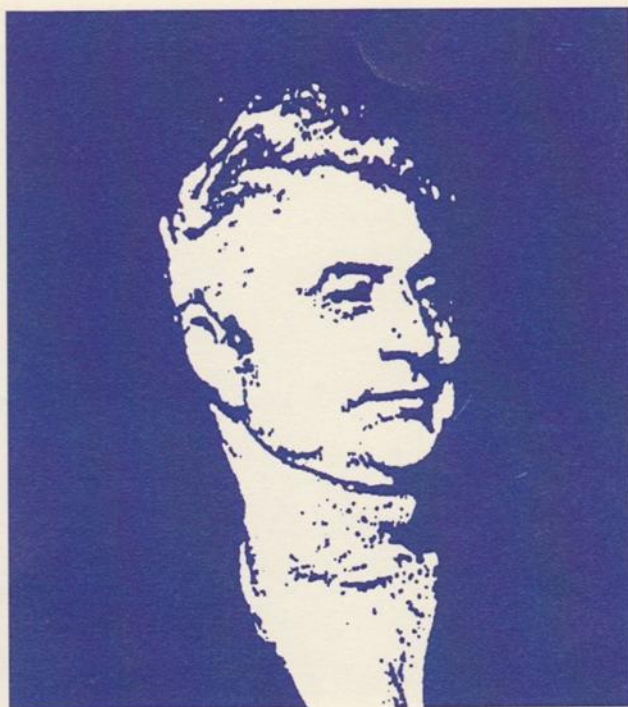


THE
SYDNEY SMITH
ASSOCIATION



NEWSLETTER

Issue 27

Summer 2022

THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION (Charity No. 1121599)

- 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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Introduction

Colin Southall

After another year in limbo, we are emerging into a world where Covid is endemic. The expectation is that as it evolves Covid will become less virulent and that vaccines will continue to provide a level of immunity – in short, we will learn to co-exist. Given this, it is hoped that we will be able to resume the lunch meetings in the autumn and to hold the 2022 AGM in person, rather than on Zoom. I for one have missed good conversation and the opportunity to meet members.

If Covid was not enough to deal with, we now have the war in Ukraine. How could we still be willing to unleash such horror on the world? This made me think of Sydney's times and the conflicts which raged then – the American Revolution, the Napoleonic wars and, later, the civil unrest in England over reform and working conditions.

Sydney did not write much about war, as he was surprised to observe when he was preparing his Edinburgh Review essays for publication, remarking "There is more of misery inflicted upon mankind by one year of war than by all the civil peculations and oppressions of a century." I found one sermon, delivered in London in 1804 when invasion was considered imminent, where he focuses on courage and a conviction in the rightness of what was being defended. In 1837 in a sermon delivered on the occasion of Queen Victoria's accession he said, "A second great object, which I hope will be impressed upon the mind of this Royal Lady, is a rooted horror of war - an earnest and passionate desire to keep her people in a state of profound peace." This can be explained, I think, because he was focused on injustice to individuals rather

than on nation states. He wrote extensively about the game laws, prison conditions, slavery, electoral reform, education and Catholic emancipation, all of which had an impact on society's views about individuals and how they should be treated.

How did Sydney come to hold these views? His father Robert was not a good model, Winchester was a feral place when Sydney was there, and New College was a lonely one where he was "thrown back on the classics and meditation." And so, when he arrived in Edinburgh in June 1797, he was finally able to gratify his love of reason and practical knowledge by attending lectures and dining with friends.

In this newsletter we have a range of contributions which explore this question. John Simpson, who was Canon Precentor at Bristol Cathedral from 1989-1999, traces Sydney's development from his time in Edinburgh, and provides insight into how these influences shaped him. We reprint Bryan Maye's article from the Irish Times published to commemorate Sydney's anniversary, and Sydnie Bones describes the impact Hesketh Pearson's biography *The Smiths* has had on her, and which led me to read his earlier book *The Whispering Gallery*.

Sydney moved to Bristol in 1828. His sermon on toleration that year did not sit well with the Corporation, but he remained in post. In June 1831 the ground-breaking ceremony for the Suspension Bridge was held; work that was to continue for over thirty years before the bridge finally opened to traffic. In September 1831 Sydney was installed as a canon at St Paul's, and in October 1831 the Second Reform Bill was defeated in the Lords. Sydney spoke forcefully for reform at a meeting in Taunton on 11th October, and Bristol saw serious rioting at the end of October. So, 1831 was an eventful year. What will 2022 bring?

My Introduction to Sydney Smith

Sydie Bones

‘Here’s a good book, Sydie – this man is one of my heroes’. It was 1957, I was newly married, and my husband Jim was arranging his books on empty shelves. He handed me a well-thumbed paperback in the Penguin series of biographies, distinctive in their dark blue and white strip: Hesketh Pearson’s *The Smith of Smiths*. I had never heard of the Reverend Sydney Smith; my out-of-school reading had covered everything on my parents’ meagre bookshelf, Agatha Christie, Jefferey Farnol, Somerset Maugham, but not a biography among them. From that time on, Sydney became one of my heroes too.

Thirty years and many books later, my husband met Norman Taylor at a men’s luncheon group in Lyme Regis. It emerged that they shared a passion for scholarship in the Georgian era and it was not long before Sydney Smith’s name came up in conversation. When Norman became involved in the formation of the Association, Jim was a willing recruit. The Newsletters were a joy to read and I looked forward to their arrival as much as he did. No surprise then that after his untimely death in 1999 I asked Peter Diggle if I might join the Association in his place.

