

The 1872-1874 Letters of George Blaxland Sr. (1800-1874), Gillingham House, Gillingham, Kent addressed to George & Jane Blaxland, Long Bay, St Thomas Island, Danish West Indies [US Virgin Islands after 1917].



*The letters are a plea for George Jr. from his father George (LHS) to finish his work in the Dutch West Indies on the **SS Columbian(*)** and to return safely to England, which sadly appears to have happened after George Sr.'s death. It appears that George Sr. died in Sept 1874 without ever seeing George & Jane again? The letters talk of bank loans, of spare parts shipped to George Jr., of business and politics, and of George Sr.'s declining health. Various ships and people are mentioned, and incidents that one might investigate. The Atkinsons of Northumberland are mentioned. George speaks of a troublesome neighbour, of walks, of hop picking in north Kent, and of visits to sites and friends. A constant refrain is George Sr. reading about storms in the Caribbean, and concerns for his son and daughter in law. Just a few years before, a hurricane and a tsunami in 1868 sank several ships and a floating dock. It appears that George Jr. and partner Mr. Wylie immediately set off from the UK as established marine salvagers to recover the goods and to install a new wharf. Mr Murphy, a diver based on the Turks Islands nearby, also assisted; he was a remarkable man, one of the early pioneers in diving. Blaxland's wharf is the origin of the Long Bay Jetty, the starting point for Caribbean cruises today. The letters make more sense after reading my 40pp. paper on father & son:*

<http://www.physics.usyd.edu.au/~jbh/share/Books/George%20Blaxland%20Sr%20Jr%20-%20STORY.pdf>

(*) This is the likely spelling for SS Columbian. There are more search hits on BNA and it appears on the gold medal below.



NOTE: 5-6 June 2021. I have copies of the original letters bequeathed by Aunt Judith in 2017. The new version of Microsoft Word takes good dictation, and so I was able to have them transcribed in a few hours. **Joss Hawthorn.**

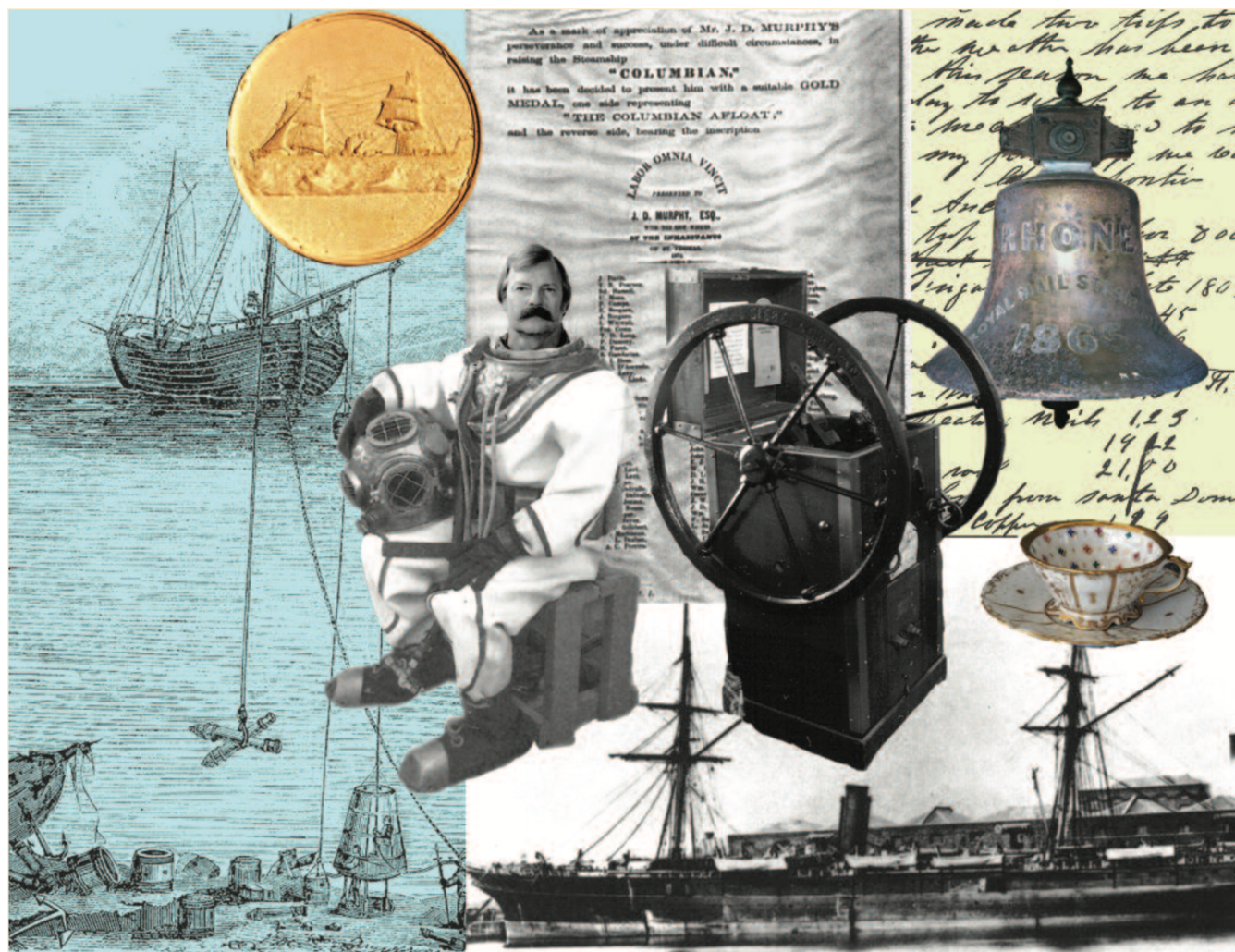
Before getting into the specific history, here are some insights on both George Jr. and Jeremiah Murphy (1832-1895), one of the early helmet divers, the astronauts of their day, going where no one had gone before. I have already written at length about George Sr.

Jeremiah Murphy: There is a useful website at the Turks & Caicos museum:

<https://www.tcmuseum.org/culture-history/golden-age-of-the-turks-islands/jeremiah-denis-murphy/>

complete with photographs and videos. The website mentions the four years he and two brothers spent at St Thomas (1868-1872) clearing the harbour of ships wrecked. It would be wonderful to know how they got on with George Jr. Tragically, the website indicates that one or both of Jeremiah's brothers lost their lives on St. Thomas. The article below indicates that George Jr. was also lucky to escape with his life.

Website: Jeremiah became a true son of Grand Turk, living here until his death in 1895, during which time he was a deep sea diver, salt merchant, guano miner, US Vice Consul, Justice of the Peace, Freemason, and ex officio member of the Legislative Board. He married into the Manuel family with ties to Bermuda. He was buried with his wife, brother, two sons and a daughter in St. Thomas's churchyard. His memorial reads *In loving memory of Jeremiah Denis Murphy. Born at Courtmasherry, Co. Cork, Ireland March 21, 1832. Died at Grand Turk, Turks Islands, Sept 21, 1895.* The image below is taken from the museum exhibit.



George Blaxland Jr.: I have taken the text below from the official obituary published on 23rd August 1912 in The Engineer:

By his death on the 8th August, Mr. George Blaxland of Gillingham, Kent, the engineering profession has lost a member interesting by his own personality and career, as well as from his connection with the past.

