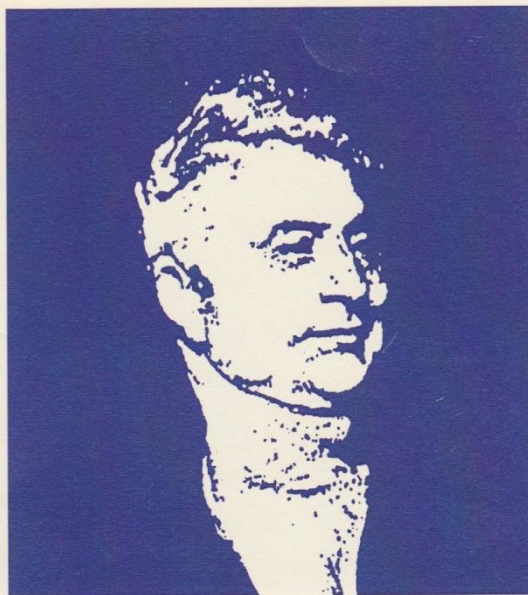


**THE  
SYDNEY SMITH  
ASSOCIATION**



**NEWSLETTER**

**Issue 21**

**Spring 2016**

## THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION.

### Objects

- *To advance the education of the public in the life and works of Sydney Smith.*
- *To advance the Christian religion by the preservation and upkeep of churches connected*
- *with Sydney Smith, in particular but not exclusively, the parish churches of Foston in North Yorkshire and Combe Florey in Somerset.*
- *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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## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I would like to thank Gerry Bradshaw for editing this Parisian-flavoured newsletter. Our gratitude to other officers of the Association is expressed in the AGM minutes.

I have spent part of the year reading over a thousand unpublished letters by Sydney Smith, in the collection made by Alan Bell, in preparation for a complete edition of the Letters, to be published by Oxford University Press. OUP pulled out in the 1980s shortly after Alan published his biography, which contains many excerpts from these letters. Alan has handed this collection to the Association for safe keeping while renewed efforts are being made to persuade OUP to publish a complete edition. Alan is pursuing various leads for editing the collection, and I received a cautiously positive response from the History editor. Henry Holland-Hibbert kindly offered to keep the archive at Munden, the house near Watford that passed to Emily Hibbert, Sydney's younger daughter. However I have also approached the archivist at New College, Oxford, and we have an offer from them to provide a permanent home for this important collection. One of the more touching aspects of the collection is Sydney's correspondence with Richard York, a landowner near York. York's descendent Col Eddie York runs the Hutton Wandesley estate and is a member of the Association. The York letters are held in the Borthwick Institute of Archives, University of York.

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**To Richard York**

**9 Apr 1840**

*Dear York*

*This comes (as the Maid Servants say) with my Love to you - I dine out 8 or 9 times every Week. If people will talk across the Table it is agreeable but I hate Whispering to the Lady next to me - when I have asked her whether she has lately been to the Opera - I am knocked up entirely and don't know what else to say - and I know she hates me for being a large fat Parson & for not slim and elegant – one of the greatest Evils of old age is the advance of the Stomach over the rest of the body - it looks like the accumulation of thousands of Dinners and Luncheons. It looks like a pregnant Woman in a*

*Cloth Waistcoat and as if I were near my time & might reasonably look for Twins - - I am very glad my dear York that Toasted Cheese is brought in now after dinner - I have done with fashions and look for realities - - - Lady Cork is well and disappoints the person below who is looking out for - - - I invited the other day Lady Holland to meet Sarah Austin and Mrs Grote the Radical Queen but these two latter Ladies as well as Mrs Sydney kept their beds and spoilt my party - Routs are coming on: Lemonade is getting up in Price. I am invited to meet Bob Peel to day - keep up your Spirits and don't neglect your small trumps at Whist which you are apt to do*

*God Bless you  
Sydney Smith*

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE AGM WEEKEND 2015**

*Ralph Rochester*

The splendid Hôtel de Charost at number 39, Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré has been the residence of the British Ambassador for just two centuries. It was here, outside its gates, that the eighteen members who followed Sydney to France gathered on the sunny afternoon of Friday, the eighteenth of September, and were met by the Chairman's embedded brother, Mark, who



had spared no pains to help organise the Association's visit. Sydney had all his life wanted to visit Paris. He visited in 1826, when he was fifty-five, and spent some weeks there. He spent much of this time at the Hôtel de Charost where, in quick succession, he met Talleyrand, the statesman, Humboldt, the great traveller, Cuvier, the zoologist, Sismondi, the political economist and many other French savants. You can learn more from Mark Cunningham's account of Sydney's visit published in this issue. Our ambassador of the time was one Viscount Granville.

Our current Ambassador to France is Sir Peter Ricketts and at the doors of the Residence we were welcomed by Lady Ricketts who was to guide us around the house with charm and friendliness. First, however, our Chairman was commanded to give a five-minute account of Sydney Smith, of happy memory, which impossible task he did with great panache.

It is difficult not to be overawed by the many treasures of the Residence. Sydney would have recognised the furniture, some of which had belonged to Napoleon's sister, the Princess Pauline Borghese, whose home the Hôtel de Charost had been. No doubt we shuffled past a chair or two upon which Sydney had sat.

The Battle of Waterloo that changed the face of Europe also brought the Duke of Wellington as ambassador to the Hôtel de Charost, since when, over the two centuries, legions of the great men of Britain and of the world have spent time there. Many of them have left their mark, not least the post-war ambassador, Duff Cooper, who created a superb library at the Residence, which is perhaps the most memorable room in the house. It so happened that we were visiting the Hôtel de Charost the day before the French journée du patrimoine when three thousand visitors were expected to arrive. This meant that we were seeing the Residence scrubbed and polished, not least the grand dining room with the table laid for a regiment, the gilded centrepieces freshly burnished, bright flowers in the vases and the candles, believe it or not, burning. One was tempted to stay for dinner.

We, however, saw everything, gasped in wonder, drank tea and thanked our hostess and departed each his separate way to meet again in the evening and to dine across the Seine at a "lushly renovated Belle Epoch oasis", Le Bouillon Racine, near to the Sorbonne. The food was excellent, the wine flowed, the conversation sparkled. One expected Jane Avril to dance in at any moment. Sydney would have approved.

One of the first acts of the restored monarch, Louis XVIII, was to commission the building of a Chapelle Expiatoire on the site where his guillotined brother's remains and those of Marie-Antoinette and of many other victims of the Revolution had been laid. The chapel was completed in the year Sydney visited Paris. Sydney was as suspicious of the Bourbons as he was of their religion and, if he looked at the chapel, he would have done so with a

sceptical eye. We gathered there on the sunny Saturday morning and listened to an excellent talk on the Restoration and on the Chapelle Expiatoire given by Elizabeth Peers, daughter of Bob and Mary, who has spent happy years in Paris. (Is it not remarkable how, from its members, the Association finds the right man or woman for every occasion?)

It was hard not to be moved by the pathetic fate of the many victims of the Revolution who were remembered there, especially perhaps the desperate Queen whose last letter to her sister in law, carved upon a plinth, brought a lump to many a throat and a tear to many an eye. The people of Paris, however, seem not to have agreed that their 'sins' required too much expiation. It has not been and is not, we were told, a favourite destination of theirs and it was only four years after the completion of the chapel, as Sydney was shrewd enough to predict, that the Bourbons were sent packing.

In the afternoon we visited the Musée Jacquemart André. The house and the standing exhibition, very French and sumptuous and the gifts to the nation of a Second Empire banker and his artist wife, were well worth the visit although at times one remembered what Sydney had said about French art and English signposts. Up a grand staircase was a truly magnificent collection of portraits of Renaissance Medicis and Borgias and their friends, with none of whom one would have wanted to have spent too much time, but glorious all the same.

