

## Southampton Local History Forum Journal

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A Precarious Business: the Skelton family of stationers, printers, publishers, booksellers and circulating library owners in Southampton and Havant, c.1781- c.1865

The Skeltons were one of a triptych of families who helped to promote Southampton as a cultural centre in the latter days of the spa period. The rival families of the Bakers and Fletchers - also stationers, printers, publishers, booksellers and owners of circulating libraries - were Liberal in politics and Congregationalist in religion. The Skeltons in contrast were Tory in politics and Anglican in religion. The business lineage of the Southampton Skeltons can be traced from Thomas Skelton (c.1757-1816) through his widow Elizabeth (?1768-1841), daughters Mary Mabella (1783-1859) and Elizabeth (born 1785), sons William (1787-1828) and Thomas Henry (1800-56), daughter-in-law Elizabeth (died 1846) to his grandson Augustus Henry (1832-1904). A closely related line in Havant embraces the brothers Henry (1787-1824) and Isaac (1800-61) Skelton.

The two branches of the family have a common ancestor in the Reverend Isaac Skelton (1707-73), vicar of South and North Hayling - although refraining from duties at the latter on the grounds that it was a chapel of ease - between 1745 and 1773. Technically non-resident, Isaac lived in Havant where he ran a private grammar school. His daughter Bridget married the Reverend Isaac Hodgon, curate of Havant and Bedhampton, in September 1763. Isaac Skelton died with no living sons. His nearest male heir was Thomas Skelton. Much of Thomas's wealth came from his grandfather's will, proven in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 21 October 1769 (copy in Hampshire Archives and Local Studies 102M86/98). This left the sizeable freehold estate of Leigh Meads in the parish of Havant to his then unmarried daughter, Mabella, for the term of her life. In November 1782, aged 45 and now living in Winchester, she married Samuel Fennell, a widower five years her senior, silversmith, brazier, auctioneer of Andover and a member of Andover Corporation. By the terms of Isaac's will, the property was to devolve to his grandson Thomas on Mabella's death. However, it is clear that Thomas had partial control of the property during her lifetime for he arranged mortgages to the London and Middlesex Bank in November 1801 (HALS 102M86/99) and in May 1808 to the Reverend George Whittaker (HALS 102M86/103), headmaster of the Free Grammar School in Southampton, fellow member of St Lawrence's congregation and several of whose numerous educational works were printed and published by Thomas Skelton. In September 1812, this control became complete as Mabella, now a widow, surrendered her life interest in the estate to Thomas for an annuity of £44 during her natural life. She died in Andover in 1817. Thomas remortgaged the estate for £950 to the Southampton bankers Clement Hilgrave and George Atherley in March 1816 (HALS 102M86/106).

Thomas Skelton moved to Southampton in the late 1770s or early 1780s. Apprenticed as a stationer to Thomas Baker (*Exeter working papers in British book trade history*: online) he served out his time as a journeyman in the employ of Thomas Ford. Skelton set up his first shop, in the High Street adjoining the Star Inn, in August 1781. This was in partnership with William Mills, a bookseller since 1779 and also a former journeyman of Ford (*Hampshire Chronicle*, 27 August 1781; John Oldfield, *Printers, booksellers and libraries in Hampshire, 1750-1800*, 1993). It was a prescient beginning to the mercurial world in which the Skelton family spent the next seventy years. Thomas Ford had succeeded to the stationery and bookselling business of John Wise in February 1779 on the latter's bankruptcy (*Hampshire Chronicle*, 8

## Southampton Local History Forum Journal

February 1779). Ford himself sought refuge in bankruptcy less than three years later (*London Gazette*, 4 August 1781): his entire stock and his copyright in the *Southampton guide* was auctioned on 30 October 1781. Skelton and Mills originally traded as booksellers, stationers and binders. They immediately acquired the Southampton agency for the *Hampshire Chronicle*, formerly printed in the town but now printed by John Wilkes in Winchester. It was an important commission, especially as any of the books or medicines advertised in the paper could be purchased through them. The partnership also acted, from its beginning, as sub-agents to the Royal Exchange Fire Office, responsible for insuring houses and buildings, household furniture, wearing apparel, stock in trade and standing arable crops. In 1782/3 the business was insured at Royal Exchange for £400. The partnership was formally dissolved on 21 May 1784, although they had ceased joint trading the previous July. The break-up was by mutual consent.