Our original Penguin copy of *The Smith of Smiths* now sits on my son’s shelves and on mine I have the 1977 Folio Society edition, handsomely bound in William Morris style boards with blue and gilt spine, elegant in its pristine slipcase. Not having looked at this copy since I bought it, I took it down from the shelf today. The seven-page *Introduction* to this edition is by Malcolm Muggeridge of which five pages focus on Hesketh Pearson. Muggeridge evidently was a greater fan of Pearson than he was of Sydney

Smith and admits to having to tread warily when discussing him. He writes: *'My reservations about Smith arose out of his worldliness; he was, I felt, Mr Worldly Wiseman to the life. ... I had a strong sense that Christianity, if it signified anything, must be about humility, lowliness, self-abnegation – qualities little in evidence in Smith's life and disposition ...'* So much for Sydney's ministry. His wit comes in for much the same treatment: *'A further difficulty is that some of Smith's witticisms have, through frequent use, become old chestnuts'*. Muggeridge does manage to include faint praise before his final barb: *'I cannot believe that Smith could have hoped for a more sympathetic biographer, or Hesketh for a more sympathetic subject for a biography'*. I could have wished for a more sympathetic introduction-writer.

In a recent issue of *Slightly Foxed* (No. 46, 2015), Michael Holroyd, Pearson's heir and literary executor, described how the publication of this biography restored the good name of its author whose career had been blighted by the publication of biographical details in *The Whispering Gallery* (1926), in which Pearson had allowed his imagination to make good a lack of evidence. This combination of fact and fiction landed him in court, charged with attempting to obtain money by false pretences. Even though he was pronounced Not Guilty by a jury, no publisher was prepared to touch his work until Hamish Hamilton accepted *The Smith of Smiths* in 1934. Its success renewed Pearson's reputation and rescued his finances.

Hesketh Pearson's admiration for his famous subject shines out from every page. The opening chapter, which covers the early years, includes extensive quotations of Sydney's retrospective accounts of his experiences at Winchester and Oxford and closes with the dashing of Sydney's ambition to become a lawyer.

"You may be a college tutor or a parson." Sydney did not relish either prospect. "Then you may go as a supercargo to China" said his helpful parent. This was still less to his liking. None of the professions suggested by Smith senior promised high rewards for ambition, and Sydney was very ambitious. "In the Church," said he, "a man is thrown into life with his hands tied and bid to swim; he does well if he keeps his head above water." Nevertheless, it was the only profession open to a scholarly and intelligent man with no private means; so, into the Church he went.

As befitted a traditional biography of the 1930s, chapters follow chronologically. Their headings, however, stir the reader's curiosity. A *Stormy Night*, with its vivid description of the conception of the *Edinburgh Review*, considered by Pearson to be 'a daring and dangerous experiment', is followed by *The Blue and Buff* which explores the controversial subjects dissected by the reviewers and consequent changes in public opinion and the law. Blue and buff were the colours of the *Edinburgh Review*'s bindings, not dissimilar to the colours of this Folio Society edition.

Pearson's portrayal of Sydney Smith as a clergyman is intriguing – I wonder if Malcolm Muggeridge had actually read it. *"He saw the good and bad in every creed but believed the Church of England taught the soundest, because the sanest, doctrine ... it was, like British polity, a representative and national institution, a necessary prop to the state"* – a *Branch of the Civil Service*: a brilliant chapter heading.

The final chapter *Growing Old Merrily* closes with a diary entry in Charles Greville's *Memoirs* on hearing of Sydney Smith's death: *I do not suppose he had any dogmatic and doctrinal opinions in respect to religion ... in his heart of hearts he despised and derided*

all that the world wrangles and squabbles about; but he had the true religion of benevolence and charity, of peace and goodwill to mankind ... Thank you, Hesketh Pearson, for introducing me to this inspirational man who brings me comfort and joy in my growing old.

From the Archives

Two hundred years ago...

London, May 10, 1822

Dear Mrs Meynell

I have got into all my London feelings, which come on the moment I pass Hyde Park Corner. I am languid, unfriendly, heartless, selfish, sarcastic, and insolent. Forgive me, thou inhabitant of the plains, child of nature, rural woman, agricultural female! Remember what you were in Hill Street and pardon the vices inevitable in the greatest of cities.

They take me here for an ancient country clergyman and think I cannot see!! ... How little they know your sincere and affectionate friend,

SYDNEY SMITH

Leeds Intelligencer, 16th December 1822

Literary Notices

From the British Newspaper Archive

The Edinburgh Review is, as everybody knows, the grand order of whiggism – the gazette extraordinary of faction – the mouthpiece of radical reform – the demi-official manifesto of well-dressed infidels and anarchists. ...

V. Mr Canning's Speeches. We have here the old story of reform over again. ... Does it proceed from the Rev. Sydney Smith, the alliterating gentleman who discovered some time ago (see a review we believe of Malthus on Population) that 'the same passions that people the parsonage with chubby children, burn equally in the breast of the baptist!' ... If the Edinburgh Reviewer thinks that poetry like this is mouthy, obscure and feeble, he is a fool; and if he has advanced such an opinion conscious of its injustice, he is a knave.

