

THE  
SYDNEY SMITH  
ASSOCIATION



NEWSLETTER

Issue 22

Spring 2017

## **THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION**

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

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***Stories, pictures or material for the Newsletter – Contact Gerry Bradshaw, Jeremy Cunningham or Sydnie Bones – e-mail addresses above.***

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Last year I reported on my reading of over a thousand as yet unpublished letters of Sydney Smith. Now members of the Association may have the pleasure of reading them for themselves, as they are being placed on our website.

A large selection of Sydney Smith's letters, edited by Nowell C. Smith was published by Oxford University Press in two volumes in 1953. This edition is long out of print, and is expensive to acquire. Alan Bell was preparing a revised and much enlarged edition of Sydney Smith's letters, in association with Oxford University Press (OUP), but the project fell through in the 1980s. Alan made typed transcripts of over 1000 hitherto unpublished letters and quoted extensively from these in his biography published in 1980. Alan made meticulous notes as to the location of the originals at the time, although some were in private hands and have since been sold. He also made photocopies of most of the originals that he had located. He prepared a day-by-day diary of Smith's known movements and locations, and he kept notes and copies of reviews of secondary sources relating to the period. Alan also made extensive notes and corrections on the 1953 edition, observing that the letters were 'riddled with errors', probably because Nowell C. Smith had relied on '*A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith. By his Daughter, Saba Lady Holland. With a Selection from his Letters, edited by Mrs. Austin. Published by Longman and Co.*'

In December 2014, I drove to Edinburgh to collect the letters from Alan Bell. He hoped that the project might be revived, and felt that the letters would be best off in the hands of this association. Although the transcripts are complete, there are few footnotes or contextual explanations, and if a publisher were to take on their publication, an editor with a good literary and historical understanding of the early 19th century would be needed. I have made a number of approaches to historians and publishers, including OUP, but as yet little progress has been made.

The Fellows of New College, Oxford (Sydney Smith's college) kindly agreed to house the collection in New College Library, so that future scholars may have the opportunity to consult the letters, or even to take the project forward at some time in the future. Alan Bell has transferred any copyright on the typescripts to the Sydney Smith Association, and in the event of the Association's being wound up, this would

be transferred to New College. I took the letters to New College earlier this year and handed them to Jennifer Thorp the archivist, who has written a very good introduction (which is printed elsewhere in the newsletter).

In the two years that the transcripts have been in the possession of the Sydney Smith Association, I have scanned a large selection to PDF files. (Those letters that already appeared in some form in the published edition are omitted, as are short ephemeral letters such as invitations and acceptances.) In the absence of progress towards a revised edition, the Sydney Smith Association has decided that the letters should be placed on the web under an 'open source' approach, so that readers and scholars can make use of them for their work. The files are organized by year, apart from pre-1800 letters. I am grateful to Alison Vickers for uploading the files to the website.

The Association does not have the resources to establish and run an interactive website. Graham Parry has kindly agreed to respond to suggestions and comments and we may publish these on our site from time to time. Meanwhile we hope that a scholar with the necessary time and interest in Sydney Smith may be able to come forward to work with a publisher to produce a complete edition of the letters of Sydney Smith.

Once again I would like to thank Gerry Bradshaw for editing this edition of the newsletter, and to add my personal thanks to officers of the Association for their service to the memory of Sydney Smith and to the churches with which he was associated. There is much in this newsletter about Randolph Vigne. I would just like to add how much I appreciated his wit and wisdom, and how honoured I felt to follow in his footsteps as Chairman of the Sydney Smith Association.

***Jeremy Cunningham   Oxford   March 2017***

## **ALAN BELL'S TRANSCRIPTS OF SYDNEY SMITH LETTERS**

*Jennifer Thorp of New College Oxford writes:-*

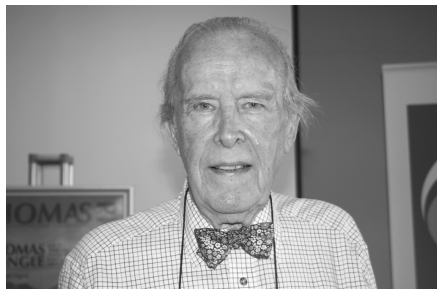
New College Oxford is proud to take into its care the large collection of transcripts of its Wykhamist scholar and fellow, Sydney Smith's correspondence, which has been amassed over many years by Dr Alan Bell. The transfer has been effected by the Association's current chairman, Jeremy Cunningham, and has Alan Bell's blessing.

It is an extraordinary collection; not only those letters already published in Nowell C. Smith's two-volume edition of *The Letters of Sydney Smith* (1953), now corrected and further edited by Alan Bell, but also full transcripts of over twelve hundred letters hitherto unpublished. The originals of these letters are widely scattered throughout the UK and overseas, some in private hands, others in academic and national libraries, some already at New College. By bringing together in one place transcripts of all of them, they become a hugely important and easily accessible archive relating to Sydney Smith's work, the circles in which he moved and the times in which he lived. Anyone who has ever used Alan's transcripts will know how accurate they are, and the archive also contains his own research notes and his correspondence with private and institutional owners of the originals. It is hoped that one day a complete edition of all known Sydney Smith papers will be put in hand, and the hunt is on for the right sort of editor, but in the meantime the archive of transcripts at New College (known as PA/BSS, the Bell-Sydney Smith collection) may be consulted alongside such originals as New College itself holds (PA/SMS, the Sydney Smith collection).

Thanks to an outline list prepared by Jeremy Cunningham, we can see that the PA/BSS Archive, covering letters dating from 1794-1844, contains such gems as the wonderful letters to the Scottish political writer and politician Sir James Mackintosh in Bombay, whom Sydney regales at one point with news of the mysterious 'Sloperilla', who "continues impenetrably cold to the advances of her numerous lovers. If I had been unmarried, I should certainly have made her an offer or marriage, not from any particular affection but because everybody does" (March 1805); several letters discussing the difficult relationship Sydney had with his father; a request to Lady Morpeth to 'pray tell me how you are going on in the Gout Line and in the Line of Measles' (January 1821), and significant letters revealing Sydney's views on dissenters, Catholics, poverty in his own parish, travel, local industry; the list seems endless and will add to the evidence already available in published letters. There is also an invaluable notebook, compiled by Alan Bell, which reveals the chronology of Sydney's activities, day by day, as represented by the letters.

Detailed listing and indexing of the transcripts will take quite a while yet, but we hope ultimately to make a searchable catalogue available, along with digital scans of the transcripts, on the New College website. In the meantime, volunteers who might like to help with that work by preparing brief descriptions and index entries of small batches of the letters, or who can add information from their own research on topics or places referred to in the letters, are invited to get in touch with Jennifer

Thorp, the New College Archivist; and anyone wishing to consult the PA/BSS or PA/SMS collections of course may do so by contacting [archives@new.ox.ac.uk](mailto:archives@new.ox.ac.uk) for further information.



