

# THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION



# NEWSLETTER

Issue 29  
Summer 2024

## 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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*Please contact Sydie Bones or Colin Southall if you have material for the newsletter.*

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## Introduction

*Colin Southall*

I was very pleased that we were able to hold our first in-person AGM since Covid in September 2023 which was organised by Jeremy Cunningham at New College. A report on day and the very interesting exhibition of Sydney's papers held by New College arranged by Michael Stansfield follows below.

The **2024 AGM** will be held at Munden on **Friday, 13th September** hosted by Henry and Kate Holland-Hibbert. **Please contact me before the end of August** at [c\\_southall@yahoo.com](mailto:c_southall@yahoo.com) to let me know if you plan to attend so that we have accurate numbers for lunch.

I was saddened by the loss of two people who contributed a great deal to the Association: Celia Moreton-Prichard and Canon John Simpson. Jonathan Ouvry provides a view of his involvement with Celia's musical ventures. Canon John Simpson was an active West Country member who provided several memorable graces to start lunches, as well as contributing articles for the newsletter. His comments on Sydney Smith and St Patrick presented at a West Country lunch are reprinted here.

The website continues to attract some interesting enquiries, one of which is reported here concerning Sydney's introduction of Thomas Manning to Cecil in Madras. Trying to view the world through Sydney's eyes also leads to some fascinating conversations, in this case a discussion about Anglican services for animals which led to Sydney's description of Botany Bay and a platypus in the *Edinburgh Review*.

Many thanks to Sydnie Bones, Jonathan Ouvry and Janet Unwin for the articles which they provided for the newsletter.

We were able to hold two lunches in London but given the small numbers we were not able to arrange a speaker to provide a discussion topic. There will be further London lunches and I hope it will be possible to arrange a York lunch and a West Country lunch over the summer.

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## New College AGM

Members met for coffee in Oxford on the morning of 23<sup>rd</sup> September before proceeding to the Conduit Room in New College for the AGM. Minutes are set out at the end of this newsletter. The future of the Association was discussed at some length. It was useful to have Michael Stansfield with us to clarify the New College Archives accession policy.

Members were then introduced to the Warden, Miles Young, in his lodgings where we had the opportunity to see Sydney's portrait.



We then set off for lunch at No 1 Ship Street where we had booked a private room. This proved a challenge as unknown to us it was at the top of the building which meant there was quite a climb to reach it.

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After lunch we returned to the Conduit Room where Michael Stansfield had arranged for us to view letters from Sydney, documents relating to his time as a student and fellow, and images of Sydney and New College:

The rough register of admissions to New College notes '1789. Mr S. Smith Ent[ered] Feb. 6th in Mr C. Bragg's place. Schollar' (NCA 965). The formal register of New College fellowships records that on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> February 1791, in the Great Hall of New College, Sydney Smith took the oath of fellowship on completion of his two probationary years and signed the register accordingly. Fellowships at that date entitled the holder to higher status within, and an annual emolument from, the college, and carried no teaching obligations (NCA 9755). On 28<sup>th</sup> June 1792 the Warden & Thirteen passed Sydney Smith's 'grace' for his BA and on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1796 they passed his 'grace' for his MA (NCA 961, fols 24, 63).

As a college fellow, Sydney Smith had rooms on Staircase 7, Set D2, until 1800 when he married and resigned his fellowship. The rooms are now part of the Junior Common Room block, the interior of which was completely remodelled in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and no trace of D2 remains.

In 1793 Sydney served briefly as Steward of the Junior Common Room, succeeding Charles Blackstone on 11<sup>th</sup> April and handing over to John Wickham three months later on 14<sup>th</sup> July. During that time he was responsible for paying the JCR bills, including the wages of the JCR servant John King, out of subscriptions from the JCR members (NCA JCR/B1).

A wide range of letters were on view, of which the following caught my eye:

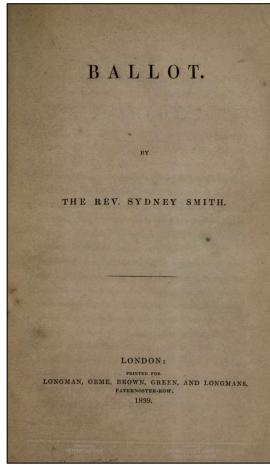
- Letter from Sydney Smith to Francis Jeffrey, summer 1802, responding to criticisms of 'excessive levity' in his early contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*, and particularly the review of a sermon by Robert Nares - 'a very stupid and very contemptible fellow' (NCA 4430/3; NCL RS5208).

