



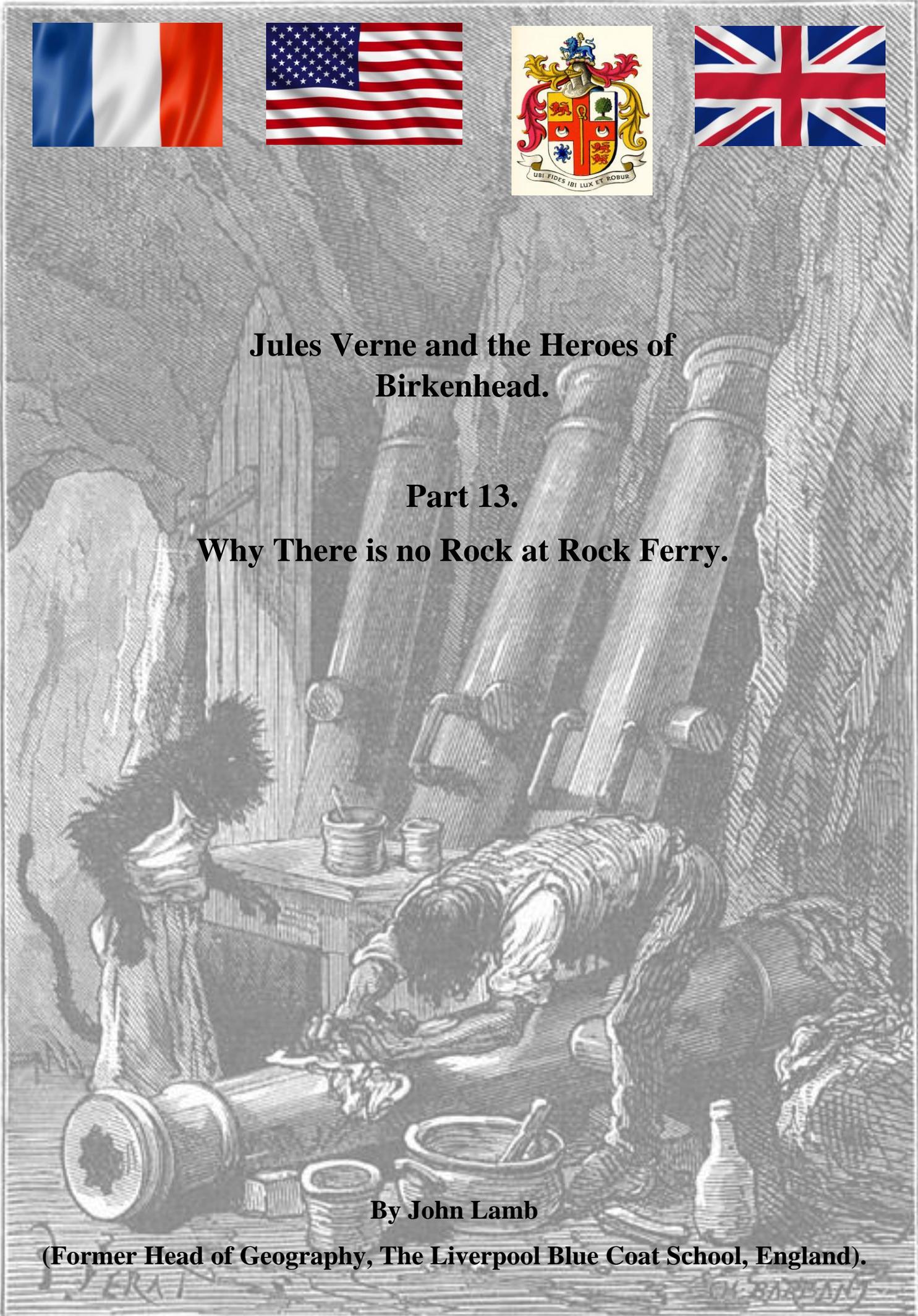
**Jules Verne and the Heroes of
Birkenhead.**

Part 13.

Why There is no Rock at Rock Ferry.

By John Lamb

(Former Head of Geography, The Liverpool Blue Coat School, England).



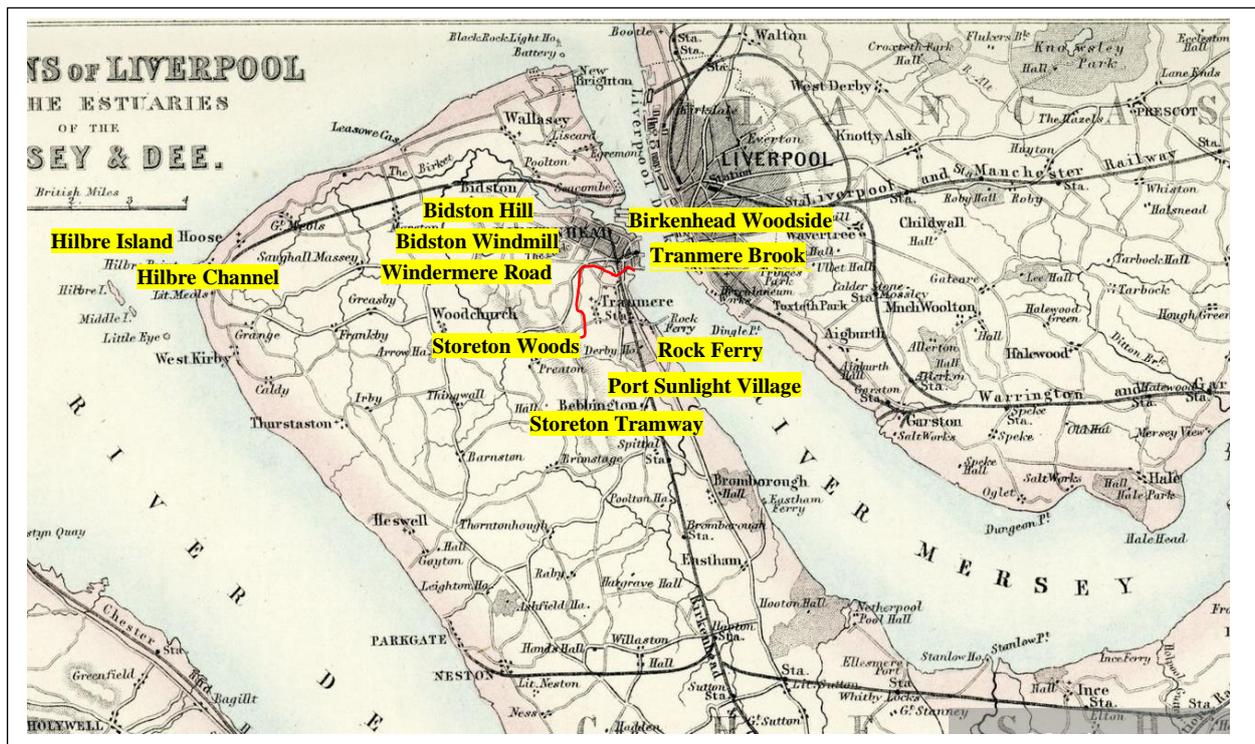
Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead.

