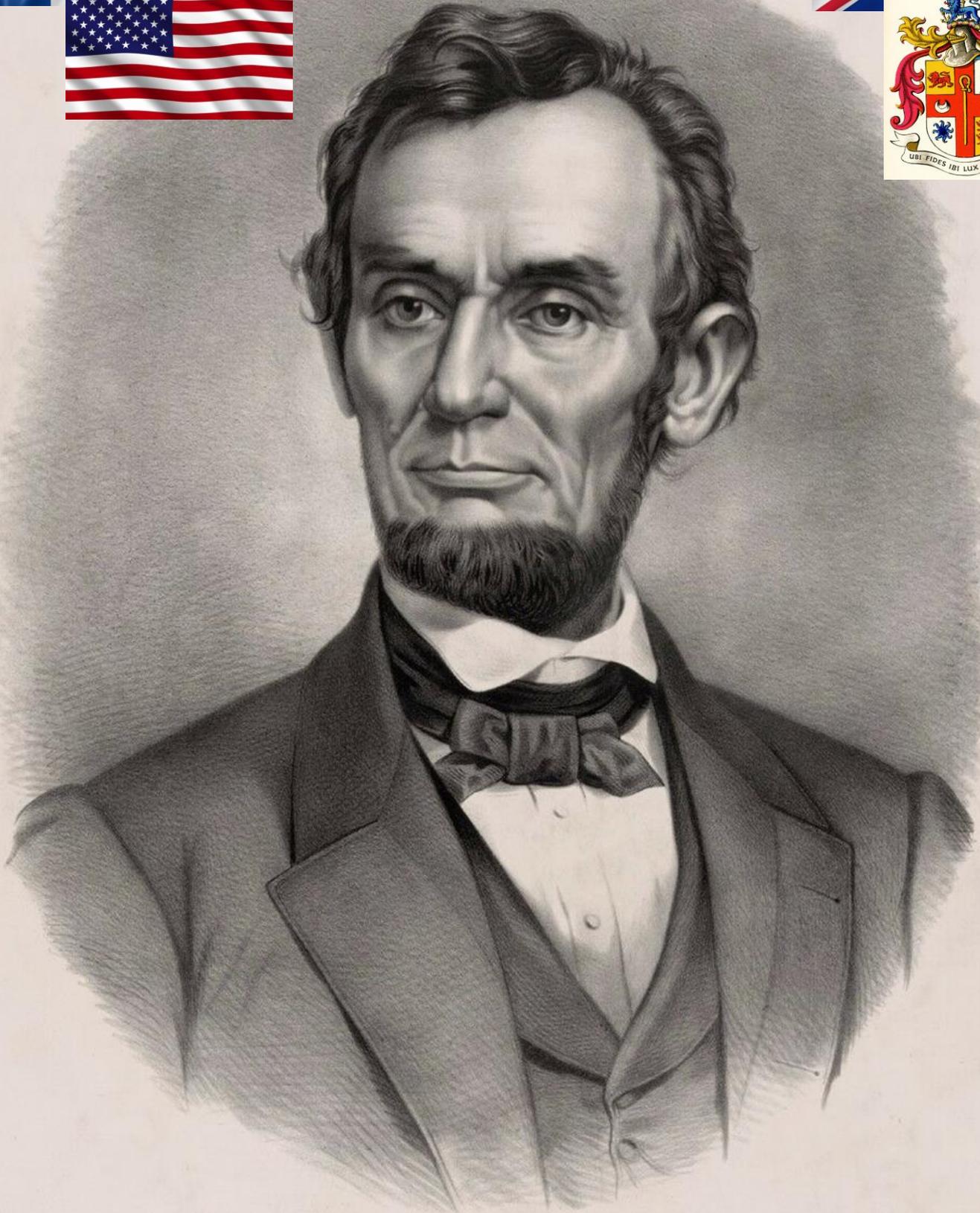


Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead.

Part 8.

The Naming of Mysterious Island.



ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

THE MARTYR PRESIDENT.

ASSASSINATED APRIL 14TH 1865.

A. Lincoln

Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead

Part 8.

The Naming of Mysterious Island.

