



East Lulworth

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The Garland Family

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If you have any information about The Garland Family which you would like to share, be it stories or old photographs etc., please email us at info@eastlulworth.org.uk

This page is in its infancy - more information will be added soon

GARLAND, GEORGE, merchant and jp; baptized 2 Aug. 1793 in Poole, Dorset, England, seventh son of George Garland, merchant of Poole, and Amy Lester, daughter of Benjamin Lester*; d. unmarried 20 Feb. 1833 in Stanley Green (Poole).

George Garland was eight years old when in 1802 his father inherited half of the immense Newfoundland trading estate of Benjamin Lester. Just three years later the Garland family fortunes surged upward again following the death without a male heir of Lester's only son, Sir John, who had been his other chief heir. Now the whole Lester estate in Newfoundland and most of that in England devolved to the Garland family. This swift turn of events had a great impact upon the lives and careers of George Garland Jr, his five surviving brothers, and his two sisters.

Although the ascent of the Lester family to wealth and power in the affairs of Poole and Newfoundland can be traced back several generations from Benjamin Lester, the final stages of Lester's becoming the wealthiest and most influential of the Poole-Newfoundland merchants occurred towards the end of the 18th century. By the time of his death Lester owned the largest firm in the England-Newfoundland cod trade. His Newfoundland headquarters were at Trinity, but he also owned properties distributed between Bay de Verde and Fogo Island, and held other fishing and sealing stations on the coast of Labrador. Besides Trinity, permanent trading establishments manned by agents, clerks, shopkeepers, and artisans were maintained at Scilly Cove (Winterton), Bonavista, Barrow Harbour, Greenspond, Tickle Harbour (Bellevue), and Fogo. By 1806 all of these were owned and controlled by George Garland Sr.

The initial link between the Lester and Garland families was the marriage in 1779 of George Garland, the son of a yeoman farmer of East Lulworth, Dorset, to Amy Lester. Shortly after the marriage Garland, who had already embarked upon business with his brother and uncle in Poole and Southampton, became a salaried manager in Lester's Poole counting-house. This event turned his career in a new direction. He was soon managing most of the practical aspects of Lester's Newfoundland trade, on which account he travelled extensively both in England and on the Continent, buying supplies for transatlantic shipment and selling the incoming staples of salt cod, train oil, salmon, and other products. By the time he inherited a share of the trade and became a principal partner Garland was nearly 50, and in the process of raising a large family. Indeed, in 1802 he had four sons over 20 and the youngest child was only four. His age, the ages of his family, and his election to parliament for Poole in 1801 were probably the factors that prevented Garland from ever going to Newfoundland. In conducting his trade he thus came to rely upon his nephews and increasingly, as they grew older, upon his sons.

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George Garland had an exceptional head for business and during the lucrative years of the Newfoundland trade at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, particularly between 1809 and 1815, he made substantial profits and added immensely to his estate. In 1817 he took his sons George Jr and John Bingley into partnership and two years later he was able to declare a profit of £15,000 despite a continuing post-war depression. In 1822 Garland relinquished control of the firm to his two sons but remained involved until his death three years later. He left an estate greater than that of Benjamin Lester, and the Garlands became one of the largest landed families in Dorset during the 19th century.

Like his father-in-law, Garland laid careful plans for his succession. He paid close attention to the education of his children, and took special pains to place his sons in favourable situations. The eldest, Benjamin Lester, was sent to Trinity in 1797 "to see, hear, remark, learn and endeavour to understand everything and every body concerned in Grand Father's business." In 1805, in accordance with his grandfather's will, Benjamin Lester Garland changed his surname to Lester. He was elected to the House of Commons in 1809 and, much to the chagrin of his father, preferred politics and the social life in London to the career of a Poole merchant. After he had repeatedly refused his father's offers to make him a partner, the latter grudgingly provided him with a stipend out of the profits of the Newfoundland trade. Benjamin Lester Lester held his parliamentary seat until 1835, when he retired to travel. Unmarried, he died in Paris in 1838. Garland's second and third sons were twins, Joseph Gulston and Francis Penton. The former went into the Royal Navy and became a rear-admiral, while the latter managed a Poole iron and timber trade inherited from the Lesters. All the other sons were sent abroad and established in various branches of the cod trade. Lester went to work for a marketing company in Leghorn (Italy), where he died in 1798 at the age of 15, and the youngest, Augustus Lester, was in 1820 supplied £4,000 to become a partner in a Leghorn brokerage firm with Henry Lloyd Routh, son of Richard*. The two sons who contributed most to keep the Garland name associated with the Newfoundland fishery and trade were John Bingley and George Jr.

In 1807, 16-year-old John Bingley was sent by his father to the counting-house of the London firm of Hart and Robinson [see Marmaduke Hart] to be "useful to his employers as well as himself to be instructed in a Counting House business." At about the same time 14-year-old George Jr was dispatched to Trinity to become acquainted with the fishery and trade under the direction of the firm's agent, David Durell. Durell was instructed to "treat him as your son, to keep him sober, deligent and attentive to his business . . . if possible bring him to write a good hand . . . overlook no faults." Garland carefully scrutinized reports on his son, which evidently were not always completely favourable. He was particularly disturbed that George was averse to visiting John Clinch*, the Trinity clergyman and doctor, for whom he himself had a high regard. But before he was sent to Trinity George Jr had developed certain character traits which his father felt suited him better for the Newfoundland trade than some of his other sons. He was rough, somewhat unpolished, and very aggressive; thus when Durell made some uncomplimentary reports about him, Garland noted that "he may not be the worse for the Newfoundland Trade for which I intend him."

