

Dr Henry James Paine:
medical officer
of health for Cardiff 1853-1889



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Henry James Paine & his Family

It is easy to assume that all of our readers are familiar with the Heritage Trail, either from one of the guided walks or from using the self-guided booklet. But not all Friends live locally and there may be some who are not sufficiently mobile to get around the cemetery.

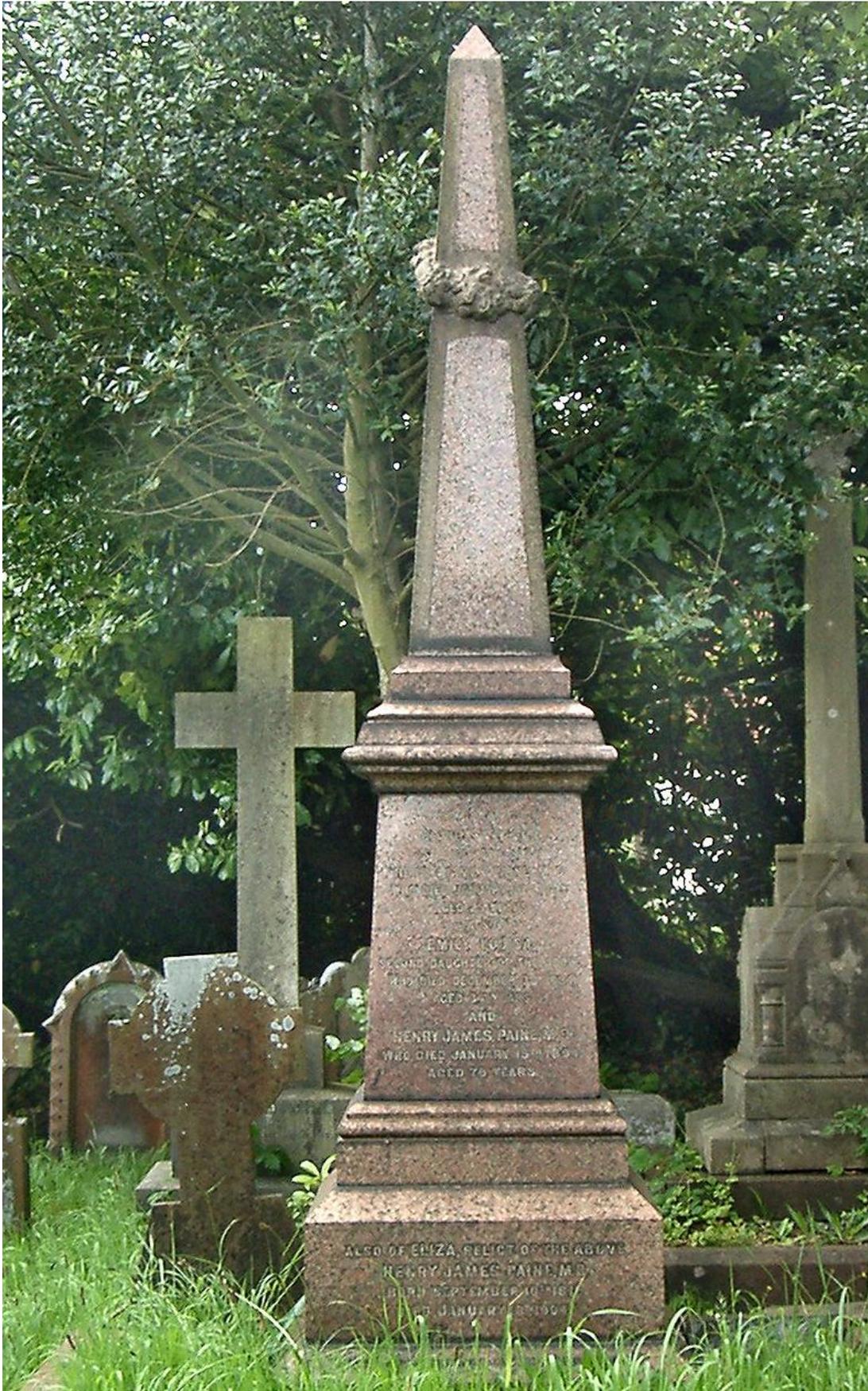
However, there is often more to the characters featured on the Heritage Trail than time on a guided walk or space in the booklet can do justice to.

