**Addendum Notes about the Hill family** – the Headlam family in planning for a commemorative reunion in Hobart in 2020, the 200th anniversary of Skelton’s arrival in Van Diemens Land, have commissioned the writing of a book on the family. It is to include some of our material about Skelton, the search for its history, and for its image.

The author, Ms Carol Bacon, has kindly made available new research material which may in due course assist in identifying who Captain Hill was. This shows that John Sleath Hill’s older brother, Samuel, was a Royal Navy officer who served at sea at Lieutenant rank and was elevated to Commander rank on retirement no doubt to recognise his good service record and to award him increased remuneration in retirement (retired officers went on ‘half pay’).

Carol’s initial advice received on Samuel Hill’s career is summarised here – “I have done a bit more research on Lt Samuel Hill RN.  He was the brother of JS Hill and Caroline Matilda Hill.   In a nutshell, Lt Samuel Hill RN joined the Royal Navy in 1805 (he was 15), served on the Monmouth, the Stately then the Aboukir, survived several sea battles, then went on half pay in 1812.  He was in VDL by May 1824, was a witness (as Lt Samuel Hill RN) at the marriage of his sister Caroline to Hezekiah Harrison in 1825, was granted land, made a JP, then Superintendent of Government Vessels, then a magistrate.   Was a witness at the marriage of GB Fraser  and Mary Selina Hill at Campbell Town in 1839. Witnesses include John Hill and Samuel Hill.  Escorted a contingent of troops from the UK to Hobart on the Pestonjee Bomanjee in September 1844.  Went back to England for good in 1846. Made a commander on the retired list in 1855.  Died 1864. It is interesting that GB Fraser must have met Lt Samuel Hill RN.”

Carol’s full timeline chart for Samuel Hill is seen here – [**Lt Samuel Hill RN**](https://bonniewilliam.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Lt-Samuel-Hill-RN.docx)  It is clear that Samuel could have had no involvement with Skelton. But it remains open as to what he was doing between going onto half pay in 1812 and when he appeared in Hobart in 1824 – could he have been in command of a merchant ship, and so earned a Captain’s title.

Whilst any seagoing Royal Navy officer at Commander rank and below could and frequently were placed in command of a warship and were entitled to be addressed as Captain while in command.

Such appointees relinquished the title and form of address when their term of command ended. Appointment to permanent official Post Captain rank, was a requirement for ongoing entitlement of the title including on retirement.

Many former RN officers of various ranks became Merchant Navy officers on retirement, and in command assumed Captain rank, and were entitled to retain the title on retirement to civilian life. It is also highly likely that any mariner whether Royal or Merchant Navy having achieved Captaincy, would have wished for, and would have enjoyed the privilege of the title of Captain in retired civilian life.

The revelation of a Commander Samuel Hill, RN, opens the possibility (we have no evidence of it) of his having had a period of command, and therefore Captaincy at some stage of his career, RN or Merchant Navy, and so entitled, at least within his family and friends of being addressed thereafter as Captain.

Were we to discover Commander Samuel Hill did in fact earn that entitlement, then it becomes highly likely he is the captain referred to on the painting’s rear dust cover, and it opens a line of thought that the depicted ship is his ship, which may not be the Skelton. Increasingly, identification of ‘Captain Hill’, and naval officer Commander Samuel Hill, becomes an important focus in solving the question of our Heading – ‘The Barque Skelton – Is this our Ship’.

A further search (February 2018) of Lloyds Register of Ships for Hill captaincies confirms that across the period 1818 through 1835 there were some 12 or so Captains with the Hill surname but none associated with Skelton. Every Hill name but one, was recorded with a single Christian name initial, the one significantly (for research purposes) having two initials, viz, J S Hill. Could it be?

This Captain J S Hill was in command of only one ship over the period 1822 to 1832, the Brig Katharine – he commanded it in 1822, 1829, 1830, 1831, and 1832. It always underwent its annual Lloyd’s seaworthiness survey at Cowes, Isle of Wight, so a southern England location, its voyage destinations in all records being La Rochelle a seaport on the southern coast of France.

However, the Lloyds J S H’s ship, Katharine, was a Brig, a two master, whilst our painting is of a Barque, a three master, so it’s not the Katharine.

What is the real significance of all this – unknown at this point – but a basis to justify more intense research about the Hill brothers. Is it possible both John Sleath Hill and Samuel Hill were mariners and sea Captains – certainly John Sleath Hill’s occupation – Steam boiler manufacturer, Trader and Chapman – does not eliminate his having been a seafarer in early life. Indeed, where better to acquire the knowledge which a trader in goods needed to be a successful Trader, than when in command of a trading sailing ship.

A Chapman is an old 17/18th century term for merchant trader, usually in such as cotton, silk and woollen raw materials for sale to spinners and weavers, with the finished cloth then traded again.

This prompts the question – what was the economic base of the town and region of La Rochelle – was it in some of these materials – let’s find out. A preliminary perusal of material about La Rochelle indicates that during the 17th and 18th centuries it was the major seaport of France on the Atlantic coast, and that it was the main shipment point for all the traded produce from the mid and southern hinterland of France for trade across the Atlantic both north and south.

The most important traded goods passing through the Port were wine, cognac, armagnac, and other fortified wines, and other agricultural produce, but also fashion fabrics (it seems France set the scene for all of Europe in high quality apparel fashions throughout 17th to early 19th centuries).

The city of Tours half way between Paris (Europe’s fashion capital) and the La Rochelle seaport, was a major location for French silk production, woven silk fabrics including printed silk fabrics for the high fashion markets of Europe, England and the New World.

The Port of La Rochelle is also recorded as having been an active player in the so called ‘Triangular Trade’ Atlantic trading practice – slaves from Africa to the New World, sugar, rum, tobacco and coffee from Carribean/South America and cotton from southern United States to Europe, woven cloths and fabrics from England and Europe to the New World, and for La Rochelle alcoholic liquors, fashion fabrics and apparels shipped out to all across the Atlantic ports.

So, we might well ask – just what was this Captain J S Hill and his Brig Katharine engaged in during that period which took them so often to La Rochelle. If it were to turn out that this Captain is our John Sleath Hill, there is a also a fit with his being described as a Chapman, ‘trader in cotton, silk and woollen materials’. Perhaps he and his brother Samuel were seafarers and traders together. Were their voyages just between England and France or did they (secretly perhaps) engage in other components of the triangular trade items.