Thomas Skelton continued as sole trader until his death in March 1816. He retained the lucrative agencies for the *Hampshire Chronicle* and the Royal Exchange Assurance. By 1786/7 his business insurance at the Royal Exchange had risen to £1350. In February 1790 he was promoted agent and receiver in Southampton and neighbourhood for assuring losses caused by fire. Skelton profitted from the lottery mania, holding agencies for Hornby and Co, Hazard, Burne and Co and the Irish State Lottery. He discounted tickets by charging London rather than provincial prices. In 1803 one of his tickets won £10,000. Patent medicines, equally a lottery for those who bought them, were a stock item, aimed, *inter alia*, at "those afflicted with venereal disease", "autumnal complaints" and more mundanely "sprains and bruises". A circulating library had been added to his empire by 1790. He published a new edition of the *Southampton guide* in 1784, printed by Linden and Cunningham as Skelton was not yet a printer. He was licenced under the Seditious Societies Act, 1799 for two printing presses, double that of his Southampton rivals (who were each licenced for one press) and on a par with the influential Winchester printer James Robbins. He printed and published his first Southampton poll book in 1794: books that reveal Skelton a consistent Tory voter. His extensive list of publications include *The complete family bible* by the Reverend Mr Ostervald of Neufchatel in Switzerland, advertised in 1797 to be completed in 110 weekly numbers. He published a novel - *The Rebel* - in 1799. Two much-prized government offices fell to Skelton, possibly in consideration of his Tory politics. He was appointed sub-distributor of stamps for Southampton in 1794, responsible for the collection of stamp duties on many legal documents and impositions: appraisements, inland bills, foreign bills of exchange, bills of sale or conveyance, bonds, indentures, legacies, leases, licences, life and fire policies, post-horse duty, probate, receipts and share transfers. Although an office of the Crown, Skelton was appointed by and responsible to the district distributor in Winchester. By 1811 Skelton was also inspector of corn returns for Southampton. This entailed the production each week of average grain prices for the port, an essential element of the Corn Laws designed to protect farmers from the importation of cheap foreign wheat. The appointment lay with local magistrates and was restricted to those not in the grain trade.

Thomas Skelton had seven children. Five came from his first marriage, at St Mary's Church in Southampton on 13 September 1782, to Mary Cartwright:

Mary Mabella	Baptized Holy Rood, 22 September 1783	Confirmed St Lawrence, 1797
Elizabeth	Baptized Holy Rood, 21 May 1785	Confirmed St Lawrence, 1802
William	Baptized St Lawrence, 24 March 1787	Confirmed St Lawrence, 1802
John	Baptized St Lawrence, 9 August 1789	Buried 6 July 1791
Harriet	Baptized ?	Buried St Lawrence, 19 August 1788

## Southampton Local History Forum Journal

Mary Skelton died, aged 45 years, in St Mary's parish on 16 April 1797. She was buried three days later in St Lawrence's Church. The *Hampshire Chronicle*, 22 April 1797 mourned "an amiable wife, an affectionate parent, and a sincere friend". A widower for just three months, Thomas married Elizabeth Batt, by licence, at St Mary's Church, Portsea on 21 July 1797. He was 40 years of age, his new wife twelve years younger. Then living in Kingston (Portsmouth), Elizabeth had been baptized at St Faith's Church, Havant on 4 December 1768. Two children were born to this second marriage:

Thomas Henry    Baptized St Lawrence, 29 April 1800

Ellen Anne        Baptized St Lawrence, 8 January 1810

Thomas was churchwarden of St Lawrence in 1799, 1800 and 1801.

The marriage of Elizabeth Batt to Thomas Skelton links us to the Havant branch of the Skeltons. Elizabeth was sister-in-law to William Skelton, master of Havant grammar school, a grandson (with Thomas) of the Reverend Isaac Fletcher and next-in-line to succeed to the family estates in Leigh should Thomas die heirless. William had married her sister Mary (after the early death of his first wife Sarah *nee* Binstead) on 25 December 1786 at St Faith's Church, Havant (Elizabeth was a witness). Mary already had seven children when she became Thomas's sister-in-law in 1797. William's death in March 1803 - less than a month after the birth of their youngest child - left his family with an uncertain future. He died intestate. Administration was granted on 18 April to Mary, his widow, and Thomas, either brother and brother-in-law or cousin and brother-in-law. A reference in October 1807 to "Mrs Skelton's Circulating Library" in Havant suggests that Thomas had established his sister-in-law, now with ten children under the age of sixteen - and six under the age of ten - to maintain, in the family business. Mary later moved to West Street in Fareham where, in the 1851 census aged 90 years, she is described as "formerly stationer". The business passed to her eldest son Henry Skelton (baptized Henry Burch Skelton at St Faith's, 28 December 1787). He was granted a licence under the Seditious Societies Act to operate a printing press in Havant on 10 October 1814: later operating under the imprint of the Havant Press. A directory of 1823/4 shows Henry as a printer and bookseller in West Street, agent to the Albion Fire Office and postmaster of Havant. He became the publisher of choice to Sir George Thomas Staunton, Sinologist and politician, who had purchased Leigh Park - adjoining Leigh Meads - in 1819. These included three seminal works on British relations with China, where Staunton had been on the embassy staff: *Miscellaneous notices relating to China and our commercial intercourse with that country* (1822), *Memoir of the life and family of the late Sir George Leonard Staunton, Bart* (1823) and *Notes of proceedings and occurrences during the British embassy to Peking in 1816* (1824). Skelton was also tangentially involved with the proposed *History of Hampshire* compiled by the Reverend William Bingley. Walter Butler, a Havant solicitor and steward to the Leigh estate, was one of Bingley's correspondents, providing material on south-east Hampshire. The failure of the ambitious county-wide project led Butler to publish his researches separately through the Havant Press: *Topographical account of the hundred of Bomere* (1817) and *Topographical account of Woolmer Forest, in Hampshire* (1821). Both Henry Skelton and Walter Butler are memorialized on a monumental urn placed by Sir George Staunton in the Temple in Leigh Park in 1824. They are described as "individuals of very estimable character ... endowed with a degree of genius which raised them considerably above the ordinary level of their respective professions" (Derek Gladwyn, *Leigh Park: a 19th century pleasure ground*, 1992). Henry Skelton died in Havant on 23 June 1824, aged 36 years. He was succeeded by his youngest brother Isaac (born 13 November 1800; baptized, three years after his father's death, in St Faith's Church on 20 August 1806). It was apparently a seamless transition.