Wisely the aperitifs at the Hotel Napoléon were served before the Annual General Meeting, which passed painlessly and swiftly. Mark Cunningham entertained us with his readings from Sydney's witty and wise letters from Paris to Kate, his wife, and he made fascinating observations comparing the France of Sydney's day with that of our own. The Association owes him, and the charming Elizabeth Peers and, of course, our own Secretary, Sydnie Bones, who, sadly, was unable to be with us but who worked hard to help make the weekend a success, substantial debts of gratitude.

What followed was the grand dinner of gazpacho and "bio" sea-bass which was enjoyed by all, followed by each member bidding the other not so much farewell as au revoir.

## SYDNEY'S PARIS

*A talk given by Dorothy Williams at a York lunch on October 21<sup>st</sup> 2015.*

This year for the first time our Association held its AGM in Paris. Sydney went there twice, once in 1826 and again in 1835 but his first trip to France (it seems that he didn't go as far as Paris then) was between his time at Winchester and going up to Oxford early in 1789. His father sent him to Mont Villiers in Normandy where (as his daughter Saba tells us) he prudently joined a Jacobin club and was known as Citoyen Smit! He remained there for six months (half a gap year) learning the language. His grandfather was a Huguenot refugee from the Languedoc whose youngest daughter Maria was Sydney's mother. Sydney must have been very conscious of his French ancestry. *"He used to attribute a little of his constitutional gaiety to this infusion of French blood."* (Saba's memoir again)

But to return to his first visit to Paris in 1826, made when he was living in Foston. He had been left money by his aunt so that for the first time he was able to fulfill this ambition. Off he went, on his own but promising to write to his wife every day, a *"promise gratuitously given and never once departed from,"* wrote his wife Catherine. He was there for three weeks and many of his letters have survived.

How Sydney would have loved Eurostar! He was not a good sailor. He survived the channel crossing on this visit by drinking a large glass of brandy before setting sail. On his second visit in 1835, when he was accompanied by Mrs Smith (*"I think every wife has a right to insist upon seeing Paris"*), daughter Emily and her husband Nathaniel Hibbert, the crossing was very rough. They all *"vomited as usual into the channel which divides Albion from Gallia"* he writes and he *"rolled on the deck not wholly unlike a porpoise and just as wet"*. The eighteen members of our party had, I think, a much less troubled journey whatever their chosen mode of travel.

Visits to unfamiliar places are often made much more enjoyable if there are friends there already, waiting to welcome us. This was the case for Sydney as it was for us. He knew that his great friends Lord and Lady Holland who had been in Paris for some months would introduce him to people and places. We were lucky enough to have three Parisian residents, our chairman's brother Mark Cunningham who lives and works in Paris, his wife Isolde and also

Elisabeth Peers whose parents are with us at our lunch today, all involved in the planning of our weekend.

The high point of our visit was, I think for everyone, our tour of the British Ambassador's residence, the Hotel de Charost in the Fauborg Saint- Honore. Built in the early eighteenth century, it was later bought and furnished by Napoleon's sister, Pauline Borghese, who sold it in 1814 to the Duke of Wellington. It has remained the British Ambassador's home ever since. Sydney went there too, several times, On his first visit he was amazingly not very impressed. *"The house was less splendid than I had expected, though I fancy I did not see the state apartments.... I found Lady Granville, (wife of the Ambassador) very civil but I am not captivated by her."* Things looked up the next day when he returned to *"a numerous assembly of French and English people and it was really a very pretty sight in a very pretty garden."* Even better a few days later: *"In the evening I went to Lady Granville's ball; nothing can be more superb. It is by all accounts the first house in Paris and it is generally admitted that Lady Granville is the first lady of Paris."*

Lady Ricketts, wife of the current ambassador, conducted us around all the state apartments, still with all the splendid Empire furniture, pointing out significant paintings and entertaining us with anecdotes about the history of the house and its past occupants. We also visited Lady Diana Cooper's bathroom and Duff Cooper's famous library, ending up with tea and biscuits, looking out over an immaculate lawn in a very English garden.



**Lady Ricketts and members**

In Sydney's day there had been a chapel in the house where he had preached to great effect, so much so that later a Mrs. Sitwell remarked to the famous Admiral Sir Sidney Smith that he must have felt very proud of his famous namesake. This remark that did not go down well with



someone who had been described as the vainest man in all Europe. There were hilarious incidents as the result of confusion between the two men. Our Sydney had begun by writing to his wife that he had not yet met “the Hero” and added acidly *“it is his business to call upon me and I am not anxious to make acquaintance with my countrymen”*. He expressed similar sentiments about the audience at the opera on his later visit: *“The house was full of English who talk loud and seem to care little for other people: this is their characteristic and a very brutal and barbarous distinction it is.”* I should add here that the two Sydneys (with a y and with an i) got on very well later.

When our party went on Saturday morning to visit the Chapelle Expiatoire in the Rue d’Anjou, behind the Madeleine, we were again following in Sydney’s footsteps for he was there in 1826. As he tells his wife, *“It is a small but very magnificent chapel built by the present king in which masses are to be said for the soul of Louis XVI.”* Elisabeth Peers added enormously to our enjoyment by telling us more about it and its position, built on the site near where Marie Antoinette and the king along with many hundreds of others had been guillotined. Our group’s visit was untroubled by the presence of any extra compatriots or even other French people. It is a peaceful and hauntingly moving place now.

Most of us on visits to Paris look forward to seeing paintings, churches and other buildings, visiting the opera perhaps. Sydney seems a somewhat unwilling participant in these tourist activities. He does visit the Louvre and is impressed by its size but *“I saw all the statues and pictures thoroughly so as to judge of and compare them amounting to many thousands in thirty two minutes.”*

Opera and most classical music we know were not for him but he did go to Bellini’s opera ‘I Puritani’. *“It was dreadfully tiresome and unintelligible in its plan,”* he writes, *“I hope it is the last opera I shall ever go to.”* He went to a number of other places, too many to mention here but some surprising ones, like the visit to an abattoir in Montmartre, *“a very useful institution but a sight not worth seeing.”* I wonder what he would have made of the Fondation Louis Vuitton, a sensational building by the architect Frank Gehry recently opened in the Bois de Boulogne that Ifan and I were lucky enough to visit.

Shopping or at least window-shopping is often on the agenda when visiting Paris. Sydney was no exception. He undertook commissions for his womenfolk and took back gifts for them when he went in 1826 but the only thing he bought for himself was a huge seal containing the arms of a peer of France which he found in a broker's shop, bought for four francs and declared should be from henceforth the arms of his branch of the Smith family.

On his first visit too he met and enjoyed the company of a number of influential people, aristocrats and politicians both British and French, including one of the most fascinating, Talleyrand, and others of his circle. He visited the Assembly of Deputies but couldn't hear very well and thought the members read their speeches *"like very bad parsons."*

For Sydney, the bon vivant, eating and drinking were among the greatest of pleasures; meals in Paris come in for very high, even ecstatic praise.

*"A matelotte at the Rochers de Cancailles, an almond tart at Montreuil or a poulet a la tartare at Grignons...impressions which no changes in future life can ever obliterate."* As a group we benefited greatly from the local knowledge of Mark and Isolde who had chosen a restaurant in the fascinating Rue Racine for a memorably delicious Friday night meal. It was a former soup kitchen now described as "a lushly renovated Belle Epoch oasis."

