



Biographie

Who was Barry Edward O'Meara?

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WHO WAS BARRY EDWARD O'MEARA?

par Peter HICKS

ABSTRACT

Irishman Barry Edward O'Meara, Napoleon's doctor on St Helena from August 1815 to July 1818, played an important role in Napoleon's later life and in the propagation of the latter's writings composed on St Helena. The first "fair" treatment of him in English was Philippe Gonnard's remarkable thesis, *The Exile of St Helena* (English version, London 1909). Since Gonnard, however, the quality of biographical treatments has been mixed. One monograph – indeed the only ever on O'Meara –, namely, *The Emperor and the Irishman* by medical doctor Hubert O'Connor appeared in 2008. Though this book offers many tantalising details regarding the Irish doctor, it is relentlessly apologetic for him, and worse still there are no notes to substantiate the new information therein. Furthermore, as with all other treatments of O'Meara's life, there is no discussion of the last sixteen years of the doctor's life (1820-1836) when O'Meara was a major player in international Napoleonism and close collaborator with members of Napoleon's family. And still today, miss-information appears in published accounts; even the most recent edition of the British *Dictionary of National Biography* is not immune. This article is an attempt at a "fair" and accurate biographical sketch of the Irish doctor.

RÉSUMÉ

L'Irlandais Barry Edward O'Meara, docteur de Napoléon à Sainte-Hélène d'août 1815 à juillet 1818, joua un rôle important dans la dernière partie de la vie de Napoléon et dans la propagation des derniers écrits rédigés à Sainte-Hélène. La première étude « honnête » sur O'Meara est la remarquable thèse de Philippe Gonnard, *The Exile of St Helena* (version anglaise, Londres, 1909). Cependant, depuis Gonnard, la qualité des études biographiques est mitigée. Une monographie – en fait la seule portant exclusivement sur O'Meara – intitulée *The Emperor and the Irishman* par le médecin Hubert O'Connor a paru en 2008. Si ce livre comporte de nombreux détails intéressants sur O'Meara, il est résolument apologétique, et pire encore, ne présente aucune note complétant les informations nouvelles apportées. Par ailleurs, comme dans l'ensemble des études sur la vie d'O'Meara, les seize dernières années du médecin (1820-1836), quand il jouait un rôle important dans le Napoléonisme international et était un proche collaborateur des membres de la famille impériale, ne sont pas abordées. Aujourd'hui encore, les publications comprennent bien des informations erronées ; même la récente édition du *Dictionary of National Biography* anglais n'est pas fiable. Cet article vise à proposer une esquisse biographique « équitable » et précise du docteur irlandais.

WHO WAS BARRY EDWARD O'MEARA?

par Peter HICKS*

Because of his high-profile feud with the governor of St Helena, Hudson Lowe, and his championing of Napoleon, Barry Edward O'Meara, Napoleon's doctor on St Helena from August 1815 to July 1818, was much talked about in his day. The chatter about him was always framed in "for and against" terms, supporters of the establishment and the government trying at all moments to underline that he was a knave, and those of a more liberal disposition (like O'Meara himself) defending his honour. It was not until the English version of Philippe Gonnard's remarkable thesis, *The Exile of St Helena*, that anglophone readers were to get their first largely "un-orientated" account.¹ Since Gonnard, there had been one monograph – indeed the only ever on O'Meara -, namely, *The Emperor and the Irishman* (Dublin, 2008) by medical doctor Hubert O'Connor. Though this book offers many tantalising details regarding the Irish doctor, however it is relentlessly apologetic for him, and worse still there are no notes to substantiate the new information therein. And as with all other treatments of O'Meara's life, there is no discussion of the last sixteen years of his life (1820-1836) when O'Meara was a major player in international Napoleonism and close collaborator with members of Napoleon's family. Furthermore, still today, miss-information appears in published accounts; even the most recent edition of the British *Dictionary of National Biography* is not immune. What follows is an attempt at an accurate biographical sketch, and it is part of a more complete study of Barry O'Meara and Napoleon currently in preparation.

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¹ Philippe Gonnard, *The Exile of St Helena: the last phase in fact and fiction*, London: William Heinemann, 1909, esp. chapter VIII, "O'Meara", pp. 69–86, English version of *Les origines de la légende napoléonienne : l'œuvre historique de Napoléon à Sainte-Hélène*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1906.

The early years

In a publication of 1819, Barry Edward O'Meara gave a short version of his own life up to 1815.² Though this is an autobiographical source, it seems the most appropriate starting point – and furthermore some of the details are corroborated by other, official sources.

O'Meara claimed that his father, identified by the first edition of *Dictionary of National Biography* as Jeremiah,³ was an “old... and highly respected” officer in the 29th (Worcester) Regiment of Foot – in 1819 O'Meara's father (if he had lived) would have been 83 years old.⁴ This regiment (O'Meara notes) served in North America under the Charles Stanhope, 3rd Earl of Harrington.⁵ The history of the 29th Foot notes that the regiment left Dublin for Canada in 1765⁶ and *The Parliamentary Register* for 1776 records that a certain Jeremiah Meara was “storekeeper” in Fort Frederick in 17[6]6-1768⁷. O'Meara then writes that his father “was honoured with a special mark of royal favour by [George III], who was graciously pleased to grant him a pension for the loyalty and gallantry he displayed in seizing with his own hands” (Jeremiah was 26 at the time) “two of the leaders of an armed mob in the North of Ireland [...] as also for other services rendered by him, in support of the honour and interest of his sovereign”.⁸ This was the uprising of the “Oak Boys” (so-called because of the oak boughs in their hats). They were Protestant insurgents who had enacted a bloodless insurrection in 1763 in Armagh, Tyrone, Derry and Fermanagh against unfair taxes and land appropriation.⁹ The 29th was indeed in Londonderry in 1763,¹⁰ and a document, dated 1 March, 1775, held at the British National Archives records that the Lord Lieutenant for Ireland requested a pension for Lieut. Jeremiah Meara, who had distinguished himself in action against the

² B. E. O'Meara, *An exposition of some of the transactions, that have taken place at St-Helena, since the appointment of Sir Hudson Lowe as Governor of that Island, in answer to an anonymous pamphlet [by Theodore E. Hook] entitled “Facts illustrative of the treatment of Napoleon Bonaparte”, corroborated by various official documents, correspondence, etc.*, London: printed for James Ridgway, 1819, (p. 96 ff.). The French version, *Relation des événements arrivés à Sainte-Hélène, postérieurement à la nomination de Sir Hudson-Lowe, au gouvernement de cette île, en réponse à une brochure anonyme [par Théodore E. Hook], intitulée : « Faits démonstratifs des traitements qu'on fait éprouver à Napoléon Bonaparte », confirmée par une correspondance et des documents officiels, etc.*, was published by Chaumerot Jeune in Paris in July 1819.

³ Ed. Sidney Lee, London: Smith, Elder and co., 1895, vol 42, s.v., “O'Meara, Barry Edward”.

⁴ See Turtle Bunbury http://www.turtlebunbury.com/history/history_irish/roadshow/barryomeara.htm, consulted in June 2013 who, citing no source, states that O'Meara's father died in 1804. For Jeremiah's birth date, see the following note.

⁵ Stanhope had been made a captain in the 29th foot in 1773, becoming colonel of the regiment in January 1788. According to the regimental history (H. Everard, *History of the 29th (Worcestershire) Regiment*, Worcester: Littlebury & Company, The Worcester Press, 1891, Chapter 4), on 17 December, Lieutenant Jeremiah Meara was Irish, 36 years old, and had served the 29th for 13 years.

⁶ See Everard, *op. cit.*, chapter 4, “1765”.

⁷ *The Parliamentary Register; Or, History Of The Proceedings And Debates Of The House Of Commons: Containing An Account Of The Most Interesting Speeches and Motions; Accurate Copies of the Most Remarkable Bills, Letters and Papers; of the Most Material Evidence, Petitions, &c. Laid Before and Offered to the House, During the Second Session of the Fourteenth Parliament Of Great Britain*, Almon: 1776, Volume 3, p. 374 records how Jeremiah Meara, esq. had received £144 s. 9 d. 0 for 963 days' pay as store-keeper in Fort Frederick in North America, from 1 Jan 17[6]6 to 28 August 1768.

⁸ O'Meara, *An exposition...*, pp. 96-7.

⁹ See “Hardy's *Memoirs of Lord Charlemont*” in Ralph Griffiths, G. E. Griffiths (eds), *The Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal*, s.n.: vol. LXVIII (1812), p. 346.

¹⁰ See Everard, *op. cit.*, chapter 4, “1763”.

