

WALKING ON WATER STREET, PART 5 THE WILL OF A FENWICK STREET MERCHANT

Graham Jones

In mid-November 1856 two young clerks sat nervously on their high stools in an office in Pemberton Buildings, no. 5 Fenwick Street. The merchant for whom they worked, Jonathan Robinson, had just died and his Will was that day being read to Jonathan's family. The young men, Peter Callender and Robert Camplin, were wondering what would become of the firm which was their livelihood.

The Will was dated 4th August 1855 and a Codicil was dated 26th September 1856. After being read to those assembled, they were then sent to be carefully copied for the purpose of obtaining probate at York and later at Canterbury (the latter being 'Extracted from the Registry of the Prerogative Court of York'). The first few lines of the Canterbury copy and of the proof for York are shown below.

This is the last Will and Testament of me Jonathan Robinson of Fairfield near Liverpool and of Pemberton Buildings Fenwick Street Liverpool in the County of Lancaster Merchant whereby I direct all my just debts funeral and testamentary expenses to be paid out of my provisional estate as soon as may be after my decease I give unto my dear Wife two hundred pounds to be paid on my decease for the immediate occasions of herself and children I give devise and bequeath unto my said dear Wife Margaret and my friends John Pattinson of Liverpool Broker Joseph Hubback of Liverpool Merchant and John Powley of Langwathby in the County of Cumberland Yeoman their heirs executors administrators and assigns according to the usual tenor respectively all my real estate at Ribblesdale in the County of Westmorland or elsewhere and all my

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(Private collection).

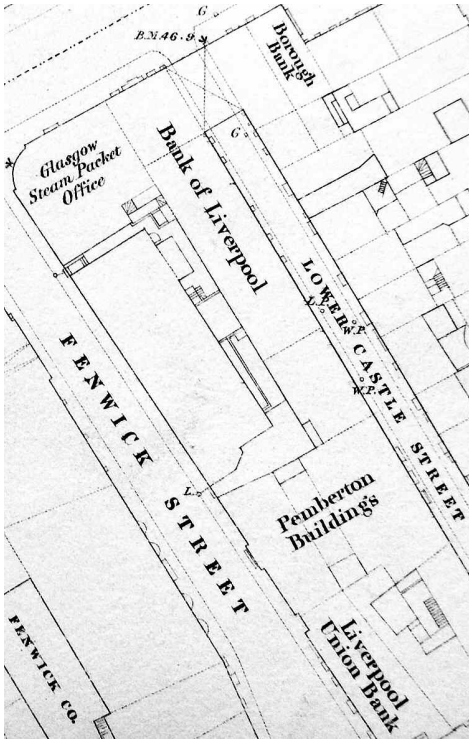
In the Name of God Amen, Proof of the Will and Codicil to the same presents annexed being admitted before the Reverend James Kayball, Clerk, by virtue of a special Commission to him in that behalf directed; **Wh,** GRANVILLE HARCOURT VERNON, Master of Arts, Commissary and Keeper General of the Exchequer and Prerogative Court of the most Reverend Father in God, THOMAS, by Divine Providence Lord Archbishop of YORK, Primate of England and Metropolitan, do approve of and register the same, and do pronounce, decree, and declare for the validity thereof, and do fully in the Lord by these Presents, commit and grant Administration of all and singular the Goods, Rights, Credits, Cattles, and Chattels of *Jonathan Robinson* late of *Fairfield near Liverpool* in the County of *Lancashire* and of *Pemberton Buildings* *Pemberton Street* in *Liverpool* aforesaid Merchant (having in his Life-time and at his Death *Bona Notabilia* in divers Dioceses or peculiar Jurisdictions within the Province of York) deceased, which were in his Life-time and at his Death within the Province of York, aforesaid, to *Margaret Robinson* widow his *Relict*, and *John Richard Pattinson* (in the Will with *John Pattinson*, and in the Codicil *John R. Pattinson*), *Joseph Hubback* and *John Powley* the Executors in the said Will named, having sworn under 20,000*l* first before the said Commissary taken the Oath according to law in that case required (saving any other Person's Right).

Given at York, under the Seal of our said Office, this *Thirteenth* Day of *December* in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and *Fifty Six*.

*Sworn under 20,000*l**
13th December 1856

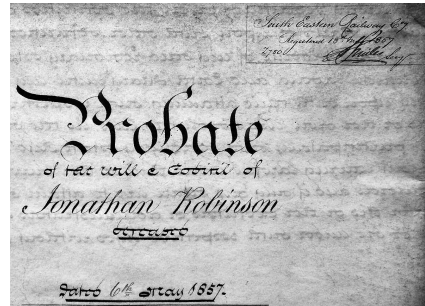
Proof of the Will at York, dated 13th December 1856.

Jonathan died on 15th November 1856 and in the Will, Jonathan's wife Margaret, along with his executors, were made guardians of his children, George Wharton, Anne Isabella and Edith Mary, until his son was 21 and his daughters were 23. The Master of a school in Cliburn was a minor beneficiary, and the Cumberland and Westmorland connections suggest that Jonathan was not a native of Liverpool but had settled in Fairfield and had prospered as a merchant in the town.



Left: A detail from the 1848 O.S. map. Image courtesy of the Athenaeum.

