

# "I Had Better Be Without Him..." Rivalry, Deception and Social Status within the Poole-Newfoundland Trade

Terry McDonald

Volume 16, Number 2, Fall 2000

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds16\\_2art02](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds16_2art02)

[See table of contents](#)

---

## Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

## ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

## Cite this article

McDonald, T. (2000). "I Had Better Be Without Him..." Rivalry, Deception and Social Status within the Poole-Newfoundland Trade. *Newfoundland Studies*, 16(2), 135–150.

# “I Had Better Be Without Him...” Rivalry, Deception and Social Status within the Poole-Newfoundland Trade

TERRY McDONALD

## INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE is based upon a number of intriguing entries in the out-letter book of the Poole merchant George Garland between 1806 and 1817 that, it will be argued, are indicative of the changing nature of the social structure in England at the time. It is suggested that when George Garland wrote a number of letters to one of his agents in Newfoundland and to those of his nephews in his employ, he was inadvertently revealing his views on how social relationships should be maintained and conducted. This correspondence reveals Garland's anxieties over problems inside and outside of his business interests, especially the activities of his agents in Newfoundland. He was particularly concerned with the behaviour of his agent in Trinity, David Durell, who unlike Garland, had been born into a family long involved in the trade. The relationship between Garland and Durell can therefore be placed in the context of England's emerging class system.

Class is a particularly English concept and one which is notoriously difficult to categorise. Although primarily the concern of the sociologist, it attracted the attention of historians in the 1960s with Harold Perkin,<sup>1</sup> Peter Laslett,<sup>2</sup> and E.P.Thompson<sup>3</sup> maintaining that “class” was a product of the Industrial Revolution and that it had replaced an older system based upon “ranks and orders” and the mutual dependency of all members of society. Within this old system were merchants, a group that contemporaries found difficult to categorise. Sir Thomas Smith, a sixteenth century lawyer, saw society as having four divisions, the third being “Citizens, Burgesses and Yeomen.” Merchants would have been in this

division, for they were certainly citizens and burgesses, but they also had well established connections with the gentry as one William Harrison recognised in his *Description of England*, published in 1577. Merchants, he said, "... often change estate with gentlemen as gentlemen do with them, by mutual conversion of one into the other."<sup>4</sup> This characteristic was confirmed by Thomas Wescote in 1630 when writing about the merchants of Devonshire;

Divers of them are esquires and gentleman's younger sons, who by means of their travel and transmigration are very well qualified, apt and fit to manage great and high offices.<sup>5</sup>

Many of Poole's Newfoundland merchants, including George Garland, were well connected and would certainly have adhered to the moral obligations of the time which meant, as Perkin says, that "a man's position in society was measured by the number of 'friends' he could 'oblige'."<sup>6</sup> If a relative, or a relative of a friend or business acquaintance sought help then there was an assumed duty of obligation. To a man like Garland, there were ways of behaving that he naturally assumed others would follow, especially if they were of a similar social or professional background to himself. That Durell did not behave as Garland expected is the key point in this article.

## POOLE AND NEWFOUNDLAND

The "Borough and the County of the Town of Poole" lies in the county of Dorset, on England's Channel coast. Its most celebrated feature is its harbour which has a circumference in excess of a hundred miles though its sole entrance measures only 285 metres across. At high tide Poole Harbour resembles a huge lake and is, according to local legend, the second largest natural harbour in the world<sup>7</sup>, and although much of it is shallow it has the double high tides which are a feature of the seas around this part of the south coast, and deep water channels. It was a recognised port in the early twelfth century, and for the next few centuries the bulk of its trade was with neighbouring ports on both sides of the English Channel and into the Bay of Biscay and the Mediterranean. However, as early as the sixteenth century its ships were involved in trans-Atlantic ventures with a table for quayage rates produced in 1579 showing that "Fyshe of Newfoundland drye" were being landed in 1528. In 1583 Poole's senior bailiff was fined £30 for not attending his duties because of his "going a long voyage towards the Newfounde Land" without permission from the mayor and burgesses.<sup>8</sup>

By the eighteenth century it was one of England's major ports. It was visited in the first half of the century by Daniel Defoe. In his journey through Britain in 1722 he arrived at Poole and described the experience thus :

South ... over a sandy wild and barren country we came to Pool (sic), a considerable sea-port, and indeed the most considerable in all this part of England; for here I found some ships, some merchants, and some trades; especially here were a good number of ships fitted out every year to the Newfoundland fishing, in which the Pool men are said to have been particularly successful for many years past.<sup>9</sup>

