

Friends in Admiral Rodney's Squadron

In 1781 two members of Holm Monthly Meeting, Cumberland, were impressed into the British Navy; Joseph Skelton and Jonathan Taylor were taken from the merchant ship *Isabella*, Anthony Harris, member of Holm Monthly Meeting, master. Their plight has recently come to light in two letters found in the archives of New York Yearly Meeting. The letter "on behalf of Joseph Skelton" written at Wigton in 4th month 1782 is signed by eight members of Holm Monthly Meeting.

TO FRIENDS IN NORTH AMERICA OR ELSEWHERE

Dear Friends:

Whereas our Friends Clement Skelton and Anthony Harris, have requested our Certificate, in favour of Joseph Skelton, who was impressed from his Master, Anthony Harris, at New York the 10th day of the 11th month 1781, and carried on Board the King's Ship, *Intrepid*, Capt. Molloy, one of Admiral Rodney's Squadrent, if the above Ship should come to New York, or any way under your Notice, that you make Enquire for Jo^s Skelton, and use your utmost indeavors to procure him his Liberty; or any other Assistance in your power, will much oblige your Friends and Brethern.

These are to certify to you on his behalf that Clement Skelton and Anthony Harris, are both members of our Monthly Meeting, the young man Jo^s Skelton had a religious and sober education with his Father, his conduct whilst here and also when under our Friend Anthony Harris, his late Master, was orderly and agreeable to Friends which Intitles him to the esteem of a member, we therefore Recommend him to your tender Notice; indeavoring if it seem practible to Obtain him Liberty from his disagreeable Confinement, so with desire for the same, and his preservation, and Growth in the Truth, we remain your Friends and Brethern,

Signed in and on behalf of the Holm Monthly Meeting held at Wigton in the County of Cumberland, the 18th of 4th month 1782.

Josh ^h . Harrison	David Souel [?]	Jn ^o . Skelton
Thomas Furnas	John Ham [?]	George Rook
Jn ^o . Bigland	Clement Skelton	

The second letter for Jonathan Taylor is similar to that for Joseph Skelton.¹

The ship *Isabella*, a 250 ton merchantman from Maryport, was appropriately named *Isabella*; the wife of the master was *Isabella* (Bull) Harris.² Anthony Harris carried Friends principles to sea as is shown by the somewhat unsympathetic sketch of him contained in an account of his grandson, John Harris:

John Harris came of a seafaring family of Maryport, and like that of many Quakers it was distinguished for innovation and eccentricity. His grandfather, Anthony Harris (1755–95), was a master mariner of stern principles: he would not wear clothing dyed with indigo although the common colour among sailors, because it was produced by slave labour; he would never set sail on Sundays; he read the scriptures to his crew, and he was an early advocate of temperance. After his death at sea, his wife *Isabella* taught at Ackworth school from 1803 to 1826, and was a gospel minister in Yorkshire, Durham and Cumberland. Their eldest daughter, Elizabeth married Joseph Taylor whose father Henry of Whitby had been a friend of Captain Cook, a pioneer founder of lighthouses and author of books on seamanship.³

In 1795 Anthony Harris, then master of another ship named *Isabella* was lost on a voyage between Maryport and Waterford.⁴

¹ The letters are in the Haviland Record Room of New York Yearly Meeting, 15 Rutherford Place, New York City.

[*Editorial note:*] The signatories may perhaps be identified as: JOSHUA HARRISON, draper, of Wigton, d. 1 i 1791; THOMAS FURNAS, joiner, of Standing Stone, d. 28 x 1784 (treasurer of Holm M.M., and sufferer in Wigton meeting 1782); JOHN BIGLANDS, husbandman, of Saltcoats, d. 28 ii 1799, buried at Kirkbride; DAVID SAUL, of Wolsty, d. 10 vi 1790; JOHN HARRIS, mariner, of Maryport, d. 6 v 1787, buried at Eaglesfield [the evidence for adopting the reading *Harris* rather than *Ham* rests largely on the fact that Holm M.M. at Wigton, 18 iv 1782, when the certificates for Jonathan Taylor and Joseph Skelton were read and approved, was attended by John Harris as representative from Maryport Particular Meeting]; CLEMENT SKELTON, yeoman, of Priestcroft, d. 21 vii 1816, buried at Bolton; JONATHAN SKELTON, yeoman, of Kirkbride, d. 17 vii 1820; GEORGE ROOK, yeoman, of Parton, d. 6 i 1814, buried at Bolton.

The information comes from Holm Monthly Meeting records, deposited at the Record Office, The Castle, Carlisle; reference FCF/3/3 M.M. minutes, 1773–1799; FCF/3/28 Register of sufferings, 1727–1792; FCF/3/33 Copy Register of marriages, births and deaths, 1776–1912.

² The *Isabella* is listed in the 1781 volume of *Lloyd's Register*.

³ H. J. Smith, "John Harris, Quaker engineer and investor, 1812–60" (*Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, vol. 69, New series, 1969), pp. 330–1.