## **RANDOLPH VIGNE 1928-2016**

*A talk by Jonathan Ouvry to the Sydney Smith Association London group 25th January 2017*

Randolph had two quite separate lives. Brought up in South Africa to which his Huguenot family had gone from Ireland in the 19th century, he became involved

in protest movements against the apartheid policies of the government and was responsible for co-founding the National Committee of Liberation, later the African Resistance Movement. When it became clear that peaceful protest was not effective, Randolph reluctantly became involved in a level of violence but never against people. It is hard to imagine the Randolph known to us in his later life blowing up electricity pylons, but he did! After arrests of colleagues it became clear that he had to leave, and quickly. The following is from the obituary in The Times of 8th January 2016.

'Having learned that a Norwegian cargo vessel was sailing for Canada that very afternoon, his friend James Currey booked a passage in his own name. The Norwegian and British consuls both agreed to facilitate Vigne's landing in Canada and onward journey to Britain. Vigne went on board pretending to be Currey. The Norwegian consul had told them that there was no check at the gangplank, but that an immigration officer would go on board to interview the passengers. When that happened the passportless Vigne would hide and Currey would present himself as the passenger. The immigration officer never appeared, so Currey prepared to leave the ship, but at the last minute he spotted the official who had sold him the ticket only a few hours previously. Currey therefore jumped off the ship, almost fell in the water, somehow scrambled on to the quay and escaped.'

Randolph went from Canada to London where he continued with political activity from afar, but also became involved in publishing and literary and historical matters. It was then, some 50 years ago, that he and I first met as members of the Huguenot Society of London. He was a valuable member of the Society with his

great knowledge of Huguenot history. He was President for two three-year terms from 1980, rather than the usual one term, in order that he should be President for the commemorations in 1985 of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the centrepieces of which were a service in St. Paul's Cathedral, when the Cathedral was filled entirely with Huguenot descendants and their families, and a great exhibition called 'The Quiet Conquest' in The Museum of London, which was visited by the Queen. Randolph was also Hon. Editor of the Huguenot Society, overseeing the well-respected Huguenot Society Proceedings for many years, and contributing many papers and articles. As a scholar he was insistent that the proceedings should reflect the learned society status of the Society and not be taken over by people primarily interested in their own family history.

In the Huguenot world Randolph was also a Director (i.e. trustee) from 1979 of the Huguenot almshouse Charity, the French Hospital, founded by Royal Charter in 1718 (sadly he will miss the forthcoming 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations). As a Director since 1960, I saw Randolph a great deal over our monthly meetings and subsequent pleasant lunches where I enjoyed discussing literary matters with him - he was never at a loss for a quotation or an amusing comment, and had the facility to remember everything he read! I enjoyed his anecdote about his great grandfather meeting my great great uncle, Frederic Ouvry, at the funeral of the Duke of Wellington, in a bitterly cold St. Paul's in November. It appeared that Ouvry had effectively saved Vigne from pneumonia by sharing his flask of brandy! Randolph co-authored a beautifully illustrated history of the French Hospital and its artefacts. He was also involved in preparatory work for the founding of the Huguenot Museum which was opened in Rochester in July 2016.

In 2016 Randolph was honoured for his work against apartheid by the presentation to him by the South African president of the Order of Luthuli. At his funeral a eulogy by the President of Namibia was read by the Speaker of the Namibian Parliament. His modesty meant that it was not until quite recently that many of his friends outside South Africa knew about his early life and brave resistance to the apartheid regime. He was truly a man with two lives, and I like to think of him as something of a cross between Doctor Johnson and the Scarlet Pimpernel.

## A TRIBUTE TO RANDOLPH VIGNE

*Given by Sydnie Bones at the A.G.M in September 2016*

Randolph became a member of the Sydney Smith Association soon after its inauguration in 1996. His family was related to Sydney's mother, establishing the Huguenot connection. When Alan Bell, the founding chairman of the Association, resigned in 2000, Randolph agreed to take the chair 'within a couple of years' when his academic commitments came to an end, and true to his word his name appears as Chairman in the Newsletter of 2002. From that time until his recent death, his name has appeared as Chairman or contributor in every subsequent issue. Randolph was a great admirer of Sydney and would talk on any number of related topics at lunchtime gatherings, write articles or bring mentions of Sydney in the media or in obscure publications to the attention of members. He spoke regularly at London luncheons, occasionally as a willing last-minute stand-in, always with scholarly and acute observations. In 2005 he drew on his historical knowledge in a commentary on contemporary financial woes in a talk entitled 'How Sydney would have regarded today's politicians', which prompted a lively discussion on the evolution of 'spin'. Randolph's twentieth century mission to promote democracy and human rights, for which he was honoured in South Africa with the Order of Luthuli, mirrored Sydney Smith's humanitarian and electoral campaigns of the early nineteenth century. He shared Sydney's compassion and his doctrine of toleration and equality under the law. In addition, he was a phenomenal reader and researcher, speculating on whether Sydney Smith and Jane Austen had ever met, or discussing books mentioned by Sydney, which had been sent for appraisal to the *Edinburgh Review*. In one of his snippets to the Newsletter, Randolph wrote, 'I look forward to an hour or two in the London Library to see if he reviewed any the books he listed and how long he took for the lengthy contributions'. Throughout his twelve years in office he maintained the scholarly standards of talks and articles destined for publication, he was meticulous in fulfilling his role as Chairman of the Trustees and he was a delight to work with. When he stood down from the Chair, he had secured the continuity of the Association by persuading another descendant of the Smith family to take over the reins. Randolph's final talk to the members at a London luncheon in October 2014 was entitled '*The French Half of Sydney Smith*', weaving together two main streams of personal interest – his own French ancestry and his admiration of Sydney Smith.



## TEACHING CLASSICS: SYDNEY AS USUAL AHEAD OF HIS TIME

*A talk by Janet Unwin at a London luncheon, January 2017*

Just to tell you how this arose. I have a friend, David Carter, who is a computer whiz by profession and a classicist by education. He has for a long time taught Greek and Latin at the London University summer schools, at one of which we originally met. These schools are largely for the benefit of students who are going to read Classics at university with no background knowledge of the languages, so they are very much about speed learning. Based on this experience, he is now having remarkable success in teaching these subjects to O and A level students – in the case of the former pupils achieving A and A\* grades after a couple of years of a one hour lesson once a week. And the basis for all this is using interlineal translation of texts to build up vocabulary as quickly as possible rather than concentrating on grammar.

He got the idea for this by looking at the findings behind the now standard 'Reading levels' used in schools which are: independent reading requires 95+% word recognition; reading under instruction 90+%; below 90% there is frustration. The child just says 'this is too hard'. So David thought maybe the reason we find Latin and Greek are so hard is that we never acquire enough vocabulary, having spent – most of us – far more time struggling with grammar and slowly decoding small quantities of text, with cribs very much frowned upon. Until fairly recently some of us might have acquired a certain facility in writing Greek and Latin verse. This is not all that far removed from the teaching methods of Sydney's days: it is undoubtedly a rigorous mental discipline, and the intellectual prestige of a degree in Classics persists. But few, even with a Classics degree, would achieve even 90% word recognition reading Latin or Greek texts. At this point David discovered Sydney's 1826 article on the Hamiltonian System in the *Edinburgh Review*, and asked 'Who was Sydney Smith?