“Oak Boys” insurgents in Londonderry.¹¹ That O’Meara’s father actually received his royal pension of £100 dated 1 April, 1775 (after agreeing to convert from Catholicism)¹² is recorded in *The Parliamentary Register* dated 1790.¹³

Though the old DNB identifies Barry Edward’s mother as “Miss Murphy, sister of Edmund Murphy, M.A. of Trinity College”,¹⁴ it is more likely that she was “Catherine née Harpur”.¹⁵ Catherine married Jeremiah in 1781 and four children were born, O’Meara being the third of three brothers, the eldest - Hely Fitzpatrick - born in 1782 and Charles Stanhope – presumably named after Jeremiah’s commanding officer in the 29th - in 1784; their sister Charlotte was the last of the children.¹⁶ As implicitly noted by Barry Edward himself in the 1819 publication, his own birth year was 1786.¹⁷ We know that O’Meara received a relatively good education – already by 1819 he was fluent in two foreign languages (French and Italian) – because his father refers to him as reading Virgil and Lucian at the age of 11.¹⁸ O’Meara recounts his professional career as follows: he was apprenticed to Mr Leake, city surgeon, and he followed (so he says) Leake’s lectures at Trinity College Dublin and at the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin. Presumably this apprenticeship did not include formal inscription at the two institutions, since as the old DNB notes Barry’s name does not appear on the registers of either. And he cannot have studied in Dublin long since he later

¹¹ National Archives, Kew, Treasury Board and In-Letters, T 1/496/68-69.

¹² See Turtle Bunbury http://www.turtlebunbury.com/history/history_irish/roadshow/barryomeara.htm, consulted in June 2013.

¹³ See *The Parliamentary Register, Or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland*, Printed for J. Porter, P. Byrne, and W. Porter, 1790, Volume 9, p. 176.

¹⁴ DNB 1895.

¹⁵ See Turtle Bunbury http://www.turtlebunbury.com/history/history_irish/roadshow/barryomeara.htm, consulted in June 2013.

¹⁶ See Turtle Bunbury (http://www.turtlebunbury.com/history/history_irish/roadshow/barryomeara.htm, consulted in June 2013) who gives details of a letter by O’Meara’s father, Jeremiah, to William Fitzwilliam, Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland, dated 24 January, 1795, in which Jeremiah writes that he had “a wife and four children, of whom three are boys, and the eldest (Hely) only turned twelve years...”. For references to Charlotte’s marriage (to William Deane) and related problems, see O’Meara’s letter to Finlaison, British Library, Mss ADD 20,146, ff. 54-57, dated 22 April, and published in Albert Benhamou, *Inside Longwood: Barry O’Meara’s Clandestine Letters*, London: Albert Benhamou Publishing, pp. 43–48. Barry Edward bequeathed what he had received in inheritance from his brother, Charles Stanhope (who died intestate a major in the 46th (or the South Devonshire) Regt. of Foot), to Charlotte’s two children, Barry O’Meara Deane and Harriet Deane, who in 1835 were not yet 21 years old, see Barry Edward’s will, Public Record office, The National Archives, Prob 11/1864, p. 351r. For a brief account of the life and career of Barry O’Meara Deane (b. 1819), see Rev. Frank Penny, *The Church in Madras. The History of the Ecclesiastical and Missionary Action of the East India Company in the Presidency of Madras from 1835 to 1861*, London: John Murray, 1922, vol. 3, p. 355.

¹⁷ See O’Meara, *An exposition...*, p. 97: “I entered the 62^d regiment, as an assistant surgeon, in the beginning of the year 1804, at the age of eighteen.” Arnold Chaplin, *Napoleon’s captivity on St Helena, 1815-1821. A comprehensive listing of those present including civil, military and naval personnel with biographical details*, London: Savannah Publications, 2002, p. 108, incorrectly gives 1782. The new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-2006, s. v. “O’Meara, Barry Edward”, gives curiously “in or after 1770?”, presumably derived from John O’Hart, *Irish pedigrees; or, The origin and stem of the Irish nation*, Dublin, J. Duffy and Co.; New York, Benziger Brothers, 1892, vol. 1, s. v., “O’Meara”, this a correction (!) of the old DNB’s “1786”. For corroboration of Barry Edward’s statement of his own age (!), see also Turtle Bunbury (http://www.turtlebunbury.com/history/history_irish/roadshow/barryomeara.htm, consulted in June 2013). O’Meara himself unfortunately confuses the situation (on p. 104 of *An Exposition...*) by inferring (incorrectly) that he was 12 at the creation of the Irish Legion (August 1803); he may however be referring to his age at the time of the French attempts to invade Ireland in 1798, which would again place his birth in 1786.

¹⁸ See the Jeremiah’s letter to the Lord Lieutenant General (quoted above, note 13) cited by Turtle Bunbury (http://www.turtlebunbury.com/history/history_irish/roadshow/barryomeara.htm, consulted in June 2013): “The eldest [son] is now reading the second Iliad of Homer and the other two Virgil and Lucian.”

affirmed that he had also studied in London, probably surgery, having studied anatomy in Dublin.¹⁹ At any rate, his training did not last long since he was to start his professional career at the age of eighteen. Following in his father's converted religion, and despite assertions in the new *Dictionary of National Biography* that Barry Edward was a Catholic, we know – because O'Meara himself says so in one of his publications – that he was a protestant.²⁰ At the beginning of 1804 (as O'Meara notes – actually on 25 February), he entered the 62nd Regiment as an assistant surgeon, at the age of eighteen.²¹ In 1806, he served in this capacity with the 1st Battalion of this regiment, first in Egypt under Major General McKenzie Fraser (which saw an ignominious retreat) and then in Sicily. He was subsequently detached (on the recommendation of a certain Mr Green, deputy inspector of hospitals in Messina) to Calabria as senior medical officer to the English forces there under Colonel Robertson.²² After suffering a two-week siege (7-17 February, 1808) in the Castello di Scylla,²³ O'Meara tended the wounded and gave medical assistance during the embarkation under fire as the troops retreated back to Sicily. The twenty-two-year-old assistant surgeon was however to be court-martialled in Messina on 17 June, 1808, “for being the bearer of a challenge from a junior to senior officer on the evening of 27 May [and] and for persevering to repeat that challenge on the 28th and subsequent days of May”, in fact, he had acted as a second in a duel for a school friend, Captain Crookshank.²⁴

On reaching Malta, a letter of recommendation from Mr Green brought him into contact with Admiral Sir Alexander Ball, whereupon O'Meara was made assistant surgeon to the schooner, *Ventura*. Lord Collingwood then appointed O'Meara acting surgeon of the 18-gun sloop of war, *Sabine*, under Captain Donnor, in which capacity he arrived in England at the end of 1809. Unable

¹⁹ See B. E. O'Meara, *Napoleon in Exile or A voice from St. Helena*, London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1822, vol. 1, p. 3: “Where did you study your profession?” [asks Napoleon, *ed.*]. ‘In Dublin and London’ [replies O'Meara, *ed.*]. ‘Which of the two is the best school of physic?’ I replied that I thought Dublin the best school of anatomy, and London of surgery. ‘Oh’, said he, smiling, ‘you say Dublin is the best school of anatomy because you are an Irishman.’ I answered that I begged pardon, that I had said so because it was true; as in Dublin the subjects for dissection were to be procured at a fourth of the price paid for them in London, and the professors were equally as good.” Hubert O'Connor, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9, citing no source, claims that, at the end of 1805, O'Meara “attended various teaching hospitals in London, including St Bartholomew's and Guy's.”

²⁰ See O'Meara, *Napoleon in Exile*, *cit.*, vol. 1, 9 November (p. 197). And continuing this protestant theme in his life, O'Meara's future wife, Theodosia, had previously been married to a renowned Baptist minister, see below.

²¹ This remark in O'Meara, *An exposition...*, is corroborated in *A List of All the Officers of the Army and Royal Marines on Full and Half-pay: With an Index: and a Succession of Colonels*, Great Britain. War Office, vol. 53, 1805, p. 227: “Sixty-second (or the Wiltshire) Regt. of Foot [...] Assistant Surg. Barry Edw. O'Meara, 25 Feb., 1804”.

²² Major Robertson of the 35th Foot distinguished himself at the battle of Maida in 1805 was commander of the garrison in the castle.

²³ See Richard Hopton, *The Battle of Maida, 1806, Fifteen Minutes of Glory*, Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2002, pp. 165–174.