Isaac printed the second volume of Staunton's *Miscellaneous notices* in 1825, followed the next year by *A topographical and historical account of Hayling Island, Hants*. He was postmaster of Havant until January 1827. The last work to bear the Havant imprint is *A poem on Leigh Park* by James King, published by Whittaker and Treacher and Co in London in 1829. The 1841 census finds Isaac, described as a printer, and his family in Tower Hamlets. In 1851, now denominated as a printer's compositor, he is in St Giles in the Fields. Isaac died in June 1861 in St Pancras.



Figure 1. Lottery advertisement. Southampton Archives D/PM Box 95/16

Thomas Skelton died at Springfield in Millbrook on 20 March 1816: according to the *Hampshire Courier* 25 March 1816 suddenly taken ill when returning in his chaise from his farm. "He was a man who had been indefatigable in business, and was highly respected for his integrity". Thomas was buried in St Mary's five days later, his age at death mysteriously and misleadingly reported in the parish registers as 72 years: incompatible with his given age of 40 in the 1797 marriage licence and the birth of a daughter in 1810. The Southampton business, at 22 High Street, was carried on by his widow Elizabeth Batt Skelton and his two eldest daughters by his first marriage: Mary Mabella and Elizabeth. They traded as E Skelton and Co, creating a prejudice amongst historians (even one so illustrious as A Temple Patterson, *A history of Southampton 1700-1914*, volume 1, 1966, page 149) that this was 'Messrs Skelton'. The female copartnership, however, fits into the strong tradition of businesswomen in the first half of the nineteenth century, exemplified in the study of retail trades in the growing spa towns of Cheltenham and Bath by Diana Russell (noted in *Local History News*, Spring 2013, page 29). An understandable if anachronistic misapprehension, however, for there was nothing overtly feminine about their trading position. They continued as agents to Royal Exchange Assurance and as lottery agents (figure 1). They continued as sub-distributors of stamps, with the younger Elizabeth - arguably the most active of the copartners - ultimately taking over the post on her own account.

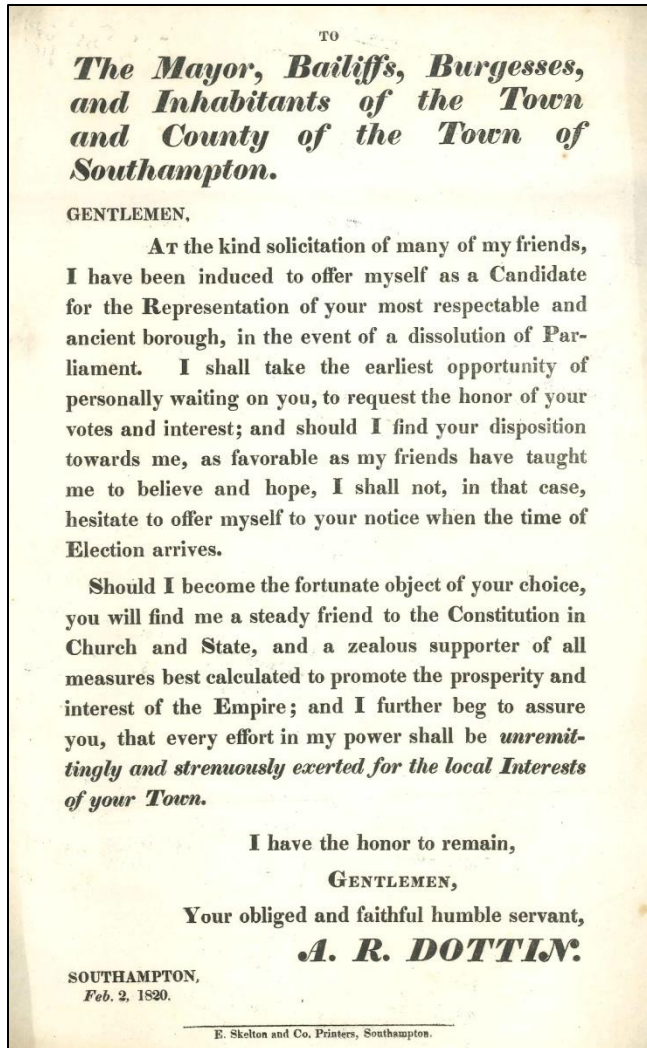


Figure 2. Election handbill for Abel Rous Dottin, 2 February 1820, printed by E Skelton and Co

They continued publication of *The Southampton guide*, specifically acknowledging in the preface to the 1823 printing "the various Gentlemen with whose assistance they have been favored in preparing the present Edition". The circulating library - containing upwards of 30,000 volumes and heavily puffed in the 1823 *Guide*- was continued, along with a reading room restricted as was custom to gentlemen only. The copartnership subscribed to the revived Southampton Races. Elizabeth and her step-daughters may have been politically unenfranchised, but they were not politically inactive. They continued to print poll books (in which they could not appear). They printed election publicity for Abel Rous Dottin, Tory candidate for the borough in 1820 (figure 2). Above all, the Skeltons were part proprietors (some believed wrongly that they were sole proprietors), publishers and printers of the *Southampton Herald*, a pro-Canning Tory newspaper first published on 28 July 1823. It was the Skeltons who introduced John Coupland, destined to become arbiter of the Tory party in Southampton for over forty years, to the town. He came from the London printshop

of William Keene, publisher of the anti-radical Sunday newspaper the *British Monitor*, where he had served his apprenticeship as a compositor. Originally a journeyman in the Skelton printing establishment, he rose to become foreman in the works and reader for the press.