On Saturday evening our AGM and dinner were held in the Hotel Napoleon very near l'Arc de Triomphe. A highlight was the talk by Mark about Restoration Paris and the creation of the modern city. It was particularly relevant to be reminded that Sydney's Paris was pre-Haussmann.

As Sydney wrote to his daughter on his return in 1835, he was since his travels very much gallicized in his character. Paris, he thought, was an abbreviated form of the word paradise. *"I look at it,"* he said in a letter to a friend, *"with some attention as I am not sure I may not end my days in it. I suspect the fifth act of life should be in great cities; it is there, in the long death of old age that a man most forgets himself and his infirmities, receives the greatest consolation from the attention of friends and the greatest diversion from external circumstances."* We were there for too short a time to be much gallicized but I think that he was probably right about cities and certainly right about the consolation of friends. We are enormously grateful to all those who helped to organize such an enjoyable visit.



## VISIT TO LA CHAPELLE EXPIATOIRE

*These notes were prepared by Elizabeth Peers (here with members) as background to the visit by members of the Association as part of the AGM Paris weekend, September 19th, 2015.*

The Chapelle Expiatoire is little known, except perhaps to

French Royalists who hold a memorial service here each January. Nevertheless this little area holds some interest for us today because of its role in the Revolution and Terror, the Empire and the Restoration of the monarchy. It was a controversial building, enduring changes in regime throughout the turbulent 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, one can just descry over the main door, the French Republican motto “LIBERTE, EGALITE, FRATERNITE” that have almost, but not quite, been erased.

Sydney Smith visited the Chapelle Expiatoire shortly after it was completed in 1826 during his first visit.

Key dates:

1789: July 14<sup>th</sup> – the storming of the Bastille.

1793: Jan 21<sup>st</sup> – Louis XVI executed.

1793: July 13<sup>th</sup> – Marat murdered in his bath by Charlotte Corday, who was executed on July 17<sup>th</sup>.

1793: Oct 14<sup>th</sup> - Marie-Antoinette tried and executed.

(The Terror: Sept 17<sup>th</sup> 1793 – July 27<sup>th</sup> 1794)

1799: Nov 9<sup>th</sup> - Napoleon becomes dictator, and is crowned Emperor on Dec 2<sup>nd</sup> 1804.

1814: Apr 6<sup>th</sup> - The Bourbon Restoration until the popular uprisings of the July Revolution of 1830. There was an interlude in spring 1815 - the ‘Hundred Days’, when the return of Napoleon forced the Bourbons to flee France. When Napoleon was again defeated they returned to power in July 1815.

The remains of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette were found here in the former Cimetière Madeleine in 1814, along with many other notable figures of the Revolution including:

- Danton: key figure in the Revolution who before execution in 1794 exclaimed  
*"Show my head to the people, it is worth seeing"*
- Lavoisier: outstanding chemist, but also a nobleman; executed in 1794
- Charlotte Corday: murdered Marat (see above)
- Olympe de Gouges: proto-feminist who wrote A Declaration of the Rights of Women and Female Citizens, executed 1793
- Madame du Barry: Mistress of Louis XVI, executed 1793

The Chapelle Expiatoire and associated Campo Santo were commissioned by Louis XVIII in memory of his brother Louis XVI and his wife Marie-Antoinette, on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1815. Their remains were transferred to the Basilique St Denis to the north of Paris with virtually all French monarchs.

The Chapelle itself was built by Fontaine in the neo-classical style between 1815 and 1826. It is oriented in the opposite direction to most churches with the altar to the west rather than the east.

The Campo Santo commemorates the many Swiss Guards who died during the arrest of Louis XVI in 1792.



Once inside the Chapelle, we are reminded of the Pantheon in Rome, although here the main focus is really on the two marble statues of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, each Kneeling at the Feet of Religion. On their plinths are his Will and her Last Letter (to Louis XVI's sister Elisabeth).

Below is a Crypt which is where the remains of the

### Members at La Chapelle

King and Queen were found. The Sacristy contains a Confessional with a folding seat in a cupboard.

The surrounding garden provides a peaceful spot in a busy part of central Paris.

### **RESTORATION FRANCE IN THE EARLY 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

*Members attending the 2015 AGM and the dinner at the Hotel Napoleon were fortunate to hear a talk on Restoration France and Sydney's visit of 1826 from our Chairman's brother, Mark Cunningham, (pictured here) who has kindly supplied the notes from which he spoke:*



In 1814, as the current bout of the war with Napoleon approached its end, it was not clear what regime would follow. It seemed established that it would involve a monarch, no doubt constitutional, but not who would fill this position. The different powers, notably Britain, Russia, Prussia, and Austria supported different candidates: the Bourbons (Louis XVI's brothers), the legitimate heirs; the Orléans family, probably more acceptable to French liberals; and even Napoleon himself.

In the event, encouraged by Talleyrand, the Comte d'Artois, the younger Bourbon brother, managed to get to Paris and set himself up as provisional governor pending the arrival of Louis XVIII. Talleyrand manoeuvred a rump legislature into "electing" Louis and a first attempt at reviving the 1791 constitution having been rejected, notably by the royalists, a Charter was adopted and amnesty declared. Louis would exercise executive, judicial and partial legislative power (notably the right to dissolve the assembly and create peers), the elected assembly and the senate would legislate and vote the budget. The citizens were guaranteed equal fiscal, legal and religious rights.

The nobles of the Ancien Régime, the army and the clergy were outraged by the concessions to the liberals and formed the ultra movement headed by the Comte d'Artois, later Charles X. For the next 10 years, with a brief hiccup in 1815 ending in a "White Terror", French politics were a tug of war between the ultras and the liberals. The liberals were initially dominant but the ultra

movement gradually gained ground coming out on top with Charles X's accession in 1824.

The increase in royal power was deeply offensive to the liberals as were its results:

- Compensation for the nobles whose property had been confiscated
- A law establishing the death penalty for sacrilege
- Attempts, more or less successful, to muzzle the press
- A virtual monopoly of education for the church and the Jesuits

The frequent processions of clergy, King and nobles and the expiatory ceremonies were intended to emphasize the ultra domination and remind the liberals and, incidentally, the Parisian populace, somewhat nostalgic for the post-revolutionary period, of their helplessness. The economic changes developing around the infant industrial revolution were creating important social tensions.

This was the régime that Sydney Smith discovered in 1826 and of which he said *"The French government are behaving very foolishly, flinging themselves into the arms of the Jesuits, making processions through the streets of 1200 priests with the King and Royal Family at their head, disgusting the people and laying the foundation of another revolution, which seems to me (if this man lives) to be inevitable"*.

He was right. Four years later an attempted absolutist coup d'état led to revolt, the flight of Charles X and the election, then coronation of Louis Philippe as Roi des Français, rather than Roi de France.

On his first visit, the liberal circles in which Sydney moved were keeping a low profile; when he came back in 1835, they were on top.

