



Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead

Part 11.

The Orangutan Attack on Birkenhead.

By John Lamb

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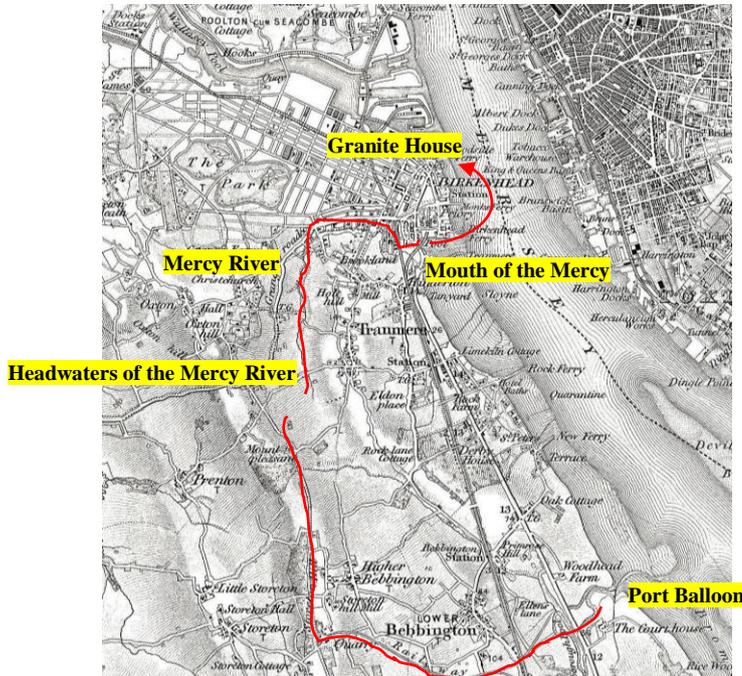
- THE ORANGUTAN ATTACK ON BIRKENHEAD – THE DOMESTICATION OF JUP-
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- BUILDING A BRIDGE ACROSS TRANMERE POOL -
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The Wirral Locations used by Jules Verne in Part 11.

The Orangutan Attack on Birkenhead

Having previously left their canoe at the 'headwaters of the Mercy' the colonists return to Granite House via the Mercy River. But all is not what it seems at Granite House.



A few strokes of the oar brought the colonists to the mouth of the Mercy. The canoe was towed up onto the beach at the Chimneys, and everyone headed toward the ladder of Granite House.

The colonists route back to Granite House.

But at this moment Top barked in anger and Neb, who was looking for the first rung, let out a cry ... The ladder was no longer there.

"This wasn't done by the wind!" said Herbert.

"I'm beginning to think that peculiar things are happening on Lincoln Island," said Pencroft.

"Peculiar?" replied Gideon Spilett. "No Pencroft, nothing is more natural. Someone has come during our absence, taken possession of our dwelling and drawn up the ladder?"

"Someone!" exclaimed the sailor, "but who?..."

The upper ladder, ordinarily attached to the landing at the door, was in its place, but the lower ladder had been drawn up to the landing. It was entirely obvious that the intruders wanted to be protected from any surprise.

Top was ordered to remain on guard.



Herbert then had the idea of attaching a rope to an arrow and shooting this arrow so that it would pass between the first rungs of the ladder which hung from the landing outside the

door. By means of the rope, they could then unravel the ladder to the ground and re-establish contact between the ground and Granite House.

The bow was released, the arrow hissed through the air, reached the rope, and passed between the last two rungs.

The operation had succeeded.

Herbert immediately seized the end of the rope; but as soon as he was about to pull the ladder to the ground, a hand reached out between the wall and the door, seized it and pulled it back into Granite House.



“Triple rascals!” shouted the sailor, “if a bullet will make you happy, you won’t have long to wait.”

Our dwelling has been invaded by apes who climbed up the ladder in our absence.”

The scene of the orangutan attack – the Great Culvert Sewer at Birkenhead, Woodside (complete with the reinstated ladder).

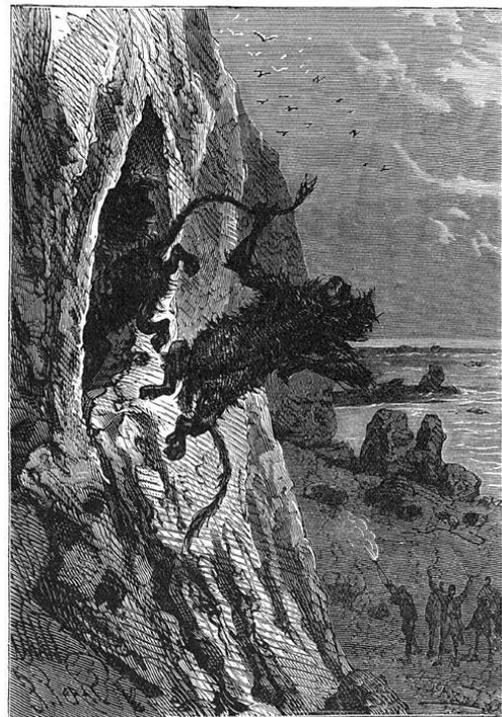
Thomas Brassey’s masterpiece in sandstone and granite – The Great Culvert Sewer, has been attacked by apes from the South Pacific. It will witness many other events both in history and fantasy before our adventure comes to a close.

And at this moment, as if to prove the sailor right, three or four quadrumanes pushed aside the shutters and showed themselves at the windows. They greeted the true owners of the premises with a thousand contortions and grimaces.

The sailor, gun to his shoulder, took a quick aim at one of the apes and fired. All disappeared, except one who, mortally wounded, fell to the ground.

Herbert, being well-versed in zoology, declared that it was an orangutan.

The ape fell, mortally wounded.



The colonists spend the night in the cave known as the Chimneys and discuss plans to evict the orangutans who have invaded their safe and dry home. They decide to enter Granite House by using the old passageway at the lake and return the next day.

It was already past noon when the colonists, well-armed and provided with picks and pickaxes, left the Chimneys. They passed under the windows of Granite House after ordering Top to remain at his post. They intended to ascend the left bank of the Mercy in order to reach Grand View Plateau.

But they had not gone fifty paces in this direction when they heard the dog barking furiously. It was like a desperate call.

They stopped.

“Run!” said Pencroft.

Everyone descended the bank as fast as they could. Rounded the bend, they saw that the situation had changed.

The apes, terrorized by some unknown cause, were trying to get out. Two or three ran and jumped from one window to the other with the agility of clowns. Soon five or six were in a position to be fired upon, and the colonists, having them easily in their sights, fired. Some apes, wounded or dead, fell back into the rooms uttering sharp cries. Others falling outside, were killed by their fall. In a few minutes, the colonists could suppose that there were no longer any living quadrumanes in Granite House.

Hurrah! Cried Pencroft. “Hurrah! Hurrah!”

“Not so many hurrahs!” said Gideon Spilett.

“Why not? They’re dead,” replied the sailor.

Agreed, but this doesn’t give us means of returning to our home.”

At this moment, as if in response to Cyrus Harding’s comment, they saw the ladder glide onto the threshold of the door. Then it unraveled and fell to the ground.

“Ah! By George! That’s convenient!” cried the sailor, looking at Cyrus Harding.

“Too convenient!” murmured the engineer, stepping on the first rung of the ladder.

Unbeknown to the colonists, Captain Nemo has come to their aid yet again. Nemo has climbed up the well inside Granite House, flushed out the orangutans and thrown down the access ladder before disappearing once again down the well.

“Take care, Mr. Cyrus!” shouted Pencroft, “there may still be several of these apes ...”

“We’ll soon know,” replied the engineer, without stopping.

All his companions followed, and, in a minute, they arrived at the threshold of the door.

They looked everywhere. No one was in the rooms or in the storeroom which had been spared by the band of quadrumanes.

The Domestication of Jup

“So, and the ladder?” exclaimed the sailor. “Who then was the gentleman who returned it to us?”

But at this moment a cry was heard and a large ape, who had taken refuge in the passageway, rushed into the hall, pursued by Neb.

“Ah! The bandit!” cried Pencroft.

And, with a hatchet in hand, he was about to crack the animal’s skull, when Cyrus Harding stopped him and said to him:

“Spare him, Pencroft.”

Nevertheless, they threw themselves on the ape who, after defending himself valiantly, was thrown to the ground and tied.



The ape was thrown to the ground and tied.

“Whew!” cried Pencroft. “And now what will we make of him?”

“A servant!” replied Herbert.

And in speaking so, the boy really was not joking because he knew that good use could be made of this intelligent race of quadrumanes.

“Good!” replied Pencroft, “the best servants are those who speak the least. So then, no wages! Do you understand my boy? To begin with, we’ll give you no wages but, later on, we will double it if we’re satisfied with you.”

In this manner, the colony increased in size by one new member who was to render it more than one service. As to his name, the sailor asked that he be called Jupiter, or Jup for short, in memory of another ape he had known.

And so, without further ado, Master Jup joined the colonists of Granite House.

The attack of the orangutans will have many consequences.

Excavating the Cutting of the Birkenhead Dock Railway

Following the attack of the orangutans, the colonists decide to take further measures to protect Grand View Plateau and Granite House. In doing so Jules Verne will supply a three dimensional geographical 'code' that proves that the Tranmere Brook and modern-day Borough Road are the real-life location of the Mercy River on *Mysterious Island*.

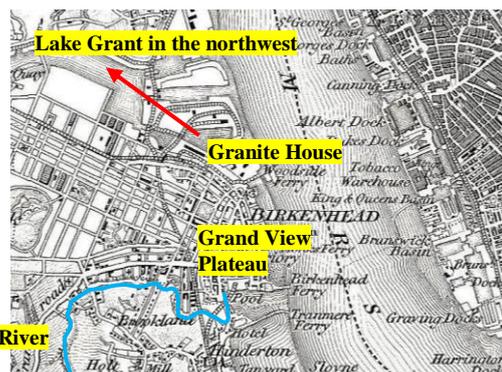
Cyrus Harding then acquainted his companions with a project both very simple to execute and very advantageous, which he had thought about for some time. It was to completely isolate Grand View Plateau in order to shelter it from any attack by quadrupeds or quadrumanes.

By this means, Granite House, the Chimneys, the poultry yard and the entire upper part of the plateau that was destined to be cultivated, would be protected from the attack by animals.

Nothing was easier to accomplish than this project, and here is how the engineer planned to do it.

The plateau was already defended on three sides by watercourses.

