

Thomas Witheridge – Mariner and Slaver, Bristol

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The coin presented here is an outstanding piece of late eighteenth century engraving in miniature⁽¹⁾. The host coin, possibly a shilling dating from the recoinage of William III, has been smoothed and engraved to act as a love token from the sailor Thomas Witheridge to his future wife, on his departure on the slave ship *The Phoenix* in 1772.



Fig. 1. Engraved shilling-sized disc – no trace of host coin. (Shown 300% and real size).

Obv. THO^S WITHERADGE * THIRD * MATE * OF THE SHIP – PHOENIX 1772 *

Around, in the background, a design including a three masted ship sailing left under a radiant sun and shaded sky, and in the foreground a sailor and woman standing on land under a tree, her right arm on his shoulder and his left arm around her waist. His right arm is outstretched with a bowl (?) pointing to the ship. The man is wearing a sailor's outfit and hat and the woman a tight-waisted corset, dress and hat, both typically late eighteenth century.

Rev. A shepherdess with crook, sitting under a tree to the left, tending her flock, a dog seated at her feet. Two sheep in front of them and two swans on a pond in the foreground. In the background a group of farm buildings, one with smoke issuing from a chimney. Another tree on the right background, with birds flying in the cloudy sky. A bucolic scene – or the rural idyll.

This note will trace some details of the ship, its voyages, and the life of Thomas Witheridge. Note that whilst the engraved piece gives the name as Witheradge, all of the contemporary records have Witheridge or Witherage.

The Ship – Phoenix

Identifying a particular ship from its name can be more difficult than identifying and tracing people. A first search for a ship called the *Phoenix* from this period resulted in the discovery of a harrowing tale of a slaving ship that was seriously damaged in a storm. Some of the slaves were released to help keep the ship afloat and when they became mutinous, many were killed. Another ship came to the rescue and saved all of the crew and the remaining slaves were left to sink with the ship!^(2,3) The ship was sailing from the African coast to Chesapeake Bay with 332 slaves. However, this was in 1762 so cannot be a candidate.

The loss of His Majesty's Battleship Phoenix (along with several others) in a hurricane off Cuba in 1780 is also well recorded⁽²⁾, opening up the possibilities of a Royal Navy connection, along with the Merchant Navy.

To further complicate the search, the name Phoenix appears many times in the Lloyd's Registers, and the name of a lost ship would often be reused by shipping owners⁽⁴⁾. For the years 1768-71 the Lloyd's Register includes 2 ships with the name and in 1776 there are 8 ships and 8 barges called Phoenix in the main alphabetical list and another ship and barge in the late entries to the "P" section. Having been looking at this topic for some time, with hindsight, one of these ships now stands out under the Phoenix heading.



Fig. 2. Entry in Lloyd's Register for The Phoenix in 1776⁽⁴⁾.

Charles Taylor was the Master of the Phoenix, weighing 200 tons, built in Bristol in 1767, owned by John Powell & Co, and was running the Bristol, Africa &c route.

Further sources of records of shipping from Bristol in the 18th and early years of the 19th century are helpful. The first is a series of publications from the Bristol Record Society^(5,6,7). These give lists of various ships involved in the slave trade, each in a common format with the following header:

- (1) The tonnage and armament of the vessel
- (2) The size of the vessel's crew, both outward from Bristol and on its homeward journey, or otherwise specified
- (3) The place and year of construction of the vessel
- (4) The place and date of its registration
- (5) The master(s) of the vessel
- (6) The owner(s) of the vessel
- (7) The vessel's date of departure from Bristol or other (named) port
- (8) The vessel's recorded place or places of trade in Africa
- (9) The number or intended (*) number of slaves shipped in Africa
- (10) The port or ports of arrival of the vessel in America
- (11) The vessel's date(s) of arrival at the port(s) in America
- (12) The number of slaves delivered to or sold at the port(s) in America
- (13) The date of departure of the vessel from its last port of call in America
- (14) The date of the vessel's return to Bristol or other known outcome to the voyage

One slaving ship, called the Phoenix had been taken as a prize of war. It was 100 tons, with 6 guns, of Spanish construction, but sailing under an English flag from Bristol to Angola and Barbados and can be traced 1738 to 1766. In that year the vessel was reported to have passed Anamaboe on its way to Bonny. It was also reported to have been in a sickly condition at Calabar in May 1766. The ship was then owned by John Powell & Co.⁽⁵⁾ It is presumed that this ship has been lost, sold or renamed.

