

Richard A. Davies

### Thomas Haliburton in Isleworth (1856-65)

"Since I saw you I have become a married man, and am settled down quietly at the above address (Gordon House, Isleworth, Middlesex) in one of the most beautiful villas on the banks of the Thames, ten minutes walk to the Richmond Station, & the same distance from those of Twickenham, and Isleworth, and by either train 20 minutes from London."<sup>1</sup>

This was how Haliburton described his new life to Joseph Howe in 1856. It is well known that Haliburton moved from Windsor, N.S. to Isleworth, Middlesex, in 1856 and spent the last nine years of his life in England. What is not so well known is how well he adjusted to his change of environment. At the age of sixty his life seemed to start anew when he married Sarah Harriet Williams, widowed like himself, an "annuitant" of Eaton Mascott, Shropshire.<sup>2</sup> Far from living "quietly" Haliburton was always active: he wrote *The Season Ticket* in 1859-60, gave several public addresses in the U.K. on British North America,<sup>3</sup> entered Parliament in 1859 as M.P. for Launceston in Cornwall and led an active social life locally in Isleworth. Many of the details of Haliburton's life at Gordon House, Isleworth, are passed over by V.L.O. Chittick in his book *Thomas Chandler Haliburton, A Study in Provincial Toryism* (New York, 1924); the following paper is a brief discussion of Thomas Haliburton in Isleworth.<sup>4</sup>

As Haliburton commented to Howe above, Isleworth was an attractive place to live in the middle years of the nineteenth century. One writer described it in these terms:

. . . Isleworth, celebrated for its salubrity, its productive fruit gardens, and the longevity of its inhabitants. Isleworth Parish Church dedicated to All Saints, with its well known "ivy-mantled tower," is a striking feature in the landscape; whilst Syon House, Kew Gardens, the progressing attractions of St. Margaret's (one of the most desirable spots on the banks of the Thames), and the classic neighbourhoods of Richmond and Twickenham, combine to render Isleworth and its vicinity one of the most delightful places of residence near the metropolis.<sup>5</sup>

Elegant villas had lined the banks of the Thames for two hundred years. The area had attracted a number of aristocratic residents when the court had centred on Kew.<sup>6</sup> Haliburton, out to impress Howe, casually mentions in the letter we have already quoted from that the house he now lived in was formerly a present from William IV to his daughter. The leading landowner in the eighteen-fifties and sixties was the 4th Duke of Northumberland, Algernon Percy, a well-known patron of the arts,<sup>7</sup> who spent some of the year at Syon House and some at Alnwick in Northumberland. It was the Duke who offered Haliburton his Parliamentary Seat<sup>8</sup> which he assumed in 1859. In addition to his Parliamentary duties Haliburton found time to involve himself in Isleworth life.

The communities of Hounslow and Isleworth were beginning to feel the effects of an influx of new residents, mostly middle-class businessmen whose newly-acquired wealth had given them a yearning for aristocratic comforts. Haliburton's arrival in the community in 1856 was at a time when the citizenry were eager to establish a strong sense of "community" spirit. An example can be seen in the laying of the foundation-stone of a new Town Hall in Hounslow, the next community to Isleworth. The stone was laid on 4 November 1858 and was an occasion redolent of civic pride. The ceremony of the stone-laying was preceded by an elaborate civic procession and a grandiloquent speech by Sir Frederick Pollock, Lord Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer. Before an all-ticket audience of fifteen hundred (mostly ladies), Sir Frederick laid the first stone of a building that was to serve as a centre ". . . of educational, philanthropic, political, religious and social activities."<sup>9</sup>

Haliburton was present at the dinner that evening: "The Lord Chief Baron presided, having on his right hand the Rev. Edward East (Vicar of Holy Trinity Parish), and on his left Judge Haliburton."<sup>10</sup> Clearly Haliburton commanded a certain amount of respect in the community, even before his entry into Parliament, probably on the basis of his literary reputation and professional status as a retired Judge of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. The dinner that night was attended by leading gentlemen in the community. They heard a new song composed for the occasion by the master of the Hounslow Choral Society, part of which self-consciously alluded to the social changes afoot:

The Railroads have come now instead of the posting,  
And coaches have gone now which used to be coasting,  
The railroads brought merchants from London to dwell,

Whose villas lie scattered some round the Bell—  
 . . . The merchants brought now all their trade to the town,  
 And many a pound went as tax to the crown.<sup>11</sup>

Hounslow was an example of a community engaged in the familiar process (to readers of *Sam Slick*) of going "ahead". Haliburton soon found himself at ease in the company of wealthy businessmen as all his life he seems to have involved himself in business matters.<sup>12</sup> In their leisure these men liked the same things as Haliburton, congenial company, dinners with plenty of "toasting", lectures, books and philanthropy.