"Jump in and Scramble"

Brian Maye of the Irish Times on the Rev Sydney Smith, Jun 7, 2021

I first came across reference to the Rev Sydney Smith through his lovely sentiment that "no furniture is so charming as books". The English Anglican clergyman, who was born 250 years ago on June 3rd, held progressive and far-sighted views on such issues as women's education, the abolition of slavery, Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform, among others, but it is mainly on his reputation as a wit and writer that I would like to dwell here.

First, a brief summary of his life. He was born in Woodford, Essex, the son of a merchant, and attended Winchester College before graduating from New College, Oxford. The law was his preferred profession but on his father's insistence, he took holy orders and became a curate near Amesbury in Wiltshire, where he worked to improve the lot of his parishioners through providing basic education.

Sent to Edinburgh as tutor to the eldest son of his local squire, after some time in the city he set up the Edinburgh Review with others, becoming its first editor.

The Latin motto he proposed for the Review, which translated as "We cultivate literature on a little oatmeal", was dropped because it was considered too near to the truth and also because, according to Smith, "It requires a surgical operation to get a joke well into a Scotch understanding".

He wrote for the Review for more than 25 years and his articles contributed greatly to its success.

He married Catharine Pybus in Edinburgh and the couple settled in London, where he preached widely across the city and lectured at the Royal Institution.

Parish work in Yorkshire followed, where he proved very popular with his parishioners. He was also appointed a canon of St Paul's Cathedral and a prebend at Bristol Cathedral. During these years, he wrote vigorously on behalf of Catholic rights, at times attacking Protestant bigotry and obscurantism, and he strongly supported the cause of parliamentary reform.

On prejudice, he gave the very sound advice: “Never try to reason the prejudice out of a man. It was not reasoned into him and cannot be reasoned out.”

Although he referred to himself as a “sincere friend of America”, what he wrote would seem to belie this. He strongly advocated the abolition of slavery.

In one piece he wrote, he asked: “In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book, or goes to an American play, or looks at an American picture or statue?” He concluded the piece: “Finally, under which of the old tyrannical governments of Europe is every sixth man a slave, whom his fellow-creatures may buy and sell and torture?”

His many sayings, comments and observations, for which he became famous, show perception, compassion, common sense and not a little humour. In his writings and sermons, he often spoke out for the poor and against the embedded privileges of the rich, and in his parish, work gave practical expression to these views. “It is always considered a piece of impertinence in England if a man of less than two or three thousand a year has any opinion at all on important subjects” shows how skewed he believed social values were.

He knew how to encourage and motivate people as may be seen from the following.

“It is the greatest of all mistakes to do nothing because you can only do little.”

“The fact is that in order to do anything in this world worth doing, we must not stand shivering on the bank, thinking of the cold and the danger, but jump in and scramble through as well as we can.”

If we did not make the effort, we would always regret it, he warned: “Regret for the things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for the things that we did not do that is inconsolable.”

Nor did he think we should be afraid to admit our lack of knowledge at times. “Have the courage to be ignorant of a great number of things, in order to avoid the calamity of being ignorant of everything.”

He was under no illusion about one of his main tools as a clergyman.

“Preaching has become a byword for long and dull conversation of any kind, and whoever wishes to imply, in any piece of writing, the absence of anything agreeable and inviting, calls it a sermon.”

“Life is to be fortified by many friendships. To love, and to be loved, is the greatest happiness of existence,” was the main lesson he wished to expound from his full, active and valuable life.

Sydney Smith – Some Reflections

John Simpson

In 2012 a friend of mine suggested that, as a Canon Emeritus of Bristol Cathedral, I should join the Sydney Smith Association. At the time I knew very little about Sydney Smith. There was the memorial in the North Transept praising his qualities. I knew that he was a renowned preacher, a wit and a *bon viveur*, whose

description of a friend's idea of heaven was 'eating caviar to the sound of trumpets' *but* had no idea of the range of achievements of the remarkable man. Since joining the Association I have learnt so much and become more and more fascinated by his life. I have read and heard many erudite academic studies about him. This is not one of them. It is merely a few selected reflections on things that have impressed me on the various visits and talks that I have attended as well as the books I have read, including quotations from articles in the Newsletters.

Sydney did not enjoy his time at Winchester College. He declared that the whole system was 'one of abuse, neglect and vice'. He disapproved of the whole public school system. When in 1789 he came up to New College Oxford he encountered an intellectual torpor and inertia. It was his time, as a tutor, in Edinburgh which helped to shape his mind. At that time Edinburgh had become known as 'the Athens of the North', the hub of the Scottish Enlightenment. Philosophy, history and political economy flourished at Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities. Sydney immersed himself in this intellectual hot house, mixing in the company of ardent young Whigs, and attending the salons of philosophers and political economists debating the latest ideas current in Edinburgh circles. He also attended lectures on medicine and chemistry.

As Professor Angus Hawkins told us, Sydney was influenced by Dugald Stewart, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University. Stewart reinforced the idea of 'their' modern age being one of unilineal advance demonstrating the progress of civilization. This applied as equally to morals as it did to politics. Prejudice, slavery and corruption were being progressively replaced by truth, liberty and virtue. Laws and legislation were the keys to achieving this

advance. Stewart covered such topics as population, national wealth, treatment of the poor and the education of the lower orders; topics which focused on the happiness and improvement of society. All these reinforced Sydney's political understanding of his pastoral and public commitments as a parson. He must also have been attracted by Stewart's common-sense approach to philosophy, a view which appears to have influenced his later writings.

