THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Issue 9

April 2004

The Sydney Smith Association

Aims

To perpetuate the memory and achievements of Sydney Smith
To cultivate appreciation of the principles for which he stood
To support the churches connected with his career
To help in the preservation of manuscripts and memorabilia relating to him and his family
To arrange periodic events, receptions and services in keeping with his inclinations

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Patrons:

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The Sydney Smith Association Newsletter

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'Sydney Smith quits us today for Yorkshire. It is a great loss in the house.'

Thus Lady Holland on 17 January 1825; but it is entirely to our gain to follow Sydney to the north for the 2004 AGM Weekend which will take place in and around York on Saturday and Sunday 2 & 3 October.

We shall meet up at Castle Howard on Saturday afternoon. The Hon. Simon Howard, our patron, will show us round the house and give a talk on the Howard family and life as it was at the time Sydney was Rector of All Saints, Foston. The AGM will follow, then we leave for York for dinner in the King's Manor. During the evening a talk will be given by Colonel Eddy York, whose forebears were close lifelong friends of Sydney.

On Sunday morning a visit has been arranged to Shandy Hall, the home of Laurence Sterne in Coxwold; we cross the road to participate in mattins at St Michael's, then lunch at the popular Fauconberg Arms (all within walking distance of each other).

Full details of our Yorkshire weekend are on the application form enclosed. Do join us.

Accommodation

A number of rooms have been booked at the Bar Convent which is within walking distance of York railway station; otherwise the York Tourist Information Centre will help with advice (telephone 01904 621756).

O 'tis a delicious retreat!

And a retreat in store for us when we visit Shandy Hall in October. Laurence Sterne found Coxwold delicious 'both from its beauty, & air of Solitude; and so sweetly does every thing about it invite your mind to rest from its Labours - and be at peace with itself & the world'. Unmissable, so fill in the form now, fortified by the prospect of lunch in the village where Sterne sat down to 'venison, fish and wild fowl, or a couple of fowls or ducks, with curds, and strawberries, and cream...with a clean cloth on my table - and a bottle of wine on my right hand to drink your health.' The table-cloths at the Fauconberg Arms will be of the cleanest, the menu less gargantuan.

Membership

Our membership increases gradually and among those we have welcomed this year are Jim and Sarah Walsh, who recently moved into The Old Rectory, Foston, which they have sensitively renovated with great love and care.

Death of a Patron

We are sorry to record the death at eighty in 2003 of a founder patron of our Association, Lord Martin Fitzalan Howard. He was a member of one of England's staunchest Roman Catholic families. After leaving Cambridge he was commissioned in the Grenadier Guards with whom shortly after D-Day he landed and was wounded in Normandy. After the war he ran the family estate and supervised the renovation of Carlton Towers. He took on a number

of public duties becoming a magistrate, High Sheriff of North Yorkshire, a Deputy Lieutenant for the county and President of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society. Martin was enthusiastic about the setting up of the Sydney Smith Association. He recognized the part played by Sydney in the emancipation of Catholics, and helped forge a link with Ampleforth College.

Subscriptions

Annual subscriptions are due on 1 March. For those who do not pay by Banker's Order and have not yet paid, would they please do so now. Cheques should be made out to The Sydney Smith Association and sent to The Hon. Treasurer, Sydney Smith Association, Belgrave House, 46 Acomb Road, York YO24 4EW.

Thanks from Combe Florey

As agreed at our last AGM, a donation of £370 was made to Combe Florey Church. In expressing gratitude to our members for the gift, Mr R. S. Brown, Hon. Treasurer to the Friends of Combe Florey, assures us that the money is 'invested in an interest-bearing account and is kept separately from our current account which settles the bills incurred in maintaining and improving our historic Church'.

York Lunches

The last two lunches in the King's Manor proved most successful, so much so that arrangements have been made for another three on the third Wednesday of the second month in each quarter. Anyone wishing to be informed nearer the time please contact the Membership Secretary (telephone 01653 618334 or email pjdiggle@aol.com).

The last speakers to introduce topics were Timmy Forbes Adam and Paddy Crossley. The former analysed Sydney Smith's view on hunting, which led to a lively discussion. Sydney was not keen on either hunting or the people who hunted, but defended their right to make their own choice. He did however appreciate the important part hunting played in society. Paddy Crossley, exploring Sydney's attitude to press freedom in the context of today's 'media' world, said Sydney felt the newspapers of his time virtually governed the country because the people were badly represented, and he called for increased power for the House of Commons. His beliefs are clear from this assessment of his character quoted by the speaker from W. H. Auden's excellent introduction to *Selected Writings of Sydney Smith* (1957): 'Sydney Smith is an example of English liberalism at its best. He is never utopian or given to large generalisations but always attacks a specific abuse...the reform he proposes is equally specific and always possible to realise. Further, he assumes that, though most people are selfish and many people are stupid, few are either lunatics or deliberate scoundrels impervious to rational argument.'

