

FREE

# A wee bit of maritime history... 10



## Captain James Pollock



Born in 1769, Captain James Pollock was a sea captain, a ship-owner and a merchant in Portaferry. His home was in Westgate, on The Strand and from there he sailed all over the world. Every eight weeks or so, in the early eighteen hundreds, Captain Pollock crossed the Atlantic. Tickets for his ships could always be obtained at his home or onboard his ships.

*This advertisement is reprinted from a Belfast newspaper:*

**FIRST SPRING SHIP FOR NORTH AMERICA.**

**FOR ST. ANDREW'S, NEW BRUNSWICK,**

The Well-Known Snow **DORCAS SAVAGE,**

**JAMES POLLOCK, Master,**

Will, with her usual punctuality, sail from

**PORTAFERRY** for the above Port on **WEDNESDAY, the 27th**

**March.** The character of the above Vessel, as well as Captain Pollock's attention to the comfort of his Passengers, are so well established, that any proof is deemed unnecessary. -

Suffice it to say, that roomy Births will be put up, and that a large supply of Water and Fuel will be laid in for the Voyage.

For Freight or Passage, please apply to **THOMAS GELSTON** and **J. SHAW,** Portaferry; Messrs. **JAS. RENTOUL & CO.**

Downpatrick; or **JAMES POLLOCK,** on board the Vessel, or at his house.

**PORTAFERRY, 13th Feb. 1822.**

Life as a sea captain was never a dull one. The *Sara & Elizabeth* was built in Portaferry in 1806 and sailed to Quebec and St. Andrews. On Jan 2, 1813 she was boarded by an American privateer and looted of everything moveable and was on the point of being set on fire when a ship hove in sight and the privateer cleared off. The ship whose appearance made the privateers run was the *Portaferry*. Her master and owner was James Pollock and he sailed her from Portaferry to St Andrews, New Brunswick until 1827.

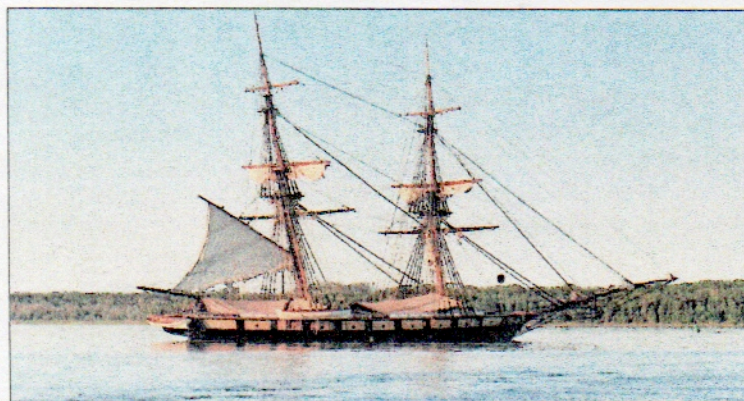
Pollock was involved in many rescues of other ships and one, described in a letter from Reverend John Orr to his brother on **November 25th 1824**, certainly had an impact on Portaferry.

Orr wrote:

You no doubt heard about the arrival of the *Dorcas* and the *Portaferry* and of the crew of *the Maria of Milford*, six of whom Captain Pollock rescued from a watery grave. A subscription was raised here and in Strangford for their relief, and nearly £20 collected.

Each of the men was furnished with a new suit of clothes complete, and also from 20 shillings to 40 shillings each were allowed to bear the expenses home, according to the distance they had to go.

The crew of the *Portaferry* had a dance in the Market House on Tuesday night, preparatory to which they fired a cannon from the rock which made the whole town resound. Fourteen panes of glass in Mr. Warnock's, seven in Mrs Dalzell's added to the music.



The esteem in which Captain Pollock was held is demonstrated in the following letter which was published in the Montreal Herald in 1818. and was written by a group of passengers upon their safe arrival in Canada.

WE THE CABIN & STEERAGE PASSENGERS ON BOARD THE BRIG DORCAS SAVAGE, FROM PORTAFERRY TO NEW BRUNSWICK, DEEPLY IMPRESSED WITH THE GRATITUDE WE OWE TO CAPTAIN POLLOCK, FOR HIS VERY KIND TREATMENT TO US DURING THE PASSAGE OF 36 DAYS, BEG TO OFFER HIM OUR SINCERE AND UNFEIGNED THANKS & ASSURE HIM HIS GREAT CIVILITY NEVER CAN BE ERASED FORM OUR MEMORY.

