The Sydney Smith Association Newsletter
Issue 14 April 2009

AGM WEEKEND IN BATH, SOMERSET
26/27 SEPTEMBER 2009

In the winter of 1797-8, Sydney Smith stayed in Bath where his father was living and notably met Jane Austen. It is a matter of some conjecture that Austen based her character of Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey* on Sydney ('rather tall, had a pleasing countenance, a very intelligent and lively eye, and if, not quite handsome, was near it') – a good story, which has exercised the imaginations of many.

On 26 September, we meet at Wood's Brasserie in Alfred Street, which serves a selection of light lunches. At 2.30pm, there is a tour of the restored house at No.1 Royal Crescent (see opposite) and at 4pm a visit to the Building of Bath Museum. Each is only a five-minute walk away. At 5pm, following tea at the Building of Bath Museum and the AGM, SSA member Adam Fergusson, a noted campaigner, will give a talk on the Saving of Bath. This will be followed, at 7.45pm, by dinner at Wood's Brasserie.

On the Sunday, a Sung Eucharist will be held at Bath Abbey at 11am, followed by a lunch at the Pump Room. In the afternoon, SSA member Michael Ranson has offered to lead a tour to the Lansdowne Tower, built for William Beckford and recently restored.

Full details of the programme and costings are in the enclosed application form. Advice on accommodation options in Bath can be found on the website www.visitbath.co.uk, the accommodation booking line on 0844 8475256, or the advice line 0906 711 2000 (calls charged at 50p/minute).

Please note that, apart from Lansdown Tower, all the venues for the AGM weekend are within easy walking distance. We encourage you to join the visit but would be grateful if you could confirm as soon as possible.

A NEW MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We are very pleased to announce that Dorothy Williams has agreed to become Membership Secretary of the Association to take care of and manage membership records and subscriptions and, inevitably, in a small society like ours much else besides; her husband Ifan will be giving her computer support. Ifan and Dorothy Williams are members of the Georgian Society, the Jane Austen Society, York Bibliographical Society, Friends of the York Art Gallery and founder members of the Sydney Smith Association.

Their address is: Hawthorn Cottage
Heslington
York YO10 5DX
Tel (01904) 410752

But they would appreciate it if members, where possible, would communicate with them by Email: ifan@apgwyn.free-online.co.uk

MEMBERSHIP and GIFT AID

Thankfully, most members pay their subscriptions by Standing Order for which we are very grateful as it saves time and money. Would those members who pay by other means please note that subscriptions were due 1 March (GBP15 single membership, GBP20 joint membership.) Cheques should be payable to The Sydney Smith Association and sent to the Hon. Treasurer, The Sydney Smith Association, Belgrave House, 46 Acomb Road, York YO24 4EW.

In addition, members wishing to take up the opportunity to run their subscription to the Association through Gift Aid will find enclosed with the *Newsletter* the appropriate form. Please fill this in and return to the Hon. Treasurer at the address above. We pass on our thanks and gratitude in advance, to all those who elect to use Gift Aid in favour of the SSA.

THE WEBSITE – WWW.SYDNEYSMITH.ORG.UK

SSA member Graham Frater was the first to identify the possibilities the internet offered those fans of Sydney who have been for too long frustrated that his work remains out of print and therefore inaccessible. However Frater's early ground-breaking work, creating the site, then scanning and loading much of the text (covering most of what W.H. Auden selected in his celebrated anthology), was soon overtaken by the International Google project. This includes most of the non-copyright texts held by the Bodleian, and the libraries of Harvard, Stanford and other significant US universities.

Since then, under Frater's direction, the website has focussed on building up a resource of pictures of places associated with Sydney including the Catholic chaplaincy at York University in Heslington; Edinburgh, and Bristol Cathedral.

After long stewardship, Graham has now handed over his responsibilities to Philip Chapman who can be contacted on the Email addresses: pac19@live.co.uk or philip@mitchellsolicitors.co.uk The SSA is immensely grateful to Graham for all of his hard work and dedication in the cause of Sydney.

AGM WEEKEND AT CASTLE HOWARD, NORTH YORKSHIRE 20/21 SEPTEMBER 2008

We met at Castle Howard in the Long Gallery on the Saturday afternoon and were warmly received at the start of several happy hours there. After a short AGM, Dr Christopher Ridgway, curator of Castle Howard, gave a fascinatingly detailed talk on Sydney's connection with the great house (see featured article).

A special attraction of the evening was the performance of *Dear Lady Holland*, a reading of letters between Sydney and Lady Holland, the wife of the Whig host of Holland House. We had hoped that SSA member Siân Phillips and actor Moray Watson would read for us, but at the last minute, as so often happens, they had to fulfil engagements elsewhere.

Nothing was lost however for, thanks to SSA member Celia Morton-Pritchard, we were able to engage actor Robert Lister who gave an admirably genial portrayal of Sydney, while Celia herself was perfect as Lady Holland.

It was time for a drink. We gathered in the splendid surroundings of the Great Hall for welcome wine and snacks which kept us going until the excellent dinner in the Grecian Hall which followed in about half an hour.

Dear Lady Holland: ***Actor Robert Lister and SSA member Celia Morton-Pritchard***

From Castle Howard to Foston: a journey so familiar to Sydney was next on our programme, after an overnight rest after Saturday's abundant entertainments. A good congregation, largely of our members, assembled for morning service at All Saints conducted by the Revd Quinton Wilson. The service concluded with a warm and thoughtful sermon from Father Dominic Milroy OSB. We thank him for enabling us to reprint this here.

A mile from the church stands the Old Rectory at Thornton-le-Clay, originally built by Sydney as he described so amusingly in his letters; then much later, in the 1960s, it was partly destroyed by fire and rebuilt. The house is now owned by SSA Patron Jim Walsh, and his wife Sarah. The Walshes are consistently generous supporters of the Association, and once again offered delightful hospitality with drinks and refreshments in their

informal and welcoming home. Several of us enjoyed a good lunch in the village pub, the White Swan, and then went our several ways at the close of a memorable and truly enjoyable weekend – as always superbly organised by Peter and Sylvie Diggle.

FROM THE MINUTES OF THE 12TH AGM AT CASTLE HOWARD, 20 SEPTEMBER 2008

- The Chairman, Randolph Vigne, opened the meeting by greeting the 41 members present and thanking the Hon. Simon Howard and his staff for enabling the Association to meet again at Castle Howard. He also introduced Michael Ranson and Mark Wade as future liaisons between members and the Association.
- The minutes of the 2007 AGM were circulated and agreed. Two matters arose: Charitable Status has now been achieved, and Peter Payan reported that the errors on Sydney's refurbished gravestone at Kensal Green had now been rectified.
- Professor Arnold Arthurs, Hon. Treasurer, reported as follows:

    - Main receipts came from subscriptions totalling GBP1988 so far, compared with GBP2254 in the whole of 2007. The SSA has 221 paid-up members of whom 143 pay by Standing Order
    - After meeting expenses of the current AGM and this year's donations, the current balance in the bank was expected to be around GBP4000
    - Donations to the Association now qualify for Gift Aid. [See enclosed Gift Aid Form]
    - Under our Objects, the main payments had been:
        Donation of GBP500 to Foston Church Sydney Smith Trust
        Donation of GBP500 to Friends of Combe Florey Trust
        Donation of GBP200 for the Sydney Smith Cup for local community activities within the Foston/Thornton le Clay area [See later story in *Newsletter*]
- The Chairman, reminding the AGM that charitable trustees need to be reconfirmed each year, read out the current list: Randolph Vigne, Major Peter Diggle, Professor Arnold Arthurs, Dr Alan Bell, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Professor Graham Parry, Dr Peter Payan and the Revd Norman Taylor. Mark Wade proposed the same trustees be confirmed for the coming year and, following a seconding from Michael Ranson, the motion was carried unanimously.