In 1767 a new and slightly heavier ship, with 6 guns, called the Phoenix, also owned by John Powell & Co is listed following the same route⁽⁶⁾.

PHOENIX 1767/21

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (1) 120 tons; 6 guns | (8) Guinea |
| (2) 40 outward | (9) |
| (3) British | (10) Dominica |
| (4) | (11) c.20 September 1767 |
| (5) George Bishop | (12) |
| (6) John Powell & Co. | (13) c.16 December 1767 |
| (7) 26 March (pass 24 February) | (14) 28 (25) January (28 July) 1768 |

According to its muster roll the vessel left Bristol with 32 crew and returned with 17. Three additional crew were enlisted at Guinea on 1 July. The vessel appears to have reached Dominica with 25 crew and to have discharged 17 there between 20 September and 16 December. Nine new crew enlisted on 10 December.

The ship repeated the round trip in 1768⁽⁶⁾, and again in 1770, 1771, 1772, 1774, and 1775⁽⁷⁾:

To the final fateful journey in 1782⁽⁷⁾:

PHOENIX 1782/5

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) 120 tons (200); 18 (16) guns | (8) Calabar |
| (2) 40 outward | (9) 430 (420) |
| (3) Bermuda (Plantation) | (10) |
| (4) | (11) |
| (5) James Sutherland | (12) |
| (6) John Anderson & Co. | (13) |
| (7) 17 October (pass 3 October) | (14) No pass returned |

Letters of marque were declared on 4 October 1782 when the other owners of the vessel were named as Thomas Easton and Joshua Powell. It was variously reported overset when 'fully slaved' on the Calabar coast or two days after leaving the African coast for the West Indies, all its slaves, its master and 21 of its crew being drowned. The records show that no muster roll was obtainable for the vessel.

So far this is all circumstantial evidence – there was a ship called The Phoenix regularly sailing the Bristol, Africa, Americas triangle from 1767 until it sank in 1782. Lloyd's Registers can be used to fill in some of the gaps in The Phoenix records and confirm that the round trip was probably made annually⁽⁴⁾.

Date	Master	Owners	Running	Comments
1767	George Bishop	J. Powell & C	Guinea, Dominica	Launched, First voyage
1768	George Bishop	J. Powell & C	Calabar, Dominica	
1770	Thomas Borthwick (Michael Bell)	J. Powell & C	New Calabar/ Bonny, Dominica	
1771	Middleton Belt (or Bell)	J. Powell & C	?, Jamaica	
1772	Middleton (William) Belt	J. Powell & C	?, Dominica	
1774	Charles Taylor	J[ohn] Powell & Co.	?, Jamaica	
1775	Charles Taylor (John Smith)	J[ohn] Powell son & Co.	Gold Coast, Jamaica	
1776	C. Taylor	J. Powell & C	Bristol, Africa &c	
1778	Jn Smith	Powell & C	Africa Bristol	
1779	M Rdmnd	Powell & C	Bristol Jamaica	
1780	M Rdmnd	J. Powell & C	Jamaica Bristol	
1781	Redmond	Powell & C	Jamaica Bristol	
1782	Suthrlnd	Andrsn & C	Bristol Africa	Sank

Table 1. Details of The Phoenix, 1767-1782.

Another direct reference to a Thomas Witherage can also be found in the same source⁽⁷⁾.