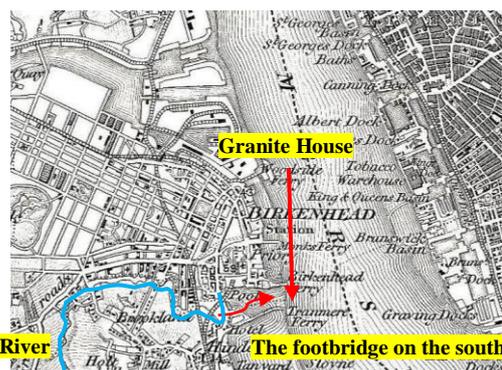
In the northwest by the shore of Lake Grant;



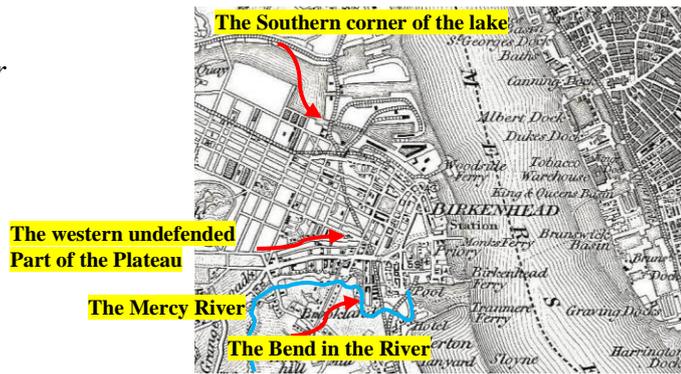
On the eastern shore by the sea itself.



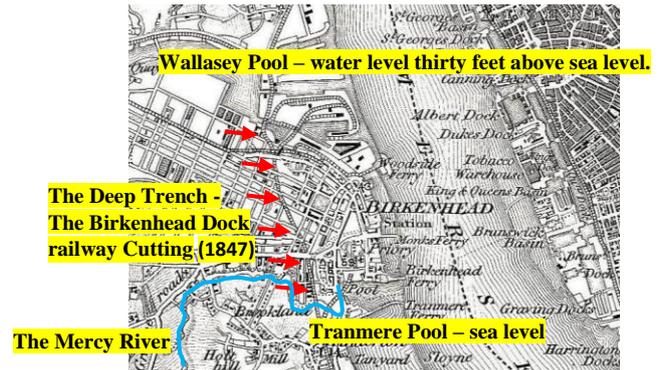
Finally on the south, ... the Mercy where they would establish the bridge.



There still remained the western part of the plateau, between the bend in the river and the southern corner of the lake, a distance less than one mile, which was open to any who might come.



But nothing was easier than to dig a wide and deep trench, which would then be filled by the waters of the lake and whose overflow would spill into the Mersey by a second waterfall.



As an enclosed dock, the water level in Wallasey Pool is thirty feet higher than the River Mersey and the Tranmere Pool at low tide. Jules Verne is going to use the *less than one-mile-long* Birkenhead Dock railway cutting as a gravity fed overflow from Wallasey Pool to Tranmere Pool. Central Birkenhead will now be surrounded by water on all sides and be protected for all time from attack by orangutans.

The level of the lake would doubtless be lowered a little as a result of this new discharge, but Cyrus Harding knew that the flow of Red Creek was sufficient to allow for it.

“In this way,” added the engineer, “Grand View Plateau” will be a veritable island, surrounded by water on all sides, and it will be connected to the rest of our domain only by the bridge which we’re going to build across the Mercy.

In order to help his companions better understand his plan, Cyrus Harding made a map of the plateau, and his project was immediately grasped in its entirety. It was approved unanimously and Pencroft brandishing the carpenter’s axe, exclaimed:

“First to the bridge!”

On November 21st, Cyrus Harding began preparing the trench that would enclose the plateau from the west, from the southern corner of Lake Grant to the bend in the Mersey. This ground had two feet of subsoil and, under that, granite. He had to make some nitro glycerine, and the nitroglycerine produced its usual effect. In less than fifteen days they dug a trench into the hard ground of the plateau, a dozen feet wide and six feet deep. A new drain was, by the same means, cut into the rocky shore of the lake. The water fell into this new bed and formed a

small watercourse called “Creek Glycerine” which became a tributary of the Mercy. As predicted by the engineer the level of the lake was lowered but by an insignificant amount.

In the first half of December, these activities were finished and Grand View Plateau, that is to say a sort of irregular pentagon having a perimeter of about four miles, was surrounded by water and absolutely protected against all aggression.



Creek Glycerine – The Birkenhead Dock Railway

Creek Glycerine, otherwise known as the Birkenhead Dock Railway Cutting, cuts a diagonal swathe across the grid iron pattern of Birkenhead’s streets. The cutting (locally known as the ‘Sough’) was opened in April 1847 – on the same historic day as the Birkenhead Docks and Birkenhead Park.

Jules Verne has now confirmed to us that the Tranmere Brook is indeed the Mercy River in *Mysterious Island*. He has given us a ‘three-dimensional map’ as to how the position of the Tranmere Brook relates to both the Birkenhead Dock Railway Cutting and Wallasey Pool.

Verne not only gives the correct compass directions and the correct scale (*a distance less than one mile*) of the railway cutting relative to other landmarks, but also the relative drop in water level height between the enclosed Wallasey Dock system and Tranmere Pool when the tide is out.

The level of the water in Wallasey Pool is 30 feet higher than at Tranmere Pool (this is exaggerated to 300 feet in the novel).



**Birkenhead Dock Extension Railway
(Creek Glycerine)**



Aerial View of the Dock Extension Railway



The colonists later build a bridge over Creek Glycerine.

They approached the plateau. One more mile and they would see the bridge over Creek Glycerine.

There are six bridges across the Birkenhead Dock Extension Railway, the specific bridge 'built' by the colonists of Lincoln Island is still open to conjecture.

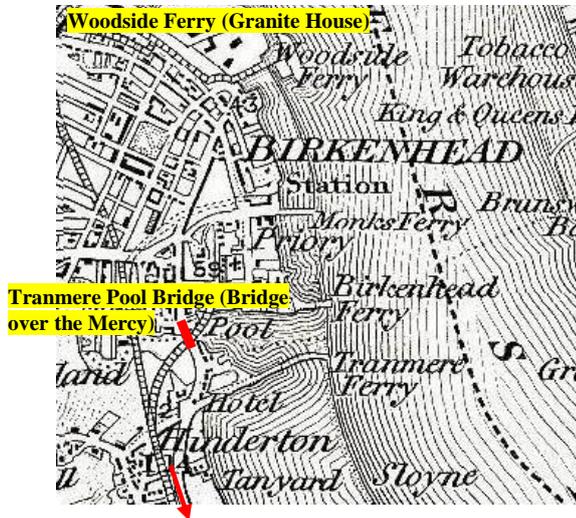
Central Birkenhead c1920 showing the Birkenhead Dock Railway cutting (on the left).

In 2022 the Dockland Railway cutting known as the 'Sough' lies abandoned and overgrown, there are plans to convert it into an urban park.

Creek Glycerine has proved very successful - because as far as the Birkenhead historical records show.... no orangutan has ever crossed it.

The bridge across the Mercy (Tranmere Pool).

Cyrus Harding discusses plans to build a bridge across the Mercy River (Tranmere Brook), and how the design needs to prepare for further orangutan attacks.



Before going to bed, Cyrus Harding and his companions, seated around the table, discussed several projects that urgently needed to be done.

The most important and the most pressing was the establishment of a bridge over the Mercy to link the southern part of the island with Granite House.

The Site of Thomas Brassey's 1831 Road Bridge over Tranmere Pool.

A41 To Bromborough Pool (Straight Road to Port Balloon)

The bridge would also make it easy to transport the envelope of the balloon which would give them linen, and the corral would furnish a collection of wool which would give them winter clothing.

The Tranmere Pool Road Bridge (Bridge over the Mercy) and the straight macadamized road to Bromborough Pool (Port Balloon) were one of the first civil engineering contracts carried out by the engineer Thomas Brassey in 1831.

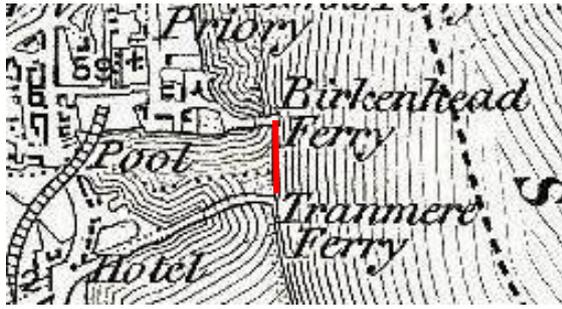
On the next day, November 3rd, they began to construct the bridge, and all hands were required for this important task.

The colonists ascended the left bank of the Mercy, and soon arrived at the bend formed by the river.

There they stopped in order to see if the bridge could be built at this point. The spot seemed suitable.

From this point to Port Balloon, discovered the previous day on the southern shore, it was only three and a half miles. From bridge to port it would be easy to blaze a path to fit a cart which would make for easy movement between Granite House and the south of the island.

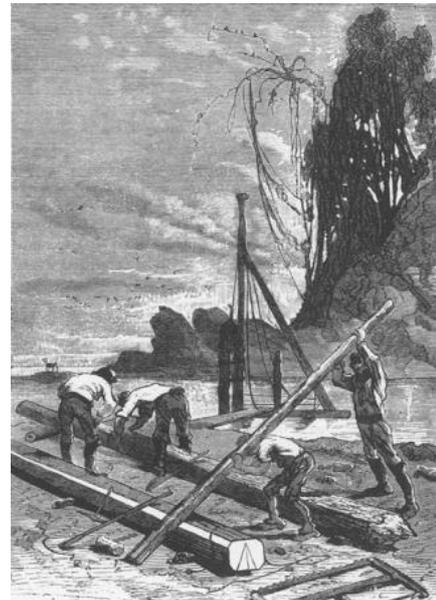
Although the colonists' location for their bridge over the Mercy will match the location of Thomas Brassey's road bridge over Tranmere Pool, the actual design will pay tribute to the mid nineteenth century foot bridge connecting Birkenhead Ferry to Tranmere Ferry (see below).



The location of the Tranmere Pool Footbridge and the same footbridge featured in the painting *Liverpool from Holt Hill, Tranmere* by William Collingwood (1863).

This work was the most urgent. The trees were chosen, cut down, branches removed, and cut into small beams, thick planks, and boards.

It was necessary to sink piles into the river bed to support the platform of the bridge and to set up a pile driver to pound down the piles, so as to form two arches to support heavy loads.



