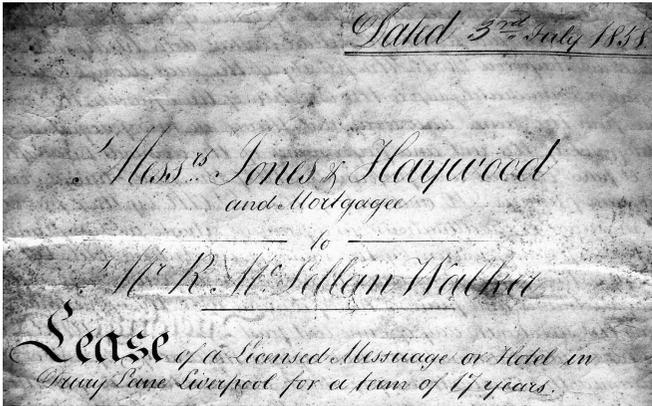


# WALKING ON WATER STREET, PART 6 THE 'MANSION HOUSE' IN DRURY LANE

Graham Jones

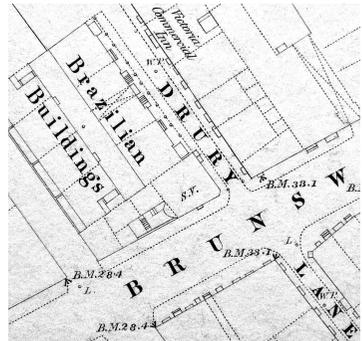


'Dated 3rd July 1858.  
Messrs Jones &  
Haywood and  
Mortgagee to Mr R  
McLellan Walker.  
Lease of a Licensed  
Message or Hotel in  
Drury Lane Liverpool  
for a term of 17 Years.'  
(Private collection)

Gore's *Liverpool Directory* for 1853 shows Robert Walker as the proprietor of an 'eating house, 9, Chapel street'. His middle name, incorrectly spelled *McCleman*, seems to have amused compositors throughout his career. During the time that subsequent directories knew of his existence they managed to have great fun by listing him as Robert *McClennan* Walker, Robert *ML* Walker, Robert *MC* Walker and Robert *McC* Walker. At least the clerk for his 1858 lease got it right (above).

In 1853 Robert moved from Chapel Street to Drury Lane having entered into a 15 year lease to run a licensed public house known at that time as the *Victoria Hotel*. It apparently had several variants of the name. The 1848 O.S. map shows it as the *Victoria Commercial Inn* (right), with John Berry first listed as a victualler at the 'Victoria Tavern, 11 Drury Lane' in Pigot & Slater's *Directory* of 1843.

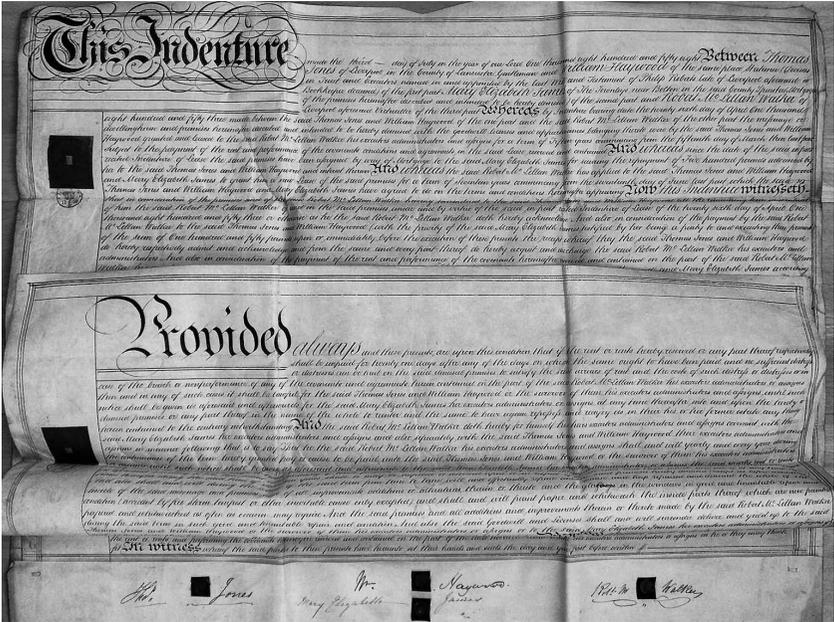
John continued at the tavern until 1851 following which Elizabeth Berry, presumably his widow, took the hotel name with her and was listed from 1853 at the 'Victoria Hotel, 1 Old Ropery'.



A detail from sheet 29 of the 1848 O.S. map showing the *Victoria Commercial Inn*. Image courtesy of the *Athenaeum*.

Thus, when Robert McDonald McLellan Walker (his impressive full name) took over the Drury Lane premises in 1853 he decided to rename it *The Mansion House*, and this is how it would be remembered many years later when a columnist on the *Liverpool Citizen* wrote of his recollection of Robert's days there.