²⁴ The official act of Court Martial was dated “Horse Guards 11 Oct. 1808”. Full details regarding the court martial were published in Charles James, *A Collection of the Charges, Opinions, and Sentences of General Courts Martial: As Published by Authority; from the Year 1795 to the Present Time; Intended to Serve as an Appendix to Tytler's Treatise on Military Law, and Forming a Book of Cases and References; with a Copious Index*, London: T. Egerton, 1820, p. 293 ff. O'Meara himself quoted the charges in a letter (dated “18 Montague-square, Feb 27, 1823”) which he sent to the *Morning Chronicle* and which was published by that newspaper on 3 March, as part of his defence himself against Hudson Lowe and a libellous review of his *Napoleon in exile*.

to continue as acting surgeon for technical reasons, O'Meara then was sent back to the Mediterranean on 74-gun *Victorious* under Captain Sir John Talbot. On reaching Messina, O'Meara was detailed to Captain Coffin's boat in the flotilla, serving against Murat for four months in 1810. On the dispersion of that army, he returned to *Victorious* upon which he served during the taking of the French 74-gun vessel *Rivoli*, seized off Venice in 1811. According to Captain Talbot's dispatch dated 3 March, 1812, "The number of wounded, and the severity of their wounds, has caused Mr Baird, the surgeon, and Mr O'Meara, the only assistant surgeon on board, very great fatigue. Mr O'Meara has passed for a surgeon these last three years and *merits every promotion*" [original italics].²⁵ O'Meara's three years' service as assistant surgeon on *Victorious* led to his being employed in the West Indies during the war of 1812, where he served as senior surgeon successively on *Espiegle* (18 guns), and on *Goliath* (56 guns) and *Bellerophon* (on the latter as ship's surgeon) both under Captain Frederick Maitland (to whom Napoleon surrendered after Waterloo).²⁶ When Napoleon's own surgeon, Louis-Pierre Maingault, refused to accompany him to exile in St. Helena, O'Meara attended the Emperor. Napoleon was impressed by O'Meara's fluency in Italian and requested that he be designated his personal physician.

O'Meara, Napoleon and St Helena

This chance employment was in fact to be O'Meara's moment of destiny. And it was not to be free from controversy. As Napoleon's private doctor, he was in a tricky position, party to Napoleon's private health details, information which in the end was to be politically sensitive, because Napoleon was to attempt to claim poor health induced by a tropical climate as leverage for a return to Europe. The result was that O'Meara - the only person qualified to describe the emperor's health - found himself put under pressure from both the British and the French side at Longwood House. The British held to the line that St. Helena was healthy (only partly true, Jamestown was healthy,

²⁵ Quoted in O'Meara, *An exposition...*, pp. 100–101.

²⁶ O'Meara served under Maitland on *Goliath* and *Bellerophon*, see O'Meara, *Napoleon in Exile, cit.*, vol. 1, p. 6: "It is of no small gratification to me to be able to produce such a testimonial as the following from a captain with whom I served in three different ships. [...] The attention and meritorious conduct of Mr Barry O'Meara, while surgeon with me in the *Goliath*, calls upon me [...] to state, that [...] I have never had the pleasure of sailing with an officer in his situation who so fully answered my expectations." In between *Goliath* and *Bellerophon*, Maitland was appointed to (but never sailed with) the ship *Boyne* in November 1814, see new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004–2006, *s.v.*, "Maitland, Frederick". It is therefore highly possible that O'Meara was likewise appointed to *Boyne*. Maitland's job reference for O'Meara (cited here) is dated 5 November, 1814, and O'Meara (above) says he served with Maitland "on three different ships", i.e., one more in addition to *Goliath* and *Bellerophon* (but not *Espiegle*, which was not captained by Maitland). See also Capt. F. L. Maitland, *Narrative of the Surrender of Buonaparte and of his residence on board H.M.S. Bellerophon; with a detail of the principal events that occurred in that ship between the 24th of May and the 8th of August 1815*, London: Colburn, 2nd ed., 1826, p. 198: "[...] he [O'Meara] had given me so much satisfaction while under my command, that I had procured his removal from two different ships in which he had served with me previous to my appointment to the *Bellerophon*, that he might accompany me".

Longwood plain was very damp and humid) and that Napoleon was in excellent health, and above all that he did not have hepatitis, the disease of the tropics. The French emphasised the poor climate, the poor quality of the food, and Napoleon's poor health brought on by the tropical climate, demanding that he should be repatriated lest he die of tropical diseases and his death be laid at the feet of the British.

This clash of two conflicting policies put O'Meara in an almost impossible position. And O'Meara made it worse by beginning to write to various people, most notably an employee and friend at the Admiralty, John Finlaison, giving accounts of conversations and anecdotes related to the French party at Longwood and life on St Helena. This took place (crucially) unbeknownst to fellow Irishman and governor of the island, Hudson Lowe. Further complicating O'Meara's situation, Finlaison, after having requested permission to receive the letters, also passed them up to his superiors, notably to John Wilson Croker (Secretary at the Admiralty and a government loyalist) and Lord Melville (slightly more liberal). Thus, behind Lowe's back, Lowe's superiors were receiving parallel information regarding not only the French party on St. Helena but also Lowe himself. Though innocuous to begin with, gradually as Napoleon's health deteriorated, these letters took on a fatal importance for O'Meara. O'Meara had also sent some of these communications up to Lowe at Plantation House as an attempt to build bridges with the newly arrived governor. O'Meara had not been appointed by Lowe, who would have preferred his own friend and doctor, Alexander Baxter, to have O'Meara's position. Lowe was also to demand regular bulletins regarding Napoleon's health. Though this troubled O'Meara's professional conscience as a doctor, he complied. As Lowe ramped up his policy to get O'Meara to leave and as O'Meara became more and more embroiled with the French party at Longwood, (performing errands, acting as go-between for them with the governor, explaining when communications between Longwood and Plantation House broke down...), the situation came to a head. From then on, O'Meara refused to collaborate with Lowe and simultaneously started working for Napoleon (notably translating his memoirs).

And with the breakdown of cordial relations between governor and doctor, O'Meara proffered his resignation.²⁷ That being said, O'Meara still had enough credit in London (as a direct result of his

²⁷ The resignation letter was sent on 12 April, 1818. O'Meara's also wrote to Lowe on a similar subject on 10 May, and this letter is quoted *in extenso* in Benhamou, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–148.

correspondence with Finlaison) for his resignation to be refused; indeed, from the way O'Meara behaved after his expulsion from the island – he wrote a long letter to the Admiralty directly accusing the Governor of having asked him to shorten Napoleon's life – he must have been quite confident in this. As late as early May 1818, Bathurst (by then receiving copies of O'Meara's correspondence with Finlaison) wrote to Hudson Lowe telling him to ignore any personal differences he may have with O'Meara and simply to put up with him since Napoleon was content with him as his doctor and not to remove him from Longwood, as it “would be an invidious measure [...] particularly if Bonaparte's health were afterwards to decline so rapidly as to bring him soon to his grave.”²⁸ However, merely two weeks later this position was undermined by Gourgaud's declarations to British minister Goulburn that Napoleon was in fine health (Gourgaud arrived in the British capital on 8 May, 1818). Worse still for O'Meara, Gourgaud also refused “to acquit him [O'Meara] of being privy to that clandestine correspondence which has for so long been carried on between Longwood and Europe.” Bathurst's letter demanding O'Meara's expulsion was dated 16 May, 1818.²⁹ Lowe received that letter on 25 July, 1818. Ordered to leave Longwood the very same day, O'Meara was finally arrested and shipped off the island at the beginning of August 1818.³⁰

Since this part of O'Meara's life has been the most picked over, I have devoted the least time to it. Philippe Gonnard's is still the best and fairest treatment.³¹ Albert Benhamou, a staunch supporter of O'Meara desiring to rehabilitate the Irishman's reputation, has recently published (with commentary) O'Meara's letters to Finlaison. Though this is a very laudable enterprise, and he has uncovered much that is of great interest, he occasionally allows his desire to exonerate O'Meara to force his conclusions.³² Desmond Gregory in *Napoleon's Jailer: Lt Gen. Sir Hudson Lowe, A life*, London: Associated University Presses, 1996, followed the negative line about O'Meara pushed since Hudson Lowe's apologist, William Forsyth.³³ And Hubert O'Connor, who offers no comment for this period in O'Meara's life, published an un-sourced diary – what he calls “a daily record of his

²⁸ Lowe Papers, Add. Mss. 20,122, published partly in Benhamou, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

²⁹ Bathurst's letter to Lowe, Mss. Add. 20,122 fol. 339, published in William Forsyth, *History of the Captivity of Napoleon at St. Helena: From the Letters and Journals of the Late Lieut.-Gen. Sir Hudson Lowe, and Official Documents not before made Public*, London: J. Murray, 1853, two vols. vol. III, p. 399.

³⁰ The naval surgeon James Hall, who was carrying correspondence and coded letters for Napoleon (unbeknownst to himself, so he says) from London, met O'Meara not only on St Helena just before he was arrested but also crossed his path on the island of Ascension when he was being forcibly returned to England on the brig *Griffon*, details on the following web site, <https://sites.google.com/site/kinghallconnections/1800-j-hms-favorite>, consulted in July 2013.

³¹ See above note 1.

³² See here below, note 34. There are also a good number of transcription errors, notably in the Italian expressions, but not only: p. 50 paragraph 1, p. 53 paragraphs 1, 2, 3, p. 54 paragraph 1, p. 56 paragraph 1, p. 58 *passim* including note 135, p. 60 paragraph 2, p. 61 paragraph 3, p. 70 paragraph 2, p. 71 paragraph 3, etc.