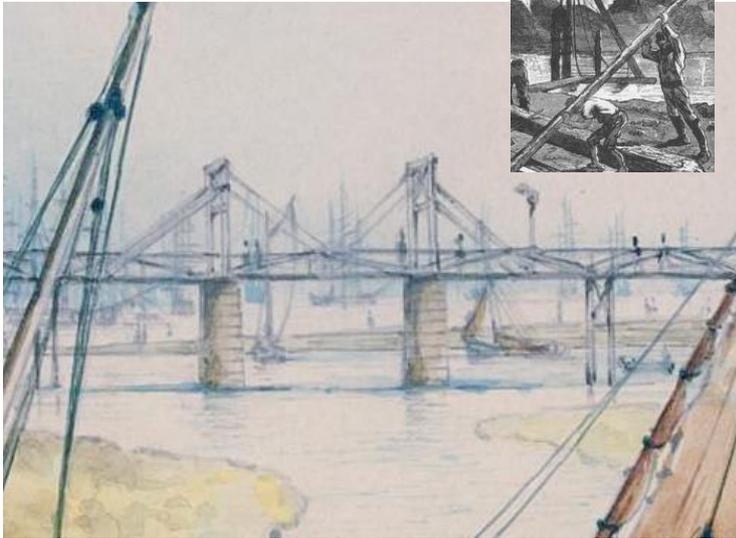
It was a large undertaking.

The bridge, stationary on the right bank of the Mercy, would be movable on the left bank, in such a way that it could be raised by means of counterweights as is done with certain floodgates.



The Tranmere Pool Footbridge *movable on the left bank in such a way that it could be raised by means of counterweights* (William Herdman c1860).

The bridge was finished on November 20th. Its movable portion balanced by counterweights, moved easily, and it required little effort to raise it. Between the hinge and the crossbeam on which it would rest when closed, there was a twenty-foot interval which would be sufficient to prevent any animals from crossing.



A close-up view of the Tranmere Pool Footbridge shows the movable portion balanced by counterweights to be raised to allow sailing boats to enter the Pool.

The construction appears of small beams, thick planks, and boards apart from the two stone piers at a twenty-foot interval – designed to prevent orangutan attack.

William Herdman c1860.



Tranmere Pool and Birkenhead by William Herdman c1860.

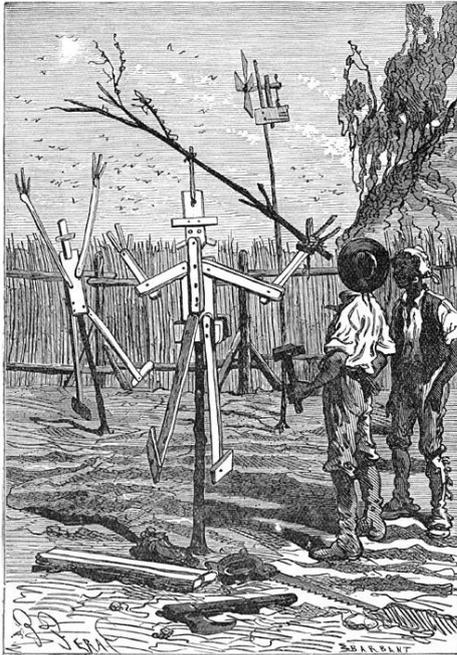
In this watercolour by William Herdman, the left side of the wooden footbridge across Tranmere Pool (The mouth of the Mercy) at Birkenhead is clearly shown.

The view also shows St Mary's Church together with Birkenhead Priory and the 'Headland of Birches'

Within 50 years, the last remnants of the Tranmere Pool had been filled in and the oldest part of 'Birchen Head – the Headland of Birches' would no longer form a promontory jutting out into the sea. It would however live on forever, in the novels of Jules Verne.

The Bidston Semaphore Telegraph

Pencroft and Neb work together to grow wheat just below Bidston Hill, Birkenhead.

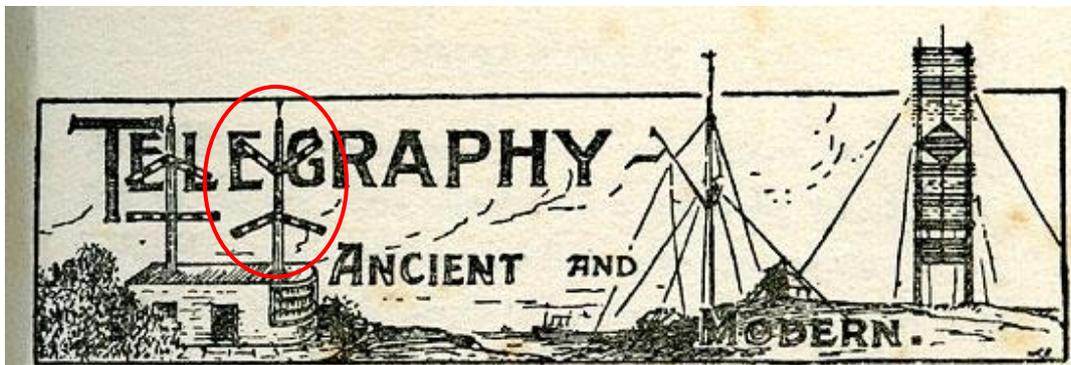


The field was prepared and then surrounded by a strong wooden fence, high and sharp, that quadrupeds would find difficult to cross.

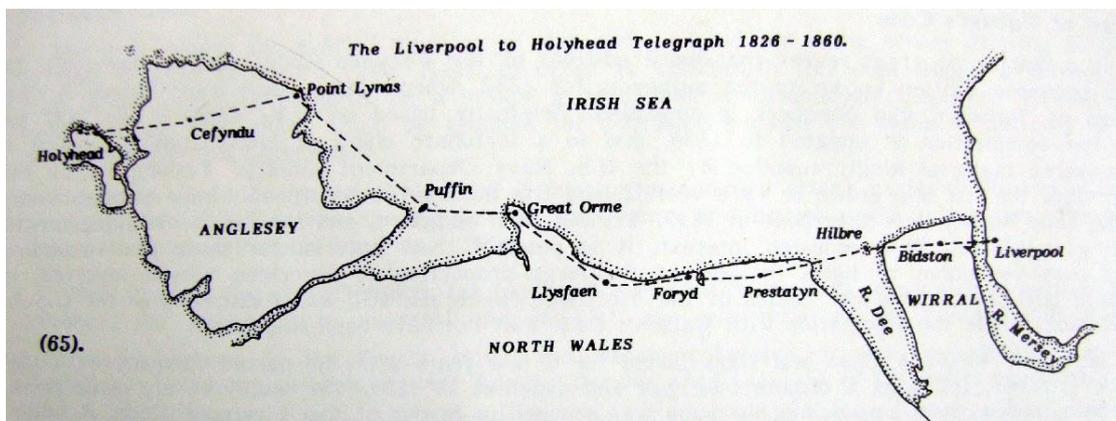
As for the birds, some noisy whirligigs and frightful scarecrows, dreamed up by Pencroft's fantastic imagination, sufficed to scatter them.

Pencroft's frightful scarecrows.

Bidston Hill yet again supplies the inspiration – this time for Pencroft's Scarecrows.



The semaphore stations ran from Bidston Hill to Holyhead, North Wales.



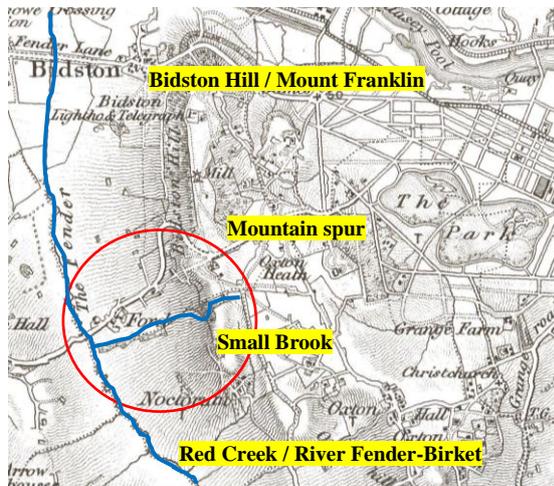
The artist Jules Ferat's illustration of the scarecrow is symbolic of the semaphore system in place on Bidston Hill until 1860 when it was succeeded by an electric cable.

Bidston Hill telegraph station (1826) was originally a semaphore system relaying a signal to Hilbre Island and continuing via seven other stations to Holyhead, North Wales. A ship approaching Anglesey could then relay notice of its approach to Liverpool shipowners in less than thirty seconds.

The windmill in the background is symbolic of Bidston Windmill and points to where we really are. The relationship between Pencroft and Bidston, Birkenhead will ultimately prove deeply symbolic as will the relationship between Pencroft and Neb.

Keeping Sheep at Upton Wirral

The colonists build a corral to protect their sheep.



There, a large piece of ground was chosen on the very flank of the southern part of the mountain. It was a prairie where clusters of trees grew, situated at the very foot of a mountain spur which closed it on one side. A small brook, having its source among the slopes, flowed diagonally across the area and fed into Red Creek.

The site of the corral.

The location of the corral is at the hamlet of Ford, where a small brook flowed into the River Fender, which in turn feeds into the River Birkett (Verne's Red Creek). This area is today occupied by the 1930's housing of Windermere Road, Birkenhead.

The perimeter of the corral was marked off by the engineer, and they then proceeded to cut the trees needed to construct the stockade.

At the front of the stockade, they built a rather wide entrance, which was closed by two swinging doors made of very thick planks strengthened by exterior cross bars.

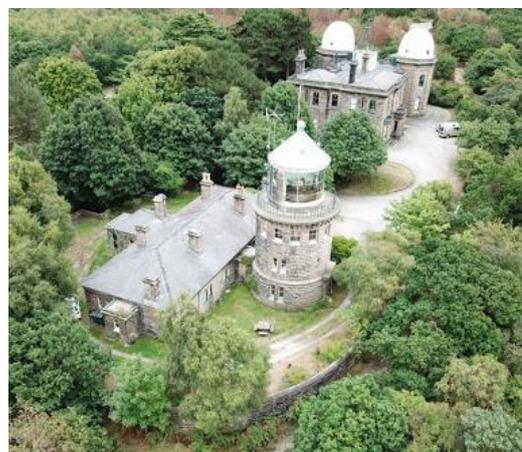
The colonists will eventually connect Granite House to the corral with a telegraphic cable.

This cable will replicate the cable running from Birkenhead Woodside to Bidston Lighthouse on Bidston Hill.

The actual bricks and mortar of the corral stockade are therefore represented by the tall retaining wall to Bidston Lighthouse on Bidston Hill (see right), although Verne moves the geographical location of this 'stage set' to Windermere Road.

Bidston Lighthouse of course also plays the role of the volcano Mount Franklin on Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island*.

Bidston Lighthouse – one building - two parts to play in *Mysterious Island*.