Part 13.

Why There is no Rock at Rock Ferry.

- WHY THERE IS NO ROCK AT ROCK FERRY–
- THE COLONISTS SEARCH PORT SUNLIGHT VILLAGE FOR PIRATES –
- WALKING THE STORETON TRAMWAY – STORETON WOODS–
- CAPTAIN NEMO ELECTROCUTES THE PIRATES AT WINDERMERE ROAD–
- THE PIRATE CAVE HIDEOUT ON BIDSTON HILL.

The Wirral locations used by Jules Verne in part 13.

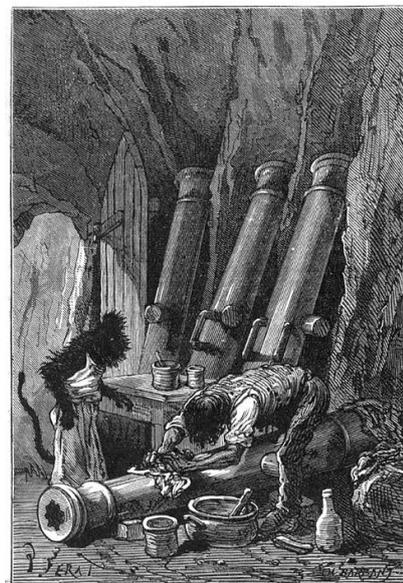


Why There is no Rock at Rock Ferry.

The colonists visit the wreck of the pirate ship *Speedy* at low tide as it lies in the channel between the Islet and Granite House. Verne here uses the tidal channel between Hilbre Island and Hoylake as his preferred location as it is almost dry at low water. Pencroft manages to salvage four cannons from the pirate ship.

As for the cannons from the brig, they were fine pieces cast in steel which, at Pencroft's urging, were hoisted by means of winding tackle and cranes to the very level of Granite House; recesses were made in the windows and soon one could see the shining muzzles of the cannons through the granite wall. From this height, these muzzles truly commanded all of Union Bay. It was like a miniature Gibraltar, and any vessel which would moor in sight of the islet would inevitably be exposed to fire from the raised battery.

How many hours he spent cleaning them.



“Mr Cyrus,” Pencroft said one day – it was November 8th – “now that this armament is in place, we should try our guns for range.”

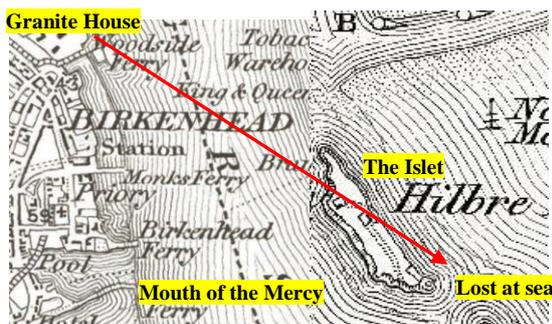
“Do you believe that is useful?” Replied the engineer.

“It's more than useful, its necessary! Without it, how can we know how far we can send one of those fine balls with which we have been provided?”

“Let's try it then, Pencroft,” answered the engineer.

It goes without saying that the four cannons were in perfect condition. After they had been salvaged from the water, the sailor had polished them conscientiously.

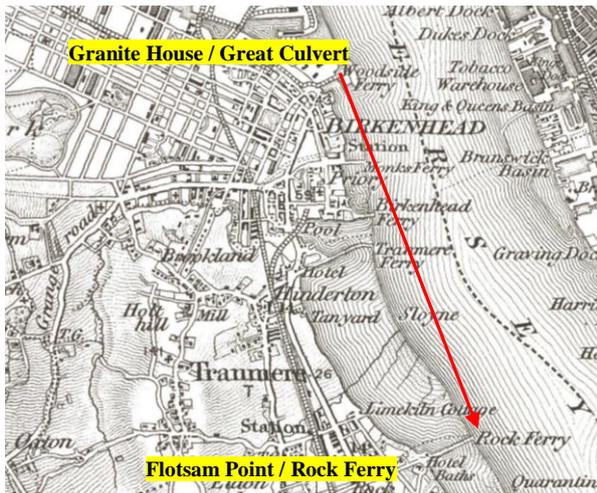
On this day then, in the presence of all the personnel of the colony, Master Jup and Top included, the four cannons were tried in turn.



Pencroft, holding the fuse cord, stood ready to fire.

On a sign from Cyrus Harding, the shot was fired. The ball, directed toward the ocean, passed over the islet and was lost at sea at a distance that they could not determine accurately.

The first shot from the cannon

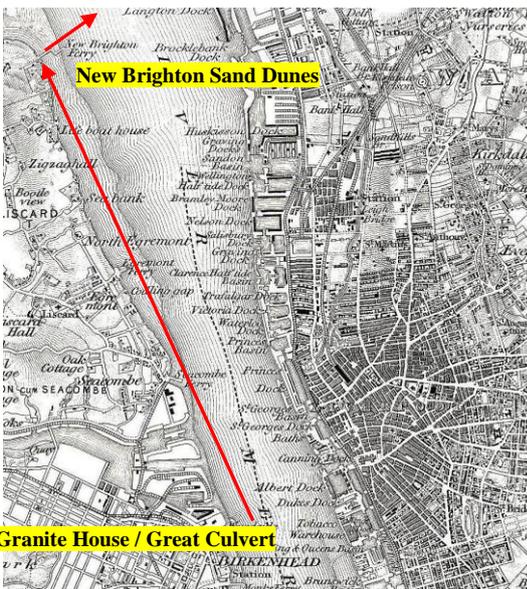


The second cannon was pointed toward the extreme rocks at Flotsam Point and the projectile, striking a sharp rock nearly three miles from Granite House, made it fly into splinters.

It was Herbert who had aimed the cannon and fired it, and he was quite proud of his success. Only Pencroft was even prouder, for the honour of this shot belonged to his dear child.

The second shot from the cannon

Jules Verne has now solved the mystery of why there is no rock at Rock Ferry, it is also fitting that it was Herbert who fired the cannon as the young boy will prove to have a personal affinity with Rock Ferry.