The Skelton influence was extended a year after Thomas's death when his eldest son William set up as a bookseller, stationer, printer, binder and circulating library proprietor at 160 High Street. The earliest advertisement in the *Hampshire Chronicle* is dated 19 May 1817. He traded independently of his step-mother and elder sisters, although he was similarly active in the Tory cause. The relative lack of newspaper advertisements suggests that it was a smaller concern. He printed the first catalogue of the Southampton seedsman William Rogers in 1825. A potentially terminal fire on the premises in July 1823 was survived with only trivial damage. His early death in June 1828, aged 41 years after a "long affliction", left his widow Elizabeth (*nee* Etheridge, who he had married at Fawley on 29 January 1818) with two young children, Elizabeth, aged 8 years, and William, aged 3 years. She had little option but to continue the business. A touching advertisement in the *Hampshire Chronicle*, 18 August 1828 appealed to the sensibilities of the existing clientele, earnestly soliciting "a continuation of their patronage and support, by which

**SOUTHAMPTON.**  
*To Booksellers, Bookbinders, Stationers, Printers,  
 and the Public.*

**TO** be SOLD by AUCTION, by  
 Mr FRANCIS PITTIS, on the premises, at  
 No. 22, High-street, Southampton, on Monday  
 the 24th day of March, 1828, and five following  
 days.—The whole of the STOCK IN TRADE,  
 Circulating Library, Binding Materials, and House-  
 hold Furniture, late belonging to Mrs. Elizabeth  
 Skelton and Co.

*The Stock in Trade* comprises elegant bound  
 books, albums, gold borders and ornaments, mo-  
 rocco and fancy papers, drawing boards and paper  
 of various sizes and colours, silver pencil cases,  
 morocco pocket books and wallets, quills, pens,  
 wax and wafers, atlases and maps, drawings and  
 engravings, a large assortment of school books,  
 in English, Latin, French, and Italian; about 250  
 reams of paper, comprising double crown, double  
 foolscap, printing and writing demy, poets, fool-  
 scap and pot; printing and compliment cards, 1000  
 copies of New Week's Preparation, 100 copies of  
 Crossman's Introduction, 50 copies of Mant's Lec-  
 tures, 100 copies of Walkingham's Tutor's Assis-  
 tant, 50 copies of Netley Abbey, several thousand  
 copies of collects and catechisms, in quires, &c.

*The Circulating Library.*—An excellent collec-  
 tion of Works on History, Travels, Biography,  
 Theology, Poetry, and an extensive range of Novels  
 and Romances, of the most popular writers; to-  
 gether with a valuable assortment of French and  
 Italian Literature: the whole containing upwards  
 of 7000 volumes of quarto, octavo, duodecimo,  
 &c. most of them being half-bound, and in good  
 condition.

*The Binding Materials* consist of several hun-  
 dred back and corner tools, of the most fa-  
 shionable and modern patterns, a variety of rolls  
 and fillets, letters of various sizes, basket, morocco  
 and other graining plates, pressing horses, ja-  
 panned and other tins, three standing presses, with  
 iron screws, six cutting presses and ploughs, a cast  
 iron beating stand, about three feet square, with  
 every other requisite for the binding business.

The taste displayed in the selection of the tools,  
 the excellence of their workmanship (most of them  
 being cut by Timbury) and being so well known to  
 the trade in the county of Hants, precludes the  
 necessity of further comment.

*The sale will commence at 12 o'clock each day.*

The stock in trade and circulating library will  
 be sold on the first, second, and third days of sale;  
 the binding materials on the fourth; and the house-  
 hold furniture on the fifth and sixth days.

The stock in trade and circulating library may be  
 viewed on Friday and Saturday before the sale;  
 the binding materials on the mornings of the third  
 and fourth days of sale; and the household fur-  
 niture on the mornings of the fourth and fifth  
 days of sale. [805]

Catalogues may be had at the Bush Tavern,  
 Bristol; Brodie and Dowding, Salisbury; Clarke,  
 bookseller, Dorsetshire; Jacob and Johnson,  
 Winchester; Mason, bookseller, Chichester; at  
 the Hampshire Telegraph office, Portsmouth; at  
 the Herald Office, Southampton; and at the office  
 of the auctioneer, Newport, Isle of Wight.

alone she will be enabled to support herself and children". A pro-Tory handbill printed in December 1829 "To the electors of Southampton, as Friends of the British Constitution and Lovers of Liberty" suggests that she shared her husband's political sentiments.

