

The Bobbitt Family in the Levant – by Francie Kieffer [*Revised June 2019*]

For years my family has passed down a vague tradition that our ancestor John Bobbitt had worked in Turkey in the early eighteenth century and had married a Turkish lady. We knew that their son Richard (my fifth great grandfather) had been born in Smyrna on 30 July 1744 and, when he was only six or seven years old, had been sent to England to be educated – this was confirmed by his obituary in a local newspaper [1]. John Bobbitt was mentioned as Richard's father in the record of the baptism of Richard's son [2] Until recently, the only other written confirmation of the story appeared to be in the register of the English factory at Aleppo, which recorded the death and burial there of John Bobbitt himself in August 1765 [3]. However, some lucky finds have now enabled me to fill in a little more of the story, although many questions still remain.

The first find was a copy of the will of Petronella Bobbitt [4], the widow of John's brother Henry, whom she described as having been an English merchant of the city of Smyrna. The will is dated 12 December 1764 and is neatly laid out in eleven numbered clauses. In the third clause she says: "I leave to my brother-in-law Mr John Bobbitt and to his wife and their two children, and to the two Daughters of the late Mr Richard Dobbs [5] the sum of Five Hundred Piastres to be divided equally among them."

Henry Bobbitt was admitted to the Freedom of the Levant Company on 10 October 1751 [6]. Either he or his brother John may have been the "Mr Bobet", an English merchant whom Richard Pococke had met at Salonica in 1740 [7]. Records of the English factory at Smyrna show that Henry attended assemblies on 22 September, 19 October and 21 November 1757 but was not present at those on 4 January 1758 or later [8], so it looks as if he may have died at about that time. A list of members of the English nation at Smyrna in 1759 [9] includes Mrs Petronella Bobbitt, "Widow to an English Merchant, without any possessions", and also Mrs Ann Bobbitt, "Wife to an English Taylor", although no tailor is listed among the men. This Ann was almost certainly the wife of John, and it seems more likely that she was Greek or Armenian rather than Turkish, as the family tradition would have it.

Petronella's will gives some interesting details about the community in Smyrna. She refers particularly to James and Margaret Fremeaux, who had given her a diamond ring and been particularly kind to her when her husband died. She appointed as her executors her "most Intimate Friend and Protector" Daniel Fremeaux, George Boddington, the British Cancellier, and the Count [Daniel Jean] de Hochepped, the Dutch consul. She mentions that her former house had been completely burnt down in 1753 and that her present house had been entirely built at her own expense. She appears to have been in business herself because she bequeathed five hundred piastres to her head warehouseman, Jani, "for his faithful services over so many years." Also mentioned are her brother Abraham Smerachi and her late brother Pietro Smerachi and his widow. All her furniture, clothes and linen were left to her bosom friend, Mrs Francesca Series. She directed that, after the payment of her debts and the various individual bequests, the residue of her estate be distributed to the widows and orphans and all families in need – particularly to Widow Edwards (possibly the widow of Eleazar Edwards senior) and to her daughter Anna Edwards.

Further finds have included reports made in July 1757 by the Dutch consul, Daniel Alexander de Hochepped (the father of Daniel Jean) about an incident in the Seven Years' War, when England was fighting France but the Dutch Republic was officially neutral. The French at Smyrna had seized goods and cash consigned to Pietro Smerachi. The reports tell us that Pietro was the son of Dimitrachi (or Demitrachi) Smerachi, who had worked for many years for de Hochepped's parents and had become a naturalised Dutch subject, so that he and his family were under Dutch protection. It also states that the pretext given for the seizure was that Pietro lodged with his sister (obviously Petronella) who was married to an English merchant (Henry Bobbitt) and he was therefore suspected of breaking a French blockade on English goods [10].

It seems that Pietro himself wrote about the seizure to the Dutch ambassador at Constantinople [11] and a list of Dutch nationals at Smyrna on 10 October 1759 [12] included him as "Pietro Smirachi", clerk (*scrivano*), of Dutch descent, with no wife and no real estate.

Returning to Henry Bobbitt, just one month before he was admitted to the Levant Company, on 10 September 1751 he had been admitted by Redemption (i.e. by payment) to the Freedom of the City of London as a member of the Wheelwrights' Company [13]. On the record of his admission he is described as the son of John [Bobbitt], late of Bridgwater in Somerset, innholder [i.e. innkeeper], deceased. So at last I know where the Bobbitts came from.

As for Richard, it seems that he never returned to the Levant. He had been sent to a boarding school in Yorkshire where he was very unhappy. It may have been one of the infamous schools on which Dickens based his Dotheboys Hall in *David Copperfield*. Richard's father, or possibly his uncle Henry, arranged for him to move to another school and he remained in Yorkshire for the rest of his life, first as a schoolmaster and then, for fifty years, as curate of Kirk Bramwith. Most of his children emigrated to the United States, where I now live.

REFERENCES

[1] *The Sheffield Independent and Yorkshire and Derbyshire Advertiser*, Saturday 28 July 1838, p. 5.
http://levantineheritage.com/pdf/Smyrna_BMD_19th_century_British_Newspapers.pdf

[2] Register of St Mary's, Kirk Bramwith, Yorkshire: baptism of William Jefferson Bobbitt, 29 December 1793

[3] *The Pedigree Register*, vol. 3, 1913-1916, p. 217.

[4] A copy of Petronella's will, which is in Italian, is among the papers of the Fremeaux family in the Huguenot Library at University College London (Special Collections, F/ FR/ 50).

[5] Alexander Drummond, *Travels*, London, 1754, p. 114, mentions dining with Richard Dobbs and others at Smyrna in 1745.

[6] TNA: SP 105/333, p. 24.

[7] Rachel Finnegan (ed.), *Letters from abroad*, Piltown, Co. Kilkenny: Poccocke Press, 2013, p. 279.

[8] TNA: SP 105/337, pp. 1, 2, 3.

[9] TNA: SP 105/337, p. 20.

[10]] *Verzameling van geheime brieven van en aan de gezanten der Nederlandschen Republiek* [Collection of secret letters from and to diplomatic emissaries of the Dutch Republic], April 1756 – April 1762, vol. 5, The Hague, [n.d.].

[11] Meiden, G.W. van der (ed.), *Inventaris van het archief van de Legatie in Turkije, 1668-1811*, The Hague, 1974, p. 46, c.24: P. Smyrachi to Elbert de Hochepped, 1757.

[12] Nanninga, J.G. (ed.), *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Levantschen Handel* [Sources for the history of the Levant trade], part 3, 1727-1765, The Hague, 1952, p. 396.

[13] London Metropolitan Archives, COL/CHD/FR/02/0754-0-761.

SMERACHI/BOBBITT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DE HOCHIEPIED/FREMEAUX FAMILIES

NOTE: Henry Bobbitt 16995 – 1755
 Petronella Smerachi (Bobbitt) about 1700 – aft 1764
 PSB = Petronella Smerachi (Bobbitt)
 (Not all children were listed per family)

Others mentioned in the will are George Boddington (also a Co-Exec); Richard Dobbs; Jani – Warehouseman; Francesca Series; Widow Edwards, Anna Edwards

There are various spellings of some of the names