In 1802, with his friend Henry Brougham and Francis Jeffery, he co-founded the Edinburgh Review. It gained wide esteem for its political and literary criticism. He continued to write for that periodical for 25 years, and his trenchant articles were a main element in its success. Sydney also gained a reputation as a preacher when he took services in the Chapel in Charlotte Square. In 1800 he published his first book of Six Sermons. In the same year he married Catherine Anne Pybus. Sydney enjoyed his time in Edinburgh but wrote: *"It requires a surgical operation to get a joke into a Scottish understanding. Their only idea of wit, is laughing immoderately at stated intervals."*

In 1803 he moved to London, and in 1804 gave the first of a series of lectures in moral philosophy, which people flocked to hear for their blend of good sense and wit. He was a frequent visitor to Holland House and met all the leading Whig politicians.

In 1806 Sydney was offered the living of Foston-le-Clay in Yorkshire. The problem was that it had not had a resident parson since the time of Charles II. The parsonage was a ruin beyond repair and for some years Sydney lived in Heslington, near York. Eventually he decided to borrow money and build a rectory for himself, his wife Kate and their four children. As Ralph Rochester

states in his article on Sydney Smith's Rectories, having dismissed the architect for being too ambitious and too expensive, Sydney and Kate sat down at their kitchen table and designed the 'snug parsonage' into which they moved on Lady Day 1814. The building had taken nine months from the laying of the first stone. How many country parsons today would be capable of designing and building a house? It required skills in drawing and maths as well as knowledge of materials and quantity surveying, let alone accountancy. Sydney later wrote: *"it made me a poor man for many years, but I never repented it. I turned schoolmaster to educate my son, as I could not afford to send him to school. Mrs Sydney turned schoolmistress, to educate my girls, as I could not afford a governess. I turned farmer as I could not let out my land"*. (At that time, most country parsons gained an income from farming glebe land. Sydney farmed 300 acres. When he started, he admitted he knew nothing about turnips.) He engaged a carpenter as a house servant and got him to make furniture for his new home. In addition to his domestic cares and duties as a parson, Sydney was village magistrate and village doctor. (His attendance at lectures on medicine and chemistry at Edinburgh enabled him to act as doctor and apothecary and he cured many people.) Physic and justice were alike dispensed in a room which was known to some as the 'surgery', to others as 'the justice-room' and to the master of the house as 'the study'.

In March 1807 the Whigs had been forced to resign on the question of Roman Catholic emancipation, which Smith supported. In 1807 he wrote the first of several letters attacking as what he saw as Protestant ignorance, obscurantism and bigotry. Success was immediate and other letters followed. Sydney won his Yorkshire parishioners' affection through his energy, cheerfulness, and care in time of need. He continued to write polemics on the

Roman Catholic question, frequently clashing with the archdeacons and local Yorkshire clergy over the issue.

In 1828 he gained preferment being installed as a prebend of Bristol Cathedral and also the benefice of Combe Florey in Somerset. He inherited a fine Prebendal House. He wrote that it was exceedingly comfortable with seven stabling stalls and room for four carriages. Away from Bristol he very much enjoyed Combe Florey. He decided the parsonage was in need of a complete rebuild and that he was just the man to set about the task. He wrote *"part of my house has tumbled down; the rest is inclined to follow"*. He employed ten carpenters and ten bricklayers and repeated much of what he had done at Foston like the great bow windows. He also built a large library, a conservatory and a pretty garden. He employed a curate to run the services and spent time at Combe Florey whenever he could. He retained the living until the end of his life.

Canon John Rogan gave us a fascinating glimpse into a critical part of his time at Bristol. It fell to Sydney to preach the sermon on 5th November 1828 when the Lord Mayor, Aldermen and councillors attended in state. They were a pompous lot, very much aware of their status and dignity. As Sydney said, it was the most Protestant Corporation in England. In addition, the city had been foremost in opposing the Abolition of the Slave Trade and ardently opposed the Emancipation of Roman Catholics. The civic authorities knew what the sermon on November 5th should be about: it should celebrate the failure of the Roman plot to blow up the royal family and all the Members of Parliament. Instead, Sydney preached on the need for religious toleration resting on the foundation of Christian charity. The civic authorities had not come to hear this. As Sydney reported: *"They stared at me with all their eyes. Several*

of them could not keep their turtle on their stomachs In short I gave the Mayor and corporation such a dose of toleration as will last them for many a year”.

The Mayor and Corporation resolved that they would never again attend such a service in the Cathedral. They would attend St Mary Redcliffe instead. The damage had been done. It was up to other members of the Chapter to try to patch things up. The fact that Smith was right, and the Corporation wrong did not make things any easier. The spat about his sermon paled into insignificance with the riots in Bristol in October 1831 over the Reform Bill, when the Bishop's Palace was burnt down and both the Mansion House and the Cathedral badly damaged. The riots took place after the House of Lords rejected the second Reform Bill which aimed to get rid of some of the rotten boroughs and give the fast-growing industrial towns such as Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Bradford and Leeds greater representation in the House of Commons.

