

Charles Wilks Esq. (1760 - 1847)

Charles Wilks was the son of Edward Wilks who came from Lincolnshire. Edward Wilks married twice. By his first wife he had two sons, Samuel and Richard. By his second wife, Jane Stanley, of Faversham, Kent, he had two more sons, Frederick and Thomas Prescott. It is not known which one was the mother of Charles Wilks.

Charles was born into a family who already had business interests and property connected with the manufacture of gunpowder and the supply and stabling of horses for the Board of Ordnance. Until 1759 Edward Wilks was Clerk of Survey at Chatham Dockyard and also Storekeeper at Upnor Castle. He was appointed Storekeeper (manager) at the Royal Powder Mills at Faversham in 1759 when they were brought into government ownership. Edward Wilks kept this position until he died in 1784. He built Belmont House at Throwley near Faversham in 1769. It was sold to Col. John Montessor in 1779 and was later enlarged by the Harris family.

Charles Wilks first appointment appears to be as **Overseer of Works** for the Board of Ordnance at Chatham, 1st October 1780, when he was twenty years of age. He was then appointed **Clerk of Works** at Chatham from 25th August 1783. He is also listed as the contractor for the supply of horses on 3rd October 1787. The stable block at Belmont survives and is likely to be connected with his father's earlier interest in this respect. [Someone working currently (June 2011) at the Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre in Faversham, told me that her father lived at the stable block and that they had always speculated about the decorative iron cannon adorning the fireplace in the building. This could be linked to the family business of supplying the navy with gunpowder.]

On December 1st 1794 Charles Wilks became the **Clerk of Works** at the Royal Powder Mills at Faversham. In 1799 when he was thirty nine years old this position brought him an annual salary of £91.

For four years between 26th February 1800 and September 1804 Charles was the **Clerk of Works** at the Royal Powder Mills, Waltham Abbey. At this point he became **Clerk of Works** for the Royal Powder Mills, overall, at a salary of £200 per annum.

Charles' salary doubled again to £400 p.a. when he moved on 9th March 1805 to Ireland. He became **Superintendent** of the Royal Gunpowder Factory, Ballincollig, Co. Cork. It had just been purchased by the Board of Ordnance from Charles Henry Leslie, a Cork banker who set up production in 1794. Wilks remained there until government production ceased in 1815. While in Ireland he was appointed as a magistrate in November 1808 and elected a Freeman of Cork in 1814. The house he lived in, now called Oriel House, is now an hotel. A major auction house recently had a sale of fine furniture from Oriel House. While he was in charge at Ballincollig he submitted plans to Matthew Boulton, the Birmingham steam engine pioneer concerning "*A scheme for the valves of large pumps*" (8th October 1811). This included pen and wash drawings and plans and sections of his designs. He also published the work: *Observations on the Height of Carriage Wheels, on the Comparative Advantage of employing one or two Horses with one Carriage, and on Repairing Roads.* (1814).

Charles Wilks became Superintendent at the Ballincollig Factory soon after it was taken over by the Board of Ordnance, and therefore it was he who began the overhaul of the site. He improved access from the Kilkenny Road, re-built the Inniscarra Bridge, expanded the barracks, mills and administrative buildings and offices and built cavalry barracks and canals on the site. It is only speculation that he also married at this time. He appears to have married Elizabeth---- but no records have been traced so far.

By 1825 Wilks was back in England and in June took up the position of **Storekeeper** of the Royal Powder Mills, Waltham Abbey.

Elizabeth Wilks died on 11th May 1831 at the age of seventy-three. She is buried in the Church of the Holy Cross, Waltham Abbey.

By 1832 Wilks filled one of the four most important government appointed posts in the Board of Ordnance as **Storekeeper** of the Purfleet Gunpowder Magazine on the north bank of the Thames. The Purfleet site consisted of five huge storage depots where all gunpowder was received and stored prior to distribution. Only one of the Magazines survives as a listed building.