- Sydney Smith's letters reveal a certain preoccupation with health which may have been typical of his times, albeit not quite in the way that he treated the subject. The debate concerning vaccination (injecting with cowpox to improve resistance to smallpox) versus inoculation (injecting with live smallpox) was still raging in 1816; and the tendency to use euphemisms (what Sydney called 'subterfugive language') for serious ailments still strikes a chord today. In 1831 he cheered up Lady Grey by recommending her to 'do sums in arithmetic and drink camphor juleep' when stressed, and towards the end of his own life took a 'malignant pleasure' in hugely exaggerating his symptoms to Lady Holland in revenge for her endless enquiries (NCA 4430/109; 4431/128,132; 4433/58,69; 4434/76; Nowell Smith 119, 499, 575, 967, 1012, 1018).
- Letter from Sydney Smith to John Murray (deputising for Francis Jeffrey), 12<sup>th</sup> July 1813, concerning the *Edinburgh Review*, and also noting the news that Lady Caroline Lamb (Lord Melbourne's wife) had stabbed herself at Lady Ilchester's ball, for love of Lord Byron; Smith regrets that his own charisma has never had that effect (NCA 4430/89a. Nowell Smith 234).
- Letter from Sydney Smith to Lady Grey, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1843, on the subject of accidental poisoning (NCA 4434/43. Nowell Smith 935).

Amongst the books and pamphlets on display I was interested in:

- *Six Sermons Preached in Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh* (1800). This is the earliest publication of Sydney Smith's sermons, given in Edinburgh in 1800. This copy carries the bookplate of William Huskisson, of whom Sydney Smith would come to approve as a fellow supporter of the anti-slavery movement and whose death (the first fatality on the railways) in 1830 caused him great sorrow (NCL RS5201). I have been reading Wilkie Collins' novel *No Name* and was struck by the railway accident which is central feature in the plot of that novel.

- Ballot (1839).



Second edition of the published pamphlet *Ballot*, and correspondence relating to its publication: 16<sup>th</sup> Feb 1839 Letter from Charles Blomfield, Bishop of London: thanks Sydney Smith for his persuasive pamphlet on ballot voting but wishes that he 'had abstained from the application of the language of Holy Scriptures' to the 'ludicrous thoughts and images' under discussion; late February 1839 Letter from Sydney Smith to Lady Grey, referring inter alia to the success of the publication (NCL RS 3986; NCA 4429/15, 4434/7. Nowell Smith 775).

Michael Stansfield later took some of us on a tour of the College and the gardens and pointed out some of the views which had been illustrated in the documents on display in the Conduit Room.

That concluded the day's events and so we parted. It was Gaude weekend and I stayed to have tea in the cloisters before attending evensong in the chapel which provided a serene end to an enjoyable day.



## Some Recollections of Celia

*Jonathan Ouvry*



The first thing that Celia would tell you, when you came into her life, was how to spell her name. She hated being misspelt, and her name contained two traps for the unwary. She was married to Stephen Moreton-Prichard, Moreton with an e in the middle, and Prichard not containing a t.

The context in which I knew Celia was theatrical. She herself was theatrical to the core, enjoying nothing more than her close association with the Greenwich Theatre, an association of many

years, during which she came to know many of the performers. It was a repertory theatre, with its own in-house Director, Alan Strachan, and plays would have a good run, often transferring to the West End. One such performer was the comedian Max Wall. On learning that he had nowhere to stay Celia invited him to stay with her and Stephen, and they became great friends, leading to Celia becoming in due course Chairman (her preferred term!) of the Max Wall Society. One wonders how Sydney Smith and Max Wall would have got on together.

When I came to live in the Greenwich area in about 1980 I looked about for a way to continue my enjoyable career in Gilbert & Sullivan operas, and thus came to know Celia. At that time she was much involved with the Royal Naval College, in two capacities. The RNC Chapel had a regular choir of volunteers, of whom Celia was one, singing tenor! She was also for many years one of a team responsible for the floral decorations in the Chapel. Her second involvement was with the Royal Naval College Drama & Operatic Society, whose operatic activity consisted mainly of an annual

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G&S production. This was of course intended for naval personnel and staff of the RNC. In practice most of the Naval officers were on short courses and had little time for such frivolity, so the Society was mainly made up of local people, of whom I became one, and took part in many performances directed by Celia. These took place in the Trident Theatre, belonging to the RNC, which was an excellent venue, with a good stage, an orchestra pit, and raked seating for the audience. It was also adjacent to two excellent pubs, important for Celia's interval glass of wine. Celia's husband, Stephen, was a professional photographer, among other things official photographer to the Greenwich Theatre, so was also photographer to our G&S productions. I treasure a photograph which he took of me as the Pirate King in 1989.



When the Navy left in 1997 the Chapel continued to function, and Celia continued to sing in the choir, but very soon Trinity College of Music arrived in King Charles Court, one of the four main blocks of the College, and instituted a unique course in church music, resulting in a newly constituted choir made up largely of singers at what is now Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance. Celia kept her involvement in the flower department, but after 25 years in the choir she sang no more.

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Soon after the RNC became the Old RNC, in 1999, Celia realized her long-held ambition of mounting performances of the morality play *Everyman*. This involved the erection of scaffolding in the Chapel, to provide scenery and staging, the composition of music by the then choir Director, auditioning and assembling a large cast, and bringing together what was acknowledged by all to be a unique and triumphant undertaking. I auditioned for and secured the part of Death, and enjoyed sweeping down the Chapel aisle in a flowing black cloak.