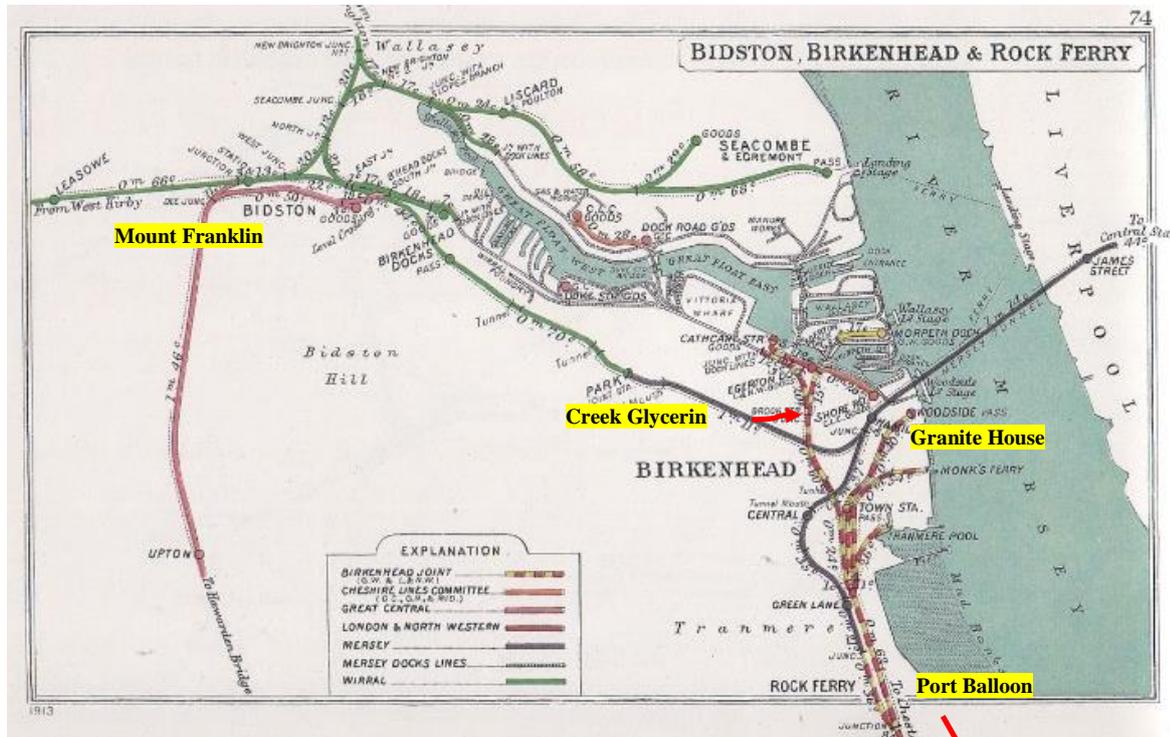


The telegraphic cable running from Granite House (Birkenhead, Woodside) to the corral (Bidston Lighthouse) will play a vital part in the finale of *Mysterious Island*.

The Rock Ferry Line on Merseyrail and the Branch Line to Bidston.

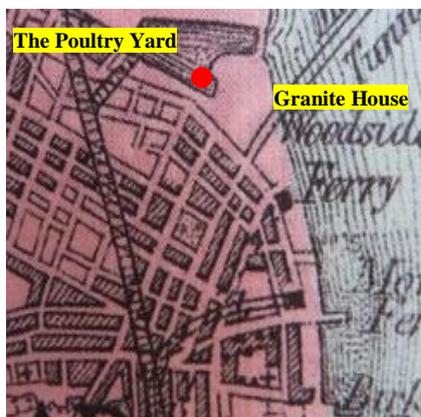
Pencroft suggests that one day the colonists may even build railways on Lincoln Island.

“A beast of burden would be very useful to us until the captain has made a steam cart, or even an engine, for some day we shall have a railroad from Granite House to Port Balloon, with a branch line to Mount Franklin!”



The Poultry Yard at Morpeth Dock Birkenhead

The colonists construct a poultry yard on the south east corner of Lake Grant (Wallasey Pool). Within the poultry yard, they also build a stable for the small wild horses (called onagers) that they have caught on the ‘Grand View Plateau’ (Birkenhead). This is the site of Morpeth Half Tide Dock – now filled in and occupied by the Birkenhead Sewage Treatment Works.



It was necessary that the birds be within the reach of the kitchen chef, and no location seemed more favourable than the portion of the banks of the lake that bordered on the old overflow.

The poultry yard occupied an area of two hundred square yards on the southeast bank of the lake. They surrounded it with a wooden fence, and they built different shelters for the animals that would populate it.

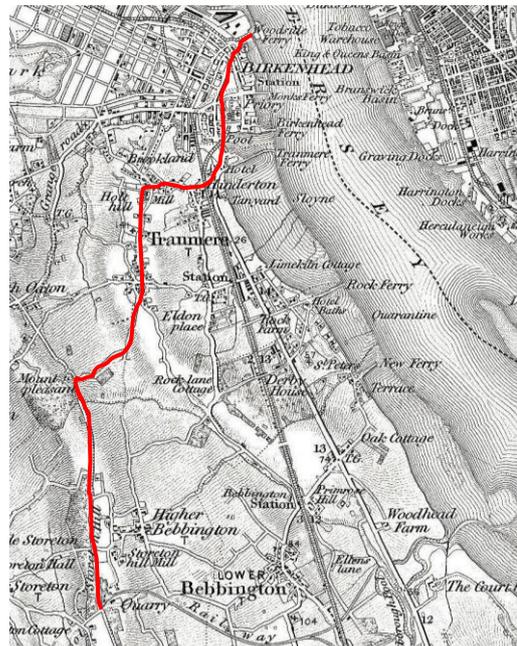
The Poultry Yard at Morpeth Dock

Mount Road, Birkenhead and Storeton Woods

The Road to the Far West

During the month of February, no other important event occurred. They attended to their daily tasks. At the same time, as they improved the roads to the corral and to Port Balloon, a third was begun from the enclosure to the western shore. The deep woods which covered Serpentine Peninsula still an unknown portion of Lincoln Island. Gideon Spilett planned on purging from his domain the wild beasts that took refuge there.

The Road to the Forest of the Far West (Storeton Woods)



Part of the Road to the Far West (Mount Road, Bebbington) and the Woods of the Far West (Storeton Woods).

In 1838 the Storeton Quarry near Birkenhead became world famous with the discovery of ‘dinosaur’ footprints some 50 feet below the surface. The quarry was owned by Thomas Brassey.

The footprints were catalogued by geologist John Cunningham of Arrowe Hall (The Falls River in *Mysterious Island*), Birkenhead and described as ‘remarkable’ by Sir Charles Lyell, the father of modern geology. The footprints were deemed of such importance that they were exhibited in the foyer of the Natural History Museum in London – where they remain today.

The Storeton Footprints.



The Veranda at Birkenhead Park Cricket Club.

Neb builds a veranda for the colonists to shelter beneath on warm evenings.

Thus, everything was successful thanks to the activity of these courageous and intelligent men. Providence had no doubt done much for them; but faithful to the well-known axiom, they had first helped themselves, and Heaven then helped accordingly.

This well-known axiom will eventually be of great importance to Jules Verne's wider story.

At the end of a warm summer's day, when work was finished and a breeze came up from the sea, they loved to sit at the edge of Grand View Plateau under a sort of veranda covered with climbing plants that Neb built with his own hands.



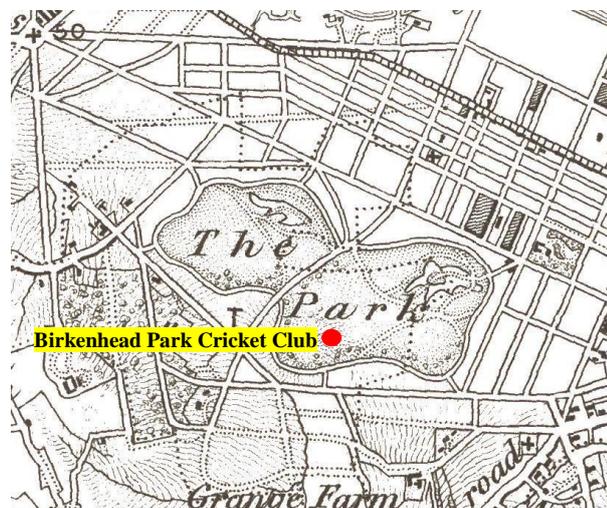
They chatted about the island and its remoteness.

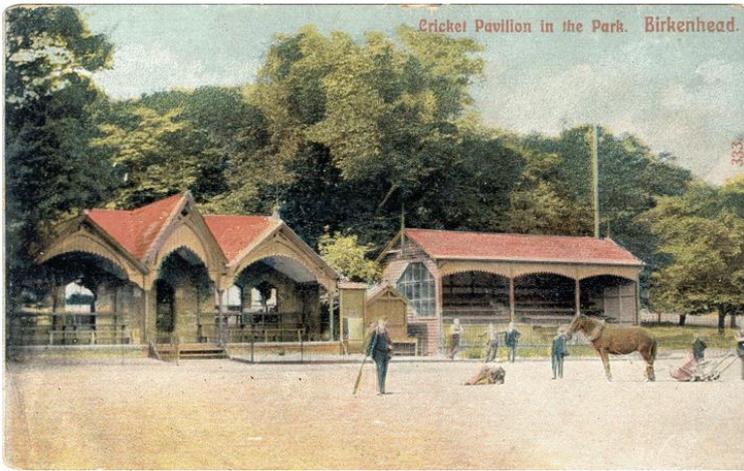


Birkenhead Park Cricket Club Veranda c1870.

Neb's veranda covered with creepers is most likely the veranda of the cricket pavilion at Birkenhead Park. The branches mimic the unusually shaped windows. The clubhouse, built in 1846 is one of the oldest in the country and a listed building. Most of the original members were old boys of the top public schools of the day.

Birkenhead Park Cricket Club.





There they chatted, they instructed one another, they made plans, the sailor's good humour always entertaining this small world in which perfect harmony never ceased to reign.

Birkenhead Park Cricket Club c1900.



Birkenhead Park Cricket Club Pavillion in 2020.

They also spoke of their country, of the dear and great America. What of the War of Secession? It certainly could not have continued. Surely, Richmond had fallen promptly into the hands of General Grant! The capture of the Confederate capital had to be the last act of this deadly struggle. Now the north had no doubt justly triumphed.

Ah! How a newspaper would have been welcomed by the exiles of Lincoln Island! For eleven months, all communication between them and the rest of humanity had been cut off., and soon March 24th would mark the anniversary of the day when the balloon had thrown them on this unknown shore. Then only castaways, not even knowing if they could wrest a miserable existence from the elements. Now thanks to the knowledge of their chief, thanks to their own intelligence, they had become true colonists with arms, tools and instruments, who had transformed to their benefit the animals, plants and minerals of the island, the three kingdoms of nature.