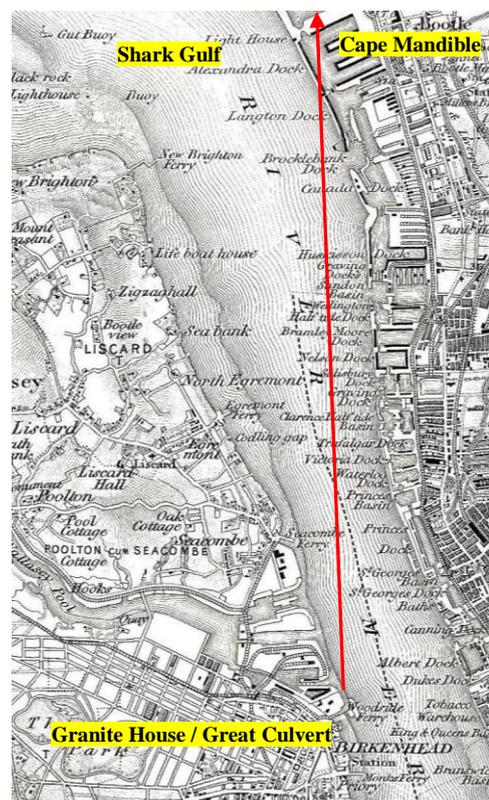
The third projectile, fired this time over the dunes which formed the upper coast of Union Bay, struck the sand at a distance of at least four miles; then after having ricocheted, it lost itself in at sea in a cloudy spray.

The third shot from the cannon

For the fourth piece, Cyrus Harding overloaded it a bit, in order to test it at maximum range. Everyone took cover as it exploded, and the fuse was ignited with a long cord.

A violent detonation was heard, but the cannon held. Running to the window, the colonists could see the projectile chip the rocks of Cape Mandible nearly five miles from Granite House and disappear into Shark Gulf.

The fourth shot from the cannon



“Well, Mr Cyrus,” shouted Pencroft, whose hurrahs rivalled the detonations produced, “what do you think of our battery? All the pirates of the Pacific have only to present themselves in front of Granite House. Now not one will land without our permission!”

“Believe me, Pencroft,” replied the engineer, “it would be better not to have the experience.”

The Colonists Search Port Sunlight Village for Pirates.

The colonists decide to look for the six surviving pirates who had escaped to Flotsam Point.

During the severe cold spells, they conducted several hunts on the vast Tadorn marshes. Gideon Spilett and Herbert, aided by Top and Jup, did not waste a shot amongst the myriads of duck, snipe, teal, pintail, and plovers.

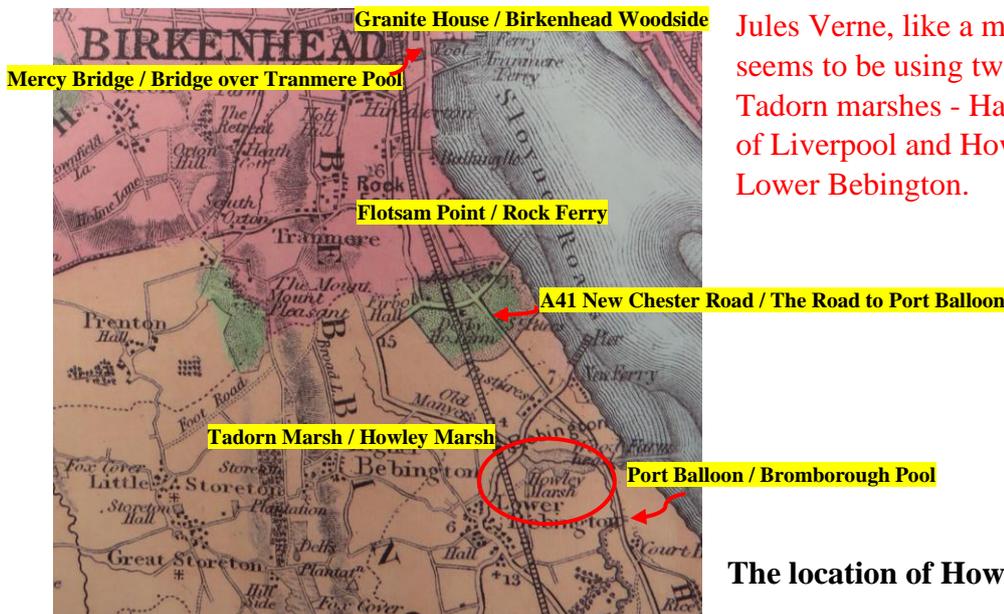
Access to the game of this territory was easy and, whether they took the road to Port Balloon by crossing over the Mercy Bridge, or they rounded the rocks at Flotsam Point, the hunters were never far from Granite House.

A translation to 'our world' is,

During the severe cold spells, they conducted several hunts on Howley marsh in Bebington...

...access to the game of this territory was easy whether they took the A41 to Bromborough Pool by crossing over the bridge over Tranmere Pool, or they rounded the stone jetty at Rock Ferry, the hunters were never far from Birkenhead, Woodside.

Here Verne gives the most accurate second location for the Tadorn Marsh, previously described as being at Hale Point on the opposite side of the River Mersey.



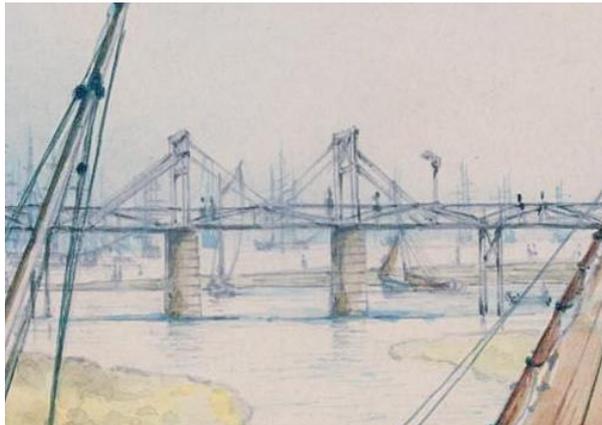
Jules Verne, like a movie director seems to be using two locations for Tadorn marshes - Hale Marsh, South of Liverpool and Howley Marsh in Lower Bebington.

The location of Howley Marsh c1850

The task had been finished quickly so that Pencroft, Gideon Spilett, and Herbert found the time for a trip to Port Balloon. The sailor wanted very much to know if the small cove in which the Bonadventure was anchored had been visited by the convicts.

All three left Granite House at about three o'clock.

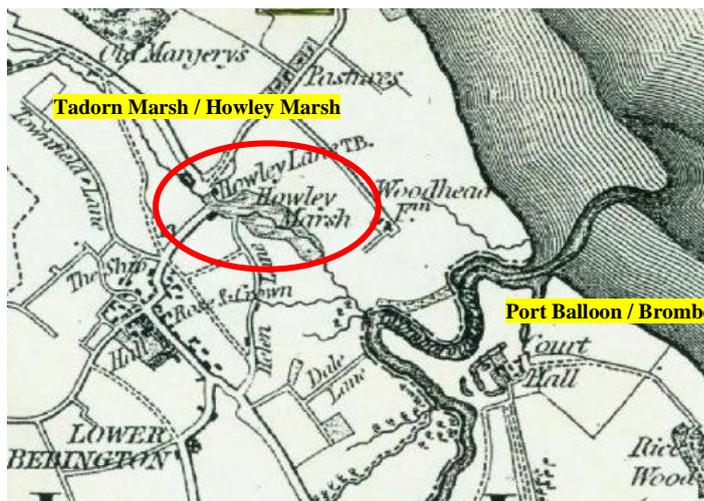
The *Bonadventure* is the colonists' boat, largely built by the northern sailor Pencroft.