ROYAL CHARLOTTE 1784/11

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) 150 (140, 237) tons; 4 (14 or no) guns | (8) Bonny |
| (2) 40 outward and at Jamaica; 20 homeward | (9) |
| (3) British (prize) | (10) Kingston, Jamaica |
| (4) Bristol; 26 July 1784 | (11) 31 March 1785 |
| (5) Thomas Witherage (Joseph Jackson) | (12) 377 |
| (6) John Collard & Co. | (13) 20 May 1785 |
| (7) 19 August (pass 22 July) | (14) 2 August (30 July) (1 December) 1785 |

According to its pass the vessel was bound for Africa and Jamaica. Its muster roll shows that it left Bristol with 43 crew and reached Jamaica with 32, though Parliamentary papers suggest it entered the island with 35. **Thomas Witherage** died on 20 August. Eighteen crew were discharged at Jamaica between 29 March and 19 April, and 7 new men enlisted on 15 May. It arrived at Bristol with 20 crew, one having died on the home run. It was reported to have passed Barbados on its way to Jamaica.

Searching Lloyd's Register for the period 1767-1784 for Wither(age) provides just one hit, confirming him to be master of the Royal Charlotte in 1784⁽⁴⁾.

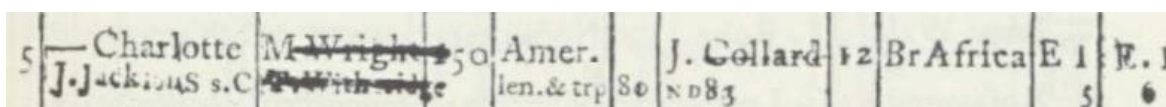


Fig. 3. Entry in Lloyd's Register for The Royal Charlotte in 1784⁽⁴⁾.

Two of the Master's names are crossed out suggesting the first Master of the Royal Charlotte was M. Wright, who was replaced by T. Witheridge and upon whose death, J. Jackson took over the post.

It would thus seem that Thomas had been promoted from Third Mate to Master at some point between engraving the token in 1772 and dying on board the copper-bottomed Royal Charlotte on 20 August 1784. That he had become master of a slaving ship adds weight to the suggestion that he was present on the slaving ship Phoenix.

Thomas's death onboard the Royal Charlotte just one day into the voyage must have been very unexpected, and likely caused by an accident rather than age or disease.

An alternative route to identifying Thomas Witheridge are the Muster Rolls for the ships that left and returned to Bristol during this period. Summaries of some of these have been presented above, but only include the name of the ship's master.

Some of the Muster Rolls can be found on the webpage of the Bristol based "Society of Merchant Venturers". The PORTCITIESBristol webpage includes low resolution images of some of the Muster Rolls⁽⁸⁾. One record is of particular interest; Muster Roll no: 35 in the muster roll book, September 1773 – September 1774. This is the Muster roll for the ship, The Phoenix, sailing from Bristol to Africa, 1772⁽⁹⁾.

With a little imagination and a squint, the fourth name on the list might be *Tho Witheridge* of Bristol.



Fig. 4. Muster Roll for The Phoenix, 1772. Thanks to and © The Society of Merchant Venturers⁽⁹⁾.

Further enquiries revealed that the original documents are held at the Bristol Archives, and it is here that more details of Thomas Witheridge's career can be found. Firstly, a readable image of Muster Roll 35⁽¹⁰⁾.

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A Muster-Roll for the Ship *Phoenix Middleton Belt* Master
from *Bristol to Africa*

Mens Names	Usual Places of Abode.	When enter'd into Pay, and where.	When discharg'd, deserted, or what became of them.	In what Ship or Vessel the last Voyage.	Time Serv'd. Months.	Days.
<i>Middle Belt</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>August 17. 1772</i>	<i>Sept. 17. 1772</i>	<i>The Phoenix</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>William Nicars</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>August 16. 1772</i>	<i>Sept. 17. 1772</i>	<i>The Phoenix</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>John Bandy</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>Ditto 16. 1772</i>	<i>Ditto 17. 1772</i>	<i>Ship Mary</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Thos. Witheridge</i>	<i>Ditto</i>	<i>Ditto 16. 1772</i>	<i>Ditto 17. 1772</i>	<i>The Phoenix</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>James Jones</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>Ditto 16. 1772</i>	<i>Dead on 18. 1772</i>	<i>The Betsy</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>12</i>

Fig. 6. Muster Roll for The Phoenix, 1772. Thanks to and © Bristol Archives⁽¹⁰⁾.