Like their close neighbours in Hounslow, the citizens of Isleworth were eager to rehouse their own reading room, Vestry hall and library. A small library had been established in 1855. At the cost of a penny a week it was possible to borrow books. Additional attractions of membership included "penny readings", lectures, concerts and entertainments. "Among those who assisted in the attempt to amuse, entertain and instruct Isleworth under the aegis of the Reading Room were the Misses Kate and Ellen Terry, Mr. George Grossmith, Mr. Justice Haliburton . . . Mr. H.G. Bohn the publisher etc. . ."<sup>13</sup> In 1858 a new site was chosen for the Reading Room, and all the residents had to do now was to raise enough money to build it. Haliburton was not content with delivering lectures but actively assisted the drive for funds. He and Mrs. Haliburton allowed a bazaar to be held in the grounds of Gordon House on 29 and 30 June 1860, and the event raised over a thousand pounds towards the new Reading Room.<sup>14</sup> It was probably Haliburton's interest in this project that led Mrs. Haliburton to donate a set of his *Works* and a plaster bust of the Judge to the Reading Room in 1867.<sup>15</sup>

Haliburton's main social activity in Isleworth was his membership of the local Philanthropic Society. The society had been founded in January 1853 and was devoted to good company and acts of philanthropy. The society raised money by means of an Annual Festival and celebrated their achievements by means of an Annual Dinner held at the Railway Inn, Isleworth. Each year a chairman and a small committee organised the Festival. Haliburton was chairman in 1861, succeeding H.G. Bohn.<sup>16</sup> Although the society was ". . . throughout its career. . . to assist those in necessity who were worthy of help," it enjoyed doing so by means of "social" activities. The nature of the entertainments offered to the community by these annual festivals of the Philanthropic Society can be judged from the account of the 1863 festival in the *Hounslow Parish Magazine*.<sup>17</sup>

The Chairman of the Festival for that year was the local coroner James Bird, the Vice-Chairman, Horatio G. Day, another prominent citizen. The Chairman's profession had no dampening effect upon the quality of the day's entertainment. The Festival took place at Whitton on 13 July 1863, and its programme consisted of a Fife and Drum Band, a Concert of Nigger Minstrelsy, the extraordinary contortion performances of the marvellous Persiviani, a Vocal and Instrumental Concert, the Band of the Irish Rifles, Tanner's Sporting Dogs and Performing Monkeys (the favourite of the day), Gymnastic and Acrobatic Performances, Rural Sports and a Melodramatic entertainment.<sup>18</sup> The grounds were illuminated, and dancing took place until late: "One great attraction in connection with the above fete (continued the account in the *Parish Magazine*), was the exhibition of a beautifully-executed life-like marble bust of John Farnell, Esq. (the local brewer), the work of Mr. Henry May, a talented and self-taught young man, a native of Isleworth. On the right of the bust was a model in plaster of Horatio G. Day, Esq; while to the left was another model in plaster of Mr. Keyzor."<sup>19</sup>

The philanthropists of Isleworth were evidently proud of the chance to immortalize themselves in marble and plaster. The plaster bust of Haliburton that was given to the Reading Room is still at the Isleworth Branch Library though it has been consigned to a cupboard under the stairs. The library has no record of its origin or of its sculptor. However, it is a safe assertion that it was the work of Mr. May, who seems to have found a ready market for his skills amongst the philanthropists of Isleworth in 1863. The bust surely marks a forgotten link between Haliburton and the Isleworth Philanthropic Society.<sup>20</sup>

There is open praise of the Philanthropists of Isleworth in the *Hounslow Parish Magazine's* report of the Twelfth Annual Philanthropic Society Dinner held on 29 June 1864:

The Hon. T.C. Haliburton occupied the chair, supported by Rev. J. Yarker and H.G. Day, Esq. About a hundred guests were present, and the whole affair, musical and prandial, was as satisfactory as could be desired. We cordially commend this society to the support of the public, as one of the most deserving in the district. The admirable system of bestowing its relief is well known and appreciated. In the words of the chairman (T.C.H.), in the course of an excellent speech touching on the society's operations, "There were a great many persons who would almost starve before they would ask for relief. This society took the trouble to find out deserving cases, relieve them, and no one was any the wiser, for even in their books the names of the recipients were entered in private marks only understood by the officers of the society. . ."<sup>21</sup>

Haliburton's philanthropy was not inspired by great personal wealth. When he was offered a seat in Parliament in 1856-57, his first thought was of the incidental expenses of the job that he might not be able to sustain. Hence his pressure upon Joseph Howe to assist him in his fight for a pension from the Nova Scotia Government.<sup>22</sup> One of the obvious expenses of his new life was the upkeep of Gordon House. Haliburton had pointed out to Howe that the house belonged to a "Lord Hallyburton", commenting upon the "singular coincidence" of the names.<sup>23</sup> They were not related. However, Lord Frederick Gordon (who changed his name to Lord Hallyburton in 1843) ceased to own Gordon House in 1851, when it was bought by Lord Kilmorey along with the house next door, St. Margaret's.<sup>24</sup> Kilmorey promptly demolished St Margaret's and rebuilt it, selling it in 1854 to the Conservative Land Commission who resold it two years later to the Royal Female Naval School, Haliburton's immediate neighbour for nine years. If Kilmorey lived in Gordon House it was for a short time in 1851-52, because the Rate Books of the property record a "Hamilton Cook" as the occupier for the years 1852-55 and then Thomas Haliburton from 1856.

The Earl of Kilmorey rather overshadows Haliburton in the local annals of the day. His story is admirably told by Alan C.B. Urwin in *Railshead Isleworth*: Kilmorey's mistress died in October 1854 and led to his sudden removal from the area to his country seat at Woburn Park, Chertsy. He took with him the elaborate (but portable) mausoleum he had built to house the remains of his mistress. When Mrs. Haliburton moved out of Gordon House in 1867, the Earl of Kilmorey returned to live at Gordon House and renovated it extensively. He also brought back the mausoleum to a small burial ground a little way from the grounds of Gordon House, where it stands today. The eccentric Earl had a tunnel built underground from the grounds of Gordon House to the mausoleum and had a tramway installed in it. He often practiced going through the tunnel in his coffin to join his mistress in the mausoleum. He finally made it in 1880.<sup>25</sup>

When Haliburton occupied Gordon House, he assumed responsibility for a footpath that the Earl of Kilmorey had constructed in 1852 between Gordon House and the river. The local Board of Surveyors agreed to the path's construction only if the Earl would agree to its upkeep in perpetuity. A legal document was signed to this effect. Not only did Haliburton find himself responsible for this footpath, but his name appears several times in the minutes of the Board of Surveyors between 1859 and 1865. At first the Board requested Haliburton to have the overhanging trees on his property lopped, and this he did promptly.<sup>26</sup>

But he was not so eager to respond to the Board's demand in a letter of 1861 that he repair the embankment in front of his residence (Minutes 5-1861). The Board was writing to him again in 1865, to say that the front wall of his property was giving way, ". . . as the owner of that property you are legally liable for such repairs."<sup>27</sup> This time the clerk of the Board visited Haliburton personally, and he was assured that repairs would be effected. Haliburton's health was failing him in 1865 and nothing was done. The Board carried out the repairs themselves and sent the bill to Mrs. Haliburton in 1867. The upkeep of the property must have been one of the factors that determined Mrs. Haliburton to leave Gordon House. She held a sale of her effects in 1868<sup>28</sup> and the same year moved to Bridge House Richmond, where she lived until her death in 1888, at the age of 84.