– THE VIEW FROM BIDSTON HILL, BIRKENHEAD –

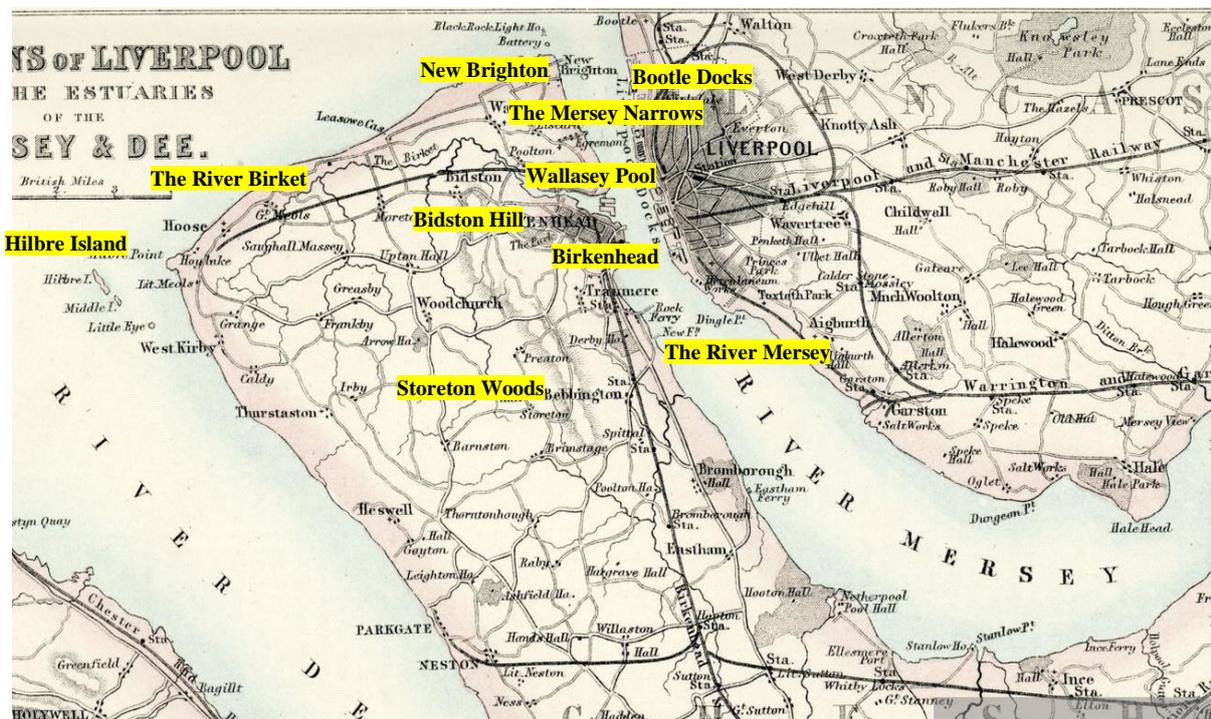
THE MERSEY NARROWS – NEW BRIGHTON – BOOTLE – WALLASEY POOL –

– THE RIVER BIRKET – HILBRE ISLAND –

BIRKENHEAD – STORETON WOODS – WORMHOLE CAVE NEW BRIGHTON –

– THE WIRRAL –

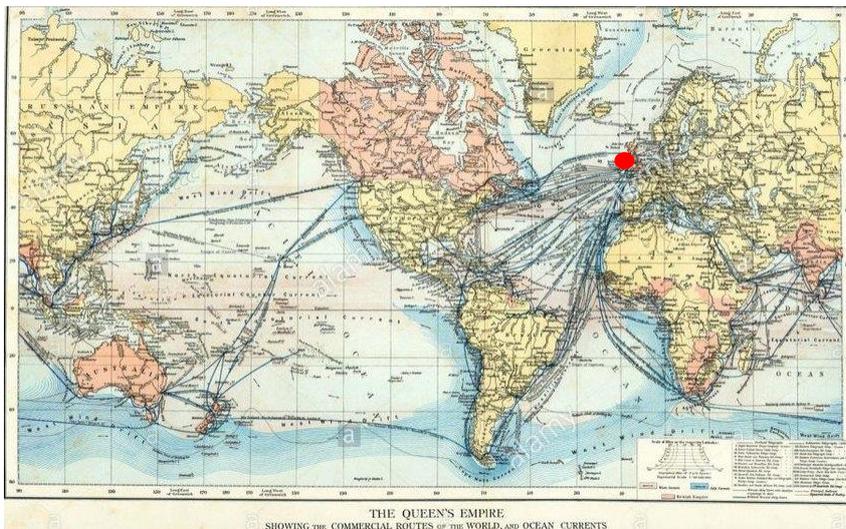
The Mysterious Island – The Wirral Locations used by Jules Verne in part 8.



The Wirral Peninsula in 1875

Having climbed down from the summit of the volcano in the middle of the night, Cyrus Harding and Herbert inform their friends that they have in fact been cast upon an island in the middle of the South Pacific rather than a continent. They return to the first plateau (Birkenhead's Bidston Hill) on the following morning.

The next day, March 30th, after a quick breakfast of roasted tragopan, the engineer wanted to climb to the volcano's summit in order to carefully observe the island. He and his friends would be perhaps imprisoned for life here if this island was situated far from all land or it was not near the lanes of ships visiting the archipelagoes of the Pacific Ocean

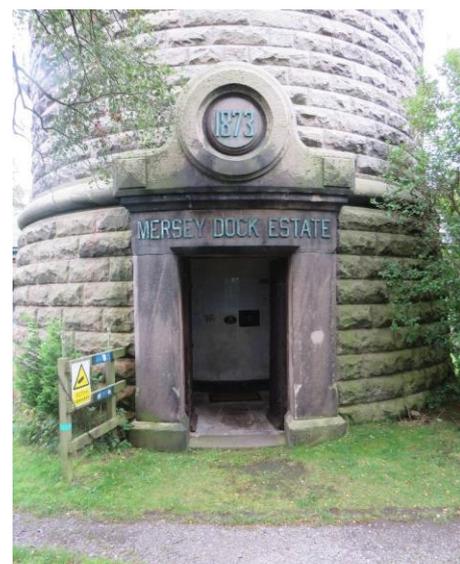


In the mid nineteenth century the Port of Liverpool was situated at the head of the world's busiest shipping lane. It was estimated that up to 20% of world trade was passing through the port at this time.

The Queen's Empire.

This time the companions followed him in this new exploration. They wanted to see this island which they would ask to fulfill all their needs.

Cyrus Harding followed the same path as the day before. They went around the cone by the plateau which formed the shoulder up to the opening of the enormous crevice.



The Enormous Crevice.

The weather was magnificent. The sun rose in a pure sky and its rays enveloped the entire eastern side of the mountain.



The side of the Mountain.

The interior of the crater, whose inclination was not more than thirty five to forty degrees, presented no difficulties or obstacles to climbing. They saw traces of very old lava which probably had poured out at the summit of the cone before this lateral crevice opened a new route.

Inclined at *not more than thirty five to forty degrees.*



Before eight o'clock, Cyrus Smith and his companions were gathered at the summit of the crater on a conical elevation of the northern rim.

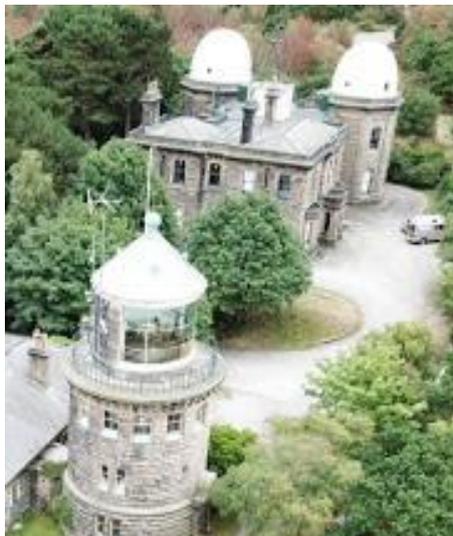
*Here we should take Jules Verne literally as the castaways have climbed onto the roof of Bidston Lighthouse, sited just above the lighthouse keeper's cottage – literally a *conical elevation of the northern limb.**

The Summit of the Conical Elevation

“The sea! The sea everywhere!” they said as if their lips could not hold back this word that made islanders of them. The sea was an immense circular expanse around them. Perhaps on climbing to the summit of the cone Cyrus Harding had hoped to discover some coast, some neighbouring island, which he had not been able to see in the darkness of the previous night. But nothing appeared on the horizon for a radius of over fifty miles. No land in sight. Not a sail. An immense desert. The island occupied the centre of a circumference that seemed to extend in infinity in all directions.