The colonists will continue to work hard to create the perfect harmony first envisaged by Abraham Lincoln and which they themselves have tried to put into practice on their own Lincoln Island.

Bidston Windmill – A View of St Hilary’s Church at Wallasey Village.

Pencroft having grown wheat on the slopes of Bidston Hill, decides that a windmill is needed to make flour. The windmill will be modelled on the still surviving Bidston Mill on Bidston Hill, just above Birkenhead.

“Five bushels, Mr Cyrus,” said Pencroft, after scrupulously measuring his riches.

“Five bushels,” replied the engineer, “and at one hundred thirty thousand grains per bushel, that makes six hundred and fifty thousand grains”

“We’ll eat bread.”

“But we’ll have to make a mill.”

“We’ll make a mill.”

The wheat harvest was finished, and they devoted the last half of November to making bread.

They had the grain but not the flour, so the construction of a mill was necessary. Cyrus Harding could have used the second waterfall which overflowed into the Mercy for his motor power, the first being already used to drive the rammers of the fulling mill; but, after discussion, it was decided they would build a simple windmill on the heights of Grand View. Constructing one did not offer any more difficulty than constructing the other, and they were also sure that there would be no lack of wind on this plateau exposed as it was to the open sea.

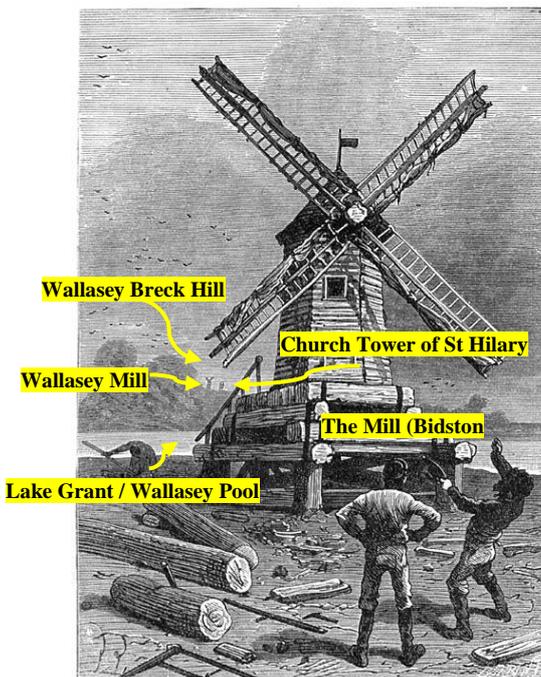
“What’s more,” said Pencroft, “this windmill will be picturesque and will add much to the landscape!”

They began the work by choosing timber for the framework of the housing and for the mechanism of the mill. Several large sandstones found to the north of the lake were easily transformed into grindstones, and the inexhaustible envelope of the balloon furnished the necessary cloth for the sails.

Cyrus Harding made up the plans, and the mill was built a little to the right of the poultry yard near the banks of the lake.



Jules Verne has moved Bidston Mill to the banks of Morpeth Dock Birkenhead.



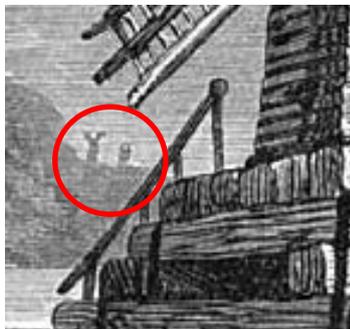
The housing rested on a pivot, held in place by heavy timbers, so that it could turn, along with the entire mechanism which it contained, toward any quarter of the wind.

This work was quickly accomplished. Neb and Pencroft had become very skillful carpenters, and they had only to follow the plans furnished by the engineer. A sort of cylindrical turret, in the shape of a giant pepperpot topped with a high pitched roof, soon rose at the designated place. The four frames which made up the windmill's arms were firmly implanted into a shaft at the correct angle and were fixed to it by means of iron bolts.

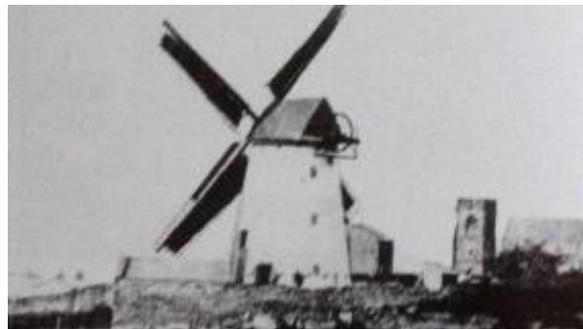
Pencroft was delighted with his handiwork.

The artist Jules Ferat leaves two visual clues that Lake Grant (pictured behind the windmill) is actually Wallasey Pool / Birkenhead Docks.

A close look at Jules Ferat's sketch of the mill on the shores of Lake Grant will reveal the clues to where we actually are.



A windmill and a church tower.



Wallasey Mill and the church tower of St Hilary.

Jules Ferat's sketch (above left) shows Lake Grant (Wallasey Pool) in the background, however the shape of the horizon behind also shows the two top sails of another windmill and a rectangular tower. The old Wallasey Mill on Wallasey Breck Hill was probably still working in Verne's time but was demolished in 1887.

The church tower is the isolated Tower of St Hilary, sited across Wallasey Pool, the main body of the church was burned down in 1857 leaving just the isolated tower behind.



Today Bidston Windmill still sits atop Bidston Hill and proudly overlooks Birkenhead. All the internal mechanism is preserved, and the mill is a listed building.

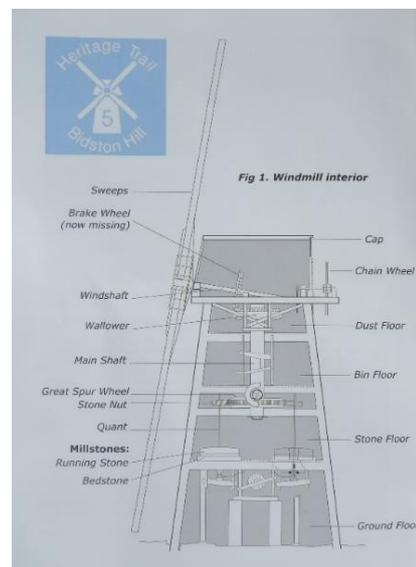
Bidston windmill will play an important role in the final parts of our fifth novel.

Bidston Mill, Bidston Hill, Birkenhead.



As to the various parts of the internal mechanism – the box destined to contain the two grindstones, the stationary stone and the turning stone, the hopper which was a sort of square spout, large on top and narrow at the base, which would permit the grains to fall on the grindstones, the oscillating spout designed to regulate the flow of the grain whose perpetual tic-tac would give it the name of “blabbermouth,” and finally the sieve which, by the operation of the sifter, separated the bran from the flour – all these were constructed without difficulty.

Bidston Mill – preserved internal arrangement.



The tools were good, and the work was easy because, in short, the mechanics of a mill are quite simple and required only the time to build it.

The Jaguar Attack at Morpeth Dock, Birkenhead.

On December 3rd, Herbert left Grand View Plateau to go fishing on the southern bank of the lake. He carried no weapons and, until then, no precaution had been needed since the dangerous animals had not shown themselves on this part of the island.

During this time, Pencroft and Neb were working at the poultry yard while Cyrus Harding and the reporter were at the Chimneys making soda, this supply of soap having run out.

Suddenly shouts were heard:

“Help! Help me!”

Cyrus Harding and the reporter, too far away, could not hear them. Pencroft and Neb, however, quickly abandoned the poultry yard and rushed toward the lake.

As they arrived, they saw the stranger, whose presence in this neighbourhood no one suspected, jumping across Creek Glycerin which separated the plateau from the forest.

Verne’s description gives us the exact location of the Jaguar attack – the junction of the southern bank of the lake and the dock extension railway – in other words the railway sidings at Cleveland Street, Birkenhead.



The scene of the Jaguar attack.



There Herbert was face to face with a formidable jaguar which resembled the one that had been killed at Reptile Promontory. Taken by surprise, he stood with his back against a tree while the animal, crouching on its haunches, prepared to pounce upon him. But the stranger, without any weapon other than a knife, rushed toward the fearsome beast who then turned toward the new adversary.

The battle was a short one. The stranger had strength and prodigious skill.

He had grabbed the Jaguar by the throat.

With one hand, as powerful as a vice, he seized the jaguar by the throat without heeding the beast’s claws which tore at his flesh., and, with the other, he plunged his knife into the animal’s heart.

The jaguar fell. The stranger kicked it aside and was about to flee just as the colonists reached the field of battle. Herbert held him back shouting:

“No! No! You mustn’t go away!”

Sited on the dock wall at Morpeth Dock, Woodside, the Birkenhead One O'clock Gun operated from 21st September 1867 until 18th July 1969.

"We have all the elements necessary for making a battery; the most difficult part will be in drawing the iron wire, but by means of a drawplate, I think that we can manage it."

They got to work and began with the most difficult task, the manufacture of the wires, because if that should fail, it would be useless to make the battery and other accessories.

The engineer finally obtained wires forty to fifty feet long, which were easy to splice together so they could extend over the five miles which separated the corral from the Granite House enclosure.

Only a few days were needed to carry out this work and, once the machine was put in operation, Cyrus Harding left his companions to work as wire drawers while he made his battery.

It was necessary to construct a battery of constant current. After some thought, Cyrus Harding decided to make a very simple battery based on the one invented by Becquerel in 1820 which uses only zinc. As to the other materials, nitric acid and potassium, he had these.

Such was the ingenious yet very simple apparatus constructed by Cyrus Harding, an apparatus which would allow him to establish telegraphic communication between Granite House and the corral.

On February 6th, they began to erect poles, furnished with glass insulators, to support the wire which would follow the route to the corral. A few days later, the wire was stretched along them, now ready to carry the electric current which the ground would return to its starting point at a speed of 100,000 kilometres per second.

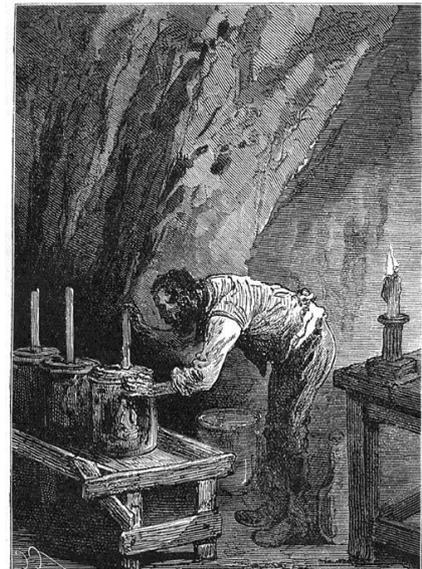
Two batteries had been made, one for Granite House, the other for the corral. If the corral was to be in communication with Granite House, it might also be useful for Granite House to be able to communicate with the corral.