Before the Navy left, its dramatic society had petered out, leaving Celia to found a new G&S Society based in the Blackheath Concert Halls, a superb building containing a Great Hall and a Recital Room, opened in 1895, and featuring all the great musicians of that time. Its inaugural concert had been a performance of HMS Pinafore, and Celia named her new venture the Centenary Company, and directed its first outing in 1995 with, of course, HMS Pinafore. I joined the new Company later, as Pooh-Bah in the *Mikado*, and enjoyed many successful productions after the Company transferred from Blackheath halls to the Greenwich Theatre.

One of Celia's theatrical interests was Music Hall, and from time to time she would put on a Music Hall evening at the Greenwich Theatre, in aid of various good causes. She got to know many performers in that world, and her regular pianist was Colin Sell, well known for his playing in the long-running radio show *I'm Sorry, I Haven't a Clue*. Colin, Music Hall and the Centenary Company all featured in the delightful celebration of Celia's life that place in the Greenwich Theatre on the 17<sup>th</sup> March, not long after her death at the age of 86 on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

I was not surprised, knowing of Celia's wide-ranging interests, to find her an established member of the Sydney Smith Association, when I joined. Her expert management of London lunches, at Boisdale in Belgravia, provided many pleasant memories.

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## Sydney Smith and St Patrick

Canon John Simpson

Reprinted from the 2015 Newsletter

Today is St Patrick's Day. I wondered if Sydney Smith would have been concerned about St Patrick. The Roman Catholic Church has celebrated St Patrick from early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although the saint is in the 2000 Lectionary, the Church of England would not have celebrated the saint in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Undoubtedly, Sydney Smith would have had some knowledge of the saint, but it may well have been limited.

I happen to have a copy of the Year Book of 1832 compiled by William Hone, published just after Sydney had become a Canon of St Paul's. Sydney may have dipped into such a book. It doesn't tell us much about St. Patrick and it has some quaint observations about the Irish. I quote:

*ST PATRICK this being the festival of the patron Saint of Ireland is denoted by wearing the 'green immortal shamrock' and by feasts and convivial meetings. There are mentions of the 'seamroy' – three leaves united on one stalk. In an early Irish-English dictionary 'seamroy' is defined as a clover, trefoil, worn by Irishmen in their hats, by way of a cross, on St Patrick's Day, in memory of that great saint.*

*Shamrocks were vital for the meaner sort in times of famine. In a poem of 1613 by Withers:*

*And, for my clothing, in a mantle goe,  
And feed on Sham-roots as the Irish doe.*

I imagine that Sydney Smith would have known about St Patrick and the shamrock.

Hone's Year Book also refers to manners and superstitions of the Irish:

*Spenser writing in 1596, respecting manners and superstitions in the sister nation states 'The Irish, at this day when they goe to battaile, say certain prayers or charmes to their swords, making a crosse therewith*

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*upon the earth. And thrusting the points of the blades into the ground, thinking thereby to have the better successe in fight. Also they use commonly to sweare by their swords.' Gainsford in the Glory of England, 1619 speaking of the Irish says 'They use incantations and spells, wearing girdles of women's haire, and locks of their lovers: they are curious about their horses tending to witchcraft'.*

These are the kind of thoughts bandied about by intelligentsia early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. No wonder Irish Home rule was such a problem!

The same type of legends and folklore pervade the story of St Patrick. We have *The Confessions* written by Patrick himself, but there are conflicting traditions about his life. He was a Romano-Briton, was born around the year 390 somewhere on the west coast of England between Cornwall and Cumbria, near enough to the sea to be captured by Irish raiders when he was 16 years old, and taken to Ireland as a slave, where he worked as a herdsman. After six years he escaped and somehow made his way home and then to the Continent. He went to Gaul, and it is generally held that he trained for the priesthood at Auxerre, under St Germanus, and was much influenced by the form of monasticism evolving under Martin of Tours. When he was in his early forties, in about 432 (the date is disputed) he returned to Ireland as a missionary bishop.

There were certainly Christians in Ireland before the coming of Patrick. They had a bishop, Palladius, but no great impression had been made, although some modern scholars think legends about Palladius and Patrick have become entwined. Certainly it was Patrick who caused Christ's gospel to be welcomed far and wide in the north, the central parts and the west, and brought an organised church into existence.

From his *Confessions* may be learned something of the success of his preaching and priestly ministrations, the opposition and dangers he encountered from the heathen, and the criticisms of some who should have been his friends – they accused him of being an ambitious ignoramus.

In 444 St Patrick established his Episcopal see at Armagh; by then he had other bishops to help him and a considerable body of lesser clergy. Despite

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being unsuccessful in his attempts to establish the diocesan system he had experienced in Gaul, his monastic foundations proved to be the infrastructure required to maintain the faith after his death, which is thought to have occurred in about 460.

Patrick also wrote a *Letter to Coroticus* denouncing an attack on one of his congregations by men linked to that chieftain. The hymn *Lorica*, the *Breastplate*, is also ascribed to him. What stands out in all his writings is Patrick's sense of being called by God to the work he had undertaken, and his determination and modesty in carrying it out.