Following the Ship's Master, Middleton Belt, Thos Witheridge is the third name on the list, certainly an indication of his position on the ship and possibly Third Mate as indicated on the engraved coin. The voyage from Bristol to Africa lasted 8 months 11 days. Also of significance it is noted that the Muster Rolls also include an entry "In what Ship or Vessel the last Voyage". In the record above, Thomas Witheridge's previous service was also on The Phoenix. This is invaluable in piecing together the sequence of voyages, though is not infallible. The figure below shows Thomas Witheridge's previous journey on the Phoenix in 1771⁽¹¹⁾.

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A Muster-Roll for the S. *Phoenix* Master
from *Africa & Jamaica*

Mens Names	Usual Places of Abode.	When enter'd into Pay, and where.	When discharg'd, deserted, or what became of them.	In what Ship or Vessel the last Voyage.	Time Serv'd. Months.	Days.
<i>William Nicars</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>1 May 1771</i>	<i>12 May 1771</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>John Gilei</i>	<i>Bramingham</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>John Mc Donough</i>	<i>Warrington</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Thos Bradley</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>John Zeman</i>	<i>Cork</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>John Jones</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Rowland Smith</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Henry Beal</i>	<i>Southampton</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Richard Watson</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>George Lacombe</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Laurance Tunnage</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>James Fell</i>	<i>Yorkshire</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>James Raphael</i>	<i>Dublin</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>William Wilcock</i>	<i>Wales</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>John Mahony</i>	<i>Warrington</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Joseph Brammer</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>William Burton</i>	<i>Warrington</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Charles Hicks</i>	<i>London</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Thos. Witheridge</i>	<i>Bristol</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>George Kelly</i>	<i>Cork</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>Phoenix</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>15</i>

Fig. 7. Muster Roll for the Phoenix in 1771. Thanks to and © Bristol Archives⁽¹¹⁾.

This gives his previous voyage on the Dominico Pacqu^t, where the trail goes cold. There is a gap in the records for the Dominico Pacqu^t in 1770, but Muster Rolls 92 (1768-69) and 1 (1771-72) make no mention of Thomas Witheridge.

Working forwards through the records, Thomas Witheridge is found on Muster Roll 7 for the Merlin (1780-81) and is second in command to Henry Webb⁽¹²⁾.

Mens Names	Usual Places of Abode.	When enter'd into Pay, and where.	When discharg'd, deserted, or what became of them.	In what Ship or Vessel the last Voyage.	Time Serv'd. Months. Days.
Henry Webb	Bristol	December 31 1779	August 31 1780	Nevis Plant.	8 0 0
Thomas Witheridge	Do	Do	Do	Tartar	8 0 0
John Neiler	Do	Do	Do	Do	8 0 0

Fig. 8. Muster Roll for the Merlin in 1780-81. Thanks to and © Bristol Archives⁽¹²⁾.

His previous ship is listed as the Factor, but again the search goes cold, with no suitable ships found.

Thomas next appears as the Ship's Master on the Herbert in Muster Roll 18 (1781-82), where the connection to his previous voyage on the Merlin can be confirmed⁽¹³⁾. Note that this Muster Roll just covers the leg of the voyage from Nevis to Bristol, taking 4 months and 20 days.

Mens Names	Usual Places of Abode.	When enter'd into Pay, and where.	When discharg'd, deserted, or what became of them.	In what Ship or Vessel the last Voyage.	Time Serv'd. Months. Days.
Thomas Witheridge	Bristol	May 21 1781	October 11	Merlin	4 20
Thomas Webb	Nevis	July 26	Do	unknown	2 18

Fig. 9. Muster Roll for the Herbert, 1781. Thanks to and © Bristol Archives⁽¹³⁾.

Moving forwards in time, the next ship associated with Thomas Witheridge is the Royal Charlotte. When the ship had sailed in 1783, Lloyd's Register has Mungo Wright as ship's master⁽¹⁴⁾. Having been built by Collard & Co and launched earlier in the year, this was the ship's first journey. Note that whilst Lloyd's Register is a searchable pdf, the entries are not in strict alphabetic order and are often abbreviated.

