustwick of Hull and Liverpool (c.1797-1865)

For those already familiar with “ Fifty Ship paintings by Francis Hustwick”, by A.S.Davidson and Anthony Tibbles, 1999, Jones-Sands Publishing, this update clarifies the question of the artist’s parentage. This and his relationships with the other members of the extensive Hustwick family of Hull are summarised in an amended and enlarged family tree. Extending from the mid-eighteenth to the present century, it now includes extensive research conducted over a lifetime by the artist’s great-great-great- granddaughter, Mrs. Joyce Tremblay (nee Hustwick) of Tilbury, Ontario.

The passage of six years has also brought to light more than thirty additional unsigned paintings, the attribution being based on the detailed criteria illustrated in the original publication. These having stood the test of time and with over eighty works thus attributed, the name of Francis Hustwick is one that must be given serious consideration when attempting to attribute a good quality unsigned mid 19th century Liverpool maritime painting.

For those collectors and others in the maritime art world not yet acquainted with Hustwick and his works, the following summary should prove a useful introduction to the definitive publication.

Francis Hustwick c.1797-1865, was a little known ‘decorative painter’ born in Hull, who settled in Liverpool as a ship portrait painter about 1846. Apart from the fact that he was made a Freeman in 1818, following an apprenticeship to Robert Hustwick, coach-maker of Hull, documented information about his early years is very sparse. Despite recent repeated searches through the likely sources, no baptismal certificate has yet come to light. Clarifying the likely relationships with Robert the coachmaker and with Robert’s brother, an earlier Francis Hustwick born in 1768, therefore presented difficulties. To complicate matters, this older Francis Hustwick was a master painter of the decorative and ornamental variety employed in Robert’s coach-making business, also advertising himself as ‘house, sign, ship and furniture painter’. The fact that the older Francis was believed (mistakenly, as it turned out) to have lived until about 1837 added to the confusion, since the implied overlap of Francis I and Francis II made it difficult to know which of the two was responsible for some reported church murals and a triptych wreck scene in the Ferens Art Gallery, Hull.

However it has now been established that this earlier Francis died of a ‘decline’ in 1799, aged only thirty one. In those days this was generally a euphemism for pulmonary tuberculosis. This piece of information along with the newly discovered will of Robert the coach-maker led to a re-interpretation of earlier information uncovered in Liverpool. All the available evidence now appears to establish beyond doubt that this earlier Francis was the father of the younger Francis and that Robert with whom the latter served his apprenticeship was his uncle. Following the premature death of Francis senior, it would fall to Robert to assist his widowed sister-in law and her family including the young Francis, a mere infant. In those pre ‘social security’ days she would be hard pressed to provide for three young children without support. When his fatherless nephews were aged about twelve, Robert’s employment of Francis as an apprentice (and later, his younger brother Robert) must have been a welcome relief.

Paintings previously attributed to Francis I but later than 1799 now clearly require fresh appraisal. If dated after about 1820, it is reasonably certain that they are the work of Francis II, who in 1818 completed his apprenticeship with his uncle Robert. Similarly, it must have been this Francis who from 1818 to 1839 described himself in the Hull directories as “portrait and scene painter” at 117 High Street. Surviving works from this period are few and as yet uncollated, but it seems that living in the port of Hull his paintings included the occasional self taught ship portrait and sea piece. However, Hull was well provided with maritime artists including the prestigious John Ward, with his apprentice and successor William Settle. Presumably it was the hope of making a better living in this maritime field that motivated Hustwick to move to the expanding port of Liverpool in the late 1840’s.

Then aged nearly fifty, he appears to have resorted to living in the port’s least salubrious dockside area. Whilst Liverpool’s transatlantic trade certainly presented a larger potential clientele than Hull, the larger number of established marine artists meant that the competition was no less. How Hustwick managed to produce about eighty extant paintings under such adverse conditions over the next twenty years, raises some interesting questions. Already a competent self taught ship portrait painter, a study of his Liverpool paintings suggest that he was influenced by the works of his new contemporaries. In particular his handling of the sea is suggestive of Joseph Heard. One possible explanation is that in order to make a living he may have offered his part-time services as an assistant to a busy established artist such as Joseph Heard (1799-1859). The agreement might have included the use of studio facilities, on the understanding that paintings so produced were not to impose a threat to the principal’s clientele and must therefore remain unsigned. Whatever the explanation, the fact that he remained undiscovered and his paintings generally unrecognised until a few years ago, is due largely to his paintings being anonymous. Eventually it was realised that a characteristically outmoded British red ensign replaced the conventional written signature. Alerted by this distinctive ‘trade mark’, a sound attribution requires a recognisable mix of other various other features favoured by the artist. With one exception, the few ship portraits conventionally signed are American. The observant will note that like their more numerous British counterparts, the American vessels display an anomalous national ensign, the star-bearing blue canton being supported by a red stripe instead of a white one – a detail first spotted by one of the author’s sons.

Within the last few months, three smaller signed paintings have coincidentally come to light. The maritime scenes depicted are in marked contrast with Hustwick’s more usual ship portraits incorporating the latter’s distinctive outdated ensigns and other stylized characteristics. Indeed, lacking such familiar criteria, attribution of this little group would be very difficult were it not for the unexpected and unusual presence of a signature ‘*F.Hustwick*’ - one being dated, (1860). Alerted to the possibility, the authors would be interested to learn of any similar instances.