Neb accompanied them up to the bend in the Mercy and, after they had passed, he raised the bridge. It was agreed that a gunshot would announce the return of the colonists and that, at this signal, Neb would return to reestablish the link between the two banks of the river.

Tranmere Pool and the raised Foot Bridge in the 'down' position c1870.

The small troop took the port route which led straight toward the southern coast of the island. It was only a distance of three and a half miles, but Gideon Spilett and his companions took two hours to walk it. They searched all along the road, including the edges of the thick forest which bordered Tadorn's marsh. They found no trace of the fugitives who, not knowing how many colonists there were nor their means of defense, undoubtedly had fled to the less accessible portions of the island.



An earlier c1830 map shows in more detail how the Tadorn Marsh relates to Port Balloon. The site of Tadorn Marsh is now covered by the village of Port Sunlight.

Left, the site of Howley Marsh.

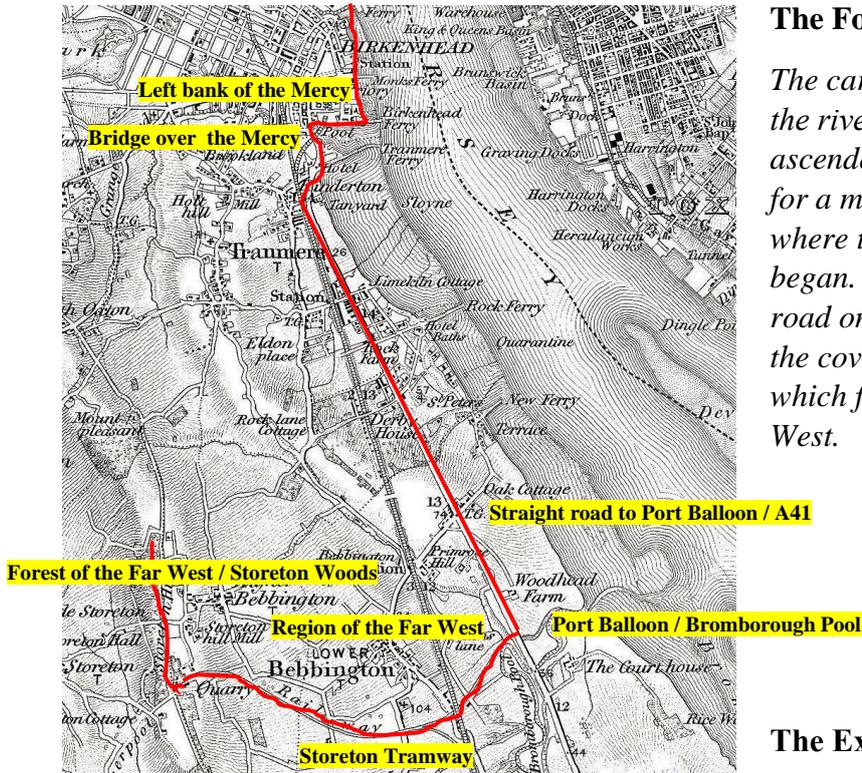
Below one of the tidal channels to Howley Marsh – now the Dell at Port Sunlight Village.

In Mysterious Island, six pirates escape from the destruction of the Speedy, Cyrus Harding gives an account of their movements, and this gives us a better understanding of the location of Tadorn's Marsh.

Once a marshy creek - the Dell at Port Sunlight.



Walking the Storeton Tramway – Storeton Woods.

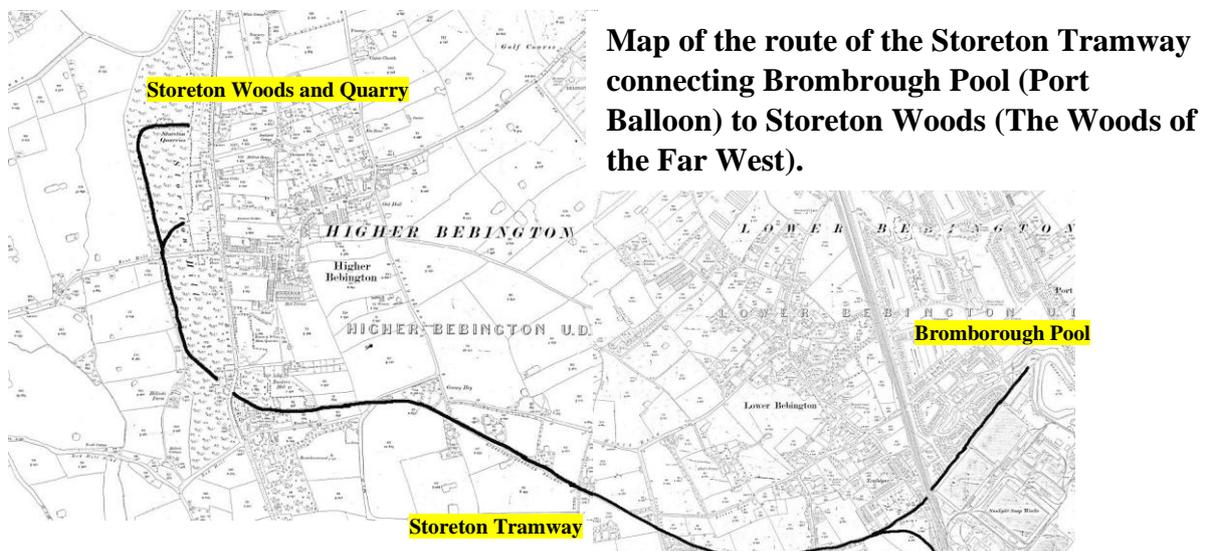


The Forest of the Far West.

The cart first turned the corner at the river's mouth then, after having ascended the left bank of the Mercy for a mile, it crossed the bridge where the route to Port Balloon began. There the explorers left the road on their left and plunged into the cover of these immense woods which formed the region of the Far West.

The Explorers' Route.

The settlers cross Tranmere Pool and are travelling along the A41 road to Bromborough Pool, constructed by Thomas Brassey in 1833, they have left this road and walked up the Storeton tramway to enter Storeton Woods at Mount Road. This is the largest woodland on the eastern side of the Wirral. The tramway carried stone via a gravity rail line to a jetty at Bromborough Pool (Port Balloon). Local folklore says it was stone from this quarry that was used to dress part of the Empire State Building in New York in the late 1920's.



