

Marrinys yn Tiger, a few details from Dutch newspapers

Lauran Toorians

The traditional Manx song *Marrinys yn Tiger* (The Voyage of the Tiger) tells the story of how a group of Manx merchants in 1778 bought a ship, the Tiger, with the intent to contribute to the war against Napoleon and make some profit as privateers. The Tiger sailed under the command of captain Richard Qualtrough and according to Moore the ship ‘had a crew of 70 men, 25 of whom were able seamen, and carried 16 guns, fourteen of which were 6 pounders, and two 4 pounders. Such cannon in these days would be considered mere pop-guns, but they then formed an armament which would have rendered the “Tyger” a formidable opponent to any vessel not a man-of-war.’¹

After a false start and a spell of bad weather around Christmas the Tyger took to the sea again and this time the crew tasted success: *As veeit shin lhong voish Holland, / As ghow shin ee dooin hene* (‘We met a ship from Holland / and took her for ourselves’). The captured ship was taken to Douglas, where the crew of the Tiger was reprimanded and threatened with imprisonment. England was not at war with Holland and instead of privateering this was an act of piracy. The ballad gives no details about what actually happened and tells us nothing more about the Dutch ship. The Manx historian Moore, already quoted above, knew more and gives the following description:²

A few days later they fell in with and captured the Dutch galliott, “De Jonge Jessie Wittween de Lemmer,” Captain Heere Anskes, bound from Bordeaux to Dieppe, loaded with 289 hogsheads of tobacco. After a quick run the “Tyger” and her prize arrived in Douglas, where they were greeted by the populace with great joy, a joy, however, which was speedily turned into sorrow as the governor declared the capture an illegal one, and at once sent John Cosnahan, son of Hugh Cosnahan, as representing the owners, together with Captain Anskes and three of his crew to. Whitehaven, where they appeared before the Commissioners of the “High Court of Admiralty”. An agreement was entered into between them and the commissioners that, on the owners of the “Tyger” paying £60 to Captain Anskes, and engaging to put him and his crew “free of expense into full possession” of his vessel, he should “exonerate and for ever quit all claims upon the captors and owners” of the “Tyger”. The Dutch captain remained in Douglas refitting till the middle of February, when he sent in his bill of costs for 30 days, amounting to £45 8s. 8d., which was duly paid by Hugh Cosnahan. So ended the “Tyger's” first unfortunate venture.

A (digital) search in Dutch archives brings nothing at all about this incident, but Dutch newspapers do add a few details to the description as given by Moore.³ Several newspapers ran ‘sea-tidings’ giving information about the whereabouts of Dutch ships. The first relevant reference to our ship occurs in the *Noordhollandsche Courant* of 29 January 1779. There, in the

1 A.W. Moore, *Manx Worthies or Biographies of Notable Manx Men and Women* (Douglas 1901), Chapter 1: The Merchant Service (quoted from www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/fulltext/worthies/ch08.htm).

2 Moore, *Manx Worthies*.

3 A large proportion of Dutch newspapers as well as books and other publications are digitally available on the website <https://delpher.nl> hosted by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Library) in The Hague.

section ‘Zee-Tyding’ we read that on tuesday the 26th of January captain Jarig Attes arrived with his ship ‘Zelden Rust’ from Bordeaux at Texel (the roadstead or anchorage before entering the Zuiderzee (now IJsselmeer) and the harbour of Amsterdam). Further down in the same section it says:

Schipper⁴ Jarig Attes, van Bordeaux in Texel binnengekoomen, rapporteerd dat hy den 17den deezer N.W. 6 Myl van de Sorlings is gevisiteerd door een Engelsch Oorlogschip en zeide tegen hem dat zy een Koff by haar hadden die van Bourdaux na een Fransche Haven Gedestineerd, was gëlaaden met Tabak, en zoude hem in Falmöuth opbrengen, na gedagten Heere Anskes, de *Geesje Witteveen*.

