

Frederick Leigh: a Winchester solicitor in Southampton, 1845-86
Richard Preston

Frederick Leigh was a Winchester solicitor who moved to Southampton in 1845 at the behest of Richard Andrews to strengthen the Liberal party in the town. He became one of the foremost advocates in the Southampton courts. The family name is perpetuated in his granddaughter, the crime novelist Dorothy L [Leigh] Sayers.

The Leigh family traced its lineage back to the time of Henry III. Their base, from the sixteenth century at least, was the Isle of Wight, with property in the Yarmouth district. Frederick's father and grandfather had a combined service of over 80 years in the militia. Grandfather Barnabas enrolled as an ensign in the Isle of Wight Light Infantry Militia on its first embodiment on 28 May 1771. Promoted lieutenant and appointed (by the governor of the island) adjutant in April 1778, he resigned, crippled by gout, in December 1801. His son Leonard – Frederick Leigh's father - succeeded him as ensign in May 1788, promoted lieutenant and quartermaster in September 1794, paymaster in 1798 and adjutant in April 1802. He transferred to the North Hants Militia in May 1803, becoming lieutenant the following month and paymaster in December 1804. He was a half-pay officer from 1829 until his death on 6 April 1848, aged 74 years, holding the rank of brevet-captain. Regimental records show a fine of a bottle of wine in December 1803 for drawing his sword in the mess-room. He served with the regiment in Ireland between September 1811 and May 1813.

Promotion to paymaster in the North Hants Militia required that Leonard move to the regimental headquarters in Winchester. Here, in 1820/1, he served in the company commanded by Captain Francis Thornhill Baring, the brilliant son of one of the leading county families, destined to become Chancellor of the Exchequer (1839-41) and First Lord of the Admiralty (1849-52). We find Leigh from 1815 living in one of two properties in Frog Lane - later 3 and 4 Back Street - leased from the Master and Brethren of St Cross Hospital. The property comprised a house and garden. He was trustee of the turnpike trust between Lower St Cross, Mill Lane and Park Gate as well as a land tax commissioner. He claimed the right to a coat of arms, bequeathing in his will "two gold seals with my armorial bearings on them" to his eldest son. Behind the military facade there lay a man of some refinement. A letter from Leigh to the Colonel of the North Hants Militia, George Purefoy Jervoise MP of Herriard House (Hampshire Record Office 44M69/F10/56/10, dated 19 August 1822) discourses on the financial problems of the regimental quartermaster John Penton Goater, a Winchester friend of Leigh. These he blamed on the extravagance of Goater's daughters: "The appearance of his daughters certainly do not bespeak poverty and they assume a consequence that does not at all become them which requires a little check. If they were to put rather less on their Backs and allow the Father to put more into his Stomach it would be much more to their credit". This lightness of literary touch resonates through the following two generations of the Leigh family.

Captain Leigh and his wife Elizabeth had three sons and one daughter. The eldest son Percival (born 3 November 1813 in Haddington, Scotland, whilst Leigh's regiment was on manoeuvres) became a medical doctor, admitted after training at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London as a member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1835. He is better known as a satirist: indeed, conceived in Ireland, born in Scotland and educated in England, perhaps it was predetermined that he be a comic writer. One of the founders of *Punch*, for which he wrote until his death in 1889, he was part of the Literary Bohemia of the mid-nineteenth century that included the illustrator John Leech (a fellow student at St Bart's), Charles Dickens, Henry Mayhew, William Makepeace Thackeray and Douglas Jerrold. Further information is in the *Oxford dictionary of national biography*. Less is known of Leonard's second son, Robert Leigh, baptised in the chapel of St Cross Hospital (the parish church of St Faith's) on 15 November 1815. He is described in the 1841 census for St Cross as a land surveyor. He appears briefly in Southampton on the baptism of a son, Percival Pryce Leigh, in All Saints Church in September 1850. Frederick, the third son and subject of this essay, was baptised in the same cathedral-like chapel on 18 February 1819. He lived with his parents in the shadow of St Cross, where the family were members of the congregation, until his

departure for Southampton. Frederick obtained a sound classical education at Trafalgar House Academy, then conducted by Matthew Lush. Obituaries record that Frederick so distinguished himself as a Latin scholar that "he commanded attention from the Cathedral and Eton College authorities, who frequently engaged him when a young man to translate charters and other documents written in medieval Latin, and was frequently employed on similar congenial service in connection with Oxford University" (*Winchester Observer*, 23 January 1886). A transcript of the visitations of Magdalen College, Oxford contained in the register of Robert Horne, bishop of Winchester 1561-79, was provided by "Mr Charles Wooldridge, the Bishop's Registrar at Winchester, and his learned friend Mr Leigh" to John Rouse Bloxham for use in his register of the college published in 1857.