Haliburton died leaving effects of under 6,000 pounds to his wife. When she died twenty-two years later, she left only 707 pounds and had been for some years "in sore distress of mind and body",<sup>29</sup> conscious she had little to bequeath her sister, the main beneficiary. Her life after the death of Judge Haliburton seems to have been one of slow financial decline. This is the impression given by Lady Charlotte Schreiber's allusions to Mrs. Haliburton in her *Journals*.<sup>30</sup> Mrs. Haliburton, like Charlotte Schreiber, was one of the few collectors of Battersea enamels in the nineteenth century. The Victoria and Albert Museum were eager to buy up many of her pieces at her 1868 sale.<sup>31</sup> During the last nine years of the Judge's life, she must have done much to assist her husband to lead the full and hospitable life that he loved: her love of china must have added an air of refinement to the household at Gordon House.<sup>32</sup>

What life was like in Isleworth on a month to month basis can be gathered from the *Hounslow Parish Magazine's* monthly commentary on events in the Hounslow/Isleworth community. The magazine started up in 1863, and the years 1863-65 are full of reports of Fetes, Agricultural Society meetings, annual festivals and a broad range of popular entertainments. The *Magazine* actively pursued a policy to interest the local populace in more rational entertainments like lectures. It is obvious from the same columns of the *Parish Magazine* that the pleasant climate provided the inhabitants with longevity but not immortality. The year 1864 saw a series of deaths among the notable inhabitants: C. Farnell, the brewer; R.A. Frogley, Chairman of the Board of Directors who built the new Town Hall in Hounslow, and early in 1865, the 4th Duke of Northumberland himself. When notable citizens died, the shopkeepers of Isleworth usually closed their businesses as a mark of respect. They were soon to do this for Haliburton himself.

The *Parish Magazine* reported as usual the thirteenth annual festival of the Philanthropic Society and in the same issue commented: "Some time back the friends of 'Sam Slick' were alarmed by statements as to his health. We are glad to find that the worthy Justice's indisposition was but temporary, and that we are not (D.V.) likely to lose not merely an eminent literary character, but a good neighbour." The September issue of the Magazine reported Haliburton's death: ". . .our obituary also contains the name of the Hon. Justice Haliburton, better known to thousands of readers by the cognomen of 'Sam Slick'. He may be politically considered the last of the Tories, and although he has retired from the House of Commons, from ill health, few could have read the brief notice of his death without paying a tribute of respect to the memory of a man of eccentric talent but sterling worth."<sup>33</sup>

Haliburton's life in Isleworth had been a success, though his active involvement in the local community has not been commented upon. His immediate acceptance by a community of wealthy businessmen must have seemed to him like a fitting culmination to a long and successful literary career. But it was made more certain by his involvement in the society of Isleworth and surrounding districts. His life was a full one, and away from his Parliamentary duties Haliburton found the congenial company that he seems to have searched for all his life.

#### NOTES

1. A.L.S. to Joseph Howe, Gordon House, Isleworth, 4th November 1856. Public Archives of Nova Scotia Vertical Mss. File. Thanks are due to the P.A.N.S. for permission to use this quotation.
2. This description of Sarah Harriet Williams in the 1851 census was kindly supplied me by the Shropshire County Records Office.
3. Haliburton gave *An Address on the Present Condition of British North America* at the City Hall, Glasgow, 25 March, 1857. The speech was subsequently printed. In a letter to W.B. Watkins, dated 7 March 1857, Haliburton remarks that "I have hitherto declined every invitation to lecture, I have been over-persuaded to do so at Glasgow." The original of this letter is at Massey College, Toronto. Desmond Neil, the librarian, kindly provided me with the text of the letter. The library had formerly acquired its group of letters to W.B. Watkins through the keenness of its former librarian, Douglas Lochhead, now at Mount Allison.
4. I am indebted to Andrea Cameron, Librarian i/c of local studies at Hounslow District Library for providing me with an array of local history materials to look at when I visited the library recently. Any errors in interpreting the materials are strictly my own.
5. Extracted from a mid-nineteenth-century account of St. John's Church, Isleworth, part of the Files on Local History at the Hounslow District Library.
6. George III as a young prince and as an old King had lived at Kew Palace. See the account of Isleworth in *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, A History of Middlesex*, Vol 3, ed. R.B. Pugh (The University of London Institute of Historical Research, Oxford University Press, 1962).