Later sources and legends are copious and of very uneven value, causing much disagreement among scholars, not least in the matter of chronology. By the 7<sup>th</sup> century he had already come to be revered as the patron saint of Ireland.

The saint's emblems are snakes and a shamrock. There are no snakes in Ireland. Legend has it that St Patrick banished all snakes by chasing them into the sea. However all the evidence suggests that post-glacial Ireland never had any snakes.

We noted references to shamrocks in Hone's *Year Book*. Legend has it that St Patrick taught the Irish about the doctrine of Holy Trinity by pointing out the three leaves on a shamrock. However the shamrock had been seen as sacred in pre-Christian days and three was a sacred number.

I want to refer to one other legend – St. Patrick's Purgatory – an ancient pilgrimage site on Station Island in Lough Derg, County Donegal. According to the legend the site dates from the 5<sup>th</sup> century when Christ showed Patrick a cave that was the entrance to Purgatory. By witnessing Purgatory the people came to know the reality of the joys of heaven and the torments of hell and believed Patrick's teaching.

Its importance in medieval times is clear from the fact that it is mentioned in texts from as early as 1185 and shown on maps from all over Europe as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. *The Legend of the Purgatory of St. Patrick* is a 12<sup>th</sup>

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century poem by Marie de France, based on a Latin text by a monk Henry of Saltrey:

*An Irish knight, Owein, travels to St. Patrick's Purgatory to atone for his sins. After descending into Purgatory, he is visited by several demons, who show him unholy scenes of torture to try to get him to renounce his religion. Each time he is able to dispel the scene by proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ. After spending an entire night in Purgatory he returns to the church where he began his journey, purged of his sins.*

From the 12<sup>th</sup> century we move to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Sydney Smith. *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, a ballad written by Robert Southey in 1798, is directly based on this legend. Robert Southey (1774–1843), an English poet of the Romantic School, one of the so-called 'Lake Poets', was a contemporary of Sydney Smith. From 1809 he contributed to the *Quarterly Review* and became so well known that in 1813 he was appointed Poet Laureate after Walter Scott refused the post.

As a prolific writer and commentator, Southey introduced or popularised a number of words into the English language. The term autobiography, for example, was used by Southey in 1809 in the *Quarterly Review* in which he predicted an 'epidemic rage for autobiography', which has indeed continued unto this day.

Although originally a radical supporter of the French Revolution, Southey followed the trajectory of fellow Romantic poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge, towards conservatism. Embraced by the Tory Establishment he vigorously supported the Liverpool government. He argued against parliamentary reform ('the railroad to ruin with the Devil for driver') and opposed Catholic emancipation. But in some respects he was ahead of his time in his views on social reform. He was, for example, an early critic of the evils, which the new factory system brought to 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain. He was appalled by the conditions of life in towns like Birmingham and Manchester, and especially the employment of children in factories. He advocated that the State should promote public works to maintain high employment and called for universal education.

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In 1817 he privately proposed penal transportation for those guilty of libel or sedition. He had in mind figures like Thomas Jonathan Wooler and William Hone, the author of the Year Book from which I quoted earlier. He urged that they should be prosecuted. Such writers were guilty, he wrote in the *Quarterly Review*, of 'inflaming the turbulent temper of the manufacturer and disturbing the quiet attachment of the peasant to those institutions under which he and his fathers have dwelt in peace'.

Wooler and Hone were tried and acquitted. Southey also clashed with Byron. Byron believed that Southey had spread rumours about himself and Percy Shelley being in a 'League of Incest' during their time on Lake Geneva in 1816, a claim that Southey vehemently denied.

I end with some questions. Was Sydney Smith concerned about St Patrick? How much did he know about him? Would he have owned or read William Hone's Year Books? Would he have read *St Patrick's Purgatory* by Robert Southey? Were he and Southey acquainted? Probably. Sydney Smith knew 'anyone who was anybody', but they probably disliked each other. They were on different sides of the political divide and had opposing views on many issues. It would be interesting to do more research, but in the meantime I hope you have enjoyed the somewhat spurious links between St. Patrick, Sydney Smith, William Hone, Robert Southey and Byron.

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## Sydney Smith and William Pitt the Younger

*Sydie Bones*

When William Pitt died in January 1806, Sydney Smith was inspired to pen the following epitaph which he proposed for Pitt's statue:

*To the Right Honourable William Pitt  
Whose errors in foreign policy  
And lavish expenditure of our Resources at home  
Laid the foundations of National Bankruptcy  
And scattered the seeds of Revolution,  
This Monument was erected  
By many weak men, who mistook his eloquence for wisdom  
And his insolence for magnanimity,  
By many unworthy men whom he had ennobled,  
And by many base men, whom he had enriched at the  
Public Expense.  
But for Englishmen  
This statue raised from such motives  
Has not been erected in vain.  
They learn from it those dreadful abuses  
Which exist under the mockery  
Of a free Representation,  
And feel the deep necessity  
Of a great and efficient Reform.*

(from The Rev Smith, Sydney, by Osbert Burdett)

Sydney's opinion of Pitt was clearly expressed in a letter to Francis Jeffrey dated 30<sup>th</sup> January 1806. 'The change in administration has made me extremely happy ... I cannot describe to you how disgusted I am by the set of canting rascals who have crept into all kinds of power during the profligate reign of Mr Pitt, who patronised hypocrisy, folly, fraud and anything else which contributed to his power - ... For 15 years I have found my income dwindling away under his eloquence ... and by the time that

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his Style had gained the summit of perfection Europe was degraded to the lowest abyss of Misery.’