Charles Wilks died on 17th November 1847. His tomb in Swanscombe churchyard bears the inscription:

Charles Wilks Esq.
formerly of Purfleet Essex
and late of Greenhithe
Died 17 November 1847
aged 87 years, 64 of which he served in
Her Majesty's Navy and Ordnance

http://www.ballincolligheritage.org/site_gunpowder_mills.html
Ballincollig Heritage Association description of the mills.

http://www.royalgunpowdermills.com/wargm_chronology.htm
Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills Visitor site.

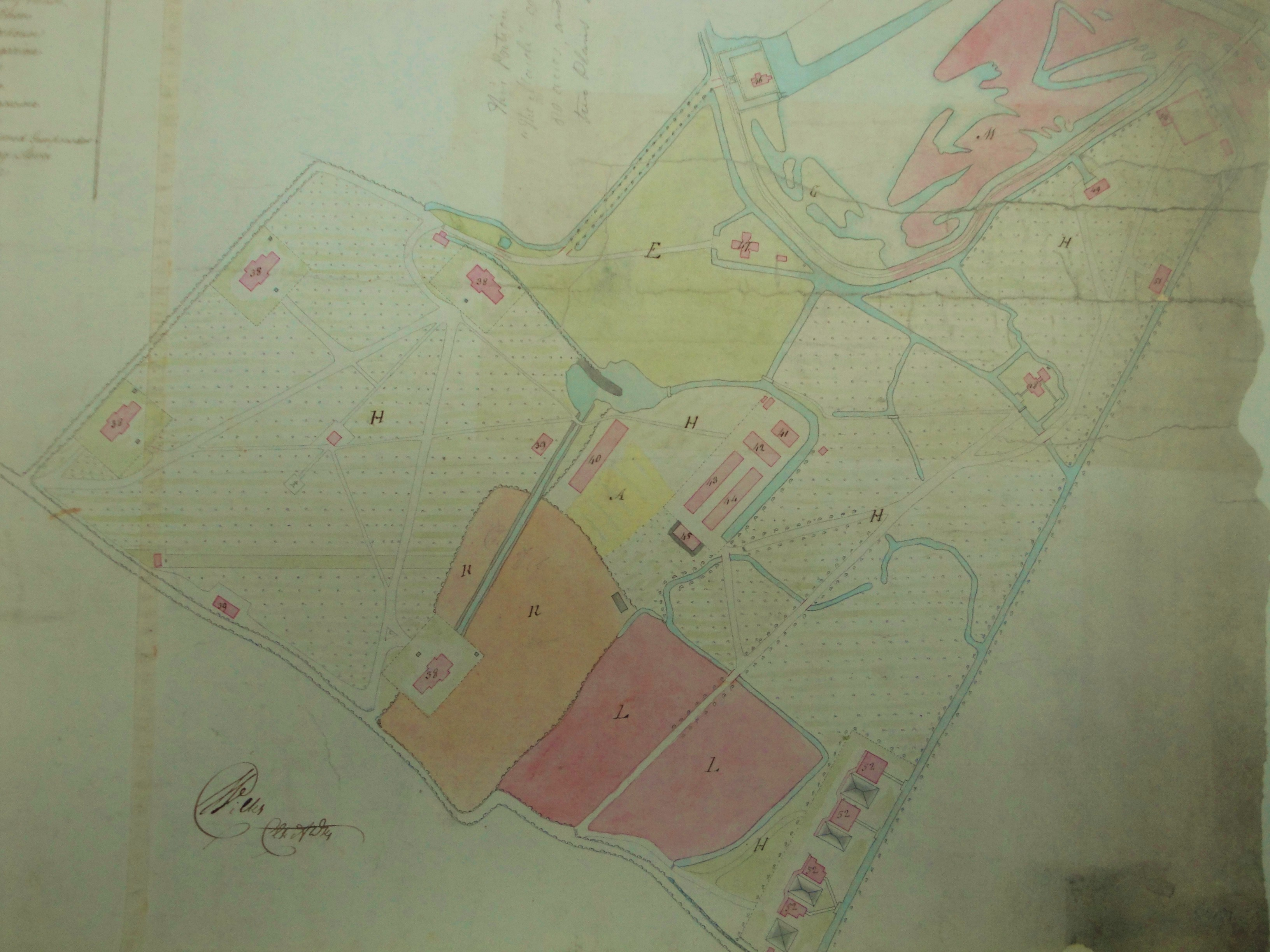
http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/industrial_revolution_series_one_part_15/documents/Reel286.pdf
Adam Matthew publications (Research Papers) The Boulton & Watt Correspondence & Papers from Birmingham Central Library.