Sermon given at All Saints Church, Foston, on Sunday, 21 September 2008 by Father Dominic Milroy, OSB

As a young monk, one of my jobs was helping to run the school theatre. I noticed that, between rehearsals, my boss Fr Kevin, would slide into an armchair in the Green Room and read a novel. It had a garish cover showing a blonde girl lying dead on a billiard table with a knife in her back, and was called *The After-Dinner Killer*. I was puzzled that

he never seemed to finish it, but just slipped it back in a drawer. One day, when he was not there, I decided to investigate. Inside the cover was a copy of the New Testament.

Fr Kevin was a master of what I call 'inverted hypocrisy'. He was a very droll and witty man, and hated to be thought pious. He was, in fact, following an injunction of St Benedict that it is both a sin and a mistake to wish to be thought holy before one actually is. So he concealed his (undoubted) holiness under a veil of flippancy and fun.

Following an excellent sermon, SSA members repaired to the Old Rectory for generous refreshments, just as Sydney would have done almost two hundred years before

You will perceive at once the connection with Sydney Smith. If you know him only through anthologies of wit, he comes across as a sort of clerical Oscar Wilde, with a penchant for ironic lateral thinking and verbal playfulness. This could take the form of catchy one-liners – 'When pearls are cast to swine, the jewels are nasty and the pork not good' – or of extravagant verbal nonsense in the style of Molière: of a young man about to marry a very portly widow twice his age – 'Marry her? Impossible! A part of her perhaps – he couldn't marry all of her by himself. There's enough of her to furnish wives for a whole parish. You might people a colony with her, or give an assembly with her, or take your morning's walk round her provided there were frequent resting-places and you

were in rude health. Or you might read the Riot Act and disperse her. In short you might do anything with her but marry her.'

This is splendid gratuitous stuff, but it is not the real Sydney Smith. The real Sydney Smith comes into play (which it does most of the time) when he uses his gifts in deadly earnest in defence of important causes, most of which are still as important today as they were then – Prison Reform, unjust Game Laws, the equality of women, and (of course) Religious Persecution.

The one-liners: 'Trying to convert the Irish by banning the use of Holy Water is like trying to defeat Bonaparte by depriving the French of rhubarb.' And the more exuberant word-play: 'No, sweetest Abraham, the Pope is not landed – nor are there any curates sent out after him – nor has he bin hid at St Albans by the Dowager Lady Spencer – nor dined privately at Holland House – nor been seen near Dropmore. If these fears exist … they exist only in the mind of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.'

In the context of Catholic Emancipation, it is important to remember that Sydney Smith did not like Catholicism (about which, I am bound to say, he knew very little), identifying it largely with certain practices that he found uncongenial. This fact makes the diamantine clarity of his defence of the rights of Catholics all the more admirable. He used his eye for detail and his gift for words as a means to expose any form of injustice as being not only unacceptable but also ridiculous. In his own words, 'the only true way to make the mass of mankind see the beauty of justice is by showing them in pretty plain terms the consequences of injustice'. These plain terms were hugely enhanced by his sense of the absurd. 'I solemnly believe that red and blue baboons are more popular here than Catholics … When a country squire hears of an ape, his first feeling is to give it nuts and apples; when he hears of a Catholic, his first instinct is to commit to the county jail.'

His passionate dedication to the 'beauty of justice', in contexts where most of his contemporaries were both half-hearted and compromised, was, I believe, that of a very holy man. By a strange and endearing paradox, his humour, whilst in some ways hiding this holiness, also reveals it.

The same is true of his conviviality. If we were to judge him simply by his own words, or by some of his renowned exploits here at Foston, we might think of him simply as an entertaining, *bon viveur,* upwardly mobile Trollopian parson, pretending (for instance) that he had a herd of deer by fitting his donkeys with antlers.

But if we look below the surface, we find that the reality is different. He not only hated injustice, he hated discourtesy in all its forms. For him, courtesy was a quality to be dispensed to all – not only to the Jane Austen gentry who were his natural peers, but to servants like the lovable Bunch, to tradesmen and farmers and (especially) to the poor and the sick. Just as he disliked Catholicism but loved Catholics, just as he deeply

preferred the town to the country but made himself a committed countryman in this place, so he was very frightened by diseases but never flinched from serving its victims. Behind his hearty appreciation of the good life, he was all things to all men.

Today we celebrate the feast of St Matthew by recalling the wonderful and paradoxical juxtaposition of Jesus celebrating his calling of Matthew by feasting with tax collectors and sinners. This combination of discipleship and conviviality sits very well on the lifestyle of Sydney Smith. Behind the self-deprecatory charm of his enthusiasm for keeping warm fires and bright wallpaper, there is no doubt that his deepest fulfilment came, in his own words, 'from the happiness of doing good'.

As a Benedictine monk, I am deeply struck by the way in which the monastic culture which, from the time of Cuthbert and Bede onwards, had done so much to form the English character, somehow infiltrated its way into Sydney Smith's cast of mind. The achievement of the sixth-century Rule of Benedict was to make the austere monasticism of the East accessible to ordinary people by moderating its human demands. 'It is with some misgiving', says St Benedict, 'that we determine what others should eat or drink … Indeed, we read that wine is no drink for monks, but nowadays monks are hard to persuade of this; so let us agree that it is best to drink in moderation.' He also says the Abbot, 'In administering correction, let him act with prudent moderation, lest being too zealous in removing the rust he break the vessel … let him not be turbulent or anxious, overbearing or obstinate, jealous or too suspicious, for otherwise he will never be at rest.'

St Benedict or Benedict of Nursia (480-547)

I somehow don't think that Sydney Smith would have done very well as a monk (except perhaps as a Commendatory Abbot in the late Middle Ages). However, in spite of his total ignorance with regard to the monastic tradition, which he associated (quite wrongly, of course) only with Holy Water, fanaticism and flagellation, there is deep kinship between his mindset and that of St Benedict.

They both loved moderation and courtesy. They both took a wryly commonsense approach to difficult issues. And they both loved aphorisms and axioms. In these, each is trying, not only to encapsulate Gospel values, but also to highlight key areas of ordinary human behaviour.

St Benedict: 'Visit the sick. Console the sorrowful. Make peace with your adversary before sundown. Don't love excessive or violent laughter. Don't nourish a grudge. Resist envy. Don't give vent to anger. Don't grumble. Don't be slothful. Bear patiently the physical and behavioural handicaps of others.'

Sydney Smith: 'Where no kindness is due, accept any, and don't quarrel with it because it is not more. You cannot extort love. If you don't get up in the morning, you will be overtaken by ignorance and poverty. Passion gets less and less powerful after every defeat. If you are defending a cause, take care to be moderate and just. You must not only laugh at sacred things, but in this serious Country, you must not laugh at anything even remotely connected with sacred things. Subdue anger. Husband energy for the real demands which the dangers of life make upon it …' And (of course), 'take short views – hope for the best – trust in God'.