*Mark continued by introducing many delightful (of course!) comments on Paris made by Sydney, which are to be found in his daily letters home to his wife, Kate.*

- *"I am quite delighted with Calais ... What pleases me is the taste and ingenuity of the shops (There were no Majestic wine and beer warehouses for the English drinker at the time.) ... and the extreme propriety and civility of everybody, even the lowest person. I have not seen a cobbler who is not better bred than an English gentleman" (what were his views on gentlemen then?).*

- The tea was “*much better than I could have met with in England*” (radical change there).
- “*The shops are all open on Sunday*” (This doesn't seem to have offended him; these days, of course, they're open in England, closed in France and subject of heated debate at the moment).
- “*I dined in the caffee, more superb than anything we have any idea of in the way of coffee-house. The dinner cost 4/10d but would have cost 30s in London*”. (Probably exaggerated by SS but the differential Paris/London still seems to be significant. Incidentally, taking account of inflation the meal would have cost £18 or 25€ today.)
- “*I am comfortably lodged at the rate of £2.2s per week*” (or £24 per night in today's money. The respective costs of a night's lodging and a meal, the former one third more expensive than the latter then, have changed radically with the explosion of house prices: an similar room costs at least 7 times more than a meal today!).
- “*Paris is very badly lighted at nights and the want of a trottoir is a great evil*”. Now we have trottoirs, but with the high dog population and the disappearance of the famous moto-crottes, you really have to watch your step. “*The Champs Elysées are very poor and bad: but for the two towns, in spite of these inconveniences, believe me there is not the smallest possibility of a comparison; Regent Street is a perfect misery compared to the fine parts of Paris*”. And Sydney is talking about Paris before Haussmann had his wicked way with her! Mind you, this was written on his second day in Paris and his rose-tinted spectacles were firmly in place; a few days later he notes “*the want of W.C. is one of the crying evils of Paris*”.
- Sydney seems to have had the modern tourist's idea of in-depth exploration. On the 20th April, he managed to have breakfast in the Palais Royal, change his passport, admire the quais “*nothing can be conceived more magnificent and imposing*” (I agree), dismiss Notre Dame “*which is nothing*”, compare the London and Paris markets (flowers better, others worse), visit l'Hôpital Hôtel Dieu “*I never saw so much cleanliness and comfort; all the hospitals I have seen in England are a joke to it*” (I'm not going to make jokes about the National Health though). From there he went to the Louvre, “*the longest room I ever saw; I saw all the statues and pictures thoroughly so as to judge of and compare them, amounting to many thousands in 32 minutes*”, probably a European or even world record. He received Lord Granville and topped things off with theatre and a 4-shilling meal at a “*Restaurateur*”.

- He didn't think much of Parisian breakfasts and was shocked by the lack of a table cloth both in cafés and at the Duc de Broglie's: *"there was roast fowl, spinach, eggs, apples, wine and afterwards tea ... the children drank wine for their breakfast"*. No sign of baguette, croissants, coffee but the tablecloths are still missing today.
- *"The French have a great deal of public hospitality to strangers. All the public sights open on particular days only to Frenchmen are open any day to foreigners on producing your passport"*.
- *"I am agreeably surprised by the water of Paris being so good. I find none of those effects from it I was taught to expect. It is the purified water of the Seine and so with the best water and with tea infinitely better than London tea, I breakfast well"*. Urban myth says that Seine water has passed through at least 6 stomachs before finally making it to the sea; I remember being warned about it on my first visit in 1967! In fact the taste of Parisian water varies tremendously from quartier to quartier, proof of its different origins.
- Sydney was very impressed by the Jardin des Plantes, its hothouses, wild animal enclosures, cabinets of natural history, anatomy, mineralogy ... Nothing much has changed there; if you've never been, do go.
- French painting gets short shrift from Sydney. The House of peers (now the senate) has *"fine gardens and the noblest staircase in Paris"* but *"bad pictures ... The French school of painting is execrable, and considerably inferior to English signposts"*.
- *"French manners are quite opposite to ours: the stranger is introduced and he calls upon him first. This very singular, and, I think, contrary to reason"*. Sydney would no doubt have been very shocked by modern practice.
- He was unimpressed by the manners of the English abroad: *"I am not anxious to make acquaintance with my countrymen"*, *"the English talk loud and seem to care little for other people; this is their characteristic, and a very brutal and barbarous distinction it is"*. This may still be true of stag parties and holidaymakers en masse, but the reputation of English residents in France is these days improved, or at least I like to think so.
- Over a three-week visit, somewhat hampered by bad weather and the wrong shoes, *"I have unfortunately left behind me my thick shoes which are as necessary for walking on the sharp stones of Paris as they are ill calculated for the clean and flat pavements of London"*, Sydney managed also to visit Père Lachaise cemetery, the slaughterhouses, the Chambre des Députés, Les Invalides, St Cloud, Meudon, various palaces, the King's library,



the opera and several theatres, in fact, virtually everything visitable including the Chapelle Expiatoire “*small but very magnificent*”. Paris had lived up to his extremely high, some would say unrealistic expectations” (“*Paris is an abbreviation of paradise*”).

Despite his stated reluctance to frequent the Parisian English, Sydney spent a great deal of his time with them. The network of temporary or permanent residents centred on the Hollands and their friends, the Granvilles, welcomed him and opened the doors of their mainly liberal acquaintances in political and intellectual circles. In his letters to Kate, he lists the people he meets; there are over a hundred references to English, less than thirty to French or other nationals. Here are some thumbnail sketches of the more notable excluding the Hollands, with whom you must all be familiar.

*Mark concluded with a review of the people whom Sydney met while he was in Paris. His notes provide a remarkable list of the great and the good.*

Lord and Lady Granville, Ambassadors to the French Court: Sydney was frequently a guest at the Residence (Hôtel Charost) for lunch, tea, dinner and one magnificent Ball “*nothing can be more superb*”.

Lord Granville was a member of the Leveson Gower family, rich, well-connected and political, mostly, though not exclusively Whig. His father was the 1st Marquis of Stafford, and his half-brother the 1st Duke of Sutherland was considered the richest man in Britain, his sisters and half-sisters were married to the Duke of Norfolk, Duke of Beaufort, Marquis of Westminster, a couple of less distinguished Earls and the Archbishop of York. Supported by this aristocratic network, his career was mostly diplomatic: Ambassador to Russia at 31, then France in two stages with Charles X and Louis Philippe. He was also known to have been the lover for some 15 years of the much older Lady Bessborough (two illegitimate children) before she arranged his marriage to her great-niece, Harriet Cavendish, the daughter of Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire. Lady Granville was “*generally admitted to be the great Lady of Paris ... I found her civil, but I am not captivated by her*”.

Talleyrand: A thumbnail sketch is impossible for Talleyrand who was at the centre of power in France for 40 odd years under the Ancien Régime, the Directoire, Napoleon, Louis XVIII and finally Louis Philippe, with a brief sabbatical under Charles X when Sydney met him with the Hollands. Talleyrand was valued, indeed at certain periods indispensable, for his political intelligence. Most often Foreign minister or Ambassador, he

negotiated with foreign powers on behalf of all these regimes. Whether or not what he negotiated and his excellent advice were in his masters' interests, they usually helped the liberal cause and invariably advanced his own, astronomical bribes being the norm from all who were in contact with him.

In 1808 he was in favour of closer ties with Austria but Napoleon sent him to negotiate a treaty with Alexander of Russia. This is how he set about it: *"Sire, you must save Europe and you can only do it by standing up to Napoleon. The French are civilised but their sovereign is not. The Tsar of Russia is civilised even if the Russians are not. The sovereign of Russia must ally himself with the French people."*

Explaining his taking of orders for which he was manifestly unsuited, he said *"in aristocratic circles, the family was loved more than the individuals, above all the young who were virtually unknown to their parents"*. He was destined for the bishopric of Autun, which he briefly held. Before the Revolution he was Agent Général du Clergé and his main job was to keep their wealth out of the hands of Louis XVIII. A few years and a Revolution later, he was uniquely well-placed to assess and confiscate all church property.

He was a libertin, a wit, a lover of luxury, totally unscrupulous in the pursuit of his own interests. At the same time he was a pragmatic and visionary politician advancing the liberal cause whenever possible throughout his career.

Sydney doesn't have much to say about him though he dined with him and found him *"very civil ... his cook is said to be the best in Paris"*. Perhaps he was so well known that further comments seemed unnecessary but we would have liked to hear more about their meeting.