Map of the route of the Storeton Tramway connecting Bromborough Pool (Port Balloon) to Storeton Woods (The Woods of the Far West).

Jules Verne replicates real life sequences on *Mysterious Island* and here there are four links to Thomas Brassey. Tranmere Pool Bridge, the A41 New Chester Road, The Storeton Tramway and Storeton Quarry – all either owned or constructed by Thomas Brassey.

For the first two miles, the well-spaced trees allowed the cart to move freely. From time to time, the colonists had to chop away at vines and brushwood, but no serious obstacle opposed their passage.

The *well-spaced trees* allowing the cart to *move freely* represent Brassey's tramway through Storeton Woods. Brassey constructed the tramway to transport stone to Bromborough Pool (Port Balloon) in the early 1830's.



The tramway used spare rails from the Liverpool to Manchester railway (1830) – the first intercity railway in the world.

It was at Storeton Quarry that Brassey first discussed with George Stephenson about a career in engineering. Brassey would later become the greatest railway builder of the 19th century.

The Storeton Tramway.

The thick branches kept the ground in the cool shade. Deodars, douglas firs, casuarinas, banksias, gum, dragon trees, and other well known species were plentiful as far as the eye could see. Present also were all the species of birds indigenous to the island: grouse, jacamars, pheasant, lorries as well as countless members of the noisy family of cockatoos, parakeets and parrots. Agouti, kangaroo and capybara ran about the grass, reminding the colonists of their first excursions upon arriving on the island.

The colonists found more signs left by the convicts. Near a fire which appeared to have been recently extinguished, they noticed footprints which they carefully examined. By measuring each against the others according to their length and width, they easily identified the prints of five men.

The 'footprints' here may be a metaphor for the Storeton dinosaur footprints. Storeton Quarry became world famous in 1838 with the discovery of footprints of the pre-dinosaur reptile *Chirotherium Stortonense*.

In the Triassic Period, the British Isles were located near the modern-day Sahara Desert and part of the greater Pangea supercontinent. The Storeton footprints are casts of the original reptile footprints, whose tracks in the lakeside mud would later be covered with windblown desert sand.

A large slab containing the footprints of the 'Storeton dinosaur' is on display in the foyer of the Natural History Museum in London. These ancient reptiles will return to our story.



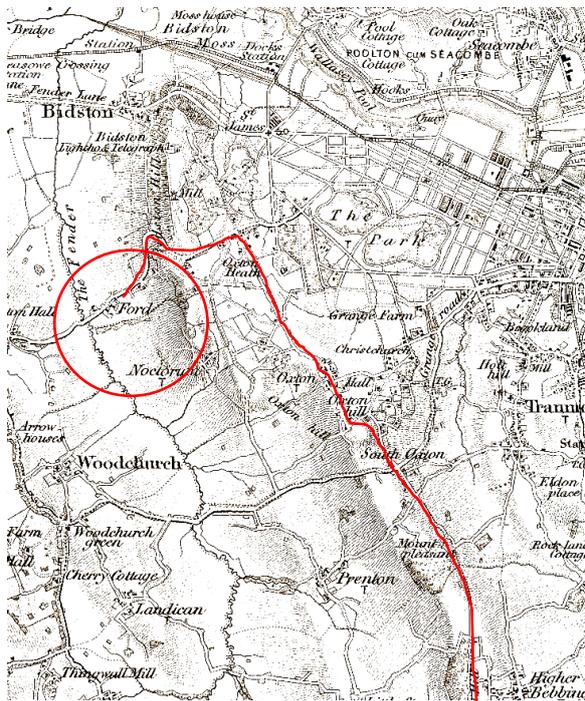
**The ‘Birkenhead Dinosaur’
Footprints – Main Foyer, Natural
History Museum, London.**

Prints in sandstone
Chirotherium storetonense
 Middle Triassic, Keuper Sandstone
 England, Storeton Quarry, n. Birkenhead

However carefully they looked, they found no additional traces of them on the western coast. No more footprints, no more cuts on the trees, no more cold cinders, no more abandoned camps.

“This doesn’t astonish me,” said Cyrus Harding to his companions.

“The convicts landed on the island near Flotsam Point and they immediately dashed into the forests of the Far West after crossing the Tadorn marshes. They then followed very nearly the same route that we have since leaving Granite House. This explains the signs that we recognized in the woods. But on arriving at the coastline, the convicts realized that they would find no suitable retreat there, and it was then that they headed north and discovered the corral...”



At five o’clock in the evening, the cart stopped about six hundred feet from the corral’s stockade. A semicircular pattern of large trees still concealed it.

The corral is situated near a stream on the ‘prairie’ at the southern flank of Mount Franklin (Bidston Hill) – this line of trees is now covered by Windermere Road, Birkenhead.

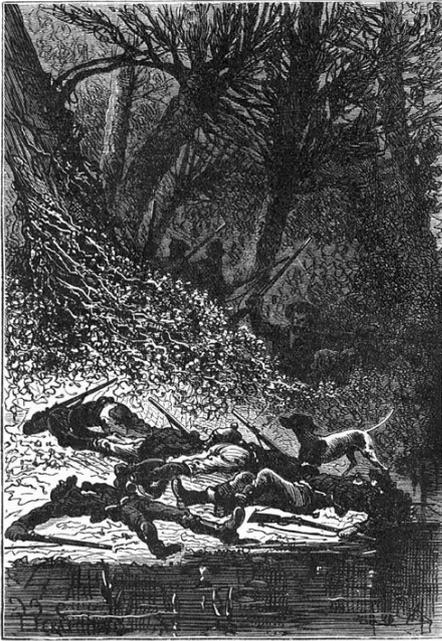
The colonists search the corral buildings and finally find the missing Ayrton lying on the bed. Jup and Top will lead them to a small stream and the remaining pirates.

The location of the corral.

In an instant, the reporter and his two companions crossed the corral and reached the door of the stockade behind which they heard Top growling lowly. The engineer, leaving Ayrton for a moment, exited the house and stood ready to fire. Herbert was at his side.

They both surveyed the hilltop which overlooked the corral. If the convicts were in ambush there, they could kill the colonists one by one.

Captain Nemo Kills the Remaining Pirates at Windermere Road, Birkenhead.



Top barked without letup, and Jup ran after the dog, making sharp hisses.

*The colonists followed them and reached **the small stream overshadowed by large trees.***

And there, in full moonlight, what did they see?

Five bodies lying on the bank!