Poole's involvement in the trade was at its peak during the Napoleonic Wars when its fleet numbered more than 350 ships and directly employed over 2,000 men.<sup>10</sup> Historians certainly accept it as a major player in the trade, with Mannion maintaining that "By 1766 Poole was the premier port in Britain for this trade"<sup>11</sup> and Perry, who is a little more circumspect, saying that "Of the many West of England ports which began to trade with Newfoundland in the late sixteenth century, Poole was for many years one of the most important."<sup>12</sup> This latter view is supported by a contemporary observer, an English seaman who kept a journal of his voyage to Newfoundland on board H.M.S. *Boston* in 1794, and who noted that "It is surprizing the great number of people who go to Newfoundland annually from Devonshire and Dorsetshire. Newton Bushell and Poole are the principal marts where people are hired for this employ."<sup>13</sup>

Poole ships sailed for Newfoundland each spring carrying the supplies and "consumer goods" needed on the island. Merchants, of course, were both instigators and practitioners in this trade but Matthews makes an important point when citing a letter from the principal of a firm to his agent in Harbour Breton. "Remember", he wrote, "We are not in Newfoundland to buy fish but to sell goods."<sup>14</sup> It was the ability of those living in Newfoundland to afford the goods brought from England that dictated the state of the trade.

The trade had long been the preserve of those individuals who had the initiative and the money to venture all in what was a decidedly risky business. Those who succeeded gave rise to family firms which came to dominate Poole's economy and politics, most notably the Spurriers, Kemps, Slades, Lesters and Garlands. This last family is central to this paper for, in the first years of the trade's decline, when the Napoleonic Wars had ended, it was forced to cope with, not only a new economic order but also, as explained above, with the changing social and business ethos caused by the industrialisation process.

## THE GARLAND AND DURELL FAMILIES

This article concentrates on the relationship between George Garland, head of the Lester-Garland Newfoundland merchant house and his agent in Trinity, David Durell. It is argued that they represent the two different strands in Poole's commercial and political life, the old and the new, although, perversely, it was the highly successful Garland, heading one of the great merchant houses and Durell's em-

ployer, who was “new.” Despite his role as agent to Garland, and therefore of perceived lesser status, David Durell was from a much older family whose members had occupied public office in Poole as early as the first half of the seventeenth century. Aaron Durell, for example, was admitted to the Corporation in 1626 on payment of a fee of 20/- and two buckets<sup>15</sup> and in 1639 he became Mayor of Poole. Three other members of the family became Burgesses during the seventeenth century, as did their descendants in the eighteenth. David Durell’s father, Robert Tito Durell paid £26 to join the Corporation in 1776.<sup>16</sup> Although never traders on a grand scale, they had long been involved in maritime trade with one Tito Durell being described as a shipwright in 1749.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the eighteenth century, though, they had begun amassing property in the town and at Lytchett Matravers, a few miles to the west. Given the nature of merchant communities in eighteenth century England there would certainly have been some form of acquaintanceship or even friendship between them. An entry in Benjamin Lester’s brother Isaac’s diary dated for August 1770 reveals something of the relationship between the two families, for on several occasions he refers to going to “Litchet” in his own “Shaise” and, on the 29th of the month, he notes that “David Durell made an Entertainment to Day at Lower Litchet, and was made a Sham member wch pleasd ye fool.”<sup>18</sup>

David Durell was born 19 September 1773, the fourth son of Robert Tito Durell and Mary Barnes. On 11 April 1800 he was employed by Benjamin Lester as a clerk and storekeeper at Trinity, Newfoundland. Benjamin’s diary for that day says “... agreed with young Mr Dd Durell to go out to NfLand at ~60P Annum.”<sup>19</sup> According to Handcock he became assistant to John Watts Garland and took over from him as Chief Agent in 1806 when the latter was captured by the French on his way home to Poole. Durell was then about thirty years old and was living in “the big house.” He was of sufficient status to become one of Trinity’s three Justices of the Peace and was without doubt running the Lester-Garland enterprises in and around the town. His name occasionally crops up in the records of the other great Poole-Trinity family firm, the Slades. In January 1810, for example, there is an entry that says “Durell’s 3 schooners rtd. with lumber.” A year later, an entry reads “Mr Durrell (sic) had a shipp (sic) or two out this day fishing.” As David Durell was not a ship owner at this time,<sup>20</sup> it is to be assumed that these were Garland ships but that his day to day presence and his near absolute authority made his name synonymous with that of his employer.