In 2017 we had the AGM weekend in Taunton. Mark Wade recalled how Sydney Smith averted a riot. I quote: “At the height of the furore over the Reform Bill when feelings throughout the country, but especially in Somerset, were running at revolutionary pitch, Sydney Smith stepped forward to address an enormous press of people who had gathered in the Great Hall of the castle, once used by Judge Jefferies for his ‘Blood Assize’. Sydney’s entrance was that of a consummate actor. He immediately perceived the need to defuse the seething anger of the protestors. He used no rhetoric but by the use of mime he fixed in the minds of his audience the image of Mrs Partington attempting to stem the Atlantic Ocean with her mop. This was followed by the briefest of perorations. A great wave of laughter then took hold of the many hundreds of

persons. Newspaper men present probably in anticipation of a bloody riot, ensured that within two or three days prints of Mrs Partington, with a face by no means dissimilar to that of the Duke of Wellington, were to be found in the streets of London. Thus, it was by means of a timely jest rather than an eloquent speech, that attempts to halt the Reform Bill were made to look ridiculous." The Great Reform Act was passed in 1832.

Sydney's stay in Bristol was short. In September 1831 he was offered a Residentiary Canonry at St. Paul's Cathedral and was installed within a month. This brought him back to London for part of each year and to his London circle where he was soon a celebrity. As Sydnie Bones wrote in the 2020 newsletter, he soon became a respected and valuable member of the administration and a popular preacher. His talents were widely recognised. But residency in winter did have its drawbacks. *"To go into St Paul's is certain death"*, he wrote one November: *"The thermometer is several degrees below zero – my sentences are frozen as they come out of my mouth ..."*.

Smith was not a great fan of bishops seeing them as time-serving supporters of a reactionary Tory government. He accused them of bullying lower clergy in the church and of useless theology in their preaching. As he said, *"I have, alas only one illusion left, and that is the Archbishop of Canterbury"*. In 1836 a brief interval with a Whig government and the death of three bishops in six weeks provided a real opportunity to elevate Sydney to the episcopate. It was not to be. He had offended so many eminent clerics and influential people that Lord Melbourne shirked the uproar that might have ensued. In 1837 he preached a sermon of advice to the young queen Victoria on her accession to the throne.

Sydney soon became responsible for much of the practical business of the Cathedral, in particular the care of the fabric of the building and its finances. Additionally, he was responsible for the music and musicians and the stewardship of the library. He preferred books to music. He wrote: *"Nothing can be more disgusting than an oratorio. How absurd to see 500 people fiddling like madmen about Israelites in the Red Sea"*. Sydney's attention to detail is evident in his meticulous record-keeping, a practice on which he insisted when dealing with work carried out on the building. In his later years his health declined. He died in 1845 at his home in London aged 73. After his death, Dean Millman told Sydney's daughter Saba that he found traces of him in every particular of Chapter affairs and that he respected "above all the perfect fidelity of his stewardship". Alan Bell writes in his biography: "It was Sydney who laid the foundations of the movement for reform in the administration of St Paul's, which was to lead to the Cathedral being one of the glories of the metropolis later in the century".

Most of you will be aware of many more incidents in Sydney's life. I have merely sketched some which have amused or impressed me. They give an indication of the vast range of talents employed by this remarkable man. He was a true son of the enlightenment with liberal views and a concern for social justice; from this stemmed his concern for Catholic emancipation and the need for parliamentary reform. His preaching and writings were down to earth and full of common sense. He was practical man, able to design and build houses with a knowledge of architecture, mathematics and materials. He also farmed his glebe land. He was able to act as a doctor and apothecary. He was a gifted preacher able to stir or to provoke. He was also sensitive to people's moods and able to act as mediator and defuse difficult situations. He

loved books and enjoyed his garden. He was generous and always willing to help those in need. He was known for his vivacious wit, social charm and love of food and wine.

On the memorial in Bristol Cathedral erected in 1909 are these words:

*As a tardy recognition of one who reasoned liberally,
Illuminating civic wisdom with Christian charity,
Political judgement with social wit,
And common sense with uncommon insight.*

Finally, with an entirely new thought – ‘I wonder what Sydney would do if he was minister in charge of the Covid crisis?’

Sydney in Bristol in 1831

The Clifton Suspension Bridge and the Reform Riots

Dr Paul Main, committee member of the Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society, wrote to Sydnie in October 2021 inquiring about Sydney’s time in Bristol.

He mentioned that the late Dr Donald Jones in his *A History of Clifton* (Phillimore & Co Ltd, 2008) states on page 147 that the Rev Sydney Smith lived at 8. Gloucester Row, Clifton, Bristol. He was interested in verifying if this and knowing how long he lived there.

One of the activities of the Society is putting up commemorative plaques to notable past residents of the BS8 area, and this information would help them decide whether such a plaque should be erected to Sydney at this address.

Sydie responded as follows:

Having spent a pleasurable two or three hours in the company of Sydney Smith, I have a few additions but no firm dates. Having been appointed as prebend at Bristol in February 1828, he took residence in Bristol in March. Addresses on his letters appear as 18 and 10 College Green and Lower College Green. One dated October 1828 may have been from Gloucester Place: he describes his residence as having "a large Gothic room with painted glass". In January 1831 his correspondence is addressed as 8 Gloucester Place, Clifton. In October 1831 he was appointed Canon of St Paul's Cathedral.

It would appear that one could reasonably say 1829-1831 as the dates of his residence in Gloucester Place, Clifton.

She also noted that a transcript of a talk given to the Association at their dinner in 2013 by Canon Rogan of Bristol Cathedral was published in the Society's newsletter, Issue No 19, 2014, pages 12-15.

Dr Main responded to thank Sydie for the information she had provided and mentioned that he had been on a committee with Canon Rogan over 30 years ago. He mentioned that Gloucester Row is a terrace of fine Georgian houses, built in the 1780s, on what is now called Suspension Bridge Road. Brunel's bridge was built between 1831 and 1864 and wondered if Sydney may have seen the foundation committee dig a turf for the foundation stone.