This is all deeply serious stuff. But, my goodness me, what a pleasure it is to find holiness enhanced by humour, wisdom enhanced by wit, and Christian discipleship enhanced by fun, friendship and fancy. If there is laughter in heaven, we know who will be at the centre of it. As his friend Samuel Rogers said, after being visited by him during a serious illness, 'he turns everything into sunshine and joy'.

Not a bad epitaph.

- In 1974, Father Dominic was appointed Prior of the International Benedictine College of San Anselmo in Rome and from 1980 to 1992 was Headmaster of Ampleforth College.

SYDNEY SMITH AND CASTLE HOWARD:
A talk given by Dr Christopher Ridgway, on 20 September 2008

In the summer of 1809 Sydney Smith exchanged the cultured milieu of London for Yorkshire. Reluctantly he bowed to the demands of his archbishop, Vernon Harcourt, that he reside near his living in Foston, and so he gave up the urbane delights of the sacred parallelogram – that area of the west end of London bounded by Oxford Street, Regent Street, Piccadilly and Hyde Park, which was the centre of his metropolitan universe.

After an arduous journey north Sydney's wife Catherine felt only 'heart-sinking pain' on their arrival in York. But if York was remote then so too was Sydney's parish, Foston, lying to the north-east of the city at the foot of the Howardian Hills. Little wonder then that the Smiths decided at first to live on the outskirts of York in the village of Heslington, much to the displeasure of Archbishop Harcourt.

Foston was a sparsely populated hamlet, lying some distance from the main road; it was to all appearances a sleepy and uncultured place, prompting Sydney famously to declare that it was 'so far out of the way, that it was actually twelve miles from a lemon'. Certainly lemons could be purchased in York, but little did Sydney know that he could have obtained them from a much closer source. By 1814 Sydney had finished building his new rectory and in March he and his family moved to Foston. He entered into rural

life with characteristic gusto, planting gardens and orchards for the local population, acting as a makeshift doctor, milkman, and farmer, and sitting as a magistrate.

Bumpy Start to a Friendship

In August came a significant event, a dramatic introduction to his grand neighbours, the 5th Earl and Countess of Carlisle, when their fancy coach became stuck in a ploughed field. Local rustics were dispatched to rescue the coach and its occupants, and Lord and Lady Carlisle were ushered into the rectory at Foston, somewhat shaken, and disgruntled at their undignified arrival. This moment, which could quite easily belong in a P.G. Wodehouse novel, marked the start of a long friendship between the Smith family and the Howards of Castle Howard.

So who exactly were Sydney's neighbours? Frederick Howard, 5th Earl of Carlisle, had been born in 1748. He was the only surviving son of the 4th Earl and his second wife Isabella Byron. Succeeding to the title in 1758, his early life was one of dissolute pleasure. He left Cambridge after only a year, and in 1767 embarked on his Grand Tour, part of which was spent in the company of his Etonian friend Charles James Fox. Not all of his time was spent carousing and gambling; as he journeyed through Italy he purchased paintings and sculpture, which were sent back to Castle Howard.

Sir John Vanbrugh's work on Castle Howard led to his Blenheim Palace commission

On his return to England Carlisle married Margaret Leveson-Gower, daughter of Earl Gower, later 1st Marquess of Stafford; it was an advantageous match providing him with an entrée into political life. But during the early 1770s Carlisle pursued his life of dissipation, he gambled large sums of money, and was renowned for his mistresses. Disastrously he stood surety for some of Fox's debts – a massive £16,000, and inevitably this plunged Carlisle into financial difficulties, forcing him to mortgage his London house and retire to Yorkshire. In 1775 trustees were appointed to superintend his

financial affairs; they allowed him £4,000 a year, and directed the remainder of his income to settling his debts.

But the most serious consequence of his financial encumbrances was that the completion of Castle Howard was delayed for many years. This great baroque palace had been begun by his grandfather, the 3rd Earl, in 1699, with the help of Sir John Vanbrugh and Nicholas Hawksmoor as his architects. By the time the 3rd Earl died in 1738 the house was unfinished, lacking the West Wing. In time his son, the 4th Earl, would commission his brother-in-law, the architect Sir Thomas Robinson to complete the house in the 1750s in a wholly different Palladian style (a decision the Earl came to regret bitterly); at the time of his death in 1758 the wing lacked a roof and the interiors were unfinished. The 5th Earl's profligacy meant that his trustees would only release small amounts of money for the completion of the building. It was roofed in the 1770s; some of the interiors were in use by the 1790s; but the Long Gallery was to remain undecorated until the beginning of the 19th century.

After renouncing his carefree lifestyle Carlisle turned to a political life in which he enjoyed some success. In 1778 he crossed the Atlantic as head of the mission sent to negotiate with the colonists; in this he failed and so might be accused as the man who lost North America (but that would be unjust). In 1780 he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and adopted an unusual line in urging Ireland be allowed greater self-determination. After Pitt the Younger took office in 1783 Carlisle spent the rest of his political career in opposition, and gradually shifted toward a more reactionary position, breaking with his friend Fox over the French Revolution, and backing Pitt's policies, including the suspension of habeas corpus in 1794. But as he grew older he became something of a cantankerous recluse and a domestic tyrant. He was not an easy man to get on with.

'The pursuits of an English nobleman'

And yet his marriage was a happy one, producing four sons and three daughters. In his spare time the Earl pursued the typical pastimes of an aristocrat as recommended by Sydney who declared, 'the pursuits of an English nobleman should be politics, elegant literature and agriculture'. Lord Carlisle kept a pack of foxhounds, he enjoyed shooting, he took a keen interest in agricultural improvement and patriotically he raised a local militia in the face of conflict with France. He also wrote and published verses and dramas, sending copies down to Foston for Sydney's critical judgement.

But by the early 19th century the 5th Earl had become something of an ogre. His grand-daughter, Harriet Granville recorded a grim dinner at Castle Howard in 1808:

> 'The dinners are insufferable – I am promoted to Lord Carlisle's right hand – We none of us speak – He sits like the nightmare upon our powers of

> articulation, and if Lady Carlisle did not laugh incessantly we should be taken for a meeting of quakers waiting for the spirit to move us.'

This then was the man who descended upon Foston in August 1814, and after this short, first visit entreated the Smiths to come and stay with him at Castle Howard. Sydney became a frequent visitor where one of the first things he would have marvelled at was the Long Gallery. After the delay occasioned by economies Carlisle was at last able to commission Charles Heathcote Tatham to decorate the interior between 1801 and 1812. Tatham produced a neo-classical scheme transforming the area into a display gallery filled with paintings, sculpture and tapestries. But the gallery also doubled up as a dining room, with curtains in the central arches to separate off either the south or the north sections, or enclose the central section – the Octagon. At other times these could be drawn back so that the view through the entire gallery, measuring 180 feet, was unimpeded. The gallery also became an exercise area in bad weather, offering the comfort of a long indoor walk. In 1820 Harriet Granville remembered walking up and down the gallery with her grandfather – evidently when he was in good spirits for he talked enthusiastically about music composed by women; although he suddenly declared his wish to establish celibacy among his granddaughters.