However, he had his enemies, not least William Kelson, Slade’s agent in Trinity who discussed him in a letter to Robert Slade in 1813, saying, perhaps prophetically, that

I know the man too well, and the little scruples he has to laying deep schemes in the way of business, ever to let his officious kindness bear any weight with me.<sup>21</sup>

As stated above, the focus of this article is upon David Durell and George Garland but the latter, as intimated in the opening paragraph, had become part of a family with well established Newfoundland connections. He was thus the first person with that surname to be involved in the Newfoundland trade and it came about almost by accident. George Garland was born in 1753 and was “the son of a substantial yeoman farmer”<sup>22</sup> of East Chaldon, near Lulworth. Apparently, as a child he had played with the children of one of Dorset’s more prestigious families, the Welds of Lulworth Castle.<sup>23</sup> This, it is suggested, reveals that George was developing a familiarity with “gentility” even before he became a successful Newfoundland trader. With his elder brother, he moved to Poole and established a corn trading business but he made a prudent decision in 1779 when he married Amy, the daughter of one of the town’s most prominent Newfoundland traders, Benjamin Lester. In so doing he became the “heir apparent” to a lucrative and long-established business.

Handcock describes Benjamin Lester as “Trinity’s most prominent and influential personality” having, with his brother Isaac, established a firm that, during his lifetime, owned “over 60 ocean going-vessels and employed no fewer than 110 sea-captains.”<sup>24</sup> They owned extensive properties on both sides of the Atlantic and Benjamin was, by any standard, an extremely wealthy man. Towards the end of the century, he had risen, as Handcock put it, “to great heights in the political and economic affairs of his native Poole.”<sup>25</sup> He was elected as one of Poole’s two MPs between 1790 and 1796, a significant honour because, before 1832, only those wealthy enough to become members of the town’s Corporation could vote. On leaving parliament, he was appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Dorset, a post he held until his death in 1802.

Lester’s son-in-law, George Garland, was clearly an excellent businessman but he was also conscious of his new status as *de facto* head of one of the town’s great merchant families. He, too, involved himself heavily in municipal affairs, and like his father-in-law, became one of its MPs in 1801, replacing a “county” name, and was a generous benefactor to the town, unlike the Lesters’ great rivals, the Slades.<sup>26</sup> He eventually became High Sheriff for Dorset and bought himself an estate, albeit not a large one at first, but replaced it with a more substantial one five years later. At the time of his death in 1825, George Garland was clearly a well respected gentleman in most senses of the term and this shows in the “out-letter” books of his correspondence between 1797 and 1826.

## GARLAND’S CORRESPONDENCE

Amongst the correspondence in Garland’s out-letter books are several written to David Durell, who had just become his Chief Agent, and one of the earliest is dated April 1806. In it, referring to Durell buying oil, sealskins or fur, he said that “it will

greatly help you to have power to draw bills somewhere” and gives him the authority “to purchase such surplus for my account if it can be got at reasonable prices.” Two years later, in 1808, Garland wrote to one of his business partners in London, George Richard Robinson,<sup>27</sup> and discussed the staffing of their new “House”, Hart, Garland and Robinson. He suggested that

If you should go to St John’s it would give me particular pleasure if you would keep George with you the winter and perhaps occasionally in the Summer to instruct him in the trade of the Island at least till John Garland returns for tho’ I have a good opinion of D. Durell and perfectly approve of his conduct in the Trade, I know there generally exists in Nfld a certain jealousy in the minds of the Agents against the presence of principals....<sup>28</sup>

In these extracts Garland is revealing an awareness of the autonomy and power of his main agent in Trinity but, unlike his father-in-law, Garland never visited the island so trustworthy and reliable staff were vital to him. Hancock points out that the Newfoundland outports were, in effect, “frontier communities” which “lacked institutional restraints and controls.”<sup>29</sup> This was, of course, true of much of the British Empire, in that attempts to replicate the “mother country’s” social structure failed, either through the political resistance of settlers or the sheer amount of land available to them in places such as Upper Canada. This was not such an issue in Newfoundland, but it, too, lacked an established “aristocracy” and “gentry” in the English sense of those terms and it was inevitably the merchants and their staffs who assumed responsibility for the running of the community. As Cadigan says, “By 1783 the fishery was primarily Newfoundland-based” and there was “... increasing residency of West Country merchants or their agents...”<sup>30</sup> Whilst not arguing a case for geo-social determinism, the harsher climate and difficult communications clearly created a working and living environment that affected social attitudes and gave both power and authority to those with economic rather than social strength.

Garland, never having experienced conditions in Newfoundland, social or physical, wrote again to Durell on 27 July 1810, praising him and assuring him that he had his full trust

I am perfectly content with the manner and the zeal with which you have conducted my business interests in whatever circumstances arise the current year and may arise which I cannot foresee ...

