

Southampton Local History Forum

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John Malachi: a man of colour in nineteenth-century Southampton

The life of John Malachi would be largely hidden from us were it not for his very public appearance before the House of Commons in March 1853, giving evidence on corruption in the 1852 Southampton parliamentary election. Newspaper coverage, both local and national, presents us with a simple fact: that this witness is a "man of colour." That fact, invisible in most documents, brings him out of the shadows and gives us a reason to tell his story.

John Malachi was born in Africa *c.*1790. He married Ann Elizabeth Mascoe in St Mary's Church, Southampton on 10 February 1828. She was born in St James's, London, *c.*1803 (according to the 1851 census), and may have had an illegitimate child before her marriage to Malachi: Robert Frederick Mascoe, son of Ann Elizabeth Mascoe, of Great Ormond Street, was baptised in St Pancras Old Church on 4 April 1823. At the time of his marriage, John was living in All Saints parish. An exchange between John and the barrister Edwin James, QC before the 1853 inquiry suggests they were a feisty couple:

Mr James: When Mr Tucker called upon you did not Mrs Malachi say, "John is going to vote one and one?"

Witness: She never calls me John; she calls me Malachi (laughter).

Mr James: Except when she is particularly fond of you.

Witness: She is always fond of me (great laughter).



Figure 1 Winchester Street from Ordnance Survey map of 1845/6, 60 inches to 1 mile, sheet 21

One daughter is recorded: Catherine, who died in April 1841, aged 7 years. For most of their time in Southampton, the Malachis lived in a house owned by John in Winchester Street (the number being variously given as 22 or 23), Kingsland Place (figure 1). He is recorded there in the July 1831 St Mary's rate book. It was a sizeable property, with a gross estimated rental of £11.12s.6d. (1844), a frontage of 32 feet and a garden. It contained two sitting rooms, four bed rooms and a wash house. As such, it was ideal for taking in lodgers. The 1851 census records four 'boarders': two labourers, a messenger

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and a dressmaker. In 1859, the family is living at 27 Union Street, Orchard Place, and in 1861 sharing 29 College Street with the Hoad family. Ann died in 1862, followed by John, buried on 16 April 1867, aged 77 years, in the parish of St Mary's. He died in Southampton poor house.

Rent from lodgers supplemented Malachi's uncertain income as a waiter or servingman in a series of inns and hotels, of which the Star Hotel in High Street, under Thomas Swyre, and the Bell and Crown in Melbourne Street, Chapel, under Thomas Bell, can be identified. In September 1857, Malachi sued the latter in Southampton County Court for nine days' unpaid wages and for five shillings promised for moving goods to a taphouse. Bell counter-claimed a set-off of 15s.6d. for 6 1/2 gallons of beer alleged to have been drunk by Mr and Mrs Malachi, and for a quart pint lost. A revealing interchange between Malachi (the plaintiff) and Bell (the defendant) is reported in the *Hampshire Independent* (12 September 1857):

Plaintiff, by Mr Pocock [attorney]: Could not drink that amount of beer in the time.

Defendant: Him and his wife could empty a nine-gallon any night after dark.

Plaintiff: Why, you has'nt [*sic*] bin sober dis fortnight.

Defendant: He can do that in brandy nearly.

Plaintiff: Ditto, brother bung [loosely translated as fellow innkeeper].

John Malachi was a political animal. In 1832 he possessed a vote for both the borough of Southampton - a scot and lot voter (paying borough rates) on the pre-Reform qualification - and the South Division of Hampshire. He was in normal times a supporter of the Tories. In September 1832 he was a signatory to a petition to John Fleming of Stoneham Park to stand at the forthcoming election against the Whig Lord Palmerston. His voting preference within the borough constituency was likewise Tory. In 1832 he plumped for John Barlow Hoy. He voted for Charles Cecil Martyn and Lord Bruce in 1841 (figure 2) and for Humphrey St John Mildmay and George William Hope in 1842. He was one of the first to plump for Sir Edward Butler in the by-election of February 1857. He survived Whig objections to his votes before the borough revision courts of October 1837 and September 1839.