So I told him. We might be more inclined to ask 'Who was James Hamilton?' and I'll get to him in a moment. As we all know, Sydney loathed his schooldays. They left him with scorn for the whole public school system of his time, and in particular the fact that 'education', both at school and university, consisted of study of the Classics to the exclusion of all else. He expanded on the topic with his customary verve in an article in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1809 and when, 16 years later, he became aware of the Hamiltonian System of teaching languages through analytical and interlinear translation, he lost no time in endorsing it with enthusiasm.

James Hamilton was an oddity. He was a Scottish merchant, but after he had insisted on, and succeeded in, being taught German in Hamburg without any 'wearisome grammar' he became a man with a mission. He started developing his system in America, after a potash-trading venture didn't do too well, and had considerable success. However when he came back to England he came up against the entrenched opposition of the entire educational establishment – and didn't help his cause by placing advertisements in newspapers boasting of his achievements and issuing challenges to schools to test his theories. In other words, he was neither a scholar nor a gentleman. I also suspect he was pretty much lacking in humour, and am not sure what he would have made –possibly, did make? – of Sydney's endorsement.

Because Sydney was far more interested in human nature than in theories, he immediately saw that the great virtue of Hamilton's system was that it was painless, and indeed rewarding, and he's concerned with why it works.

'The interlineal translation of course spares the trouble and time of the mechanical labour [of looking up in dictionaries]. Immediately under the [e.g.] Italian word is placed the English word. The unknown sound is *instantly* therefore exchanged for one that is known. The labour here spared is of the most irksome nature; and it is spared at a time of life the most averse to such labour; and so painful is this labour to many boys, that it forms an insuperable obstacle to their progress. It is useless to say of any medicine that it is valuable, if it is so nauseous that the patient flings it away. You must give me, not the best medicine you have in your shop, but the best you can get me to take.'

I think we would all agree that this is the voice of an acute child psychologist *avant la lettre* ...

This sort of psychological insight did not really influence the world of education until the last century, and of course, it applies to more than the teaching of Classics. The figures underpinning Reading Levels quoted earlier come from a book called 'Foundation of Reading Instruction' by an American educationalist called Emmett Betts, which was published in 1946. This of course is about teaching young children to read English, not a foreign language, but the emphasis on word recognition is the same. As an aside, the Hamiltonian method had much greater traction in the US, where it presumably encountered much less in the way of systematic opposition from the educational establishment, and was apparently in

use into the early twentieth century. So it is not inconceivable – though there is absolutely no evidence – that it may have had some remote influence on Mr. Betts.

But Sydney in some ways anticipates even more recent educational developments. It is only a tiny detail, but when he is writing about interlinear translation he picks up on the importance of immediacy. ‘The unknown sound is *instantly* exchanged for one that is known’ – the emphasis is Sydney’s. Modern neurological studies now talk of the importance of ‘cognitive automaticity’ in how the brain acquires reading facility. But, far more importantly, he was generations ahead of the educationalists’ discovery that the tipping point for reading discovery is what is called ‘emotional engagement’.

Only, being Sydney, he talks of enjoyment and pleasure, which was probably enough in itself to prevent his views from being taken seriously.

[ As a postscript:]

The Hamiltonian system keeps being rediscovered, from Mr. Henry Salt writing in the Westminster Magazine in 1896 to the present day. Some of the comments echo Sydney rather uncannily.

Here is Ernest Blum in 2009 writing in a periodical called ‘American Scholar’:  
‘In no other classrooms on campus is basic information systematically withheld as a matter of policy. What is withheld is the information on the meaning of words’.

And here is Sydney:

‘ “If you wish boys to remember any language, make the acquisition of it very tedious and disgusting”. This seems to be an odd rule.’

Or, a comment from Norway in 2014:

‘I would say that 1800 was way before any systematic studies in pedagogy so I would be suspicious of any method from that time that did not become popular since then.’

Compare Sydney satirising a hostile father:

‘Was it possible that I might have been spared all this? The whole system is nonsense and the man an imposter. If there had been any truth in it, it must have occurred to someone else before this period’.

## **‘ENLIGHTENED AND CULTIVATED UNDERSTANDINGS’: SYDNEY SMITH AND SCOTTISH THOUGHT**

*Transcript of a talk given by Professor Angus Hawkins at last year’s A.G.M dinner in Rewley House Oxford*

How did the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment influence Sydney Smith’s thinking? How did they help shape the mind of this extraordinary man? These are the questions I would like to explore with you.



**Dugald Stewart Memorial**

Certainly, on Sydney Smith’s own testimony, it is Edinburgh, not Winchester College nor Oxford University, to which we should look to understand crucial aspects of his view of the world and society. Of Winchester he famously recalled the relentless tedium of having to undertake Latin translation. When, in 1789, he came up to New College, Oxford, he encountered an intellectual torpor, which he scathingly recalled.

‘A genuine Oxford tutor would shudder to hear his young men disputing upon moral and political truth, forming and pulling down theories, and indulging in all the boldness of youthful discussion. He would augur nothing from it, but impiety to God, and treason to Kings’.<sup>1</sup>

Sydney Smith’s reaction to Edinburgh, by contrast, when he arrived there in 1798, ‘Never shall I forget the happy days passed there, amid odious smells, barbarous sounds, bad suppers, excellent hearts and most enlightened and cultivated understandings!’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sydney Smith, *The Works of Sydney Smith*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 3 vols., (London, 1845),

<sup>2</sup> Saba, Lady Holland, *A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith...with a Selection from his Letters*, 2 vols., (London, 1855), i, 14.

However, the reception given to Smith's well-known wit may have been doubtful. He later remarked that it took a surgical operation to get a joke well into the Scottish understanding!<sup>3</sup>

By the 1790s Edinburgh had become known as 'the Athens of the North'; the hub of the Scottish Enlightenment. The atrocious crime, religious cruelty, political oppression and gloomy fanaticism that, for the English, had characterised Scottish history prior to the 1740s, culminating in the failed Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, had given way to ideas and a culture defining the character of a 'modern' age in the vanguard of 'progress' and 'improvement'. A spectacular flourishing of philosophy, history and political economy had transformed the intellectual life of Edinburgh and Glasgow Universities. The writings of David Hume (1711-76), informed by a sceptical empiricism, had inspired the subsequent seminal writings of Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, Adam Ferguson, Dugald Stewart, and John Millar. It was in this intellectual hot house that Sydney Smith immersed himself, mixing in the company of ardent young Whigs such as Francis Jeffery, Henry Brougham and Francis Horner, and attending the salons of philosophers and political economists debating the latest ideas current in Edinburgh circles. Compared to the academic drudgery of Winchester and the intellectual inertia of Oxford it was a heady and exhilarating milieu.

What were the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment encountered by Sydney Smith on his arrival in Edinburgh? Fundamental was the idea of 'progress'. Classical Greek and Roman notions of history as a succession of closed cycles, embracing a society's rise, decline and fall, were discarded. Such cyclical formulas were inappropriate in describing what had become seen as the development of a 'modern', i.e. post-feudal, age. Such an age was unique and historically unprecedented. It represented the linear continuing advancement of society. Societies slowly ascended a ladder of development, nations standing on different rungs of elevation. Advancement, in turn, was evident in the increased diversity and variety of society.