The Royal kalendar and court and city register for England, Scotland... 1835 p215

Godfrey, Raymond & Percival, Arthur. Faversham Gunpowder Personnel Register 1573 - 1840. The Faversham Society 2003.(Faversham Paper No. 84)

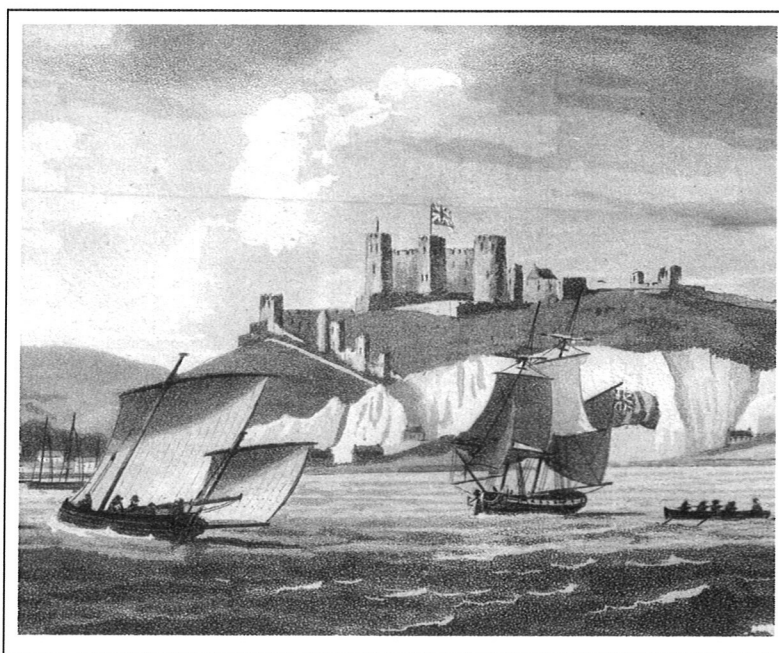
In addition to the Board of Ordnance letters at the National Archive, Kew, there are maps of Faversham (signed C.Wilks) and Ballincollig from the period.

TARS/SA/6/11.



This pattern
of the fortification
is 80 acres, and
two plantations

Wicks
1714



“GIVING NEW LIFE TO OLD TARs!”

at

**ST. PETER & ST. PAUL,
SWANSCOMBE**

THE French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars were fought over the whole globe. Conflict took place across much of western and central Europe, the Middle East, southern Africa and the West Indies. At sea, rival navies battled for supremacy in all the waters around Europe, the Atlantic, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and beyond. People of the time referred to these conflicts, as ‘the Great War’.