Gideon Spilett inscribed the names on his map.



*The engineer and his companions, speechless, motionless, gazed at the ocean for several minutes. Their eyes strained to make out its furthest limits. Pencroft, who possessed a marvelous power of vision, saw nothing. If there was land anywhere on the horizon, even if it appeared as an imperceptible vapour, the sailor would undoubtedly have detected it **because nature had truly placed two telescopes under his eyebrows.***

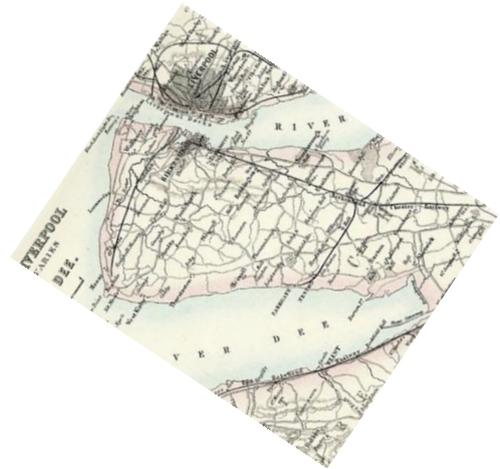
Two telescopes under his eyebrows.

Bidston Observatory has two astronomical domes, the eastern dome housed a transit telescope to track the passage of stars, and the western dome housed an equatorial telescope to observe comets. Jules Verne is a master of the metaphorical ‘in-joke’.

If Cyrus Harding was not mistaken in his evaluation, the island was nearly as large as Malta or Zakynthos in the Mediterranean. It’s truly unusual shape surprised them, and when Gideon Spilett sketched its contours at the engineer’s suggestion, they found that it resembled some fantastic animal, a sort of monstrous pteropoda which was sleeping on the surface of the Pacific.

The Kingston English translation (1874) says *the shape of the animal resembled some fantastic leviathan*. The rectangular shape of the Wirral Peninsula is comparable to the rectangular hull of Verne's favourite ship – the Birkenhead financed and Birkenhead based *Leviathan or Great Eastern*.

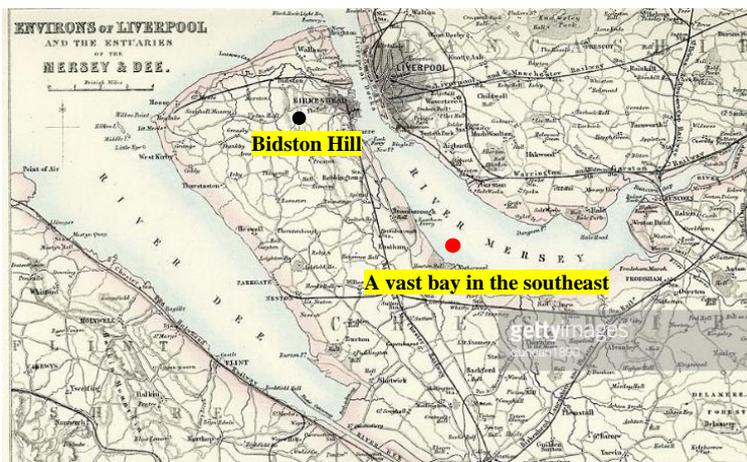
This could be a rare coincidental metaphor; the only other alternative is that Verne had far more influence on his English Kingston translation than previously thought. There will be a growing body of evidence to suggest that this indeed may be the case.



The two Leviathans.

This was the exact configuration of the island, a map of which was immediately and concisely sketched by the reporter.

The *New York Herald* under its proprietor Gordon Bennett Senior was the first newspaper to accurately map the battlefields of the American Civil War.



The eastern portion of the coast on which the castaways had landed was curved on a large arc and bordered by a vast bay which ended in the southeast by a sharp cape, a point hidden from Pencroft at the time of his first exploration.

The location of Bidston Hill and the vast bay in the southeast.

In the northeast, two other capes closed the bay and between them a narrow gulf was hollowed out which resembled the half-opened jaw of a formidable shark.



Bidston Hill and the ‘Mersey Narrows’ (situated to the north east).

From this point on, the coastline was somewhat regular north and south, cut at two thirds of its length by a narrow creek, and it ended in a long tail resembling the caudal appendage of a giant alligator.

This tail formed a true peninsula which extended for more than thirty miles into the sea.

The Wirral Peninsula, of course has no south coast, and so Jules Verne must invent one. The ‘long tail’ seems to reflect the shape of the River Mersey estuary south of Liverpool as far as Warrington. Jules Verne seems to be ‘turning sea into land’ and attaching it to the south coast of his *Mysterious Island*. Reversing words or images seems to be a recurring theme in the world of Jules Verne.

As to the interior of the island, its general appearance was thus: very wooded in all of its southern portion from the mountain up to the shore and dry and sandy in its northern part.

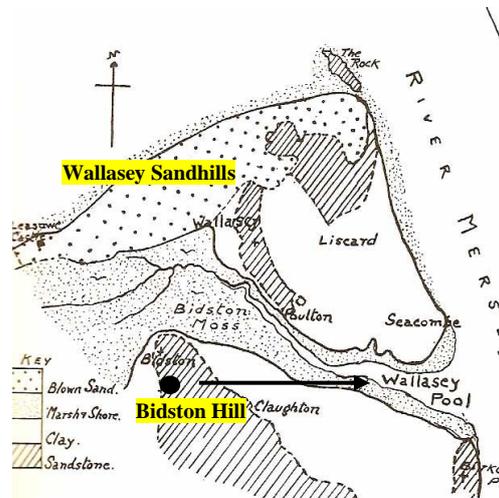


The view from Bidston Lighthouse - very wooded in all of its southern portion.

To the North of Bidston Lighthouse lie the Wallasey sandhills and the land is therefore *dry and sandy in its northern part.*

Between the volcano and the east coast, Cyrus Harding and his companions were surprised to see a lake, bordered by green trees, whose existence they had not suspected.

Wallasey Pool from Bidston Lighthouse.