The Duchess of Dino: Of aristocratic German origins, and extremely rich in her own right, Dorothée von Courland was married to Talleyrand's nephew at the age of 17, somewhat against her inclinations, and rarely saw him thereafter. She was beautiful, determined, liberated and witty and for many, rather frightening. She became Talleyrand's hostess, and perhaps mistress, at the Congrès de Vienne and stayed with him until his death in 1838, the last few years at the Embassy in London. During this period she had several acknowledged lovers, and at least three illegitimate children. She felt that she was European in a negative sense ... French in Germany, German in France,

belonging nowhere but at ease in England. After Talleyrand's death she retired as Duchess of Sagan to her estates in Silesia corresponding with a broad range of personalities and writing her memoirs.

Her great friend in Paris when Sydney was there was the Duchesse de Broglie, daughter of Mme de Staël.

**Le Duc de Broglie:** From a noble ancient regime family, promoted by Talleyrand at the Restoration and re-ennobled, he was a prominent liberal politician and intellectual in temporary eclipse at the time of Sydney's visit. Sydney says that the ducal couple is *"virtuous, sensible disagreeable people who give bad breakfasts without a tablecloth"* (which didn't stop him taking breakfast with them several times) but elsewhere that he is *"amiable ... but very shy"*. *"After tea I was engaged in an admirable speech of the Duc de Broglie and was as tired with it as one always is with admirable productions"*. The Duc was strongly in favour of the abolition of slavery, freedom of the press, civil liberties and the English political system. He came into his own with Louis Philippe under whom he was successively Minister for Education, for Foreign Affairs and finally Président du Conseil. A contemporary said of him *"the only thing that de Broglie lacks to make up for his high rank, unassailable probity, disinterestedness, and talent, is the art of managing others' pride"*. Also *"chiefly concerned with his honour, he sees politics less in terms of achieving results than avoiding compromising himself. He accepts power as a duty, a patriotic obligation"*. As you can imagine, with this profile in the political turmoil of the times, he didn't achieve a great deal in the end.

**Casimir Perier:** Sydney met Casimir Perier at Lord Holland's and notes that he was one of the best speakers of the Assembly. An extremely wealthy banker and député, he was a major figure of the liberal opposition during the reign of the ultras; before dying prematurely of cholera in 1832, he was Président du Conseil and Interior Minister under Louis Philippe and one of the principal defenders of the Charte establishing the pre-eminence of the government and the Assembly. *"The King reigns but does not rule"*. An excellent orator, risk-taker and man of action, he was in many respects the opposite of the Duc de Broglie.

**Two Scientists:** Sydney met Humboldt, the greatest geographer of the age, *"the great traveller; a lively pleasant talkative man"* and Cuvier the great classifier of the animal kingdom who attracts no comment other than that he is

*"famous"*. We can't know whether these meetings involved significant exchanges.... It may be that he is communicating what he thinks will interest Kate.

To conclude, here are one or two "bons mots" from Sydney's letters, his own inimitable thumbnail sketches.

- *"Abercrombie, secretary of the Legation, as thin and short as a walking stick."*
- *"I called on Mrs Greathead again; she is very much Frenchified."*
- *"I have seen Sigismondi and Madame Sigismondi this morning; he is an energetic, sensible toothless old man. She has lost her beauty and hoisted the yellow flag of senility."*
- *"I renewed my acquaintance with Crèvecoeur young Craddock; there is something in him, but he doesn't know how little it is. He is much admired as a beauty."*
- *"The Parisians are very fond of adorning their public fountains. Sometimes water pours forth from the mouths of enormous lions ... sometimes trickles from the jaws of a serpent. The dull and prosaic English turn a brass cock or pull out a plug – what a nation!"*

Note: Extracts of letters taken from *The Letters of Sydney Smith* ed. Nowell C. Smith, Oxford 1953

### **FRIENDS , ACQUAINTANCES AND MEDICINE**

*A talk to members at the London lunch, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015 by Dr Henry Oakeley,  
Garden Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, London*

I would like to start by talking about the relationship of Sydney Smith (1771-1845) with three of my great, great, great uncles and end with his medical atrocities – sorry, I mean activities. Two uncles were in my maternal lineage: firstly, the chemist Sir Humphry Davy, and secondly, the jurist, wit, and man of letters, Abraham Hayward. With these Sydney Smith dined and exchanged letters, and, I would claim, some of Smith's continuing fame can be attributed to Hayward's essays. The third was in my paternal line, the Rev. Frederick Oakeley, one of the founder members of the Tractarian movement led by Edward Pusey, whose followers were attacked by Sydney Smith, but about Frederick no more will be said.

Sir Humphry Davy was President of the Royal Institution, and lectured there on scientific topics from 1801-1812. They would have met when Sydney Smith was lecturing there on Moral Philosophy from 1804-1806. Davy had had little formal education but moved up the scientific and social hierarchy with the speed of a rocket, becoming a lion of London society by his hugely popular lectures, which were attended by up to 600 people. Sydney Smith shared the same verbal skills and huge audiences and they moved in overlapping social circles.

In 1811 Davy was planning to marry the wealthy widow, Mrs Apreece, whose fashionable soirées in Edinburgh had made her famous. Smith, who enjoyed the company of beautiful women and clearly knew her well enough to flirt and flatter, advised her in December 1811 not to marry Sir Humphry:

*'Dear Mrs Apreece, I shall be in London in March. Pray remain single, and marry nobody (let him be whom he may); you will be annihilated the moment you do, and, instead of an alkali or an acid, become a neutral salt. You may very likely be happier yourself, but you will be lost to your male friends ...'*

She married Davy in April 1812, but she continued to meet and correspond with Sydney Smith until his death in 1845. The Davys were regular guests of the Smiths in their various homes, but Sydney found Sir Humphry, when not in his laboratory, a vain dandy, calling him: *'a foolish coxcomb out of his crucibles'*. In November 1816, shortly after Davy announced his life-saving miners' lamp, he wrote to a friend:

*'We have had Sir Humphry Davy here. A spurious Aladdin has sprung up in Northumberland, and pretends that the magical lamp belongs to him. There is no end to human presumption and arrogance'.*

His opinion mellowed with time and in 1822 he writes after another visit:

*'Humphry Davy was very agreeable, neither witty, eloquent or sublime, but reasonable and instructive'.*

Shortly afterwards there was a letter from Davy to Smith thanking him for the gift of some curiosities and discussing their composition and the pigments used in Egypt, Sidon and Rome. Lady Davy continued to visit and exchange correspondence after Sir Humphry's death in 1829. She stayed with the Smiths in 1833, and in a long letter to her in 1840 Sydney flatters her with a rewriting of a part of Paradise Lost *'... If chance with nymph-like step the Davy pass, what pleasing seem'd, for her now pleases more ...'* and in 1841-2

he wrote further letters to her, bemoaning her living in Rome. His love of the ladies and his delight in verbal repartee is exemplified by these letters. I have wondered how close they actually became.

Now to Abraham Hayward and Sydney Smith. Abraham Hayward was also a guest of the Smiths at the parsonage at Combe Florey (July 1835), and, reciprocally, Smith attended the parties for the glitterati of London hosted by Hayward in his chambers in the Temple. Hayward would provide dinners to delight a gastronome such as Smith, to which he would invite other A-listers such as Macaulay and Lord Lansdowne. Keeping quiet himself he would act as a foil so his guests could hear what a reviewer called 'the torrent of Sydney Smith's wit'. At one, Lord Lyndhurst recounted how an elderly lady acquaintance kept books by male and female authors on separate bookshelves, to which Hayward was unable to restrain himself, and supposed that this was because she did not wish her library to increase. It may be that these dinners became too uninhibited for the Reverend Smith, for in 1836 he refused an invitation on grounds of delicacy and virtue.