**COMMANDER THOMAS HILL R.N.
LIEUTENANT GEORGE SOWTON
GEORGE SMITH
& CHARLES WILKS ESQ.**

**COMMANDER THOMAS HILL R.N.
(1767-1836)**

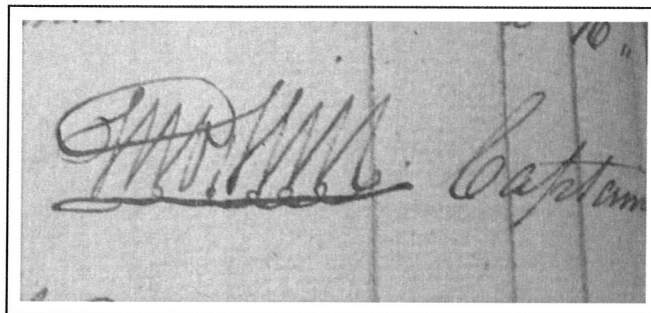
Family Tomb by West Gate

10 Nov 1779	Ordinary Seaman	<i>HMS Canada</i>	(74)
28 Oct 1781	Able Seaman	<i>HMS Fame</i>	(74)
01 Dec 1781	Midshipman	<i>HMS Fame</i>	(74)
25 July 1783	Midshipman	<i>HMS Elisabeth</i>	(74)
25 Apr 1786	Able Seaman	<i>HMS Ganges</i>	(74)
20 Oct 1786	Mid & Master's Mate	<i>HMS Crown</i>	(64)
01 Oct 1788	Lieut. Examination		
02 Jan 1794	Appointed Lieutenant	<i>Ship not known</i>	
27 July 1801	Married Mary Sharp	St. Mary's, Stone	
14 Nov 1801	Acting command	<i>HMS Voltigeur,</i>	(18)
1805	Commander	Sea Fencibles	
08 Dec 1836	Died at Greenhithe	Buried Swanscombe	

While a midshipman on *HMS Fame*, Hill would have been present at Admiral-Rodney's famous action, the Battle of the Saintes, 12th April 1782.

In 1802 Hill spent five months on *HMS Voltigeur*. His command began by being almost wrecked on the Scillies when bringing the prize ship from Oporto.

The Sea Fencibles were a naval "home guard". Hill commanded, alongside three other naval officers, from Emsworth, Hampshire to Beachy Head, Sussex. The headquarters was at Shoreham.



Hill's signature while in command of Voltigeur (National Archive)

IN Pursuance of the Directions of the Right Hon^{ble} the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, signified to Us by Mr. *Stephens's* Letter of the *29th Oct 1788* We have examined Mr. *Thomas Hill* who by Certificate appears to be more than *Twenty One* Years of Age, and find he has gone to Sea more than *Seven* Years in the Ships, and Qualities under-mentioned, Viz.

Ships	Entry.	Quality.	Discharge.	Time		
				Years	M.	W. & D.
<i>Canada</i>	<i>10 Nov 1779</i>	<i>Cord</i>	<i>10 March 1780</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>1</i>	
<i>Same</i>	<i>28 Oct 1781</i>	<i>Able</i>	<i>30 Nov 1781</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>6</i>	
<i>Do</i>	<i>1 Dec. "</i>	<i>Mid</i>	<i>2 July 1783</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Elizabeth</i>	<i>25 July 83</i>	<i>Mid</i>	<i>20 Oct 1785</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Do</i>	<i>2 Nov 1785</i>	<i>Do</i>	<i>24 April 1786</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>	
<i>Janges</i>	<i>25 Apr 1786</i>	<i>Able</i>	<i>19 Oct. "</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Crown</i>	<i>20 Oct. "</i>	<i>Mid</i>	<i>27 Sep 1788</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>1</i>
				<i>7</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>

He produceth Journals kept by himself in the *Same Elizabeth* and Certificates from Captains *Barbor Wilson Kingsmill* *Sir Roger Curtis and Cole* of his Diligence and Sobriety: He can Splice, Knot, Reef a Sail, work a Ship in Sailing, shift his Tides, keep a Reckoning of a Ship's Way by Plain Sailing and Mercator; observe by Sun or Star, and find the Variation of the Compass, and is qualified to do the Duty of an, Able Seaman, and Midshipman. Dated at the Navy-Office, the *1 October 1788*

Wm. Wallis *W. Wallis* *W. Wallis*

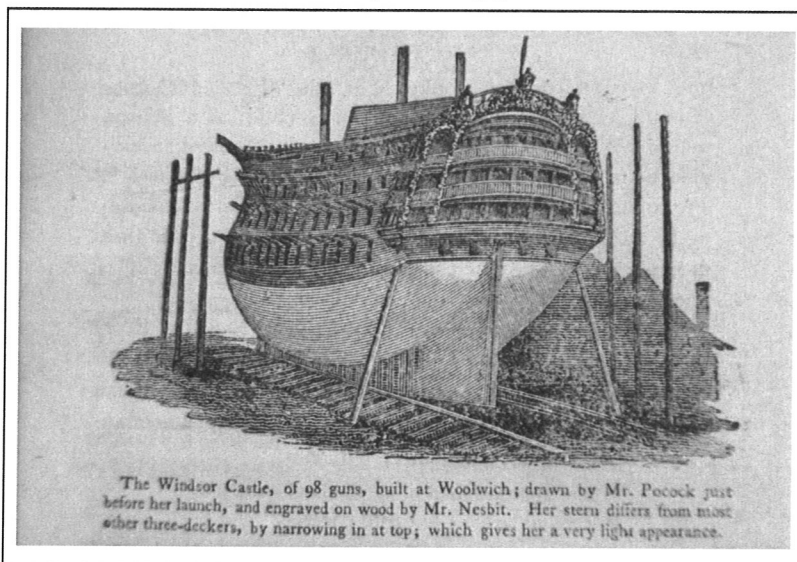
Thomas Hill sat for his examination on the 1st October 1788. He gave proof of the ships he had served on for at least six years. He had to go through the ordeal of sitting before three captains to be tested on his knowledge. He would have had to answer questions like "You are sent to a ship ordered to be fitted out, the captain not having appeared; the lower masts and bowsprits are in, but not rigged; what part of the rigging goes first over the mastheads?" He passed, but did not get a lieutenant's post until 2nd Jan. 1794. (*National Archive*)