He went on, though, to communicate on a more confidential matter, saying

I come now to what more immediately relates to yourself and I have in the foregoing endeavoured to place that full and fair confidence in you which I believe you want

and which you have placed in me as to your future views and expectations. I know but too well, many perhaps most agents do under the trade of their Employers, particularly if like mine, a large one, carry on small trades, extremely beneficial to themselves and of course proportionately disadvantageous to their principal. This it may be conceded, or managed, so as to prevent discovery or proof of loss; it would be false in me to say I have never heard anything of this of you but I must solemnly declare, I never gave ear to it for a moment or put pen to paper to anyone on the subject. If you believe me in this you must of course believe, I have done you no injustice on the subject.

Garland then went on to assure Durell that a claim he had made on the estate of Benjamin Lester and Co., would eventually come good once Chancery had done with it and that in the meantime, he would "make you a salary of £300 a year, from the 21st October last." In an almost oblique reference to the dubious practices of some agents that he had previously mentioned, based upon Durell's suggestion that he be paid in fish to the value of £200, Garland said

I confess I do not exactly like your shipping in fish the amount of your late salary £200 not because I think it would be worse for me, or better for you, ... even if I gave you the freight and added insurance would not net you £100 profit on £200 unless to obtain the £200 worth of fish you imported from this country or abroad, goods to pay for it, and this is what I do not understand from your letter or could agree to, because it is exactly the thing you have so justly reprobated in former agents.

He concluded

I hope what I have said will make you perfectly satisfied and at least for the present give up the idea of coming home — should you be captured the consequences for both of us would be disastrous.

This letter is an important one in many ways for it reveals how heavily Garland relied on Durell, for who else could he put in place at short notice? It also reveals Garland's awareness of the way in which agents could deceive their employers and, given the events of 1816-17 when Durell's duplicity was revealed, is almost a case of "protesting too much." Was this a warning to Durell that, whilst Garland had no evidence to make him doubt his honesty, he should nevertheless behave himself, and was he letting the Poole-Newfoundland community know his thoughts on the subject? Out-letter books, by definition, are not private to the writer and, as Ditz notes, seemingly private correspondence would quickly enter the public domain and was in reality a mechanism for disseminating information or for warning rivals and enemies that their activities were both known and unacceptable. Letters, Ditz says, when writing about merchants in late eighteenth century Philadelphia



had a critical place in the system of oral and written communication in port cities. Their contents rapidly circulated in Philadelphia's coffee-houses and taverns and along the wharves, and they sometimes appeared, summarized or verbatim in newspapers and pamphlets.<sup>31</sup>

Despite his reliance on Durell, Garland clearly had plans to involve his sons and nephews when the time was right, although he was brutally honest about one of his sons, telling George Robinson in 1808 that in the new London "house" he

... should certainly be happy to have one of my family associated but at present you know I have none but Frank and certainly he is only fit for the Counting House and to take care nothing is lost ...

For those with more talent and who were to work in Newfoundland, Garland makes sure they realise that it is Durell who is in charge there.

I have written to James Garland<sup>32</sup> to come round to Trinity at fall of the year to request you to keep him there as second to you in case you go to St John's.

Yet Garland always had his nagging doubts about Durell and in April 1814 decided to see if he could discover anything untoward going on. He wrote to a master of one of his vessels, Capt. Mark Seager, saying

As you will probably spend a month or two at Trinity this summer, I wish you would do me the favour to enquire and make your observations in a letter as to the state of my trade there and its management with respect to the clerks, sailmakers, carpenters etc ... these are things Mr Durell does not much enter ... (?) ... in his letters. Indeed I know he has full employment and generally speaking I am perfectly content with his management, but I know that in Mr Lester's time and ever since there have been lying (?) in the trade a great number of old ... (?) ... and families [who] can have no further claim on me than other servants have.... I shall most likely make some new arrangements. I therefore trouble you with this to make your general and particular observations which you may rely on I shall make no improper use of nor suffer it to be known on no one but myself ...

There is no extant letter to Durell at this time. However, in April 1816, Garland wrote to another of his nephews, John Watts Garland, at Lisbon<sup>33</sup> and informed him of a surprising development

Having Durell now home, I am determined if he seconds me as he seems well dispos'd to do, to begin the reformation of this for the present year may cramp my trade in extent of quantity of fish exported, no matter.

With the coming of peace, Durell had finally come home and seemed to want to be Garland's deputy. "If this is to be," said Garland, "I intend making changes in Newfoundland." A month later he wrote to Durell, "then in Poole, bound for Trinity" and in a very long letter stated how he saw their future relationship.

The conversations we have frequently had and the observations you have been enabled to make here on the general state of the trade I believe put us fully in possession of the present and probable future state of the trade for a year or two, but I think it not ( ... ?) to state in writing. The leading alterations and arrangements we have agreed on. As it will when agreed to, lead each of us on a reformance (?) ... to recollect it correctly and act accordingly.