London Lunches

London lunches to celebrate Sydney Smith are held in the Boisdale Restaurant in Eccleston Street, just a few minutes' walk from Victoria Station. The size of its private dining-room does restrict the number of guests to fifteen, but makes for a jolly and intimate atmosphere. Our first lunch this year was on March 3 when the topic for discussion was presented by Deirdre Bryan-Brown: 'Sydney in print and on the small screen'. Among the 2003 speakers were Robin Price on 'Glossitis: from SS to SOS', which allowed all present to put forward their pet hates of modern English usage and to which Sydney would have made a telling contribution: for, as Robin concluded, 'he might have held that ... anything which pollutes the pure fountain of

language - the clear stream of communication - must be reprehensible, if not actually criminal'; Peter Payan on 'What profession would Sydney have followed today?' (the meeting agreed that Sydney would have made a superb advocate, or a brilliant political correspondent on TV. It was also pointed out that had he chosen the Church, he almost certainly would have been made a Bishop in these more ecumenical times), and Alan Bell on editing Sydney Smith's Letters (reported with facsimile later in this issue).

Any member who is in London on June 2, September 1 or December 1 (all Wednesdays) is very welcome to contact Mary Beaumont on 0208 318 3388 or email: mary@maryb.demon.co.uk. Our London lunches are addictive, in the nicest possible way.

Suffolk Lunches

Michael Belfrage, our East Anglian convenor (01728 668809), reports that there are now seven Association members around Wissett and Yoxford. And Daphne Ritchie who lives in Wissett (that brief outpost of Bloomsbury in 1916) says she is but one of only two hundred souls: 'even a smaller village than Foston-le-Clay, then three hundred in 1807'. None the less they go for Sydney, for last May no fewer than twenty-four people responded to an invitation to 'Have a light lunch and learn a little history: Sydney Smith'. Ann and Gale Sieveking were again the generous hosts, and after lunch Daphne's discourse on Sydney, with slides, had the audience asking for more. Daphne's latest venture, this March, was 'a happy Spring lunch - very congenial - held in "The Cut", Halesworth's Arts Centre in a massive converted old malting. Ten of us considered our reasons for joining the Association, helped by references to the first *Newsletter* of 1996 and the latest of 2003.' Sydney would warmly have welcomed the presence of the woman priest: 'Don't you know, as the French say, there are three sexes - men, women, and clergymen.'

A pocketful of Sydney

Daphne Ritchie did a felicitous thing at her Spring lunch: at every place at table she put a copy of Carr's Pocket Book on Sydney Smith. Familiar as this truly pocketable little yellow-back is, Daphne felt it worthy of mention in the *Newsletter*: 'I do think this booklet really gives an *excellent* introduction to Sydney.' We agree, and we asked Bob Carr, who now runs his father's famous publishing venture, to tell us about it: 'J. L. Carr started the Pocket Books in the 1960s, almost as a supplement to the local NUT journal, of which he was editor. The first was John Clare - a Northamptonshire man - and sold for sixpence; the market was in single volumes by post in a standard envelope. The series grew to over eighty titles, but today is half that. Some names simply do not sell: Dryden and Milton, for example, but Sydney Smith has been a constant seller. There's no doubt Dad had a fellow-feeling for the man, and it wasn't just the Yorkshire connection (Dad originated from the York area, but with East Riding ancestry). I think he went along with "but God has given us wit and flavour and brightness and laughter and perfume, to enliven the days of man's pilgrimage and to charm his pained steps over the burning marle" - it comes over in Dad's novels, and was why he was an outstanding teacher.' (Pocket Books cost £1 from booksellers; or - minimum order £5 - from The Quince Tree Press, 116 Hardwick Lane, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 2LE.)

Have a Nice Day!
We had/we did, in Winchester on Saturday 27 September 2003 at the start of our AGM Weekend, thanks to the time and courteous energies of Dr Geoff Day who teaches at the College. (Geoff 'collects' Sterne and is an authority on him, and we first met years ago at Shandy Hall which we shall visit this October when we gather in Yorkshire.) He gave us an extensive tour, described below, and after the brief AGM a fascinating talk on Winchester life and strife while Sydney was there. We are most grateful to him, and print his talk opposite.

Our tour of Winchester College

We started the tour in Chamber Court, where the 70 'poor and needy' scholars are still housed, and looked at the combination of flint and cobbled sections which are a permanent reminder of two great revolts around the turn of the eighteenth/nineteenth centuries when the boys ripped up the cobbles in order to threaten the militia. Then we moved into the Chapel with its splendid wooden fan vaulting and briefly looked at the remains of the original east window, with one of the earliest representations of Richard II, and the Crimean War memorial.

From there we went to Cloister - the only cloister in the world in which there stands a chantry - and looked at monuments, among which the most notable are those to Mallory, with a stone image of him standing on Everest; and the one to the old Wykehamist who, dying at 18, was recorded as moving on to heaven rather than to Oxford. This was followed by a brief look at School - the late seventeenth century room used for teaching the entire community - a near double cube, which has been (almost certainly incorrectly) attributed to Wren.

On the brick wall of the Old Mill we saw the A. Trollope graffito and then walked across playing fields (a very rare example of a cricket field where there are trees within the boundary off which it is possible to be caught under local rules) to the Commonwealth Sick House, where there was a further example of Trollope family graffito and a rather curious game carved into a table top.