George had a privileged education at the Greenwich Naval School. He served his apprenticeship as a mechanical engineer with **Mr. John Penn FRS, of Greenwich**, and at an early age *acquired the confidence of his master*. He had barely completed his indentures when he was sent by the firm to supervise the erection and preliminary running of some factory machinery at Genoa. Two years later saw him in Brazil superintending the engines of a warship constructed by his master. Shortly after returning home he was appointed by the Spanish Government to the post of director of machinery at Havannah. Here for several years he had control of the arsenal and the repairs of the Spanish naval vessels arriving at port. His tenure of this office covered the period of the American Civil War [1861-5], and several ships of war and blockade runners from both sides put into Havannah for repairs, among them the famous Confederate corvette Alabama. After six or seven years in Cuba, he once more returned to England where, in partnership with Mr. Wyllie [sic], he set up in business as a marine salvage engineer.



About this time [1867] a severe hurricane at St. Thomas, West Indies sank a floating dock designed by the late Sir Frederick Bramwell as well as the mail steamer Columbia [sic] and several other vessels. A contract for salving [saving from ruin] the dock was entrusted to the new firm. The ensuing operations were attended with great difficulty. The dock pontoons were badly crushed, and only 3ft. or 4ft. of the side walls projected above the surface of the water. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to raise the dock, but in the end Mr. Blaxland refloated and repaired it. His method of doing so is worthy of record, as it is said to mark first use of compressed air for salvage work. He designed special air locks whereby access to the various pontoons might be obtained, and by means of air pumps constructed on the spot he expelled the water. He and his workmen then entered the pontoons and effected the necessary repairs preparatory to the final raising. The dock is, we believe, still in use at St. Thomas. The same procedure was applied to the steamer Columbia. Mr. Blaxland was again successful, and himself navigated the vessel back to Liverpool although it had been under water for about eighteen months (What year?).

SS Columbian's fortunes: An image of the ship is shown on the medal and photograph above. We know that the SS Columbian arrived shortly before the disaster - this is from the Glasgow Evening Post on 26th March 1867. Later in the year, it was wrecked like so many vessels in St Thomas harbour by the tsunami.

In 1868, it was raised in spectacular fashion (this had never been done before) by George and team, as described in detail below. Just a year later, it sailed to the Suez and on to Bombay, as reported in the Bradford Observer on 26th Dec 1869 (RHS).

THE WEST INDIES.
QUEENSTOWN, March 25.—The West Indian Co.'s s.s. Columbian has arrived here, with dates from Colon, to the 2d inst.; Kingston, 6th inst.; Port-au-Prince, 9th inst.

MAIL AND SHIPPING NEWS.
NEW YORK, Monday.—The National Steamship Co.'s steamer Helvetia arrived out to-day.
SUZ, Monday.—The Peninsular and Oriental Company's s.s. Columbian left at 11 a.m., and the Moultan at 4 p.m., yesterday, for Bombay and Calcutta respectively, with the outward India and China mails of the 11th and 17th December.

The vessel had many successful years after refloating, as reflected by many articles on the BNA. It succumbed to fire in the Atlantic in early May, 1914. A full account of this tragic incident is given in the Birmingham Post, 28 July 1914 (RHS).

An independent account:

The following remarkable article in The Engineer was found on BNA and it details much of what was going on, with priceless images drawn from early photographs. On the first page, a lot of credit is given to Jeremiah for his remarkable skills operating at 30' to 40'. It also recounts how George and a local assistant were lucky to escape with their lives.

SHIP "BURNING ALL OVER."

CAPTAIN'S STORY OF LOSS OF THE COLUMBIAN.

The loss of the *ss. Colombian* of the Leyland Line, which caught fire and was abandoned by its crew in the North Atlantic early in May, was the subject of a resumed enquiry held by the Board of Trade at Casino Hall, London, yesterday.

The *Columbian* caught fire at about midnight on May 4, and within forty minutes the flames gained such a hold on the ship, two deck hands being seriously injured as the result of an explosion in the engine room, that the captain decided to abandon her, and the crew took to three of the boats. Two of the boats were picked up two days later, but the third boat drifted for several days, its eleven occupants suffering such privations and hardships that only three were alive to tell a fearful story of their experience when they were rescued.

Captain Macdonald, of the *Columbian*, was closely questioned by Sir R. T. B. Acland, K.C., for the Board of Trade, as to why there were no companions in the boats.

Captain Macdonald replied that the companions were taken out of the boat at Antwerp and placed in the lamp room for safety because of thefts of brasses. Captain Macdonald mentioned that prior to the outbreak he noticed one of the barrels of the cargo leaking, but could not tell whether the stuff was creosote or tar oil. Witness was walking along the alleyway when the explosion occurred. The roof was blown off the wheel, and witness then observed that the explosion had blown up a portion of the deck on the starboard side. He did not get into a boat until he was quite satisfied there was nobody living left on board. The last he saw of the *Columbian* was a mass of flames; she was burning all over, and eddies of fire were shooting up into the air from explosions occurring at intervals.

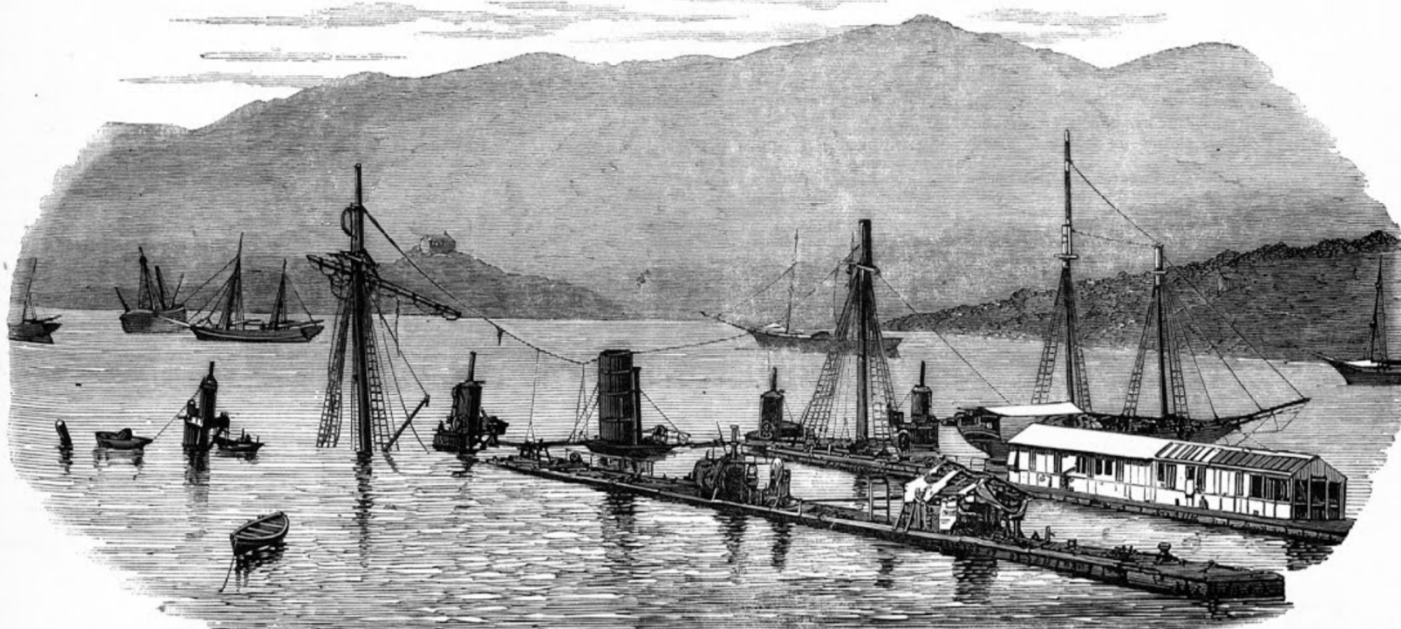
Answering the President, Sir R. D. B. Acland said of the three survivors on the third boat only one he was afraid would be able to give evidence. The first officer, who was in this boat, was still in hospital, and had lost both his feet.