At this point then, Garland is convinced that Durell is still a loyal employee and perhaps even a colleague. As he went on to say

I have with pleasure agreed to augment your salary from three to £400 a year from October 20 on conditions of your declaring (deceasing?) directly and indirectly; all private trade hereafter at the end of the present year you will draw for your late salary £300 without any deduction for loss on your coming home and will turn over to my house any goods you have on your own intended for private trade in the land.... This done you will have it in your power strictly to prohibit all private trade on the part of my out-agents.... I hereby not only authorise but direct you to discharge from my employ; one and all who act contrary to your orders. I have written to my nephew J.W. Garland and confirm it to you, to assure him that he also must cease to trade on his own account and he can if he wishes it write to me on the subject, I am willing to do my best for all but on this point I will be resolute because I ... (?) ... without it I must drop the trade.

In April 1816, then, Garland was still prepared to place a great amount of trust and authority in Durell and believed he was dealing with someone as straight and honest as himself and who adhered to accepted business practice. However, on 1 March 1817 he wrote to his nephew James Painter Garland in Trinity, telling him that

Your brother in Lisbon informs me he has heard Mr Durell's illness is partly feigned,<sup>34</sup> that he came home with intention to begin business himself, that the room at New Harbour is in high order and that he expects to ship off three cargoes this year. I confess I cannot believe it because he told me it would be wrong on account of his health to go out this year.

Garland then goes on to implicate others, including the "Pitman family" against whom he bears a grudge for the next few years. His problem with the Pit[t]mans is interesting and never fully explained. Handcock has a William Pittman as a

“principal inhabitant” of Trinity in 1800-1801 when the census describes him as “Lester’s sailmaker, formerly a ship’s captain, privately a school teacher.” As to Durell, he told his nephew to

be on your guard and on the lookout to see that we are not ...?..should the report suspecting Mr Durell be true, which however I cannot yet believe. I heard formerly that he and Mr Robert Slade were likely to be connected in business; and shall even now think that more likely than any other; however it must be known from here, or with you if there be any truth in the report.

Such is Garland’s faith in his long serving agent that he then tells his nephew of Durell’s recommendation for the “second” and his ideas about the “Bonavista business.” Two weeks later Garland wrote again, telling James Painter Garland that

I have heard that Mr Durell certainly keeps a retail store at New Harbour, with Mr Newhook and that there were current reports at Trinity that he intended to trade, and I find by the Custom House last year, that there were shipped in his brother’s name several barrels of goods, *Liberty*, also goods off the *George* and *Maria* to value around many hundreds of pounds. As this must have been after he agreed with me not to trade separately, and for which I added to his salary, it appears he did it to blind me ...

Then, with an eye to the continued running of his business, Garland asks

I beg you also to let me know whether with a good second under you; conduct my business for me, for if Mr Durell has been so fly I had better be without him.

Yet he still had doubts about Durell’s motives and said

I am convinced and have long been so that Mr Durell’s connection with Mr Pitman and that family has induced him to do things which he otherwise may not, and that he has encouraged others to do the same for a master could not check them ...

In a post-script dated 24 March he added

I have heard Mr Durell has agreed with Mr Newhook at £100 per year for five years as my agent let me know if it be so or not and from what time the agreement is.

Two days later he wrote again, and was at last convinced.

I have just discovered that Mr Durell has entered for Newfoundland as for his father’s vessel *Liberty* ... to Trinity about £200 assorted goods for the fishery. Pray now find out if possible to whom it goes and let me know if he traded, or who for him last year,

if any clerk, under-agent, or planter, captain or servant receive goods from him or sells any on his account ... I am determined to end it with everyone and with your help, which I depend upon, I am sure I can do it without any injury to my trade ... I think he has done wrong and I will not put up with it ...

Garland's anger towards the Pittman family, for whatever the reason, manifested itself in a letter written to James on 2 April. In it he told his nephew that

I have just heard that George Pitman is going out passenger in the *Liberty* to Trinity. I beg you on no account to take him into my employ, nor suffer him to be employed there in any way or by any one under me.

There is a post-script to the letter, dated 11 April in which Garland says that he has discovered that Durell's packages being sent on the *Liberty* include a fowling piece and two or three bundles which, because they are valued at £200 must be "shop goods." He asked his nephew to "endeavour to find out for whom the goods are, whom they may go to ..."