We walked via the War Cloister, commemorating dead from both World Wars (in the first of which the school lost in the region of 600 old boys - the equivalent of three times the then size of the school), back to the Eccles Library where there was a display of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Winchester literary items, including manuscripts by and relating to Jane Austen, and Thomas and Matthew Arnold; signed presentation copies of the Barchester novels; and both a Sydney Smith English essay prize volume with a highly ornate inlaid plaque on the spine and a manuscript notebook containing two of his sermons.

Peter Payan says: I am most grateful to Geoffrey Day for the above account of our tour of the College. (My notes, written on the move, were in the event unreadable.) A room known as 'College Seventh Chamber' was of particular interest to us because of a traditional plaque or 'marble' placed high on a wall among many others. This commemorates Sydney's name and the year, 1788, in which he was head boy or 'Auli Prae'. The room is lined with study cubicles called 'Toyes', after a former master.

One of the two sermons in the manuscript volume was described thus: 'A Charity Sermon commanded to be preached upon the Irish (in the Parish Church of Foston, Yorkshire: Colossians 3.14 - "And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness." A very moving account of the sufferings of the Irish poor, with detailed evidence, from eye-

witnesses; followed by an appeal to the charitable disposition of the congregation coupled with the minatory: "I solemnly believe that God will never forgive you if you do not shew some sign of pity to these poor people."'

WINCHESTER IN SYDNEY'S TIME by Geoffrey Day

When Sydney Smith arrived at Winchester in 1782 he arrived at a school which was close to the nadir of its fortunes. By leaving in 1788 he probably avoided the worst year in its six hundred years' history, but only by five years.

The headmaster in Smith's time was Joseph Warton who entered Winchester as a scholar in 1736 and went up to Oriel in 1740. He took advantage of various livings to devote time to his poetry, and his translation of the Eclogues and Georgics of Virgil into English verse, which was published in 1753, led to Oxford bestowing upon him an honorary M.A. degree. His appointment to Winchester as Hostiarius in 1755 also seems to have been a result of this publication. Hostiarius is the title given to the master in charge of the scholars. He succeeded Burton as Informator in 1766 - Informator is still used on certain official occasions to denote the Headmaster - and held the headmastership until his seventy-first year. He was spectacularly inadequate: Burgess records that a boy threw a Latin dictionary at Warton's head during a lesson; the inaccuracy of his scholarship was a serious obstacle to his success in teaching; and it was during his tenure that the Rebellion of 1793, possibly the most formidable outbreak of the kind on record, took place and was a major factor in his resignation from a post for which he had never been fitted.

We have some remarkable evidence of Winchester life under Warton. In the exhibition downstairs is a fifteenth century copy on vellum of the College's statutes. This transcription was paid for by Robert Heete of Woodstock, a scholar of New College, Oxford, who was admitted a Fellow of New College in 1417, and a Fellow of Winchester College in 1422. At the end of the volume there is a list of those who contributed to the building of School, which was completed 11 June 1687. For many years the school's library was a peripatetic collection which was moved from room to room as occasion and demands of space dictated. During the eighteenth century this volume was used by scholars as a book in which to doodle, draw simple caricatures, record events in the life of the school, and make offensive remarks about fellows, dons and other scholars. The majority of these annotations were made during the headmastership of Warton, who was most conspicuously unsuccessful in the matter of discipline. What would now be regarded as vandalism has become, with the passage of time, an interesting historical source. Most accounts of school life are written many years after the experience, and often through rose-coloured spectacles: the marginalia in this manuscript enable us to see something of eighteenth century Winchester College through contemporary eyes.

We learn of acts of unnecessary violence: 'Talbot that little infant destroy'd 3 young Pigs, by kicking 'em against the Barn door, at Woolgers.' The precocity of certain scholars is also evident: 'Tyrwhitt goes every night to an evil place more properly an house of ill fame' - Richard Tyrwhitt (Coll. 1782-87), who arrived in the same year as Sydney Smith, left Winchester College at the age of 15; and of Robert Sturges (Coll. 1779-81), who was no more

than 16 when he left the school the year before Smith arrived, we are told, 'Sturges was Clapp'd damnably last August: Tantare animis colestibus orae Do little children such diseases know.' Only one entry suggests any measure of intellectual activity: 'Mr Burdon please to send a Johnson Dictionary for Humphreys', to which is added in a different hand, 'for Herbert', but in general academic pursuits seem to have been at a low ebb. One page declares: 'Be it known to Posterity that in October 85 a famous Grecian by name Maltby Came to this School - which was then in a State of Digeneracy & Corruption with regard to Literature & every other virtue The only Geniuses of the School were Mr G Wells & Newton Ogle.' (One might record in passing that this remark was almost certainly in the hand of the said Ogle.) Other marginalia are concerned with the trivia of everyday life: 'Let it be noted that in the Reign of N. Hurd in 1775 a remarkable Badger was lodged in the Possession of the Praefects' and: 'I want my supper.' We also learn, inter alia, that on 24 October John Wooll (Aul. Prae.) with three other scholars, after drinking claret at the White Hart in Winchester, ordered a chaise to take them to Southampton, where Wooll passed himself off as 'Lord Brook'; and in an annotation in which there is a degree of pronoun confusion, we are told that Dr Warton found Ogle under his bed - or possibly that Ogle found Dr Warton under his bed - not only do we not know who was actually under the bed - it is not entirely clear whether 'his' is an indication that the bed was that of Ogle or of the headmaster. Though, as at this point he was in his third year at Winchester, it is possible that Sydney Smith knew.