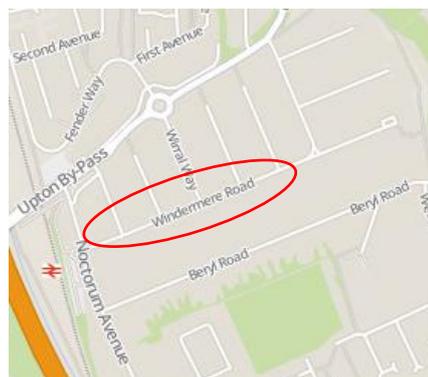
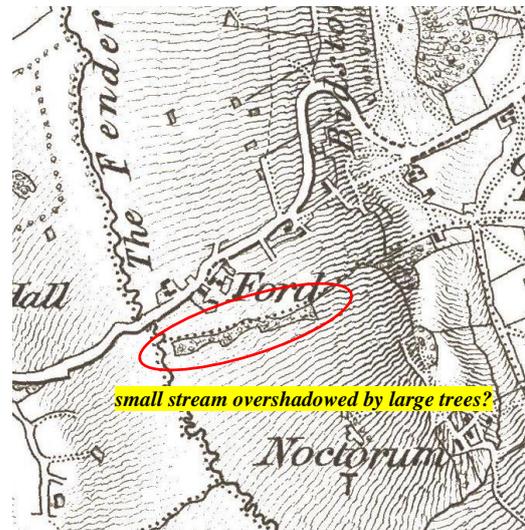
They were the convicts who, four months earlier, had set foot on Lincoln Island!

Five bodies lay on the bank.

The pirates all have a small burn mark on different parts of their body – they have been electrocuted by Captain Nemo's electric gun.

It is for this scene (possibly in modern day Windermere Road, Upton, Birkenhead) that modern day scientists credit Jules Verne for inventing the weapon that we know today as the 'taser'.

The *small stream overshadowed by large trees* - now occupied by Windermere Road Birkenhead.

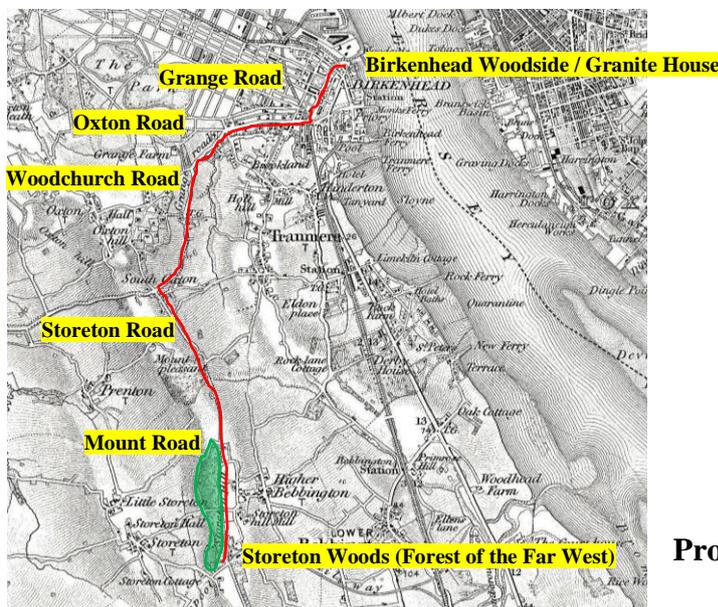


Mount Road - the Road to the Far West

It was the Forest of the Far West which produced the best species of oaks and elms. They took advantage of the path already made at the time of the last excursion to open a practical route which they dubbed the Far West Road.

As for the Far West Road itself, it wined capriciously through the forest – the choice of wood determined its path – but it facilitated access to a large portion of the Serpentine Peninsula.

It is quite straightforward to trace the line of the *Far West Road* running from Granite House (Birkenhead, Woodside) to the Forest of the Far West (Storeton Woods). Storeton Woods is the largest woodland in Birkenhead and home to the Storeton dinosaur footprints discovered in the quarry of Thomas Brassey in 1838.



Probable Route of the Far West Road.

Concealing the Upper Entrance to Granite House.

During these two days, Cyrus Harding was occupied with a project which would protect Granite House from any surprise. He wanted to completely conceal the upper opening of the old passageway which had already been sealed and half hidden under grass and plants at the southern corner of Lake Grant.



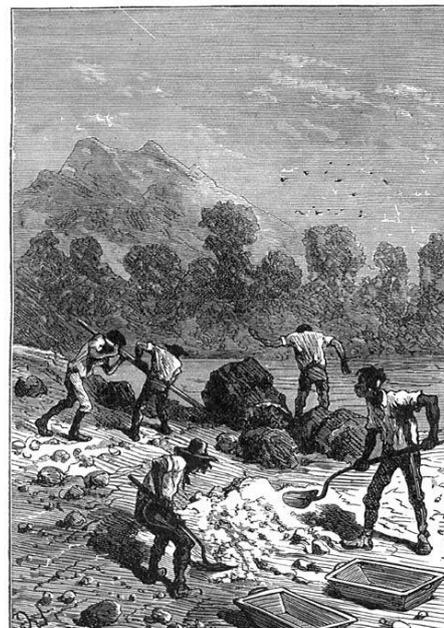
This is Morpeth Dock, Birkenhead, the location of the dugong attack on the colonists' dog Top and the site of the overflow of Lake Grant.

Morpeth Dock Birkenhead.

Nothing would be easier since all he needed to do was raise the level of the lake by two or three feet so that the opening would be completely submerged.

Now to raise this level, he had only to build a dam at the two trenches of the lake which fed Glycerine Creek and Grand Falls Creek. The colonists commenced this work and they quickly built two dams, not exceeding seven or eight feet in length and three in height, made of cemented lumps of rock.

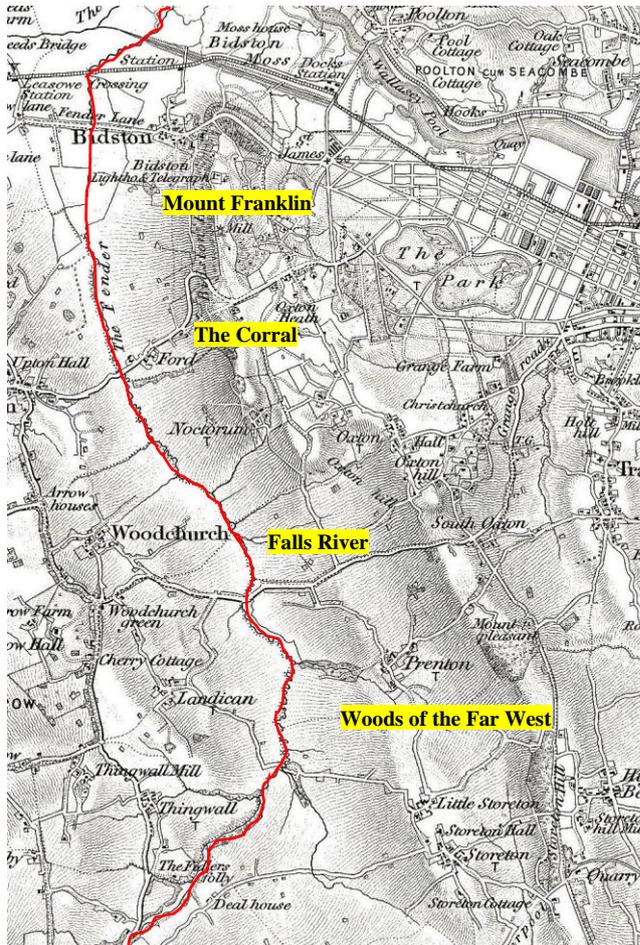
With this work completed, it was impossible to guess where their subterranean passage existed.