However, they remained friends and when, in 1843, Smith wrote amusing (and presumably satirical) articles about the insolvency of the State of Pennsylvania and was violently attacked by sections of the American press, Hayward sent him press cuttings from those who supported him, whereas the Dean of St Paul's sent only the abusive ones. Both were denied high office because of their frank opinions, and grumbled to each other about it.

When Lady Holland's *Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith* appeared in 1855, Hayward wrote a glowing 50 page review, praising his worth as a '*great public benefactor, as well as his admitted superiority in what we must make bold to call his incidental and subordinate character of 'wit'*'. I would like to comment on Hayward's praise of Robert 'Bobus' Smith, Sydney's brother, but time does not permit.

Sydney Smith is no Pepys, no diarist to whom we may turn for vignettes of the larger world: he mentions Waterloo and the Fall of Paris in correspondence, years after these events. He barely mentions Napoleon. His art is in revealing the life of a campaigning clergyman, of delighting with his skill with words and humour, and his role in the world of pastor, reformer and socialite. He also shines a narrow beam of light into the medical practices of his age.

So to proceed to the medical practices of Sydney Smith. In a previous life I was a physician and I know that two hundred years from now, my descendants will look back at my era with the same horror as I regard Sydney Smith's rural and domestic doctoring of two centuries past. His medical knowledge was gained by attending the lectures of Sir Christopher Pegge, Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, and clinical demonstrations at the medical school in Edinburgh. This was sufficient for him to stock 'all the vegetables and minerals' required for basic therapies, based on the humoral theory of illness and treatment propounded by the circle of Hippocrates from 370 BC; established by Galen in the second century, and pursued with homicidal intensity into the foothills of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He used leeches to remove blood (the excess of the hot humour) and induced painful blistering by application of crushed *Cantharides* beetles (the 'Spanish Fly'). The rationale of the latter has always escaped me unless it was supposed to remove dangerous humours in the fluid-filled blisters. He wrote to Lady Howard in verse, recommending blistering for sick children:

*'Spare not in eastern blasts when babies die,  
The wholesome vigour of the Spanish Fly.  
From timely torture seek thy infant's rest,  
And spread the poison on his labouring breast.'*

He used purgatives to rid the body of 'black bile' – the melancholy humour – using castor oil, ipecacuanha, rhubarb, and calomel. He had 'Peter's Puke' (an emetic), 'Dead Stop' for overactive guts which came with Laudanum (that is morphine) which would certainly have been effective in that regard; and a stomach pump which he used for a case of accidental arsenic poisoning. He recounts the treatment of his son, Douglas, for whooping cough with all the ingredients in his shop, and that he then 'cravatted his throat with blisters and fringed it with leeches'. This I found simply horrifying, not only because it must be an early example of converting a noun into a verb.

His account of treating his six-month old daughter, similarly ill, is worse. He gave her two grains of calomel (mercurous chloride) every hour for 11 hours until the attending physician said more would be fatal. The daughter was no better so he said 'Persevere' and continued himself until she had had 32 grains. As 12 grains can be fatal in an adult, and certainly can cause neurological damage (hatter's shakes) and renal failure, we must assume it induced vomiting so she would not have absorbed this monstrous dose. His

infant son Noel died a few months after having whooping cough, and one can but wonder if it was illness or treatment that precipitated his demise.

He was not always so aggressive in his therapies, writing:

*'We conquered the whooping cough here with a pennyworth of salt of tartar, after having filled them with the expensive poisons of Halford.'* (Halford was president of the Royal College of Physicians from 1820-1844.)

But his ability to poison his own children when two of them had a typhus-like fever (i.e. typhus or typhoid), continued unabated. He writes:

*'I attended two of my children through a good stout fever of the typhus kind without ever calling in an apothecary, but for one day. I depended upon blessed antimony, and watched anxiously for the time of giving bark.'*

Antimony causes abdominal pain, vomiting, pancreatitis and is cardio-toxic in the minutest doses, but was widely used. Quinine (Cinchona bark) has its own side effects and is only of use in malaria. It is a tribute to the robustness of human physiology that any of his children survived to adulthood.

Smith was a kind and attentive doctor to his flock but during an epidemic of scarlet fever in 1833 in which 15 of his parishioners died, he left their treatment to graduate doctors, writing to Lady Grey with a trace of insight:

*'You will naturally suppose that I killed all these people by doctoring them, but scarlet fever awes me, and is above my aim. I leave it to the professionals, and graduated, homicides.'* by which he meant licensed killers - those with medical degrees.

His wit was manifest in seeking information on a local physician applying for an unspecified post. He wrote to Abraham Hayward in London from the Parsonage at Combe Florey in Taunton in the winter of 1843:

*'Dear Hayward, Do you know anything of the Aesculapius of Lyme Regis? Does he march in the paths of rhubarb? Can he remove a limb? Does he know his way in the bowels? Can he see in the caecum? Can he remove a full stop in a colon? Is his practice right in the rectum? In plain prose, do you know anything about him, and is he fit for the office he is desirous to fill?'*

Medicine was moving on, real cures were being found. The Theriacs, powdered fox lungs, incinerated swallows and dried earthworms had



disappeared from the pharmacopoeias, but bleeding, blisters and purgatives as used by Sydney Smith continued until the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mercury, antimony and other poisons continued longer. Obituaries now may carry a phrase such as 'died after a short illness': then, 'died after a short course of treatment' would have been more likely.

My time has also expired so let me finish with Abraham Hayward's eulogy on Sydney Smith:

*'With the single exception of Lord Brougham, no man within living memory has done more to promote the improvement and well-being of mankind by waging continual war, with pen and tongue, against ignorance and prejudice in all their modifications and varieties'.*

As nobody now remembers Lord Brougham except as the designer of a horse-drawn carriage, I commend Sydney Smith to you through the words of my ancestor as being unique and very, very special.

### **FROM THE SPECTATOR, 9 JANUARY 2016**

*(Courtesy of Ralph Rochester)*

' "I am 12 miles from a lemon," lamented that *bon vivant* clergyman Sydney Smith, on reaching one country posting. He was related to Gerard Manley Hopkins, a priest who ... would quite possibly balk at the offer of a lemon. After all ... Hopkins dared not eat a peach, fearful of its delicious flavour.'

Out of range of biographies I'd be grateful to know how this unlikely kinship came about. Unlikely they ever met: when Sydney died Hopkins was six months old.

### **THE LATE GEORGIAN CHURCH**

*A talk by Graham Parry, York, 9 March 2016*

The Church in which Sydney Smith served from the time of his taking orders in 1794 was a moribund condition, largely devoid of spiritual content. The revival inspired by John Wesley had parted company with the Church of England after his death in 1791. All that energy went into the Methodist movement, leaving the National church to moulder on. The mouldering was physical as well as spiritual. Parish churches were very rarely repaired, let alone restored in this period. Comprehensive neglect was the norm, unless there were unusually energetic churchwardens. Parish rates were expended on the poor, not on the fabric. Accounts of the state of churches that one

finds in journals and diaries of the 1820s and 1830s tell a lamentable story. For example, one book on Cambridgeshire churches I was reading recently notes that 'Haslingfield church has suffered considerably from damp and neglect; the state of the floor at the west end of the north aisle is such that would certainly not be permitted in any gentleman's stable, nor, voluntarily, in the meanest cottage.' In Cherry Hinton Church, 'the north aisle is blocked off, and irreverently used as a dust-hole and rubbish depository – an idle and unseemly custom, very common in the churches in the neighbourhood of Cambridge. Histon church 'has an air of dank, neglected decay which pervades the entire place, betrays the spirit of the present day.' Chancels were sometimes boarded up, when the roof leaked or the windows had blown out. The cost of repairing the chancel usually fell on the rector or on the owner of the living.