200	Royal Charlotte	Wright	250	Amer.	Collrd & Co	12	Br Africa	E. I
	S & C			len & trp 80	& N. D. 83			5

Fig. 10. Entry in Lloyd's Register for The Royal Charlotte in 1783⁽¹⁴⁾.

The Muster Roll for this voyage of the Royal Charlotte is shown below⁽¹⁵⁾. This was the crew on 11th June 1784 having returned to Bristol from Tobago, after a total voyage lasting 11 months 3 days. Thomas Witheridge is second on the muster list after Mungo Wright, the Ship's Master.

Muster Roll for the Ship *Royal Charlotte*, Mungo Wright Master, from Tobago, (142.)

Men's Names.	Usual Places of Abode.	When enter'd into Pay, and where.	When discharg'd, deserted, or what became of them.	In what Ship or Vessel the last Voyage.	Time serv'd. Months Days.	
<u>Mungo Wright</u>	Bristol.	8 th July 1783	11 June 1784.		11	3
<u>Thos. Witheridge</u>	Do	Do	Do		11	3
John Black	Do	Do	Do		11	3
Nicholas	Do	Do	Do		11	3
Henry Ryan	Do	Do	Do		11	3
Isaac Corner	Do	Do	Do		11	3
Thos. W. Daniels	Do	Do	Do	unknown	11	3
John Barnes	Do	Do	Do	do	11	3
Thomas Ayser	Do	Do	Do	do	11	3
John Mann	Do	Do	Do	do	11	3
Michl. Brown	Do	Do	Do	do	11	3
<u>Joseph Jackson</u>	Do	Do	Do	Here	11	3
John Banks	Do	Do	Do	do	11	3

Fig. 11. Thomas Witheridge returning on the Royal Charlotte in 1784. Thanks to and © Bristol Archives⁽¹⁵⁾.

According to Lloyd's Register (Figure 3 above), the next voyage of the Royal Charlotte began a few weeks later, initially with Mungo Wright as Ship's Master. Wright was replaced by Thomas Witheridge who then died on 20th August and was replaced by J. Jackson. This is likely the Joseph Jackson who appears further down the crew list of the previous voyage (Figure 11).

The muster roll for the Royal Charlotte has been found for 1784-1785, but as it was completed at the end of the voyage, when the ship returned to Bristol on 30th July 1785, Thomas Witheridge is not named⁽¹⁶⁾. The following table summarises the records, including those naming Thomas Witheridge, that have been found in the Muster Rolls in the Bristol Archives.

	?	Dominica Pacq(ue)t	Phoenix	?	Factor	Merlin	Herbert	Royal Charlotte
1768	?	(Roll 92)						
1769								
1770		?						
1771		(Roll 1)	Roll 181					
1772								
1773			Roll 35					
1774								
1775			(Roll 199)	?				
1776								
1777			(Roll 137)					
1778						(Roll 131)		
1779			(Roll 40)					
1780						Roll 7		
1781			(Roll 61)				Roll 18	
1782								
1783								Roll 142
1784								
1785								(Roll 90)

Table 2. Details of Thomas Witheridge's career c.1768-1784.

Bold red entries show muster rolls where Thomas Witheridge is named, red arrows indicate a cross reference and entries in parentheses indicate that a muster roll was checked, but Thomas Witheridge was not found.

Thomas Witheridge

The name Thomas Witheridge is quite unusual, and even when allowing for variations in the surname (Witheridge, Witheradge, Witherage etc), there are not many candidates in the records. One possibility is the birth of a Thomas Witheridge on 27th Nov 1751 at East Down, near Barnstaple, Devon.

On firmer ground, a Thomas Witheridge married Christian Gill on 13th October 1776 in Bristol⁽¹⁷⁾.