Garland's dislike of the Pittmans is intriguing, especially as the Baptismal Records for Trinity and the Durell family bible in Poole reveal the existence of David's "natural son" John, born 5 November 1806, to 30 year old Ann Pittman, and baptised at St Paul's Anglican church in Trinity two days later.<sup>35</sup>

Among the documents in Poole Museums' Durell collection is a list of Newfoundland people who died intestate and for whom, presumably, a member of the Durell family had some involvement in sorting out their effects. It was almost certainly David Durell's nephew, also David, who performed this task. One of the names on the list is Ann Pittman, spinster, and whilst the date given is May 1871, infuriatingly the actual document is missing.<sup>36</sup> However, the death of all the others listed had always occurred some five or more years before the date of the document so it would seem that Ann died in the mid 1860s and the younger David found himself dealing with the estate of his uncle's one-time lover. The elder David Durell never married, nor did Ann Pittman. Their son, John Durell, worked as a clerk for Slade and Kelson at Carbonear between 1827 and 1829. He then went to England to join his father and he died of consumption in Poole in March 1830.

Whatever the truth of the Durell-Pittman affair (and a David Durell of Poole was writing to a Corbett Pittman of New Perlican in 1838<sup>37</sup>), Garland still maintained a respect, even affection, for Durell, or at least an element of disbelief that he had actually left his employ. In yet another long letter, dated 25 April 1817, and mentioning the appearance in Trinity of a new agent, Garland asked his nephew to say to "all that may be particularly attached or connected to Mr Durell in way ... " to "simply and pleasingly state" that

Mr Durell came home unexpectedly and Mr Garland wanted a little help in correspondence etc etc, he could not at short notice get another but I would not (say?) that Mr Durell did not intend to return himself by supposition made you are likely to get information which may otherwise be withheld and which perhaps in some instances may happen ...

Durell was undoubtedly an excellent agent and Hancock is almost certainly correct in his suggestion that

the Garland fortune was largely of the period when Durell was their chief factor in Newfoundland, the long-term success of the family must be attributed to some degree to his management.

It could be argued that Garland knew that in losing Durell his own business affairs were bound to suffer but what comes through in all this one sided correspondence is Garland's sense of hurt. Throughout his life he appears to have made a virtue of "gentlemanly conduct" and he had certainly risen above the station of his birth. His out-letter book includes letters to members of the nobility and to the Archbishop of Canterbury and one to his London partner, Mr Hart, thanking him for including one of his daughters in their "Paris party." David Durell, born a "gentleman" or, at the very least, into wealth and status was more opportunistic. They were an old family that over the years had married into other old families, although never achieving "greatness" in the way that some other old Poole families had but were an integral part of the town's upper strata. To Durell, George Garland was probably something of an interloper who had married his way into the trade and into the town's municipal affairs and was clearly establishing a new dynasty through his sons and nephews.

This may be a little unfair in that Garland had obviously become fully involved in the affairs of the town and had given much to it. Like Durell, George Garland was a "Burgess," a member of the Corporation, the self-elected and self-perpetuating gentleman's "club" that ran the town. In the 1826 general election, when only members of Poole Corporation could vote, the poll book lists just two Durells, David (who is by then described as a "Gentleman" and living at Lytchett) and his elder brother John Nickleson<sup>38</sup> Durell "of Poole, Custom House Officer." There are, however, ten Garlands listed,<sup>39</sup> suggesting that it was not just George who had "arrived." His brothers, sons<sup>40</sup> and nephews had also merited membership of the Corporation and, not surprisingly, all ten voted for George's son Benjamin Lester Lester as one of the town's two MPs.<sup>41</sup>

Four years later, in 1830 and presumably to raise money, the Corporation decided to allow each "Burgess" to nominate two new members (at a fee of £25 each) and both the Durells and Garlands took advantage of this opportunity. David Durell nominated his brother and father's namesake, the linen draper Robert Tito

Durell, and his seventeen year old nephew, also called Robert. His elder brother, the Customs Officer, John Nicholson Durell nominated another of their nephews, nineteen year old David and the ship owner Francis Edwards.<sup>42</sup> Six of the Garlands chose to nominate, bringing in twelve new members, but only three of them carried the family name. This tends to suggest that the Garland branch of the “Lester-Garlands” was now so well established within the town that it saw no need for excessive nepotism.

What happened to the two protagonists after their split in 1816? With George Garland the answer is simple. He went on trading and continued to prosper but died suddenly (in a carriage accident) in 1825. The firm continued in Newfoundland with George’s son, John Bingley Garland<sup>43</sup> at its head, but ceased trading in 1849. Their property there was leased to the firm of Robinson and Brooking.<sup>44</sup>

Whether Durell ever returned to Newfoundland is uncertain for, although George Garland’s long letter to him laying down the terms under which he would remain as the firm’s agent is addressed to him as “then in Poole, bound for Trinity,” there is nothing to show that he actually arrived there. When, in 1818 Garland wrote to his nephew about “Newhook’s wages” he says “I wrote to Mr Durell on it” and on this occasion the out-letter book includes a copy of Durell’s response. He said

In reply to yours of yesterday’s date on the subject of Mr Newhook’s salary. I agreed with him fall 1815 for £100 per annum and on which he would not remain having an offer to advantage elsewhere, but no time was mentioned the following sale he did not come to Trinity to settle his account as I expected, which you very justly observe, I think the sallary (sic) for an agent as Newhook much too high without you built ships under his direction but consideration alone induced me to make his salary £100 p.a.