This is the large tidal inlet of Wallasey Pool. By 1874 Wallasey Pool had been enclosed behind a wall and dock gates built to create the Birkenhead Docks System – the largest enclosed dock in the world – essentially a large lake.

Seen from this height, the lake seemed to be at the same level as the sea but on reflection the engineer explained to his companions that the altitude of this small expanse of water must be 300 feet because the plateau which served as its basin was that high above the coast.



The enclosure of Wallasey Pool in the 1850's to create Birkenhead Docks resulted in the water level of the 'lake' being 30 feet higher than the River Mersey at low tide. Jules Verne is adding a zero for dramatic effect.

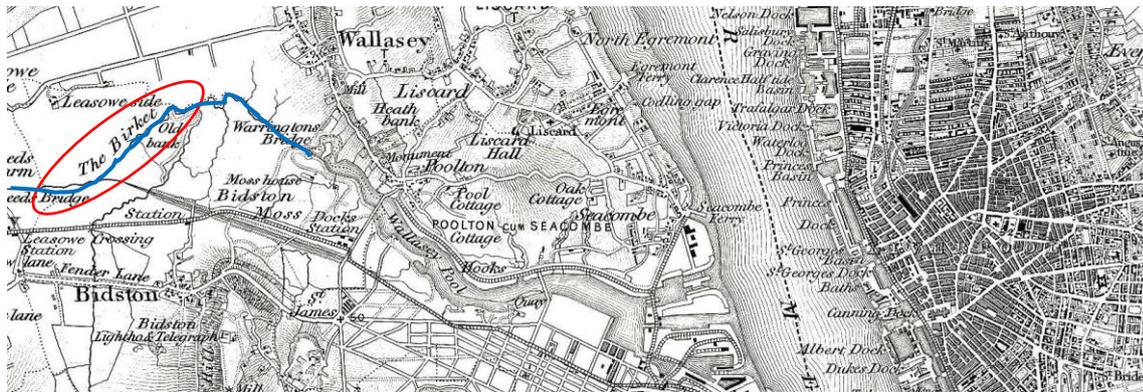
The Birkenhead engineer Thomas Brassey sited his main works (The 'Canada Works') at Wallasey Pool. Brassey will prove to be a great engineering hero to Jules Verne.

Thomas Brassey (1805-70)

"Is this a fresh water lake? Asked Pencroft.

"I see a small brook that flows into it," said Herbert, pointing to a narrow creek which probably flowed from the foothills in the west.

The narrow creek Herbert is referring to is the River Birket which historically drained into the tidal inlet of Wallasey Pool. In *Mysterious Island* it will become 'Red Creek'.



The River Birket flowing into Wallasey Pool and the Birkenhead Dock System c1870.



Yes,” replied Cyrus Harding, “since this stream feeds the lake, it’s likely there exists an outlet by the sea where its overflow escapes”. We’ll see this on our return.

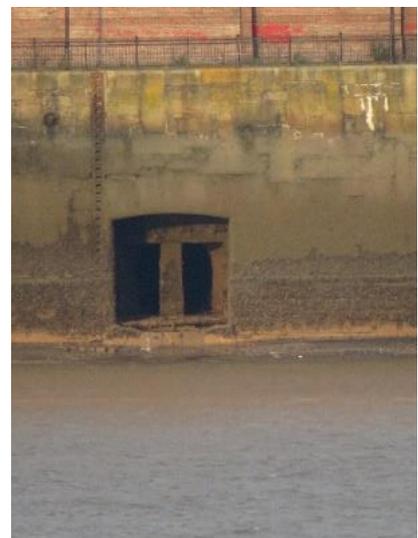
The outlet referred to by Cyrus Harding is a tunnel called the 'Great Culvert' and built by Thomas Brassey in 1844 to allow the River Birket to flow around Wallasey Pool and directly into the River Mersey at Woodside, Birkenhead.

“I see a small brook said Herbert.”

The mouth of the 'Great Culvert' with its granite stone facing and iron step ladder is still visible today at Birkenhead, Woodside.

The Great Culvert - Birkenhead’s main sewer outlet will go on to play a leading role in Jules Verne’s *Mysterious Island*.

The Mouth of the Great Culvert drain at Woodside, Birkenhead.



Nowhere could be seen the work of human hands, no conglomeration of cabins, not an isolated hut, not a fishery on the shore. No smoke rose to betray the presence of man. But the islanders of these narrow lands that emerge from the Pacific tend to live along the shore, and the shore appeared to be absolutely deserted.



Smoke rises to betray the presence of man - the crowded industrial shores of Birkenhead.

But was it visited, at times, by natives, from neighbouring islands? It was difficult to answer this question. No land appeared within a radius of approximately fifty miles. But fifty miles could easily be crossed, either by Malaysian proas or by large Polynesian canoes. It would be best to take certain precautions against a possible visit from neighbouring natives.

But before giving his companions the signal to depart, Cyrus Harding said to them in a calm and serious voice:

“Here my friends, is the small corner of the world on which the hand of the Almighty has thrown us. It’s here that we’re going to live a long time perhaps. Maybe unexpected help will arrive if some vessel passes by chance I say by chance because this island is not very important. It offers nothing which can serve as a port of call of ships, and I fear that it’s situated outside the ordinary shipping lanes.



The Port of Liverpool in about 1865 *nothing which can serve as a port of call of ships.*

Jules Verne ‘hypnotizes’ the reader into believing this place is indeed an isolated island in the middle of the South Pacific rather than in ‘our reality’ the largest commercial port of the nineteenth century and situated at the end of the world’s busiest shipping lane.

“As for me,” said the sailor, “may I lose my name if I shirk my work. If you wish, Mr. Harding, we’ll make this island a Little America! We’ll build towns, railroads, telegraphs, and one fine day when it is transformed and civilized, we’ll offer it to the government of the Union!”

I ask only one thing.”