³³ William Forsyth, *op. cit.*

doings and conversations with his great patient [...] extracts and summaries from those diaries” – but presumably from previously published material. It is uncritical and unusable.

What would appear to be indisputable is that, over and above the Lowe/O’Meara feud, during his three years on St. Helena, O’Meara emotionally speaking gradually became Napoleon’s man. Gourgaud in his memoirs even claimed that O’Meara took money from Napoleon,³⁴ though Dr Walter Henry, military doctor (assistant surgeon to the 66th) on St Helena during Napoleon’s stay and professional colleague of O’Meara’s,³⁵ in his memoirs emphatically claims that O’Meara was too honest for that. Since in my opinion Dr Henry gives the most succinct and credible account of this period in O’Meara’s life, I have preferred just to let his remarks speak for themselves, as follows:

“There can scarcely be any reasonable doubt entertained, by those at all acquainted with the circumstances of the case, that Mr. O’Meara suffered himself to be cajoled and fascinated into the admirer, adherent, agent and tool of Napoleon.³⁶ I will not say corrupted, for he was of a nature to scorn a pecuniary bribe. Yet in one sense he was corrupted. He was perverted from his proper duty and allegiance, his judgement was warped, his conceptions of right and wrong were weakened and confounded, and his principles undermined, by the blandishments and sophistries of the great Machiavel with whom he held daily converse”;³⁷ of course, not helped by his catastrophic relations with fellow Irishman, the governor.

³⁴ Albert Benhamou (*op. cit.*, p. 219–20) takes issue with this, claiming correctly that in the ms. of Gourgaud’s *Journal* at the Paris Archives Nationales (314 AP 90, fol. 379), in the incriminating sentence “The doctor was never so ‘for’ me [Napoleon] until I gave him my money” (published both in the 1899 or 1944 editions of Gourgaud’s text (mistranslated however by Benhamou (p. 220)), the words “the doctor” do not appear. A space however was left and marked with an underscore – the usual nineteenth-century way of implying that a name had been omitted - followed by the French word “il” (he) – a photograph of the passage in the ms. is published in Benhamou, *op. cit.*, p. 220. However, two remarks must be made: a) the underscore implies a missing name (Benhamou imagines that the “il” could be read as a capital “I” referring to Ibbetson, though if this were the case the “I” really ought to precede the underscore). Furthermore, Benhamou does not attach the sentence to Ibbetson but rather (on p. 211) links it to Balcombe, and if that is the case, the abbreviation should be “B”. Whatever the situation, the meaning is clear; the English can all be bought and one in particular has been bought by Napoleon; and b) the text in the 1944 edition (in its words but not sense) is relatively different from that in the ms., perhaps a sign that there was more than one ms. copy of Gourgaud’s *Journal*, something which would explain the variants and the completion of the blank with “Le docteur”. That Gourgaud cannot have much liked O’Meara is shown by the fact that when Gourgaud arrived in London (he had left St. Helena in March 1818), he loudly proclaimed that Napoleon’s illness (noted by O’Meara) was a fake and that the Emperor was in fact fine, see Jacques Macé, *Le Général Gourgaud*, Paris: Fondation Napoléon/Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2006, pp. 313–322. Indeed, these remarks provided Hudson Lowe with the final piece he needed in his attempts to remove O’Meara from the island.

³⁵ O’Meara proposed calling upon Henry (and other medical men on St. Helena) to aid in diagnosis of Napoleon’s illness on 10 July, see O’Meara’s letter to the Admiralty dated 20 October, 1818, (published in Benhamou, *op. cit.*, p. 187).

³⁶ See also Capt. F. L. Maitland, *op. cit.*, pp. v–vi, on the almost irresistible nature of Napoleon’s charm when coupled with pity and regret that a man so able should fall so low: “It may appear surprising, that a possibility could exist of a British officer being prejudiced in favour of one who had caused so many calamities to his country; but to such an extent did he [Napoleon] possess the power of pleasing, that there are few people who could have sat at the same table with him for nearly a month, as I did, without feeling a sensation of pity, allied perhaps to regret, that a man possessed of so many fascinating qualities, and who had held so high a station in life, should be reduced to the situation in which I saw him.”

³⁷ Walter Henry, *Events of a military life*, London: Pickering, 1843, 2 vols, vol. II, p. 42–4.

And Henry to continue (quite accurately):

“Mr O’Meara was dismissed from the British service for having officially insinuated that Sir Hudson Lowe had suborned him to poison Buonaparte, or sounded him respecting such a crime, nine or ten months before he made the communication to the government. The secretary to the Admiralty said, ‘You have either fabricated this most grave accusation, or it is true. If the charge is false, you are unworthy to remain in the service; if, on the other hand, the horrid and improbable imputation is true, you have grossly violated your duty in concealing such an atrocity so long.’ Now I do not perceive any way of escape from this dilemma.”³⁸

And despite the fact that O’Meara did indeed have support in high places, it was not enough to save him from being expunged from the service. Henry again gives the details:

“I have been informed since, on authority which I cannot doubt, that Mr O’Meara had a friend in London, the private secretary of Lord M[elvi]lle,³⁹ who found it convenient to have a correspondent in St. Helena, then a highly interesting spot, who should give him all the gossip of the Island for the First Lord of the Admiralty, to be sported in a higher circle afterwards for the Prince Regent’s amusement. The patronage of Lord M[elvi]lle was thus secured; and Mr. O’Meara, confident in this backing, stood out stiffly against Sir Hudson Lowe. The latter was quite ignorant of this intrigue against the proper exercise of his authority; and when he discovered it afterwards, he found it was a delicate matter to meddle with, and affecting, possibly, the harmony of the ministry. Even after the development of the vile poisoning charge against the Governor, the influence of the first lord was exerted to screen O’Meara, but in vain; for Lord Liverpool exclaimed, as in another well known instance, of a very different description, ‘It is too bad!’”⁴⁰

The fight with Hudson Lowe, which led to O’Meara’s dismissal, merely served to push the doctor further into Napoleonist activities. Starting even before his return to England, O’Meara was to publish works in support of Napoleon,⁴¹ he was to translate and have published Napoleon’s

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ It was surely this fact that gave O’Meara the confidence to stand up to Hudson Lowe.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Letters from the Cape of Good Hope, in reply to Mr. Warden; with extracts from the great work now compiling for publication under the inspection of Napoleon. The third edition.* [The preface signed: C-, i.e. B. E. O’Meara.], London: James Ridgway, 1817.

memoir on Waterloo,⁴² and he was to be offered a pension by Napoleon's mother Letizia and brother Joseph (see below). Indeed, almost immediately after being struck off the navy rolls, O'Meara was to find his financial salvation in supporting Napoleon. Henry gives fascinating details about O'Meara's life post-St Helena and after the publication of *A voice from St. Helena*. Henry again:

“Still O'Meara has had his reward. He is now beyond the reach of praise or blame,⁴³ but it can scarcely be deemed harsh or uncharitable to say, that his conduct at St. Helena made him very popular with the liberal section of politicians. He has been embalmed in a couplet by Lord Byron,⁴⁴ was pensioned deservedly by the Buonaparte family, admitted to the affections of a rich old lady on account of his politics, and again largely pensioned by his doting wife; besides being admired, quoted, and panegyricized by all the Buonapartists yet extant, all the Levellers, Jacobins, and Radicals, and a large proportion of the Democrats and Republicans in the world.”⁴⁵

O'Meara, the Napoleonist: Napoleon in exile or A voice from St Helena

Napoleon died on 5 May, 1821. And as had been expected (even by Napoleon himself), those who had been in close contact with French ex-emperor on St Helena began approaching publishers with the aim of seeing their diaries of the St Helena experience appear in print. Barry O'Meara's *Napoleon in exile or A voice from St Helena* was the first to be published. Whilst it would appear true that the book was a financial exercise, the Irishman also had an agenda. As he outlined in a letter (to Julie Bonaparte, wife of Napoleon's elder brother, Joseph Bonaparte) written in 1823: “the prime reason for the publication of the book was to defend the reputation of the late emperor [...] and to refute the frightful calumnies with which our ministers and their paid agents tried to sully his

⁴² *Historical Memoirs of Napoleon, Book IX, 1815, translated from the original ms. by B. E. O'Meara, with an appendix that the pretended manuscript from St. Helena was not written by Napoleon*, London: Sir Richard Phillips and co., 1820. O'Meara also saw into publication the French version, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France en 1815, avec le plan de la bataille de Mont-Saint-Jean*, Paris: 1820. In his letter to Joseph Bonaparte dated 4 February, 1820 (Wellcome Library, see below note 66), O'Meara recorded how he had brought the manuscript for this book back from St Helena (« ouvrage dicté par l'Empereur, qu'il m'a donné en partant de Longwood ») and how he had had the text published in London, Paris and in the Netherlands, see below, though in the publication (more circumspectly, since he had been expelled from St. Helena for being too close to the French) O'Meara claimed that he had received in October 1818, in other words, on his arrival in London and therefore had not brought it back with him from St. Helena.