The letter from Durell carries an address of “London” so the inference is that he never did go back to Trinity. Hancock maintains that Durell’s attempts at establishing his own firm met with little success and says that his name “fades from Trinity Bay records in the early 1820s” and cites as evidence a letter from William Kelson to Robert Slade dated 17 May 1820 which mentions “David Durell of Poole.”<sup>45</sup>

David Durell retired to the family’s property in Lytchett, having, in 1831, told the Corporation that he intended to “live in the country.” He was certainly already doing that in 1826 for he appears in the poll books of that year as a “gentleman” and with his residence given as “Lytchett, Dorset.” He gave one of his two votes to his former employer’s eldest son, Benjamin Lester-Lester.<sup>46</sup> In the 1850s he moved back into Poole, living in New Orchard with his nephew, David Durell, until his death in April 1870 at the age of 96. According to the *Poole and SouthWestern Herald* he was the town’s oldest inhabitant.

It was noted above that seemingly private correspondence usually entered the public domain and certainly there is much in Garland’s out-letter book to suggest

that this actually happened. He frequently adds to his letters the latest information on Durell's movements and, as has been shown, was not averse to bringing in other people (such as Capt. Seagar) to "spy" on Durell. Many in the Poole and Trinity merchant communities, especially the Slades, were almost certainly well aware of Durell's dealings and George Garland, as his comments reveal, was reluctant to believe the rumours. To Garland, Durell, a fellow Corporator and a fellow representative of a great merchant family simply would not behave in such a manner.

Although the facts of the Durell-Garland relationship and the former's double dealing are well known, little attention appears to have been given to the power and autonomy of the Poole merchants' agents in Newfoundland and their relationship with their employers.<sup>47</sup> This is particularly interesting for they flourished at a time when the old social system of "ranks and orders" was gradually giving way to a new one based upon class, with all its complexities and contradictions. If there is a common theme in novels by nineteenth century writers such as Austen, Trollope, and Thackeray it is an obsession with where people were in the social hierarchy and how they related to each other. In short, they debated the social divisions created by "class." One feature of a "class," though, is that it is both exclusive and inclusive, consisting of people who thought and acted alike and who had little time or sympathy for those they perceived as "outsiders." There was clearly a perception by Garland that he and his agent were, by family, of equal social status but it is open to question whether Durell really accepted this. The merchant-agent relationship was an intriguing one and this study has attempted to unravel some of the social subtleties that both united and divided Garland and Durell.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society*, (London, 1969).

<sup>2</sup>P. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost – Further Explored*, (Cambridge, 1965).

<sup>3</sup>E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (Harmondsworth, 1963).

<sup>4</sup>Cited in Laslett, p.47.

<sup>5</sup>G. Oliver and P. Jones (eds.) *A View of Devonshire in 1630*, by Thomas Westcote. Cited in Laslett, p.48.

<sup>6</sup>Perkin (1969), p.46.

<sup>7</sup>This, as is implied, is debatable. It would appear to depend upon definitions of harbours, at what state of the tide they are measured etc. Halifax, Nova Scotia also claims to be the second largest after Sydney, Australia. Despite the doubts, Poole's proud claim can frequently be found in record books.

<sup>8</sup>I. Andrews. "Background Briefing," a paper given in support of Mr Andrews' presentation at the "Dorset and the New World" seminar, Lyme Regis, 1998. Most of the information is from John Sydenham's 1839 work, *The History of the Town and County of Poole*.

<sup>9</sup>D. Defoe, *A Tour Through England and Wales*, (Everyman edition, 1928), p.209.

<sup>10</sup>D. Beamish *et al.*, *The Pride of Poole, 1688-1851*, (Poole, 1974), p.1. J. Hillier, *Ebb Tide at Poole*, (Poole, 1985), p.11, explains how Poole merchants capitalized on restrictions imposed on rivals in Europe and America.

<sup>11</sup>J. Mannion, "Waterford and the South of England : Spacial Patterns in Shipping Commerce, 1766-1777." *International Journal of Maritime History*, VI, 2. December 1994, pp.131-40.

<sup>12</sup>P. Perry. "The Newfoundland Trade – the Decline and Demise of the Port of Poole, 1815-1894." *American Neptune*, XXVIII: 4 (Fall 1968), p.275.