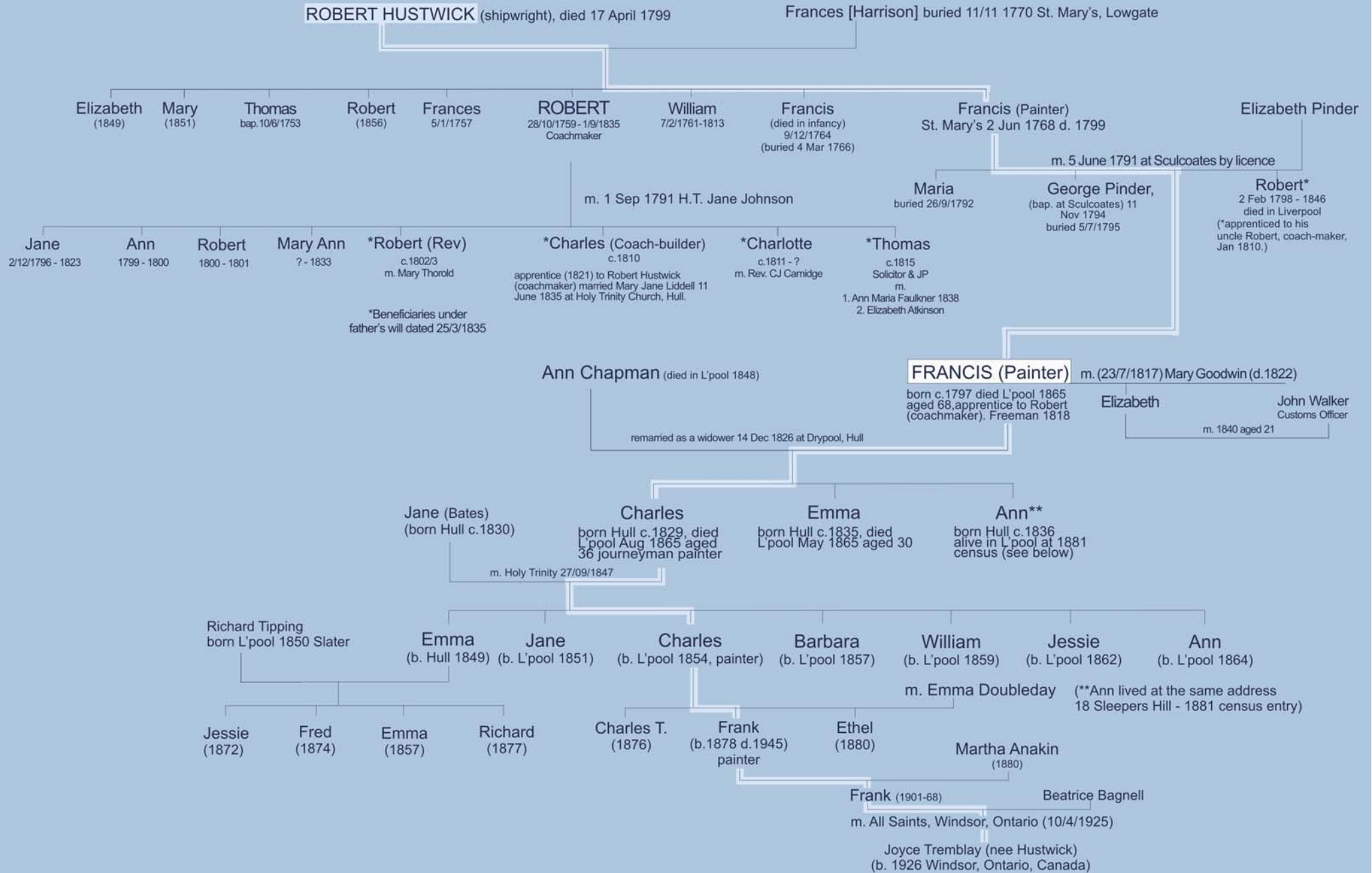
As previously published, by 1865 Francis Hustwick was a widower cared for by his two adult daughters, with his married son Charles a journeyman painter of Hull, living nearby. Tragically all four contracted typhus in one of the many Liverpool epidemics of the period. Only one daughter survived; Francis himself dying in a Liverpool workhouse.

Reared in straitened circumstances in his native Hull, and meeting with no better fortune in his adopted Liverpool, Francis Hustwick might appear a somewhat pathetic figure. Yet despite all the obstacles encountered and overcome, he has bequeathed us a significant number of paintings of enduring quality. Serving as his sole memorial they justify his long delayed entry to the ranks of his better known Liverpool artisan contemporaries, including Duncan McFarlane, John Hughes, and William McMinn.

An awareness of Hustwick's role is slowly percolating through maritime art circles, despite the problem of re-appraisal when an unsigned painting, long accepted as the work of one of his Liverpool contemporaries, is discovered to comply much better with the Hustwick criteria. Since any painting acquires a financial rating based on fashion and previous market experience of the particular artist involved, a period of readjustment is only to be expected. Already a few discerning collectors of Liverpool maritime paintings are learning to recognise the authenticity of Hustwick's works and to evaluate them on their own merits. It must only be a matter of time before the market place becomes better informed and the artist is accorded his true worth.

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From a headstone at St. Mary's, Hull



Acknowledging the extensive researches by Mrs Joyce Tremblay (nee' Hustwick) of Ontario, into her family tree.