The 1852 borough election was an exception. Malachi, out of work for over a year and desperate for money, was ripe for turning. He declined to give his customary promise to the Tories on their initial canvass. This left open the way for a rapprochement with the Whigs. Four or five days before the election, John Traffels Tucker, auctioneer, alderman (elected sheriff later that year and mayor the following year) and one of the Whig election managers (responsible for the payment of expenses to the out-voters) called on Malachi, ostensibly to offer him temporary employment as a porter at a forthcoming auction. Malachi was not at home, but his wife seized the opportunity to importune a place for her husband, referring to the recent vacancy as attendant on the Royal Pier caused by the retirement of George Perkins: "her husband wanted a permanent situation, and would like some light description of employment". The situation was in the gift of the Whig-dominated Pier and Harbour Commission (of which Tucker, as a member of Southampton Council, was an *ex officio* member), and was a place worth having: a salary of 15 shillings a week, with "many a sixpence to be made", and light work, handling ropes and sweeping the pierhead. On the day of the election (8 July) Tucker gave Malachi a draft letter of application, which Malachi, at an expense he could ill afford, had printed: 'he would endeavour to give satisfaction to the Commission and the public at large, so far

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	M.	B.	H.	M.
Luce, John Bennett, Victualler, High-street				
Lucas, Joseph, Shoemaker, Canal Walk.				
Lucas, Henry, Accountant, James-street				
Luke, William, Wine Porter, Bevois-street				
M				
Mabson, William Rouse, Ironmonger, Above-Bar-street ..				
Macey, Charles, Labourer, Bevois-street				
Mackey, William Henry, Gentleman, Cumberland Place..				
Macklean, Jabez, Cork-cutter, Middle East-street				
Maclachlan, Archibald, Gentleman, Bellevue Place				
Maddison, Martin, Burgess, Castle Square				
Maffey, John, Builder, Lower East-street				
Maffey, Jonah, Baker, Upper East-street				
Maffey, Thomas, Timber Merchant, Mount Place.....				
Major, John, French Polisher, Chandos-street				
Malichi, John, Waiter, Winchester-street.....				
Malsler, Richard, Shoemaker, College-street				
Mansbridge, William, Shopman, Orchard Lane.....				
Mansbridge, Peter, Cordwainer, Hog's Mount				
Mansell, John, Bricklayer, Grove-street				
Mann, John, Grocer, Above-Bar-street				
Manning, James, Watchmaker, Hanover Buildings				
Marsh, Henry, Gardener, Bedford Place				
Martin, Thomas, Flyman, Orchard-street				
Martin, Thomas, junior, Flyman, Orchard-street				
Martin, Richard, Baker, French-street				
Martin, William Henry, Pork Butcher, French-street				
Martin, John William, Hair Dresser, Orchard Lane				
Martin, Herbert, Painter, Middle East-street				

as lay in his power, if he should be fortunate enough to succeed in his application'. Malachi took a copy of the application to the mayor Richard Andrews, controller of political patronage in the town, no doubt to verify the genuineness of the offer. When asked about Perkins's place, Andrews replied (according to Malachi's testimony) that "he would interest himself if he could to get it for me". A partiality that ill became the official neutrality of the returning officer. Alderman Tucker was content that Malachi merely split his vote between Augustus Vansittart, the least popular of the Tory candidates, and Sir Alexander Cockburn, who as a London lawyer was the more vulnerable of the sitting Whig candidates. On election day itself, however, Malachi fell under the influence of Thomas Swyre, another of the Whig election agents, who had been active in the Whig canvass of the borough. Swyre had previously employed Malachi as a live-in waiter at

Figure 2 Southampton pollbook, July 1841.

the Star Hotel for two years. Ann had accompanied her husband to the Star, whence he was escorted by Swyre to the poll. Discovering that his charge intended to vote one and one, Swyre counselled a more radical approach: "---- it all, John, don't vote in that way; lay it all on one side". And so he did, voting for both Whig candidates, Cockburn and Brodie McGhie Willcox.