<sup>13</sup>Jean M. Murray (ed.) *The Newfoundland Journal of Aaron Thomas, 1794*, (London, 1968), p.33.

<sup>14</sup>K. Matthews, *Lectures on the History of Newfoundland*, (St John's, 1973), Lecture XXIX, pp. 263-4.

<sup>15</sup>Poole Borough Archives (PBA), PBA210, Admission of Burgesses. Before Britain adopted decimal currency in 1971 twenty shillings (one pound) was written "20/-."

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Durell Papers, Poole Museums' Collection.

<sup>18</sup>Bundle 365, Dorset County Record Office.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>There is a reference in the Garland out-letter book to "his father's ship *Liberty*" but the Durells do not appear in any of the Poole directories as "ship-owners" or "merchants."

<sup>21</sup>Kelson to Slade, 31 March 1813, cited in G. Handcock, "The Merchant Families and Entrepreneurs of Trinity in the Nineteenth Century." Unpublished research manuscript, St. John's, 1981.

<sup>22</sup>The term "yeoman" refers to one who cultivates his own land.

<sup>23</sup>D. Beamish, *et al. Mansions and Merchants of Poole and Dorset*, (Poole, 1976), p.111.

<sup>24</sup>G. Handcock. "The Poole Mercantile Community and the Growth of Trinity, 1700-1839." *Aspects* Vol.15, no.3, December 1984, pp.24-5.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>The Slades were Poole's wealthiest Newfoundland merchants and also had a base in Trinity. See Terry McDonald, "1849 — The Decisive Year for the Poole-Newfoundland Trade?," to be published by Edinburgh University's Centre of Canadian Studies as part of the proceedings of its "1849" Conference, held in May, 1999.

<sup>27</sup>George Richard Robinson was born in Wareham in 1781 and went on to become a Newfoundland merchant, ship-owner, East India proprietor, Director of the Bank of England and Chairman of Lloyds of London. He was M.P. for the city of Worcester between 1826 and 1837, and for Poole from 1847 until his death in 1850. (T.A. McDonald. "The Electoral History of Poole, 1832-1885." Unpublished M.Litt thesis for the University of Bristol, 1981, pp. 271-2.

<sup>28</sup>Out-letter book, LEG/F21, Dorset CRO. All quotations by Garland are from the out-letter books.

<sup>29</sup>G. Handcock, *The Story of Trinity*, (Trinity, NF, 1997), p.9.

<sup>30</sup>S.T. Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay — Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855*, (Toronto, 1995), p.31.



<sup>31</sup>Toby L. Ditz. "Shipwrecked; or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia." *The Journal of American History*, Vol.81, no.1, (June 1994), p.54.

<sup>32</sup>His nephew, James Painter Garland.

<sup>33</sup>Out-letter book, DLEG/F23, Dorset CRO.

<sup>34</sup>This suggests that Durell came home claiming that he was ill.

<sup>35</sup>From information supplied by descendants of the Pittman family and passed to the writer by Frank Jones, of Halifax, Nova Scotia.

<sup>36</sup>Even more infuriating is the fact that against her name on the list is "& will."

<sup>37</sup>Frank Jones of Halifax has provided the writer with copies of three letters from "David Durell" to "Corbett Pittman" but suggests both men are the nephews of the men discussed in this article.

<sup>38</sup>In the poll-book it is spelt "Nicholson" but the family records have it as "Nickleson."

<sup>39</sup>Their occupations are given variously as "merchant," "gentleman," "esquire," "Captain, R.N." and for two of them, "yeoman." These last two were living at Wareham.

<sup>40</sup>George Garland had eight sons and two daughters.

<sup>41</sup>Poll Book for the Election of Two Burgesses to Serve in Parliament, 1826. Ref s.1659, PBA.

<sup>42</sup>He was elected Collector of Quay and Harbour Dues in 1833. Cited in D. Beamish, *et al.* (1974).

<sup>43</sup>Unlike his father, he spent a considerable amount of time in Newfoundland and, in 1832, was elected as the Member for Trinity in the island's first House of Assembly.

<sup>44</sup>Handcock, *The Story of Trinity*, p.63.

<sup>45</sup>Handcock, (Research Manuscript 1981).

<sup>46</sup>Benjamin Lester Garland changed his surname to Lester in 1805, in accordance with the wishes expressed in his grandfather's will.

<sup>47</sup>Recent works that might throw some light on this include Sean T. Cadigan's *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay: Merchant-Settler Relations in Newfoundland, 1785-1855*, (Toronto, 1995) and Shannon Ryan's *Fish Out of Water: the Newfoundland Saltfish Trade, 1814-1914*. (St John's, 1986).