Having established a promising life as victualler of the tavern just off Water Street – the town’s commercial centre – in 1857 he upgraded his premises from *eating house* to *restaurant*, and in the following year negotiated a new lease:-



‘This Indenture made the third day of July in the year of our Lord One thousand eight hundred and fifty eight between Thomas Jones of Liverpool in the County of Lancaster Gentleman and William Haywood of the same place Stationer (Devises in Trust and Executors named in and appointed by the last Will and Testament of Philip Roberts late of Liverpool aforesaid Bookkeeper deceased) of the first part Mary Elizabeth James of the Townleys near Bolton in the said County Spinster (Mortgagee of the premises hereinafter described and intended to be hereby demised) of the second part and Robert McLellan Walker of Liverpool aforesaid Victualler of the third part Whereas by Indenture bearing date the twenty sixth day of April One thousand eight hundred and fifty three made between the said Thomas Jones and William Haywood of the one part and the said Robert McLellan Walker of the other part the message or dwellinghouse and premises hereinafter described and intended to be hereby demised with the goodwill licenses and appurtenances belonging thereto were by the said Thomas Jones and William Haywood granted and leased to the said Robert McLellan Walker his executors administrators and assigns for a term of Fifteen years commencing from the fifteenth day of March then last past Subject to the payment of the rent and performance of the covenants conditions and agreements in the said Lease reserved and contained And whereas since the date of the said in part recited Indenture of Lease the said premises have been assigned by way of Mortgage to the

said Mary Elizabeth James for securing the repayment of Five hundred pounds advanced by her to the said Thomas Jones and William Haywood and interest thereon And whereas the said Robert McLellan Walker has applied to the said Thomas Jones and William Haywood and Mary Elizabeth James to grant him a new Lease of the said premises for a term of Seventeen years commencing from the seventeenth day of June last past which the said Thomas Jones and William Haywood and Mary Elizabeth James have agreed to do on the terms and conditions hereinafter appearing ...[text omitted regarding the terms and conditions]...

They the said Thomas Jones and William Haywood and Mary Elizabeth James according to their respective estates rights and interests in the said premises Do and each of them Doth by these presents grant demise and lease unto the said Robert McLellan Walker his executors administrators and assigns All that messuage or dwellinghouse and premises situate in Drury Lane in Liverpool aforesaid now in the occupation of the said Robert McLellan Walker heretofore used as a Licensed Public House formerly known by the name of the "Victoria Hotel" but now called "The Mansion House" Together with the Goodwill and Licenses and all yards outbuildings areas courts pumps cisterns pipes sewers ways lights easements fixtures and appurtenances to the said messuage and premises belonging or appertaining To have and To hold the said messuage goodwill licenses and premises hereby demised with the appurtenances unto the said Robert McLellan Walker his executors administrators and assigns for the term of Seventeen years from the seventeenth day of June last past Yielding and Paying therefore yearly and every year during the first five years of the said term unto the said Mary Elizabeth James her executors administrators and assigns the clear yearly rent or sum of Fifty Two Pounds...'

Thus by mid-1858 Robert had a lease for a further 17 years, and he immediately set out to give the restaurant the semblance of a history. In the directories from 1859 it became listed as the *Old Mansion House*, a name that it would retain for several years after Robert had gone.



The indenture ribbon and red wax seal. Even Robert played safe with his middle names, abbreviating them to just 'M'.

In the 20th century the appearance of Drury Lane changed dramatically with the arrival of India Buildings which now covers the site of Robert's premises.



*The Drury Lane face of India Buildings in 2010 with its delightful line of ground floor shops.*  
*Approximately half way along this row had once stood the Old Mansion House.*  
*Rather appropriately, a sandwich bar, 'The Granary', now exists on the site.*

Born about 1819 and the son of a newspaper reporter, Robert was working as a printer when he married Ann O’Keeffe in 1844 at St Philip’s, Hardman Street. The 1851 census shows them with two young daughters at Oxton where by then he had decided to try following in his father’s footsteps as a reporter. Having subsequently established himself at his restaurant, by the time of the 1861 census Robert and Ann were employing two barmaids, three kitchen maids and a waitress at Drury Lane. Sadly, however, Robert was destined to enjoy less than half of his 17 year lease. He died on 29th October 1865 and Ann briefly took over as victualler before the premises passed in quick succession through a variety of other hands.

So what had been Robert’s success at the *Old Mansion House*? On February 4th 1888 the columnist Charles Millward wrote the following affectionate tribute to Robert Walker in *The Liverpool Citizen* :-

**“Dirty Bob’s” in Drury Lane**

*The soubriquet of “Dirty Bob” was very unjustly applied to Mr Robert Walker, a very worthy and well-known gentleman, who kept the Mansion House tavern and restaurant in Drury-lane thirty years ago. As an old customer of the house, I am able to state that there certainly was nothing dirty about it. At one time there was an ugly rumour of the “crackle” of black beetles having more than once been detected in the sixpenny plates of soup daily dispensed by Mr Walker. It was a cruel insinuation, and although the host of the “Mansion House” treated it with derision, it caused him to be vulgarly, and, as I have said, unjustly known thereafter as “Dirty Bob.” I have a lurking suspicion that, prior to going into the “public” business, Mr. Walker was a member of the local press, and if I have been rightly informed, he for some time was the advertisement manager of the Liverpool Standard... a Tory paper of the Toriest kind. I have a pleasant recollection of “Bob” Walker, a genial and hearty fellow who was greatly esteemed by his friends and customers. Bob was one of those sensible tradesmen who believed in advertising, and he was almost the first local resterauteur who advertised his daily menu. “Dine at the Mansion House, cheaply and expeditiously,” was his cry, and many local men did dine there, and dined well. But “Dirty Bob’s” customers did not respond as readily as they should have done to the landlord’s business-like appeal, and the time came when Drury-lane and the Mansion House knew Robert Walker no more.*

Thanks to this discovered lease and to Charles Millward’s kind comments, Robert Walker and his Old Mansion House can in fact live on in Water Street’s collective memory. And the ghosts in India Buildings perhaps still dine there – and dine well at *The Granary* sandwich bar.