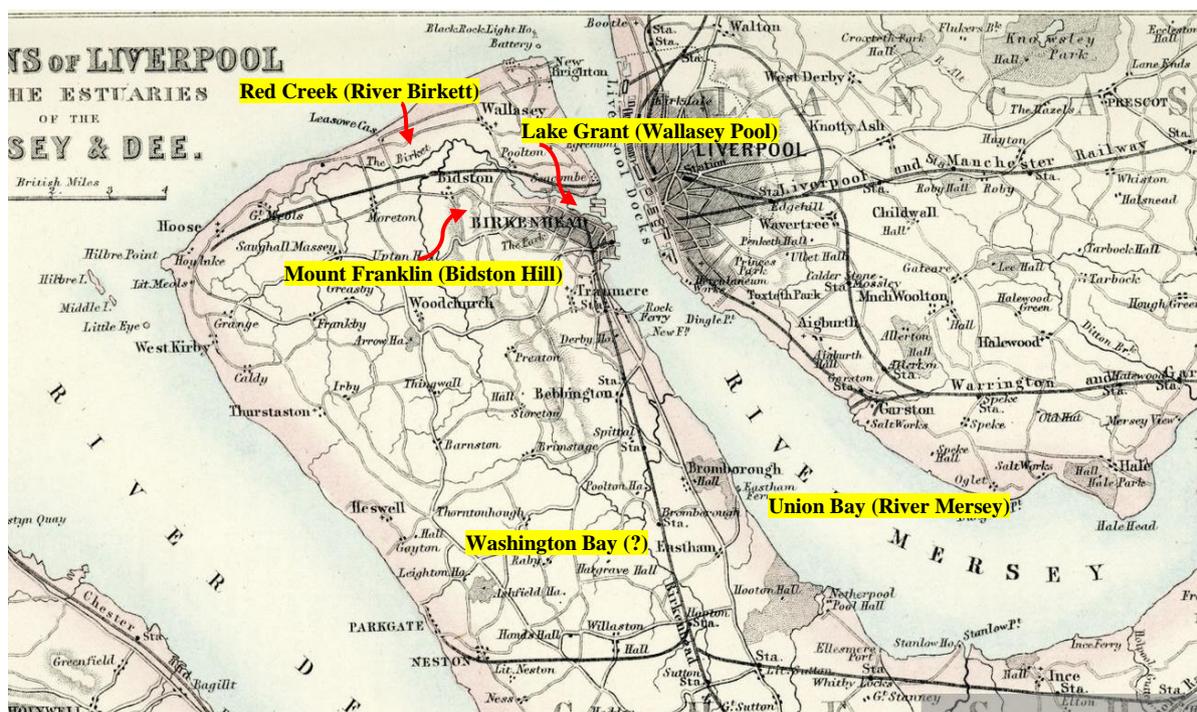
“What’s that asked the reporter.

“That we no longer think of ourselves as castaways but as colonists, here to colonise.”

“One moment, my friends,” said the engineer. “It seems best to give a name to this island, and its capes and promontories, and the watercourses that we saw below.”

“I would prefer names borrowed from our country” replied the reporter, “which would remind us of America.”

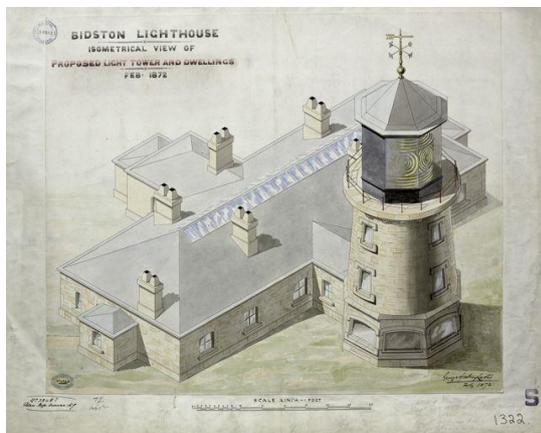
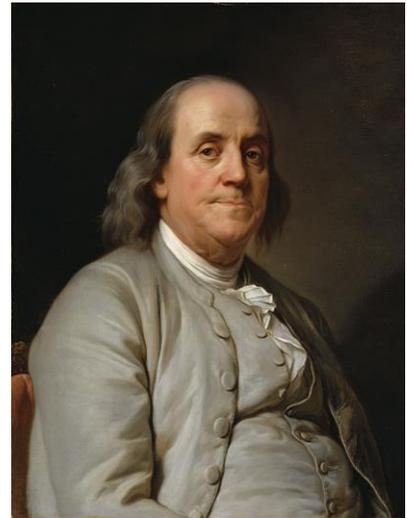
“Yes, for the main features,” said Cyrus Harding, “for those of the bays or the seas, I fully agree. We could give to this vast bay in the east the name Union Bay for example, to this large indentation in the south that of Washington Bay, to the mountain on which we’re now standing that of Mount Franklin, to the Lake which extends beneath us that of Lake Grant; nothing could be better my friends. These names will remind us of our country and those great citizens who have honored it.



Benjamin Franklin was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States and helped draft the Declaration of Independence, it is therefore fitting that his name plays such a prominent role on Lincoln Island as the colonists try to build a fairer and multiracial 'Little America' in Birkenhead.

The naming of Bidston Hill as Mount Franklin is a tribute to the scientific advancements that Benjamin Franklin made in the fields of electricity, meteorology, ocean currents and bifocal lenses in the eighteenth century.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-90)



The history of Bidston Hill, its electric telegraph, its weather and space observatory, its maritime and tidal studies as well as having the most powerful light beam lens in the world is a perfect complement to Benjamin Franklin, the scientist.

The most powerful light beam lens in the world (1872).

Franklin did come to Liverpool in 1759, and he would therefore have come within a short viewing distance of the 'mountain' that in literature at least, would later bear his name.

The naming of Washington Bay pays tribute to George Washington, a revolutionary hero to Jules Verne and Victor Hugo. George Washington's portrait would adorn Captain Nemo's bed chamber wall aboard the Birkenhead built *Nautilus*.

George Washington's family bible came from the Wirral – given to him by Bishop Wilson of Sodor and Man of nearby Burton village, and possibly via Robert Washington of Bidston Church, Birkenhead. Robert Washington is said to have been a distant relative of George Washington.

The link between George Washington and Birkenhead is another example of 'coincidental noise'.

George Washington (1732-99)



But the rivers, the gulfs, the capes, and the promontories which we see from the top of this mountain, let's choose names which will recall their particular configuration.

First they named Union Bay, Washington Bay, and Mount Franklin, as the engineer had proposed.

"Now said the reporter, "this peninsula which projects to the southwest of the island, I propose to give it the name of Serpentine Peninsula, and the name Reptile End to the curved tail at its end because it's truly a reptile's tail."