Somehow Sydney was able to penetrate the stiff reserve of Lord Carlisle, and they seem to have enjoyed a warm friendship. In 1815 he reported to Lady Holland:

> 'We are become acquainted with Lord Carlisle, who has broke out this year into a fit of most extraordinary politeness towards his neighbours. Among the rest he paid a visit to a family whom he had not visited since the capture of the bastille [i.e. 1789 – 26 years earlier], and apologised for not having called before…We have stayed at Castle Howard for 2 or 3 days. I found him very good natured, and even kind with considerable talents for society.'

Three years later Sydney was able to describe himself and Carlisle as 'Playfellows', remarking that 'he has many good points, and I must do him the justice to say that he keeps his bad ones tolerably well out of sight. He is very fond of quizzing me, but I give him as good as he brings, and so all goes on very well.'

If Sydney had worried about languishing in rural obscurity when he arrived at Foston in 1814, perhaps too Lord Carlisle, by then largely retired from public life, had felt a similar sense of isolation, and was thus relieved to strike up friendship with the well-known essayist, with whom he could share intelligent discussion and lively argument.

Conversation Piece

What did the two men talk about? Politics – national and regional no doubt; religion and society probably; local matters too. They shared an interest in agriculture, Sydney learning the hard way how to keep suitable livestock and manage his small acreage.

Carlisle, who had lands in Yorkshire totalling 13,000 acres, was strongly committed to agricultural improvement, building a model farm, investing in new machinery and conducting breeding trials; he also took a peculiar interest in the subject of manure, even going so far as to compile a notebook on its composition and chemical qualities and its beneficial effects for agriculture. The parson farmer and the aristocrat farmer both sound like 19th-century versions of Lord Emsworth; and once again it is hard not feel that the world of Blandings Castle is not far away.

But Sydney's Foston days were not always congenial and pleasant. He courted controversy and to some of his neighbours he was a tiresome, meddling parson. In 1824, during a debate on the proposed new road to Malton he crossed swords with the Revd Read from nearby Huttons Ambo, who believed Sydney had insulted him. Both men adopted entrenched positions and looked to Carlisle to arbitrate the dispute, which eventually died away. But it led one local landowner, Colonel Cholmley, to declare about Sydney: 'Really I think a clergyman residing in the county, without an acre of land in the county belonging to him, ought to know better than to attempt to be a leading character in county business.'

The 5th Earl of Carlisle in 1769, aged 21, by Joshua Reynolds

Lord Carlisle too, on occasion, grew tired of the parson's trenchant views as expressed in the *Edinburgh Review*, or through his spats with neighbours. In 1824 Carlisle penned a lengthy letter in which he chastised Sydney but also tried to make him see the error of his ways. Carlisle's letter is itself a masterpiece of eloquence as he struggled to understand why Sydney needed to translate witty, effusive remarks into sustained, written attacks on people and institutions. He advised caution and discretion:

> ‘When you are so capable of giving us both instruction and pleasure, why run amuck at every component part of society, Order, Class, Profession, the Bar, the Bench, rural residents, West Indian proprietors, youthful sportsmen, brother Magistrates? These perhaps you think you are only tickling with a straw; but your friends too well know, by the writhings of the wounded, you have occasioned many an ulcer that is ruining all within.’

He went on:

> ‘For God’s sake consider that what often is forgiven from the tongue is not endured from the pen. The calm of study banishes all excuse of indiscretion or precipitation and when you let slip your dogs of war upon the world, you yourself must admit you do so with the sobriety of premeditation and cold blooded intention. Now this world is a most tough old Lady, very like a whale, most difficult to harpoon and often upsets the boat which attempts it… No one ever undertook your voyage, who was not shipwrecked.’

And he concluded by counselling, ‘You may stroke, but do not strike the world.’

This was not the only rebuke Sydney received from Lord Carlisle, shortly afterwards the two men fell out over comments Sydney had made in print regarding Irish Catholics. Carlisle said he had read the piece ‘more in sorrow than in anger’, but he took Sydney to task, commenting that ‘you fulminate from your stall your censures upon the Administration with many of whom you have lived in terms of intimacy’. This constituted both ingratitude and a kind of betrayal, made worse by how Sydney’s principal object seemed to be to ‘render those who differ from you ridiculous’. Exasperated, angered and weary of Sydney’s polemics, Carlisle nevertheless concluded his letter by saying, ‘you will I trust excuse an old friend the freedom I have taken’. It is not clear if the two men were ever fully reconciled, even to the point where they might simply have agreed to differ, but there is no reason to doubt Sydney’s sincerity when he wrote to the young 6th Earl a year later following the death of his father, saying how he felt ‘most sincerely the loss of so good a neighbour and so kind a friend’.

Sydney’s relationship with the 5th Earl is perhaps typical of the man. He was witty and entertaining. His liberal views for the most part sat comfortably with his peer group, but when irked or challenged he would react with stubborn inflexibility. For the most part he can be admired for the principled positions he adopted, not least of all his defence of free speech, but at times this would lead him into difficulties which strained or fractured friendships.

But Sydney’s friendship with the Howards lasted long after the death of the 5th Earl. He cultivated good relations with his son George Howard, Lord Morpeth, who in 1825 became the 6th Earl. More significantly perhaps, Sydney also formed a close friendship

with the Earl's wife, Lady Georgiana, who was the daughter of the beautiful Georgiana, 5th Duchess of Devonshire.

Freedom of the Library

Sydney was allowed free access to the library at Castle Howard – an enormous privilege, considering that when the renowned bibliophile Thomas Frognall Dibdin visited in 1838

Lady Georgiana, wife of the 6th Earl, was known in childhood as Little G in deference to her mother Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire

he was not permitted by the housekeeper to handle any of the volumes in the library. Thus Sydney would come and go, borrowing or returning books. He was also allowed to fish in the lake; and the Howards regularly sent food down to Foston – venison, game, vegetables, and even exotic fruits. The enormous range of hothouses and conservatories in the walled garden at Castle Howard ensured an abundant supply of grapes, melons, pineapples, and citrus fruits – thus disproving Sydney's early lament that he was twelve miles from a lemon.

In 1821 Sydney received cucumbers and cauliflowers from his neighbour and he repaid Lord Carlisle's generosity rather eccentrically by sending him some calculations on the

cost of coal, concluding that the Earl had over the past 60 years been overcharged something like £7,000 for fuel. The Earl must have been perplexed by this reply. When Sydney received venison in 1819 he replied with an account of his trials for a homespun game larder – hanging the meat down a well-shaft where it kept for longer in the cooler temperature. There is something odd about these replies as though a simple 'thank you' was insufficient; Sydney was perhaps uncomfortable with the notion of indebtedness – he seems keen to repay if not in like then in a way unique to himself.

Witness his role as self-appointed salad expert in Regency England, particularly during his visit to Harewood House. After confirming to Lady Georgiana how the place was beautiful, the ladies of the house 'amiable and polite', and the house surprisingly warm, he condemned the Harewood potatoes as bad, and the salads as 'poor and insignificant'. Sydney then took it upon himself to give the Lascelles family a lesson on salads; he admitted that as it was his first visit to Harewood this impromptu lecture was rather 'a strong measure', but he defended himself less as the champion against 'the dreadful mistakes and follies which are every day committed with salads'. Tthis was far from an isolated instance, Sydney sent poetical effusions to Lady Holland on how to make a salad. The topics of food and health assume a great importance in his letters. Late in the 1820s Sydney was pleased to send Lady Georgiana what he considered to be a basket of model potatoes bought locally, but urged her ladyship not to let the greedy Castle Howard housekeeper, Mrs Flynn, spirit them away to eat in the Steward's Room. His very happiness, Sydney asserted, depended upon potatoes.