FEB. 17, 1871.

THE ENGINEER.

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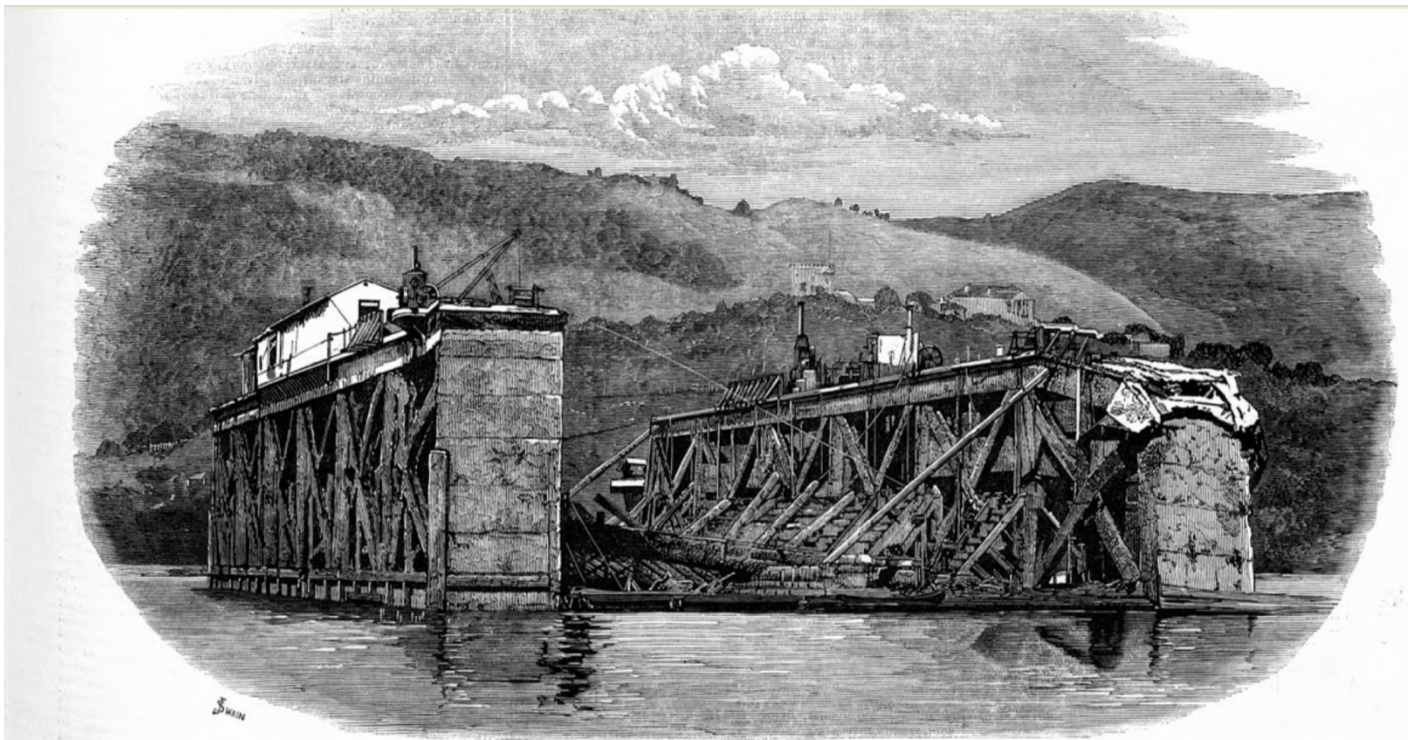
ST. THOMAS' FLOATING DOCK.



In 1867 a floating dock, designed by Mr. Bramwell, C.E., was, as our readers will remember, sent out to St. Thomas, West India Islands. General particulars of this dock were published in our impression for June 7th, 1867. Shortly after its completion the dock was sunk by an accident. It remained submerged for some time, and has only recently been recovered. As the operation of raising it was an important engineering feat, we have much pleasure in laying the following description of the work before our readers:—Our illustrations show a portion of the harbour of St. Thomas, West Indies, where the floating dock was sunk by accident in 1867. Afterwards, during the great hurricane of October 27th following, the steamer *Colombian* and the sailing ship *British Empire* shared the same fate, both being wrecked at the end of the dock. Our first illustration is taken from a photograph obtained after the *British Empire* had been raised, and operations commenced for lifting the *Colombian*. The *British Empire* was raised in 1868 by Messrs. Wylie and Blaxland and Messrs. Murphy Brothers.

under whose superintendence the whole operations were to be conducted, proceeded to St. Thomas, and the work was commenced with vigour. An examination of the pontoons disclosed the fact that several of them could not be pumped out, as the top sides collapsed under pressure. It was then decided to use compressed air in the weaker pontoons, and an air pump which was at hand was set to work for that purpose. Mr. Blaxland, however, had larger air pumps made from his own designs. The defective parts were discovered with the aid of the small air pumps and effectually stopped, although some of them were severe and very awkwardly situated for getting at. Rivets had to be cut away and patches bolted on here and there. However, these preliminaries were satisfactorily finished, and to Mr. J. D. Murphy belongs the credit of having carried out, at a depth varying from 30ft. to 40ft., of these most difficult tasks. These done, and the large air pumps having arrived from England by the end of July, 1870, the pontoons were filled with air and the water pumps started. The dock then rose unequally and unsteadily,

supply of air being stopped when the water had all been forced out. In order to make the bulkheads tight it was necessary to enter the pontoons, but the smallness of the manhole prevented the divers from entering them, so that Mr. Blaxland hit upon the idea of overcoming the difficulty by means of an air lock, which was made in about three weeks. It was attached to one of the pontoons, and Mr. Blaxland and a Negro labourer entered into its upper chamber, where, from the displacement of the india-rubber packing ring of the joint, and mismanagement of those outside, the two had a narrow escape of losing their lives. Fortunately they got out in time, the seething water fast following them, having rapidly reached above their waists. The defective working of the air-lock was, however, soon remedied, and its use was one of the principal appliances in enabling the dock to be successfully raised. The whole of the necessary work having been completed, early on the morning of the 3rd January last the air pumps were set to work once more, and were continued in constant operation until the morning of the 4th,



The dock was built at Cardiff and sent out in pieces and fitted together at St. Thomas. It is 300ft. long, 100ft. wide, and 42ft. 3in. high over all. Its gross weight is about 3600 tons, and it is of sufficient capacity to dock the largest steamers in the merchant service. In docking the Wye, belonging to the Royal Mail Company, the accident occurred which caused the dock to sink in about 64 fathoms of water. Steps were at once taken to recover the dock by the company to whom it belonged, but progress was stopped by the great hurricane of October 27th, 1867, which also caused further injury to the dock by the Colombian and other vessels striking it. The funds of the company having become exhausted they wound up, and a new company was then formed to prosecute the recovery of the dock, and they invited tenders for that purpose. The tenders of Messrs. Wylie and Blaxland, engineers, London, was accepted, those gentlemen working in conjunction with Messrs. Murphy Brothers, professional divers, of Turks Island. These parties undertook to raise the dock for £20,000, partly in cash and partly in bonds, and asked for no payment whatever unless the salvage was effected. The contractors, therefore, ran a risk which we are happy to find they have successfully escaped.