Frederick was articled as a solicitor to the family partnership of Charles Wooldridge the elder (1774-1840) and the younger (1799-1880). The son, a keen antiquarian, is referred to above. They were the most influential law firm in the city. As deputy - registrars to the bishop, they had a virtual monopoly of the legal work of the diocese (The office of registrar, held by Brownlow North, grandson of the bishop and appointed whilst still a boy, was a £300 *pa* sinecure). The younger Wooldridge became a town councillor in 1837, serving two terms as mayor: in 1840-1 (during which time it is said he declined a knighthood) and 1860-1. A brief biography of the younger Charles's brother – Henry Wooldridge – forms an appendix to this essay. The two families were closely connected. As stewards of St Cross Hospital, the Wooldridges were agents for the Leighs' landlord (the Earl of Guilford, master of the hospital). They were clerks to the turnpike trust of which Leonard Leigh was trustee. The younger Wooldridge was a benefactor under Leonard's will and joint executor. Wooldridge *pere et fils* and Leonard Leigh were Conservatives in politics, although in the elections of 1841 and 1847 the latter split his vote between the Tory James Bullar East and one of the Liberal candidates (Richard Budden Crowther and John Bonham Carter respectively). Frederick in contrast was a staunch Liberal throughout his adult life. After serving his term, Frederick was admitted an attorney and solicitor of Her Majesty's courts of common law and equity on 22 January 1839. Although not yet 21 years old, he set up on his own account, quickly establishing an extensive and respectable practice. He can only have benefitted from the circle of militia families which surrounded his father.

In March 1845, Frederick Leigh left Winchester for the political maelstrom that was Southampton. The fulcrum for this life-changing decision was Richard Andrews, coachbuilder and manipulator of the Liberal interest in Southampton. Andrews had built up a property portfolio, including a weekend residence, in Winchester the previous year. The potential of this young, articulate, scholarly and politically active young man for the Liberal party's cause in Southampton was clearly not lost on a man as astute as Andrews. He introduced his protégé to the Southampton public at a packed Guildhall meeting in December 1845 to memorialize the Queen to open the United Kingdom ports to foreign grain: the culmination of thirty years opposition to the Corn Laws. Leigh seconded the key resolution, moved by Andrews himself. The same year saw the marriage, on 22 March, of Frederick to Sarah Bearham, eldest daughter of the late Charles Bearham, former maltster of Winchester and churchwarden of St Peter's Church Cheesehill. She had been educated at a ladies' seminary run by Sarah Swann in Southwick. The wedding was at St Bartholomew's Church in Hyde. Giving his address as Vincent's Walk, the groom had already moved to Southampton.

Leigh practiced as a solicitor in Southampton, with an extensive clientele, for the next forty years. His first chambers were at 11 Portland Terrace. He moved in early 1850 to 3 Portland Street (figure 1). His true professional calling was as an advocate in contested cases before the local courts - the Borough Police Court (his first appearance being on 4 March 1845), the County Bench, the County Court for the recovery of small debts, the Licensing Courts and the Insolvent Debtors' Court. In later years he often stood in for the elderly John Eldridge, clerk to the Southampton bench, in advising the magistrates. Few of his confreres matched his attendance record. Within the county, he can be found before the magistrates' bench at Winchester, Romsey, Hythe, Lyndhurst, Lymington, Beaulieu, Gosport and Newport (Isle of Wight). His reputation was of the purest. He boasted that he never advised a client to enter into litigation