LIEUTENANT GEORGE SOWTON (1781-1803)

Headstone in churchyard. South-West of Chancel

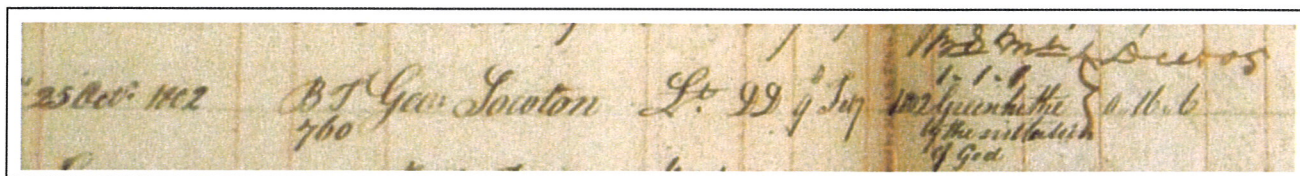
20 Feb 1781	Baptised in Gosport, Hampshire, son of James and Peggy Sowton		
11 Apr 1795	Volunteer	<i>HMS Southampton</i>	<i>(Frigate)</i>
19 June 1795	Volunteer	<i>HMS Windsor Castle</i>	<i>(98)</i>
01 July 1795	Midshipman	<i>HMS Windsor Castle</i>	<i>(98)</i>
14 Feb 1797	Midshipman	<i>HMS Cumberland</i>	<i>(74)</i>
26 Aug 1797	Midshipman	<i>HMS Ramillies</i>	<i>(74)</i>
19 Mar 1799	Mid/Master's Mate	<i>HMS Russell</i>	<i>(74)</i>
02 Apr 1801	Present at Nelson's victory at Battle of Copenhagen		
06 Oct 1801	Lieutenant's Examination		
14 Oct 1801	Appointed Lieutenant (on half pay-no ship)		
25 Oct 1802	Lieutenant	<i>HMS Juno</i>	<i>(Frigate)</i>
08 Feb 1803	Died on board Juno aged 21		

George Bradley Sowton began his naval career at the age of 14 as a "Volunteer, First Class" a new type of entry into the navy for boys over the age of 11. George would have received wages of £6 per annum. As he first went to sea in a frigate he would have berthed with other young gentlemen who were already midshipmen. Fast, glamorous, frigates gave the prospect of easy prize money, so this was a lucky first appointment.



The Windsor Castle, of 98 guns, built at Woolwich; drawn by Mr. Pocock just before her launch, and engraved on wood by Mr. Nesbit. Her stern differs from most other three-deckers, by narrowing in at top; which gives her a very light appearance.

From Frigate duty Sowton transferred to *HMS Windsor Castle*, a 2nd rate ship of the line and the flagship of Admiral Robert Man on the Mediterranean station. George progressed to Midshipman/Master's Mate in *HMS Russell* under Captain William Cumming and took part in the Battle of Copenhagen. Later that year he was promoted to Lieutenant.