This conduct was not unique to the years of Warton's headmastership. Thomas Arnold - later to become a distinguished headmaster himself - wrote a series of letters while a scholar here which indicate that what to the twenty-first century reader constitute extraordinary levels of violence were commonplace. Of one battle in Chamber Court at the beginning of June 1809, he wrote: 'I was assaulted by two or three at first; but Lipscombe coming into the chamber and beginning the assault, & the forces of the enemy increasing, I sprung out of my bed, & girding a blanket about me, & standing up on my bed gave & sustained a most dreadful fire. - Loaves of crum of bread, washing boxes, candles, candle sticks, the broom & every kind of missile weapon was hurled without distinction: I received a wound on my head from a washing box, but my pericranium being far harder than stone, the washing box rebounded.'

In a pitched battle which took place on St Catherine's hill in September of the same year we learn that Arnold 'Hurled such stones at him as would if rightly directed have sent him to the shades below ... I wounded [him] in the neck and twice in the breast and chin; at last I made a furious charge, & hurled him down the precipice, pelting his posteriors almost raw in the descent. ... But on the next day, our skirmishing was put a stop to in a very unfortunate manner ... when a stone from Rosehill struck Awdry on the forehead, so that reeling back a few paces he fell to the ground.'

It is unlikely that Arnold himself, when a headmaster, would have been so blasé about such behaviour. Clearly Winchester was a fairly barbaric place at the time, and it is hardly surprising that Sydney Smith's brother, Courtney, who came to the school a year after Sydney, was so miserable that he ran away twice.

The true depths were plumbed in 1793 and 1813 when both years saw serious rebellions. On the first occasion the flashpoint was the imposition of a general punishment on the school for the breaking of bounds by one single boy who had gone to listen to the Buckingham Militia band in the Cathedral close. The boys sent a formal complaint to the warden who rebuffed them. The boys then occupied the gateway tower and armed themselves with large flints from

Chamber Court. It is very noticeable today that one half of the Court is still set with flints, whereas the other half is laid with cobbles, replacing the boys' weapons. The warden was offered help by local military leaders, but the siege was eventually brought to a negotiated close. Thirty-five boys left the school as a direct result of the disturbance. The blame for much of this was laid at the headmaster's door, for having allowed matters to get to such a state, and he retired later in the same year.

The rebellion of 1818 was in some ways even more violent. The boys barricaded the warden into his lodgings, and presented a list of grievances which began with the spectacularly tactless objection: 'That you are ugly.' The Mayor arrived to mediate and was jeered by the boys. Then the militia was called out. When the colonel arrived the boys told him quite clearly that 'if his soldiers came near enough they would have their heads broken by stones from the tower'. The boys were tricked into surrendering their fortified position by the headmaster, who suggested that they could all go home. When they emerged from their citadel the militia, fully armed, charged and routed them. Once again there were numerous departures.

It is hardly surprising that Sydney Smith used to speak with horror of the wretchedness of the years he spent at Winchester and declared that the whole system there was 'one of abuse, neglect, and vice'. Later in life he recounted that William Howley, by that time Archbishop of Canterbury, had at Winchester knocked him down with a chessboard for having checkmated him.

He disapproved of the whole public school system, declaring: 'to give to a boy the habit of enduring privation to which he will never again be called upon to submit ... is surely not a very useful and valuable severity in education'. And he particularly objected to the system, which operated until well into the twentieth century, of rule by boys: 'At a public school … every boy is alternately tyrant and slave. The power which the elder part of these communities exercises over the younger is exceedingly great - very difficult to be controlled - and accompanied, not infrequently, with cruelty and caprice. It is the common law of the place, that the young should be implicitly obedient to the elder boys; and his obedience resembles more the submission of a slave to his master, or of a sailor to his captain, than the common and natural deference which should always be shown by one boy to another a few years older than him.'

A good deal of spleen was reserved for the boy at the head of the boy-rule hierarchy: 'The head of a public school is generally a very conceited young man, utterly ignorant of his own dimensions, and losing all that habit of conciliation towards others, and that anxiety for self-improvement, which results from the natural modesty of youth.' This may reveal a degree of self-knowledge, as Sydney Smith himself was Auli Prae - the head boy of the scholars, in 1788. When he left the school he appears to have had no qualms about continuing the tradition of presenting a marble plaque with his name, the year of his leaving and his position in College - and this marble was seen in seventh chamber on this afternoon's tour.