Young Garland spent five years in Trinity under Durell's tutelage, years when the firm flourished. Several of Lester's chief competitors in Trinity – John Jeffrey, Thomas Street*, and Samuel White, for example – withdrew from the Newfoundland trade between 1797 and 1809, and although another Poole firm owned by Robert Slade (brother of Thomas*) moved into Trinity in 1804 it was not sufficiently well established to challenge the Garland firm. Thus when the price of fish soared between 1809 and 1811 Garland, who had a virtual monopoly on trade both in Trinity Bay and on the northeast coast, reaped enormous profits. The firm also began to expand into the seal fishery, using schooners built in Newfoundland, and enlarged its supply trade with the growing resident population.

In 1812 Garland established a brokerage house in Lisbon and sent his son George to work there. George remained in Lisbon for seven years and returned to Trinity with John Bingley as partners in the firm of George Garland and Sons. The Garland brothers arrived in the brig *Brothers* on 9 June 1819 and the next day George left to inspect the Greenspond and Bonavista premises. During the rest of his Newfoundland residence, he functioned primarily as an "outside agent," making frequent trips to the out-harbour establishments and to St John's. Although in theory equal to John Bingley, George was clearly subordinate to his elder brother, who ran the counting-house in Trinity. In July 1819 Governor Charles Hamilton* visited Trinity and the Garlands were appointed two of the four justices of the peace for the district.

Until 1821 the brothers returned to Poole each winter. Evidently their father felt that they needed assistance in managing the trade, for in that year he sent out William Furnell from his Poole counting-house. Furnell and George Jr constantly plagued William Kelson (Robert Slade's agent) with their aggressiveness and intrigues, so much so that he wrote in frustration, "I wish both Furnell and G. G. Jr. would remain at home." At the same time Kelson confided that he respected John Bingley and had amicable relationships with him in settling wages, prices, and other trade matters.

Most of George Garland's sons ventured into politics at some stage of their career. John Bingley was elected as the first member for Trinity Bay in the Newfoundland House of Assembly of 1832 and served as the first speaker. Apart from his appointment as magistrate, however, a position which at the time usually went to the merchant's agent, George Jr had no such involvement. He served on a committee for the building of a new church at Trinity in 1820, but here again he was vice-president and his brother president.

Following the death of George Sr in 1825, the name of the firm was changed to include the names of the two heirs. George Jr left Newfoundland for the last time on 20 Sept. 1828. He seems to have been in ill health, for which reason he withdrew from the trade two years later. Still unmarried, he went to live at Stanley Green, a country estate near Poole previously owned by Benjamin Lester but purchased in 1823 for George and his unmarried sister Maria by their father. George died at Stanley Green on 20 Feb. 1833, aged 40. A memorial tablet subsequently placed in the Trinity mortuary chapel states it had been given by "the inhabitants of Trinity . . . to be a Grateful Memorial of [George's] unostentatious munificence as a benefactor of this Church," but it was probably inscribed and paid for by his brothers.

When George Jr and John Bingley were taken into the Newfoundland trade in 1817, their father stated that their investment was £80,000, and when he relinquished control of the firm in 1822 he allowed them to share the profits after paying him an annual interest of four per cent, apparently on the amount of the investment. He retained personal title to his Newfoundland properties and ships but in his will left them in half shares to the brothers. At their father's death they shared a further £14,000 and the surplus capital in the Newfoundland trade; moreover, each received a country estate and numerous other assets.

As entrepreneurs, neither George Jr nor John Bingley exhibited the drive, pragmatism, or acumen of their father: possibly they were so independently wealthy that they lacked sufficient motivation. Indeed, they seemed more intent upon sustaining the Newfoundland trade as long as it was somewhat profitable rather than upon attempting to expand it. Throughout the 1820s they pursued a policy of achieving efficiency through concentration and economy, a policy advocated by their father in his declining years. The Garland fleet between 1827 and 1830 consisted of ten ocean-going vessels; when he assumed sole control in 1830 John Bingley quickly reduced the number to four. But although the Garlands were content to maintain the status quo and reduce their shipping and establishments. Robert Slade strove to expand. and by 1830 his firm was on an

equal footing in Trinity Bay with theirs.

W. Gordon Handcock

ACC, Diocese of Nfld. Arch. (St John's), St Paul's Church (Trinity), reg. of baptisms, marriages, and burials (mfm. at PANL). Dorset Record Office (Dorchester, Eng.), D365; P227/RE3-18. Nfld. Museum (St John's), W. G. Handcock, "The merchant families and entrepreneurs of Trinity in the nineteenth century" (report prepared for the Nfld. Dept. of Culture, Recreation, and Youth, typescript, St John's, 1981). PANL, GN 5/1/B/1, Trinity, minutes, 1805-25; estates, 1789-1816; GN 5/4/B/1, Trinity, 1775-1811, 1826-42; P7/A/6, Slade & Kelson, letters, Trinity, 1809-26. Trinity Hist. Soc. Arch., Slade-Kelson diaries, 1809-46 (photocopies at Maritime Hist. Group Arch., Memorial Univ. of Nfld., St John's). DCB, vol.5 (biog. of Benjamin Lester). Derek Beamish et al., *Mansions and merchants of Poole, and Dorset* (Poole, Eng., 1976).