Dr Henry James Paine is perhaps a good example. From the walk or the booklet, you will learn that his memorial can be seen in Section L. (If you enter this section on the higher path from the chapels, then take the grassy path which arcs around to the right, you will find the memorial just over half way round on the right.) Since this is an area that has had much attention on Friends' workdays, this obelisk is more easily seen today than it was a few years ago. You would also learn from the guide that his main achievements were in bringing much improved sanitary conditions to Cardiff and establishing the Hamadryad Hospital Ship.

The inscription on the red granite obelisk tells you that Henry James Paine died in 1894, at the age of 76 and that his relict (how many wives today would welcome this Victorian designation?), Eliza, died in 1904, aged 92. But the rest of the story is more tragic. Their first three children are buried in St John's churchyard, since their deaths pre-date the opening of Cathays Cemetery, and died at the ages of 19 days, 4 months and 2 years 7 months in the years 1848 and 1849. It is probably not irrelevant that Cardiff suffered its worst cholera epidemic in 1849. Although their other two children reached adulthood, both died relatively young and failed to outlive their parents: their second daughter, Emily Louisa, died in 1884, aged 34, while their third son, Francis Trevor died in 1878, aged 25.

In the face of such personal tragedy, it is perhaps even more commendable that Henry James Paine should have done so much for the health and well-being of the people of Cardiff during his own life time.

As if his medical role wasn't enough, Dr Paine also served as a Justice of the Peace for Cardiff, a role that was time-consuming and surprisingly diverse. As an example, he sat on the inquiry, in January 1886, into the circumstances attending the loss of the pilot cutter "Gertrude" through collision with the steamship "Eliza Hunting", in Penarth Roads, the previous month. The Court found that the "Eliza Hunting" failed to keep a proper look-out. Its master was deemed guilty of neglect and had his certificate suspended for 3 months - a seemingly mild punishment in the circumstances.



Memorial to Henry Paine and his family

Henry James Paine and the Hamadryad Hospital Ship

HMS Hamadryad was the third ship of that name: the first was a 36-gun Spanish frigate, the *Ninfa*, which was acquired as a prize after grounding near Cape Trafalgar, purchased by the Admiralty for use as an armed transport but eventually sank close to Algiers. The second was another captured Spanish frigate, the *Matilda*, which remained in active service until 1813, when she was sold for £2610.

The third Hamadryad was a 46-gun man-of-war, built at Pembroke Dock between 1819 and 1823 for £24 683, but never saw active service. It was laid up at Devonport until 1866, when orders were given for it to be broken up. Two other redundant warships had been brought to Cardiff in 1860, one to become the 'Ragged School' for homeless children, the other being used as a church for the Missions to Seamen. It has been suggested that this gave the idea of a Hospital Ship to Henry James Paine, who was the local Medical Officer of Health.

In February 1866, the Mayor of Cardiff convened a meeting to discuss an extension to the Glamorgan & Monmouth Infirmary and Dispensary to accommodate new wards for patients with infectious diseases and ill seamen. It came as a surprise to the meeting to hear that Dr Paine had already negotiated the loan of HMS Hamadryad from the Admiralty. Dr Paine believed the most suitable accommodation for seamen who were unwell was a ship.



The hospital ship moored in Cardiff -courtesy of Cardiff Central Library Local Studies Section

The scheme was not universally supported. The *Cardiff Times* feared that the plan would fail ... but urged that the "very doubtful experiment" be implemented quickly, so that it would be fairly tested to enable a decision on the extension to the Infirmary, which had been postponed, to be made as soon as possible. The paper was less than complimentary about Dr Paine's judgement and commitment to the medical needs. The *Cardiff & Merthyr Guardian* was more supportive, being particularly concerned that the diseases of the world were not dragged through the streets of the town and allow to fester in the middle of it. It also thought that there would "be more chances of an old

or young salt's cure, floating in this hollow oak, with old mess mates about him, and the Union Jack wavering o'er him, than there would be in the most perfectly fitted ward in any infirmary."

In the event, Dr Paine's proposal was accepted and, only a month after the order to break up the ship, arrangements were in place for its conversion into a seamen's hospital ship for use in the Port of Cardiff. It was fitted out at a cost of £1414 to receive between 60 and 65 inpatients, with facilities for a doctor, his medical staff, a matron and her nursing staff. On arrival in Cardiff, the ship was grounded on wasteland known as Rat Island, the area that subsequently grew into Tiger Bay.