Malachi quickly found that promises made in the frenzy of an election campaign are rarely kept. The cold douche of reality came when he took his piece of paper round individually to the Pier and Harbour Commissioners and, as he told the parliamentary inquiry, "I found at the house of one of the Commissioners eight waiting in the hall" (laughter). In the event, four applicants were considered: Malachi, William Cole (a mariner), Richard Hardy (a porter) and John Luscombe. The latter was successful - a 22-year old sailor born in Portsmouth of a sea-faring family living with his widowed mother, on poor relief, in Bugle Street. The motion for his appointment was made by Alderman Tucker. Malachi was again reduced to part-time jobbing and taking in lodgers, with the transient salve of three days work as a porter at Tucker's auction house. He was in the mood to turn Queen's evidence. Even before the day of the appointment (27 July) he had visited John Zimmerman, landlord of the St George's Inn in Bugle Street and a Tory political bruiser of the first order. A brief biography is given below in an appendix. Malachi later recalled, under examination by Edwin James, their first conversation: "He asked me what I wanted, and I said I had called about Perkins's place. He said, 'You ---- fool, you won't get it' (laughter). He then took a book out of his pocket, and put down my

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statement. I had a glass of beer, which I paid for, and then he gave me another". Malachi was later visited in his own house by William Henry Mackey, a Tory attorney and solicitor who had cut his political teeth in the bruising borough election of 1842 and who was seeking evidence to support an appeal against the return (Serjeant Kingslake, attorney for the sitting members before the parliamentary enquiry, stated that it was William's younger brother, Bryan Mackey, who made the approach, but it was William who was the more active in the fishing expedition). Malachi was 'pumped' for half an hour: "He wanted a great many things that I could not tell him, and he suggested several things to me". The hope was that he would confirm rumours that he had been directly bribed - sums of ten shillings, two sovereigns and five pounds were mentioned - , but Malachi resisted, fearing no doubt liability to legal proceedings. He admitted nothing but the promise of a place on the pier. The Southampton petition was subsequently heard before a select committee of the House of Commons. Malachi was an ideal witness to put before the committee, feeling a deep sense of betrayal, personally unscrupulous, clearly intelligent and not one to be overawed by the paraphernalia of the occasion. He was accompanied to London on the eve of the enquiry by John Zimmerman and the following day (5 March 1853) gave his evidence with spirit and bravado. That Malachi was one of only three local witnesses to give evidence on the first day shows the importance given by the Tory managers to his testimony. It was, however, all for nought. The select committee found for the sitting members.

The impression we receive of John Malachi is of a man accepted in the local community. Southampton newspapers refer to him as 'a man of colour' or (*Hampshire Advertiser*) "a little elderly man of colour", but there is no sense of alienation or prejudice. It is the national press which tends to stress his ethnicity. The London-based *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (13 March 1853), in its account of the parliamentary investigation, describes Malachi in a way which no Southampton paper did: 'a negro of a most singular physiognomy - a low retreating forehead, with protuberant lips and a lower jaw'. It is a travesty of this sense of normality that Malachi should be caricatured in a work of fictionalised propaganda: *The slaveholder abroad; or Billy Buck's visit with his master, to England: a series of letters from Dr Pleasant Jones to Major Joseph Jones, of Georgia*. Published anonymously in Philadelphia in 1860, the author has subsequently been identified as Ebenezer Starnes, a member of the Georgia Supreme Court and sometime state attorney general. The work fits into that genre of 'anti-Tom' literature which followed publication of *Uncle Tom's cabin* in 1852. Its intention was to discredit the British anti-slavery campaign, reinvigorated by the release of Harriet Becher Stowe's novel in England the following year, by portraying Britain as socially, morally and politically derelict. In Starnes' work the plantation slave Billy Buck, in company with his master Dr Jones, meets Malachi, 'a brother negro', in Southampton during the reception of Louis Kossuth in late 1851. Buck is subsequently invited by his new friend back to Southampton to witness the shenanigans of the 1852 election. The account of the election, given in the dialect of the southern states, can be read online at <http://www.archive.org/>. Allegedly an eye-witness account, it is based solely on newspaper accounts of the House of Commons enquiry.

Appendix

John Zimmerman: a political maverick in nineteenth-century Southampton

John Zimmerman was a man who lived on the margins of Southampton society. His life would be little more than a collection of bare facts were it not for his involvement in the most raw forms of political electioneering. It is in this way that he crossed paths with John Malachi.