Entry in Juno's Muster Book recording the death of George Sowton (National Archive)

His career looked promising as he had uninterrupted advancement, even during the Peace of Amiens, when he was appointed in October 1802 to the Amazon class frigate *HMS Juno*. The 21 year old Sowton would have had every expectation of taking part in *Juno's* subsequent success in the Mediterranean. He was with her at Woolwich while being fitted out and made ready but unfortunately he died on board on the 8th February 1803.

GEORGE SMITH (1806-1850)

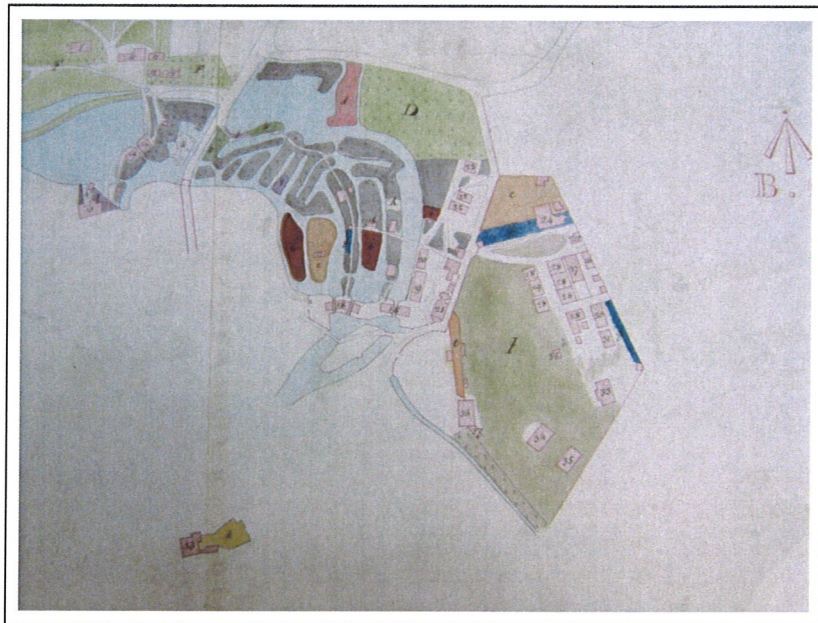
Headstone South of Transept

George Smith was a seaman belonging to *HMS Hercules* (74). He drowned at Greenhithe on Boxing Day, 1850, aged 44 years. His headstone in the churchyard was erected by his shipmates. *HMS Hercules* was an Armada class ship of the line, built at Chatham and launched in 1815. She had no battle honours as her duties had always been those of troopship, carrier of timber from India and from 1847-51 as a storeship at Chatham.

**CHARLES WILKS ESQ.
(1760-1847)**

Headstone in churchyard

01 Oct 1780	Overseer of Works for Board of Ordnance, Chatham.
25 Aug 1783	Clerk of Works, Chatham.
03 Oct 1787	Contractor for supply of horses.
01 Dec 1794	Clerk of Works, Faversham Royal Gunpowder Mills.
26 Feb 1800	Clerk of Works, Waltham Abbey Gunpowder Mills.
09 Mar 1805	Superintendent of Royal Gunpowder Factory Ballincollig, Co. Cork, Ireland.
15 Jun 1825	Storekeeper, Royal Powder Mills, Waltham Abbey.
11 May 1831	Death of his wife, Elizabeth, aged 73 years, buried at Holy Cross Church, Waltham Abbey, Essex.
1832	Storekeeper at Purfleet, Essex.
17 Nov 1847	Late of Greenhithe. Died aged 87 years. Served 64 years in Her Majesty's Navy and Ordnance.



Wilks' Map of Faversham Gunpowder Works (National Archive)

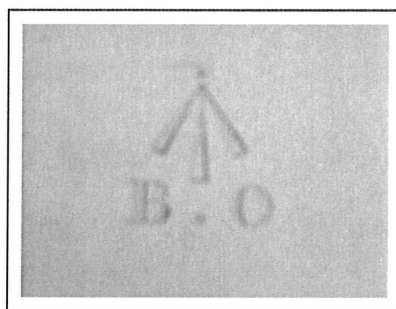
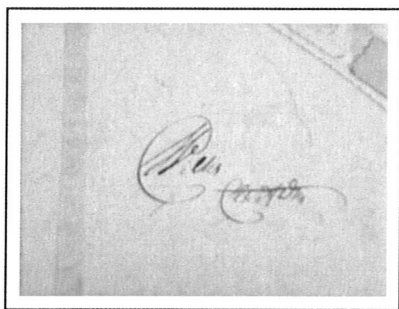
Charles Wilks was the son of Edward Wilks, the Storekeeper, or manager of the Royal Gunpowder Factory at Faversham. It was the father who built the first house at Belmont, Throwley in 1769, before it was sold and enlarged by Col. John Montresor.