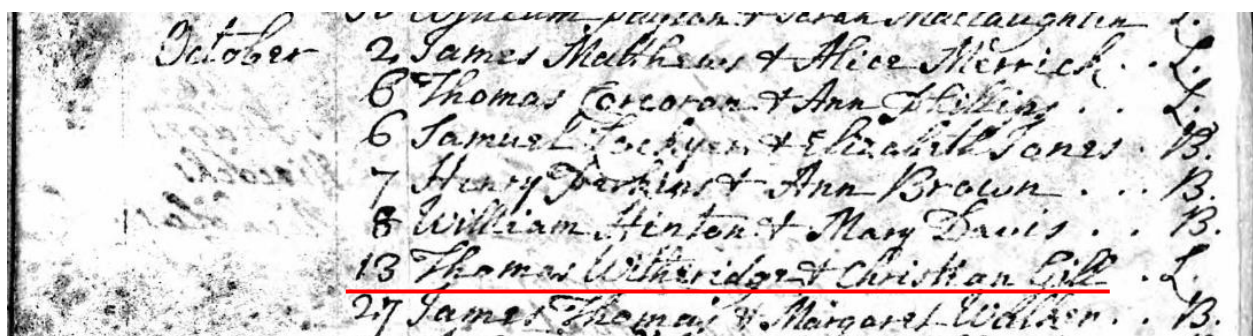


Fig. 11. The record of Thomas Witheridge's marriage to Christian Gill⁽¹⁷⁾.

There is also a record of a "Christ. Gill", baptised in Bristol 28th July 1755, child of David and Hannah Gill. The gender is given as male, but I suspect this is an error and assumption by the transcribers on reading "Chris.", which though rare, is also a female name.

The PCC transcript of Thomas's Will has been found and begins "I Thomas Witheridge of the City of Bristol Mariner".⁽¹⁸⁾ In his Will he gives everything to his dear wife Christian Witheridge including "Freehold and Leasehold Messuages, Lands, Tenements and Hereditaments", "Goods, Chattels and Personal Estate". The Will was written on 11th November 1776. The Will is very short and makes no mention of children or money, and is witnessed by Jn^o Seager Junior, Charles Bowles and Edw. Hoskins. The Will was proved in London on 3rd January 1785. This is a copy of the proved will in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury records. In an attempt to

find the original and possibly Thomas's signature, the first enquiries to the Society of Genealogists and then The National Archives all reverted back to the PCC copy.

Thomas Witheridge In the Name of God Amen
 I Thomas Witheridge of the City of Bristol Merchant
 do make this my last Will and Testament in manner
 and form following that is to say I give bequeath and
 bequeath unto my dear Wife Christiana Witheridge
 all and singular my Freehold and Leasehold Movable
 Realms Tenements and Hereditaments whatsoever and
 whosoever to hold to her my said Wife for her
 Executors Administrators and Assigns respectively I do
 give and bequeath unto her my said Wife her
 Executors Administrators and Assigns all and singular
 my Goods Chattels and personal Estate whatsoever and
 whosoever and I do hereby constitute and appoint
 her my said Wife sole Executrix of this my last Will
 and Testament hereby revoking all former Wills by me
 made and declaring this to be my last Will and Testament
 In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and
 Seal the Eleventh day of November in the Year of Our
 Lord One thousand seven hundred and Seventy Six, Tho:
 Witheridge. I should sealed published and declared by
 the said Testator Thomas Witheridge as and for his last
 Will and Testament in the presence of us who at his
 request in his presence and in the presence of each
 other have subscribed our names as Witnesses the
 Seages, Junr, Charles Bowles, Edw. Watkins.


This Will was proved at London the fifth
 day of January in the year of Our Lord One thousand seven
 hundred and eighty five before the Right Worshipful Peter de
 Calver Solicitor of Laws Master of the Court of Chancery of the
 prerogative Court of Canterbury lawfully constituted by the Oath
 of Christian Witheridge London the Clerk of the deceased and the
 sole Executrix named in the said Will to whom Administration
 was granted of all and singular the Goods Chattels and Credits
 of the said deceased the said being then first sworn
 by Commission duly to Administer.

Fig. 12. .PCC copy of Thomas Witheridge's Will, proved 3rd January 1785. Thanks to and © The National Archives⁽¹⁸⁾.

However, the National Archives do hold approximately one million original wills. They are not indexed or scanned, but they are grouped by date and then sorted alphabetically, thus requiring a visit and manual search, with no guarantee of success. Knowing the date of probate narrows the search down to one box of Wills at the National Archives that might possibly contain the Will, PROB 10/2969⁽¹⁹⁾.