John Zimmerman had exotic origins. Baptized on 11 May 1804 in All Saints Church, Southampton, he was the son of Jacob Zimmerman, a cavalryman in the 20th Light Dragoons then stationed in the barracks between foreign assignments. His mother was Juliana Zimmerman. John was twice married. His first wife, Mary, was born in Southampton c.1800. She died on 5 May 1859. Eight children were born between 1827 and 1855. None lived beyond the age of 30 and four perished under five years old. Seven family addresses are recorded during this period, most in the St Mary's district: Queen Street, Union Street, Pardy's Buildings (Lower Canal Walk), Briton Street, Armour Street, Bedford Place and Bridge Street. John married his second wife, Ann, born in Bitterne c.1809 and sister of the fly proprietor William Hunt, in 1863.

The list of John's early occupations would be similarly sparse were it not for the report in the *Hampshire Advertiser* (27 July 1844) of his cross-examination by the barrister Charles Saunders in a trial at Winchester in July 1844 (referred to later). It is a one-sided exchange for all we have is Zimmerman's replies to the questions fired at him. "He got his living honestly, and worked hard for it; he was an agent - could be an agent for Mr Saunders - anything to get money honestly. Was not able to work; was a cripple; had two limbs broken; was a porter seven years ago when he fell off a coach; was a book-keeper; was never a cad; did not know what a cad was; gave up his book-keeping because the Railroad unfortunately began. He did everything he could to get an honest living". This hand-to-mouth existence is confirmed by his occupations recorded between 1827 and 1844: tapster, porter, mariner, book-keeper, toll collector and agent.

A veneer of respectability was achieved when Zimmerman, then in his mid-40's, took over the licence of St George's Hotel in Bridge Street in November 1849. He held the licence until late 1860, interrupted only by a brief interlude as licensee of the Clarendon Hotel in Bernard Street between August 1858 and November 1859. These were two important hostelries in the town. In order to supplement his income, Zimmerman acquired the right in 1856 to graze sheep and cattle on the Common Fields of the town. He clearly believed that this corporation contract 'to rent the grass' was a passport to wealth, for his tender (£50) in April 1857 to renew the contract (held for nine months) was over twice that of other bidders. It was a miscalculation. The common lands were being transformed from an essentially agricultural resource into a sterile urban park. The cricket ground carved out of Hoglands in 1857 significantly reduced the scope for profit. The further condition that the contractor was to feed and mow the grass if grazing alone did not produce the good turf demanded by the corporation was increasingly irksome to Zimmerman. In June 1857 his contract was temporarily cancelled for his failure to keep the sward in good condition. He was also obliged to pay for any damage caused to trees and shrubs by his work. In 1858 Zimmerman lost the contract. Two years later, in November 1860, he applied for bankruptcy in Southampton Insolvent Debtors' Court owing debts of £288.3s.7d., mainly to local tradesmen. He had no assets. His total profits from November 1859 to November 1860 amounted to no more than £30.

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Bankruptcy was a temporary setback to a man of Zimmerman's resilience. In 1862 he was awarded the contract to provide refreshments at the grandstand during the July race meeting on the Common. 'The Wines and Spirits are of the choicest qualities, and the Refreshments from the well-known cuisine of Mr Brixey, High Street'. The contract went elsewhere the next year - lost to a higher tender - but as lessee of the grandstand Zimmerman personally supervised the victualling department run from No.1 Pavilion in the immediate rear of the grandstand, serving luncheons, wines, spirits, Bass, Guinness and Allsopp's ales and stouts. Two years later, in 1865, he returned to the innkeeping trade as licensee of the Fish and Kettle Tavern in French Street, which he briefly renamed the Market Tavern. On his death on 30 May 1868, aged 68 years, the licence was taken on for a few years by his widow Ann.