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<sup>3</sup> Saba, Lady Holland, *A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith...with a Selection from his Letters*, 2 vols., (London, 1855), i, 15.

More sophisticated and complex social relations supported the onward march of 'progress'. These were the essential features of the post-feudal age in which Scottish Enlightenment thinkers saw themselves living. Hume had emphasised the part played by custom, imitation, political institutions and moral values in shaping the character of 'modern' society. Other contemporary studies of cultural values also emphasised factors such as geography and climate, but Hume largely ignored such considerations. So the writers of the Scottish Enlightenment described a sequence of stages through which human society had progressed, the Classical period being followed by feudal society, which had in turn, in their own times, given way to a 'modern' civil society. This traced the transition from hunting to pastoral, then agricultural, and finally the contemporary era. To describe this final, more sophisticated, stage of social development they coined the term 'civilisation'.

The factors creating contemporary civil society were commerce, manufacture, consumerism and material refinement. The increased complexity and broader spread of commerce facilitated progressive civil development. It shaped increasingly sophisticated and diverse social relations. It gave greater status to self-interest as a motor of economic advance. It also gave greater influence to 'opinion' within society; the responsible judgement of educated individuals on matters of public importance. In post-feudal society the potency of enlightened opinion was as important as relations based on property. So might the more intricate and varied social relations of the 'modern' age rest securely on the conditions of property, opinion, manners, justice and the rule of law. This made the notion of 'balance', the avoidance of extremes, a crucial moral civilising quality. The desirable diversity of social interests required a broad-minded tolerance to prevail, characterized by politeness and refinement. Fanaticism and 'enthusiasm' were condemned. A forbearing and open-minded sociability had to ensure the stable balanced equilibrium of 'modern' society.

Dugald Stewart, in particular, had a strong influence on Sydney Smith's thinking. Stewart was the Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University from 1785 to 1810.<sup>4</sup> A number of young Whigs, later influential figures themselves, came to learn from him. They included not only Francis Jeffery, Henry Brougham and

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of Stewart's philosophy see 'The System of the North: Dugald Stewart and his Pupils', Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 23-62.

Francis Horner, but also future prominent Whig politicians such as Lord John Russell, Lord Palmerston and Lord Lansdowne. Lectures on politics were a regular part of Stewart's moral philosophy curriculum. He taught that human nature was susceptible to gradual development, enhancing each individual's intellectual and moral capacity. In turn, this produced a proportional enlargement of the capacity for enjoyment and happiness. Like his Edinburgh colleagues, Stewart emphasised the linked beneficial importance of commerce and liberty, safeguarded by tolerance and social refinement. He also emphasised the importance of institutional reform in securing social advance; reformed institutions delivering the moral improvement which propelled progress forward. He emphasised the dangerous error of drawing a false distinction between theory and experience. Theory had to be drawn inductively from experience. Finally, Stewart advocated the gradual and prudent accommodation of established institutions to changing opinion and circumstances. Improvement, not to be confused with change, was beneficial and necessary. Inertia brought catastrophe. While, on the other hand, violent radical change, especially that which was based upon theory divorced from experience, ushered in calamitous ruin. By the mid-1790s Stewart's initial enthusiasm for the French Revolution in 1789 had given way, following the Reign of Terror in 1791-2, to revulsion at the horrors instigated in the name of abstract ideals of equality, freedom and fraternity. Bigotry must be rejected. What he called 'the rage of innovation' must be staunchly resisted.

So Stewart reinforced the idea of their 'modern' age being one of unilineal advance demonstrating the progress of civilisation. Importantly, this applied as equally to morals as it did to politics. Prejudice, slavery and corruption were being progressively replaced by truth, liberty and virtue. Law and legislation were keys to achieving this advance. Stable well-founded progress proceeded from the increased enlightenment of legislators, not from creating new constitutions based on abstract ideals.

Such arguments formed the basis of the lecture series on political economy Stewart delivered annually from 1799 to 1810.<sup>5</sup> The main headings of Stewart's lecture notes comprised population, national wealth, treatment of the poor, and the education of the lower social orders; topics, which for Stewart, focused upon the

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<sup>5</sup> Stewart's lectures were reconstructed from his notes and edited by Sir William Hamilton as 'Lectures on Political Economy', in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, 11 vols., (Edinburgh, 1854-60), vols. viii and ix.

happiness and improvement of society. Steering a middle course between a destructive enthusiasm for constitutional innovation, on the one hand, and a deep-laid political scepticism, on the other, was the surest means of realising such improvement and increased happiness.

Dislike for excessive scepticism, and a sense that moral advance was a complement to Higher Providential purposes, distinguished Stewart's voice from many of his fellow Scottish thinkers. Stewart was more optimistic about the continued advance and ultimate perfectibility of society than Hume and Adam Smith for example. Increasingly educated opinion, he stated, would foster greater general enlightenment. This would displace folly, pride, ignorance and prejudice with their virtuous counterparts. Greater public virtue, in turn, created more general happiness. Equally, Stewart described philosophers as 'fellow workers with God in forwarding the gracious purposes of His government'.<sup>6</sup> Increased virtue and happiness formed part of a Providential process in which God's intentions and man's aspirations converged.

How did Stewart's ideas influence Sydney Smith's thinking? First, Stewart's broad conception of political economy, embracing subjects such as population, the Poor Law, poverty and education of the lower social orders, reinforced Sydney Smith's political understanding of his pastoral and public commitments as a parson. At the hugely popular lectures he delivered at the Royal Institution, London, in November 1804, Sydney Smith defined the subject of his talks, moral philosophy, as the study of 'everything which belongs to the human mind.'

Secondly, Sydney Smith acquired from Stewart the conviction that the lessons drawn from the study of moral philosophy required practical action through legislation and public deeds. Understanding necessitated reform of the law and the enlightenment of 'opinion'. It was the realisation of the lessons revealed by moral philosophy through tangible improvement of the law, justice and educated views that underpinned the continued 'progress' of society. Philosophy must bear on experience.

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<sup>6</sup> 'The System of the North: Dugald Stewart and his Pupils', in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History*, (Cambridge, 1983), p. 41.



Thirdly, Stewart's ideas strengthened Smith's belief in the moral nature of 'progress', in which corruption, exploitation, cruelty, prejudice and slavery should be displaced by truth, liberty and virtue. Sydney Smith's campaign for abolishing the exploitation of young boys as chimney sweeps, his call for the more humane treatment of the insane through occupational therapy, his benign judgements as a magistrate, and his planning of small gardens for poor villagers in his parishes sprang from his profound belief in the moral nature of 'progress'. So might virtue and greater happiness replace folly, ignorance and bigotry. In turn, this brought social improvement and Providential purpose into a harmonious convergence.

Fourthly, Stewart's dislike for extremism and rejection of partisan bigotry reinforced Sydney Smith's own conviction in the necessity of 'balance' and sociable tolerance to civilised society. 'All great alterations in human affairs', he stated, 'are produced by compromise.'<sup>7</sup> Prudent accommodation, not radical innovation, safeguarded the stability of society and 'progress' through a process of gradual measured reform.