Everything was completely installed on February 12th. On this day, Cyrus Harding, turned on the current along the wire, asked if all was going well at the corral and, a few moments later, received a satisfactory response from Ayrton.

The engineer sealed them with cork lids

Pencroft was overjoyed. Each morning and each evening he sent a telegram to the corral, which never went unanswered.

Pencroft's telegrams which never went unanswered may have a wider historical significance in terms of both the Bidston lighthouse and Observatory.



This mode of communication presented two very real advantages: first, it permitted them to verify the presence of Ayrton at the corral, and, second, it did not leave him completely isolated. In addition, Cyrus Harding never allowed a week to go by without going to see him, and Ayrton came to Granite House from time to time where he was always well received.

The Legend of the Octopus in the Well at New Brighton.

From the very outset the well in Granite House has attracted the curiosity of the engineer Cyrus Harding. Jules Verne mentions an octopus in the colonists first descent down the cave that is to become Granite House.

... and the thought which must have come to more than one of them was that some octopus or other gigantic cephalopod might occupy those interior cavities which communicated with the sea.

Cyrus Harding often remarked that when Top came near the dark well, which was in communication with the sea and whose opening was at the base of the storeroom, he made strange growls.

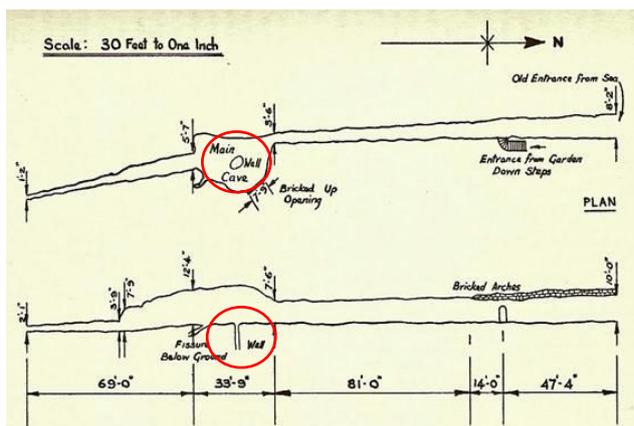


The colonists gather around the well.

Top circled this hole which had been covered with a wooden panel, and sometimes he even tried to slip his paws under the panel as if he wanted to lift it. He then yapped in a particular way which indicated anger and uneasiness at the same time.

The engineer observed this behaviour on several occasions. What was there in this abyss that could so affect the intelligent animal? The well led to the sea, that was certain. Did it branch out through narrow passageways across the foundation of the island? Was it in communication with several other interior cavities? Did some marine monster come from time to time to breathe at the bottom of this well?

The engineer did not know what to think, and he couldn't help but imagine bizarre complications. Accustomed to dealing with scientific reality, he could not pardon himself for drifting into the domain of the strange and almost supernatural. Top was one of those sensible dogs who did not waste his time barking at the moon, but how could he explain why the dog insisted on probing this abyss with his smell and hearing if there was nothing to arouse his uneasiness? Top's conduct intrigued Cyrus Harding more than he found reasonable to admit to himself.



The well at Wormhole Cave, New Brighton is the inspiration for the well in Granite House.

Wormhole Cave at Rock Villa, Wellington Road, New Brighton, is but one part of a whole network of caves within the sandstone bedrock of this area.

Wormhole Cave New Brighton.

These caves are still largely unmapped and undocumented. It is thought there are many other caves beneath the modern land surface which was raised after promenade construction in the 1930's.

The well in Wormhole Cave New Brighton today, complete with rusty piping and an old broom and handle.



Gavin Chappell in '*Hidden Wirral Myths and Legends.*' talks about Wormhole Cave and a legend from a neighbouring house in the same road.

Endcliff, another house on the same street (Wellington Road), had a tunnel leading from the cellar to the shore. According to Tom Slemen, the cellar which was flooded from 6 to 11 feet due to this tunnel, was for many years the home to a sea creature -- apparently some kind of octopus -- popularly known as "Higgledy" which came and went when the tide allowed, and had been the pet of the owner around the turn of the nineteenth century; an eccentric man who is said to have fed the creature rats, chickens and eventually his own dog.

It went on to terrorise later inhabitants, including William Parry Evans, a cotton broker, who is said to have shot at it with his revolver, although he failed to kill it. Higgledy – described as a huge black octopus with a massive beak and dead, staring eyes is said to have still haunted the cellar until the 1950's.

Endcliff is one half of a much older house called Ellerslie, the house was originally constructed in the 1840's and divided into two dwellings in 1892.

*In 1874, the year *Mysterious Island* was written Ellerslie was bought by the solicitor F. S. Hull, Mr Hull will return to play a small but integral part in our story.*

*At the end of *Mysterious Island* – the identity of the 'creature' lurking in the bottom of the well is revealed – it is not a monster; it is not even an octopus - it is in fact Captain Nemo who has been listening to the colonists' aspirations and woes.*

Top began to pace around the opening of the well located at the end of the inner corridor.

"Why is Top barking that way again?" asked Pencroft.

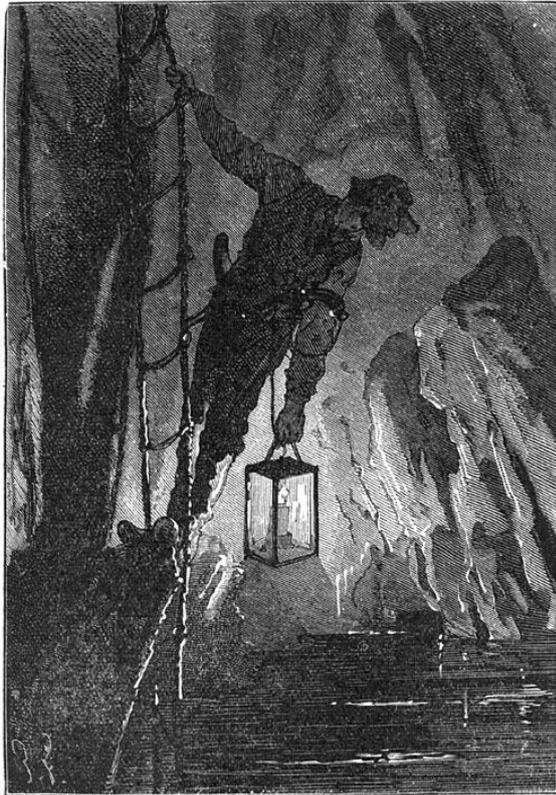
"And Jup growling so?" added Herbert.

Indeed the orang, along with the dog, gave unmistakable signs of agitation, and, curiously, these two animals appeared to be more alarmed than irritated.

“It’s obvious,” said Gideon Spilett, “that this well is in direct contact with the sea and that some marine animal comes from time to time to breathe at the bottom.”

No more attention was given to this incident. But it worried the engineer.

Cyrus Harding later descends into the well.



It was easy to descend to the bottom of the well by using the rope ladder. The engineer dragged the ladder up to the opening, whose diameter measured about six feet, and he let it unfurl after firmly securing its upper end. Then, lighting a lantern, taking a revolver, and putting a cutlass into his belt, he descended the first rungs.

The wall was solid throughout; but there were several projections of rock here and there and by means of these projections it would have been possible for an agile person to climb up to the well’s opening.

Cyrus Harding descended deeper, lighting up every part of the wall. He saw nothing suspicious there.

He saw nothing suspicious.

The wall, which Cyrus Harding struck with the handle of his cutlass, sounded solid – solid granite through which no living being could make his way. In order to reach the bottom of the well and then ascend to its opening above, it would be necessary to travel through the submerged channel, which led to the sea through the rocky subsoil under the beach, a feat possible only for marine animals. As to the question of where the channel ran, at what point on the shore and at what depth under the waves, that could not be determined.

Having completed his exploration, Cyrus Harding then climbed back up, drew up the ladder, and covered the opening of the well. As he returned to the large hall of Granite House, he was very pensive, saying to himself,

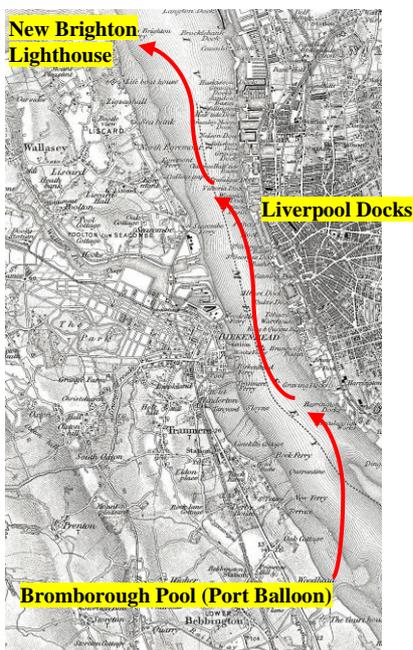
I have seen nothing, yet something is there.”

Jules Verne the Genius - Liverpool Docks in Metaphor.

The colonists build a boat to circumnavigate Lincoln Island. This is straightforward, but how will a boat circumnavigate a landlocked Wirral Peninsula?

It was decided that they would use the boat to take a trip around the island before winter came on. The complete reconnaissance of the coasts had still not been accomplished.

The departure day was fixed for April 16th, and the Bonadventure, casting off from Port Balloon, was provisioned for a cruise that could be of lengthy duration.



The colonists' boat *Bonadventure* will leave Port Balloon (Bromborough Pool) and sail along the north east coast of Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island*.

In 'our reality' the *Bonadventure* will sail along the eight mile stretch of Liverpool's Docks *without equivalent perhaps in any corner of the world*.

The course of the *Bonadventure* and the 'bottleneck' mouth of the Mersey Estuary.

The *Bonadventure* will then sail to the narrow mouth of the Mersey Estuary. The narrative here will be one of admiration for the great Port of Liverpool but also one acknowledging its sinister past as a slave trading port.

What a contrast between the southern portion and the northern portion of this coastline! As much as one was wooded and verdant, the other was harsh and wild. They could refer to the latter as "the iron coast" as it is called in certain countries.

Paddle Steamer Ferry Boats at Liverpool's Pier Head c1880.



Its tortured topography seemed to indicate sudden crystallization of the basalt while it was still molten in geological times. Piled up in a frightening way, it would have scared the colonists if they had first been thrown on this part of the island. From the summit of Mount Franklin, they had not been able to recognize the deeply sinister aspect of this coast because they were too high; but, now seen from the sea, this shore presented a strange character without equivalent perhaps in any corner of the world.