⁴³ By the time Henry's memoirs were published, O'Meara was dead.

⁴⁴ In his poem, *The Age of Bronze*, Canto 3, line 79: “And the stiff surgeon, who maintain'd his cause, Hath lost his place, and gained the world's applause”.

⁴⁵ Henry, *op cit.*, vol. II, p. 44.

memory and also to give a picture of this great man, full of noble courage, expiring under the talons of that monster, half monkey, half tiger whom they chose to be his jailer.”⁴⁶

On publication day (the first edition was issued in 1822 by Simpkin Marshall and Co., at their offices in Stationer’s Hall on Ludgate Hill, London),⁴⁷ *Napoleon in Exile* caused such a stir that the small courtyard in front of the building was mobbed, and the police had to be brought in to control the crowds.⁴⁸ The book was a huge success, running into three editions in the first year of publication.⁴⁹ Less than a year after signing the contract O’Meara had received £1,350; and he had kept for himself the rights for foreign-language translations.⁵⁰ There were naturally to be certain temporary financial setbacks. In mid-1822, O’Meara was fined 500 pounds for taking a horsewhip against a man he took for the owner of *The Times* newspaper,⁵¹ and at the end of 1825 and beginning of 1826 he suffered “considerable temporary embarrassment” on the failure of Sir Walter Stirling’s bank.⁵² But his financial worries were to be soothed by his Napoleonism. His support of the emperor on St Helena brought him pensions, not only 8,100 francs from Madame Mère⁵³ but also 1,200 francs from Joseph in 1819, not to mention a grant of 2,370 francs 36 from Prince Eugène.⁵⁴ So from possible penury resulting from having been kicked out of the navy, O’Meara was back on the road to financial security.⁵⁵ And his marriage to Theodosia Boughton/Beauchamp was to

⁴⁶ O’Meara to Julie Bonaparte, 18 June, 1823, letter on sale in March 2011 at Maggs Brothers Ltd, 80 Berkeley Square, London, reference AU5383. Though Love attempted to sue O’Meara for what he considered the libel against him in the book, the case was thrown out on a technicality, details in the legal section of the newspaper *Examiner* (London: 1808), 823 (1823: Nov. 9) p. 730.

⁴⁷ The book contract, published in Joseph Shaylor, *The Fascination of Books: with other papers on Books & Bookselling*, London: Simpkin Marshall Hamilton Kent and Co Ltd, 1912, pp. 208–214, bears the date, 5 July, 1822.

⁴⁸ See Shaylor, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁴⁹ By 17 March 1824, 10,000 copies of the book had been published, see Shaylor, *op. cit.*, p. 214. Thomas Creevey M.P., 21 July, 1822, in *The Creevey papers: a selection from the correspondence & diaries of Thomas Creevey, M.P., born 1768 - died 1838*; edited by Sir Herbert Maxwell, London: John Murray: 1904, (quoted in O’Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 193) expressed his enthusiasm as follows: “I wonder whether you will be anything like as much interested by O’Meara and Buonaparte as I have been and am still. I can think of nothing else... I am perfectly satisfied Buonaparte said everything O’Meara puts into his mouth. Whether *that* is true is another thing...”

⁵⁰ The book was published in three French editions.

⁵¹ Since O’Meara had written in *Napoleon in Exile* that Napoleon had said that *The Times* could be bribed, *The Times* called O’Meara a liar. Upon his exacting revenge on the wrong man (William Walter instead of John Walter, his brother and the owner of *The Times*), O’Meara appeared in court on 22 July, 1822, and made a complete and unreserved apology. William Walter accepted this, and O’Meara was bound over to keep the peace and fined £500, see “Mr. Walter and Mr. Barry O’Meara”, *Calcutta Journal of Politics and General Literature*, 1:5 (1823: Jan. 6) p. 76.

⁵² Letter for sale: Barry E. O’Meara to Baron Emmanuel de Las Cases in Paris, 2-1/5 pages, 4to, [London], February 8, 1826. He writes, “I am much obliged to you for the introduction of your sensible and well informed friend Dr. Grimaud. I introduced him to Mr. Lawrence, who felt great pleasure in conducting him through St. Bartholomew hospital (to which he is surgeon)... Mr. Lawrence speaks very highly of the pamphlet upon artificial anatomical preparations and expresses his conviction of their ultimately becoming of great utility in this country, where subjects are so very difficult to procure... I am much obliged by your kind offer of your services in making an application to [French financier] M. Laffitte, which I accept with great pleasure, more especially as I am suffering under considerable temporary embarrassment, caused by the failure of Sir Walter Stirling’s bank...”

⁵³ D.-J. Larrey, *Madame Mère, Napoleon’s mother: essai historique*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1892, vol. 2, p. 224, Letter from Madame Mère to Joseph Bonaparte, Rome 14 April, 1820: “Je vous disais encore que nous nous étions réunis, dans la famille, pour accorder une pension de 8,100 francs au docteur O’Meara, et que nous en accordions une au docteur Stokoe”. Indeed, O’Meara was to remain on friendly terms with Napoleon’s mother in Rome. In 1829, O’Meara in London wrote a letter to Cardinal Fesch recommending a certain General Warren to him (soon to visit Italy) and sending his respects to Madame Mère. Letter sold by AuctionArt, Rémy le Fur et associés Cirque d’Hiver Bouglione - 110 rue Amelot 75011 Paris, on Wednesday 4 July, 2012, “Autographes N°181 SAINTE-HÉLÈNE - LES MÉDECINS”, a) Barry Edward O’MEARA, ALS, 2 pages, small in-4, in Italian, dated London, March 1829, to Cardinal Fesch.

⁵⁴ See Frédéric Masson, *Napoléon et sa famille*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1919, vol. XIII, p. 133.

⁵⁵ As another financial sideline, O’Meara also launched his own brand of tooth powder, see Masson, *op. cit.*, pp. 133–4.

bring him financial independence. As with all events in Barry Edward's life after his fateful meeting with Napoleon, it was by no means an ordinary one. The groom was 37 and the bride, twice-married, ex-Baptist minister's wife, Dame Theodosia Anna Maria Boughton, was 66! Lady Leigh (from her second marriage to "the preaching Baronet", Sir Egerton Leigh, 2nd Baronet⁵⁶) sometimes she called herself Beauchamp from her mother's maiden name.⁵⁷ The wedding took place on 10 February, 1823. This was done at Theodosia's house (possibly in Montague Square).⁵⁸ They were only to be married for seven years since she was to die on 14 January, 1830. It would appear that they met as a result of political affinities and that theirs was a "marriage of minds" – Theodosia did not take O'Meara's name and was buried alongside her second husband (not her third). Henry noted it,⁵⁹ and Hubert O'Connor asserts that Theodosia came to hear Barry O'Meara give an after dinner speech and was charmed.⁶⁰ In confirmation of Barry Edward's financial security, on the death of his wife in 1830 she apparently settled a thousand a year on him,⁶¹ and he moved into a fitting residence in "Tyburnia", London, in the recently-built Italianate Cambridge Terrace off Edgeware Road at No. 16,⁶² definitely not a chic area but one which was up and coming. His (not necessarily

⁵⁶ For Rev. Sir Egerton Leigh, "the Preaching Baronet", and his career as a trail-blazing Baptist minister, see Alan Betteridge, *Deep Roots, Living Branches: A History of Baptists in the English Western Midlands*, Leicester: Matador/Troubador, 2010, p. 103–105 and *The Baronetage of England*, London: Stockdale, 1806, p. 345. See also "History of the Baptist Churches in connection with the Leicestershire Association", part VIII "Rugby" in *The Baptist Magazine for 1866*, ed. Rev. W. G. Lewis: London: Elliot Stock, vol. LVIII (series V. vol. X.), 1866, pp. 13–14, and the website <http://www.rugbybaptist.org.uk/history/history.php>, consulted in June 2013.

⁵⁷ See "Theodosia Anna Maria Boughton (127234)" on the website, *W.H. Auden, Family Ghosts*, <http://www.stanford.edu/group/auden/cgi-bin/auden/individual.php?pid=127234&ged=auden-bicknell.ged>, consulted in June 2013. It can be read, and family lore maintains, that this was Barry O'Meara's second marriage. I have however found no documentary evidence for a first marriage. However, in his will (Public Record office, The National Archives, Prob 11/1864, p. 351r-v), he bequeathed items to two different women, both married, namely Sophia Teste Faro, wife of William Faro esq. Surgeon, now resident in or near Geneva, and Anne Isabella/Isabel Anne Jones (Mrs Cotton). These items were exceptionally precious and some of which he had received from Napoleon and his family. To Sophia were to be given a small brilliant pin with Napoleon's hair in it, a brilliant ring, a cameo (from Napoleon's mother) and a bronze statue (from Napoleon); O'Meara also appointed one of his will executors as one of Sophia's executors. To Isabella, he bequeathed £100 and a painting of a cock in the drawing room. And should O'Meara's nephew and niece die, their heirlooms were to be divided into three parts, two being given to Sophia and one to Isabella. It is not clear who these women were.