These letters to Lady Georgiana are perhaps the most memorable in the collection here at Castle Howard. Tender, full of heartfelt advice and with flashes of humour, they are the words of a close confidant. Georgiana was a delicate creature, Sydney described her as having lived all her days in the 'Greenhouse of prosperity' and thus liable to shrink when exposed. She was prone to melancholy, little wonder perhaps when between 1802 and 1823 she gave birth to twelve children: she was therefore pregnant on average every eighteen months. But her form of depression, however we might diagnose it today, afflicted her all her life.

In 1819 Sydney consoled her by stating how 'every body is haunted with spectres and apparitions of sorrow'; he went on to say how 'the horizon is almost always of a sombre colour', but observed reassuringly that 'the imagining griefs of life are greater than the real'. In 1820 he wrote hoping she had conquered her 'blue daemons', before sending her a list of twenty remedies against melancholy (which we shall hear shortly). Recognising how physical wellbeing and mental wellbeing were closely interlinked, Sydney also recommended exercise, abstinence from tea and coffee, and the avoidance of too much introspection. Above all, he pronounced, 'everybody with a disturbed imagination should wear a flannel waistcoat at night'.

Occasionally Sydney himself was on the receiving end of medical assistance, as when Lady Georgiana sent him a mixture that disagreed with him, prompting him to pen a mock epitaph in doggerel:

> Here lies a reverend priest and he
> Died of a draught from Lady G

Sydney himself suffered from bouts of melancholy, and his wife Catherine once related to Lady Georgiana how there were few people more nervous than her husband, and went on to recount the touching anecdote about how when in London, Sydney 'sometimes keeps a letter from home half the day in his pocket unopened, fearing lest it should contain ill news, yet too nervous to venture on the certainty that would follow the reading of it'. But, she confided, 'this is a piece of secret history'.

'Accidental parson'

The letters from both Sydney and Catherine Smith in the archives at Castle Howard span three decades and the correspondence continued long after the Smith family settled at Combe Florey in Somerset. They offer a marvellous insight into how wide-ranging Sydney's character was. This 'accidental parson' who had 'no tap root in the soil', as he rather quaintly referred to himself, could be funny, stubborn, compassionate, nervous, ironic, witty, argumentative, eccentric, proud, wise, satirical, erudite, and much else. The letters are thus the echoes of the conversation that must have sounded within the walls of Castle Howard, or in the parlour at Foston. And yet conversation flies away in a moment, it vanishes in the air: that is its weakness (or perhaps its virtue if the 5th Earl is to be believed, since people forgive the tongue more readily than the pen). Conversation may be entertaining, or tedious as for example when in 1835 Sydney waspishly reported:

> 'I dined the other day with the Duchess of Sutherland, there were the Duke of Norfolk, Lord and Lady Surrey, Dr and Mrs Holland and Lady Darcy – or rather there was only Lady Darcy – for she talked incessantly from soup to coffee.'

Conversation meant that you were heard, it signalled your presence at table or in the salon; if you were silent you were to all intents invisible, absent; but with your voice, your wit, your words you engaged, you debated, you entertained. Sydney knew this intimately, and for him the great social fault was not to talk too much, but to talk in such a way as to bore people; this was Lady Darcy's crime.

Today all we are left with are Sydney's written words - the carefully crafted essays, and the letters which offer more intimate insights into his character. Here was the man who, lamenting the absence of the Howards from Castle Howard, declared how the house looked 'splendidly lugubrious'; but in the next sentence he mocked his own deprivation - no Howards at home meant no meal ticket for him: thus he wrote, 'the famished parson

screams and passes by'. In 1835, settling into lodgings in Charles Street in London he reckoned his house was about as big as one of Lady Georgiana's travelling trunks. But on another occasion he could describe Castle Howard as that 'little cottage of Hinderskelfe'. It is as though he delighted in extremes: big things became small; small things became big. There is a pleasure in turning everything on its head, finding the opposite point of view, the quirky perspective on things, the startling metaphor or description.

So in one of his letters there is a marvellous description of his chambers in Bristol, 'a large Gothic room', where he is visited by ghosts of former deans, and waited on by 'an old woman with only one Gothic tooth'. A little later in the same letter he conjures up another delightful image for the steamship his friends embarked on for a voyage to Ireland. They had to return to port because 'the navigation kettle did not boil well'.

' … expect poetry …'

After leaving Foston he described the delights of Combe Florey and offered a characteristic ditty: 'I feel romantic – expect poetry, Trees/Bees, Zephyr/Heifer, Leaf/Beef', delighting in these banal rhymes. At the same time he reported how he and the family were 'digesting their furniture', which he admitted was no easy thing. An engaging image comes to mind – the white-haired parson, grappling with packing cases, and muttering childish rhymes.

In 1839 he delivered a hilarious account of his voyage to Holland, which he called 'The Kingdom of frogs' on account of its low-lying watery nature; it was, he said, 'the proper domicile of aquatic reptiles', where the people were hideous, and every thing one breathed was either fog or tobacco. Holland was 'historically wonderful, morally grand, physically odious': a typical sequence in a Sydney letter, as strong positives are punctured by a bathetic conclusion. He also reported how he had grown weary of looking at art, and sounded a mock prudish note: 'I have seen between 700 and 800 large women without clothes painted by Rubens till I positively refuse Mrs Smith to see any more.'

This is the Sydney Smith who was neighbour to the Howard family. Friend, correspondent, a man who knew three generations of Howards – the 5th Earl, the 6th Earl and even the future 7th Earl, whose political career he followed with approval, even though he felt that the young man wanted 'nothing but bad qualities'. This is surely a foreshadowing of the kind of wit we associate with Oscar Wilde. But at the end of the day Sydney Smith was Sydney Smith, he was no one else – and perhaps that is why he did fall out with the 5th Earl of Carlisle who wanted him to become someone different.

George Howard, the 7th Earl, in an early albumen print taken several years before his death in 1864

Clearly Sydney treasured his relationship with the Howards declaring to Lady Georgiana how 'Castle Howard befriended me when I wanted friends; I shall never forget it, till I forget all'. There is no reason to suppose that friendship was not reciprocally valued. Lady Georgiana was, after Lady Holland, probably the closest of his correspondents. In a moment we will hear Lady Holland speak, she who was the great political hostess of early 19th-century England, and who in Sydney's words spread herself 'over an infinite surface of society'. But let us close with one of Sydney's last communications to Lady Georgiana, chronicling his ill-health and recovery:

'I am making a good progress; in fact I am in a regular train of promotion from gruel, vermicelli, and sago, I was promoted to panada, from thence to minced meat, and (such is the effect of good conduct) I was elevated to a mutton-chop. My breathlessness and giddiness are gone – chased away by the gout. If you hear of sixteen or eighteen pounds of human flesh, they belong to me. I look as if a curate had been taken out of me … Lady Holland is severe in her medical questions; but I detail the most horrible symptoms, at which she takes flight.'

Even the ghost of this accidental parson has enough substance to entertain us today.

- This year Dr Ridgway will lead a series of monthly Hidden Secret Tours and Talks focussing on different strands of Castle Howard and Howard family history. For more information please refer to www.castlehoward.co.uk

BISHOPS by George Ramsden:
From a talk at a York lunch

I don't have much personal experience of bishops. I'd like to look at three attitudes to them from the fairly remote past.