Finally, Sydney Smith absorbed Stewart's more tempered scepticism, than that expressed by Hume and Adam Smith. When Francis Jeffrey, on one occasion, exhibited a deep Humean scepticism Sydney Smith effectively parodied him: 'What's the use of virtue? What's the use of wealth? What's the use of honour? What's a guinea but a damned yellow circle? What's a chamber pot but an infernal hollow sphere?' Smith finally rebuked him: 'The whole effort of your mind is to destroy.'<sup>8</sup>

Though there were aspects of Scottish thought that Sydney Smith never embraced; in particular, the tendency of Scottish writers to indulge in a comprehensive verbosity. 'The Scotch, whatever other habits they may have, can never condense; they always begin a few days before the Flood, and come gradually down to the reign of George III, forgetful of nothing but the shortness of life.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> E. A. Duyckinck, *The Wit and Wisdom... of Sydney Smith*, (New York, 1870), p. 184.

<sup>8</sup> Nowell C. Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Sydney Smith*, 2 vols., (Oxford, 1953), i, p. 121.

<sup>9</sup> Nowell C. Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Sydney Smith*, 2 vols., (Oxford, 1953), i, p. 327

His ridicule of diffuseness and loquacity extended to sermons. When reviewing the published sermons of the Rev. Dr Parr he observed, Dr Parr 'gives us a discourse of no common length, and subjoining an immeasurable mass of notes, which appear to concern every learned man, and almost every unlearned man since the beginning of the world.'<sup>10</sup> When reviewing the sermons of a Dr Langford he gave full vent to his satirical talent:

'[The reviewer] was discovered with Dr Langford's discourse open before him, in a state of the most profound sleep; from which he could not, by any means, be awakened for a great length of time. By attending, however, to the rules prescribed by the Humane Society, flinging in the smoke of tobacco, applying hot flannels, and carefully removing the discourse itself to a great distance, the critic was restored to his disconsolate brothers.'<sup>11</sup>

Yet there can be no doubt that the experience of living, studying and preaching in Edinburgh had a profound effect on Sydney Smith's thinking. That the 'enlightened and cultivated understandings' he enjoyed and absorbed in the 'Athens of the North' framed his view of the world, morality and religion for the rest of his life.

## FRANK COLLIESON

The death of Frank Collieson in Cambridge on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2016, shortly after his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, will sadden those who enjoyed his genial company at the Association's lunches and AGM weekends, and all members who appreciated his behind-the-scenes help in the production of the Newsletter, as Editor or Co-Editor, from 2002 to 2012.

For five or six years Frank took the train - his favourite mode of travel - from Cambridge to York, was met at the station by Peter Diggles and transported to The Old Brewery, Thornton-le-Clay, for a working visit of two or three days. There, with

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<sup>10</sup> E. A. Duyckinck, *The Wit and Wisdom... of Sydney Smith*, (New York, 1870), p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> E. A. Duyckinck, *The Wit and Wisdom... of Sydney Smith*, (New York, 1870), p. 108-9.

a bottle of whisky in front of him, he helped Peter knock the newsletter into shape. As Frank was a computer novice, he would dictate what he thought worthy of reading to Peter who, with a smile on his face, prepared the text until a proof-perfect copy was ready for printing. These sessions with 'The Major' and Sylvie in attendance were greatly enjoyed by Frank. His expertise in typography, layout, grammar and proof-reading were invaluable and much appreciated.

On leaving school Frank worked as an office boy at the London branch of the New York Times. After war service as a Bevin Boy in Wallsend, Northumberland, he re-entered the world of publishing, first with Gordon Fraser in Bedford and then in the printing department of Heffers in Cambridge. When Heffers became a public company, Frank joined the board, taking over the management of the bookshop in Trinity Street, a role he filled with notable grace and courtesy. At his retirement party in 1991, the three levels of the bookshop were thronged with a diverse company of friends. In recognition of his scholarly service to its members and the wider community, the University of Cambridge awarded him an honorary degree. The Sydney Smith Association was indeed fortunate to have benefited from Frank's dedicated service.

## **SYDNEY'S SMITH'S SCHOOL**

*A talk by Geoffrey Day at the York September lunch*



GATEWAY OF WINCHESTER COLLEGE.

When Alfred, Lord Tennyson, first visited Winchester he solicited the views of his coachman on the place. The reply was succinct: 'Debauched, Sir, debauched. Like all cathedral cities.'

When Sydney Smith arrived at Winchester in 1782 he arrived at a school that was close to the nadir of its fortunes. By leaving in 1788 he probably avoided the worst year in its six-hundred-year history, but only by five years. There was, it has to be said, debauchery.

We have some remarkable evidence of Winchester life in the years when Smith was a scholar. There is, in the college archives, a fifteenth century copy on vellum of the College statutes. During the 1780s this volume was used by scholars to practise their spelling of four-letter words, doodle, draw simple caricatures, record events in the life of the school, and make caustic remarks about those who had

offended them. What would now be regarded as vandalism has become, with the passage of time, an interesting historical source. Most accounts of school life are written years after the experience, and often through rose-coloured spectacles: the marginalia in this MS enable us to see something of the reality of late 18th-century Winchester College.

There are details to support Tennyson's coachman's view: the precocity of certain scholars is evident: 'Tyrwhitt goes every night to an evil place more properly an house of ill fame' - Richard Tyrwhitt, who arrived in the same year as Sydney Smith, left Winchester College at the age of 15; and Robert Sturges, who was no more than 16 when he left the school the year before Smith arrived, we are told, 'Sturges was Clapp'd damnably last August ... Do little children such diseases know'.

There are acts of unnecessary violence: 'Talbot that little infant destroy'd 3 young Pigs, by kicking 'em against the Barn door'. And the academic standards of the institution are derided: 'Be it known to Posterity that in October 85 a famous Grecian by name Maltby Came to this School - which was then in a State of Digeneracy & Corruption with regard to Literature & every other virtue The only Geniuses of the School were Mr G Wells & Newton Ogle'. [One might record in passing that this remark is almost certainly in the hand of the said Newton Ogle.] Other marginalia are concerned with the trivia of everyday life: the boys had pets, rather unusual pets indeed, including a badger and an eagle. They got up to complicated pranks: on 24 October [year unspecified] John Wooll, the senior prefect in College, with three other scholars, after drinking claret at the White Hart in Winchester, ordered a chaise to take them to Southampton, where Wooll passed himself off as 'Lord Brook'. When the Lord Chief Justice visited the school the boys were expecting him to announce at least a half-day's holiday. He gave 1s. 3d. towards the cost of apples. They made their views on this very clear. And in an annotation in which there is a degree of pronoun confusion, we are told that Dr Warton found Ogle under his bed - or possibly that Ogle found Warton under his bed. Not only do we not know who was actually under the bed - it is not entirely clear whether 'his' is an indication that the bed was that of Ogle or of the Master. Though, as at this point he was in his third year at Winchester, it is almost certain that Sydney Smith knew Ogle, who was the son of the Dean of Winchester, went on to become Richard Brinsley Sheridan's brother-in-law.