WE FURTHER BEG TO ASSURE HIM THAT WE ARE FULLY AWARE THAT OUR COMFORT WAS HIS CHIEF STUDY, AND IN WHICH HE SO WELL SUCCEEDED BY KEEPING GOOD ORDER AND CLEANLINESS TOGETHER WITH WATER & FUEL IN ABUNDANCE, THAT NO PERSON HAS BEEN AFFLICTED [EXCEPT WITH SEA-SICKNESS] DURING THE PASSAGE.

IN ADDITION TO THE MANY OBLIGATIONS WE ARE UNDER TO HIM FOR HIS PATERNAL CARE, WE WOULD FEEL DOUBLY GRATIFIED BY HIS HAVING THE GOODNESS TO PUBLISH THESE OUR UNITED THANKS IN THE NEWSPAPERS & HAND-BILLS AT HOME, AS A GUIDE TO ANY OF OUR FRIENDS WHO MAY WISH FOR A SAFE AND SPEEDY PASSAGE TO AMERICA, BEING CONFIDENT IN NO VESSEL, CAN THEY BE MORE COMFORTABLY BIRTHED OR BETTER TREATED THAN ON BOARD THE DORCAS SAVAGE WITH CAPTAIN POLLOCK.

ST. ANDREWS 4TH JUNE 1818

SIGNED

ROB. BROWN JOHNSTON; JOHN WILSON & FAMILY  
THOMAS CORHRAT; MATHEW DOWNEY  
ANDREW BYERS; JAMES SMYTH  
JOHN DICKSON; JAMES MAGEE  
LESLIE COULTER; PAT McGRATH  
RICHARD POLLY AND FAMILY; JOHN SEED  
JNR. REYNOLDS & FAMILY; MICHAEL HUGHES  
SAMUEL SHANKS; JOHN MISKELLY  
JAMES McHARG & FAMILY; THOMAS JONES & FAMILY  
WILLIAM CRANGLE; JOHN RAMSEY  
HENRY MURNEY; ELIZA MATEER & FAMILY  
HENRY SEED; JAMES GRAHAM & FAMILY  
DANIEL TAGGART; ANDREW CAVANAGH & FAMILY  
HUGH TAGGART; JOHN COATS & FAMILY  
JOHN HUGHES; JOHN GOSBEY & FAMILY  
SAM. SEEDS & FAMILY

On 3rd April 1828, Reverend Orr of the Presbyterian Church in Portaferry also wrote about another ship captained by James Pollock, the *Hibernian*, leaving for St. Andrews with 135 passengers. He said '*Such a multitude as was on the quay, and along the shore when she loosed off about 3 o'clock, I have seldom witnessed in Portaferry.*' Sadly, seven months later, on a trip back from Canada, Captain Pollock allowed his twenty two year old son, Thomas, to sail the *Hibernia* home. The vessel was wrecked in thick weather in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Thomas died from exposure.

Many Portaferry men were crew members of Captain James Pollock's ships and one Portaferry man, Alexander McCappin, was one of the crew of Captain Thomas Pollock's ship on the fateful voyage, which was his first and last as master.

In 1924 his grandson recounted the story he told:

*My grandfather, Alexander McCappin, was ships's joiner, and had sailed with the older Captain James Pollock for some time. So when he decided to retire and put the son Thomas in command he asked my grandfather to act as a father towards him as he was only a boy in years and experience of the world. And Alex McCappin fulfilled the pledge he made to James Pollock, as far as it was possible for a man to do.*

*On that terrific night, when the boat was endeavouring to reach the provision station and failed - as she lay at anchor with the waves rolling over her - young Captain Pollock lay in my grandfather's arms rolled in oilskins to shield him from the waves and piercing snow. When morning dawned and they carried him ashore midst blinding snow the only place of shelter the little company could find was the lee side of the trunk of a large tree. With his back against this, my grandfather stood with the young man in his arms till the snow rose up to his waist.*

*Then the others banked the snow under his feet till he was raised sufficiently high to keep the dying youth above it. In a few hours the spirit left the body, and it was laid down on the great white winding sheet that covered the ground. Some of the men were placed on guard while Alex McCappin and the others travelled back along the coast to the wreck and gathered as much timber and tools as made a coffin. In it they deposited the remains of this promising youth, and laid them to rest midst the snow and ice on that lonely island on the St. Lawrence.*

*How slow were the means of communication at the time may be gathered from the fact that no intelligence of the calamity reached Portaferry till the shipwrecked mariners themselves returned.*



The  
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for Northern Ireland

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