Although Charles Wilks headstone states that he served 64 years in Her Majesty's Navy and Ordnance, he did not serve on a ship at any time. He served the navy indirectly by working for the Board of Ordnance. It was this department which purchased, manufactured and supplied all weapons and gunpowder to the army and navy. It was also responsible for the storage, warehousing and repair of all equipment. The greatest proportion of gunpowder would have supplied fighting ships in the Navy.

The Board of Ordnance took over the running of the Gunpowder works at Faversham in 1760 and Waltham Abbey in 1788. Charles Wilks held important senior positions at both of these sites before becoming Superintendent at the Royal Gunpowder Factory Ballincollig, Co. Cork, Ireland.

While at Ballincollig Wilks lived at what was later called Oriel House. It survives as an hotel. He was appointed a Magistrate and also elected a freeman of Cork.

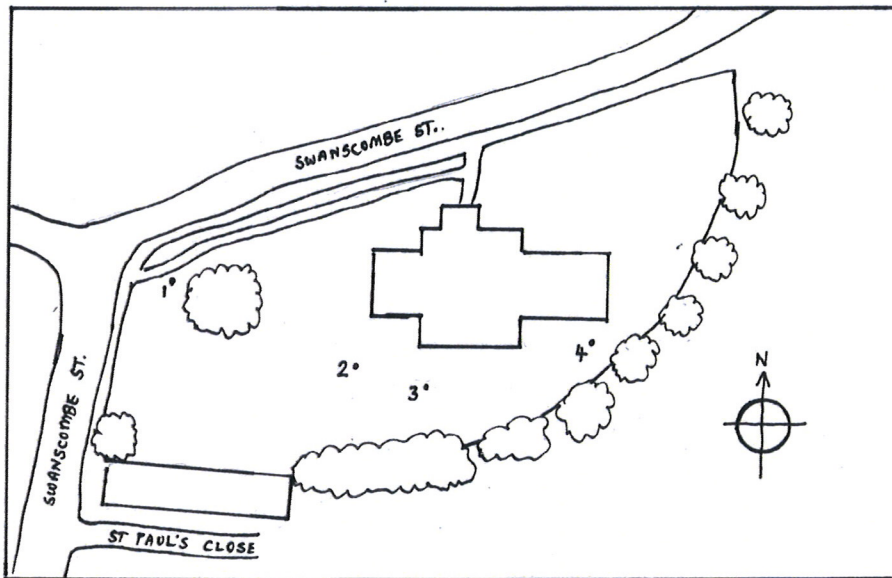
Charles Wilks last appointment was back in Essex at the Board of Ordnance's largest gunpowder depot on the banks of the Thames at Purfleet. Five huge gunpowder magazines were erected in 1831. Only one building survives. He was one of only four officials under the Master General of the Ordnance.



*Charles Wilks Signature as Faversham Clerk of Works Board of Ordnance Broad Arrow
(National Archive)*



St Peter & St. Paul, Swanscombe



1. Hill 2. Sowton 3. Smith 3. Wilks

**BREATHE NEW LIFE INTO NEARBY TARS BY VISITING:
Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats Memorial Window at St. Botolph's,
Northfleet.**

Contact e-mail: tars1758@yahoo.co.uk



June 2011



Ian MacFarlane

From: Richard Venn [r.venn@hotmail.co.uk]
Sent: 02 June 2011 22:01
To: archives@royalgunpowdermills.com
Subject: C.Wilks (storekeeper)

Attachments: Wilks map.JPG



Wilks map.JPG (1 MB)

Hello, my name is Richard Venn, I have a keen interest in the History of the Royal Navy. Myself and a few fellow enthusiasts have been working on a project of locating graves and memorials of naval personnel who served during the Napoleonic era. One such grave is at Swanscombe, Kent, (St Peter and St Paul's church.) The inscription has worn on the grave but we know it originally read:

Charles WILKS Esq formerly of Purfleet Essex and late of Greenhithe died 17 November 1847 aged 87 years, 64 of which he served in Her Majesty's Navy and Ordnance.