The Master in Smith's time, Joseph Warton, had entered Winchester as a scholar in 1736 and gone up to Oriel in 1740. He initially devoted his time to poetry, and his

translation of the Eclogues and Georgics of Virgil, which was published in 1753, led to Oxford bestowing upon him an honorary M.A. His appointment to Winchester as Second Master in 1755 seems to have been a result of this work and of his connections: he was a member of The Club, a friend of Johnson, Garrick, and Goldsmith among others. Warton succeeded Dr John Burton as Master in 1766 and held that post until his seventy-first year. He was spectacularly inadequate: it is recorded that a boy threw a Latin dictionary at Warton's head during a lesson; the inaccuracy of his scholarship was a serious obstacle to his success in teaching.

Clearly Winchester was a fairly uncivilised place at the time, and it is hardly surprising that Sydney Smith's brother, Courtney, who came to the school a year after Sydney, was so miserable that he ran away — twice.

The true depths were plumbed in 1793 and 1813, both of which years saw serious rebellions. On the first occasion the flashpoint was the imposition of a general punishment on the school for the breaking of bounds by a single boy who had gone to listen to the Buckinghamshire Militia band in the Cathedral Close. The boys sent a formal complaint to the Warden who rebuffed them. They then occupied the gateway tower and armed themselves with large flints from Chamber Court. It is noticeable today that one half of the Court is still set with flints, whereas the other half is laid with cobbles, replacing the boys' weapons. The Warden was offered help by local military leaders, but the siege was eventually brought to a negotiated close. 35 boys left the school, out of a total of 70 scholars, as a direct result of the disturbance. The blame for much of this was laid at Warton's door, for having allowed matters to get to such a state, and he retired later in the same year from a post for which he had never been fitted.

The rebellion of 1818 was in some ways even more violent: the cause even more trivial. In an effort to tighten up discipline the Master announced that henceforth the boys would not be permitted to have a look-out posted outside the schoolroom to warn the other boys of his approach. The boys barricaded the Warden into his lodgings, and their disinclination to negotiate was shown when they presented a list of grievances beginning with the spectacularly tactless objection: 'That you are ugly.' The mayor arrived to mediate and was jeered. The militia was called out. When the colonel arrived the boys told him quite clearly that 'if his soldiers came near enough they would have their heads broken by stones from the tower.' The boys were tricked into surrendering their fortified position by the Master, who suggested that if they came out there would be a holiday. When the scholars

emerged from their citadel the militia, armed with fixed bayonets, charged and routed them. Once again there were numerous departures.

Such behaviour continued throughout the century. Thomas Arnold - later to become a distinguished headmaster himself - wrote a series of letters while a scholar indicating that, what to the 21st-century reader are extraordinary levels of violence, were commonplace. Of one pitched battle on St Catherine's Hill in September 1809, he wrote to his aunt that he had:

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

These rock-throwing battles on St Catherine's Hill were common and had been so for centuries. In the cloister at Winchester is a ledger-stone to Thomas Welford who, in 1677, died as a result of being hit on the head with a rock. He is memorialised with the pious observation, 'We hope he has gone to heaven rather than to Oxford' - thus summing up the whole ethos of Winchester: Oxford, or die.

I would not wish to suggest that Winchester was uniquely violent and vile. Wellington College was founded to educate the orphan sons of officers. The day the school opened, the boys were lined up and addressed by the headmaster with such ferocity that that night the entire school ran away. This is, I think, the only recorded occasion when an entire school has done a bunk.

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

He disapproved of the whole public school system, declaring: 'to give to a boy the habit of enduring privation to which he will never again be called upon to submit ... is surely not a very useful and valuable severity in education.' And he particularly objected to the system, which operated until well into the twentieth century, of rule by boys:

'At a public school ... every boy is alternately tyrant and slave. The power which the elder part of these communities exercises over the younger is exceedingly great - very difficult to be controlled - and accompanied, not infrequently, with cruelty and caprice. It is the common law of the place, that the young should be implicitly obedient to the elder boys; and his obedience resembles more the submission of a slave to his master, or of a sailor to his captain, than the common and natural deference which should always be shown by one boy to another a few years older than him.'

Anthony Trollope found this out when he arrived as a scholar in 1785, two years after Sydney Smith. Trollope's elder brother, Thomas Adolphus Trollope, was a prefect and exercised his prefectorial powers by regularly beating his younger brother — with a cricket stump.

A good deal of Smith's spleen was reserved for the boy at the head of the boy-rule hierarchy: 'The head of a public school is generally a very conceited young man, utterly ignorant of his own dimensions, and losing all that habit of conciliation towards others, and that anxiety for self-improvement, which results from the natural modesty of youth.' This may reveal a degree of self-knowledge, as Smith himself was head boy of the scholars, in 1788.

One element of the curriculum to which he took exception was the emphasis placed upon the teaching of classical languages: 'The prodigious honour in which Latin verses are held at public schools is surely the most absurd of all distinctions.'

This may well be a reflection on his own relative academic performance, for in his leaving year he was presented with the prize for an English prose essay, rather than one of the more prestigious classics prizes, for which silver medals were awarded. Sydney Smith was presented with the two volumes of Apollonius Rhodes *Argonauticorum libri quatuor*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1777). These two volumes are bound in one. It is a remarkable binding, in scarlet straight-grained morocco bearing the College coat of arms on the front cover and the arms of George Pit, first Baron Rivers on the back.

The use of this particular College coat of arms proves this book was bound in the bindery at the rear of the college bookshop - a bindery which still functions today. I have seen many Winchester prize bindings, but this one is unique: the most notable element of the binding is the prominently raised section of the spine, into

which is set an ivory engraved plaque setting out the essential details of the volume and the circumstances of its acquisition:

APPOLLONIUS RHODIUS.  
Winchester College Prize,  
FOR AN ENGLISH PROSE ESSAY,  
BY SYDNEY SMITH.  
1788.

It must have been commissioned by Smith himself. Despite the fairly uniformly negative view Sydney Smith expressed of Winchester, it is possible to suggest that he did feel some pride in the achievement this prize represented.

## **WEST COUNTRY SPRING LUNCHEON, 22 MARCH 2017**

A dozen members from the West Country made their way in spring sunshine towards Hornsbury Mill in Somerset for their annual gathering. Luncheon was preceded by a bespoke Grace, written and spoken by Canon John Simpson.

'As the French say, there are three sexes – men, women and clergymen. As one of the latter, I offer you Grace containing quotations from Sydney Smith.

*Lord, thank you for this festive fare  
and all these friends who've come to share.  
For those like me who were in the Navy  
please note that Sydney hated gravy.  
At the end there may be chocolates or toffee,  
'To improve understanding we must all drink coffee'.  
Relieve, we pray, the poor and needy,  
protect them from the mean and greedy.  
To give God praise, with due accord;  
for food and fellowship, thank the Lord.  
When we leave, well after five,  
remember not to drink and drive.  
As Sydney said,  
'Take short views, hope for the best, and trust in God'.  
Amen.'*

This Grace was rewarded with instant applause – surely a 'first'.