The colonists set to work

The River Fender.

The six convicts had landed on the island, had followed the southern shore and after rounding Serpentine Peninsula and not in the humour to venture into the woods of the Far West, they reached the mouth of the Falls River. Once at this point, they went up the right bank of the watercourse and reached the foothills of Mount Franklin.



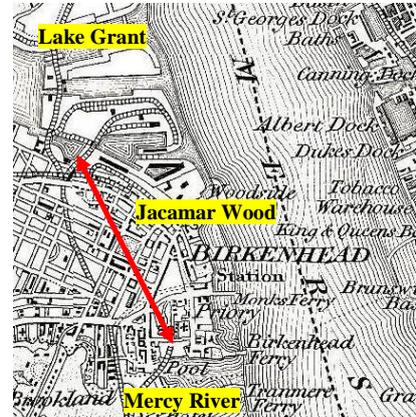
It seems that Verne manages to merge together many of the small rivers of the Wirral to make his *Falls River*.

These include the Prenton Brook, the Arrowe Brook, the Dungeon Brook and now the River Fender flowing northwards towards Bidston Hill (Mount Franklin)

Jacamar Woods

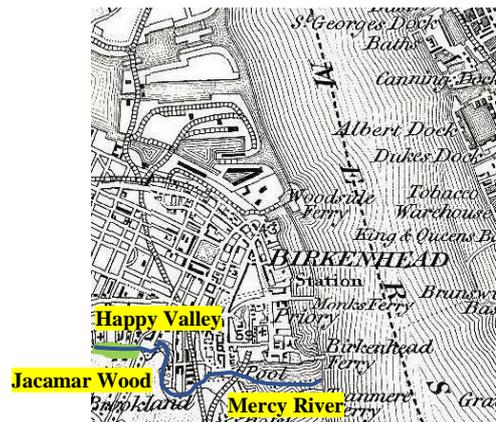
The exact location of Jacamar Woods is something of a mystery. It may represent the built-up part of Birkenhead, the Happy Valley Woodland, or even Birkenhead Park itself. Verne seems to give bearings in relation to all three of these locations.

The road was deserted, as was the entire area of Jacamar Woods which extended from the Mercy to the Lake

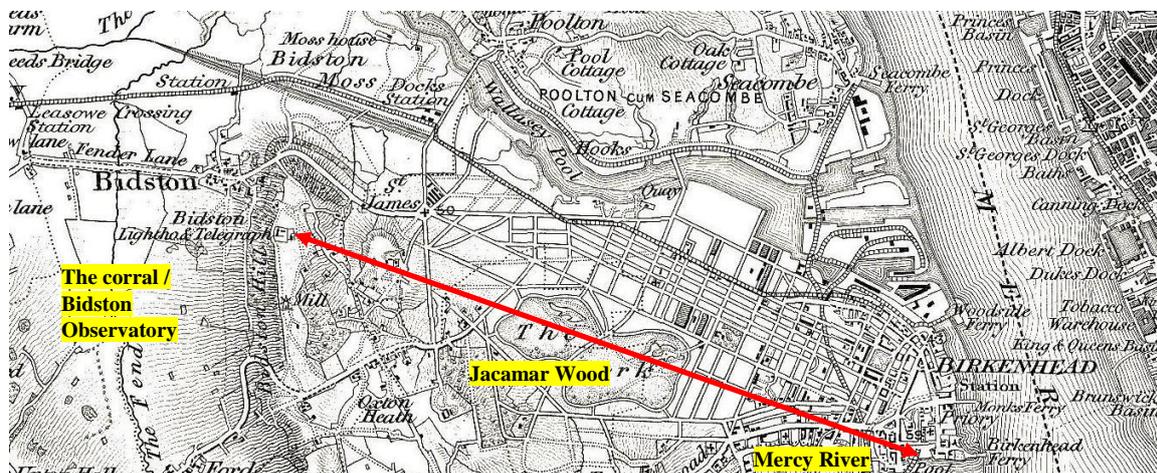


In all probability, the convicts either knew about the return of the colonists to Granite House, having seen them on the road from the corral, or else, after destroying the plateau, they had followed the Mercy upstream and fled into Jacamar Woods, and were unaware of their return.

This description may refer to the woodland of the Happy Valley which until the 1870's ran along present-day Borough Road, Birkenhead.

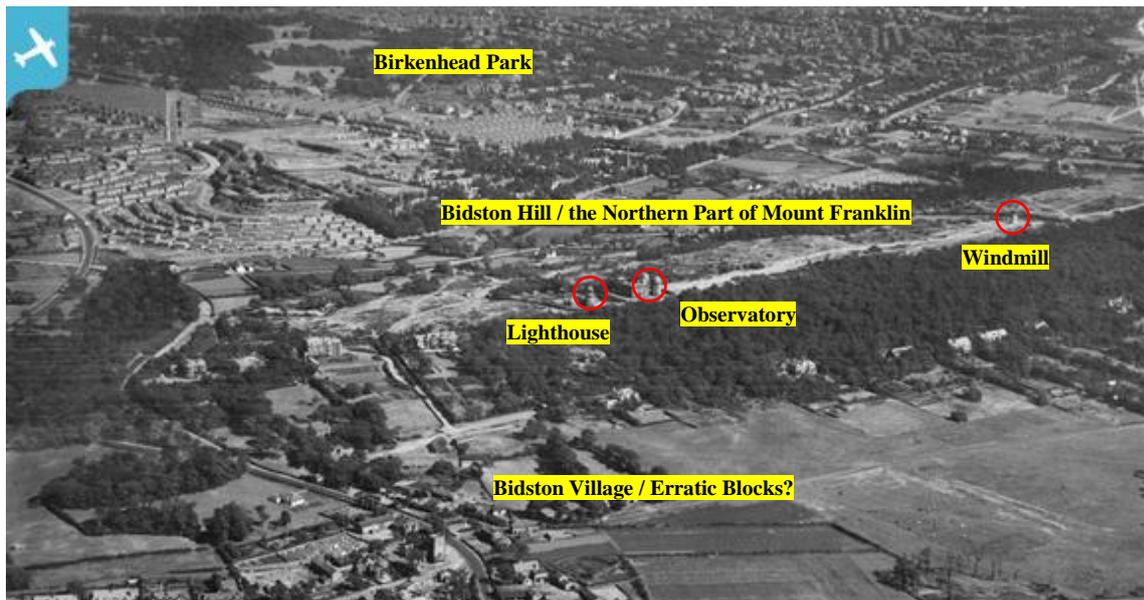


The colonists were well acquainted with all the eastern shore from Cape Claw to the Mandible Capes, the vast Tadorns marsh, the neighbourhood of Lake Grant, Jacamar Woods between the corral and the Mercy, the courses of the Mercy and Red Creek and finally the foothills of Mount Franklin where they had established the corral.