"Adopted," said the engineer.

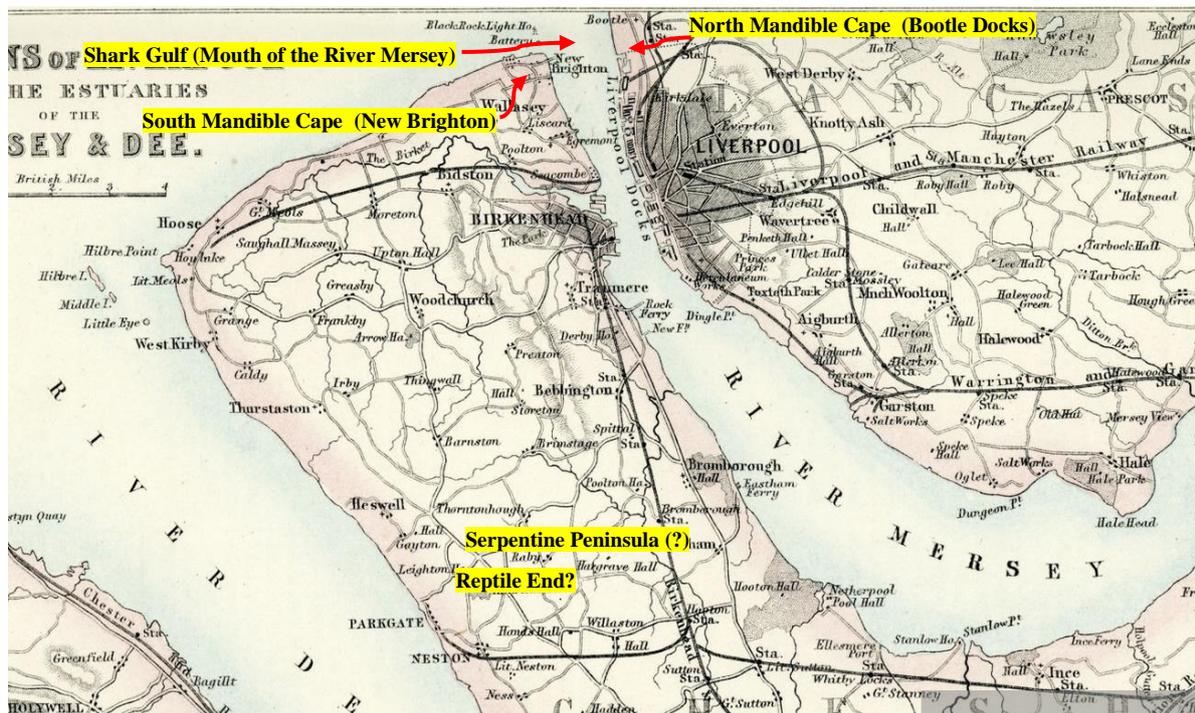
"Now," said Herbert, "for this other extremity of the island, this gulf which so singularly resembles an open jaw, let's call it Shark Gulf."

"Well done!" said Pencroft, "and we'll complete the picture by giving the two parts of the jaw the name Mandible Cape."

"But there are two capes," observed the reporter.

"Well then," replied Pencroft, "we'll have North Mandible Cape and South Mandible Cape."

"They're so registered," replied Gideon Spilett.



The mouth of the River Mersey is given a sinister name to reflect its slave trading past.

“How about the point at the southeast end of the island?” said Pencroft.

“You mean the end of Union Bay?” replied Herbert.

“Cape Claw,” Neb shouted out. He also wanted to be the Godfather of some piece of domain.

As a freed black slave Neb is now the ‘Godfather’ of a terrain overlooking the Port of Liverpool, once the biggest slave trading port in the world.

In truth, Neb had found an excellent name because this cape really represented the powerful claw of the fantastic animal which resembled the outline of the island.

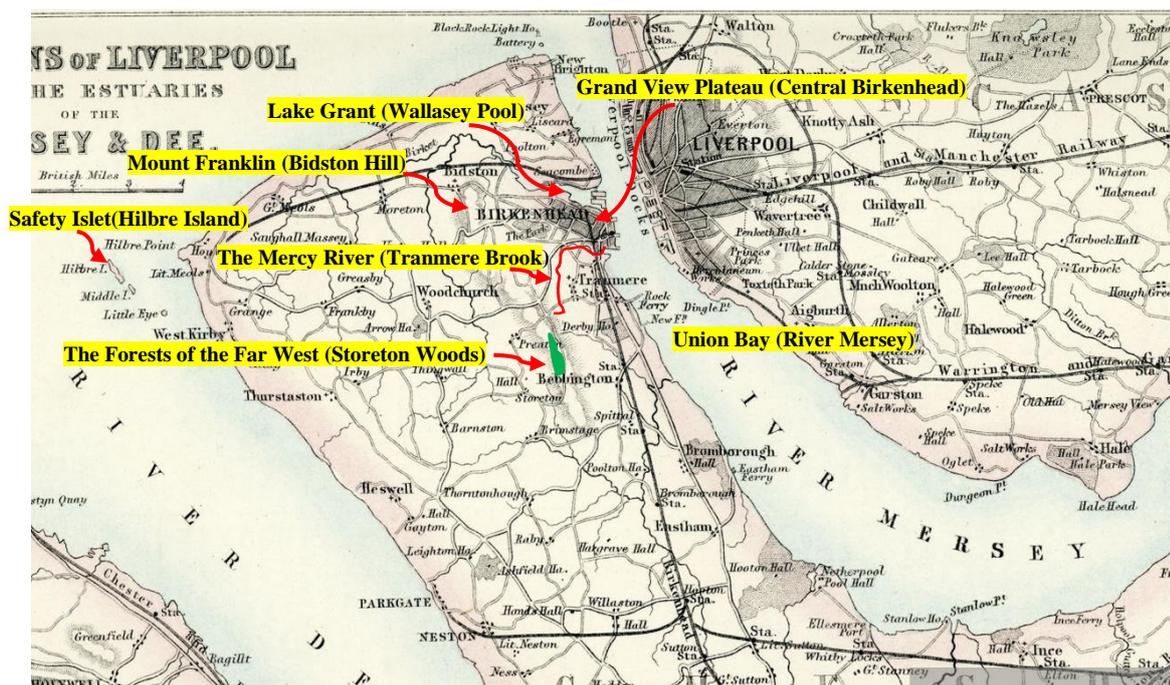
Pencroft was delighted by this turn of events. And their somewhat overexcited imaginations had soon given:

To the river, which furnished fresh water to the colonists near where the balloon had thrown them, the name of the Mercy, a true thanks to Providence;

To the Islet, on which the castaways had first set foot, the name of Safety Island;

To the plateau, which crowned the high wall of granite above the chimneys and from where they could see all of the vast bay, the name Grand View Plateau;

Finally to this massive impenetrable woods, the name Forests of the Far West.