**West Country Luncheon, March 2017**

When the eating and chattering was done, Michael Ranson delighted us with a dissertation on the portrayal of clerics in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century by the satirical writer Thomas Love Peacock. The extract in this newsletter is a shortened version of his amusing talk.

## **CLERICS IN THE BOOKS OF THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK**

*Resumé of a talk by Michael Ranson at the SW Region luncheon, March 2017*

Thomas Love Peacock, born in 1785, was a near contemporary of Sydney Smith. However, there is no record of their ever having met. Peacock wrote a number of extremely humorous short novels, all of which are based on the technique of gathering together more or less eccentric individuals in the setting of a country house party, whom Peacock then uses as channels through which to poke delicious fun at the fashionable concerns of his age, such as political and social reform, utilitarian philosophy, the romantic movement and so on. Two of his most celebrated novels are *Headlong Hall* and *Crotchet Castle*. A paternalistic Tory of the old school, Peacock often snipes at the Whigs. However, he would have been able to agree with Sydney on a number of issues, including Catholic emancipation, electoral corruption, slavery, the game laws and the exploitation of labour in the new factories.

One area of difference between Peacock and Smith would have been religion. Although not overly concerned with niceties of doctrine, Sydney certainly believed in the basic premises of Christianity, and in its beneficial role in society. But Peacock, more or less an atheist, delighted in holding parsons up to ridicule, especially in his earlier novels, where they are made to represent the worst characteristics of the Georgian clergy, such as worldliness, gluttony and hypocrisy, to the extent that they are mere caricatures. In *Headlong Hall* the Revd Dr Gaster is introduced thus:

'The Revd Dr Gaster, though of course neither a philosopher nor a man of taste, had so won on Squire Headlong's fancy, by a learned dissertation on the art of stuffing a turkey, that he considered no Christmas party would be complete without him.'

Nevertheless, whereas in the early novels the parsons have little or nothing to commend them beyond their potential for humour, in the later novels they become much more rounded and sympathetic characters. Still worldly and apparently little more than nominal Christians, they are nevertheless scholars, steeped in classical learning and of humane principles. Their civilised philosophy of life is essentially Epicurean rather than Christian, and to a large extent it is through the clergymen of his last novels that Peacock chooses to represent his own views. In place of the earlier mere figures of fun, we have figures worthy of respect and affection. Such a one is the Revd Dr Folliott in *Crotchet Castle*, who is introduced thus:

'In a village in the vicinity of the castle was the vicarage of the Revd Dr Folliott, a gentleman with a tolerable stock of learning, an interminable swallow, and an indefatigable pair of lungs, ... this reverend gentleman, being both learned and jolly, became by degrees an indispensable ornament to the new squire's table.'

Peacock was no friend of the Whigs or of the *Edinburgh Review*, (for which Sydney of course wrote), and it is worth briefly quoting an exchange at dinner where we see Folliott - as the mouthpiece for Peacock, in contention with the Scotsman Mr Mc'Quedy.

*THE REVD DR FOLLIOTT. There is a set of persons in your city, Mr Mc'Quedy, who concoct every three or four months a thing which they call a review; a sort of sugar-plum manufacturers to the Whig aristocracy.*

*MR Mc'QUEDY. I hope Sir you will speak of those gentlemen with respect, seeing that I am one of them.*

*Dr FOLLIOTT. Sir, I must drown my inadvertence in a glass of Sauterne with you.*

There is no space to enlarge further on the topic of Peacock and Smith here, but members are urged to acquaint themselves with the novels of Peacock if they have not yet encountered him. They will find the experience very rewarding.

## SYDNEY SMITH'S RECTORIES

*This article by Ralph Rochester was written in response to a request from the Rectory Society in whose Journal it was published earlier this year ([www.rectorysociety.org.uk](http://www.rectorysociety.org.uk)).*

Sydney Smith, of happy memory, flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was a founder of, and contributor to, the celebrated *Edinburgh Review*. He was literary critic, satirist, political agitator, ambitious clergyman, conversationalist, preacher, prolific letter-writer and wit. It is as a humourist that he is best remembered today and anyone wanting to make a brief first acquaintance with Sydney cannot do better than to spend a happy few minutes reading his hilarious remarks as listed in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*.

Sydney delighted in a pun and when, in his comfortable old age, he needed a motto



**Foston Rectory**

to write beneath his somewhat suspect coat-of-arms he chose *faber meae fortunae*, the *smith* of my own fortune. He, however, was not only the

smith or creator of his own fortune, he was, to all intents and purposes, the architect of two of his own rectories, that of Foston, nine miles northeast of York, and that of Combe Florey, six miles northwest of Taunton.



**Combe Florey Parsonage**

When he came to Yorkshire in 1806, Sydney found that his parish of Foston had not had a resident parson for a century and a half. The parsonage was a ruin beyond repair and for some years Sydney lived in Heslington, near York. Eventually, (he was by now in his forties,) he decided to borrow money and to build a rectory for himself and for his wife, Kate, and their four children. An architect was engaged but was soon dismissed, 'with five and twenty pounds', for being too ambitious and too expensive. Sydney and Kate sat down at their kitchen table and designed the 'snug parsonage' into which they moved on Lady Day 1814. The building had taken nine months from the laying of the first stone. Six months later he wrote to his friend, Francis Jeffrey, 'I like my new house very much. It is very

comfortable. I would not pay sixpence to alter it but the expense of it will keep me a close prisoner here for life.' Sydney later wrote, 'It made me a very poor man for many years, but I never repented it. I turned schoolmaster, to educate my own son, as I could not afford to send him to school. Mrs. Sydney turned schoolmistress, to educate my girls, as I could not afford a governess. I turned farmer, as I could not let my land. A manservant was too expensive; so I caught up a little garden-girl, made like a milestone, christened her Bunch, put a napkin in her hand and made her my butler.' In the same spirit, he engaged as a house servant, a carpenter who had come to him for parish relief to work in the house but also, as carpenter, in an outhouse to make furniture for his new home. In addition to his domestic cares and his duties as parson Sydney was village doctor and village magistrate. Physic and justice were alike dispensed in a room which was known to some as the 'surgery' to others as the 'justice-room' and to the master of the house as the 'study'. He wrote of his home, 'My house was considered the ugliest in the county but all admitted it was one of the most comfortable.'

When his daughter Saba, by then Lady Holland, came to write her memoir of Sydney she recalled many happy details of life at Foston. There were always family larks when Sydney was at home. He was larger than life in everything he said and did and so was everything about him, his horse, his carriage, his servants, the way he administered justice, the way he engaged with visitors and neighbours, his relations with the local children, whom he supplied with sweets from his pocket, the stories he told at dinner, all these, at his touch, became sources of amusement for the family at the rectory and bore witness to his indefatigable sense of fun.