He said that he could find no mention in the old maps and local history books of Gloucester Place and was consulting the Bristol

cannon, and music provided by the band of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, of whom more later.

Sydie mentions a letter from Bristol in January 1831. We know Sydney was in London in September 1831 as he was installed as a Canon of St Paul's on the 27th, but do not know when he left Bristol for London, or whether he had travelled to London from Combe Florey.

An account of the ceremony was published in the Bristol Mercury on Tuesday, 21st June 1831, though sadly there was no list of attendees:

CLIFTON SUSPENSION BRIDGE.
COMMENCEMENT OF THE UNDERTAKING.

It is with heartfelt satisfaction that we this day record the commencement of that stupendous and magnificent work, the construction of a Suspension Bridge across the Avon, from Clifton Down to Leigh Wood.

The resolution of the Committee to commence operations having been suddenly taken, it being so lately as Saturday last that the measure was determined on, the circumstance was but partially known, and though it has been hailed with delight and satisfaction, our fellow citizens, for the most part, have been taken by surprise, and many of them undoubtedly regret having lost the opportunity of witnessing the ceremony of commencing a structure that, we doubt not, will become an object of universal attraction and general admiration.

The design chosen by the Committee, as most of our readers are already aware, is that of Mr. Brunel, Jun., and it is admirably adapted to the beautiful scenery of the enchanting spot, to which it is destined to add new charms. The sum estimated to complete the erection, including the approaches and every expense, amounts to 57,000*l.*, of which about 20,000*l.* yet remains to be provided; but notwithstanding so great a deficiency, the ardour of the Committee has been such as to induce

them to comply with the wish so generally entertained, of seeing the work begun, trusting to the liberality and public spirit of the more wealthy and influential of the inhabitants to enable them to carry it on to completion.

We believe it was only on Wednesday last that the question of commencing was first mooted by one of the respectable gentlemen belonging to this body. At that time, in the present state of their finances, his advice was regarded as bold and hazardous; but, at the meeting on Saturday, to which day they adjourned in order to deliberate on the proposition, it was unanimously adopted, and measures were immediately taken to set to work in right good earnest yesterday morning. Accordingly, at an early hour, a number of excavators commenced leveling the ground which is to form the approach on the Clifton side; and, to give to the event, of itself one of the most interesting of a local nature that has occurred for many years, additional éclat, in the course of the morning, a simple, but pleasing ceremony was performed.

The Committee assembled between eight and nine o'clock, at the Bath Hotel, where a public breakfast was served up in handsome style by the worthy host. At this time the number of spectators, on the down, was but few; but, about ten o'clock, the weather being particularly fine, a great many of the respectable inhabitants of the neighbourhood made their appearance, and, shortly after, the assemblage was graced by the attendance of a considerable number of females of rank and fashion. It was intended, we believe, that the ceremony should take place between ten and eleven, but from some cause with which we are unacquainted, it was delayed till twelve, at which time the Committee, most of them accompanied by their ladies, proceeded from the Hotel and took their station around a pile of stones, the first, we believe, that had been removed.

Mr. Brunel then entered the circle, and taking up one of the stones, presented it to Lady Elton as a memento of the commencement of the undertaking; Lady Elton, holding it in her hand, expressing her best wishes for its success, and that the labours of the engineer might be prosecuted prosperously, and brought to a happy termination.

This event was announced by a discharge of cannon, planted on the summit of the rocks, and by the side of the river immediately underneath, the band of the 3rd Dragoon Guards playing "God save the King," and the multitude rending the air with acclamations. At

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This event was announced by a discharge of cannon, planted on the summit of the rocks, and by the side of the river immediately underneath, the band of the 3rd Dragoon Guards playing " God save the King," and the multitude rending the air with acclamations. At this moment also, the colours which had been flying from a flag-staff erected for the occasion, and which had been temporarily struck, were re-hoisted.

Sir Abraham Elton, Bart., having been called upon by the Committee, then addressed the assembly nearly to the following effect :—He said it was customary to address an audience from a public station, perfectly in view ; but called on, as he had been, to address so crowded an assembly on a most important object, though the situation in which he was placed was most unexpected, yet he found it most pleasing, surrounded and honoured as he was by the attendance of the ladies. He considered the object for which they had met as one promising the most important consequences, and interesting not only to the ancient city of Bristol, but also to the world at large. It was a common observation, that bystanders saw more of a play than those who were engaged in it. He would call himself a bystander, and having considered calmly and coolly the utility of the great work they had that day commenced, he would say that, in his opinion, it was impossible to calculate the benefit that would arise from it.