A Forest of Ships' Masts – Liverpool Docks c1860 - *without equivalent perhaps in any corner of the world.*

The Bonadventure sailed a half mile along the coast. It was composed of blocks of rock of all dimensions, from twenty feet to three hundred feet in height, and of all forms, cylindrical as if made on a lathe, prismatic like steeples, pyramidal like obelisks, and conical like a factory smokestacks. Icebergs in the polar sea could not have been thrown together in more frightful confusion.



Liverpool Skyline c1915. Steeples, Factory smokestacks and blocks from twenty feet to three hundred feet in height.

Here, bridges thrown from one rock to another, there arches arranged like the nave of a cathedral into whose depths the eye could not penetrate; in one place, there were large excavations whose vaults presented a monumental aspect; in another, a conglomeration of sharp corners, pyramids, and arches such as no gothic cathedral ever had.

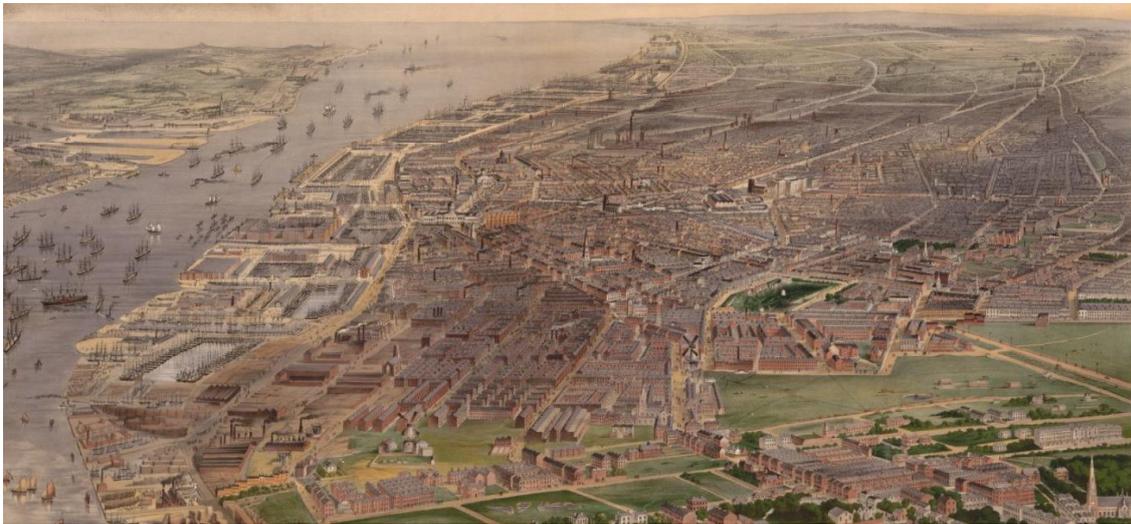


Liverpool Pier Head



Albert Dock Liverpool c1900.

All the caprices of Nature, still more varied than those of the imagination, were arranged along this grandiose coast which extended for a distance of eight to nine miles.



The eight mile stretch of Liverpool Docks – drawn from a balloon (1859)

A masterful description of the eight-mile length of Liverpool Docks in metaphor which for Jules Verne's literary genius matches his description of Bidston Lighthouse as representing the volcano – Mount Franklin.

And so it can be revealed that Jules Verne's Mysterious Island is not just based on the Wirral peninsula but it also encompasses Liverpool's *eight to nine miles* of docks.

Here for comparison is Jules Verne's actual description of Liverpool Docks from his novel *Backwards to Britain* (supposedly written in 1859 but not released until 1989)

'The entrance to the Port is impressive. On the left stands a row of huge buildings displaying the English passion for order, and a great many lights illuminate that part of the coast. To the right lies the point of Birkenhead, the cannon of its fort commanding the whole roadstead. Liverpool harbour occupies the whole estuary, and from the Irish Sea, it stretches inland from the river for some seven or eight miles.'

*The 'Hamburg' was already steaming past granite walls where large black lettering spelled out the names of **Liverpool's immense docks, unequalled in the whole world**. On reaching Victoria Tower, which guards the main harbour entrance, the ship dropped anchor in the middle of the river: the state of the tide made it impossible to enter the docks.*

'The true magnitude of Liverpool, which until then had seemed a town like any other, became apparent at the harbour. Its wet docks represent a Herculean achievement that is impossible to visualise, spreading out, double, triple even, over more than a league. How they open one into the next is such a mystery that not even Ariadne's thread could guide a stranger out of such a liquid labyrinth. Ships are berthed so close that their mass blots out the water, ships of all sizes shapes and shores: American clippers built on a huge scale, whose superstructures could hold a nation; stout Dutch galliots. Invariably spruced and bright under their tarry varnish; slender steamers whose long ornate prows curve along the quaysides; three masters whose tonnage would put first class frigates in the shade; sailing lists pinned to colourful boards at their sterns of a thousand ships; delightful poetic names embossed in gold letters, names borrowed from the legendary lands of India and the East Indies, the gulfs, straits and rivers of America and the South Seas; flags from all the globes nations floating in the mist, challenging the uniform grey with their gaudy colours.

In the holds there are mounds of bales bursting with coffee, sugar, cotton, stacks of logwood and mahogany, samples of every single colonial produce, all filling the air with exotic aromas; an army of workers most of them wearing black hats and large aprons fastened round the waist; coaches sliding along rails that crisscross in intricate loops; weird machinery designed for specific tasks – grabs, crane, a whole mechanical menagerie in perpetual motion, lifting bales, sacks and crates all bulging with goods; and, in the very heart of this bustling anthill, the whistling of steam. The chug and rattle of tramp steamers, the screeching of chains, the hammering of caulkers against a ships side, coaches thundering on swing bridges, hooves clattering on plates of metal, the swish of water as ships bump against each other, and the wind whistling through the forests of masts to the muffled breathing of the incoming tide – such are the sights and sounds of these docks that contain a whole sea, such the activity, the rhythm, the sounds – in a word, the life – of the Port of Liverpool.'

Backwards to Britain, Jules Verne (1859).

According to William Butcher this description was reworked several times by Jules Verne, presumably because of the effect *Liverpool's immense docks, unequalled in the whole world* had upon him.

Liverpool's immense docks, unequalled in the whole world.



The town which I know best in England is Liverpool, and as I stayed there for some time with friends, I had a good opportunity of studying it, especially the docks and the Mersey.

Jules Verne

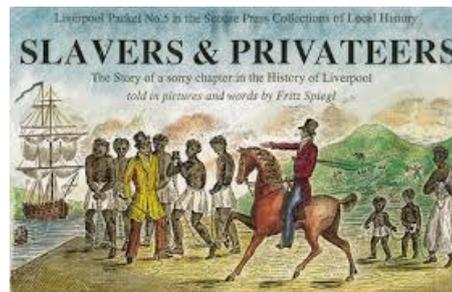
There is also a hint that Captain Nemo is secretly hiding on this coast.

Cyrus Harding and his companions looked at all of this with a surprise that bordered on stupefaction. But if they remained silent, Top was not so inhibited, and his continual barking created echoes that were repeated by the thousands among the basalt walls. The engineer even noted that these barks had something strange about them, like those that the dog had made at the opening of the well in Granite House.

And the Bonadventure grazed as close as possible to the rocks on the coast. Perhaps there was some grotto here worth exploring? But Cyrus Harding saw nothing, not a cavern nor a fracture which would serve as a retreat for any being whatsoever because the foot of these rocks was washed by the very surf of the water. Top soon stopped barking and the boat returned to a few cable lengths from the shore.

There is possibly yet another message here, hidden between the metaphors, and this the narrative of Liverpool's sinister past.

Verne's use of the words 'iron coast' 'tortured' 'frightening' and 'deeply sinister' is a thinly veiled reference to Liverpool's links to the slave trade. This will be developed further.



Liverpool Slavery and Privateers. Fritz Spiegl (1982).



Slave Irons. International Slavery Museum, Liverpool.

'... the moment we landed at Liverpool. The Captain threatened the disturbers with putting them in irons if they did not become quiet—these men disliked the irons—were quieted by the threat; yet this infamous class have put the irons on the black.'

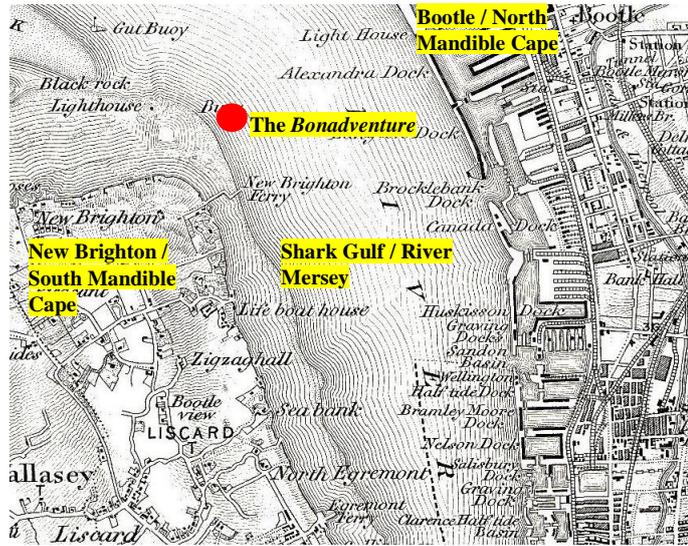
Frederick Douglass *Cork Examiner* on 25th September 1845).

Frederick Douglass is recounting the first 'Cambria Incident' whereby Captain Charles Judkin of the Royal Mersey Yacht Club of Tranmere, Birkenhead defended Douglass's right to speak on the evils of slavery aboard the SS *Cambria*. Judkin was approached by one of the 'infamous class' of New Orleans slave owners and Judkin promptly floored him with his fists.

At eight o'clock, the Bonadventure weighed anchor and moved rapidly towards North Mandible Cape because the wind was aft and become stronger.

"Very well," said Cyrus Harding, "let's carry as much sail as we're able and seek refuge in Shark Gulf. I think that the Bonadventure will be safe there."

"I shall not be unhappy," added the engineer, "to spend the night and all day tomorrow in this bay, which deserves to be carefully examined."



The foreboding name of Shark Gulf is Jules Verne's way of telling us that we are really at the narrow mouth of the River Mersey between New Brighton and Bootle. The Port of Liverpool's historic and sinister links with the slave trade will grow stronger in metaphor.

"What time is it?" asked Pencroft.

"Ten o'clock," replied Gideon Spilett.