Was this, I wondered, merely an invective from a young cleric denied preferment or was there some truth in his assessment of this former leader of government? Chambers’ Biographical Dictionary of 1897 filled in some of the detail. Presented with a Tory seat by Sir James Lowther, Pitt entered the House of Commons in 1781 at the age of 21, becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer one year later. Within three years, ‘Pitt became one of the most powerful ministers in all English history’, his ministry continuing almost unbroken for the next twenty years. There is praise for Pitt’s espousal of reforming legislation in his early years but this biographical entry soon switched from praise to criticism, stating that ‘it became evident that he cared more for power than measures’. He abandoned parliamentary reform in Ireland, created peerages ‘with extreme lavishness’ and failed in his management of the wars in Europe. His final ministry was a humiliation and he was driven out of office in 1805 on charges of misappropriation of public funds. Although the conclusion states: ‘England has had no greater leader, few greater masters of financial and commercial legislation; and he was one of the first statesmen to adopt the teaching of Adam Smith’, it also records that ‘He was not free from the prevailing vice of hard drinking, and his great indifference to money degenerated into culpable carelessness. With no extravagant tastes, with no expensive elections, and with an income of at least £10,000 a year, he left £40,000 of debt to be paid by the nation.’

An assessment from a later perspective is given by Professor Jack Plumb in his 1956 book on The First Four Georges. In spite of his early reforming zeal, Pitt had been a favourite politician of George III. Plumb questions the motives for his support of the king: ‘His character is difficult to comprehend. He was arrogant, ambitious, and despised the majority of mankind. He loved power for its own sake; wanted it so that he might put into operation those ideas which lay close to his heart. His conviction that he ought to rule was not entirely megalomaniac, for he possessed uncommon capacities. ... For the desirable if expected prize of ruling his

country, Pitt was willing to moderate those strong principles to which he had so hastily paid lip service.’

For Sydney Smith, paying lip service to campaigns for ‘great and efficient’ reform and then abandoning their causes in the pursuit of personal aggrandisement must have been anathema. It would appear that he had good reason to reach for his acerbic pen.

## Seen and Heard 2024

*Sydie Bones*

**Seen in *The Lyttleton Hart-Davis Letters, Vol 2***, published in 1979, in a letter from Rupert Hart-Davis to George Lyttelton, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1956:

*Once again you’re out of luck, for it’s eleven p.m. and I am too sleepy for a decent letter. To make up a little, here is a delicious letter from Sydney Smith: I hope you don’t know it already. It was copied out for me by William Plomer, and before transferring it to my book, I thought you might like to put it in yours.*

And, of course, what followed was the whole of Sydney’s letter to Lady Georgiana on how to avoid low spirits. The reply from George Lyttelton, 22<sup>nd</sup> November:

*That S. Smith letter is **fine** and I have transferred it and return it with many thanks. A rum thing is that S.S. was like old Johnson in many ways, but the latter in a letter to Boswell expressly commands him to be entirely silent about his mental and physical ailments and then he will think about them less and ‘then they will molest you rarely’. S.S.’s advice to talk freely about them postulates a long-suffering audience. Of course the best bit of advice would have been ‘come and sit in a corner when I am in good form’. And what boisterous fun he would have had with Leavis.*

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F.R. Leavis, controversial professor of English, was a regular target for their criticism. Lyttelton writes:

*There seems to be a good deal of 'gunning' for Leavis, and the more the merrier. That contempt for practically all the stuff that has ever been praised and liked borders, to my mind, on the insane, like other forms of conceit.*

Seen in **Bernard Levin's *Conducted Tour***, first published 1981, in the chapter devoted to a visit to the Barcelona music festival where he recounted his experience of a harpsichord recital. He writes: Sydney Smith described the sound of a harpsichord as that of *'a piano which has succeeded in getting out of its skin and sitting on its bones'*.

## Constitutional Gaiety

Janet Unwin

I've always been intrigued by Sydney's practical advice in his letter to Lady Georgiana Morpeth who suffered from depression. It is full of sensible ideas - what we would now label coping mechanisms - but 'nobody has suffered more from low spirits than I have done' is quite a claim and I am looking out for evidence.