Everything was thus finished, and the colonists had only to climb down Mount Franklin to return to the Chimneys, when Pencroft said:

“What incredible dopes we are!”

“Why do you say that?” asked Gideon Spillet, who had closed his notebook and was getting ready to leave.

“What about the island itself? We’ve forgotten to name it.”

Herbert was going to propose the engineer’s name and all his companions would have applauded this choice, when Cyrus Harding simply said:

“Let’s name it after that great citizen, my friends, who now fights to defend the unity of the American republic. Let’s call it Lincoln Island.”

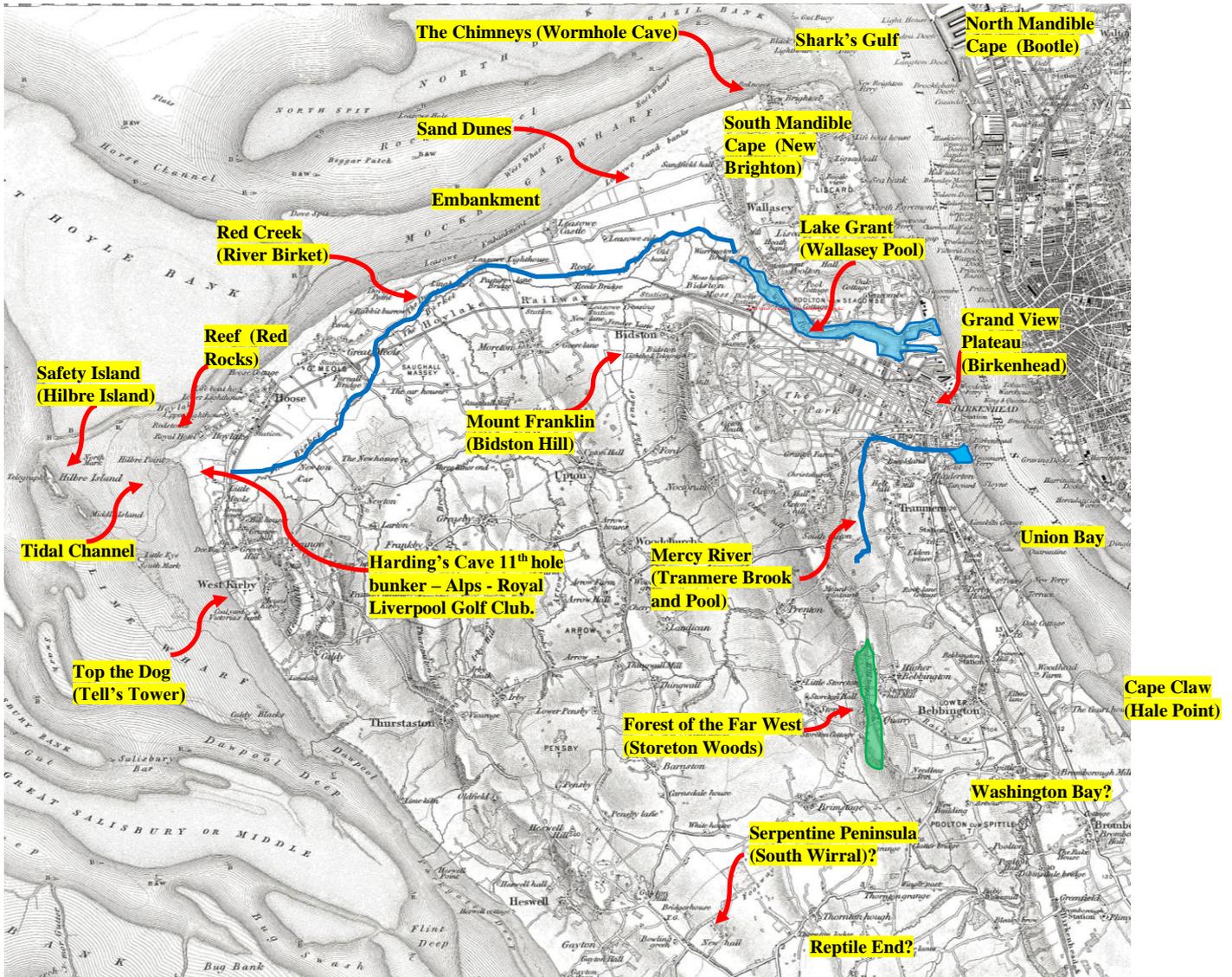
Three hurrahs cheered the engineer’s proposition.

And that evening, before going to sleep, the new colonists spoke of the country they all longed for; they spoke of this terrible war which was staining it with blood; they could not doubt that the South would soon be subdued and that the cause of the North, the cause of justice, could only triumph thanks to Grant and thanks to Lincoln.