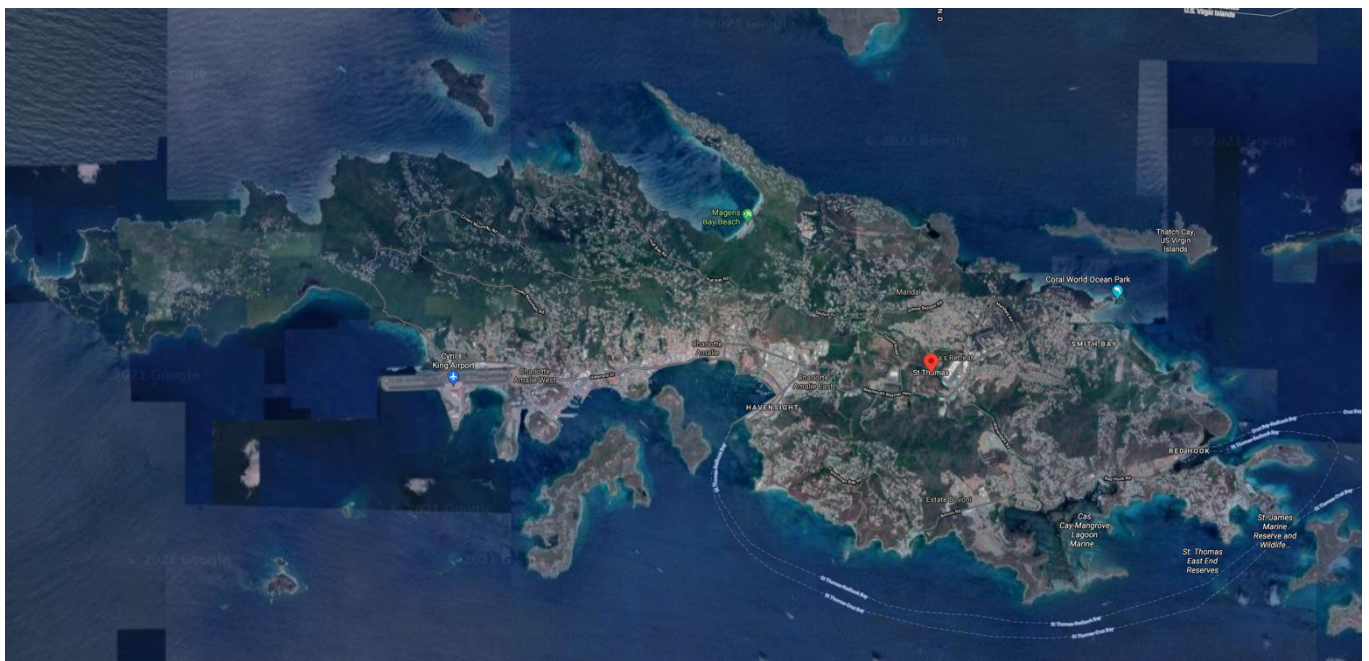
The contract was finally arranged and signed on the 5th May, 1869, and shortly afterwards Mr. George Blaxland, jun., A.I.C.E.,

lurching over to one side, and it was found impossible to raise the lower side, as the compressed air passed over to the higher side too quickly for the rate of supply. A leaky pontoon was also discovered, and it eventually broke away from the girders and fell to the bottom. The dock was therefore again lowered, and it was decided to expel the water by means of compressed air alone, which had been proved by experience to be the best plan of procedure. For this purpose there were three sets of air pumps employed, each set having three cylinders driven by two combined vertical engines and boilers of 5-horse and 7-horse-power respectively. The manhole covers on the pontoons were removed, and plates, to which were fixed iron pipes, were attached in their places. Through these pipes the water was expelled, the air being admitted through junction pipes from the main air pipes to the several chambers of the pontoons. By this means sufficient water could be displaced in about thirty-six hours to enable the dock to be started. As, however, the floats would not set, owing to rust and damage from collisions, the dock was very unstable. The floats also were full of water, which had to be expelled by compressed air, which operation was successfully carried out by Mr. Blaxland. He drilled two holes in each float, introducing the compressed air through one which expelled the water through the other, the

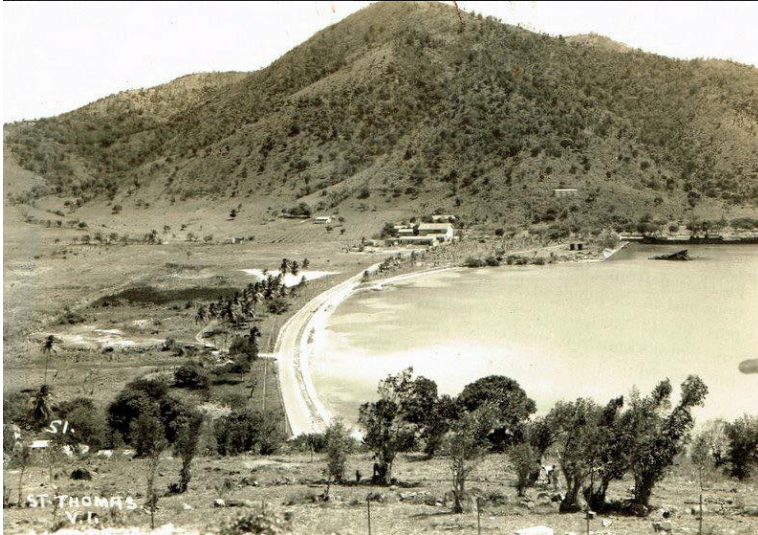
when the dock again commenced to rise. By the morning of the 5th the dock was fully raised, and on the afternoon of the same day was towed across the harbour by the steamer Titian to Long Bay, where it was safely grounded in about 8ft. of water in the position shown in our second engraving.

From the few details given, none but those who have passed some time in the tropics can imagine the difficulties encountered by Mr. Blaxland and those connected with him in his arduous undertaking. We understand that one of the principal considerations in accepting the offer of Messrs. Wylie and Blaxland was the knowledge of the fact that Mr. Blaxland had previously filled the post of Chief Engineer of the Royal Dockyard, Havana, and was accustomed to conduct engineering work in a tropical region. We understand that he only had the services of one English mechanic, formerly under him at Havana, the rest of the work being done by the Messrs. Murphy and a corps of negro assistants. We congratulate Messrs. Wylie and Blaxland and their co-contractors on the successful termination of a most difficult and dangerous work, and on the extremely simple and scientific manner in which it has been carried out; and we likewise congratulate the shareholders on the recovery of a most valuable property, which we hope soon to learn has been repaired and is in constant and remunerative use.