A few weeks later . . .

In the Name of God Amen. I Thomas
Wetheridge of the City of Bristol Mariner do make this
my last will and Testament in manner and form following
that is to say I give devise and bequeath unto
my dear wife Christian Wetheridge All and singular my
freehold and Leasehold Messuages Lands Tenements &
hereditaments whatsoever and wheresoever To Hold
to her my said Wife her Heirs Executors Administrators
& assigns respectively I also give and bequeath unto
her my said Wife her Executors Administrators and assigns
All and singular my Goods Chattels and personal
Estate whatsoever and wheresoever And I do hereby
constitute and appoint her my said Wife sole Executrix
of this my last will and Testament hereby revoking all
former Wills by me made and declaring this to be my last
will and Testament In Witnes whereof I have hereunto
set my hand and Seal the Eleventh day of November
in the year of our Lord One thousand Seven hundred &
Twenty Six -

Thos. Wetheridge 

Signed Sealed published and declared
by the said Testator Thomas Wetheridge
as and for his last Will and Testament
in the presence of us who at his request
in his presence and in the presence of
each other have subscribed our Names
as Witnesses -


Charles Bowles

Wm. Haskins

Fig. 13. Thomas Wetheridge's original signed and sealed Will. Thanks to and © The National Archives⁽¹⁹⁾.

Loose Ends

A further record gives the death of a Christian Witheridge in Bristol on 7 June 1821. The year of birth is given as 1754 and the gender male. This is a very unusual name combination and I suspect another assumption in the reading of Thomas's wife's first name. No Will or descendants have been found.

Interestingly, there are directory entries (1785⁽²⁰⁾ and 1787⁽²¹⁾) for a Thomas Witheridge operating as a "Master of a ship marine(a)" and then "Captain", based at King Street, Bristol. The way the data was collected, and the printing process often means trade directories can be a year (or more) out of date. These references are likely to the Thomas Witheridge who had died on board The Royal Charlotte in 1784.

Conclusions

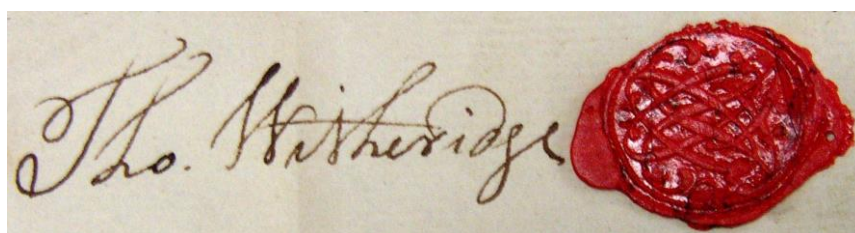
Thomas Witheridge was possibly born in East Down, near Barnstaple, Devon, on 27th Nov 1751. Having likely served an apprenticeship as a mariner, in 1771 the muster rolls show he was a crew member on board The Phoenix and by 1772 he had become the Third Mate, the same year the love token that prompted this note was engraved (shown in figure 1). The Phoenix was one of many slaving ships working between Bristol, Africa and the Caribbean, using the trade winds to make the annual voyage.

On the 13th October 1776 he married Christian Gill in Bristol, and his Will was written on 11th November the same year. Though there are a few gaps in his records, his presence on other Bristol-based slaving ships has been confirmed from the muster Rolls (The Factor and The Merlin) and he rose to be Ship's Master of The Herbert in 1781.

The slaving ship The Royal Charlotte was built in 1783 and on its return from Tobago in June 1784 the Muster Rolls show Mungo Wright as master with Thomas Witheridge as second in command. When the ship sailed again on 19th August 1784 something happened on the ship shortly after departure and Lloyd's Register shows Thomas Witheridge taking over as Ship's Master's from Mungo Wright. Thomas Witheridge then died on the 20th August, to be replaced by Joseph Johnson for the rest of the journey.

Thomas's Will was proved in London on 3rd January 1785, where he left everything to Christian, his wife. The ship returned to Bristol on 30th July 1785.