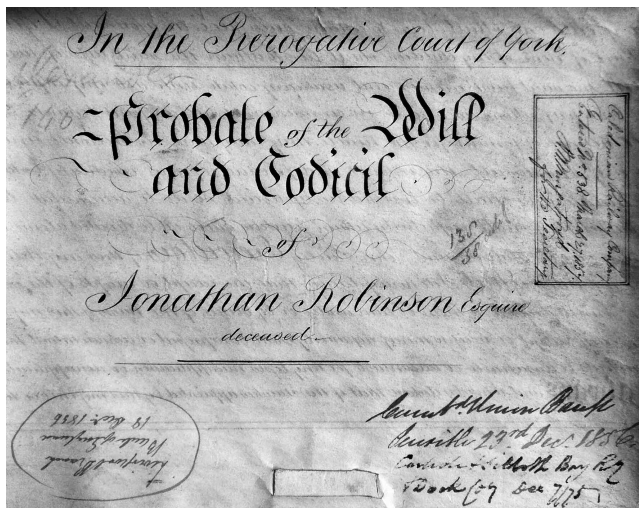
Below: From the Canterbury copy of the probate, dated 6th May 1857, showing (in the top right hand corner) that it had been registered at the South Eastern Railway Co on 18th May of that year.



One of the executors, Joseph Hubback, was listed in the 1853 Directory as a corn merchant at Talbot Chambers, 1 Fenwick Street. The detail from the 1848 O.S. map marks Pemberton Buildings and the adjacent Liverpool Union Bank, whilst the building shown as the Glasgow Steam Packet Office had become Talbot Chambers by 1853 (Water Street runs across the top left hand corner).

After being proved the copies were sent to the offices of a number of banks and railway companies for registering the trustees of Jonathan's estate. This was the age of rapid development of the railway system and Jonathan had not only seen fit to hold shares in these companies but, in his will, had also recommended that further purchases might be made on behalf of his family: *'...to invest the residue of my personal estate in the names or name of my Trustees or Trustee for the time being in the purchase of stock in some or one of the public funds upon Government or real*

securities at interest in England or Wales or upon Railway debentures or on the securities of any Company incorporated by Act of Parliament or in the purchase of preference or guaranteed Railway Shares...'



From the York copy of the probate showing that the details had been registered with the Caledonian Railway Co on 27th March 1857 (top right) and with a number of banks including the Liverpool Branch of the Bank of England (in Castle Street) on 18th December 1856 (bottom left).

Another part of the document shows that it had also been entered at the North Eastern Railway Co on 21st April 1857 and at the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway Co on 24th April of that year.

In the Will his wife Margaret was *'to enjoy my household goods and furniture plate linen china and other household effects during her widowhood'* and, following the sale of various parts of his personal estate, his executors were *'upon trust to pay to my said dear wife the sum of five thousand pounds twelve months after my decease or as soon after as the same can be conveniently realized with interest at five per cent from the expiration of six months after my decease until payment.'* However, subsequent advice or a change of mind prompted Jonathan to write the Codicil in which the five thousand pounds was to be invested by his trustees, with the interest, dividends and annual proceeds going to Margaret. Then, in the event of her subsequently remarrying, she was to receive £3000, with the balance of the £5000 returning to the residual estate for the benefit of the children.

Since Jonathan had a personal estate which fell within the Provinces of both York and Canterbury (the railway shares, for example), his estate had to be sworn and his Will had to be approved and registered at both. The Proof for the Province of York, dated 13th December 1856, stated that his estate had been sworn as under £20,000. However, a little bit of recounting appears to have taken place for, on the reverse of the document, has been written, *'The effects have since been sworn under thirty five thousand pounds'* (several million pounds today). The estate within the Province of Canterbury was declared as under £2000.

So what was the outcome for the clerks, as they waited upon their uncertain future? The Will instructed Jonathan's trustees *'either to carry out my present Business and Mercantile affairs during such period as they may think proper with the aid and*

assistance of my Clerks Peter Callender and Robert Camplin my nephew with whom my Trustees are empowered to make such arrangements as they may think proper either as principals or assistants... or at their discretion with all convenient speed after my decease sell and absolutely dispose of such parts of my said personal estate as shall be of a salable character..'

History shows that the trustees did indeed arrange for the firm to continue at Pemberton Buildings, thus enabling Peter and Robert each proudly to enter themselves in subsequent directories as *'merchant (Jonathan Robinson & Co).'*

Robert stayed with the firm for a further 10 years before leaving it to continue to prosper in the capable hands of Peter. In 1879 the business moved briefly to Cereal Court (an office block in Brunswick Street where India Buildings now stands) before settling down from 1880 in an office on the opposite side of the street where the firm eventually became *Jonathan Robinson & Co, corn merchants, Corn Exchange Buildings, Brunswick Street.*

In 1900, perhaps sensing that his life was drawing to a close, the directory shows that Peter's two sons, Alexander and William (living with Peter at Claughton), had joined him in the firm. Then, finally, in the 1901 directory Peter's name is no longer listed and his sons are shown sharing a new home together at Hoylake.



No. 5 Fenwick Street as it exists today, with its entrance in the centre of the view. Like several of the buildings in the area, following internal conversion it now provides apartments for those who enjoy living in the city centre.

To its left is the doorway to no. 3 which provides a side entrance to the building which replaced Talbot Chambers and which for a time was a much enlarged Bank of Liverpool. Its main entrance on Water Street is currently used by 'Il Palazzo'.

The crest of the Liverpool Union Bank survives on the building to the right which is now a restaurant.