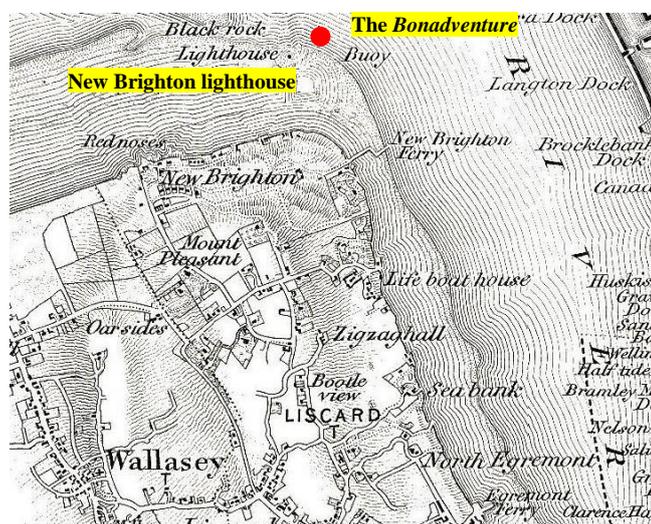
"I shall try to keep in the open sea until the flood tide, until seven o'clock this evening, and if there is some daylight, I'll try to enter the gulf; otherwise we'll stand off during the entire night and enter it tomorrow at sunrise."

There are of course no tides in the South Pacific location supposedly occupied by Mysterious Island. The tidal range on the Mersey however, at 30 feet, is one of the highest in the world.

"As I said, Pencroft, we'll leave it up to you to decide," answered Cyrus Harding.

"Ah!" said Pencroft, "if there only was a lighthouse on this coast, it would be much easier for navigators."

New Brighton Lighthouse.



Pencroft's predictions proved, as usual, to be well founded. The wind became stronger, changing from a light breeze into a true squall and acquiring a velocity of forty to forty-five miles per hour. A ship on the high seas would have been obliged to reef its sails and lower its topgallant sails. About six o'clock, the Bonadventure was opposite the gulf, but the ebb tide was strong at this moment, and it was impossible to enter. They were compelled to remain on the open sea because, even if they had wanted to, Pencroft would not have been able to reach the mouth of the Mercy.

And here again, Jules Verne reminds us where we really are – utterly confusing with the ‘Mercy’ and the Mersey ... but utterly brilliant too.

Verne even has the *Bonadventure* waiting for a high tide so she can clear the sandbank known as the ‘Mersey Bar’.



Liverpool Pilot Boat the ‘Leader,’ leading a fleet of vessels over the Mersey Bar (1881) by William Horde Yorke.

When the first rays of dawn appeared on the eastern horizon, the wind, diminished a little, shifted two points on the compass and allowed Pencroft to easily enter the narrow entrance to the gulf. About seven o'clock in the morning, the Bonadventure, leaving North Mandible Cape behind, carefully entered the channel and ventured into these waters bordered by the strangest lava formation.

“Here,” said Pencroft, “is a bit of sea that would make an admirable harbour where fleets could maneuver at their ease.”



The Channel Fleet crossing the ‘Bar’ and entering the Mouth of the River Mersey 1907.

“What is especially curious,” observed Cyrus Harding, “is that this gulf has been formed by two lava flows spewed up by the volcano, which accumulated from successive eruptions. The result is that this gulf is completely protected on all sides, and I believe that, even in the worst winds, the sea is as calm here as on a lake.”

*These waters bordered by the strangest lava formation most likely refer to the granite dock walls on both sides of the Mersey Estuary and written about by Verne in his novel *Backwards to Britain* (1859) - The 'Hamburg' was already steaming past granite walls.*

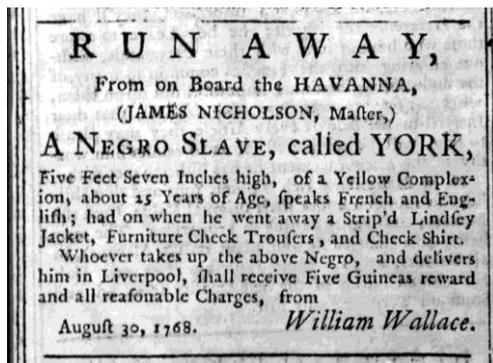
"Without doubt," replied the sailor, "since the wind has access only by this narrow bottleneck between the two capes, and the north cape protects the south cape in such a way as to make it difficult for squalls to enter. In truth, our Bonadventure could remain here from one year to the other without even pulling on its anchors."

"It's a little too large for it," observed the reporter.

"Well, Mr. Spilett," replied the sailor "I agree that it's too large for the Bonadventure, but if the navies of the Union have need of a safe harbour in the Pacific, I believe that they'll never find one any better than this!"

"We're in the shark's mouth," Neb then noted, making allusion to the shape of the gulf.

And in one comment, Neb, as a freed slave sums up his unease at being in the mouth of the greatest slave port the world has ever seen.



Runaway Slave – Liverpool 1768.

"All the way into the mouth, my brave Neb," replied Herbert, "but you're not afraid that it will close on us, are you?"

"No, Mr. Herbert," answered Neb, but nevertheless this gulf doesn't please me much! It has a wicked look.

Although very few slaves ever came to Liverpool, in the eighteenth century the town was Europe's largest home port of slave ships and slave traders. Herbert's salute to Neb's bravery is both profound and perhaps in some way explanatory of future events.

"So!" exclaimed Pencroft. "Now Neb is putting down my gulf just as I was thinking of making a gift of it to America!"

And, in fact, the sheer walls of lava did not offer a single ledge for disembarking anywhere along the entire perimeter of the gulf. Although more barren, it was an insurmountable curtain of rock which resembled the fiords of Norway.

Pencroft consoled himself by saying that, with the help of a mine, they would surely know how to make an opening in this wall if necessary but since, obviously, there was nothing to do

in the gulf, he sailed his boat toward its entrance, about two o'clock in the afternoon, left the gulf behind.

"Whew!" said Neb, letting out a sigh of satisfaction.

One could truly say that the worthy negro did not feel at ease in this enormous jaw.

Jules Verne as an author is as sympathetic to the abolitionist cause as was his great friend, the novelist Victor Hugo.

There were barely eight miles between Cape Mandible and the mouth of the Mercy. The bow was then pointed towards Granite House, and the Bonadventure, under full sail descended the coast a mile offshore.

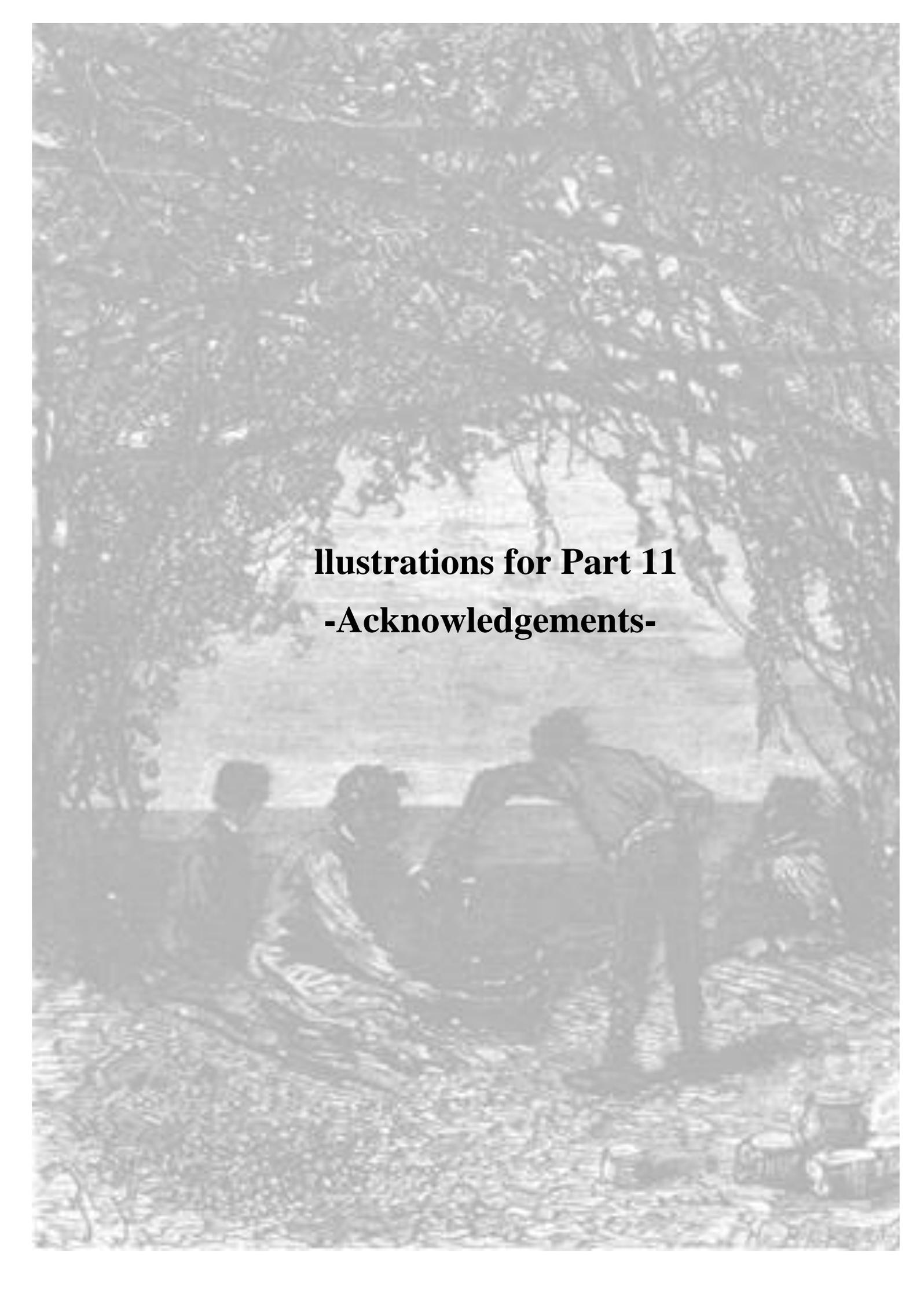
About four o'clock, Pencroft, passing the point of the islet on his left entered the channel which separated it from the coast and, at five o'clock, the Bonadventure's anchor gripped the sandy bottom at the mouth of the Mercy.

The colonists had been away from home for three days. Ayrton was waiting for them on the beach, and Master Jup joyously came to meet them, making loud grunts of satisfaction.

During the greater part of this the third winter that the colonists passed on Lincoln Island, they remained confined to Granite House. There were large storms and terrible squalls which seemed to shake the rocks to their foundations. Immense tidal waves covered large parts of the islet, and certainly any vessel anchored in the vicinity would have been lost, crew and all. Twice during these storms, the Mercy rose to such a height that they feared the bridge would not hold, and it was even necessary to strengthen the bridge along the shore which disappeared under sheets of water when the sea beat against the beach.

Next in Jules Verne's Heroes of Birkenhead.

Part 12. The Pirate Attack on Birkenhead.



Illustrations for Part 11
-Acknowledgements-

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