The Pirate Cave Hideout on Bidston Hill.

The base of the northern part of Mount Franklin was composed of only two valleys, broad, not too deep, without vegetation, erratic blocks scattered about, long moraines paved with lava, hills of large mineral deposits interspersed with volcanic glass and labradorites. This part called for a long and difficult exploration. It was criss-crossed by a thousand cavities, doubtless not very hospitable, but absolutely concealed and difficult to access. The colonists even visited dark tunnels which plunged into the heart of the mountain and dated from the volcanic period, still black from former fires. They walked through dark galleries carrying resin torches, probing the smallest excavations and sounding the shallowest depths.



The ridge of Bidston Hill with Birkenhead Park and lakes in the background.



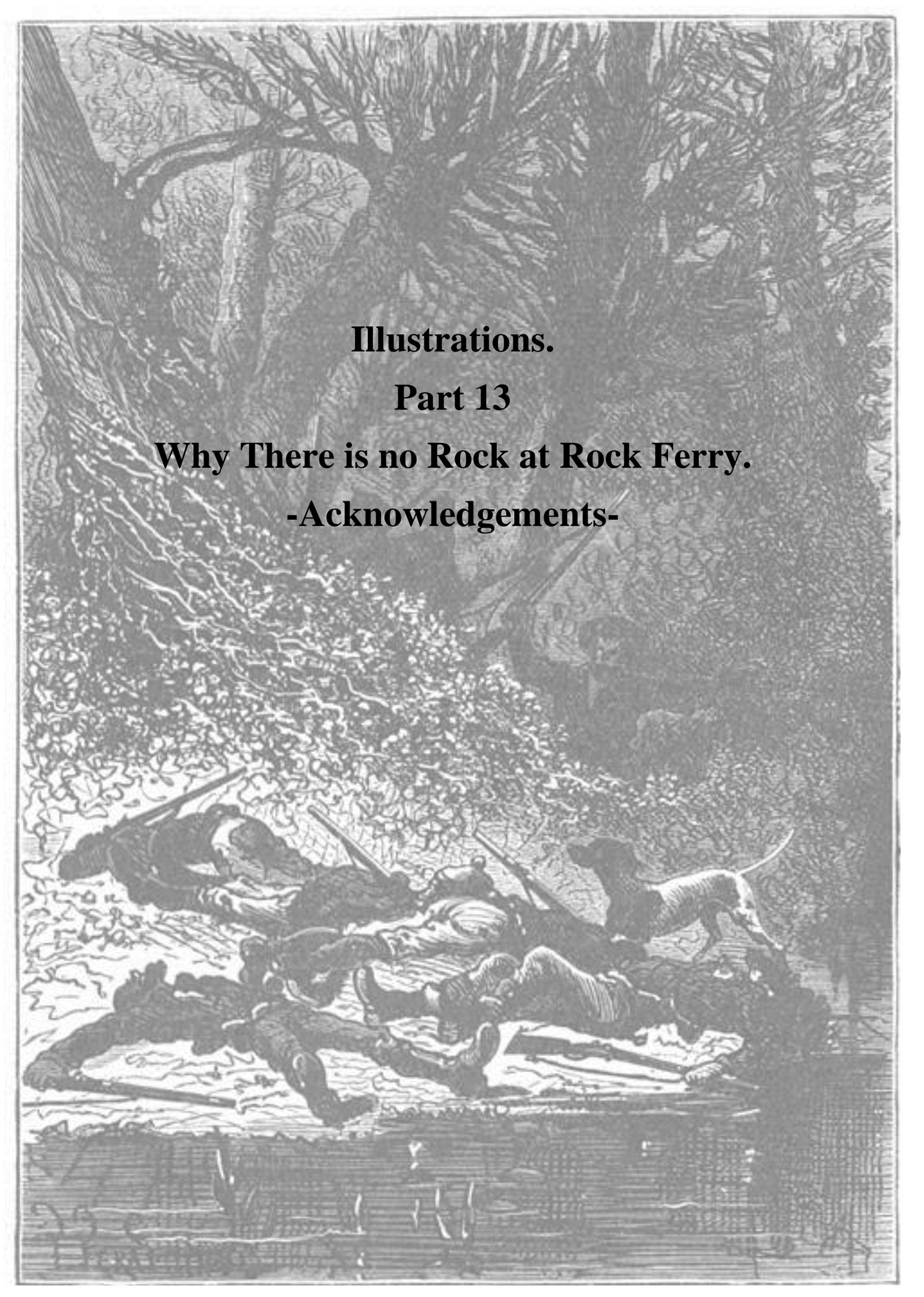
*Are the **erratic blocks** a metaphor for the buildings of Bidston village and **long moraines paved with lava** a metaphor for the roads?*

The sequence of three buildings on Bidston Hill will be used to spectacular effect in our fifth novel.

Bidston Village, Birkenhead.

Next on Jules Verne and the Heroes of Birkenhead.

Part 14. The Return of Captain Nemo.



Illustrations.

Part 13

Why There is no Rock at Rock Ferry.

-Acknowledgements-

| Page | Photograph Acknowledgement | Page | Photograph Acknowledgement |
|-------------|--|-------------|--|
| 1a | TRIXES Large French Flag | 9a | John Lamb |
| 1b | Pending | 10a | Pending |
| 1c | Talbot Flags | 10b | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey |
| 1d | Heraldry-wiki.com | 11a | Wikisource – La Bibliotheque Libre |
| 1e | Wikisource – La Bibliotheque Libre | 11b | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey |
| 2a | gettyimages | 12a | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey |
| 3a | Wikisource – La Bibliotheque Libre | 13a | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey |
| 3b | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey | 13b | John Lamb |
| 4a | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey | 13c | Wikisource – La Bibliotheque Libre |
| 4b | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey | 14a | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey |
| 4c | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey | 15a | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey |
| 5 | - | 15b | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey |
| 6a | Ordnance Survey | 15c | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey |
| 7a | Williamson Art Gallery Birkenhead | 16a | Britain From the Air |
| 7b | Pending | 16b | John Lamb |
| 7c | Visitwirral.com | 17a | Wikisource – La Bibliotheque Libre |
| 8a | Wirralmapreproductions Ordnance Survey | 18 | - |
| 8b | Friendsofstoretonwoods.co.uk | | |