Both concerns ended badly. The first and most spectacular collapse was that of the copartnership headed by Thomas's widow Elizabeth. The original commission of bankruptcy was dated 2 January 1826. John Coupland - who was to benefit more than most from the collapse - recorded "an unparalleled sensation in this part of the country. ... the event is spoken of with much regret and kind feeling" (*Southampton Herald*, 16 January 1826). The principal mover was Richard Davison Pritchard, partner with John Kellow in a Southampton bank which the previous month had temporarily suspended payments following the stoppage of their London agents Sir Peter Pole and Co in the financial crisis then sweeping the country. Kellow and Pritchard were owed £1867.5s.6d, an obligation partly accounted for by serious debts inherited from Thomas Skelton and from the heavy expenses (more than doubled between July 1823 and January 1826 according to Coupland) of conducting the *Herald*. Overarching even this debt was the £2724.10s.9d owed to the distributor of stamps in Winchester - the banker Edward Knapp - for stamps sold and then in hand. It is clear that Elizabeth Skelton had been applying the stamp money to underwrite the general business. If the Crown were to ask for repayment of the stamp debt - which it could do at any time - this would leave nothing for the other creditors. A second commission of bankruptcy was issued against the mesdames Skelton in July 1826 by their principal London creditor George Byrom Whittaker, son of the Reverend George Whittaker and now one of the largest wholesale booksellers in the country and a major supplier

Figure 3. Bankruptcy sale for E Skelton and Co.  
*Hampshire Chronicle* 10 March 1828

of the Skelton copartnership. Whittaker had himself recently temporarily stopped payments following over-speculation and the fraudulent machinations of one of his authors (*Oxford dictionary of national biography*).

The mesdames Skelton sought every legal avenue to salvage something out of the financial debacle. The London solicitor George Pritchard, acting for his brother Richard, wrote of their "unwarrantable falsehoods [used for] a malignant purpose" and their "gross public attack ... on my character and conduct". Attempting to profit from an anomaly in the bankruptcy laws, they persuaded their friend and financial backer Miss Jane Bowen to begin bankruptcy proceedings against them. According to Bowen's affidavit, "the Misses Skelton themselves came to her bedroom and with tears and great earnestness besought her to take the steps she afterwards did take to make them bankrupts". A procedure characterized by George Pritchard as "fraud and concert among themselves, the authors of an illegal act to serve a purpose of their own and seeking the benefits of that illegality to annul the act and serve a new and more questionable purpose afterwards" (*Southampton Herald*, 10 July 1826). This is not the world of Jane Austen.

Desperate situations demanded desperate measures. The public auction in August 1826 of the Royal Exchange assurance policy on the life of step-daughter Elizabeth raised £1000. It all came to naught. The entire effects "late belonging to Mrs Elizabeth Skelton and Co" were sold at public auction between 24 and 29 March 1828: the stock in trade and circulating library on the first three days, the binding materials on the fourth and the household furniture on the last two days (figure 3). The glittering prize of the *Southampton Herald* had long gone. At the first signs of distress, John Coupland took over as both printer and publisher, removing the whole of the printing materials and plant to 105 High Street (*Southampton Herald*, 16 January 1826).

The *Herald* was rebranded as the *Hampshire Advertiser* in September 1827.

The youngest of the three Elizabeth Skeltons fared no better. She assumed the running of her late husband's concern at 160 High Street in August 1828. It was a doomed transition. In November 1830 the whole of her stock in trade, debts and property was assigned to Pewtress, Low and Pewtress, wholesale stationers of Gracechurch Street, London, acting as trustees for her creditors in both London and Southampton. An attempt two years later to re-establish the business at 15 High Street (next door to the Crown Inn) was similarly doomed. An advertisement in the *Hampshire Advertiser*, 16 April 1832, soliciting from her former customers "a share of their patronage to enable her to support herself and family", yielded nothing.

Deliverance from irredeemable catastrophe came in the person of Thomas Henry Skelton, youngest son of Thomas Skelton by his second marriage. He was set up independently as a bookseller, stationer, binder and printer at 180 High Street, premises near the Bargate formerly occupied by the draper Henry Watts, in February 1826, a mere seven weeks after the first commission of bankruptcy against his mother and step-sisters. He operated a gentleman's subscription reading room, had weekly correspondence with the Parisian booksellers and continued the family agency of the *Southampton Herald*. More importantly he simultaneously acquired, in his own name, the sub-distributorship of stamps - appointed the day before a writ of extent was put in force to seize the bankrupts' property for the Crown. This legal stratagem to ring fence part of the family estate was challenged in a third commission of bankruptcy against the mesdames Skelton in which he was named as a copartner. A day-long trial in the Court of Exchequer (9 June 1827), centring on the Crown's connection with the sub-distributorship of stamps, validated the Skeltons' position. An advertisement in the *Hampshire Advertiser*, 17 November 1827 signified that the family had survived. T H Skelton thanked his