Dr Johnson said about a man whose piety he greatly revered, 'I would as soon contradict a bishop.' All right. Dr Johnson gets the bishops off to a flying start.

We now fast-forward 100 years to *Barchester Towers* set in the 1850s. Somebody told me that one of Trollope's characters, the charming ne'er-do-well, Bertie Stanhope, addresses the bishop in these terms: 'Hello Bishop, how's bishoping?' Well, he doesn't

quite say that, though he easily might have done because Trollope does use the word 'bishoping'.

Incidentally, near the beginning of the novel there are two references to the Reverend Sydney Smith. *Barchester Towers* appeared twelve years after his death, but his reputation as a liberal clergyman lived on, before being eclipsed by his reputation as a wit.

To return to Bertie Stanhope and the bishop. They first meet at Mrs Proudie's large reception for her husband soon after his enthronement. They happen to be rather boxed in behind a sofa.

'Bishop of Barchester, I presume?' said Bertie Stanhope, putting out his hand frankly. 'I'm delighted to make your acquaintance.' He then engages the bishop in conversation.

'Do you like Barchester, on the whole?'

The bishop, looking dignified, said that he did like Barchester.

'You've not been here very long, I believe,' said Bertie.

'No, not long,' said the bishop, and tried again to make his way between the back of the sofa and a heavy rector.

'You weren't a bishop before, were you?'

Dr Proudie explained that this was the first diocese he had held.

'Ah, I thought so', said Bertie; 'but you are changed about sometimes, a'nt you?'

'Translations are occasionally made,' said Dr Proudie [. . .]

'Is there much to *do* here, at Barchester?' [asked Bertie] exactly in the tone that a young Admiralty clerk might use in asking the same question of a brother acolyte at the Treasury.

'The work of a bishop of the Church of England is not easy. The responsibility which he has to bear is very great indeed.'

'Is it?' said Bertie, opening wide his wonderful blue eyes. 'Well, I was never afraid of responsibility. I once had thoughts of being a bishop, myself.'

'Had thoughts of being a bishop!' said Dr Proudie, much amazed.

‘That is, a parson—a parson first, you know, and a bishop afterwards. If I’d once begun, I’d have stuck to it. But on the whole I like the Church of Rome the best.’

The bishop could not discuss the point, so he remained silent.

Now, if we polarise Dr Johnson and Bertie Stanhope as the extremes of levity and gravity, respect and disrespect toward bishops, we might, if there were a sofa handy, coax Sydney Smith into a space between them, at some peril to the upholstery. Between them is where he belongs both in time and in attitude. I think that Sydney would have laughed at Bertie’s carryings-on with the bishop, whereas Dr Johnson would have been shocked and issued a rebuke, perhaps to them both.

For Sydney Smith himself, my third illustration, persecuting bishops was almost irresistible. ‘Men of purple, palaces and preferment’ he called them. ‘What bishops like best in their clergy’, he said, ‘is a dropping-down-deadness of manner.’ What he wanted, as he rusticated in Netheravon, Foston, or Combe Florey, was for people to be happy, and he didn’t see theology as contributing much to that end. ‘His Lordship,’ he wrote of the Bishop of Peterborough, ‘is himself a theological writer and not remarkable for his concision.’ That is caustic enough but occasionally he launched an Exocet. The remark I am going to quote *is* like an Exocet, it scuds across the water for quite some distance before it hits the target, or it doesn’t, as when I tried it out on my parents on Monday. It refers to the doctrine that bishops are all descended from the apostles. Sydney said, ‘I am bound to believe in the apostolic succession, otherwise I cannot account for the descent of the Bishop of Exeter from Judas Iscariot.’

Sydney Smith said he’d never accept a bishopric. Bertie Stanhope once considered it. What if we had a similar whim and it were to be suddenly fulfilled. The two Archbishops and the Bishop of Durham, it is said, hold their offices by Divine Providence; the other bishops by Divine Permission; Hensley Henson added that others do so by Divine Inadvertence. So, it could happen. You’d have to be of mature years (thirty or over), of sound character and doctrine, and, I believe, legitimate. You’d still wear a mitre: unlike the constabulary, bishops haven’t discarded their helmets. (I haven’t been able to consult a policeman about this - they always seem to be in cars.) The mitre was invented in eleventh-century Rome and has two pointed halves, representing the Old and New Testament, which fold together when not in use. It is in fact a flat pack, an idea shamelessly plagiarised by IKEA.

Time prevents me from further developing this fantasy of being a bishop.

One difficulty Sydney Smith did raise, concerning a bishop’s domestic prospects:

‘How can a bishop marry, how can he flirt? The most he can say is “I will see you in the vestry after church?”’ We laugh. In our enjoyment of the bishops’ dilemma we are

almost persuaded that it is insoluble. The solution is in fact clear: 'Do your flirting and your marrying *before* you do your bishoping.'

For Sydney, bishops were the grit in the oyster of a happy life, which produced the pearls of his *bons mots*. And for these we are grateful.

MAUREEN PAYAN, MBE

We are proud to report that our founder members Maureen and Peter Payan went to Buckingham Palace on 18 February 2009 where Maureen was awarded the MBE for the thirty years and many thousands of hours of voluntary work serving the needs of the disabled, disadvantaged and elderly of Twickenham. The charity, which numbers between 100 and 150 volunteers, is registered under the title HANDS (Help A Neighbour in Distress Scheme) and is run by Maureen from an office near her home, provided rent-free by the local council.

Coming upon elderly people whose dearest wish was to live out their lives in their own homes, she saw that they could be enabled to do so with well-organised voluntary help beyond the capacity of local statutory services. Their infirmity meant that activities taken for granted were now beyond them. Shopping, collecting their pensions and prescriptions, going to see their GPs, attending hospital or day centre, participating in the life of the community, could now all be achieved. The worry of being unable to change a light bulb, walk a dog or tidy a garden was removed. In such ways is cherished independence maintained.

We warmly congratulate Maureen for her splendid work over such a long period and her much-deserved honour.

SYDNEY AND THE CREDIT CRUNCH by Howard Peach
From a talk at a York lunch

Whatever would Sydney Smith have made of our global financial meltdown? Although in his earlier years as a parson and family man his belt was tighter, by successive legacies his position improved until, according to Bishop Hugh Montefiore, he had become the 24th highest paid incumbent in the Church of England.

Accordingly he had no illusions about money. 'I can safely say I have been happier for every guinea I have gained,' he admitted, a position at variance with conventional wisdom about brass and bonhomie.

The little matter of today's presently troubled stock markets would undoubtedly add to his repertoire of wit and wisdom. Here are some possible signposts.

Sydney, surely, would have been impatient with the plethora of economists' jargon … hedge funds, bear markets and the like. Yet debt, plainly understood, was to be taken seriously. It is hard to see Sydney adopting a Keynesian approach of spending one's way out of trouble. He would have argued that sub-prime debts, passed from bank to bank and country to country, are a reminder that the Day of Judgement may be nearer than some divines and political economists have predicted.

Adapting his view of the countryside as a kind of unhealthy grave, he just might, for once, have resorted to a pun in asserting that the pursuit of money not properly earned and secured is … an unhealthy crave.