Early history: The Engineer article clearly identifies Long Bay as where George's seminal work took place. Long Bay is the middle bay to the south, now the main port of call for tourist ships. The sepia photograph is from around 1900 taken at Long Bay, and supports the obit. comment above. The remains of the early wharf are visible. (Contact Don Cox on US Virgin Islands for more details.)



St Thomas, St Croix and St John were collectively known as the Danish West Indies, until purchased by the US in 1917. The islands had been inhabited by mysterious tribes (Ciboney, Caribs, Arawak, Taino) for 3000 years before Columbus arrived in 1493. The English and the Dutch cohabited the island in 1620. The Danish West Indian company purchased the island from the French in 1733. In 1815, the island became a free port that attracted a lot of shipping in the new 1840s age of steam ships, and of course George Blaxland Sr. played a major part in that story.



Camille Pissarro, the French-Danish impressionist artist, was born on the island in 1830 but was shipped off to boarding school by 1842. He must have returned at a later time to create the St Thomas painting shown RHS above. Below is a modern photograph of Long Bay wharf and the town of Charlotte Amalie.



Water Island has now been added to USVI. Since the 1950s, the islands are the premier upmarket

tourist destination in the region. In 1820, the population was 15,000; the 2020 census, there were 51,000 inhabitants.

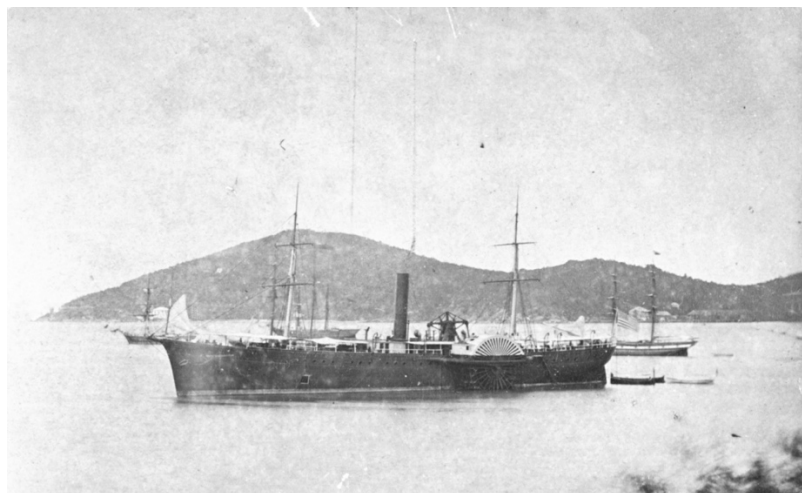
After 1815, the islands attracted a lot of business and became successful trading posts, until the devastation of 1867. It appears the George Blaxland Jr. initially went to St. Thomas in 1867/8 as part of a successful salvage team to refloat vessels and help clear up the mess. Here's a summary of what was truly an annus horribilis.

The 1867 hurricane, earthquake and tsunami – taken from wikipedia

For context, the **Virgin Islands earthquake** occurred on November 18, 1867, at 2.45 p.m. in the [Anegada Trough](#) about 20 km southwest of [Saint Thomas](#), [Danish West Indies](#) (now [US Virgin Islands](#)). The 7.5 magnitude earthquake came just 20 days after the devastating [San Narciso hurricane](#) killed more than 600 people in the same region. Tsunamis from this earthquake were some of the highest ever recorded in the [Lesser Antilles](#) since those produced by the [1755 Lisbon earthquake](#).

The earthquake consisted of two shocks, 10 minutes apart, and the two tsunamis came 10 minutes after each shock. Shaking reportedly lasted a minute in [Frederiksted](#), where the earthquake stirred a dust cloud that blanketed the town. Shaking reached intensity IX on the [Rossi-Forel scale](#) in the Danish West Indies. The Reid Fault located 17 km south of Saint Thomas on the northern scarp of the Anegada Trough runs for seven tens of kilometers may have ruptured and produced slip no greater than ten meters. Another possible fault is the Zahibo Fault which is 120 km long and 30 km by measured width.^[4] The rupture may have initiated at a depth of 3 km along this thrust fault. An [underwater landslide](#) triggered by movement on the seafloor would likely be the primary source of the tsunami as the run-up heights of the tsunami were unusually high, and the waves arrived almost immediately after the quake.

At [Saint Thomas](#), the first wave was described as a "straight white wall, about 15 to 23 feet (4.6 to 7.0 meters)" which advanced to the harbor, 10 minutes after the earthquake. The wave picked up steamers along the way and broke to just a few feet in front of the town. Its run-up height was 9.1 meters across the town. A smaller wave came shortly and penetrated further in the island. Thirty people perished when the waves swept them away.^[3] Run-ups of 6 meters were recorded at [Charlotte Amalie](#), where 12 people died.^[6] The *La Plata*, a steamship serving the [Royal Mail Steam Packet Company](#) was knocked over by the waves, killing nearly all of its crew onboard. Little Saba, about 10 km out from Long Bay, saw the highest waves at 15.2 meters (terrifying!).



A US Navy ship, the [USS De Soto](#) which had arrived the day before was ripped from her moorings and beached. The second wave then brought the ship with her bottom seriously damaged back to sea.^[7] The vessel is shown above in 1868 shortly after repairs. This is precisely the view of the bay that George Blaxland Jr. must have had upon his arrival in 1867/8 when he first arrived to refloat the SS British Empire.

At [Christiansted](#), [Saint Croix](#), the 7-9 meter waves drowned five people and inundated the island up to 90 meters inland. The tsunami destroyed 20 houses and stranded numerous boats inland. In some parts of the island, the waves reached a run-up height of 14.6 meters.^[8] [Frederiksted](#) on the same island was hit by waves up to 7.6 meters. The surging seawater beached many vessels including a US Navy ship, [USS Monongahela](#) along the beaches of Frederiksted.^{[9][10]}

And now finally the letters...

Sept. 16th, 1872



My dear George and Jane,

How are you? Your acceptable letters of the 26th came to hand on the morning of Wednesday the 11th and Mrs Blaxland being at Woolwich and not expected to return home until Friday or Saturday the 13th or 14th, I at once decided upon at once dispatching them by the 1st post therefore enclosed them in the same envelope in which I had intended sending the state of my health by the noon post. But to my astonishment about 8:00 PM on Thursday, Mrs Blaxland in person arrived at about the hour her letters would arrive at Woolwich. I was greatly annoyed as you may suppose, having promised myself a little sojourn at Woolwich with our friend. I therefore but ought to be perfect in bearing disappointment being well experienced in broken promises.

On Saturday last I saw in the Daily News an article stating that there had been a hurricane at some of the Windward Islands which has made me anxious for you but I think according to the maps you are amongst the seaward group of islands but this telegram also states that considerable damage was done on the Coast of Dominica, that ships were dashed to pieces, wharves broken and many lives lost. I think Dominica is a seaward island I see also that Messrs Lamb Nash & Co of 192 Gresham St have got into difficulties And Messrs John Gary Turquand and Young public accountants is appointed receiver. I fear these are the parties with whom you are interested you will see some account of the parties in the Lloyds weekly newspaper of the 15th which I shall send by this mail I have for some time feared the stability and honour of the lawyers and accountants and who have been acting for you but my hope my fears may prove groundless. I sometimes think I am growing old and foolish. I was glad to see by yours that Graham had conducted himself properly the last fortnight. I sent for his wife so soon as I received your cheque and gave her £6 the same afternoon I shall be glad when you have disposed of the Colombian to your satisfaction which will take a load of anxiety from your shoulders.

