

A TALE IN A BOTTLE

By Colin Clifford

I have in the past prefaced my simple tales with a visit to Sunderland Cemetery and this article is no exception. I sometimes feel they should be called “Tomb Stone Tales” or something similar.

Just to the left of the entrance is a large imposing marble memorial to John Joseph Candlish. My immediate thought was that it was to John Candlish the industrialist but this turned out not to be incorrect although the rest of the Candlish family are buried in adjacent plot including John Candlish.

On this imposing obelisk is the following inscription.

John Joseph Candlish Born Sunderland March 29th 1855.
Died at Shotton Hall, November 18 1913.

This monument is erected to his memory by the workpeople of Seaham Harbour Bottle Works as a mark of the esteem in which he was held by them and in grateful appreciation of his many acts of kindness and consideration shown by him to for their welfare.



Memorial to John Joseph Candlish.

No employer could ask for a greater token of respect especially considering the level of wages in 1913.

Joseph however had taken over the bottle works from his father Robert who died in 1887 who in turn had taken it over from his more renowned brother John Candlish.

John Candlish was born in Tasset in Northumberland in 1815 the son of a farmer and when his mother died in 1820 they moved to Sunderland.

His father opened a bottle works at Ayres Quay which was managed by his brother Robert. (Josephs father).

John was educated, being a Baptist at local Dissenter schools and then an academy in North Shields where he studied French and algebra but returned when he was eleven to work in the bottle works as a labourer

When he was fourteen he was apprenticed to a draper in High Street and later became a partner in a drapery shop.

Later, in partnership with George Richmond he opened a newspaper the “Sunderland Beacon” but this failed after six months leaving him heavily in debt.

He then worked for a Sunderland coal importer but within year he was running a shipyard at Southwick. This was later bought by Robert Thompson and amalgamated with Greenwells ship repair yard. Thompson was to become one of Sunderlands major employers.

Following his expedition into shipbuilding John Candlish became involved in coal exporting which made little profit and later he founded another newspaper the "Sunderland News", he was also Secretary to the Sunderland Gas Company.

His career became more established in 1853 when he obtained a lease on the Seaham Bottle Works in partnership with his friend Robert Greenwell who had worked in a forge and as a shipyard fitter. Being of totally opposite personalities the partnership was as oil and water and John bought out his partner. He then absorbed the adjacent Fenwicks bottle house in 1856.

He was given patronage by Frederick Stuart the Fourth Marquis of Londonderry and the works was renamed Londonderry Bottle Works.

By this time he also owned ships, firstly the Bottle Boat "Lollard" and later a ship the "Oakwell" which took bottles on a weekly basis from Seaham to a warehouse in London and also carried black sand from the continent for the glassworks.

He was a very forward looking employer greatly appreciated by his employees and as an early example of good industrial relations he opened a library and a voluntary school on the site for his employees and their families. He also created a community around the works by building houses such as Gallery Row, a chapel and Candlish Hall for the benefit of this community.

His next venture was to purchase a site at Diamond Hall where he opened four new bottle houses which with the seven at Seaham employed 600 people and made him the biggest bottle manufacturer in Europe and possibly the world.

The bottle works was taken over by his brother Robert in 1868 and renamed R.Candlish and Sons.

On Roberts death in 1887 it was taken over by his sons Joseph John, Richard and John and this was Joseph John who was held in such high esteem by his employees. The works finally closed in 1921 as a result of new manufacturing developments. As reminder to this industrial heritage there is still a Bottle Works Road in Seaham Harbour.

John Candlish however had also become interested in politics and was elected 1848 at the age of thirty three to Sunderland Borough Council. He became Mayor in 1858 and again in 1861.

He also held public office as a River Wear Commissioner, a magistrate, Chairman of the Board of Guardians and was Principal of the Sunderland Orphan Asylum which was established in the 1860s for the education of deceased mariner's sons.

He also maintained his association with shipping heading the Sunderland Shipowners Society in the 1860s.

He remained a pivotal member of the Baptist Church with his membership of the Sans Street Baptist community which many older readers will remember in High Street East. A breakaway from this Mission eventually led to the founding of the Bathesda Free Church which still exists today in Tatham Street.

John also stood as one of the two Member of Parliament for Sunderland in 1865 but was defeated by Henry Fenwick and James Harley but was elected a year later as Liberal Member of Parliament for Sunderland West Ward following the resignation of Henry Fenwick. He held the seat until shortly before his death.

In 1870 John went to India on a Parliamentary visit during which he was presented with a bottle of beer in a bottle from his own works (although being a Baptist was a lifelong abstainer).

Following this visit his health slowly deteriorated (many said as a result of his visit to India) and died on 7 th March 1874 at Cannes in France. He was brought back to Sunderland and buried on 25 March 1874 at the age of fifty eight.



The monument to John Candlish
In Sunderland Cemetery.

As a token the esteem in which he was held within the town, a public collection was held and a statue of him was unveiled in Mowbray Park in 1875 and as a further token of appreciation, a road, John Candlish Road near his Diamond Hall glass works was named after him.



The statue of John Candlish in Mowbray Park

Once again a venture into Sunderland Cemetery brings to light a tale of one of Sunderlands industrial forbears such as the Fenwicks, Greenwells, Thompsons, Doxfords et al, who helped bring industrial might and prosperity to Sunderland.

There are many tales still to be told.

Colin Clifford.