It was possible for those actively engaged in prosecuting the noble design, to be somewhat enthusiastic; but his own opinion had been formed upon calm and deep reflection. He thought it right to state thus much, lest any might say, "What business has that old fellow here, who knows nothing about the matter?" He thought it became him as an inhabitant, and one who was attached to the city, and anxiously desired its welfare, to declare his sentiments on the present occasion; and he thought that the accomplishment of their object would make Bristol, already distinguished among the cities of the empire, yet more renowned. She was famous for many things—she had reason to be proud of her poets; but the completion of this undertaking would be the realization of more than the fiction of the imagination. It had been said that old men were fond of proverbs, and there was one which, at the present moment, forced itself upon his attention—"A faint heart never won a fair lady." He would, however, apply it seriously; for viewing the obstacles and the difficulties which the Committee would have to contend with in the prosecution of their work, if "a faint heart never won a fair lady," so a faint heart never would accomplish such a stupendous work as the one in which they were engaged. He trusted, however, that they would be cheered in their labours as well by the smiles and the influence of the ladies as by the assistance of those on whom they relied for support. He observed before him a gentleman on whom, he felt assured, all the inhabitants of this great city might repose with confidence. He congratulated that gentleman on his singular good fortune, in being selected, young as he was, to conduct an undertaking of such magnitude; and he doubted not it would be completed no less to the satisfaction of the promoters than to his own honour. He could anticipate the time when, as that gentleman walked along the streets, or as he passed from city to city, the cry would be raised, "There goes the man who reared that stupendous work, the ornament of Bristol and the wonder of the age." Sir Abraham concluded amidst loud cheers.

"Success to the undertaking and to the conductor," was then drank in sparkling champagne; Mr. Brunel acknowledging the compliment in appropriate terms, assuring the company that he would indefatigably prosecute his labours.

The humbler classes were regaled with a barrel of beer, and the ceremony terminated much to the satisfaction of every one.

At present we believe no part of the work has been contracted for. Building and Finance Committees are however formed, and as soon as the ground is somewhat cleared, tenders will be received. We earnestly entreat our fellow-citizens to come forward to the support of the undertaking: we cannot for one moment imagine that they will allow the energies of the conductors to languish for want of the necessary means to complete the work. It has been intimated to us that as soon as an additional 10,000*l.* shall have been subscribed, all the contracts will be immediately completed.

A short account of the ground-breaking ceremony was published in the London Morning Advertiser on Thursday 23rd June 1831:

“Clifton Suspension Bridge. - Yesterday morning the stupendous work of the Clifton Suspension Bridge, across the Avon, from Clifton heights to Leawood, was commenced under the superintendence of the Trustees and Mr. Brunell, junior, their engineer, by whom the first stone was raised, in making the approaches, and handed to Lady Elton, on which Sir Abraham Elton made an appropriate speech. The beauty of the scenery, heightened by the beauties of Clifton, the attendance of the band of 3d Dragoon Guards, and the re-echoing of the cannon amongst the rocks, together with the colours flying on both sides of the river, and the steam-packets passing below, gave an effect to the whole, which no one can picture who is not acquainted with that delightful spot.”

It is interesting to see that this account was widely reported, in most cases verbatim, in newspapers across the country over the next few weeks.

An advertisement appeared in the Bristol Times and Mirror on Saturday, 25th June 1831 for “a view of the suspension bridge now erecting over the Avon at Clifton” by Rowbotham:



There is a rather sad coda to this story. Sydney was still in London on Saturday, 8th October when the Lords voted down the second reform bill and he had warned Lord Dudley of the consequences. He was in Taunton on Tuesday, 11th October where he made his speech concerning the inevitability of reform (and introduced us to Mrs Partington). His words were reported in the Bristol Mercury on Tuesday, 18th October 1831 and in many other newspapers.

The Bristol city magistrates had requested troops be sent to help with any disorder and 93 men from the 14th Light Dragoons and the 3rd Dragoon Guards (whose band played at the bridge ceremony in June) were deployed. The 14th were unpopular in Bristol as they had recently been involved in the suppression of disorder in the West Country, while the 3rd, a regiment based locally, were cheered.

There were serious riots in Bristol on 29-31st October 1831. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Brereton who commanded the 3rd led the military response but was unable to prevent the destruction of houses and civic buildings. An additional hundred soldiers from the 14th arrived on 31st October and, with the assistance of a civic posse of over 3,000, were able quell the riot. Brereton was arraigned before a court-martial in January 1832. He committed suicide before a sentence could be passed.

Sydney's Common Place Book

More nuggets of wisdom from Jeremy Cunningham's transcription of the original volume:

- 249 Is there any original passion in our nature as the love of truth? Happens to me that a child first begins to love truth from the important consequences he finds attached to it, thus it is ... Ice is slippery ... this he realises? Because he can slide upon it ... every truth he cares for not for itself but in proportion as he can derive any practical consequences from it ... tell him some connection between two ideas, from which he can derive no practical inference, he will have no relish for it ... except that which proceeds from wonder.

192 Moral Philosophy “I propose to make a list of words in our language, significant of the malevolent and benevolent affections, also of pleasing and painful sensations which have no relation to action or mankind.”

“There is always a certain degree of testimony which will make any event credible ... it is quite contrary to human experience that a stone has spoke ... it is quite contrary to human experience that 400 philosophers who have had said so should lie ... you cannot add to the incredibility of the speaking stone, but you can add to the credibility of the philosophers, doubling, trebling, quadrupling their number ... and so make their assertion more credible”.

Sydney Smith – Influencer

We know Sydney worked tirelessly to advance the causes he felt were important, often at his own expense.

It was with some amusement then that I spotted the following advertisement in the Bristol Mirror of Saturday 21st February 1835:

“CHRONIC RHEUMATISM AND GOUT

THE FRENCH EMBROCATION. This extraordinary preparation is “no fiction” to those afflicted with Rheumatism and Gout either in their incipient or chronic Stages. It was particularly countenanced by the Rev. Sydney Smith, who personally observed that it acted most decisively, and indeed, two applications only are deemed sufficient to remove the most obstinate attack either of rheumatism or gout...