Services were commonly perfunctory and routine. Services were dominated by the sermon, just as the interior of the church in those days was dominated by the pulpit, which was often placed centrally. The communion table was almost irrelevant, as communion was taken only three times a year in most parishes, at Christmas, Easter and Whitsun. Sermons generally offered the precepts of good behaviour, duty to one's fellows and obedience to superiors, and belief in the governors of church and state. I have come across very little in sermons of this time that speaks of the mysteries of the faith, of the significance of the incarnation and the crucifixion, of life as a spiritual journey through a divinely created world towards death and the hereafter. The sermon was a time to relax. At the church at Tong in Somerset, in the 1830s, the Squire had recently built a pew in the chancel, and when the sermon had begun, a servant regularly entered at the chancel door with the luncheon tray. Here is the Dean of Exeter commenting on his recent visitation of the diocese in 1840. *'We may now see in most of our rural churches a rabble of boors and boys seated on the very steps and rails of the altar, and the altar itself used to place their hats on, and perhaps at other times, and when there is no vestry employed as a table for the accommodation of the farmers in vestry assembled. This extreme irreverence, and shocking desecration of holy things, is capable of no excuse.'* The Dean was a man ahead of his times. More normal was the behaviour of the churchwarden in a Surrey church in 1836, who interrupted the first service of the new vicar (John Mason Neale, the future hymnologist): *'in the middle of the service, the church warden,*

wanting to open the east window, got up on the altar . . .’ The use of the word ‘altar’ here, by the way, is a sign of things to come.

A major source of the growing dysfunction of parish churches in later Georgian and Regency times was the fashion for ever larger pews. When I say pews I mean box pews, and not the kind of box pews that you see today in some churches. These were large family boxes that were erected by the squire and other gentry families at the top end of the nave and along the aisles. Their wooden walls were a good five feet high, with an extra foot of curtain on a rail at the top. The occupants were completely secluded from view from the rest of the congregation – they were visible only to the preacher in the pulpit. The box pews were the property of the family that occupied them, and that family paid a pew rent to the rector - a useful additional income to the incumbent. These pews grew larger and more numerous and more comfortable towards the end of the eighteenth century. Here is an account of one in a church in Lincolnshire in the 1830s. *“The squire’s pew was a very large enclosure, occupying a space fully capable of accommodating at least 25 persons on open seats. It was carpeted, curtained round and furnished with a mahogany drawing room table and a set of cane chairs. There were two easy chairs, with footstools, placed by a small brazen stove on one side, which was duly furnished with fire-irons, grate and coal-scuttle.”* A pleasant place to snooze. A visitor to a church in Somerset in the 1820s noticed that the squire in a similar well-equipped pew was in the habit of rattling the poker in the grate when he disapproved of the sermon, or had had enough of it. A feature of churches at this time was the increasing number of stove pipes and flues that rose out of the pews and through the walls. In the Lincolnshire church just mentioned, the squire’s wife had had a window blocked up because the light irritated her eyes, and the flue from her grate was pushed through the newly bricked-up wall. These over-sized pews and their equipment became deeply resented, and the cause of much discord in the congregation. As the nave filled up with these private boxes, the less well off were sidelined to the aisles, and poor of the parish had to sit on benches at the back or along the aisle, or had to stand. The seating in the parish church reflected the hierarchy of the village or the town, shaped by birth, wealth, and ownership of property. It is not surprising why so many people abandoned the parish church in the early nineteenth century to attend the new Methodist chapel instead, for there all the seats were free, and there were open benches. No oppressive social hierarchy, and in addition, the minister was

likely to speak of the life of the spirit, salvation and the Love of God. There would also be a good deal about the perils of sin.

The large pews have almost completely disappeared from the churches of England. They were one of the first casualties of the mission to reform and restore churches that began to gather force from the 1840s onwards. But the scenes I have described were common in the churches where Sydney Smith spent his working life. Sydney however, seems never to have been bothered by them. He seems never to have been aware of the dereliction of the fabric or the unseemliness of the services – probably because this was the normal state of affairs.

The Church began to undergo transformation with the growth of the Oxford Movement, which is usually understood to begin in 1833, when Keble preached his famous sermon against state interference in the Church and for greater holiness and spirituality in the C of E. The doctrines of the C of E needed to be re-examined and reaffirmed, and the sacramental aspects of worship needed to be advanced. Led by Newman, Keble and Pusey, the Oxford Movement had an immense influence on the way the clergy understood its role, and on the character of worship in the established church throughout the kingdom. Because every member of the established clergy had to have been educated at Oxford or Cambridge, the religious revival at Oxford had nation-wide consequences. The Oxford Movement transformed worship and doctrine.

A parallel movement at Cambridge, less well known, transformed the setting of worship. This was the Ecclesiological Society, otherwise known as the Cambridge Camden Society, which began to demand the restoration of churches on sound Gothic principles, and the introduction of furnishing schemes that were appropriate to the liturgy of the Church of England that was now undergoing renewal. Both Oxford and Cambridge movements were energetic and purposeful, driven by young men with ideals. The Cambridge movement would result in ninety per cent of the churches of England being restored within fifty years, and changed the appearance of churches everywhere. It would demolish all those great box pews and stove pipes, open up the chancels and fill them with surpliced choirs, new stained glass and new woodwork. We have all grown up in the churches shaped by the Ecclesiological Society without knowing it.

Sydney Smith paid no attention to the Oxford Movement or the Cambridge Movement, as far as I can find out. He had no interest in them. In his occasional references to the Oxford Movement, he expresses a broad dislike of the more ceremonial form of worship it encouraged, and showed no interest in liturgy or doctrine. He regarded such developments as 'popish' and affected. His dismissive attitude is evident in the way he would sometimes parody the practice of Oxford Movement clergymen, who liked to date the letters by saint's days or feast days: St Barnabas' Day or Ash Wednesday, for example. Sydney would sometimes date his letters Washing Day or Pancake Day. Sydney remained resolutely a man of the Georgian Church. That Church had served him very well, he understood how it worked, and he saw no need to change his opinions in the later stages of his life.



**Members in Paris for the AGM**

## **THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION MINUTES OF THE PARIS AGM - 19TH SEPTEMBER 2015**

After aperitifs and a talk by Mark Cunningham on early 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris, the Chairman welcomed members to the AGM held in the Hotel Napoleon, Paris.

Apologies had been received from Arnold & Elspeth Arthurs, Mary Beaumont, Gerry Bradshaw, Sydnie Bones, David Chamberlain, Dickie Dawe, Nicholas Faith, Graham Parry, Tessa Reitman, John Simpson, Ruth and Norman Taylor, Jane Urquhart, Eddy York, Harry & Nicky Yoxall.

- The Chairman opened the meeting.
- Minutes of the 2014 AGM were accepted as a true record of the proceedings.
- Points arising: rebinding of books. Ralph Rochester updated members on the current situation. Three volumes have been rebound, sponsored by Ralph, the Yoxalls and the Association; these will be housed in the library at Munden. Seven in a parlous condition remain. Sydney Smith's bookplate has been retained in each volume; the Chairman added he believed that the Smith coat of arms used was bought by Sydney Smith in Paris. It was agreed *nem con* that the Association would authorise a fourth rebinding at a cost of £100. Once again, thanks to Kate Rochester for her professional bookbinding were recorded.
- The Treasurer's financial report (below) was read by the Chairman and accepted by the members. Finances for the Association continue to be satisfactory. The meeting recorded thanks to the Treasurer for all his work, including dealing with the Charity Commissioners.
- Membership: Mark Wade described numbers showing a slow decline, dropping to around 150 paid up members, with perhaps half a dozen more to come. The Chairman remarked how sad it would be if the Association were to be wound up, although if in future no officers were found it would wind up of its own accord. The Chairman thanked the Membership Secretary for all his hard work.
- Lunches: the Chairman thanked local organisers for their continued dedication to arranging lunches during the year.

