



## *In search of* **KELWAY'S HOTEL**

*By Charles Priestley*

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Few of us are able to cross the Atlantic as much as we would like in order to pursue our obsession. Many of us, indeed, have probably never seen the battlefields which we enjoy reading about. In my own case, although I am lucky enough to have an aunt and uncle in Chattanooga and to have spent a year teaching at the university there, my last visit to Tennessee was more than eight years ago and my wife and children seem strangely reluctant to sanction any further visits, at least for the time being. The result is that we are forced to look nearer home for sites of Civil War interest to satisfy the craving. One place worth looking at must be Southampton.

I imagine that other members have found themselves, as I did a year ago or so, sitting in their local library reading the long account in *The Times* for June 21st., 1864, of the sinking of the *Alabama* and the landing in Southampton of those of the officers and crew rescued by the *Deerhound*. Perhaps they, too, paused at the following sentence: "*Captain Semmes, and his first-lieutenant, Mr. J.M. Kill (sic), are staying at Kelway's Hotel, in Queens-terrace, where the gallant commander is under the care of Dr. Ware ....*" Might Kelway's Hotel still exist? Having some free time last October, I decided to find out.

The first step was to make some enquiries. Southampton City Information Centre is not easy to get through to, but at my third attempt I was fortunate to be put on to Mr. Geoff Watts, a man with a real interest in the history of his city. Within a few hours, he had called me back with the information that one Robert Kelway, a Chief Steward with the Peninsular and Oriental Company, had owned a hotel called the Oriental at No.6, Queen's Terrace in 1859, in partnership with a Miss Coster. By 1861, the name had been expanded to the Oriental and Australian, and in 1863 Kelway's partners consisted of Messrs. John Ford and James Bascombe, as well as Miss Coster. Mr. Watts added that there had, until recently, been a restaurant or cafe called the Oriental in Queen's Terrace. It had now closed down, but he thought that the sign might still be there.

It was now time to go down to Southampton and take a look. Arriving at Queen's Terrace in great excitement, I experienced a feeling, which will be all too familiar to anyone who has ever gone in search of Judah P. Benjamin's London residences, for example. The whole of the Western end of the street, from No.1 to No.22 or so, consisted of modern blocks, the original buildings having presumably been destroyed

either by the Luftwaffe or by the developers. Walking down to the far end of the street, where the houses, though run-down, were at least original, I decided to cut my losses and go for a walk around the walls instead. Just as I was turning away, I suddenly noticed the word "Oriental", in large but faded letters, across the upper front of one of the buildings. This was clearly the restaurant mentioned by Mr. Watts, now sold, according to the signs in the windows, for conversion into two-bedroom flats. Could it also have been Kelway's Hotel? It was certainly of the right period and of about the right size, but it was also No.29, not No.6. Could the system of numbering have changed since the 1860s?

On my return to London, I contacted Mr. Watts again. This time, he was able to inform me that the block at the Eastern end of the street, on the corner of Terminus Terrace, had originally been occupied by Radley's Hotel and that Kelway's had been next to it. In other words, the building which I had seen was almost certainly Kelway's Hotel, or at least a part of it, and the well-known photograph of Semmes and Kell with Dr. Wiblin (who seems to have taken over from Dr. Ware) was presumably taken in one of its rooms.

There is clearly much more research to be done on Southampton's role in the Civil War. The same Times article states that the wounded men "*were taken to the Sailors' Home, in the Canute-road*". Was this the Royal Mail Sailors' Home, at 7-8, Canute Road, near St. Lawrence Road, or the larger building further up the street, opposite the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company's factory? Semmes himself tells us, in *Memoirs of Service Afloat*, that he "*engaged quarters at Millbrook... as duties connected with the welfare of my crew would require my detention in the neighborhood of Southampton for a week or two.*" Where exactly were these quarters? It would be satisfying, too, to identify the two hotels, one very welcoming and the other the reverse, mentioned by Sinclair in *Two Years on the Alabama*.

A further lead is contained in the information pack on the *Alabama* put out some years ago by Jerry Williams and the Alabama Trust with the help of Wirral Council. One of the items in the pack is a cop, a document certifying that a seaman has been duly paid off. At the bottom left-hand corner of it, in small type, there appears what is presumably the name of the printer. Although the inscription is not very clear, at least on the photocopy, the first word appears to be "Bennett", the second could possibly be "Son" or "Sons" and the last is definitely "Southampton". Thus, although this particular example was filled in on July 16th, 1864, in Liverpool, it looks very much as if Semmes had a number of these certificates printed up during his stay in Southampton.

Perhaps some member living in the Southampton area would like to investigate these and other questions, including, of course, the earlier visit to the city of the *CS.S. Nashville*. I imagine that the files of the local newspapers would be a fruitful place to start. In return for the help that I received from Mr. Watts, I have suggested that Southampton Council might like to think about marketing the city's link with the Alabama. After all, if they have a Titanic Trail, why not an Alabama Trail? The staff at the Information Centre clearly knew nothing of Southampton's connection with the Civil War, and I have therefore sent Mr. Watts, at his request, some background information on both the Alabama and the naval war in general, together with some suggestions for further research.

Meanwhile, any member who likes the idea of sleeping where Semmes slept might consider investing in a two-bedroom flat in what was once Kelway's Hotel, Southampton.