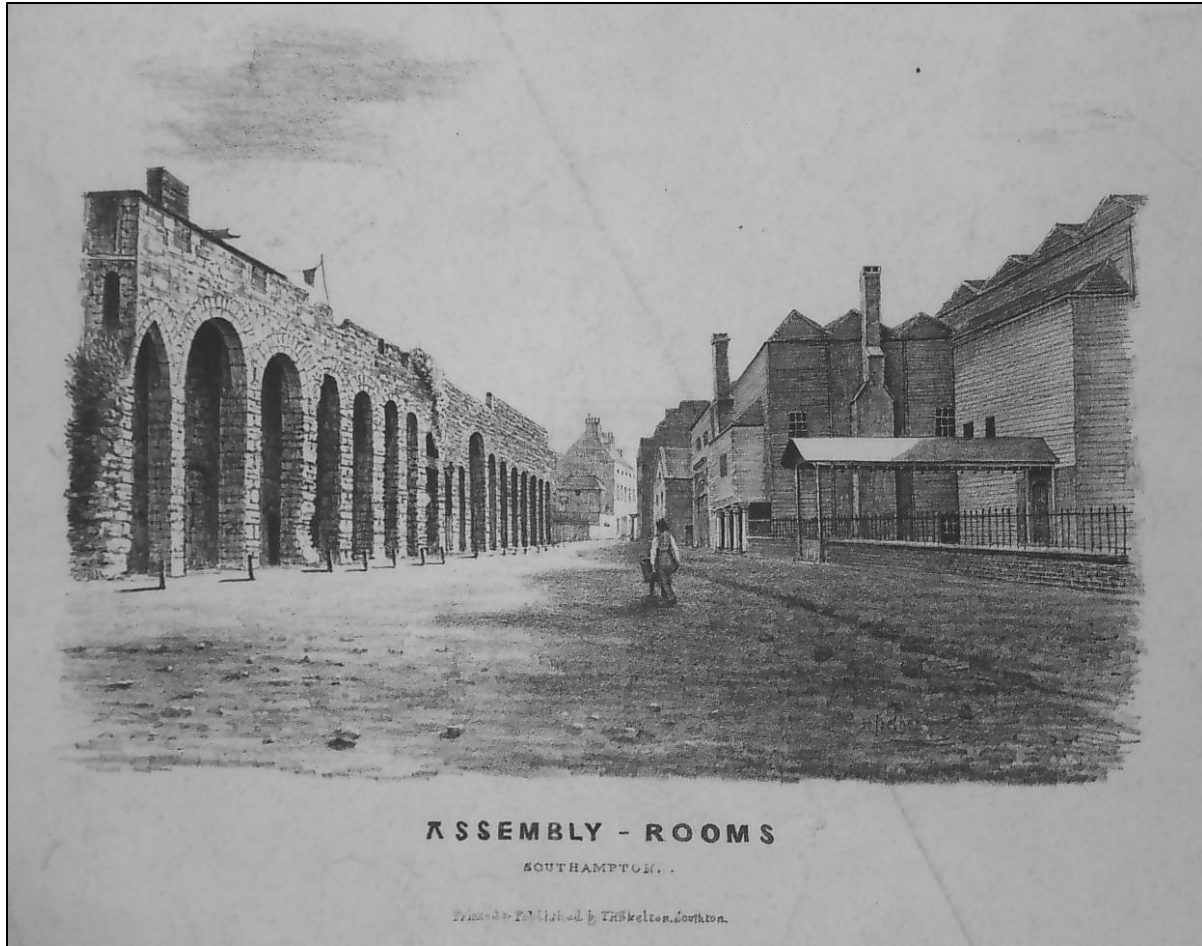


Figure 4. Assembly Rooms [1830]: Henry Pether artist; T H Skelton lithographer

numerous friends "for the kindness they evinced to him during the whole of his late unfortunate affairs, which being now fully arranged and settled, he takes this opportunity of soliciting their future favours, having re-stocked his shop with a good selection of articles". The inspectorate of corn returns was also retained. He was released from bankruptcy in November 1828. It was not, however, merely a reprise of times past. Marriage to Helen Pether, on 7 August 1829 at St Alphege's Church in Greenwich, was dynastically significant. It brought Thomas Henry into the family of the "Moonlight Pethers", landscape painters of note in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Helen was the seventh child of Abraham Pether, former vice-president of the Society of Artists, a frequent exhibitor at the Royal Academy and its precursors the incorporated Society of Artists and the Free Society of Artists and cousin of William Pether, perhaps the most renowned mezzotint engraver of the late eighteenth century. Helen was born on 6 March 1805 (privately baptized at St Michael's church the following month), the first of Abraham's children to be born in Southampton after the family had moved from Chelsea. Two of her brothers - Sebastian (born 1790) and Henry Pether (born 15 March 1800 and baptized in All Saints church on 15 March 1812) - followed their father as landscape painters specialising in moonlight scenery. It may have been this connection that led Thomas Henry - himself as was later proved an artist of considerable talent - to diversify into the art world, and particularly into lithography. An advertisement in the *Hampshire Advertiser*, 12 June 1830 listed the services he offered from 180 High Street: lithography in all its branches executed; stones and all materials



## Southampton Local History Forum Journal

furnished; oil paintings, water colour drawings and prints cleaned and repaired or bought or sold on commission; framing and varnishing for paintings, prints, *etc*; prints of Southampton, the Isle of Wight and neighbourhood constantly on sale. An 1830 trade card describes him as "lithographic draughtsman and printer". A short-lived but productive collaboration in 1830 between T H Skelton as lithographer, printer and publisher and his artist brother-in-law Henry Pether spawned arguably the finest engravings to be published of early/mid-nineteenth century Southampton. These included commercially viable prints of the Assembly Rooms [*aliter* the Long Rooms] (figure 4), the Royal Victoria Archery Grounds and Assembly Rooms, the Custom House on Town Quay (figure 5), the French Protestant Church ("Maison-Dieu"), the West Gate and St Michael's Church. It was a partnership born out of necessity. Thomas had just emerged from bankruptcy and the Pether family had yet to recover from their destitution following the death of Abraham leaving a widow and nine children dependent on public charity.