(Captain Jarig Attes, arrived into Texel from Bordeaux, reports that he on the 17th of this month [January] six miles Northwest of the Sorlings [the Scilly Islands] has been visited by an English warship which told him that they had a koff [a type a merchant vessel similar to a galiot] with them which had been sailing from Bordeaux to a French harbour loaded with tobacco, and were to take this ship to Falmouth. Likely this [ship] was Heere Anskes’ the *Geesje Witteveen*.)

Here we have the name of the captain and the ship as mentioned by Moore in his *Manx Worthies*. The full name of the captain appears to be Heere Anskes Schotanus. He was born in Lemmer (province of Friesland) on the 6th of December 1758 (baptised there 10 December 1758). Not much about him can be found, but apparently he became a citizen of Emden – now in Germany – on the 17th of August 1781.⁵ The name of the ship appears in two variants, either *Jonge Geesje Witteveen* or *Geesje Witteveen*. ‘Geesje’ is a diminutive form of the girls name Gezina (probably short for Geertruida, Gertrude) and *Witteveen* is a relatively common surname. Perhaps this name can be linked to Jouwert Fredriks *Witteveen* who between 1802 and 1828 owned a shipyard in Lemmer where several koffs were built, and in 1811 a tjalk (a smaller vessel) with the name *Vrouw Gezina* (‘Lady Gezina’).⁶

Two later editions of the *Noordhollandsche Courant*, report further on the whereabouts of our unfortunate vessel. On 26 April 1779 we read: ‘Te Dieppe Heere Anskes, de *Geesje Witteveen*, van Bourdaux’ ([Arrived] in Dieppe, Heere Anskes, the *Geesje Witteveen* from Bordeaux). So by this date the ship was released and could continue its journey to Dieppe. On the 12th of July we read: ‘AMSTERDAM den 8 july, in Texel binnen gekomen. / Heere Anskes, de *Jonge Geesje Witteveen* van Bourdaux’ (Amsterdam, the 8th of July, arrived in Texel. Heere Anskes, de *Jonge Geesje Witteveen* from Bordeaux). This tells us that it took until the 8th of July 1779 for the victim of the Tiger to arrive home safely.

The next and last reference in a newspaper is the announcement of the sale at auction of the vessel. This auction took place in an Inn in Lemmer on the 27th of March 1784. The announcement is made ten days earlier in the *Leeuwarder Courant* (17 March 1784) and gives a slightly different name for the ship. It is clear however that this is the same vessel and the description is informative as would be expected:

4 The text has a misprint here: ‘Schippea’.

5 Information from the genealogical website of the De Jong-family (www.pdejong.com/genealogie/jongsmits/4027.htm). A namesake born in the same year, but in a different place, died in 1827. The date and place of death of our Heere Anskes remain unknown.

6 See <http://www.marhisdata.nl/werf&id=2107>.

Een Welbezeild COFFE SCHIP; genaamd *De Juffrouw Geesje*, lang over Steeven 100 voeten wyd .22 voet en 8 duim, hol onder de Watergang 10 voeten en 5 duim , Amsterdamsche Maat, in het Jaar 1762 nieuw uitgehaald, en in 1780 zwaar vertimmerd, laast by *Heere Anskes Schotanus* van de Lemmer als Schipper zynde gevoerd, leggende thans te Rotterdam.

(A well equipped (with sails) coff named *De Juffrouw Geesje*, length over the prow 100 feet, wide 22 feet and 8 inches, hollow under the waterline 10 feet and 5 inches, measure of Amsterdam.⁷ In the year 1762 [the vessel was] newly taken out [in a dry dock] and in 1780 heavily modernized. Last [owned] by *Heere Anskes Schotanus* from Lemmer who sailed it as captain. At present moored in Rotterdam.)

This suggests that the Manxmen damaged the *Jonge Geesje Witteveen* enough to justify an complete overhaul the year after it returned home. If the statement that Heere Anskes moved to Emden in 1781 is correct, it is possible that he found another trade there and gave up sailing.

⁷ The Amsterdam foot measured eleven Amsterdam inches and was equivalent to 28,31 cm.