One element of the curriculum to which he took exception was the emphasis placed upon the teaching of classical languages: 'The prodigious honour in which Latin verses are held at public schools is surely the most absurd of all distinctions.' This may well be a reflection on his own relative academic performance, for in his leaving year he was presented with the prize for an English prose essay. Today the English essay prize is a very splendid gold medal, the Queen's Gold Medal, which is sent down from the Royal Mint. Sydney Smith was presented with the two volumes of Apollonius Rhodius *Argonauticorum libri quatuor* ... edidit… Joannes

Shaw, Oxford: E typographeo Clarendoniano, 1777. These two volumes, displayed downstairs, are bound in one. It is a remarkable binding, in scarlet straight-grained morocco with a double headband, bearing the College's coat of arms on the front cover and an as yet unidentified coat of arms on the back cover. The arms are not those of Smith, who wrote, 'The Smiths never had any arms and have invariably sealed their letters with their thumbs.' The most notable element of the binding is the prominently raised section of the spine, into which is set a bone or ivory engraved plaque setting out the essential details of the volume and the circumstances of its acquisition. No other similar binding is known to the librarians, and it is assumed that it was commissioned by Smith himself, rather than being a conventional prize binding of the time. In view of the use of the College arms on the front board, it is also assumed that the binding was carried out in the workshop of Thomas and John Burdon, whose bindery is thought to have occupied the building to the rear of what is now P. & G. Wells Bookshop, and in which a bindery is still in operation. If this is the case, despite the fairly uniformly negative view Sydney Smith took of Winchester, it is possible to suggest that he did feel some pride in the achievement this prize represented.

To Jane's, after breakfast...

The marmalade alone was worth coming to Winchester for! - thus spake a reverend member from Dorset, overheard as we assembled for an unusual 'photo-call' at half-past nine on the Sunday morning. Next stop: Chawton, for a first visit for many of us to Jane Austen's mellow and unassertive seventeenth-century house. Here we joined other pilgrims in an exhibition/lecture room for an introductory talk by a latter-day Mr Jingle - for so quick and staccato was his outpouring of Jane-ite information that we wondered what other visitors made of it whose first language was not Dickensian English. Inside the house, we roamed at will, completely relaxed among so much touching memorabilia; the presence of Jane was almost tangible. We lunched over the road in a welcoming restaurant - Cassandra's Cup - called after Jane's sister. Henry Tilney's name came up, and David Cecil's suggestion (in his *A Portrait of Jane Austen*, 1978) that in the winter of 1797 'there was staying at Bath a young clergyman called Sydney Smith, tall, pleasant-looking and extraordinarily amusing in a vein of humour peculiarly his own. He was employed by a family called Hicks Beach as tutor to their son; the Hicks Beaches knew the Austens. A year later Jane began to write a novel later to appear as *Northanger Abbey*, in which the heroine visiting Bath meets a tall, pleasant-looking young clergyman called Henry Tilney, extraordinarily amusing and in a vein of humour very like that of Sydney Smith. Can there be any connection between these two events?' Well, we'd like to think... Alan Bell (*Sydney Smith*, 1980) acknowledges John Sparrow's floating of possible resemblances between the two young clergymen and concludes: '...the inference is tempting, but the evidence for the movements of both parties is, tantalizingly, too weak to prove a meeting at this time. The fictional parallels should not be ignored because the clinching biographical detail is lacking, and the equation of Henry Tilney with Sydney Smith remains an under-documented but intriguing possibility.'

Man of the Cloth

Sydney sought good marmalade, we are sure - for he loved breakfast, with or without philosophers (devoted *Newsletter* readers will remember Issue 7 with its delightful poem by Matt Simpson, 'An Invitation to Breakfast from Sydney Smith', which began: 'Muffins and metaphysics,/contradictions and crumpets,/will you come?'). An invitation irresistible to us, but Sydney, we feel, could have done without two Paris breakfasts in seven days with the Duke de Broglie: first, 'There was no cloth upon the table... There was roast fowl, spinach, eggs, apples, wine, and afterwards they brought tea... The children drank wine for their breakfast'; second, 'They are virtuous, sensible, disagreeable people, and give bad breakfasts without a table-cloth.' (Quotes found in *The Pleasures of the Table* compiled by Theodora FitzGibbon - despite its subject, an elegantly slim volume published by Oxford in 1981.)

Good news from Ireland...

... in the shape of two welcome recruits to our Association: Christopher and Hanne Gray. Writing from Trim (shades of *Tristram Shandy*'s corporal) in Co. Meath, Christopher gladdened an editorial heart with a handsomely written letter: 'Sydney Smith has been in the back of my mind for over 20 years. At last I came across Hesketh Pearson's "Smith of Smiths" and read it enthusiastically. A visit to Combe Florey and a meeting with the Churchwarden and a gift of your Newsletter Issue 7 confirmed us in a wish to follow up the Association's Aims.' Good. And Christopher enclosed some extracts from *The Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers* (ed. Morchard Bishop) including: 'At one time, when I gave a dinner, I used to have candles placed all round the dining-room, and high up, in order to show off the pictures. I asked Smith how he liked that plan. "Not at all," he replied; "above, there is a blaze of light, and below, nothing but darkness and gnashing of teeth."' Rogers goes on to quote more sayings (inevitably the sound of those trumpets is heard again) and concludes, interestingly: 'Witty as Smith was, I have seen him at my own house absolutely overpowered by the superior facetiousness of William Bankes.' We've managed to discover that Bankes was a Cambridge friend of Byron and an M.P., but haven't turned up any examples of his 'superior facetiousness'. Readers' discoveries on an old-fashioned postcard, please.