7. See the DNB.
8. Haliburton wrote to Howe in 1857 (January 15) that he had had an offer of a Parliamentary seat but was hesitant to accept because of the "incidental expense" involved. This letter is now at the University of King's College, Halifax, Nova Scotia. My thanks to Mrs. J.E. Lane, the librarian, for providing me with a copy.
9. Newspaper cutting from the *Middlesex Chronicle*, 1 Jan 1927, "Our Old Town Hall," Hounslow District Library Sc/9 iii, p.74.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 73b.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Chittick, pp. 158-60
13. *Borough of Heston & Isleworth Public Libraries Official Opening of the Isleworth Branch Library Twickenham Road Isleworth*, by Alderman F.C. Green, Chairman of the Borough of Heston and Isleworth Public Libraries Committee. Saturday, October 10, 1936.
14. Rev Richards (curate), *Topography of the District* (a typescript at the Hounslow District Library), p. 19 supplies sample accounts of the Library at Isleworth during 1860. Unfortunately the Annual Library Reports are missing for the years of Haliburton's residence in Isleworth. The run in the Hounslow District Library starts at 1871.
15. There is no record at Hounslow of how or why the books and bust were given to the Isleworth Branch Library, though it is possible to deduce answers to both items. For more on the bust see later in the article.
16. H.G. Bohn (1796-1884) was the highly successful publisher of Bohn's Library of Classics. He lived on a fine estate in Twickenham. In 1864, he sold his publishing business for 40 thousand pounds. He was a collector of fine china, like Mrs. Haliburton. See later in the paper. My information on the Isleworth Philanthropic Society is derived from the Files of *The Heston, Hounslow and Isleworth Citizen, A Monthly Journal*, No. 1, April 1924, p.9 "Isleworth Philanthropic Society A Short History."
17. Ed. J. Erskine Clarke (London, 1863 et. seq.). See the August issue for 1863.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. The librarian i/c of local studies at Hounslow thought that the gifts of books and bust were a bequest of Haliburton. But the will of Thomas Haliburton makes no detailed bequests and leaves the entire estate to Sarah Harriet Haliburton, his wife. Mrs. Haliburton seems to have presented the bust and books to the Isleworth Reading Room in 1867, preparatory to the Sale she held in 1868. The present neglect of the bust is largely due to its uncertain origins. It is a good one and shows the Judge possibly in the last two or three years of his life. One hopes that the Haliburton Museum at Windsor, N.S. could acquire the bust and preserve it in safekeeping. Though the books might seem more functional in a library, the Isleworth Branch has no facilities for their use either. The edition of Haliburton's *Works* is splendidly bound and marked "Isleworth" on the bottom of the spine.
21. See the issue for July 1864.
22. See Chittick's discussion of Haliburton's pension battle, pp.565-72.
23. See note 1 above.
24. I am greatly indebted in these remarks on Gordon House history to Alan C.B. Urwin's *Railhead, Isleworth. The History of Gordon, Lacy and St. Margaret's Houses, Isleworth, Middlesex* (The Hounslow and District History Society, 1974)
25. Urwin, p.18 et seq.
26. The information on Haliburton and the Board of Surveyors at Isleworth is extracted from J.G. Castle's File on Local History, "HALIBURTON" section. Mr. Castle made voluminous notes on local figures, extracting information from a multitude of sources. My comments are based on his notes on the Board of Surveyor's Minutes between 1859 and 1867, as they relate to Haliburton.
27. Minute 6-1865.
28. Castle's compilation on "Haliburton" mentions Mrs. Haliburton's Sale. Castle's source was William Chaffers', *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain* (Third edition, 1870), p. 738": "There is also a Collection of Battersea enamels at the S. Kensington Museum selected from Mrs. Haliburton's sale in 1868." I have not located the date of the sale. The Victoria and Albert Museum had no record of the date of their acquisitions from Mrs. Haliburton.



29. *The Will of Sarah Harriet Haliburton of Bridge House, Richmond* (1886).
30. *Journals. Confidences of a Collector of Ceramics*, ed. Montague J. Guest, 2 Vols (London, 1911). See i.31, 63, 67, 200, 238; ii, 280, 428. Mrs. Haliburton seems to have boosted her ailing finances by selling some of her better pieces to Lady Schreiber.
31. As Egan Mew points out in his book on *Battersea Enamels* (Medici Society, London & Boston, 1926), pp. 5-6, there were only "a very few mid-nineteenth-century collectors, until recent times. Beckford of Fonthill, perhaps, and such enthusiasts as Lady Charlotte Schreiber, and Sir Wollaston Franks, certainly, and Mr. Storr-Kennedy and Mrs. Haliburton, gave it consideration, and their harvests are now safety guarded in the museums."
32. One of Haliburton's letters to W. B. Watkins, now at Massey College, Toronto, mentions his wife's passion for collecting china. It is a letter dated 27 October 1858.
33. See the issues for May and September 1865.