Figure 5. Custom House [1830]: Henry Pether artist; T H Skelton lithographer

T H Skelton continued to trade at 180 High Street until December 1839. It was an active time. His lithographic skills were put to the service of the Tory party. A satirical lithograph printed during the 1829 borough by-election depicts John Story Penleaze, Whig candidate for the borough, and his committee - including Martin Maddison, Joseph Lobb, the Reverend Thomas Adkins, Edward Harrison, James Sharp, William Lankester and Colonel Henderson - as animals, reptiles and birds (figure 6). It is amongst his earliest lithographic works. Following the general election six months later, a large lithographic print of the entrance to Southampton was inscribed to Abel Rous Dottin and James Barlow Hoy, successful candidates for the borough (*Hampshire*

## Southampton Local History Forum Journal

*Advertiser*, 12 June 1830). Skelton continued as inspector of corn returns, at a salary of £7 per quarter. As inspector of stamp returns he pursued John Rose, a notorious and unrepentant seller of unstamped press, through the legally questionable employment of a common informer (*True Sun*, reproduced in *The Man*, 24 November 1833). He also had the power, under an order of the commissioners of stamps in January 1832, to inspect hawker licenses and to seize and detain persons trading without one. He was agent to the *Hampshire Telegraph*, the *Saturday Magazine*, the Norwich Fire Office and Hall's Hygeian Medicines. He was in partnership with Matthew James Preston, trading as T H Skelton and Co, between September 1832 and July 1834. They printed a retrospective volume of verses by John O'Keeffe in 1834 for G Whittaker and Co, continuing a long relationship between the two commercial houses. On the dissolution of the partnership, the *London Gazette*, 18 July 1834 described Skelton and Preston as, *inter alia*, 'private teachers', suggesting that they were offering tuition in the art of engraving. Reinstatement as a sole trader prompted Skelton to clear his entire stock: "reduced prices for ready money" for bibles, prayer books, account books, drawing requisites, second-hand prints, drawings and caricatures, blotting cases, pencils, playing cards, mathematical instruments, school books and upwards of 3000 volumes of second-hand books (*Hampshire Advertiser*, 7 June 1834). A second partnership (dissolved in May 1839) with Henry Thomas Wood, dancing master of Laura Place, reveals Skelton as joint keeper of the Royal Victoria Assembly Rooms. Throughout the whole period, the name T H Skelton appears on a wide selection of local lithographs, for some of which he was both artist and engraver.

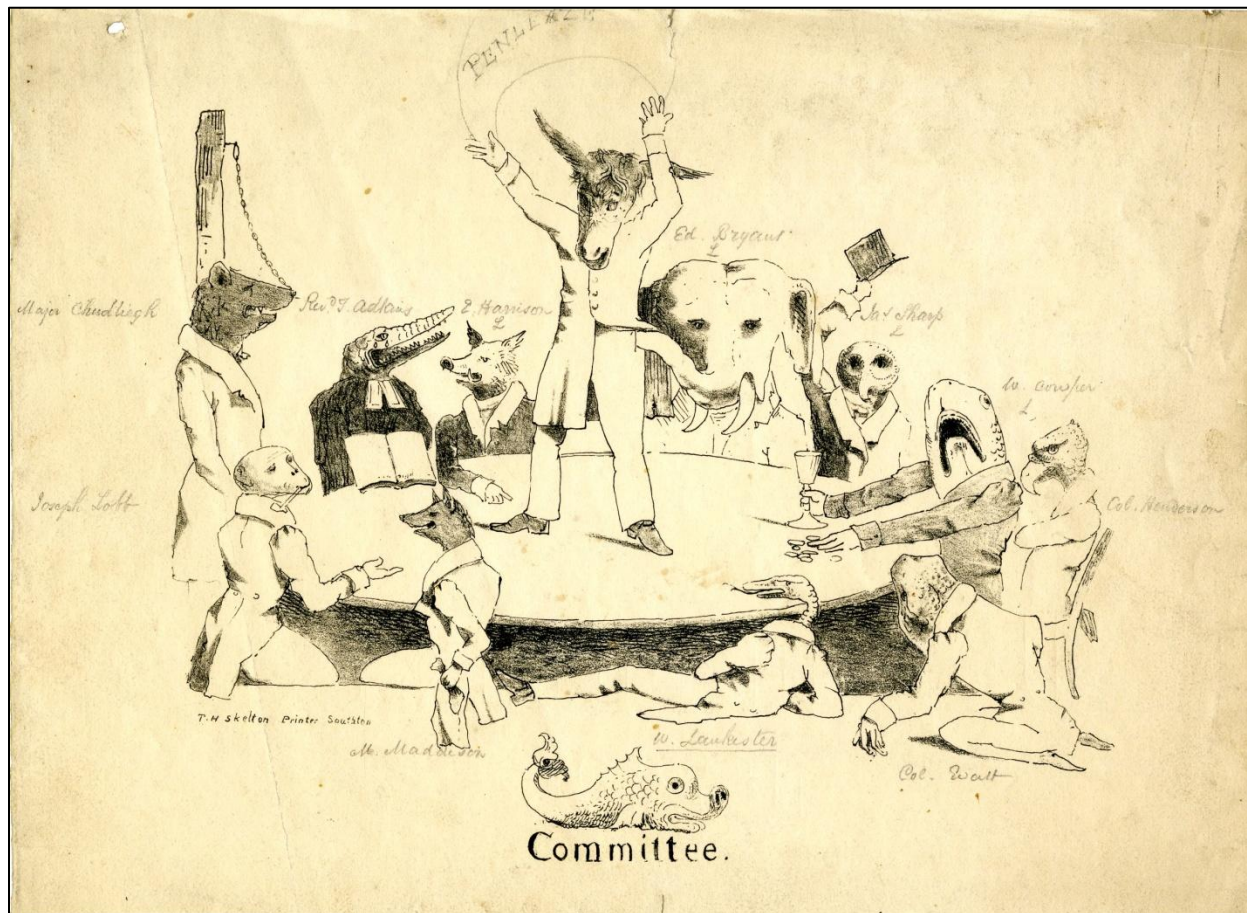


Figure 6. "Committee". Election lampoon printed by T H Skelton, 1829. British Museum 2011, 7052.1