when there was no chance of gaining a success. To the obituarist of the *Winchester Observer*, he was "in the strictest sense of the term a poor man's lawyer, never having been known, it is said, to refuse a case because of the financial means of his would-be client". For Alderman Tucker, "there was not a more conscientious lawyer in the town, nor one who thirsted less after fees than Mr Leigh" (October 1877). A solicitor for 25 years to the Southampton Board of Guardians, he represented the Board in court in cases concerning non-payment of poor rates and the settlement of paupers (non-contentious removal cases were left to the removal officer from October 1877). It was a tradition of the Guardians' annual dinner that Leigh respond to the toast "The honest lawyer". There is some evidence that this reputation was acquired in hindsight. The *Hampshire Advertiser* complained in October 1848 of the increase in salary from £80 to £120 to the recently-elected clerk of the Southampton Poor Law Board. "We were sometime since informed that the salary, if Mr Leigh had taken the appointment, was to have been raised to £160". Politics may lie behind this allegation, for Leigh seems not to have applied for the post.



Figure 1: 2-4 Portland Street, 1941. (Portcities Southampton 2273)

This forensic talent for advocacy found its political outlet in the municipal and parliamentary revision courts, annual battles to maximise party strength in the voting registers. Leigh was retained by the Liberals in Winchester between 1841 and 1849 and in Southampton (originally as the legal agent of the Reform Protection and Registration Association) between 1846 and 1865 at least. In the late 1840's, Leigh frequently appeared before four separate courts in as many weeks. His services were exported to bolster the Liberal cause in outside constituencies: Andover in 1848, South Hampshire in the 1860s and Shaftesbury in 1873. Leigh's mastery of the arcane technicalities of the revision courts can be seen in the case of the canons of Winchester Cathedral. The canons, predominantly Tory, were enfranchised by virtue of their tied houses in the Close: houses in which they merely reserved a room, often furnished with little more than a tented bedstead and chest of drawers, for their occasional use when in the city on diocesan business. The Whigs had in every year since the passing of the Reform Act tried to manoeuvre their disenfranchisement. The canons' vulnerability was that voters in the Close, as an extra-parochial place, were listed in the contiguous parish with the smallest population. That parish, under the 1831 census, was St Lawrence. The 1841 census, taken when the Commoners of Winchester College were on vacation, relegated St Swithin to this position. The canons, however, continued to be listed in St

Lawrence. A Liberal objection in 1843 failed on the technicality that they had failed to prove that 1841 was, in law, the latest census. Subsequent publication of the official enumeration abstract provided such legal proof. The Tory revision agents failed to take this into account, allegedly owing to an oversight by the government in not supplying the town council with a copy. Leigh, however, had realized the legal significance of the publication. He obtained a copy directly from the government printers, Messrs Stockdale and Hansard in London. This he produced triumphantly - to the "acknowledged surprise" of his Tory advocate - before the Revising Barrister. The votes were rejected. A pyrrhic victory perhaps, for the votes were reinstated the following year, but an audacious ambush.

It was a natural extension that Leigh was appointed - with James Chaldecott Sharp, a fellow labourer in the revision courts - joint secretary of the County of Hants Freehold Land Society, established in February 1850 by the political allies of Richard Andrews. The original aim of the society was to strengthen the Liberal presence in the Southern division of the county. Building lots of a minimum value of 40 shillings a year, the qualification for a county vote, were created and allotted by ballot to the members. These were in the early days overwhelmingly Liberal. Quickly losing its exclusive party affiliation, the society, with Leigh playing an active role, was responsible over a period of twenty years for the creation of freehold estates in Shirley Park, Freemantle, Christchurch, Boscombe, Gurnard (Isle of Wight), Fareham and, within Southampton, Bevois Mount and the Avenue. Progenitor of this land movement was the National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association. The Southampton branch was founded in November 1849, the child of former Anti-Corn-Law-Leaguers amongst whom Frederick Leigh was prominent. Its agenda of government retrenchment and Parliamentary reform, including household suffrage and the ballot, can stand for Leigh's own political ideology.