When we are threatened by depression and recession Sydney adds buoyancy and levity. We recall his diatribe in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1820 – 'Taxes on the ermine which decorates the judge, and the rope which hangs the criminal – on the poor man's salt, and the rich man's spice – on the brass nails of the coffin, and the ribands of the bride … at bed or board, couchant or levant, we must pay.'

Sydney, as a *bon viveur*, might well have invoked the laws of comparative advantage. We can all agree on what Sydney and most of us do well: eat, drink and be merry might be one way of expanding the economy. Sydney's very rotundity suggests to me curves or demand and supply not striving too hard to intersect. He might have protested, 'Such is my *avoir-dupois* that I can no longer get my head around that wretched *Footsie.* Instead let's try to tackle the liquidity problem by passing around the port.' As for the credit crunch, what better than an after-dinner mint or two handed to him by Lady Holland?

More seriously, he would have pleaded the greater use of gardens and allotments to boost food production and foster self-help. We can all grow patio box lettuces and herbaceous border beans and tomatoes, however distanced we are from a lemon! And as a practical planner and builder he would have encouraged ideas for rural housing and community well-being.

Finally, think of those CDSs – Credit Default Swaps, whatever they mean. I fancy Sydney playing around with them until they meant, for example, Celebrate, Dine, Savour, in which respects he remains among the easiest of savants to follow.

COMBE FLOREY: CAN'T AFFORD IT!!

News that Evelyn Waugh's old house at Combe Florey was for sale last year, prompted SSA member Christopher Gray from Co Meath, to query whether 'at GBP2.5 million, too much as an HQ for the Association?'

This report prompted some early members of the Association to recall the abundant hospitality provided by Auberon and Lady Teresa Waugh when members visited Combe Florey in September 1997, the same day as the funeral of Princess Diana. Auberon, one of the first patrons of the SSA, penned an excellent introduction to Nowell Smith's *Selected Letters of Sydney Smith* (OUP 1981) including this sentence of unstinting praise about Sydney: 'He is the embodiment of our national genius, or at any rate one fairly major expression of it.'

Auberon Waugh cherished Combe Florey's connection with Sydney, and many other literary figures (from the* Daily Telegraph, *April 2008)

Auberon's introduction included several Sydney gems relating to his time as rector at Combe Florey after 1829: how Sydney tied oranges and lemons to the beech and oak trees to prove to a visitor the mildness of the climate, how he rigged up antlers on two of his donkeys to befuddle an impressionable visitor, and that his devoted Yorkshire housekeeper Bunch would charge a penny a time for villagers to peep through the library keyhole when Lord John Russell visited.

Beginning a lively article in the *Daily Telegraph*, Adam Edwards noted:

'Not only was the West Country hamlet home to the greatest English novelist of his age (and also to the late 19th-century essayist and wit the Reverend Sydney Smith, and the 20th-century playwright Terence Rattigan), but the house was where many of Britain's influential hacks, as guests of Bron and his wife Teresa, drank deeply, talked loudly and formed opinions from the 1970s to the 1990s …

'… Perhaps a pertinent monument is Evelyn Waugh's famous sign engraved in stone at the front entrance. It reads "No Admittance on Business" and it has welcomed the literary riff-raff and kept the not-so-literate at bay for more than half a century.'

Like the Waughs, Sydney thoroughly enjoyed his time at Combe Florey ['There now lift up your eyes and tell me where another parsonage house in England has such a view as that to boast of. What can Pall Mall or Piccadilly produce to rival it?'] All the more reason for our members to recall the privilege of being entertained there in 1997.

SYDNEY AND TOLERATION by Philip Chapman
From a talk at a York lunch

Nigel Forbes Adam recently reminded us of the importance Sydney attached to feeding the body as well as the mind. To take the former first, there were limits to his toleration of food and drink as his approval of the following couplet makes clear:

> 'That throat so vexed by cackle and by cup
> Where wine descends and endless words come up.'

And in a letter he states, 'The advice I sent to the Bishop of New Zealand when he had to receive the cannibal chiefs there was to say to them: "I deeply regret sirs to have nothing on my own table suited to your tastes but you will find plenty of cold curate and roasted clergymen on the sideboard." And if in spite of this prudent provision his visitors should end their repast by eating him likewise – why I could only add I sincerely hoped he would disagree with them.'

Toleration, I suggest, is one of Sydney's defining characteristics. In a letter he describes himself as 'A tolerating churchman'. But he was not just tolerant: he acted vigorously to oppose intolerance. And he did so throughout his life. Sydney bravely defended minority causes such as Catholic Emancipation (differing in this respect from his contemporary the poet Wordsworth who opposed it). He writes to Lady Holland, 'We have had meetings here of the clergy upon the subject of the catholic petition but none in my district; if there is I shall certainly give my solitary voice in favour of religious liberty and shall probably be tossed in a blanket for my pains.' Later he writes: 'We have had a little fight about the catholics – you will see what passed in the York paper.' Only two clergy supported Sydney in a counter-petition at a meeting of the clergy in Thirsk held on the question of Catholic Emancipation. In a letter of 1828 he refers to the sermon on Toleration which he gave in Bristol on 5th November: 'I gave the mayor and corporation a dish of toleration as shall last them many a year.' (This was not in the tradition of 5th November sermons such as given by Bishop Lancelot Andrews who published ten sermons on the 'gunpowder treason' delivered from 5th November 1606 onwards.)

In 1829 Parliament passed the Catholic Emancipation Act which removed restrictions on Catholics serving in the Armed Forces, becoming members of Parliament and voting, etc. But Sydney's toleration extended also to dissenters. In an essay on toleration for the *Edinburgh Review* he writes: 'What is the meaning of religious toleration? That a man should hold without pain or penalty any religious opinions and choose for his instruction in the business of salvation any guide whom he pleases – care being taken that the teacher and the doctrine injure neither the policy nor the morals of the country.'

But perhaps only a tolerant man could joke at the end of his life on being taken ill with what proved to be his final illness: 'I feel so weak, both in body and in mind, that I verily

believe, if the knife were put into my hand, I should not have strength or energy enough to stick it into a dissenter.'

SYDNEY SMITH: SEEN AND HEARD

'Sydney, Darwin and Lady Cork'

Randolph Vigne writes: The bicentenary of Darwin's birth recalls the story he tells in the brief autobiography he wrote for his children in 1876: 'I once met Sydney Smith at Dean Milman's house. There was something inexplicably amusing in every word which he uttered. Perhaps this was partly due to the expectation of being amused. He was talking about Lady Cork, who was then extremely old. This was the lady who, as he said, was once so much affected by one of his charity sermons that she *borrowed* a guinea from a friend to put in the plate. He now said, "It is generally believed that my dear old friend Lady Cork has been overlooked"; and he said this in such a manner that no one could for a moment doubt that he meant that his dear old friend had been overlooked by the devil. How he managed to express this I know not.'

In Sydney's own version it is he from whom this famous old hostess and lion-hunter borrowed a sovereign to put in the plate having been 'so moved by a charity sermon ... But she never repaid me and I believe she spent it on herself.'

The Countess of Cork and Orrery, the old lady, on whom Dickens partly based Mrs Leo Hunter in *Pickwick*, had entertained everyone of note from Dr Johnson to Sydney Smith. The only source I have for Sydney's version is a book called *The Family Chest* (1887).

A Gentle-Jog

Mindful of Sydney's 23-year connection with Foston and neighbouring Thornton-le-Clay, the Association was delighted to help a recent fundraising initiative to support the village hall.

