

Irish Migration Studies in Latin America

Society for Irish Latin American Studies

Thomas Joseph Hutchinson (c.1802-1885), diplomat, physician and travel writer



Thomas J. Hutchinson (c.1802-1885)
(*The Paraná, With Incidents of the Paraguayan War, 1868*)

Hutchinson, Thomas Joseph (c.1802-1885), diplomat, physician and travel writer, was born on 18 January 1802 - though the year 1820 is mentioned in some records - in Stonyford, County Wexford, probably the son of a minor landowner, Alfred Hutchinson [*Hutchenson*] from an Anglo-Irish family with a Protestant background. It is reported that he was sent to study on the European continent, and graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Göttingen in 1833. On 2 January 1836, he graduated from the Apothecary's Hall, Trinity College Dublin. By May 1843, Hutchinson was practicing as a physician and surgeon at Saint Vincent's Hospital, Dublin. In 1849, Thomas Hutchinson settled in England, where he worked in the Poor Law Union of Wigan, Lancashire.

In 1851, Hutchinson was appointed senior surgeon on board the *Pleiad*, for the expedition to the rivers Niger, Tshadda and Binue up to 1855, led by John Beecroft. In this capacity, Hutchinson conducted research on the use of quinine as a preventative measure against the effects of malaria. He insisted that, in small doses, quinine had a favourable effect in preventing fever. In the late 1850s, Bailey & Wills of Horseley Fields produced 'Dr. Hutchinson's Quinine Wine', marketing it to ship owners and crews.

On 29 September 1855, Thomas Hutchinson received his first appointment in the British Consular Service, as the consul for the Bight of Biafra. He married Mary, his lifelong wife, and on 29 December 1855 they arrived in Port Clarence, Fernando Po (present-day Malabo, Equatorial Guinea), formerly a Spanish dominion. Most of the business managed by Hutchinson in Fernando Po was related to British affairs in the region, which included chiefly the production and transport of palm oil and occasionally other products. He also represented, albeit unsuccessfully, a group of emancipated slaves and their families who wished to be recognised as British citizens, and was a constant arbiter between the ship masters and the local producers of raw materials. Furthermore, in 1858, Hutchinson obtained a tonne of seeds from the Manchester Cotton Supply Associations to undertake experiments on the continental coast of West Africa. In his affairs, he was frequently partial to the interests of certain Liverpool merchants, a practice for which he was reprimanded by the Foreign Office. Hutchinson remained in Africa until June 1860, when he and his wife returned to England for health reasons, together with Fanny Hutchinson, an African girl that they had adopted. On 9 July 1861 he was replaced by Captain Richard Francis Burton.

With friends and connections in the Foreign Office and various scientific and business associations, among them George William Frederick, Earl of Clarendon, and William Bingham Baring, Lord Ashburton, Thomas Hutchinson managed to balance his consular work and medical practice with exploration, travel writing and scientific research. From 1858 to 1867 he was Fellow of some important institutions, including the Royal Geographical Society, the Ethnological Society, the Royal Society of Literature and the Anthropological Society. During his long life, he was also elected honorary vice-president of the African Institute of Paris, an honorary member of the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society, foreign member of the Palaeontological Society of Buenos Aires, and founding member of the Society of Fine Arts in Peru.

Hutchinson's next appointment was as consul in Rosario, Argentina, on 12 July 1861, where he was also an agent for Lloyds. Thomas Murray, in his book about the Irish in Argentina, wrote that there were rumours in Buenos Aires 'that Hutchinson got his appointment and preference from the English Government for betraying his friends. He was an Irishman and was, it is said, one of O'Connell's secretaries' (Murray 1919: 310). However, this could not be definitively proven, as Hutchinson's connections and friends were the principal cause of his appointments in the consular service.

Between 25 November 1862 and 10 March 1863, together with the merchant Esteban Rams and with official support, Thomas Hutchinson organised an exploration from Rosario to the River Salado in search of wild cotton. As a result of this journey, he wrote *Buenos Ayres and Argentine Gleanings: with extracts from a diary of the Salado exploration in 1862 and 1863*, published in London in 1865. On Hutchinson's initiative, the governor of Santiago del Estero, Gaspar Taboada, began tests to produce cotton in his province.

During a cholera epidemic in Rosario in 1867, Hutchinson and his wife established a sanatorium in their house and rendered a great service to the poor of the city administering free medicines and clothing. The governor of Santa Fe province Nicasio Oroño gratefully mentioned Hutchinson's services in his message to the provincial parliament, and he was presented with a Gold Medal by the Union Masonic Lodge of Rosario in July of the same year. On 15 May 1867 he was appointed honorary member of the Argentine Rural Society.

In 1864 and until 4 June 1865, Hutchinson was also Acting Consul for Uruguay. In Montevideo, he owned the Farmacia Británica at the corner of 25 de Mayo and Ituzaingo. In October of 1870 the family left Rosario for England. The same month Hutchinson was appointed Consul at Callao, where he arrived with his family on the *Cordillera* on 22 April 1871. Most of his work in Peru had to do with shipping, in particular with the problems of crimping by ship captains. He also dedicated time to travel and to exploring vestiges and the burial grounds of the indigenous peoples previous to the Spanish conquest, an experience he recorded in *Two Years in Peru, with Exploration of its Antiquities* (1873).

Hutchinson resigned from the Consular Service in 1874, though he had been on leave and off-duty since November 1872. On 21 April 1874 he was granted a pension. The family went to live in Ballinescar Lodge in Curraclloe, St. Margaret's parish, in County Wexford, where Hutchinson dedicated himself to writing about his travel experiences. He travelled through Germany and France, and in 1876 he published *Summer Holidays in Brittany*. Then he moved to Chimoo Cottage Mill Hill near Hendon in the English county of Middlesex, and finally to Italy. Thomas Hutchinson died on 23 March 1885 in his apartment at 2 Via Maragliano, Florence. He was survived by his wife Mary Hutchinson and their adopted daughter Fanny Hutchinson.

Wealth at death: £1,145-16s-5d (Calendars of the grants of probate, England and Wales, 2 May 1885, Ref. 95-96)

Edmundo Murray

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