*Sold by HUGHES and Co of the Chemical Hall, Bristol,
and by every Vendor of Patent Medicine in the United Kingdom, in
Bottles at 2s9d and 4s6d each” (abbreviated)*

I wonder if he was paid for this endorsement?

I was able to find five other instances of this advertisement published in Bristol between 1831 and 1835. I was interested that despite his differences with the Bristol Corporation, Hughes and Co. were keen to use him to promote their cure.

In *A Wit and His Gout* (Wallace, 1962), Stanley Wallace notes that Sydney apparently suffered his first attack of gout toward the end of 1829. Sydney described gout as “that toe-consuming tyrant” and likened it to “walking on eyeballs”. He wrote in July 1834 that he had been suffering with the effects for a month. To this Wallace notes “It is clear that any therapy he might have been taking at this time was ineffective.” Hardly the ringing endorsement of the French Embrocation published above, so maybe Sydney did not even know his words had been used to endorse it.

References

Wallace, S. (1962). *A Wit and His Gout. Arthritis and Rheumatism, Vol 5, No 6 (December)* , 610-615.

THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION

MINUTES of the AGM - 18th September 2021

The meeting was held electronically via Zoom with nine members in attendance.

Apologies: Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Sylvie Diggie, Robin Price.

The Chairman opened the meeting.

Minutes of the 2020 AGM were accepted as a true record of the proceedings.

Points arising: the final books from Sydney Smith's library, now rebound, will be delivered to Munden by the Chairman and Jeremy Cunningham.

Chairman's Report: reiterating the aims of the Association, the Chairman described how these had been upheld where possible during the past year. Contact was made with the churches to mark the 250th anniversary of Sydney Smith's birth which may result in a mention in a future Woodford church magazine; lengthy articles appeared in the New Statesman (Matthew Engel) and the Irish Times (Brian Maye) which sparked interest from both members and non-members. The Chairman raised the possibility of revisiting other important places, such as Kensal Green Cemetery.

The Treasurer read his interim financial report for 2021. Subscriptions were successfully chased up during the year, yielding a welcome increase in income plus occasional penitential offerings. Generous donations had also been received towards the upgrading

of the website. The question of saving money by sending the newsletter electronically was discussed but the decision was taken to continue producing a printed copy. The sum of £1500 is available for donations and it was agreed that £750 each be sent to the churches at Foston and Combe Florey.

Membership: Numbers continue to decline and now stand at 146. More email addresses would be welcome. Attracting new members continues to confound us. Jeremy started to use Twitter as a medium but has found it less than satisfactory. Colin offered to explore the possibilities.

Lunches: Local organisers have agreed to explore with members the prospect of putting lunches back on the menu from spring 2022. Meetings via Zoom could still be offered intermittently.

Newsletter: The Chairman thanked Editor Gerry Bradshaw. Articles are always needed for the newsletter and members could be encouraged to write about what first aroused their interest in Sydney Smith. Deirdre BB has offered to put pen to paper for us. The absence of lunchtime speakers will once again deprive us of interesting copy. Gerry suggested that reprinting articles from the early years of the Association newsletters could be a good source of material.

Website: the revised website has had a good reception from members and has led to further enquiries from overseas. Jeremy will talk to the website manager about the Index for the Commonplace Book. There are some errors on the website which require correction, for instance one mention of a 250th anniversary of Sydney's death which should have stated 150th. Also, the Images folder needs careful examination to identify duplicates and

wrongly labelled photographs. A volunteer to undertake this task will be sought.

Election of Officers and Trustees: All Officers and Trustees have expressed their willingness to stand again for the coming year. They are: Chairman (Colin Southall), Treasurer (Harry Yoxall), Secretary (Sydie Bones), Arnold Arthurs, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Jeremy Cunningham, Sylvie Diggle and Robin Price.

AGM 2022: It was agreed that the AGM would be held on September 24th, 2022, location yet to be determined but probably London.

Any Other Business: Jeremy expressed appreciation on behalf of all members for the work done by all those involved in running the Association.

Financial Report

I confirm that the final accounts for last year 2020 were submitted to the Charity Commission as required. The finances of the Association continue to be sound. The closing balance for the year was £953.

Interim figures on 31 July for the current year, which runs to the end of 2021, show receipts of £2550; expenditure of £518; and a balance of £2985.

Harry Yoxall, Hon Treasurer, Sydney Smith Association
1 October 2021

Association News

Luncheon Dates

Members have been approached by local organisers wishing to reinstate our traditional lunchtime meetings; this was met with a mixed response. The most enthusiasm was expressed by the York members and Graham Frater is planning a lunch at Middlethorpe Hall in September. Celia Moreton-Prichard and Sydnie Bones will continue to keep the London and West Country members informed about future plans.

Website

A recent enquiry from an art historian 'across the pond' has led to an interesting correspondence regarding the relationship between Sydney Smith and one of his cousins. We were able to identify a source of letters from Sydney to his Longman cousin, held at Reading University, noted on one of the unpublished letters on our website.

Errors in the text of the website of which we were aware have been corrected; a volunteer is still needed to go through the Images to delete duplicates and correct errors in identification.

We depend on you for material for our Newsletter!

During the year ahead, if you find any potential material – from a speaker's text to a newspaper story quoting Sydney or referring to him, please do not hesitate to let me have it for next year's newsletter.

Email – ggbradshaw@btinternet.com phone 01653 648328, or write to Gerry Bradshaw, Standerlands, Terrington, York YO60 6PP

If you want to
improve your
understanding, drink