Frederick Leigh had no political ambitions of his own. This is clear from his time as town councillor, representing his home ward of All Saints between 1851 and 1863. His first election address spoke of civic responsibility: "it is the duty of all good citizens to accept a fair share of the labours incidental to free institutions". Conventional perhaps, but in this case well founded. He sat as a Liberal, in a period of party dominance, but never used his position for personal political gain. He did not stand for council office. Only once did he nominate a fellow Liberal for office: George Degee as junior bailiff in 1854. He rarely contributed to major political debates. In none of the four elections in which he stood - 1851, 1855, 1859, 1863 - did he canvass in person. He was a technocrat, a backroom worker, an assiduous member of four workaday council committees: sanitary (continuing his work as a commissioner of waterworks before absorption of the waterworks board into the council under the Public Health Act, 1848); lease and cemetery; gaol; and Hartley bequest. His legal knowledge was of especial service to the latter committee, in which he strongly opposed litigation before the Court of Chancery. He left the council in November 1863, a victim of a Tory putsch against the four Liberals seeking re-election in All Saints. To the editor of the *Hampshire Independent*, who hoped that his reputation might save him, it was a sad loss, there being "no cleverer or more thoroughly independent and at the same time courteous and conciliatory a member to be found in the Town Council". The final shots of his farewell speech are an essay in irony:

"He would not refer to it as a party contest; for himself he had stood quietly by, and it was said that owing to that he had lost the election. He would not lay that flattering unction to his soul at all. He chose to accept the issue without canvassing them, and he said to himself that if the people had not been satisfied with him during the whole time he had served them, they would re-elect him, and if they had not been satisfied, they would not. They had not returned him, and he accepted their decision most emphatically that during the time he had served them he had not done his duty in the Council ("no, no" and "yes, yes"). He would accept it in that way, or in what way they liked; he thanked them for former favours, and begged now to take leave of the ward for ever."

Frederick maintained the family tradition of service in the militia. He enrolled as a private in the 2nd Hampshire Rifle Volunteer Corps in 1861, shortly after its formation in Southampton. Promoted lieutenant in November 1866, he served until forced to resign his commission in December 1879, aged

61, following the introduction of new age limits. He was scornful of those who joined the militia "for mere fashion sake - follow my leader, and with no desire to make themselves efficient", arguing for greater assimilation of the reserve forces into the regular army. For Leigh, the political justification of the volunteers was that they removed the necessity of a large standing army and did away with any notion of compulsory service. In January 1862, he braved fierce opposition in the town council when advocating the allocation of land in West Marlands - a "rubbishy corner" of the sacrosanct common lands - for the erection of a drill shed and armoury. The motion was heavily defeated.

Frederick Leigh fared well in Southampton. His personal estate was valued for probate at £2,009.0s.9d (gross). In January 1862 he had taken the oath to qualify as one of the pier and harbour commissioners. He owned the leasehold of professional chambers in the heart of Southampton. He purchased a sizeable property in Shirley Warren in c.1850, which became the family home for almost 35 years. Its original name - Winchester Villa - commemorates his native city. The house was renamed The Chestnuts in the mid-1870s. The link with the Andrews family was strengthened by the purchase by Arthur Andrews, soon after his father's death in 1859, of the property immediately to the south (Brook Villa). Figure 2 shows the relationship between the two properties. On appointment as sheriff in 1870, Arthur Andrews made his neighbour under-sheriff. At the time of his death in 1886, Frederick was owner of the 76-acre Upper Lee Farm at Shalfleet, near Yarmouth, in the Isle of Wight. Its sale the following year by the trustees of his estate effectively ended the Leigh connection with the island, compromised as it had been by the declared lunacy of Uncle Barnabas in 1845 (then an inmate of Laverstock Lunatic Asylum, near Salisbury), the bankruptcy of Barnabas's son (like his father a coal merchant and maltster in Yarmouth) in 1862 and a Chancery case ('Leigh v Leigh') in January 1854 over a contested will. Frederick commissioned a portrait of himself from Frederick Tatham, a sought-after water colour artist, miniaturist and disciple of William Blake. He was also, like his father, armigerous. The presence of the Leigh family in Southampton was strengthened when Frederick's mother Eliza moved to the town on the death of her husband in 1848. First occupying Tower House in Upper Prospect Place, she followed her son to Shirley in the late 1850s, taking a house in Winchester Road. Her spinster daughter Leonora (born in Winchester in January 1820) lived with her. The mother died in 1861. Leonora, described in the 1851 census as a fundholder and mortgagee of real property, died in 1865, leaving personal effects valued at "under £4,000".