I have been to the PRO at Kew and started researching Charles Wilks, Ordnance records are a little sketchy, I have found a map (attached) drawn by him. Is it possible that the C.Wilks listed on your chronology as storekeeper from 29 June 1825, could be the same man?
would it have been an R.N ordnance appointment?

If so would you have any further information on Charles Wilks?

Any assistance would be very much appreciated, our group are producing a leaflet for the church concerning a number of sailors buried at Swanscombe.

Best wishes!

Richard.

Ian MacFarlane

From: Ian MacFarlane [imacfarlane@royalgunpowdermills.com]
Sent: 15 June 2011 11:42
To: 'Les Tucker'
Subject: RE: TARS Wilks.

yes

Thank you,
Ian MacFarlane
IT Coordinator
www.royalgunpowdermills.com
01992707370
Royal Gunpowder Mills
Beaulieu Drive
Waltham Abbey, Essex, EN9 1JY

England & Wales Registered Charity No. 1062968 Registered Office Bank House
66 High Street
Dawley, Telford, Shropshire, TF4 2HD

-----Original Message-----

From: Les Tucker [mailto:les10tucker@btinternet.com]
Sent: 14 June 2011 19:55
To: imacfarlane@royalgunpowdermills.com
Subject: FW: TARS Wilks.

Ian

Would it be possible to print a copy of the leaflet for WASC ?

Thanks

Les

From: Richard Venn [mailto:r.venn@hotmail.co.uk]
Sent: 12 June 2011 22:40
To: Les Tucker
Subject: FW: TARS Wilks.

Dear Les,
Susan has got back to me a lot quicker than anticipated. There is one other mail to follow, the attachment on this one is a PDF of the leaflet. Please feel free to print of as much or as little as you wish. The attachment on the following mail is Wilks notes produced by Susan. If you had any further queries you may find it easier to contact Susan direct, her details appear below: susan_amos2005@yahoo.co.uk (there is an underscore between susan_Amos)

As always best wishes,

Richard.

Date: Sun, 12 Jun 2011 21:40:52 +0100
From: susan_amos2005@yahoo.co.uk
Subject: TARS Wilks.
To: r.venn@hotmail.co.uk

Dear Richard,

I send you the enhanced version of the Swanscombe leaflet and my expanded version of the information about Wilks. You may send both to your other contacts at the Kent churches and Waltham Abbey.

Please let me know by e-mail if possible how the Trowten (Troughton) searches ended up yesterday after I left Room 4. Did you find him on Grampus? Where was Grampus? What dates precisely?

Andrew thinks he will try to go back and do all the other 1st June ships for John George Mount.

Have not had a chance to write up my notes yet, been too busy doing Wilks!

Susan.

Susan Amos
20 Heath Side
Petts Wood
Orpington, Kent
BR5 1EY
01689 832604

Ian MacFarlane

From: Les Tucker [les10tucker@btinternet.com]
Sent: 16 June 2011 10:08
To: imacfarlane@royalgunpowdermills.com
Subject: FW: TARS Wilks extra

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Attachments: Charles Wilks Esq.doc



Charles Wilks
Esq.doc (34 KB)

Ian

Thanks for printing the leaflet.

Could these notes be printed to complete the WASC.

I will tell Derek.

Regards

Les

From: Richard Venn [mailto:r.venn@hotmail.co.uk]
Sent: 12 June 2011 22:41
To: Les Tucker
Subject: FW: TARS Wilks extra

Date: Sun, 12 Jun 2011 21:44:28 +0100
From: susan_amos2005@yahoo.co.uk
Subject: TARS Wilks extra
To: r.venn@hotmail.co.uk

Susan Amos
20 Heath Side
Petts Wood
Orpington, Kent
BR5 1EY
01689 832604