The Value of Sydney

It was good to hear the other day of a friend's indebtedness to Sydney's sayings for saving the day - and more importantly *the night* - when her late husband was ill. When things got particularly difficult they would read Sydney to each other and then find themselves surprised by laughter ... and easeful.

And Sydney's fountain overflows. We are always pleased to receive members' favourites. Bob Peers of Altrincham said he'd been reading a book in which the Budget of 1815 was mentioned, and that this led him to Sydney's diatribe against taxes in the *Edinburgh Review* (1820) which concluded: 'taxes...on the ermine which decorates the judge, and the rope which hangs the criminal - on the poor man's salt, and the rich man's spice - on the brass nails of the coffin, and the ribands of the bride - at bed or board, couchant or levant, we must pay'.

From John Anderson of Bridport, two quotations ('They are probably known to long-time aficionados of Sydney, but I particularly like the second one: for, as Norman Taylor says, it shows what an honest fellow he was!'): 'The wife of a wit is under constant discipline of mortification' - Fanny Allen, a friend of Sydney's; then Sydney on Georgiana, Duchess of Bedford: 'I am forced from time to time to read over my papers of holy orders to prevent

myself from admiring her too much.' (John says he found this in Georgiana Blakiston's book *Lord William Russell and his Wife 1815-46.*)

Keep 'em coming, please.

From Peter Payan: **Guizot on Sydney Smith**

I am grateful to our chairman Randolph Vigne for drawing to my attention, and providing me with the text of, one of the rare accounts of meetings with Sydney by a foreigner. It appears in 'GUIZOT ET SON TEMPS, Propos et Portraits', by Robert Legrand, published in 2002 by F. Paillart, Abbeville.

François Pierre Guillaume Guizot (1787-1874), minister to Louis-Philippe, spent the months of February to October 1840 as French ambassador to Britain. Described by Douglas Johnson as 'one of the great historians of the nineteenth century, an important political thinker, the author of many incisive books and essays, a leader of French protestants', Guizot inevitably found himself invited to Holland House. I have tried to render into English his own account of what followed:

Holland House was more than the place where Whigs in public life habitually met. It was the favourite salon, the adopted 'home', of cultivated liberals not directly engaged in public affairs but dedicated to the exchange of ideas and the righting of ancient social wrongs. There it was that I first met the Reverend Sydney Smith and Lord Jeffrey, founders of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1801. They were the two men of their time who from outside Parliament contributed most to the success of the Whig party and the advancement of libertarian ideals.

Their youthful vigour and influence were long past by the time I met them in 1840, but Mr Smith at 69 was still possessed of an original imagination and an exceptional wit that surprised and delighted everywhere, in everyday conversation as well as in the salons, probably even in his own thoughts alone in his study.

I wrote to Paris after our first meeting: 'Yesterday evening I conversed with Mr Sydney Smith, a man whose condition it is to be witty as it is that of Lady Seymour to be beautiful. Everyone expects this, and warns you about it. As a carriage demands a saddler, so we expect entertainment from Mr Smith. Indeed we laugh overmuch, before, during and after his sallies. Nothing escapes his humour, even bishops, though he stops short of disrespect for his own robe. When he no longer felt he should dine out on a Sunday, and did not dare tell Lady Holland, she took pleasure in embarrassing him by issuing an invitation.'

This was a weakness: his humour and his talk sometimes accorded ill with his position. But it was at his father's insistence and not by his own choice that he entered the church, and though scrupulous in fulfilling the requirements of his office he cannot change his nature. Even when the occasion demands, he is unable to restrain his unquenchable gaiety. He is however the best of men, as gentle as he is courageous, full of Christian charity and sincere liberality, as formidable a preacher in his pulpit as he is an eminent critic in the *Edinburgh Review*. One whose sermons collected after his death are as highly regarded as his articles, and more than make up for any humorous excesses.

He visited me one day at the embassy and his conversation was a pleasing blend of the serious and the mischievous. He spoke much of Lord John Russell, of whom he thought highly, regarding him as the moving spirit of the cabinet. Lord Melbourne is a man of intelligence and (I quote his English phrase): 'a fine fellow rather than a politician', much less carefree than he affects to be. Mr Smith is anxious not to be taken for a radical. 'The radicals', he said, 'are losing ground in the House of Commons; they are discouraged, and uncertain of their future.' They imagined that they would change everything, but the common sense of the public paralyses them. Most will become absorbed by the Whigs. I did not ask him if the Whigs would meet them half-way.

I listened without entering into discussion. Some people are pleased when one talks to them, others when one simply listens. The two are quickly told apart. Mr Sydney Smith was used to being listened to, indeed he expected it.