## Southampton Local History Forum Journal

T H Skelton relocated to 48 Above Bar in December 1839, trading as bookseller, stationer, bookbinder, letter press, lithographic and copper plate printer (figure 7). It was here that his mother died in June 1841, aged 74 years. The change of location was not a success. Financial troubles deepened. Sometime between 1839 and 1843 Skelton lost the lucrative sub-distributorship of stamps, relinquished to his business competitor Isaac Fletcher. A brief partnership with James Reddish - presumably brought in to inject capital - was dissolved in July 1843. Nemesis came in 1844, a traumatic year which saw Skelton imprisoned for debt in Southampton gaol and facing a double bankruptcy. He appeared on his own petition before the Court for Relief of Insolvent Debtors in March 1844 with debts of over £600. The whole of his printing equipment - a double crown Stanhope press, an iron Albion press, three very excellent lithographic presses, 39 German [Bath] stones, sewing press, *etc* - was sold a few weeks later by order of his assignees. A sale which Skelton witnessed from his prison cell. Fearing that self-imposed insolvency was a ruse to escape the worst consequences of financial collapse, the main London creditors instituted separate proceedings in the Court of Bankruptcy in June 1844. It was a messy affair, as the two jurisdictions clashed, but Skelton was discharged from insolvency in August and from bankruptcy in December 1844. He resumed business as printer, engraver, lithographer and bookbinder - still printing Tory political literature (particularly for W J Le Feuvre) and still inspector of corn returns. The business was based in Spa Road until *c.* 1848 when it was moved to Vincent's Walk. In his private life Skelton was more itinerant, recorded in a succession of directories at Vine Cottage, Brunswick Place; Woodside Cottage, Shirley; Mill Place Cottage, Shirley and Priory House, St Denys. The 1851 census sees him at the latter residence with his wife, three children and sister-in-law Eliza Pether. He died in late 1856, his death registered at Alresford.



Figure 7. Above Bar Street, showing Skelton's shop [1843]. Drawn by G L Lee; lithographed by T H Skelton

## Southampton Local History Forum Journal

The family business was taken over by Augustus Henry Skelton, elder son of Thomas Henry and Helen Skelton, christened at All Saint's Church on 18 May 1832. He appears in the 1861 Southampton directory as "lithographic-printer &c" and in the 1861 census as "printer employing two apprentices". This, however, is the swan-song of the Skelton printing empire. A H Skelton soon quit the business. A stock broker by 1865, he was appointed clerk to Southampton Harbour Board in March 1868. There he oversaw the development of the Town Quay and the building of the new pier. An amateur archaeologist and numismatist, he was a contributor to the *Papers and proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*. He died in July 1904, probate valued at £3389.2s.6d. His younger brother Thomas Alfred (born 18 March 1832; christened at All Saint's Church on 24 April 1833) became an architect, surveyor and estate agent. The rebuilt Southampton Workhouse is his best known architectural work. He was heavily involved in land speculation at St Denys (owner of the site of St Denys Priory between 1857 and 1878, residing in Priory House), Portswood (agent for the sale of Portswood Park in 1857) and Ashurst in the New Forest. He was an enthusiastic member of the 2nd Hants Rifle Volunteer Corps, appointed ensign in 1866 and resigning as major in 1885. He became a borough magistrate in June 1892. As earlier family members he was decidedly Tory in politics, nominating a series of Conservative candidates for the borough in the 1870s and 1880s and serving as secretary of the local Conservative party. He died in March 1898, with personal effects valued at £1605. Although not directly involved in the family printing business, it is perhaps T A Skelton who is the true heir to the Skelton genius. He was a lithographer, publishing illustrations of the Platform (HALS 15M84/P3/644) and Christ Church, Highfield, with the architect John Elliot's proposed parsonage house (HALS TOP286/2/265). He was also - as his grandfather Abraham Pether and uncle Henry Pether - a man of invention. In February 1872 he was granted a patent for catoptric street lamps, in which the lenses were so arranged that those rays of light that usually ascended above the level of the lamp were directed downwards. Parts of Trafalgar Square were experimentally lit in this fashion. This consummate interest in natural lighting contrasts neatly with the devotion to natural light shown by his grandfather and uncle.

### Sources of Illustrations

- Figure 1. Lottery advertisement. Southampton Archives D/PM Box 95/16
- Figure 2. Bankruptcy sale for E Skelton and Co. *Hampshire Chronicle*, 10 March 1828
- Figure 3. Election handbill for Abel Rous Dottin, 2 February 1820, printed by E Skelton and Co. Local Studies Library, Southampton Central Library: election posters
- Figure 4. Assembly Rooms [1830]: Henry Pether artist; T H Skelton lithographer. Portcities 270
- Figure 5. Custom House [1830]: Henry Pether artist; T H Skelton lithographer. Portcities 2451
- Figure 6. "Committee". Election lampoon printed by T H Skelton, 1829. British Museum 2011, 7052.1
- Figure 7. Above Bar Street, showing Skelton's shop [1843]. Drawn by G L Lee; lithographed by T H Skelton. Portcities 1801