Figure 2: Section of the Ordnance Survey 25" to 1 mile, sheet LXV.1, 1869

Frederick was legal adviser to two of the principal building societies in the town. These included the Southampton and South Hants Equitable Benefit Building and Investment Society, established in 1847 by a cohort of Richard Andrews's Liberal friends. He was in addition legal agent to the Loyal Fidelity Lodge of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows, a prosperous lodge which did a large business with its investment funds.

A persistent thread in Frederick's life is what his obituary in the *Southampton Times* calls an "unfailing fund of racy humour". He was for many years an occasional contributor to *Punch*. Some of his Southampton friends, according to the *Hampshire Advertiser* in June 1858, mischievously represented that Frederick, not his elder brother Percival, was the famous *Punch* writer: a deception made possible by the anonymity of contributors. His humorous speeches enlivened many a Southampton meeting. Margaret Mary Leigh - writer, novelist, Somerville don, Cornish farmer, Highland crofter, Carmelite nun and daughter of Henry Devenish Leigh - preserved family memories of her grandfather in her autobiography (*The fruit in the seed*, published in 1952): "... witty, expansive, and irritable, with a sharp tongue and clever pencil, he was born for a freer life: and could relieve the tedium of the courts only by making comic sketches of the people round him". Extempore wit rarely translates well on the printed page. The following extracts from Southampton newspapers reflect, albeit weakly, this side of Frederick's personality.

July 1863. Town council debate on terms of admission to the Hartley Institution, in opposition to the flat rate advocated by J R Stebbing. "As to the horns of a dilemma the Hartley Council saw the horns and sat in the middle of and between them".

April 1849. Defence of Henry Pond before Southampton Petty Sessions for non-payment of the St Mary's church rate. "He could not conceive that any Board of Magistrates would desire a window to be placed in a man's breast, in order that they might see his secret thoughts, for one must allow that every man must be the best judge of his own conduct and intention".

August 1867. Response to the toast "The Volunteers" at the foundation ceremony for the new dispensary. "Soldiers were called lobsters, and policemen raw lobsters, and he should call volunteers par-boiled lobsters".

February 1879. Response to the toast "The Volunteers movement" at the anniversary meeting of the Loyal Fidelity Lodge. "He was afraid he was making his last dying speech and confession, for he was a little over the age at which he was entitled to remain in it, although the authorities did not know it".

February 1862. Town council debate on W H Rogers's scheme to grub the furze in the Common - characterized by Leigh as an attempt to change the wild scenery of the Common into the appearance of a gentleman's lawn. "He could not think what the furze had done to Mr Rogers that he should have such an enmity against it".

Frederick Leigh died on 21 January 1886, aged 68, at Portland Street. He never recovered from burns received six years earlier when, taken by a sudden fit, he fell on the fire grate in his chambers. The family moved out of The Chestnuts in 1884, letting the house to the Reverend Henry S Gorman, a retired Anglican clergyman and entomologist of international reputation. He made the large garden a wildlife observatory. Frederick was survived by his wife Sarah, who died in Portland Street on 22 February 1889. Both are buried in the family vault in St James's churchyard, Shirley. They had twelve children: Leonora (born 8 January 1846; died 15 June 1854); Amy (born 7 September 1847); Mabel (baptised 15 February 1849); Jessie (baptised 21 April 1851; died 24 February 1867); Frederick (born 1 September 1852); Perceval (baptised 24 March 1856); Helen Mary (baptised 20 August 1856); Leonard (born 22 November 1857); Charles Bearham (baptised 24 November 1859); Lilian Sarah (baptised 8 September 1862); Henry Devenish (baptised 16 January 1864); and Clara Diana (baptised 29 April 1866; died 6 September 1869).

Only Henry Devenish of the five surviving sons showed any liking for books. Educated at Oundle School, he was to have a glittering if short Oxford career: scholar of New College; fellow and classics tutor, later dean and vice-president, of Corpus Christi College; and pro-proctor of the university. He died in Lucerne in May 1903, just short of his fortieth birthday. His four brothers - "with the queer centrifugal tendency of all my people" to quote Margaret Mary Leigh again - were lost to the family in the vastness of the colonies. We know that Frederick joined the merchant service (having run away to sea, according to the Margaret) and that Leonard emigrated to Minnesota in the United States.