A group of 144 runners raised more than £1,400 by taking part in a ten-kilometre fun run in October. The winner received the Sydney Smith Cup (acknowledging that a favoured medicine of Sydney's was 'the Gentle-Jog: a pleasure to take it'). The race was open to anybody who lived within a five-mile radius of either village.

The money raised will be spent on heating and painting the wooden village hall, as well as moving an oil store away from the building to keep in line with new fire safety regulations. Organizers intend making it an annual fixture.

Race director Richard Harrison told the *Malton Gazette & Herald,* 'The village hall provides lunches for the local school and a venue for various events and classes. It is a

self-supporting organisation, so it is great that we have been able to raise this much money.'

All the runners finished the race within 90 minutes, with Steven Body – first ever winner of the Sydney Smith Cup - coming first with a time of 33 minutes and 28 seconds.

Alan Brien and Empyromancy

Alan Brien (1925–2009).

We quote a few lines from the highly entertaining obituary of Alan Brien, journalist and critic, in *The Times* following Brien's death in May 2008 at the age of 83: '… He listed "empyromancy" as a hobby — a passion, shared with the Revd Sydney Smith, for blazing fires — and fulfilled it at his last home, the most ancient cottage in Highgate Village, which he shared with his fourth wife, the writer Jane Hill. As a retired man of letters, he kept up with old friends and with contemporary cinema, read poetry, and walked his dog, Solly, on Hampstead Heath …'

Sydney, as quoted in Saba's *Memoir*, had this to say on the subject: 'What makes a fire so pleasant is that it is a live thing in a dead room.'

'Bobus' – Neither Seen Nor Heard

Readers of *Newsletter 13* who were struck by the similarity of Sydney's brother Robert Percy to Oliver Cromwell were correctly stricken: characteristically, 'Our Chief of Men' asserted himself in favour of 'Bobus'. We have no idea how it happened but apologize to all concerned for any distress caused.

Rings as True Today …

*The Revd Norman Taylor writes: '*With continuing revelations about MPs' expenses, I quoted Sydney to the South-West Dorset MP – "Suspect all governments, for it is the constant tendency of those entrusted with power to conceive that they enjoy it through their own merits, and for their own use, and not by delegation, for the benefit of others."'

RICH LORE MARKS HISTORIC MALADY THAT ATTACKS THE HUMBLE BIG TOE *(Seattle Post-Intelligencer)*

'"When I have gout, I feel as if I am walking on my eyeballs," declared the Rev. Sydney Smith. The malady, which attacks the joints of the extremities, classically the great toe, is brought on by an abnormally high concentration of uric acid in the blood. Only tuberculosis has a mythology as potent, and in this fascinating general-interest study,

Ray Porter and G.S. Rousseau examine the medical, cultural, and ethical history of an affliction

From a review of *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (Yale University Press 1998). We are sorry to learn that the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ceased publication in March after 146 years.

Sydney and the Aztec Beer Drinkers!

Seen this January in the *Express-Times* newspaper of Easton, Pennsylvania: 'What event is more awfully important to an English colony than the erection of its first brewhouse?'- Revd. Sydney Smith.

Sydney's quote was used by the newspaper to herald the launch of Theobroma (translation – Food of the Gods), a distinctive chocolate-flavoured beer produced by Dogfish Head Brewery of Milton, Delaware. Theobroma is based on chemical analysis of pottery fragments found in Honduras which revealed the earliest known alcoholic chocolate drink used to toast special occasions (often involving large-scale human sacrifices). The discovery of this beverage pushed back the earliest use of cocoa for human consumption more than 500 years to 1200 BC. The beer is made with Aztec cocoa powder and cocoa nibs, honey, chilies and annatto and follows earlier Dogfish 'successes' recreating an ancient honey-grape-and-saffron beer discovered in the 700 BC tomb of King Midas, as well as a rice-honey-and-fruit beer dating to Neolithic China.

Perhaps Sydney would have approved of the Dogfish Head Brewery motto: *Off-Centred Ales for Off-Centred People.*

THE SYDNEY SMITH LUNCHES

London – After Mary Our warmest thanks to Mary Beaumont, who, for so many years, has organised the enjoyable lunch programme at the Boisdale in Eccleston Street. Anyone who has arranged and managed such events will appreciate just how much effort is involved. We are most grateful to Mary, and also salute Peter Payan who has agreed in the interim to be contact for the lunches which will continue on the same lines: Peter's telephone is (020) 8892 9231 or by Email: payan@doctors.org.uk

Members and guests are asked to be present by 12.30pm (the bar opens at noon) and choose either a three-course lunch with soft drinks and coffee only for GBP27.50; a three-course lunch with wine and coffee for GBP35.50, a two-course lunch with soft drinks and coffee for GBP23 or with wine GBP31.50.

Lunches for the rest of 2009 will be held on these Wednesdays: 22 July and 7 October. Please confirm attendance no later than three weeks before the event. Cheques should be made out to the Sydney Smith Association.

York We continue to enjoy excellent lunches at the Grange Hotel in Bootham and are very grateful to Jeremy and Vivian Cassels and their staff for continuing to make us feel so welcome. Future lunches in York will be on Wednesday 20 May, Wednesday 26 August and Wednesday 18 November. Please apply to Mary Rose Blacker, Huttons Ambo Hall, York YO60 7HW. Telephone (01653) 696056.

South-West The 2009 annual gathering for members living in the South-West was held in Wells, Somerset, on Monday 27 April.

Sydie Bones writes: In spite of inclement weather and unavoidable cancellations, a small group of West Country members congregated under the Episcopal shelter of the entrance to the Bishop's Palace at Wells, Somerset for our annual meeting. We were greeted by a guide whose enthusiasm and erudition concerning the history and the structure of the building ensured that spirits were not dampened by the rain as we toured the ruins of the Great Hall and gardens, learning *en route* how hungry cygnets are taught by their parent swans to pull the bell-rope, hanging over the moat, to summon food.

Around the table in the undercroft restaurant, inspired by the tour and the ambience, conversation naturally gravitated towards Sydney's views on bishops, both in general and in particular. Fortunately, Norman Taylor and Alan Hankinson had devoted a whole chapter to bishops in *Twelve Miles from a Lemon* which produced a number of relevant quotations: definition of a 'real' bishop ('never encountered'); vulnerability through infirmity ('wife bishops, daughter bishops, butler bishops, and even cook and housekeeper bishops'); and a succession of battles fought through the *Edinburgh Review* against the Bishops of Peterborough, Gloucester and Exeter, the latter (Bishop Philpotts) provoking some of Sydney's most scourging argument. At the end of our debate, we remained uncertain whether Sydney would indeed have refused preferment had 'the See of Bristol' been offered to him.

Any member who would like to receive details of future SSA gatherings in the South-West is requested to contact Sydie Bones, telephone (01297) 35525, or by Email: sydie.bones@btopenworld.com

FINALLY …

It is with great sadness that the Editor writes with news about two SSA members who have recently passed away … Tyrrell Burgess was a longstanding member of the Association in addition to being a prolific author and academic specialising in education policy … and Mary Read who, with her husband Bill, was responsible for restoring Sydney's Old Rectory in Combe Florey and who will be remembered by SSA members as being unfailingly kind to anybody who wanted to visit and unstintingly hospitable to boot.