It is very annoying you're not receiving the angle iron and plates for making good the defects in the shipside more especially as you are threatened with hurricanes. I think you have taken a wise precaution in having her into shallow waters but I doubt the good of running water into the ship until she takes the ground as in case of a large tidal wave in the chance of earthquake the ship may be suddenly filled and lifted and be suddenly bumped again on the bottom, but you are best acquainted with any contingency that may be likely to occur.

You do not say how Mr Bell is progressing with the repairing of the dock but Mr Alford says in his letter of the 13th to Mrs Blaxland that the dock engineer is a very obliging man and suitable. George is glad he is done with the dock as he fears it will not be a commercial success we shall wait most anxiously for the next West India mail to give intelligence of hurricanes earthquakes and I fervently hope and trust you may be preserved from sickness and the evil effects of climate and storm and that there be many good blessings in store for you in my earnest desire and prayer.

We have had an extremely fine warm September and are now in the midst of hop picking of which I understand there is a most excellent crop more abundant and a finer quality than is scarcely ever known before such is there a past that we hear but we have not yet had a turn through the hop gardens as I have not been able to prevail upon Louisa to give us a day's drive through the hopping district but she now talks about us having an outing this week as Miss Bristol is I understand expected to spend two

or three days with us tomorrow or next day but this I know that if we do not go shortly it will be too late to see the beauties of the country with the hops on the poles or the picking. The trade is extremely brisk I think never in my life so good.

We find our neighbour an extremely unpleasant and ungentlemanly and the most unobliging man I think I ever met with. He is constantly writing and making complaints. Last evening he sent a letter complaining about our dogs and threatening to lay poison for them. He better mind what he took his is about although he may be a General I know the thing that he is not he is not a gentleman. I do all in my power to live at peace with all the world and willingly or knowing would not injure man or beast and should be attempt and should he attempt or otherwise poison and injure my poor little harmless Minnie. I really think I could not forgive so gross and injury now my dearest George and Jane with best wishes for your health and happiness, believe me dear children your loving father George Blaxland

p.s. I am quite at a loss how to answer the generals letter of complaints having previously exhausted the subject therefore I think the wisest step for me will be to silent contempt he keeps two dogs we we have two also and he has no more business to restrict me that I have to on him and do not trespass into his on his grounds

Sept. 30th, 1872



My dear George and Jane,

On Saturday the 28th I read in the Daily News the following article, Saturday the 28th September 1872 Plymouth September 27th the Royal Mail steamship Elbe with the fortnights homewards West India and Pacific mails arrived off Plymouth sound at 9:50 tonight. We looked fully expecting a letter on Saturday at noon or most certainly at the Evening Post both of which have passed and no letter. Well we must hope for the Sunday morning's mail but again disappointment what could have happened. It was the hurricane season - could you have been visited with one and both of you so seriously injured or worse unable to write to us?

At 10:30 AM the newspaper arrived when I immediately examined with the object of seeing what if any news from Saint Thomas but that place was not named nor any intelligence of the hurricane or earthquake in the West Indies.

12 at noon, an welcome letter arrived on in the envelope dear Jane, Gillingham house, Gillingham Kent England which was written in large official letters Chatham on the envelope stamped Bath September 28 Gilliam said territory 9th Chatham September 20th and this delay is uneasiness and anxiety from it not being properly and legibly directed. Chatham is the post town of Gillingham it would be quite as consistent to address letter to Sarah thus Mrs Atkinson, Westbourne house, Longbenton Northumberland near Newcastle upon Tyne. she would doubly receive it at some time but it is most probable that considerable delay would be occasioned. I know Mrs Blaxland has objection to Chatham being substituted for Kent but for all that it is the most direct and simple to ensure speedy delivery well enough about this extremely vexed and tiresome subject which has caused me extreme and painful anxiety unnecessarily.

It is over now and that I must be wiser in future and I know that I am getting extremely nervous as I have been very ill and my foot very sore and extremely painful. I think I shall have to resort to laudanum or chloroform to give me ease I was much pleased to receive dear Janes kind letter it was indeed a sedative and balm to my nerves and should have greatly welcomed a letter a few lines from my dear

George but have no doubt he is fully employed in being able or prepared to resist the effect of storm and flood.

I think the means he is adopting will have the effect of reducing the strain upon its anchors and cables, providing you are not visited by a large tidal wave [tsunami] which sometimes attends or accompanies earthquakes.

When may we hope to see you again in England. You know you now have two warm rooms at Gillingham house the new sitting room free from all draughts and southwest aspect with a similar bedroom over the West aspect and I will do what little is injury to make you comfortable and your surgeon happy but I begin to fear my days of walking are nearly over as Mrs Blaxland says she does not expect my foot will ever get well again. So you I do not obtain much encouragement from that quarter but I must be contented and think of the many blessings I'm allowed to enjoy and those beautiful lines come to my recollection: "When all thy blessings [mercies], oh my God, my rising soul surveys," not more than others I deserve, but thou hast given me more, but I must expect to feel the effect of old age. Only I perhaps feel it more acute by having been accustomed to an active life and being now restrained from walking merely by an ill conditioned foot. The question rises whether I should not be better without it and stump about on a piece of timber but all they say is well that ends well perhaps it may get well again but I am apt to be impatient.

Tuesday morning the 1st of October, I have had a bad night but little sleep constant pain in my foot requiring me to change the dressing. Mrs Blaxland is ill with a touch of bronchitis that we are now a poor ailing couple but must endeavour to imitate Mark Saplin[?] and be jolly bearing in mind that my case is much improved since yesterday morning by receipt of letter from Saint Thomas. Therefore I must be content I had this morning received a letter from Mrs Alford saying that Mrs Alford [?] and Miss Bristol arrived at Woolwich last evening. With dearest love, believe me my dear George and Jane your affectionate father George Blaxland.

Oct. 15th, 1872



My dear George and Jane,

We received your acceptable letters in regular and due course yesterday morning and was extremely sorry to learn that our dear George had been suffering from boils on his leg. I can sympathise with him having suffered in a similar manner when I was at to he too I believe these are few reflections attended with greater pain but I used to be consoled by being told that they were conducive to health although I used to find it difficult to swallow that doctrine. But I hope it may prove correct in your case and that you are by this time in the enjoyment of the usual or improved good health and that your ship is ready to undertake the voyage across the Atlantic.

It is extremely annoying that to have been so much delayed in completing the repairing of the hull by the non arrival of the plates and angle iron. But I hope you have received them by this time you have never been you never informed me whether you had got the patent metal bearings for crank pins sent from London in July last. I have been surprised at not receiving any tidings of them as am anxious to know how you like them and whether your experience difficulties in fitting them in place all which particulars I am anxious to be informed of as I thought you would bravely bear them out bore them out in the lays by bolting the bearings onto the saddles which if necessary or required could have been from the late bed.