⁵⁸ According to the burial register for the church of Newbold on Avon - St. Botolph, Warwickshire, at No 279, Theodosia was buried (presumably alongside her second husband Sir Egerton Leigh (Bar't), noted in the register at no. 98) on 20 January, 1830, under the name "Theodosia Beauchamp (Dame) Wife of Barry Omeara Esqur. LEIGH (her second husband's name), Aged 73 Address: Brownsover [Hall, Newbold on Avon], & Montague Square, London." See http://www.hunimex.net/warwick/bmd/newbold_burials_1800-1882.html, consulted in July 2013. Her obituary in the *Annual Register [...] of the year 1830*, London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1831, vol. 72, p. 250, appears as follows: "Early in the present year died Theodosia Beauchamp, wife of Barry E. O'Meara, esq. styling herself lady Leigh O'Meara. She was the only daughter of Sir Edward Boughton, the sixth baronet of Lawford, in Warwickshire, by his second wife, Anna Maria, daughter and heiress of _____ Beauchamp, esq. She was first married, in 1777, to captain John Donellan, who was hung at Warwick, April 4, 1781, for having, in the hope of inheriting the fortune, poisoned his wife's only brother, sir Theodosius Edward Allesley Boughton. This he effected by some prussic acid distilled by himself from laurel leaves, which he contrived should be administered, in lieu of medicine, by the mother of his victim. Inheriting the fortune her first husband had thus procured her, her second husband was Sir Egerton Leigh bart. He died at Bath April 27, 1818 aged 56; and his widow bestowed her hand in Feb. 1823 on Barry E; O'Meara esq. former surgeon of the Bellerophon, and the well-known medical attendant on Napoleon at St Helena."

⁵⁹ See above.

⁶⁰ O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 196. Further evidence that this was a marriage of convenience might be seen in the Old Bailey Trial of 13 September, 1827 (*The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, Ref: t18270913-71, http://www.hronline.ac.uk/oldbailey/html_units/1820s/t18270913-71.html, consulted in July 2013) in which O'Meara prosecuted two men for stealing watch-seals worth 10 shillings. The thieves were acquitted, "the property having been conveyed over to trustees for the sole benefit of Lady Theodosia Beauchamp Leigh, and the prosecutor having no controul [*sic*] over it".

⁶¹ See O'Meara's obituary in *The Medico-Chirurgical Review and Journal of Practical Medicine* (New Series) vol. 25 (1st April to 30th September) 1836, vol. V of Decennial Series, ed. James Johnson and Henry James Johnson, London: S. Highley, p. 286. The obituary also notes that Theodosia was seen by the same Doctor Johnson who attended Barry Edward's last days. She died of a "hypertrophy of the heart".

⁶² Grand Junction Street (a tree-lined avenue) was bordered by carriage roads called Cambridge Terrace to the north and Oxford Terrace to the south. This road complex was presumably complete by the late 1820s. See: "Paddington: Tyburnia", *A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 9: Hampstead, Paddington* (1989),

contemporary) neighbours included the Napoleon-obsessed painter Benjamin Haydon, the engineer Robert Stephenson, and William Makepeace Thackeray, author of the “Napoleonic” novel *Vanity Fair*, who lived there with his parents.

But O’Meara’s devotion to the Emperor was not simply out of financial expediency. His activity in Napoleonist circles was to continue long after the island episode. Daniel O’Connell dined with O’Meara in July 1823 and noted: “We dined with him at Lyons. He is a plain, unaffected young man, greatly attached to the memory of the unfortunate great man.”⁶³ The Whig politician and commentator, Thomas Creevey also noted how much O’Meara had fallen for Napoleon.⁶⁴ In fact, the Bonapartist poet Heine was to baptise O’Meara as one of the evangelists of St Helena.⁶⁵ And this evangelism (which was to last the rest of his life) was all to pass through the channel of Napoleon’s elder brother, Joseph.

O’Meara and Joseph

The first existing letter from O’Meara to Joseph was written on 4 February, 1820.⁶⁶ It gives a wealth of detail concerning Napoleon’s entourage on St Helena and also contacts between O’Meara and the Napoleonic world. O’Meara had been (he says) to meet Albine de Montholon on her arrival in Europe, then pursued a ‘long and perilous voyage on the emperor’s business’. On learning the necessary details from Albine, he delivered the letters she bore from St Helena to Prince Lucien (he says he met him on 19 October, presumably in Canino). He spent the month of December in Rome where he met Madame Mère (who attributed him a pension) and the Princess Pauline who was suffering from a liver complaint. Cardinal Fesch was well, as was Lucien and his family. O’Meara had suggested that Madame write a letter to Parliament demanding that her son be removed from St Helena because of his illness and the poor climate. The Irishman had a mysterious meeting in

pp. 190–98. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=22664&strquery=paddington%20green>. Date accessed: July 2013. The address of O’Meara’s house is however wrongly given there as “32” – his will gives No. 16.

⁶³ Maurice R. O’Connell, *The Correspondence of Daniel O’Connell* (8 vol.), Dublin, 1972-1980, vol. 3.

⁶⁴ Creevey, *op. cit.*, 24 August, 1822: “Robert Ferguson tells me that he has seen a great deal of Major Poppleton lately, the officer of the 53rd who was stationed about Bonaparte. Bob says Poppleton is quite as devoted to Nap, and as adverse to Lowe as O’Meara, and that all the officers of the 53rd were the same... Poppleton has a beautiful snuff-box poor Nap gave him. What would I give to have such a keepsake from him, and, above all, to have seen him. O’Meara has a *tooth* of his he drew, which he always carried about with him...”

⁶⁵ Heinrich Heine, *Reisebilder*, “Ideen. Das Buch Le Grand”, Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1827, chapter 9.

⁶⁶ Letter from O’Meara to Joseph, dated 3 Lyons Inn, London, 4 February, 1820, Welcome Institute, London, 67125.

Florence (was this with Louis or Jerome?) He learned of the arrival on St Helena of Antommarchi and the Corsican priests and St Helena news up to 25 November. Napoleon, though not recovered, was much better. O'Meara also suggested to Madame Mère how to ensure a secure ally in Parliament – “the elections six months after the king's death would be a propitious moment”, he opined. O'Meara noted to Joseph that he would send the latter *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire de France ou Mémoires de Napoléon, ouvrage dicté par l'Empereur*, given to him on St Helena and which he had had published in Paris, London and the Netherlands. O'Meara had a letter to Las Cases published in all the London and Netherlands papers in October 1818. He ended the letter giving the impression that Joseph had sent him money and stating that Joseph could always count on his devotion and fidelity, and that he could always depend upon him to act in his and the emperor's service. We learn from a subsequent letter that Joseph had indeed promised O'Meara a pension, starting in 1819, as compensation for the loss of his navy salary. In the Irishman's letter of 1823 to Joseph's wife, Julie, we learn that O'Meara had been promised an annual pension of 1,200 francs.⁶⁷

There must have been contact between O'Meara and Joseph over the years, but the only hint of this we have is a letter written at the beginning of 1832, when Joseph was still in the planning stages for his return to Europe from the US. In a communication between O'Meara and the publisher R. Marshall, the Irishman notes that wants to send copies of the French version of his *Napoleon in exile* to the emperor's brother “en suite” in other words in agreement with the Count, thereby implying previous contact.⁶⁸ O'Meara was at that moment simultaneously pursuing Napoleonist agendas in parallel with Napoleon supporters in France. In the introduction to his short volume of observations on the memoirs of Bourrienne,⁶⁹ O'Meara relates how he was “during a few weeks' residence at Paris, in December last”. Paris was in ferment with the arrival of Louis Philippe, and in

⁶⁷ O'Meara to Julie Bonaparte, 18 June, 1823, letter on sale in March 2011 at Maggs Brothers Ltd, 80 Berkeley Square, London, reference AU5383: “Your Majesty . . . was good enough to bestow on me an annual pension of 1,200 francs for life (as compensation for the loss of my pension due for services to the Royal Navy) commencing in 1819. If I am not mistaken, I believe I only twice had the benefit of your generosity, in 1819 and 1820. Therefore please allow me, Madame, to take the liberty of now drawing those pensions for the years 1821, 1822 and the current year in three letters of change of 1200 francs each, in order to deal with the heavy expenses which this case has incurred for me.”

⁶⁸ Letter dated 2 January, 1832, on sale at Sothebans Bookshop, London, in March 2011.