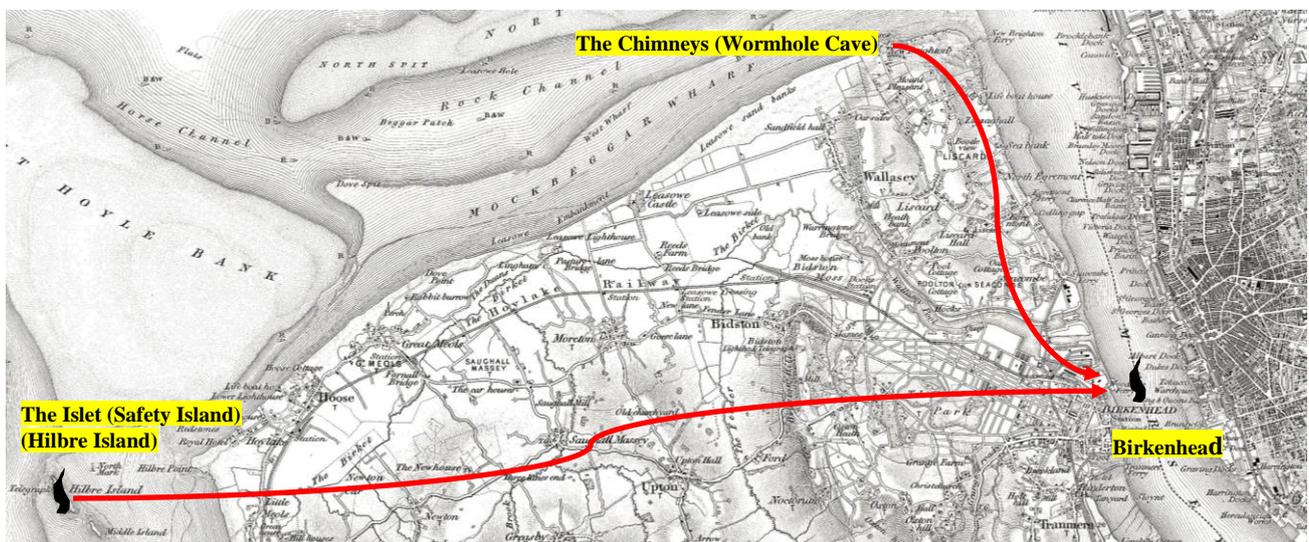
So passed the 30th of March 1865. They would scarcely know that two weeks and a day later, a horrible crime would be committed in Washington and that, on Good Friday, Abraham Lincoln would be murdered by a fanatic.

The names of the Mercy River, Lincoln Island, Union Bay and Lake Grant will all relate to the rich history of Birkenhead and Liverpool. They will have a deep symbolism and be looked at in detail once we have finished our adventures on Jules Verne’s *Mysterious Island*.

A Full Map of Lincoln Island (The Wirral Peninsula)



As an ex-producer of plays, Jules Verne will move two pieces of 'stage scenery' to Birkenhead to aid his storyline. The Chimneys (Wormhole Cave at New Brighton) will fill a recess in the Birkenhead dock wall while Verne will move The Islet (Hilbre Island) to lie just off Birkenhead.

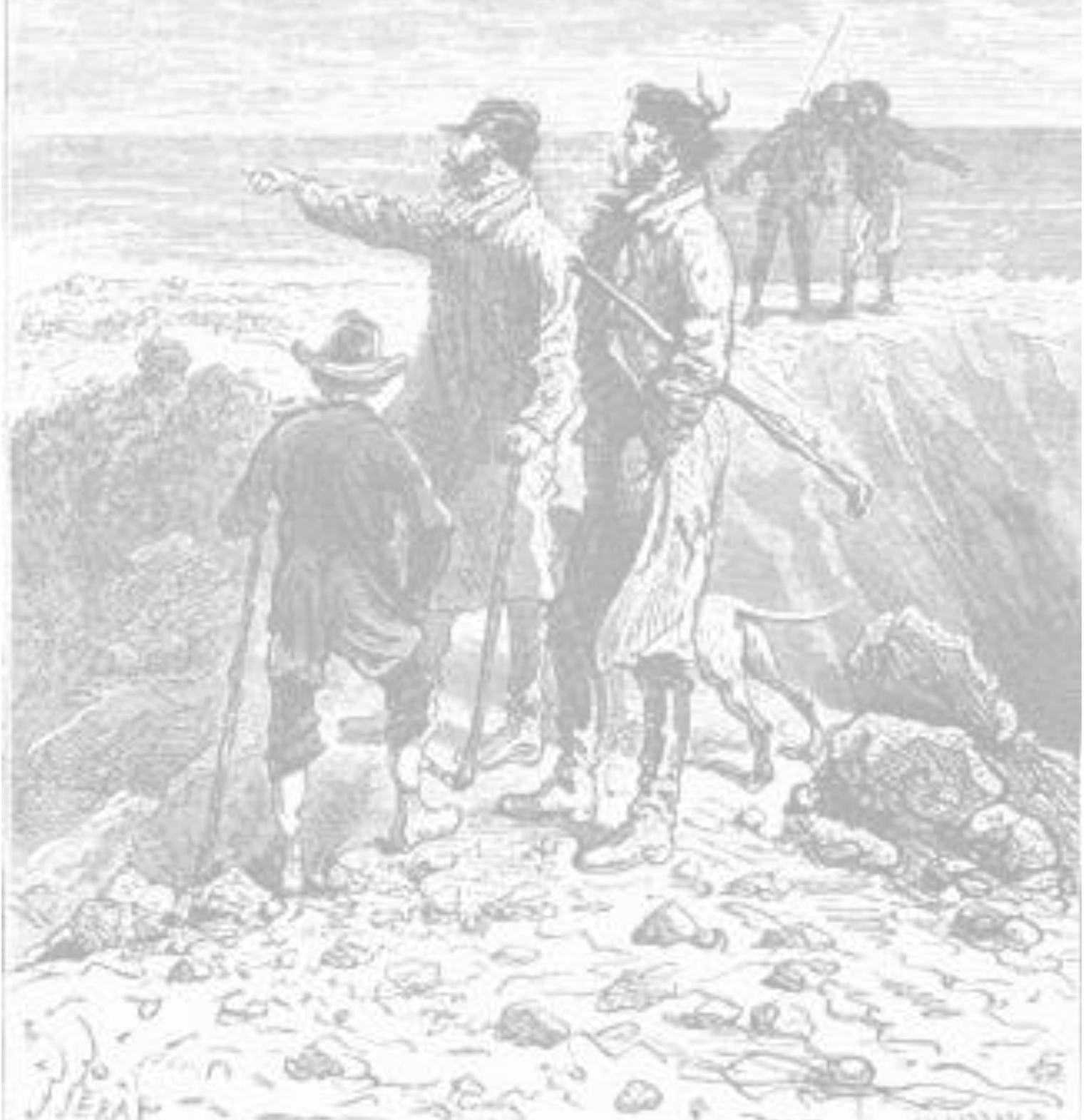


Next in Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead.

**Part 9. The Colonists Make their Home in Granite House – In ‘our reality’
The Great Culvert Sewer in Birkenhead.**

Illustrations for Part 8.

-Acknowledgements-



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