- London: Celia Moreton-Prichard, assisted by Peter Payan, hosts lunches three times a year at the Boisdale Restaurant (owned by a member), with 8-10 in attendance.
- York: Mark Wade reported that 20-25 members attended lunches at the Middlethorpe Hall; talks are usually printed in the subsequent newsletter.
- South-West members' lunch is organised by Sydie Bones, usually with a speaker.
- Several members asked to be included on the email circulation lists giving details of lunches. The Chairman will investigate means of communication.
- Newsletter: the Chairman thanked Gerry Bradshaw who has taken over as editor.
- Website: thanks were recorded to Alison Vickers who maintains the site, but younger people could be encouraged to get involved.
- Sydney's Letters: during the year, the Chairman collected 800 unpublished letters by Sydney Smith from Alan Bell. OUP has expressed an interest in publishing them; an academic editor will be needed. The letters, not originals, are Alan's typed copies collected from libraries.
- AGM 2016 will be held in Oxford, provisional date is 10<sup>th</sup> September to avoid a clash of dates with the York book fair. The Chairman will approach New College. Thanks to Sydie Bones for helping with this AGM were recorded.
- Trustees: Graham Parry has resigned after many years' service; all other existing trustees have agreed to stand for re-election: Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, Alan Bell, Sylvie Diggle, Peter Payan, Norman Taylor, Randolph Vigne: all were elected *nem con*.
- Any Other Business: none.

*Minutes kindly prepared by Deirdre Bryan-Brown*

## **Treasurer's Financial Report**

*I confirm that the final accounts for last year 2014 were submitted to the Charity Commission as required. Finances of the Association continue to be sound. Interim figures for the current year, which runs to the end of 2015, show receipts from subscriptions, gift aid and donations of £2065 compared with £1873 for the whole of the*

*previous year. With the expenses of the AGM to be taken into account, which at this stage are unknown, it is difficult to estimate the funds from which donations to Foston and Combe Florey can be made. Nevertheless, as a first suggestion, donations might be £500 to each of Foston and Combe Florey."*

*Arnold Arthurs, Hon Treasurer, SSA  
14 September 2015.*

## **AGM WEEKEND IN OXFORD, 10 AND 11 SEPTEMBER 2016**

Two hundred and twenty-five years ago, or thereabouts, Sydney Smith was admitted as an undergraduate to New College, Oxford. Ten years ago, the Association held its AGM and dinner in New College and a return visit is planned for September this year. There is little known about Smith's time at Oxford; he was neither aristocratic nor rebellious enough to feature in college records, but his opinion of higher education is recorded in the *Edinburgh Review*: 'excessive abuse of classical learning'. We shall be returning to New College on the Sunday morning where the Librarian and Archivist will escort us on a tour of the college, including a Sydney Smith associated exhibition.

Jump forward a couple of hundred years for the star attraction of Saturday's events – a visit to the Weston Library, a newly refurbished section of the Bodleian. Two important exhibitions are planned for September. One will feature 24 pairs of the most magnificent items from the Library, rare books and manuscripts, including Tolkien's illustrations for *The Hobbit*. In the St Lee Gallery, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death is to be marked by a themed collection of works by Shakespeare associated with the theme of tragedy, death and ghosts. The AGM will be squeezed into the afternoon's itinerary before Choral Evensong in Christ Church Cathedral at 6 p.m. At the end of a busy day, the annual dinner will give members the opportunity to relax and chat to old friends. As New College is already reserved for an alumni event, dinner will be held in Rewley Hall, home of the Department of Continuing Education in Oxford, where our after-dinner speaker will be the notable historian, Professor Angus Hawkins, Professor of Modern British History, Fellow of Keble College, author and authority on British political life. Lunches on both days will be in traditional Oxford eating houses. Good company is guaranteed. ***A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.***



## WEST COUNTRY SPRING LUNCHEON, 12 APRIL 2016

*Sydie Bones*

Our annual lunchtime gathering took us back to Hornsbury Mill, near Ilminster in Somerset, where once again the sun was shining and ducks were basking on the river bank. Before inviting the Revd Claude Rutter to say grace, Sydie Bones read a short extract from an unpublished letter from Sydney Smith, on the subject of Somerset: 'This is the most beautiful county in England; and nature, in imitation of the shepherd Paris, has given it the Apple - an accursed Gift: everybody is drunk from 1<sup>st</sup> January to the last of December.' With ten sober members round the table, and good food soon set in front of us, conversation flowed in and around topics covering at least a couple of centuries. With Somerset in mind, what better introduction to Sydney Smith could there be than that written by Auberon Waugh for *The Selected Letters*, edited by Nowell C. Smith? A couple of chosen extracts were read, encapsulating Sydney's wisdom and humour. The library at his Combe Florey rectory was his pride and his delight. 'One cannot be sure,' writes Waugh, 'but it was probably in the library that Lord John Russell sat, while on a visit to his friend, while his 'butler' – a devoted Yorkshirewoman whom he called 'Bunch' – charged a penny a time for villagers to look at him through the keyhole.' Waugh quotes Sydney's common man's guide to politics: 'Don't be led away by nonsense. All things are dearer under a bad government and cheaper under a good one', adding that 'it would excite the same noises of approval in Taunton today as it did in Taunton in 1830'. In a summing-up, Waugh writes: 'What he is, surely, is the *ideal* English clergyman, the mould from which every amiable English clergyman in English literature has been drawn. More than this, he is the embodiment of our national genius, or at any rate one fairly major expression of it. Long before the politicians variously and preposterously decided that we were a nation of gritty, classless workers anxious to improve ourselves' or 'a nation of helpless incompetents in need of constant visiting and encouragement by the caring professions – long before any of this there was Smith'. And Smith remains, he added, as close to us today through his letters as Waugh himself was, living in Combe Florey not fifty yards from the little village church where Sydney Smith had preached.

## **MARY ROSE BLACKER**

*Timothy Forbes Adams writes*

Mary Rose Blacker, who died on 15<sup>th</sup> April, undertook the organisation of the northern branch lunches for ten years. She had had experience of running large gatherings for concerts and other occasions in Sussex, where she had spent thirty years of her married life. But what we all appreciated most was how she subtly made the invitations so personal and attractive, and how much she obviously enjoyed her engagement with all who came. She would agree that she was not an expert on the life and work of Sydney, but she understood his worth.

Her great interest, after her family, was music. She was a pianist, trained to professional level, and an ardent singer in choral concerts — the Messiah perhaps her favourite. She knew and loved all the great operas, and Bach too was a favourite composer. (She didn't include Bartok in her pantheon!)

She also had the distinction of being the author of a "Standard Work", on the history of decorative flower arranging. This was so well and widely received that it led to her lecturing on the subject, and advising the National Trust on suitable arrangements for houses of different dates.

But above all she was one "who left a trail of happiness behind her" as someone said. Not only those who knew her well but anyone who met her, however briefly, loved her. As she had loved and appreciated their virtues, unaffectedly, and gratefully. We are thankful for her presence in our lives.

## NEWSLETTER MATERIAL

*If you have any stories, pictures or other material for inclusion in the next Newsletter, please send it to;*

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*I am worn out...  
defending Europe... I  
must think a little of  
myself*