Two of Frederick's surviving daughters also spent time overseas. Lilian Sarah, with her husband Norman Logan, emigrated to California, where she became an art teacher. Her first daughter was evocatively named Shirley. Amy, married to the Exton farmer Henry Richard Shrimpton, also moved to California, returning to England with her daughter Ivy on becoming a widow. The other two surviving daughters remained in England. Helen Mary, a vivacious and attractive woman - a writer perhaps herself under other circumstances - married a dull Oxford schoolmaster, the Reverend Henry Sayers (scholar of Winchester College, 1866-71) in August 1892. He was later to become rector of Bluntisham in Huntingdonshire. Their only daughter, Dorothy Leigh Sayers, was born in 1893 when her mother was 37 years old. This is not the place to engage with the prodigious literature on this famous and popular writer. Suffice for our purpose to say that two of her paternal aunts, elder sisters of Helen Mary, were to play a large role in her life. Mabel, remaining a spinster, helped to raise Dorothy and became a fixed part of her household until her death. Amy, on her return to England, helped to run the fostering home in Cowley to which Dorothy's illegitimate son was sent after his clandestine birth in a private nursing home in Southbourne in 1924. Amy's daughter - cousin Ivy - was a life-long confidante and friend to Dorothy.

The Leigh family has taken us on a literary odyssey from the water meadows of Winchester, through the law courts of Southampton, to the fens of eastern England.

Appendix. Henry Wooldridge (1812-1902): a brief biography

Henry Wooldridge was baptised in St Maurice's Church, Winchester on 29 January 1812. He was the eleventh of twelve children born to Winchester solicitor Charles Wooldridge and his wife Keziah (nee Weddell). His eldest brother Charles - as we have seen - was mayor of Winchester in 1840/1 and 1860/1. A brother-in-law, the Reverend John Chitty Harper, became first Anglican bishop of Christchurch and, in 1867, primate of New Zealand. Henry entered the medical profession, admitted, whilst still residing in Winchester, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons on 28 November 1834. He later moved to Botley, marrying on 25 January 1838, by licence at Hound parish church, Sarah Ann Buckland, daughter of John Buckland, yeoman, of Satchell in Hound. Two children were baptised in Botley parish church: Henry John (8 December 1838: born on 7 November) and Annie (3 March 1840). By the time of the birth of their next child, the family had moved to Southampton, originally living at 6 Anglesea Place and subsequently at 7 Moira Place and 12 Portland Street. Five children were baptised in All Saints Church: Sarah Ann (12 March 1841), Arthur (19 August 1842), Cecilia (25 September 1844), Charles Buckland (18 September 1846) and Frederick Deacon (31 January 1849: died 5 May 1849). Wooldridge was an ambitious man. He stood, unsuccessfully, for the vacant coronership of the borough in April 1846, canvassing for votes before the death of the then terminally ill coroner George Corfe. He represented the parish of All Saints on the Board of Waterworks and, for one term from April 1844, on the Board of Guardians. He was joint secretary in 1845, with Joseph Bullar, of an association of general practitioners in south Hampshire campaigning against the elitist opposition of the College of Surgeons to Sir James Graham's Medical Reform Bill. In June 1848 he led a rebellion of nineteen local doctors against the Guardians for the "miserably low salaries" paid to medical offices for attending the poor. This led to an abortive charge of conspiracy and combination filed by the chairman of the Board: an action fuelled it

was said by party feeling against the Tory Wooldridge. In a display of unity, Frederick Leigh appeared with Charles Wooldridge the younger in defence of his brother.

The Wooldridge family was in Southampton for a little over nine years. They left England on 30 August 1849 aboard the *Simlah* bound for Australia. Their first residence was in Adelaide. The death of Henry's wife in March 1850 led to the family returning briefly to England, but Henry was back in Australia in November 1851. He was followed over the next few years by his children. He married twice more, each time without issue. By 1860, Henry is in South Yarra, near Melbourne. He practised as a surgeon and medical practitioner in Australia for about 50 years. He was elected a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons on 16 December 1869. His pioneering treatment of snake bites by the injection of liquid ammonia into the vein earned him the respect of colleagues. He was elected a member of the Royal Society of Victoria in August 1860. Another side of his interests is shown by his submission in the State of Victoria of a patent for 'An improved method of constructing the bulk-heads of ships'. He died, in South Australia, on 11 July 1902, aged 90 years.

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