[Guizot became prime minister of France in 1847 but was forced to resign after street disturbances in Paris in February 1848, disappearing from the political stage and fleeing to London. We can be sure that he would have sought Sydney out and received due solace had he not died three years earlier.]

Beside the lake, beneath the trees...

For some, *writes Peter Payan*, the English year holds few more piquant pleasures than the 'Weekend Arts & Book Festival' held in Grasmere each January. Conceived and conducted by Robert Woof, Director of the Wordsworth Trust, it is a feast of many flavours, above all of good company and good talk. Invited contributions are of high quality and come from among the very best in their respective fields.

This year we heard talks on 'The Rise of the Ashmolean Museum' by its Director Christopher Brown, on 'Trees, Writers and Painters' by Thomas Pakenham, on 'The Restoration of Michaelangelo's Tondo, and other conservation matters' by John Larson, the country's greatest expert, and the life and work of that giant among booksellers, Quaritch. There are also demonstrations of printing and bookbinding and advice on conservation. Participants stay in the hotel opposite Dove Cottage. The outstanding Wordsworth Museum is hard by.

My reason for referring to this excellent event (apart from urging our members to try it) is that I was startled to hear the writer and historian Penelope Hughes-Hallett quote Sydney Smith on the Quaker penal reformer Elizabeth Fry. What I heard was: 'examples of living, active virtue disturb our repose, and give birth to distressing comparisons: we long to burn her alive'. Tracking this down to a letter written to Lady Mary Bennet after he had visited Newgate with the reformer herself, I read with relief the preceding tease: 'She is very unpopular with the clergy'. So, just Sydney unable as ever to resist an opportunity.

[A hearty editorial endorsement of Peter's 'piquant pleasure', for Grasmere *is* unique fun: and exposure to Robert Woof's massive and genial scholarship re-enthuses one for the delights of conversation, books, pictures, poetry and landscape - so attendance would seem a must for members of our Association. For details of the 2005 Festival, write to: Weekend Arts and Book Festival, Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria ZA22 9SH.

Peter tells us he 'did the walk' this year, and we report this with pride. The walk round the lake at Grasmere takes place each morning at half-past seven, practically in the dark and

almost regardless of weather: it's not compulsory, but the numbers of perambulators are taken and announced. When - muddy, ruddy and steaming - they enter the dining-room, the very slightest sense of guilt envelops the indoor types already more than half-way through breakfast.]

Sydney Smith's Letters

At our London lunch in December, Alan Bell introduced a discussion of Sydney's letters, published and unpublished. He was beginning to resume work on his edition and had been assessing the new material that has been gathered over the years. If the texts already printed were revised - an essential task - and all the new material published, four large volumes would be necessary, scarcely a viable proposition when the cost of a set would be £400 or more. A 'complete' edition must be an illusion, as new material (some of it 'merely' social, like some of the recently discovered letters to the economist Nassau Senior) keeps turning up. A 'select' edition would meet the needs of general readers but would fail to satisfy the specialist. Perhaps the best way forward would be to try and meet both needs, with a well-edited selection (at possibly £35 in hardback) supplemented by secured electronic publication lightly annotated text of the rest. He was investigating the possibilities of this hybrid method of presenting as much material as possible in a way that would satisfy the curiosity of the educated reader and also place the whole correspondence within reach of the more detailed student.

He showed some samples of newly discovered letters which, it was agreed, would not merit publication in a complete edition. More recently, a letter that surely deserves a place in any selection has come to light. It was written by Sydney to Lady Holland in the last few months of his life, and we reproduce opposite its middle pages.

Part of an unpublished letter from Sydney Smith to Lady Holland, 17 October 1844: [I can hardly walk across the] room - and I have hardly breath enough to blow out a taper.---The Doctor says I am better to day but no animal food allowd. I beggd for a broild Butterfly or the moiety of a Larks Leg - but was met by the unchristian Edict "you must live on bread alone" a Canon of St Pauls deprivd of animal food!!! I have read of many bereavements, & wept over many Tragedies but I was not prepared for this. ....

Nice and Easy

A faithful correspondent in York says she was cheered at a winter funeral to find there was a reading of Sydney's description of 'A Nice Person' – 'so moving and so amusing', she thought. Unaware of this nicety, we consulted our growing S.S. shelf and quickly found it - thanks to the crisply helpful index entry: 'Nice person, definition of a, 198' in volume one of daughter Saba's *Memoir* (1855) of her father (a recent exciting but expensive find in Mayfair - no, *not* in Oxfam). When Sydney branded a young visitor 'a nice person' she protested: 'Oh, don't call me "nice", Mr Sydney; people only say that where they can say nothing else.' Sydney at once called for pen and ink and off the clerical cuff set down six paragraphs to define 'A Nice Person'. We quote only the last, where Sydney is characteristically obedient to the dictum, 'Always leave 'em laughing': 'A nice person never knocks over wine or melted butter, does not tread upon the dog's foot, or molest the family cat, eats soup without noise, laughs in the right place, and has a watchful and attentive eye.'