John Zimmerman had a largely hidden life as a political manipulator. It was a role revealed in a series of legal and parliamentary enquiries into the electoral practices of the borough. The case of *Bray v Andrews*, heard before the Undersheriff of Hampshire, Charles Seagrim, in July 1844, casts light on his role in the pivotal parliamentary election of July 1841. Charles Bray of the Wheat Sheaf tap in Bridge Street sought to recover £19.16s.0d. from Richard Andrews for breakfasts, lunches, dinners, grogs and suppers supplied to friends of the Liberal candidates E J Hutchins and Captain Charles Mangles. John Zimmerman and Richard Ray, the latter of the Wiltshire Eating House in West Street, - both former Tory supporters and both without a vote - had been empowered to open the Wheat Sheaf and "take there the doubtful voters whom it was likely that they could secure for Mangles and Hutchins". The voters were provided liberally with refreshment and escorted to the poll on election day to ensure that there was no backsliding. Their puppet master was Richard Andrews, in perhaps his first election as a Liberal operator. Charles Saunders - counsel for Andrews - argued the impossibility of such a man employing Tory apostates like Zimmerman and Ray. The court disagreed, giving a verdict in favour of the plaintiff and awarding damages against Andrews of £9.14s.0d. In the words of the Undersheriff, Zimmerman and Ray "were men who made money how they could and that they had gone to Richard Andrews and offered to commit unlawful acts". Or more explicitly in the testimony of John Zimmerman, under cross-examination, "Went to Mr Andrews because he paid for it". Evidence given by Richard Andrews before the House of Commons election committee in July 1842, investigating corruption in the 1841 election, reveals a further service performed by Zimmerman. He admitted having given him £10 so that he could "pay 20 men on the nomination day [who] were to go to the hall [Guildhall] to secure a hearing for our candidates": *ie* political enforcers.

Zimmerman had a vote at the next parliamentary election in August 1842. He exercised it - as he did in 1852 and 1865 - in favour of the Conservatives. He was by now a member of the Grand Protestant Association of Loyal Orangemen, one of whose meeting places was the St George's Hotel. In 1852 he became one of the first investors in the Southampton Freehold Land Society, in its early days an exclusively Tory organisation. We have already met Zimmerman in 1853 as one of those who encouraged John Malachi to give evidence against Richard Andrews and his fellow Liberals before the parliamentary inquiry into corruption during the borough election of the previous year. Malachi testified that it was Zimmerman who took down his statement about being offered Perkins's place. The exchange is recorded above. Zimmerman acted as a whipper-in to the Tory witnesses before the 1853 inquiry and accompanied Malachi to London in

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March 1853 where, despite Malachi's too insistent denials to the contrary, he clearly pumped the witness on how to respond to the questions he was to be asked. A fellow coach was the Tory solicitor - and member of the Loyal Orange Association - William Henry Mackey, who later represented Zimmerman before Southampton Insolvent Debtors' Court.

A foot soldier for most of his political life, Zimmerman made a public and controversial intervention in the 1856 municipal election for the ward of Holy Rood. The contest, to fill the vacancy caused by the retirement of John Henry Cooksey, became a fratricidal battle between two Tories of a very different hue: William Henry Rogers, well-known nurseryman and pledged to obtain the benefits of the Hartley Bequest for the ward, and John Zimmerman, landlord of the St George's Hotel and intent on making mischief. To the *Hampshire Advertiser* (11 October 1856), 'the game has been carried out during the week with immense zest. Addresses have appeared in the name of certain celebrities, some of which to the townsmen are full of point, and one or two exhibit very trumpery spite and inane threats, which only damage the party they are meant to serve'. The *Hampshire Independent* believed that 'the accession to the Council of John Zimmerman was no means considered to be desirable'. Unsuccessful appeals were made to two Tory stalwarts - John Coupland, editor of the *Advertiser*, and William Le Feuvre, who had some time since resigned from the council in despair of its work - to break the impasse. But neither Rogers nor Zimmerman was prepared to concede. The day of the poll saw a reversion to the politics of the 1830s, with intimidation and at least three cases of impersonation. The poll was neck-and-neck until noon, but in the end Zimmerman lost by 65 votes to 55. He claimed that seven of his promised supporters had voted against him and that twelve had kept away. It is an ironic footnote that in March 1857 Zimmerman was appointed one of the two ward assessors for All Saints. It was the job of assessors to maintain the purity of the burgess lists, deciding who was and who was not eligible to hold the municipal franchise.