The signature and seal shown below are from the hand of Thomas Witheridge who, in 1772, gave the love token to Christian Gill, his wife-to-be.



References and Acknowledgements

- (1) The piece, ex Fred Baldwin (mid 1960s) and David Young, has been on the author's "need to research this, but not making much progress" list for many years. Newly found online archives have recently allowed progress to be made.
- (2) Anon. *Thrilling Narratives of Mutiny, Murder and Piracy*. No date, but from the style of the binding and images c.1900. Includes "Wreck of a Slave Ship" pp212-213. And *An Account of the Loss of H.M.B. Phoenix* pp17-30. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25982/25982-h/25982-h.htm>
- (3) A. Vanner. *The sinking of the slave ship Phoenix, 1762*. 2016. <http://dawlischchronicles.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/the-sinking-of-slave-ship-phoenix-1762.html>
- (4) <https://hec.lrfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/lloyds-register-of-ships-online>
- (5) D. Richardson (Ed.). *Bristol, Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Slave Trade to America. Vol. 2 The Years of Ascendancy, 1730-1745*. Bristol Record Society's Publications vol XXXIX, 1987. <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/Depts/History/bristolrecordsociety/publications/brs39.pdf>
- (6) D. Richardson (Ed.). *Bristol, Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Slave Trade to America. Vol. 3 The Years of Decline, 1743-1769*. Bristol Record Society's Publications vol XLII, 1991. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/History/bristolrecordsociety/publications/brs47.pdf>
- (7) D. Richardson (Ed.). *Bristol, Africa and the Eighteenth-Century Slave Trade to America. Vol. 4 The Final Years, 1770-1807*. Bristol Record Society's Publications vol XLVII, 1996. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/History/bristolrecordsociety/publications/brs47.pdf>
For those wishing to dig further, Richardson cites two primary sources which have not been checked: Felix Farley's Bristol Journal: 24th July, 14th, and 28th August 1784, 12th February, 21st May, 11th June, and 6th August 1785; Manuscript available at Bristol Central Library. And also the Cornwall Chronicle, 9th April 1785, (Published Montego Bay, Jamaica).
- (8) <https://www.discoveringbristol.org.uk/>
- (9) <https://discoveringbristol.org.uk/browse/slavery/muster-roll62/>
- (10) Bristol Archives. SMV/9/3/1/7, Muster Roll 35 (Phoenix, 1773-1774). <https://archives.bristol.gov.uk/indexes/musterrolls>
- (11) Bristol Archives. SMV/9/3/1/6, Muster Roll 181 (Phoenix, 1771-1772).
- (12) Bristol Archives. SMV/9/3/1/8, Muster Roll 7 (Merlin, 1780-1781).
- (13) Bristol Archives. SMV/9/3/1/8, Muster Roll 18 (Herbert, 1781-1782).
- (14) <https://archive.org/details/HECROS1783/page/n285/mode/2up>
- (15) Bristol Archives. SMV/9/3/1/9, Muster Roll 142 (Royal Charlotte, 1783-1784).
- (16) Bristol Archives. SMV/9/3/1/9, Muster Roll 90 (Royal Charlotte, 1784-1785).
- (17) <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/discoveryui-content/view/1241911:61666>
- (18) PROB 11/1126-1. Will of Thomas Witheridge, Mariner of Bristol, Gloucestershire. <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D418747>
- (19) PROB 10/2969. Wills proved during January 1785, surnames S-Z. Wills proved during February 1785, surnames A. https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/results/r?_q=PROB+10%2F2969
- (20) The Bristol Directory [for 1785] ... including Bedminster, Clifton & the Hot-Wells, 1785. Via Ancestry.
- (21) The Bristol and Bath Directory [for 1787] ... being the Third Number of the General Directory of England, Wales, etc. Via Ancestry.

As well as the usual genealogy websites FindMyPast and Ancestry, researching this token has really only been made possible through the great help of several archivists who answered my online requests and guided my searches. Lisa Holyoake and Caroline Chambers at the Society of Merchant Venturers, and Ginny Gilman at the Society of Genealogists, are thanked for the first steps in tracking down the muster rolls and the signed copy of the Will.

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