Here are some examples:

*'I don't mean to say I am prone to melancholy, but I acknowledge my weakness enough to confess that I want the aid of society and dislike a solitary life'.*

*'Many in this world run after felicity like an absent man hunting for his hat while all the time it is on his head or in his hand'.*

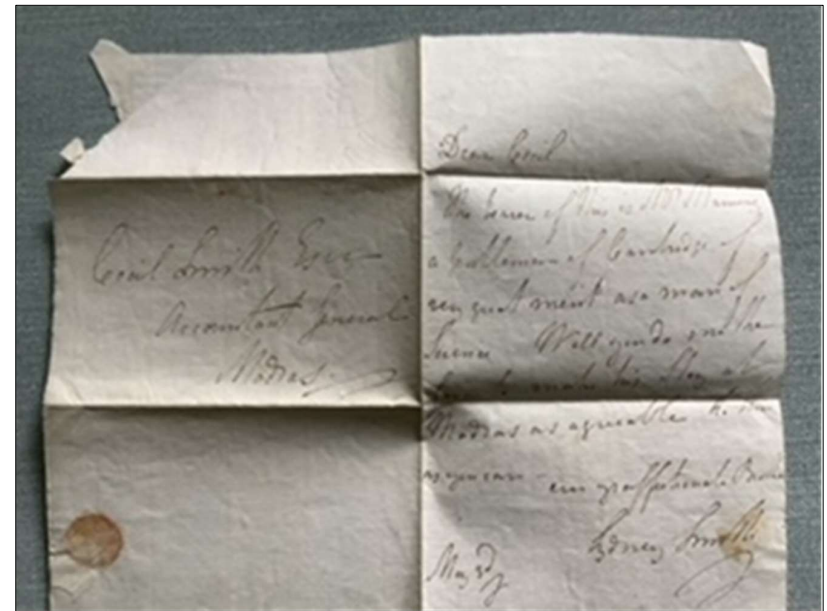
*'I never take leave of anyone, for any length of time, without a deep impression upon my mind of the uncertainty of human life and the probability that we may meet no more in this world'.*

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Sydney however has a priceless resource: 'My constitutional gaiety comes to my aid in all the difficulties of life'. So constitutional gaiety clearly sees off low spirits.

## Thomas Manning

Following up on an enquiry received via the website we were informed of a letter written in 1810 from Sydney to his brother Cecil in Madras to introduce Thomas Manning:



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Dear Cecil

*The bearer of this is Mr Manning, a Gentleman of Cambridge of very great merit as a man of science. Will you do me the favour to make his Stay at Madras as agreeable [ ] as you can*

*ever your affectionate brother*

Sydney Smith

May 3rd

Thomas Manning (1772-1840) was a mathematician and one of Britain's first Sinologists. He was the first Englishman to meet the Dalai Lama, visited Napoleon in St Helena, and corresponded with the likes of Charles Lamb, Sir Joseph Banks and Charles Lloyd. He travelled widely in Europe and Asia.

He clearly knew Sydney well enough to ask for the introduction when he was in India in early 1810 enlisting support for his planned expedition to China, travelling overland via Tibet.

## Botany Bay

The November 2023 LAMAS Local History Conference was titled *The London Menagerie: Animals in London History*. Dr Joseph Hardwick, Associate Professor of British History at Northumbria University, talked about animal-themed worship in London which had roots in Victorian concerns for the welfare of animals. He mentioned that there were also complaints about animals in churches and that dog whippers were employed at St Paul's to maintain order. I asked him afterwards if he knew of any interest in animal services in Georgian times and wondered if Sydney had employed dog whippers. He responded that he did not know of any animal services before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century but that he did know about Sydney, having lived for a time in Heslington next door to Sydney's house there when he was studying at York university for his PhD. He told

me that he uses one of Sydney's *Edinburgh Review* articles as a teaching aid for his undergraduate students in a session on the platypus as part of a module on animals and British colonialism.

I looked up the review which appears in as the second article in volume 32 of the *Edinburgh Review* published in July 1819. This is a review by Sydney concerning books about New South Wales. It starts:

*This land of convicts and kangaroos is beginning to rise into a very fine and flourishing settlement ...*

And then goes on to describe the country and the climate before some wit creeps in:

*... in this remote part of the earth, Nature (having made horses, oxen, ducks, geese, oaks, elms, and all regular and useful productions, for the rest of the world) seems determined to have a bit of play, and to amuse herself as she pleases. Accordingly, she makes cherries with the stone on the outside; and a monstrous animal, as tall as a grenadier, with the head of a rabbit, a tail as big as a bed-post, hopping along at the rate of five hops to a mile, with three or four young kangaroos looking out of its false uterus to see what is passing. Then comes a quadruped as big as a large cat, with the eyes, colour and skin of a mole, and the bill and web-feet of a duck-puzzling Dr Shaw, and rendering the latter half of his life miserable, from his utter inability to determine whether it was a bird or a beast. Add to this a parrot, with the legs of a sea-gull; a skate with the head of a shark; and a bird of such monstrous dimensions, that a side bone of it will dine three real carnivorous Englishmen;-together with many other productions that agitate Sir Joseph, and fill him with mingled emotions of distress and delight.*

He then turns serious and bemoans the lack of town planning and Treasury penny-pinching, suggests that a 'proper person' should have been appointed governor rather than Bligh, and notes the lack of any effort to reform convicts sent there. He concludes:

*This only proves that it may be a good place for reform hereafter, not that it is a good one now. One of the principal reasons for peopling Botany Bay at all, was, that it would be an admirable receptacle, and a school of reform, for our convicts. It turns out, that for the first half century, it will make them worse than they were before, and that, after that period, they may probably begin to improve.*

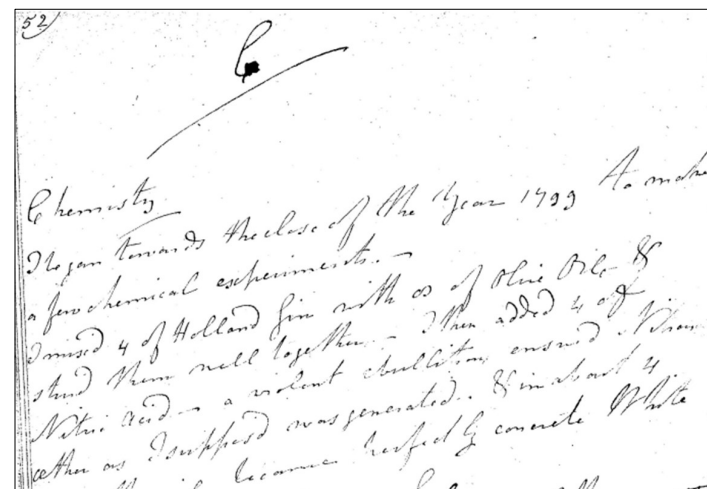
What would he make of New South Wales today?

## Sydney's Commonplace Book

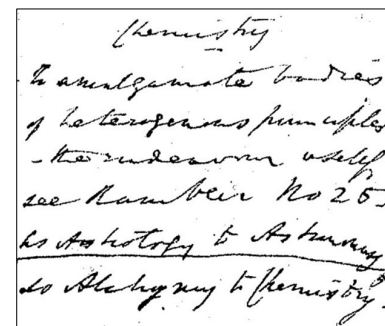
Sadly, following the ransomware attack on the British Library last October, they have been unable to proceed with the scanning of Sydney's Commonplace Book. As they have no date when they will be able to resume service, we are in discussion with another provider to see if they can do this.

I was prompted to refer to Sydney's Commonplace Book after viewing the fourth episode of Bronowski's *Ascent of Man* which describes how our understanding of the structure of matter evolved and which ends with a summary of John Dalton's atomic theory set out in 1803 which provided the basis for rapid advances in chemistry.

The first entry under 'C' in Sydney's Commonplace Book is headed Chemistry and starts by saying 'I began towards the close of the year 1799 to make a few chemical experiments'. He describes mixing gin, olive oil and nitric acid; and in another experiment mixing tallow and sulphuric acid. There is no explanation as to what prompted him to perform these experiments, but he must have had access to a helpful apothecary who supplied the ingredients.



A short note made by Sydney of uncertain date provides a definition of chemistry as 'to amalgamate bodies of heterogeneous principles' and compares astrology to astronomy and alchemy to chemistry.

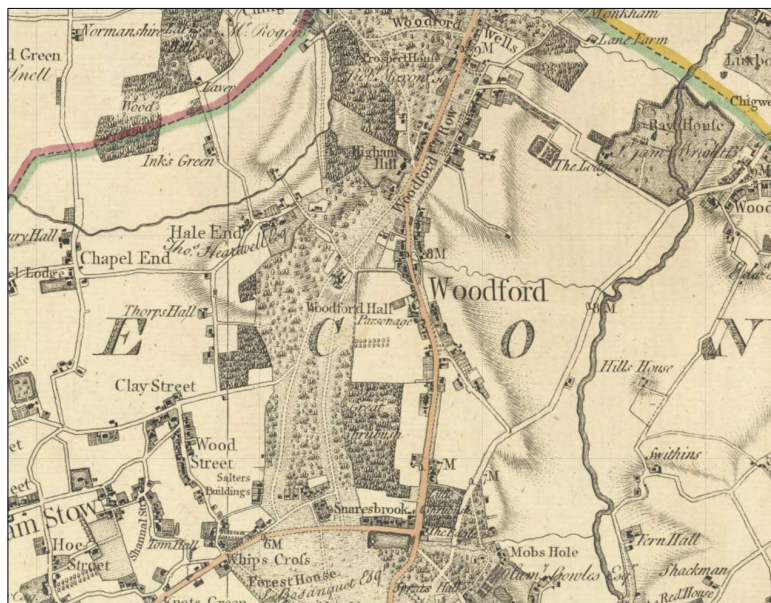


These notes echo the definitions set out in Johnson's Dictionary in 1755 and in Chamber's Encyclopaedia of 1738 where chemistry is defined as 'the art of separating the several substances whereof mixed bodies are composed by means of fire; and of composing new bodies in fire, by the mixture of different substances or ingredients', while alchemy is defined as 'a higher, more refined kind of chemistry employed in the more

mysterious researches of the art'. Sydney left no further notes on chemistry in the Commonplace Book to indicate that he knew of Dalton's discovery.