Over 30 years, 173 000 patients from all over the world were treated on the ship. This included 1285 with fractures or dislocations, 1384 with wounds, and 2098 with chest infections. Of the 1182 fever cases, many came from the town itself. It was one of only two hospitals devoted to the free treatment of seamen of all nations, the other being the Dreadnought Seamen's Hospital, in Greenwich.



One of the hospital ship wards-courtesy of Cardiff Central Library Local Studies Section

At a meeting to discuss the best means of celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria it was suggested that a permanent seamen's hospital should be built. This was opened on 29 June 1905 and as the Royal Hamadryad Seamen's Hospital continued to provide free medical treatment for seamen until 1948, when it was incorporated into the National Health Service. On becoming redundant, the hospital ship was taken to Bideford and broken up, although the ship's bell and figurehead were preserved and kept initially in the new hospital. Today, the figurehead is one of the largest exhibits in the Cardiff Story Museum.



The ship's figurehead in the Cardiff Museum

Henry James Paine and Public Health

The growth of Cardiff in the 19C was frantic. Between 1831 and 1856, the population grew from around 6,000 to over 30,000. The docks became very busy and prosperous as trade increased, aided by new railways and improvements to the Glamorgan Canal. But there was insufficient housing, resulting in overcrowding, poverty and poor sanitation. The Glamorgan Canal also served as a source for drinking water ... and for sewage disposal! Landore Court in St Mary Street illustrates the degree of overcrowding - in 1848, there were 27 two-roomed houses accommodating 500 people. Further, in 1858, Dr Paine who was by then Medical Officer of Health for Cardiff provided a list of 222 dwellings housing 2,920 people, including one house with 26

inhabitants.

Not surprisingly, disease was common and Cardiff suffered repeated epidemics, the spread of which was also aided by the increased movement of people, which came with growing trade. In 1842, the first cholera epidemic of the century struck Cardiff, killing many people.

The 1846/7 epidemic of typhus killed nearly 200 people, while cholera returned in 1849 and 1854, killing in excess of 365 and 200 people, respectively. In 1857, 150 deaths resulted from a smallpox infection in the area around Caroline Street. The fact that a cholera outbreak in 1866 only resulted in 76 deaths was seen as a measure of the success of measures that had been taken to improve health and sanitation.

In 1847, the Rammell Inquiry stated that Cardiff had dangerously polluted water and no sanitation, while the Public Health Act of 1848 permitted the establishment of local Boards of Health and the new position of Medical Officer of Health. It was an enabling, not a compulsory, act and implementation depended on the initiative of local communities, but Cardiff was among the first in Wales to grasp the opportunity offered by the new legislation.

Shortly afterwards, Dr Paine was appointed as Medical Officer of Health. The Cardiff Waterworks Company was set up to supply wholesome drinking water from clean sources and the 1850 Cardiff Waterworks Act granted the powers to do this. By 1856, a new system of sewerage/drainage was nearing completion, at a cost of £200,000.



*Dr Paine – courtesy of Cardiff Central Library
Local Studies Section*

Perhaps more important was a better understanding of the causes of diseases and the best way to control and minimise their spread. It had been commonly thought that epidemics had been caused by smells, bad food, cold and damp or, even, the "shocking habits of the Irish"! (The Irish Potato Famine had resulted in a lot of immigrants in the years 1845 - 1852 and there was undoubtedly some anti-Irish sentiment at the time.)

Under Dr Paine, Cardiff was divided into districts and a medical officer appointed for each district. At the first sign of disease, every house would be visited once a day by a doctor. Houses were whitewashed with lime. People living near the canal were advised to move. Efforts were made to tackle the worst areas of overcrowding, which had the highest mortality rates. Flat Holm was acquired for the reception of immigrants with cholera so that the disease did not enter the town.

It was widely recognised that the improvements achieved were largely due to the efforts of Henry Paine, who was the Medical Officer of Health from 1853 to 1887. He often had to fight both medical and political opposition but, through his pioneering ideas to improve sanitation and keep Cardiff free from disease, it is estimated that he may have saved over 15,000 lives by the time of his retirement.

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