⁶⁹ B. E. O'Meara, *Observations upon the Authenticity of Bourrienne's memoirs of Napoleon*, London: Ridgeway, 1831, pp. 1–2. This book would appear to have been an attempt to bolster, in English, the effect of the French and Belgian editions of *Bourrienne et ses erreurs volontaires et involontaires ou observations sur ses mémoires; par messieurs le général Belliard, le général Gourgaud, le comte d'Aure, le comte de Surveilliers, le baron de Meneval, le comte Bonacossi, le prince d'Eckmuhl, le baron Massias, le comte Boulay de la Meurthe, le ministre Stein, Cambacérès. Recueillies par A. B.[uloz]*, Paris: Heideloff, 1830, Bruxelles: Hauman et cie, 1831. O'Meara implies that a republication of Bourrienne's memoirs in 1830 was essentially negative to the Napoleonist cause, indeed he interprets it as a sort of act of political aggression against a Napoleonist party in full effervescence in France: “I was fully convinced of its [the republication of Bourrienne's memoirs] being a book-making speculation, auspicated by the Legitimates, and “got up” for the united purposes of profit and malignity.”

the autumn and winter of 1830 Napoleonists thought that perhaps then was the time to put Napoleon's son on a throne in France.⁷⁰

Joseph, Napoleon's brother, had arrived in Liverpool on 16 August, 1832, moving immediately to London, initially renting a residence in central London, but later moving out of the city, first to Marden Park in the summer of 1833 and then to Denham Place near Uxbridge in the summer of 1834 (to avoid the cholera in the city),⁷¹ at which O'Meara was a visitor.⁷² Indeed, in the draught manuscript version of his biography of Joseph,⁷³ Louis Mailliard, Joseph's factotum,⁷⁴ notes for the year 1832, "The doctor Barry O'Meara, Napoleon's doctor on St Helena, came to offer his services and placed himself entirely at his disposal. He became greatly attached to Joseph and immediately became very useful to him." In 1833, for example, (notes Mailliard) O'Meara introduced the "patriot" Daniel O'Connell to Joseph. And O'Connell managed to get Joseph to agree to travel in Ireland. Furthermore, in his *Souvenirs et notes 1833 et 1834 au 31 mai 1835*, Mailliard also noted O'Meara's presence with Joseph as follows:

"28 March, 1833, General Romarino came. We met him at O'Meara's house.

18 July, 1833, We went with O'Meara to take another look at Marden Park [...]. In the end we decide to take it.

18 July, 1833, We went with O'Meara to the bookseller, Murray, to get some information regarding the letters from the allied sovereigns, which they say were sold in London in 1818 or 1819. These letters were the originals. We do not know what happened to the copies which the emperor mentioned to O'Meara. The originals had remained, following his order, in the hand (house?) of the Duc de Bassano in 1815.

15 October, 1833, We went to Brighton with Monsieur and O'Meara.

17 October, 1833, Monsieur and O'Meara went to London, and from there to Colonel R.W. Clayton in Marlow.

⁷⁰ See P. Hicks, "Joseph Bonaparte and the 'Réunion de famille' of 1832-33", *Napoleonica. La Revue* 2/2010 (N° 8), pp. 30-52.

⁷¹ Michael Ross, *The reluctant king: Joseph Bonaparte, King of the Two Sicilies and Spain*, New York, Mason/Charter, 1977, p. 268 wrongly gives the address as Godstone in Surrey.

⁷² An entry in Joseph's diary dated 16 January, 1834, (quoted in *Mémoires et correspondance politique et militaire du roi Joseph/publiés, annotés et mis en ordre par A. du Casse*. - 2^e éd. pour tomes I à IX. -; Paris: Perrotin, 1854-1855, vol. 10, p. 240, note 2) gives as follows: "At Midday I received Monsieur O'Meara and with him the general Mina".

⁷³ Mailliard's diary, Library of Yale University, New Haven, "Papers of Louis Mailliard", Ms 341, Journals of 1833-1835, 1840, 1841, Box 7 folder 80.

⁷⁴ Louis Mailliard was Joseph's "valet de chambre de confiance", in other words, his gentleman's gentleman, from 1815 until Joseph's death in 1844 (and after, as recipient in his will and friend of the family). Louis Mailliard's Journal 1815-1869 (in French), manuscript 6 volumes, is held apparently in Yale University library. He died in 1869. Occasional details about him appear in Gabriel Girod de l'Ain, *Joseph Bonaparte: le Roi malgré lui*, Paris: Perrin, 1970, 468 p, notably what Mailliard received as per Joseph's will, and the adventure in which Joseph exiled in the US sent Mailliard to Prangins (Switzerland) to dig up diamonds which Joseph had buried there to bring them to the US, pp. 330, 357-8, and 429-441.

November, 1833, We went to Windsor picking up O'Meara en passant in London. We arrived at 8pm and stay at the White Hart hotel, which was bad and expensive.⁷⁵ O'Meara wrote to Napoleonist, Ida de St Elme,⁷⁶ from London on 16 May, 1834.⁷⁷ And Ida came to see Joseph at Denham place in spring 1835 to try to sell him the correspondence of Louis Philippe.⁷⁸

Joseph furthermore was on occasions a guest at O'Meara's house.⁷⁹ In his will, O'Meara refers to a marble group and three paintings belonging to Joseph which were in O'Meara's house and which were to be returned to Joseph.⁸⁰ An autograph O'Meara letter published in *The Century Magazine* to Mailliard (dated simply "Saturday Night, May 2")⁸¹ reveals O'Meara's involvement in Napoleonist party affairs, in close collaboration with Mailliard.⁸² On 11 January, 1835, Mailliard noted that O'Meara was ill. On 3 March, 1835, Mailliard noted that they dined at O'Meara's house with the famous cameo engraver, and officer at the royal mint, Petrucci. On 11 March, O'Meara accompanied Mailliard to visit the doctor Johnston for Mailliard's liver and spleen complaint. On 12 March, Joseph and Mailliard visited John Soane's House, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and also John Sainsbury at his house at 35 Red Lyon's Square, John Sainsbury "who has a collection of all things related to the Empire and the Emperor Napoleon".⁸³ On 19 March, 1835, the Duke of Sutherland went to O'Meara's house to see the Joseph's antique marble group there with Baron von Bulow – he found it beautiful. On 6 April and 16 April, 1835, Joseph was again at O'Meara's house. On 1 and 2 May, 1835, Napoleon's bastard son the Comte Léon (who had just arrived from Paris) was at O'Meara's house. Mailliard notes: "he has no real plans – these people are all crazy!" (according to Mailliard,

⁷⁵ Mailliard's diary, Library of Yale University, New Haven, «Papers of Louis Mailliard», Ms 341, Journals of 1833-1835, 1840, 1841, Box 7 folder 80.

⁷⁶ An eccentric figure renowned for her love for Marshal Ney and for her possession of autographs of Napoleon's letters to Josephine, her real name was Maria Elselina Johanna Versvelt, though she was also known as Elzélina van Aylde Jonghe or Vanayl de Yonghe. She was born in Lith, Noord-Brabant 27 September, 1776 and she died in Brussels 19, May, 1845. Living in London in the early 1820s she had relations both with the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and also the Shakespeare actor Edmund Kean. Back in Paris in 1824, she published her (exceedingly successful) 8-volume *Mémoires d'une contemporaine* in 1827-28. Her *Une contemporaine en Égypte*, 1831, was less successful. After the *Trois Glorieuses*, she published *Mille et une causeries* (1833) which was countered by Vicomte de Toucheboeuf-Clermont with his book *Mille et unième calomnie de la Contemporaine* (1834). In March to September 1836 she published from London a Bonapartist paper entitled, *La caricature française*, which included much criticism of Louis-Philippe and publication of letters written by him in 1807 critical of France. Full details here <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/DVN/lemmata/data/versfelt>, consulted July 2013.

⁷⁷ Letter cited in Sainsbury, John, *The Napoleon museum. The history of France illustrated from Louis XIV to the end of the reign and death of the Emperor, comprising: marbles, bronzes, carvings, gems, decorations, medallions, drawings, miniatures, portraits, pictures... etc. collected... and described by John Sainsbury*. London, 1845, p. 595.

⁷⁸ Mailliard, *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ Mailliard's diary, Library of Yale University, New Haven, «Papers of Louis Mailliard», Ms 341, Journals of 1833-1835, 1840, 1841, Box 7 folder 80, records two visits in July 1834, one in August and then O'Meara accompanies Joseph to the dentist.

⁸⁰ A marble group which stood in O'Meara's back drawing room and three paintings, *The Boar at Bay*, *The Creation*, by Ingres, and a *Battle*, by Giulio Romano, which hung in his "Pantheon", all belonged to Joseph; see O'Meara's will, Public Records Office, National Archives, Prob 11/1864, p. 351r.