There were two powerful reasons for not having them board in London. First, not having a gauge of the crank pin and secondly, the delay that would have been occasioned you having given the date that it was necessary for them to be at Liverpool and again work being so brisk in London causing great difficulty in having work being done if required at an early date.

You give us no information when we may hope to see you in England but I hope we may anticipate that pleasure but I again fear the ills of a winters passage and the still greater evil of you coming home in the short cold days of winter that on one thing you may rest assured that we shall give you a most hearty welcome which I'm sure little Minnie [George's dog] will most heartily join.

On Saturday last I went up to London to meet our dear Mary Isabella [George Jr.'s older sister] who was coming to London in company with Mrs Pinkard [Agnes, his niece?], they expecting to arrive at the Kings Cross station at 5:35 PM but the train came in until 10 minutes after it was due which caused us to lose our last train to New Brompton. I think if the board of trade would enforce punctuality in all the railways by the imposition of fines, they would take the most effectual measure to prevent accident by collision of any other means used again. The managers of railways have the arrangements of time for something and arrival, and should be made answerable to their passengers for non observance of contract or agreement more especially, as in this instance the weather was extremely fine, there was no gale, no snow and the train being an express one, but the railway interest is all powerful.

On Tuesday the 8th I went to Woolwich, intending on the following day to go to London with Mr Alford. But the Wednesday proving a wet day, we spent that day at Wellington St and enjoyed ourselves and leading in reading and conversation which I was not sorry for as my foot will not permit me to go about without giving me considerable pain and causing inflammation and swelling of the ankle besides being quite ill from lumbago as to render it difficult for me to stand upright. Indeed I find the old man growing fast up on me today I took a short walk with dear Mary Isabella but returned home quite tired and knocked up. I must therefore I fear discontinue nearly all walking exercise all waking exercise as I begin to think what Louisa [2nd wife] says is true that my foot will never again be quite well so I must endeavour to imitate Mark Sattley[?].

Mrs Graham called today for her money and she seemed well and speaking of her husband said you had fitted him up a comfortable cabin on board the Columbian and said that Mr Murphy and Mr Blaxland had both been suffering from boils and that Mr Graham [?] now remained on board and his victuals sent him from the shore.

I am very glad that you have managed to keep him on board out of the way of temptation to get drunk as when sober I think you will find him a useful hardworking man but a fool and a madman when drunk. Wednesday morning, damp morning and cold winter evidently coming on rapidly. I feel much better as regards my foot having had a comfortable night free from pain I must keep quiet and repair from walking exercise refrain from walking exercise and trust and hope that I may again be able to have the free use of my limbs and faculties that I may be capable of fully enjoying your much wished for SoC is my most ardent desire but above and overall may I seek for resignation to whatever may be my lot and feel satisfied that whatever is good and my duty lays in being resigned to God's will. Our dear Mary Isabella writes with me in dearest love and kindness wishes for your health happiness and prosperity believe me my dear George and Jane, your sufficiently attached father, George Blaxland

p.s. Mr Alford, Mr Bristol desired me to remember them kindly to you, GB.

Dec. 31st, 1872



My dear George and Jane

Thank you for your kind letters of the 14th which reached us on the morning of the 30th of December yesterday and I was sorry that you are proceeding so slowly with the fitting of the Colombian [sic] but I think you are acting wisely in sending her to England where she would be undoubtedly realise a much better price that you would be likely to get in the West Indies although there would be the drawback of great expense in fitting her for the passage across the Atlantic and the risk of the voyage.

I shall be glad should we be spared to welcome you to England at whatever post you may arrive at yesterday Mr Alford and self ran down to Sheerness. We found Mrs Townsend had been laid up with a wounded leg for 9 weeks having had a fall on board one of the launches and severely injured against one of the shawls he had only yesterday gone to duty and he and Mrs Green desired to be kindly remembered to you. The latter is extremely ill completely prostrated having entirely lost the use of one side. I was much grieved to see him so extremely low but pleased to observe the kind attention he received from his affectionate and good wife Mrs Turner. Mr. Turner and wife also inquired kindly after you and desired their kind remembrance. Miss Turner was ill, she appeared Mrs Turner was ill, she appeared to me to be bordering on attack of ague. Mr Alford and self are hard at work renewing the decayed parts of the greenhouse. With much love believe me your you're attached and loving father George Blaxland I did not forget my dear George, your birthday your natal day and 37.

March 1st, 1873



My dear George and Jane

Your kind and truly acceptable letters of the 14th of February came duly to hand yesterday and was sorry to see you had little delay by a broken steam pipe. But thank, you adopted a good method of repairing the defect and think it would be sounder than when you at all events it will be I think not be likely to give any serious trouble.

I agree with you that whoever purchases the vessel while she is at Saint Thomas will expect to have her as a great bargain but it brought over to English port will be much more likely to realise her true value of course you will have the expense anxiety and risk of the voyage to England to set against the difference between the two posts. I shall be most truly glad to assist you in what you propose and accepting a bill payable at London joint stock bank. I placed about £400 there a few months since on deposit they will therefore have no objection to my acceptance and it would be great and sincere pleasure to be in a position to aid you and I'm sorry I have it not in my power to be more assistance to you.

I often wish it was in my power to assist you in preparing the ship for the voyage across the Atlantic had the distance being more convenient. I should have endeavoured to have been the greater part of my time employed in your service. I have sufficient opinion in my abilities to think I should have been of service to you as I find myself much better in health when I'm employed in some mechanical pursuit. I have been this morning employed fixing some harbours on the paths of the garden until the snow and sleet actually drove me away from my post to seek for shelter from the storm, and Mrs Blaxland calling

to me to say that I shall completely lay myself up with rheumatism and cramps too which complaints I am frequently subjected, particularly the last few weeks which have been extremely cold.

So I am now sitting writing to you in a warm cosy room with the little thing snoring [Minnie] beside me. But I do not manage writing well as I frequently forget how to form my letters, as I think my last attack at something I am not so well capable of writing as I used to be so. The doctor says I had better not engage myself in writing but keep to my work in the shop which gives my head more relaxation. I have not over tashian S's I am informed that the doctor orders Mr Townsend to keep to be kept as quiet as possible it is surprising his being seized in a similar manner to his late brother-in-law Mr. Green. But I think I will if the weather is at all suitable run down next week and see his sister Mrs Green and endeavour to learn all particulars.

I shall after April arrive and be looking for your arrival at some English port, but I think you are quite right to wait until the equinox gales have blown over as I presume equatorial gales have blown over, as I presume you will sail her the greater distance to economise which are now an expensive necessary in the steam vessel stores. When you arrive in England, I shall then endeavour if possible to see the good ship Colombian. We had an extremely cold and uncomfortable day, believe sincerely, your affectionate and loving father, George Blaxland.