## Woodford

The Chapman & Andre map of Essex published in 1777 shows several large houses in Woodford, with Woodford Hall to the west of St Mary's and the parsonage (located in the centre of the image).



The map was accurately surveyed and is beautifully printed on 25 large sheets. It was paid for by subscribers who could have their names added to the map, as can be seen on several of the houses in the image above.

The Essex record office holds papers for the Woodford Hall estate which I have been working though slowly to see if any information about the house that Sydney was born in can be found.

## THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION

### Minutes of the AGM – 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2023

The meeting was held in the Conduit Room at New College, Oxford, with eight members in attendance including five Trustees.

**Apologies:** Arnold and Elspeth Arthurs, June Blakemore, Don and Irene Brierley, Sylvie Diggle, Matthew Engel, George and Marilyn Ewart, Adam Fergusson, Malcolm and Priscilla Flower-Smith, Bob and Mary Peers, Celia Moreton-Prichard, Judy Stephenson, Jean Toynbee, Charlotte Willson-Pepper, Nicky and Harry Yoxall.

The Chairman opened the meeting and thanked Jeremy Cunningham and Michael Stansfield, archivist of New College, for arranging the meeting.

- **Minutes** of the 2022 AGM were accepted as a true record of the proceedings.
- **Points Arising:** Sydney's Commonplace Book, available in its entirety on the website, would benefit from more advanced techniques of reproduction which Jeremy Cunningham and the Chairman will explore via the British Library.
- **Chairman's Report:** The Chairman was pleased to report that the past year had seen more activity in the regions with two lunches held in London and one in the West Country. Maintaining membership remains a challenge, but interest in the website has generated a number of enquiries and a membership request.
- **Treasurer's Report:** The Chairman presented the accounts for 2022 on behalf of the Treasurer. Although income for the year was reduced, contributions were made of £1,000 to the church in Foston and £500 to the church in Combe Florey.

- **Membership:** Numbers remain steady at around 140 with one new member joining during the year.
- **Lunches:** Two lunches were held in London this year. The Chairman thanked Celia Moreton-Prichard who has stepped down from organising the London lunches after 15 years of liaison with Boisdale. The Chairman will take over temporarily. One lunch was held in Somerset but sadly none in York. The Chairman thanked Sydie Bones and Graham Frater for work to organise Somerset and York lunches.
- **Newsletter:** The Chairman thanked Sydie Bones for her work on the newsletter, and thanked members for their contributions.
- **Website:** Enquiries via the website continue to come mostly asking for information and occasionally drawing our attention to an unfamiliar reference or recently discovered letter.
- **Future of the Association:** The Chairman opened the discussion by asking those present to define criteria which, if met, would indicate that the Association should be wound up. Two criteria were suggested: no active members; and insufficient funds. The Chairman agreed to report status at the next AGM.

Graham Frater raised the issue of custody of Association records and the website. Michael Stansfield indicated that the New College archives would be able to receive original documents by Sydney Smith and could take an archive copy of the website. Members who are interested in arranging to donate documents to the archive should contact Michael directly at New College.

- **Election of Officers and Trustees:** Sydie Bones reluctantly gave notice of her resignation as secretary, pleading advancing years and disabling deafness. She will remain as Trustee and Membership Secretary. All other Officers and Trustees have expressed their willingness to stand again for the coming year. They are: Chairman (Colin Southall), Treasurer (Harry Yoxall), Arnold Arthurs, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Jeremy Cunningham and Robin Price (Trustees).

- **AGM 2024:** It was agreed that the AGM would be held in September at Munden on a date to be determined.
- **Any Other Business:** None.

### Financial Report for year ending 31 December 2022

Income	£5,507	(including one donation of £4,000 earmarked for church donations).
Expenditure	£691	(see note)
Closing balance	<b>£6,328</b>	

**Note:** Donations of £1,000 to Foston and £500 to Combe Florey agreed at the 2022 AGM were not presented until after the end of December 2022 and will appear in the accounts for 2023.

Harry Yoxall, Hon. Treasurer, Sydney Smith Association  
1<sup>st</sup> September 2023

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## Association News

### Luncheon Dates

**York:** Graham Frater will contact members to see if a lunch can be arranged. As postage by Royal Mail has become prohibitively expensive, it would be much appreciated if members in the York area could let Graham have their email address ([grahamfrater@madasafish.com](mailto:grahamfrater@madasafish.com)).

**West Country:** Sydie Bones plans to organise a lunch for West Country members during the summer.

**London:** Two London lunches were held at Boisdale over the past year: one in July 2023 and the second in February 2024. Further lunches are planned for the summer and autumn 2024.

### Website

The website continues to generate a number of enquiries, some of which have provided interesting information on Sydney's activities. Please let Sydie Bones or Colin Southall know if you spot any errors or omissions and we will work to get them corrected.

### Newsletter

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 us have it for next year's newsletter.

Contact Sydie Bones or Colin Southall – e-mail addresses on inside front cover.

I am convinced that  
digestion is the Great  
Secret of Life