For *Isabella* Harris (1757–1832) see *Jnl. F.H.S.*, 24 (1927), p. 29, and: Norman Penney, ed., *Pen pictures of London Yearly Meeting*, (*Jnl. F.H.S.*, Supplement, no. 17, 1930) p. 210, n. 10. See also *Annual monitor*, supplement to no. 22, 1834, p. 65–74 (and particularly pp. 67–69 for an account of Anthony Harris). The writer is indebted to Malcolm Thomas of Friends House Library, London, for the references to Anthony and *Isabella* Harris.

⁴ The second *Isabella* is listed in *Lloyd's Register* for 1793, 4, 5.

Naval discipline on the *Intrepid* of 64 guns, with a complement of 500 officers and men was a strange contrast to serving on the *Isabella* with its Friendly atmosphere. Actually Jonathan Taylor and Joseph Skelton were impressed early in October. Muster of the ship company on the *Intrepid* was taken four times a month and the names of the two Friends appear on all musters from October 5th, 1781, to August 22, 1782. The December 1781–January 1782 list shows "Jon^a Taylor, last *Isabella*, prest 1 Oct. 1781, then Q M Mate", able bodied seaman, with allowances of £2/13/8 for "slop cloaths" and 6/4 for tobacco. No mention is made of Joseph Skelton having been on the *Isabella*, but he appears on the muster roll with allowances for slop-cloaths, bed and tobacco.¹

The *Intrepid* had been part of the fleet of Admiral Graves which had engaged the French under Admiral Comte de Grasse at the entrance to Chesapeake Bay on September 5th, 1781; in this action her Captain had "behaved with the greatest gallantry to cover the *Shrewsbury*."² Shortly thereafter the *Intrepid* was in New York, where the two Friends were unceremoniously added to its complement, and then sailed for the West Indies in the fleet commanded by Rear Admiral Hood (Sir Samuel Hood, Viscount Hood 1762–1814). Although the damage sustained by the *Intrepid* on September 5th had been inadequately repaired in New York, it was part of the English fleet in the encounter between Hood and de Grasse at St. Kitts; an action which Admiral Mahan in his *Influence of Sea Power* has credited with disrupting the French time table and preparing the way for the subsequent victory in the decisive Battle of the Saints on April 12th, 1782. On February 19th, Admiral Rodney (George Brydges Rodney, First Baron Rodney, 1719–1792) returned to naval command in the West Indies and on this date the *Intrepid* was in the line of battle off Barbados; the squadrons of Rodney and Hood were joined on February 25th.

By March 10th, the *Intrepid* was declared "unfit for service in this climate" and was ordered to sail to Europe with the May convoy. March 18th however found it stationed with other ships "for the better protection of Pigeon Island and St. Lucia in general." Pigeon Island, off the northern tip of St. Lucia, was a lookout point for the British fleet in Gros Islet Bay in St. Lucia. On March 21st the *Intrepid* was one of a line of ships across Gros Islet Bay. The *Intrepid* was spared participation in the Battle of the Saints, April 8th to 12th, when Rodney defeated and captured Admiral de Grasse. On April 7th, just before sailing to engage the French, Rodney ordered the *Shrewsbury*, the *Intrepid* and the *Princess Caroline* to sail with a convoy to Jamaica. April 30th found the *Intrepid* still at Port Royal, Jamaica. On May 11th the order was given for the *Intrepid* to receive

¹ *Muster Rolls of H.M.S. Intrepid*, vols. ADM 36, Nos. 8505 and 8506. Public Record Office, London.

² *Letters written by Sir Samuel Hood (Viscount Hood) in 1781–2–3*. Edited by David Hannay. (Navy Records Society) 1895, 42.

"French soldiers and officers, prisoners of war, and deliver them to the first port you make in England."¹

The involuntary tour of duty for Jonathan Taylor and Joseph Skelton ended in August 1782. The muster roll of the *Intrepid* shows that Taylor was discharged August 26th at Egmont and Skelton the following day at Deal. Possibly their discharge was aided by Admiral Rodney's dislike of impressment. In a letter written June 12th, 1782 to Brigadier-General Archibald Campbell, Governor of Jamaica, the Admiral asks the General for assistance in adding some 3000 men to his fleet, but states:

I have since my arrival Here (and indeed wherever I have had the Honour to Command) not only not had Resource to the disagreeable Mode of Pressing, but have given Orders for such men as have been impressed without my knowledge to be released.²

The way would not have opened for Friends in North America to intercede with either Captain Molloy or Admiral Rodney. Available minutes of New York Meetings for this period, understandably not always complete, make no mention of the letters from Holm Monthly Meeting. The extant records of Holm Monthly Meeting and Maryport Preparative Meeting contain no specific reference to the impressment of their members.³

A. DAY BRADLEY

¹ The account of the *Intrepid* in 1781-2 is based on the following: Information Index at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich; *Order Book of George, Lord Rodney, Admiral of the White Squadron, 1780-1782* (New York Historical Society) 1932, 561, 606, 616, 656-7, 684, 697, 713, 726-7; *Letter Book of George, Lord Rodney, 1780-1782* (New York Historical Society), 274, 317, 348, 381, 455; Sir Samuel Hood, *op. cit.*, 31, 42, 48, 65, 86.

² *Letter Book of George, Lord Rodney*, 455.

³ The extant records of Holm Monthly Meeting and Maryport Preparative Meeting have been very kindly searched by Mr. B. J. Jones of the Joint Archives Committee of Cumberland, Westmorland and Carlisle.