April 1st, 1873



My dear George and Jane

Your kind letters of the 15th arrived by the Last Post yesterday evening. I had begun to think it late and to fear some accident had happened to the mail packet to keep her so late as last Wednesday the 26th of March I went to Woolwich to see our old friends and made at Mrs alford's until Friday the 28th when expecting the arrival of letters from you I returned home in the expectation of hearing news from Saint Thomas Mr Alford is only middling he is suffering from difficulty in breathing but we enjoyed a few hours turn in the lawn and conversation calling upon Mr Ling and having chat with him an old times and steamboats as they used to be 30 or 40 years since and on Thursday the 27th somebody and self took a turn over to Chislehurst to see the residents on the outside of the residence of the X Empress and endeavour to see the inside of the little Catholic Chapel where the remains of the emperor are deposited for the present but we with others were not permitted to see the inside of the Chapel as there is only one day in the week when visits are permitted to view the interval which day is on Tuesday between the hours of two and three in the afternoon we had a most beautiful fine day and greatly enjoyed the view and beautiful sunny around the beautiful village of Chislehurst we return to Woolwich to dinner and T T in one both I think much pleased with the excursion whilst looking about for the Catholic Chapel miss Bristol thought the Episcopal Church which only a Pretty Little neat one to be the Catholic Chapel we were searching for which certainly had much of the appearance of a Roman Catholic place of worship both externally and internally being most gorgeously fitted up with all description of religious finery alter clothes and I've embroidered silk upon a lovely thing and painted windows with services of time and day during lent indeed I think I have never seen in Roman Catholic Church is a more elaborate and tastefully decorated place of worship I should like to accompany you both to see it now my dearest George I have been expecting a draught of yours for £400 or £500 for my acceptance but I have not seen any document to that effect the money is laying at the joint stock bank on deposit to be drawn at anytime giving seven days notice and very much for your service I shall look forward with hope for the end of June or July having to be able to welcome you both to your native home and county I have I assure you frequently reflected upon myself for not having gone outside Saint Thomas to assist you in fitting out the Colombian's I'm sure you have had a great deal to do and yet flatter myself that I

could do a good day's work and I never felt so really or cheerful as when I am actively employed you must in the event Telegraph to me when you arrive in an English port and if I am well and if Mr Alford can do so to arrange we will both endeavour to come to you and welcome your arrival but I feel afraid to anticipate but must endeavour to look forward with hope and that and trust that the almighty may permit to see those who are so near and dear we last week had most beautiful weather I think we are we have sun then we had censored Morse and then sat September last the last winter has not been what we should call a severe one for us but has been extremely dull and that with but little sun sometimes for a week or two we have not had a peep of the sun but last week we had the sun shining brightly every day which made things look cheerful on Sunday evening last we had a thunderstorm with rain but spring appears to be setting up on us and the trees are putting out the chutes and something well for blossom making everything look bright and the bees coming out of the hives we have this year.

I hope Sarah's business will not suffer by her Clerk leaving her I do not think it would have been well to have taken Mr Ronaldson as a partner as I have a dread of partnerships seeing how badly Mr Wiley behaved. But at the same time I think Reynolds said Mr Ronaldson ought to have an interest in the business say by a Commission on the profits in excess of his salary but I have no idea what salary he had indeed I had no idea what amount of business Sarah has been doing with tourist and fondest love believe me dearest children your affectionate attached father George Blaxland.

April 16th, 1873



My dear George and Jane

Letters of the 27th of March 1873 came to hand on Monday morning the 14th of April Mr Alford was here very busy helping to fix new sashes to the front of the greenhouse I assure you the four days he was here were both we both worked extremely hard and have made the most serious improvement to the appearance and security of the greenhouse. I have several little finished jobs to perform but I flatter myself that you will approve of what we have done. Then we have been highly favoured with the weather. I am sorry to hear such a poor account of Mr Murphy's health as all the hard work and responsibility it must rest entirely upon you.

I wish often that I had gone out to Saint Thomas as 12 months since I had as I feel sure I could have been an assistance to you in effecting the necessary repairs and refreshments for the voyage to England. Besides taking a match on the passage home, I think you managed admirably in floating the main mast off to the ship. You must have had a good job made of it as you could not have floated it off as it is only a few of the iron and steel mast that have come under my observation that were watertight.

You do not say in your last letter whether your calls had arrived nor when we may expect to hear of your arrival. I dreamed last week that you had arrived at Bristol and Mr Alford and myself had started the two Bristols to welcome you and see your ship, but like most dreams I think we missed ourselves on the road and did not get to the ship. Mr Alford agrees with me that we should much like to spend a night on board. I shall feel extremely anxious for your safe arrival. There is one thing I comfort myself with that you will have the advantage of long days when you get into our northern latitudes which I know is a good thing compared with long nights and cold weather.

What is most sad and I think negligent act the running of the Atlantic on the rack. I was quite unable to account for what appears to me the total of all precautionary means in navigating the ship on her approaching a most dangerous coast. The lead do not appear to have been used or any means taken

too to know the position of the ship on the whole it appears quite a gross neglect as we experienced on board the old Red Rover.

I saw in the Daily News yesterday an account of the expedition of the Challenger dated from Saint Thomas as March 24th in which there is a very good account of the island which the writer says they entered by the West trigger[?] channel and anchored at the head of it in a very secure and pleasant position the trade winds blowing uninterruptedly and rendering the heat which however was not excessive thermometer ranging from 72 to 78 degrees in the shade quite enjoyable. I have wondered whether you might not have had something to do with the disabled ship Rowantree which has fallen in with the sound close to the Saint Johns Island with jury [we use jerry rig today, but jury rig is older] main mast and an apology for jury mizzen mast.

You will have heard that the Gladstone ministry are again reinstated to power. Mr Disraeli was unable to form an administration so the Irish Catholics have made fools of themselves with the Pope at their head. I think there is very "something" when the Pope attempts to dictate through the Catholic Bishops how the members of the House of Commons are to vote. Hoping you next get better will give me some idea when we may look for your arrival in England. Believe me, my dearest George and Jane, your affectionate father George Blaxland.

1874 – last letter



My dear George and Jane

I received my dear George's letter of the 10th in due course and also the catheters [pipes for bladder] the day previous for kind attention and favours I am much obliged. It helps my dreary and painful journey through life although you must excuse me saying that I felt annoyed and vexed that our dearest Jane had thought it necessary to guard against my committing self-destruction in taking away the "something-over" which you kindly presented me sometime. Since I am fully inclined to give dearest Jane the kindest possible intention in removing one means of self destruction from me, but I hope and trust that our heavenly father will restrain me from rushing unbidden into his presence.

I admit that at times my agony is made more than I will know how to bear and that I have at times expressed my feelings in very powerful expressions but I trust my sense of duty to myself and family will restrain my actions from committing such an unpardonable act. Since my love for my family I hold alone restrain my action I should alone restrain my action from committing so vile a crime her poor dearest mother has already enough to bear and that would extremely wicked in me to add for her at present overtaxed endurance.

I see you are as yet undecided as to your future movements. I should could have controlled it much like to remain in England but I see little or no prospect suitable for your turning up in England. Perhaps I am selfish in wishing you to remain in England. I must plead guilty to this along with other charges but I'm sorry to be so great a drawback from your happiness and enjoyment, and must hope you will never be called to suffer what is my lot which makes existence of pain I try to bear up everywhere whilst writing. But I find it extremely difficult to either write or indict. I am barely able to spell a word. You must therefore excuse my many blunders. I received a very kind letter from my dear old friend Mr Alford which is I enclosed for your perusal you will see that facts are more strange than fiction. In addition to my other ailments, I have had severe pains in my right side as to make breathing at times quite painful. I see no particular news from the Gold Coast. With dearest love believe me, my dear yours ever affectionate my dear George and Jane, yours ever affectionate father George Blaxland.