⁸¹ "Talks with Napoleon", *The Century Magazine*, vol. LIX, (Feb. 1900), no. 4, unnumbered illustration.

⁸² In the letter O'Meara makes reference to a serious party dispute. Comparison to a reference by Mailliard in his diary, Library of Yale University, New Haven, «Papers of Louis Mailliard», Ms 341, Journals of 1833-1835, 1840, 1841, Box 7 folder 80, date May 3, 1834, makes it possible to date this letter to 1834 – May 3 « Nous allons à Londres pour régler une mauvaise dispute entre M. Lethiere et le Prince de Canino. Nous réussissons complètement moyennant de l'argent. Notre patron est vraiment bien tourmenté par les siens et ses prétendus amis. Que ne sommes-nous tranquilles à P. Breeze ! Je n'augure rien de bon de notre séjour ici ! »

⁸³ *Id.*, 12 March, 1835.

the Comte Léon and his associate architect Mr David had an insane plan to buy some land and found a Napoleonville). On 3 May, O'Meara wrote to Mailliard noting that the Comte Léon had become angry after Joseph's departure the day before and refused to go to Denham. On 9 May, O'Meara told Mailliard that the Comte Léon had left for Portugal and that he spoken badly about Joseph. In June, O'Meara wrote to Mailliard,⁸⁴ noting that the Comte Léon had indeed gone to Portugal but was returning to England on the next steamer. No attention had been paid to him in the country, despite letters of introduction. The Comte Léon's aim had been to get married, but O'Meara thought this unlikely. As for the impending arrival of the count, in his postscript to Mailliard, O'Meara noted humorously "I think I had better "not be at home" when somebody arrives." O'Meara was never to see Mailliard or Joseph ever again since Joseph left London on 8 September 1835, only returning in August 1836, by which time however O'Meara had died. Seven months before his death (26 November, 1835), O'Meara wrote to John Sainsbury to praise his Napoleonic collection, then on show in Piccadilly.⁸⁵

Amongst O'Meara's final public political acts - in addition to support for Daniel O'Connell and his pursuit of Catholic Emancipation - was his participation in the founding of the Westminster Reform Club. O'Meara was in fact a committee member of the club in its founding year of 1836. The new club was the brain child of Edward Ellice (1783-1863), a Whig whip whose main interest had been the securing the passage of the Reform Act 1832, for members of both Houses of Parliament. It was meant to be a centre for the radical ideas which that bill represented. And indeed, it was this political activism which was to cause Barry Edward's demise.⁸⁶

O'Meara's death

O'Meara's death, like his birth is a matter of controversy. Chaplin,⁸⁷ agreeing with the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Annual Register*⁸⁸ (which the old and new DNB follow) gave the date

⁸⁴ Letter in amongst Mailliard papers, *Id.*

⁸⁵ Facsimile of the letter published in Sainsbury, John, *op. cit.*, p. 597 and plate 40.

⁸⁶ O'Meara was active in liberal circles almost immediately on his return from St Helena, as noted by Henry, above. In 1821, Thomas Moore spotted him in Paris in the autumn working with liberal lawyers for the Queen's divorce: Earl John Russell (ed.), *Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore: Diary*, Boston: Little, Brown, and co., 1853, Volume 3, p. 151. On 25th Sept, 1821, he recorded that O'Meara was in Paris "on Queen's business, forwarding witnesses, etc. etc."

⁸⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁸⁸ *Annual Register* for 1836, volume 78 (1837), p. 205.

of demise as 3rd June, 1836. The burial records for O'Meara (which do not record death date) are also given by Chaplin. He notes that the church was St Mary's Church Paddington Green. The Burial register for the church for the year 1836 (p. 227) gives as follows: "Name: Barry Edward O'Meara (Surgeon for Napoleon); Abode: 16 Cambridge Terrace;⁸⁹ When buried: June 18th; Age: 54; By whom: J. G. Giffard, Curate."⁹⁰ The death date of 3rd June however must be incorrect since in O'Meara's will, one of executors, William Holmes, claims to have visited O'Meara "on or about the fifth day of June last during the illness of which he died",⁹¹ and the obituary in *The Medico-Chirurgical Review, and Journal of Practical Medicine* (Vol. 25, 1836, p. 286, dated "July 1st", i.e., very shortly after death) gives the more likely date of 10 June.⁹² The obituary in medical journal offers details of how O'Meara stood too close to an open window, "through which a current of cold easterly wind was constantly entering" at a public meeting for Daniel O'Connell held at a tavern called the Crown and Anchor.⁹³ Since the room itself was crowded and hot, noted the obituary, he got a chill. O'Meara first assumed that he was having one of his usual attacks of "pulmonic inflammation", for which he had himself bled. The next morning erysipelas appeared on his face, "accompanied by a pulse of 140". His illness lasted ten days. The obituary notes how O'Meara was fond of food and drink and that he had grown fat, suffering from attacks of gout twice a year.⁹⁴ Indeed it also notes how after his wife's death O'Meara "spent his time in the enjoyment of the Society of choice spirits. He had a very large circle of acquaintances in the various clubs of the West End, and being rather an epicure, he wound up the frame of his constitution much too tight";⁹⁵ indeed his will was written on 31 October, 1835, "in consequence of some recent occurrences".⁹⁶ However, it was his political journey to "extreme liberality and reform" which was to give him "the poison which carried him to his grave."⁹⁷ In his will, O'Meara was still trying to clear his name and to win the final victory over Hudson Lowe (in the end a struggle of liberals against

⁸⁹ O'Meara in his letters wrote "16 Cambridge Terrace, Edgeware Road".

⁹⁰ A photograph of the entry in the Burial Register for St Mary's Church, Paddington Green, is published in Albert Benhamou, *op. cit.*, p. 216. As noted above there is some confusion over Barry O'Meara's birth date. This has been exacerbated by the obituaries which give his age at death, on 3 June 1836, as 54, thus placing his birthday in 1782. O'Meara's biographer, Hubert O'Connor, gives a birth date of 1783, but cites no source. The obituary in the *Medico-Chirurgical Review* gives "in his 53d year" (p. 286). If we agree with O'Meara that he was born in 1786, he was 50 when he died.

⁹¹ Public Records Office, National Archives, Prob 11/1864, p. 352r.

⁹² http://books.google.fr/books?id=U-YEAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=meara&t=false, consulted in July 2013.

⁹³ The meeting is described in *The Spectator*, Saturday, 4 June, 1836, page 531, and is said to have taken place on Wednesday, so 1 June. On the Crown and Anchor as a locus of radical politics, see Christina Parolin, *Radical Spaces. Venues of popular politics in London, 1790-c. 1845*, Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010, chapter 5, "Fresh Crown and Anchor sentiments: radical reform in the Strand, 1817-1847", pp. 147-177.

⁹⁴ See Mailliard's journal (above) for the date 11 January, 1835.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Public Records Office, National Archives, Prob 11/1864, p. 351v.

⁹⁷ *The Medico-Chirurgical Review, and Journal of Practical Medicine, loc. cit.*

conservatives). He asked for the following sentence regarding his book “A voice from St Helena”, quoted by slightly incorrectly by Chaplin,⁹⁸ to be inscribed upon his tombstone: “I take this opportunity of declaring that with the exception of some unintentional (and most of them trifling) errors, the work published by me entitled “A voice from St Helena, or Napoleon in Exile” is a true and faithful narrative of the treatment inflicted upon that Great Man by Sir Hudson Lowe and others his subordinates and that I have even suppressed some facts which although true might have been considered to be exaggeration and not credited.” After his death, O’Meara’s effects were sold at auction. The *Annual Register* for 1836,⁹⁹ published the following account of the sale:

“On the 18th and 19th of July a sale of his effects took place, when there was considerable competition among the purchasers, for various articles which had been the property of Napoleon. A few lines in the emperor’s handwriting sold for 11 guineas; a lock of his hair, of a light auburn colour, and of silky texture, for 2l. 10s.; one of his teeth, extracted by Mr O’Meara, for seven guineas and a half; and the instrument with which it was extracted, 3l. 3s.; a few articles of plate, formerly the property of the emperor, sold for about six times their intrinsic value.”

Barry O’Meara is perhaps the quintessential Napoleonist, inasmuch as he spells out (just as Las Cases would do shortly afterwards) the (we might add, very well hidden!) liberal nature of Napoleon’s political actions as publicised through the writings and dictations on St Helena. Indeed he had drunk at the source of Napoleon’s St-Helena-found liberal persona. And with the benefit of hindsight, we can see (where the writers of his obituary could not) that there need be no contradiction in the heart of a man whose “political sentiments were strong, and though [we would need no ‘but’ here] an enthusiastic admirer of the greatest tyrant of modern time – NAPOLEON – yet he went to the extreme of liberality and reform, of late years. [...] He died at about the same age as his great master and patron, BONAPARTE.”

⁹⁸ Chaplin, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

⁹⁹ Volume 78 (1837), p. 205.