From the 'watchful and attentive eye' department:
Taking up our Hogarth Press paperback reprint (1984) of Hesketh Pearson's *The Smith of Smiths* (first published in 1934, and widely sold as a Penguin in 1948), we observe that Sydney's place of birth oddly relocates from Essex to the adjoining county. We quote from page 22: 'Meanwhile his wife bore him five children - four sons and one daughter - at five different homes. They happened to be at Woodbridge in Suffolk on the 3rd of June, 1771, when their second child, Sydney, was born.' Mrs Robert Smith's confusion as to which of the five was born where, given 'five different homes', would have been fully justified - but she knew perfectly well, unlike The Hogarth Press, that Sydney joined the world in Woodford, Essex. We mustn't make too much of this, for after all bridges and fords do the same job: they get you across the river and into the trees. Nevertheless, an intriguing bibliographical point, for the Hogarth edition (unlike the Penguin) was 'offset, with additions and corrections, from original Hamish Hamilton edition' - which we don't have, so will a reader who does own it let us know what it says?

Haydon encounters eloquence...
'Breakfasted with Wilkie; went to church; Sydney Smith preached: he took his stand for Christianity on the conversion of St Paul. If his vision and conversion were the effect of a heated brain or fanaticism, it was the first time (he said) that madness gave a new direction to a man's feelings. Fanaticism he described as a want of perception of the different feelings and habits of mankind. I never heard a more eloquent man.' (Journal entry for 4 December 1808 from the *Autobiography of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, World's Classics, 1927.)

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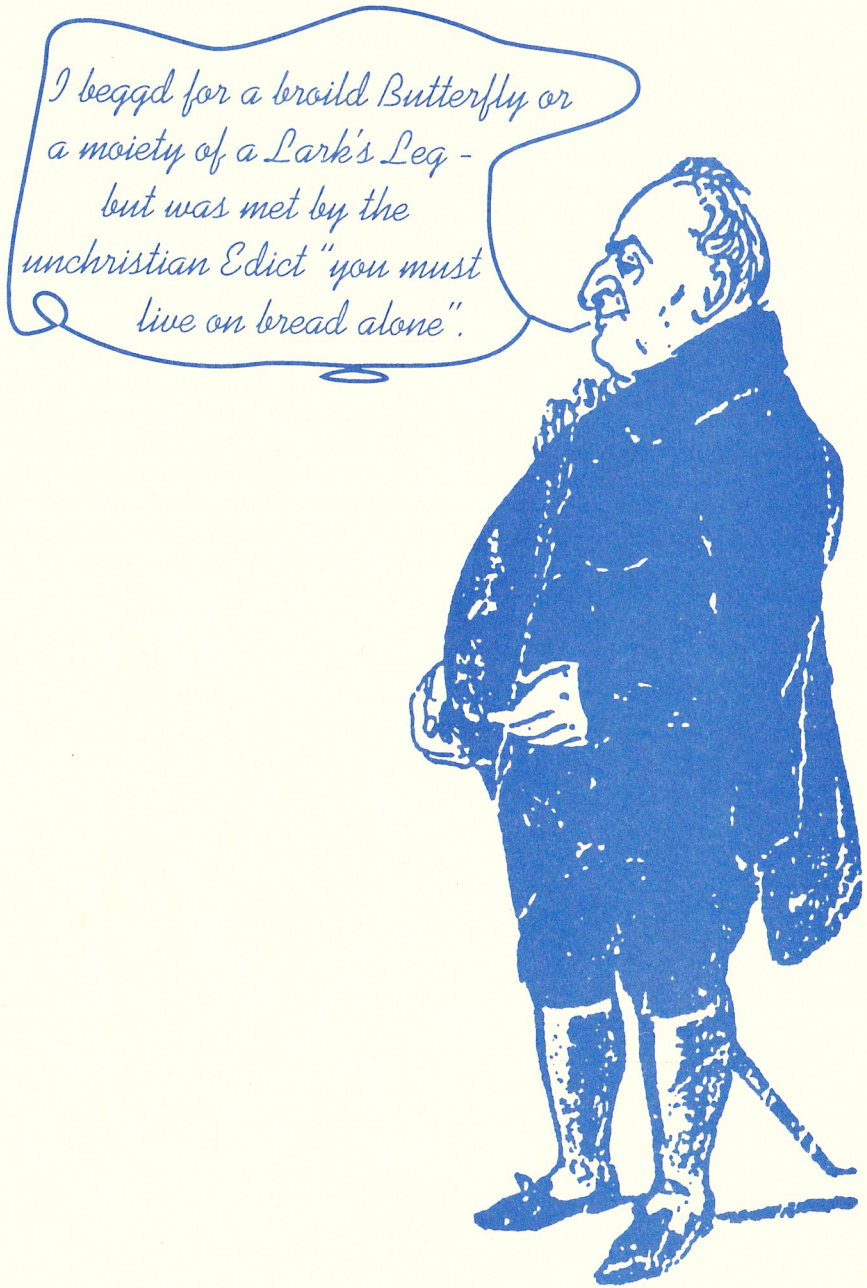
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