Sydney was in Foston Rectory for fourteen or fifteen years. In 1828, however, he left Foston with his family and his servants for Combe Florey in Somerset. By now, by way of inheritance and clerical preferment, he was no longer a poor man. At Combe Florey he decided that the parsonage was in need of a complete rebuild and that he was just the man to set about the task. In August 1829, he was busy building. He wrote to a friend 'I have very few years to live and therefore I cannot afford to waste time in building. I have ten carpenters and ten bricklayers at work. Part of my house has tumbled down, the rest is inclined to follow. We sleep upon props. An enemy or a Dissenter might saw me down in the night-time.' Soon he was able to write, 'I am delighted with this parsonage and this country. It is, by common consent, the prettiest place (I am speaking of the residences of holy men) in one of the finest counties of England.' Sydney repeated much at Combe Florey that he had done at Foston, from the great bow windows that he loved, to the home-made, by his daughters, patchwork blinds. He built for himself, what he had

always longed for, a library and he much enjoyed his conservatory and pretty garden. Stories abound of his deeds there. How, for example, he tied oranges to trees to amuse one guest and antlers to his two ponies' heads to impress, with his 'deer-park', another.

In his last years, (he died in 1845,) he spent much time in London but he came home to the rectory at Combe Florey whenever he could. He had taken as much satisfaction from his two rectories as he had from his clerical career or his contributions to the great political causes that he espoused. Sydney Smith is certainly not forgotten and there is a thriving Sydney Smith Association that welcomes members.

[\(http://www.sydney-smith.org.uk/\)](http://www.sydney-smith.org.uk/)

## **SSA VISIT TO OXFORD 10/11 SEPT 2016**

A party of some twenty members gathered at St Mary's Church Vaults for luncheon at 12 o'clock on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September. The architecturally very important venue was formerly the Congregation House of the Ruling Council of Senior Scholars, built circa 1320, and the first central meeting house of the University authorities. As it was raining hard the restaurant was exceedingly busy, and thus some members, after a light bite, took a stroll in the neighbouring streets and sampled local hostelry before repairing to the S T Lee Gallery, Weston Library, a newly opened building and part of the Bodleian. We were there to visit the special Exhibition 'Shakespeare's Dead' which explored the theme of death in Shakespeare's works, with fascinating exhibits of contemporary pictures, documents and artefacts, including a copy of the First Folio. Whether an exhibition on the subject of the Grim Reaper was well designed to provide an uplifting start for an elderly membership may be questionable as there were some who retired afterwards to their hotel rooms to recuperate, rather than proceed to Evensong at Christ Church Cathedral. Those who did attend enjoyed a feast of Anglican music, in seating which had been reserved in the Choir.

At 6.15pm some seventeen of us gathered at Rewley House, in Wellington Square, the HQ of Oxford University Continuing Education, and a most agreeable venue. A brief AGM took place, and it was recalled that all of ten years had passed since we last met in Oxford, at New College. It was noted that we currently have 125 paid up members, but that only a modest fraction of these ever manage to get to functions. Members were urged to try to introduce one new member each, if the Association was to remain viable, and there was general acceptance that without new blood its

long term survival must be in doubt. Members took note with sadness of the deaths of Randolph Vigne, Frank Collieson, Mary Rose Blacker and Jeremy Bradshaw. After agreement that the next AGM would be held at Combe Florey, Sydnie Bones concluded the proceedings by reading an extract from a tribute prepared for Randolph's funeral. (He was apparently related to Sydney's mother, a fact of which I for one had not been aware, but which goes some way to explaining his unstinted devotion to the Association over so many years.)

After the AGM members and guests settled down to a most excellent dinner, which even the great Sydney would have thoroughly enjoyed. But the high point of the evening was undoubtedly a talk by Professor Angus Hawkins of Keble College on the topic of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Edinburgh Enlightenment and its principal thinkers, of whom the pivotal figure for Professor Hawkins was Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), Professor of Moral Philosophy, and a significant influence on Sydney during his Edinburgh years, as also upon others who were to be close to Sydney, in particular Brougham and Lansdowne. We were treated to a truly stimulating, learned but frequently amusing survey of a fascinating subject, to which the large number of questions and follow up discussion bore ample witness. Stewart was a major exponent of the Scottish 'common sense' school of philosophy, which saw the subject as akin to a science, which should thus be unfettered by metaphysical speculations. Ideas should be soundly rooted in reason and empiricism. He was thus no great friend of the Romantic Movement. One can see why Sydney would have found this common sense approach eminently attractive, and why it may thus have influenced his writing considerably.

On Sunday morning at 10.30 members gathered at the main gate of New College for a most excellent tour led by the College Archivist, Mrs Jennifer Thorp, the high point of which was a display of contemporary documents, manuscript letters and engravings relating to Sydney which Mrs Thorp had kindly prepared for us. The impressive archive of Sydney related material brought on a discussion between our Chairman and the Archivist concerning the possibility of lodging our collection of novels containing Sydney's own bookplate at New College as they are rebound, and this seems likely to happen. There was plenty of time to examine this treasure trove before Sunday luncheon at Chequers Restaurant and subsequent fond farewells. It had been a most successful weekend.

*Michael Ranson*

## **AGM WEEKEND IN SOMERSET 23 AND 24 SEPTEMBER 2017**

A return to Somerset for our AGM weekend is long overdue. The village of Combe Florey was very dear to Sydney Smith, home to his family for 15 years and close to the county town of Taunton where he gave some of his most influential speeches. The focus of the weekend will lie with both of these. The Great Hall of Taunton, where Sydney delivered his devastating Dame Partington tirade against the House of Lords, is now part of the town's newly refurbished museum and where events on the Saturday will be based. These will include a guided tour and an exhibition of material associated with the town in the early 19th century and records of Sydney Smith's involvement. The AGM and dinner will be held in The Castle Hotel which is adjacent. The hotel is offering a special rate for members who wish to stay overnight.

Sunday will be spent in Combe Florey and Bishops Lydeard where we are immensely privileged to have access to two of the properties well known to the Smith family. The day will start with Morning Service in Combe Florey Church, followed by coffee and conversation with the rector, the Reverend Matthew Tregenza, and members of the congregation. A short walk leads us to The Rectory. The new owners of the property, Simon Hawes and Kathy Cleary, who have spent the past few years renovating the building, much as Sydney did in his day, have invited members to visit and (numbers permitting) to join them for lunch. It is many years since we enjoyed the hospitality of the Rectory and this return visit will be one of the highlights of the weekend.

Another will be our afternoon trip to the neighbouring village to take tea with fellow member Vaun Wilkins at Lydeard House, the former home of Sydney's father, Robert Smith, where we will be shown archive material about the house and, weather permitting, invited to walk round her beautiful garden. Somerset in late summer, tangible associations with Sydney Smith and open doors to private houses promise to make this a memorable occasion.

**A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter.**

## **SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017**

Taunton, Somerset, Saturday 23rd September 2017

### **AGENDA**

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2016 AGM
3. Points Arising
4. Financial Report
5. Membership
6. Lunches
7. (a) Newsletter  
(b) Website
8. Chairman's Items including  
(a) 2018 AGM weekend  
  
(b) Election of officers and trustees
9. Any Other Business

### ***MINUTES of the OXFORD AGM of the SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION - 10th September 2016***

*The Chairman welcomed 18 members to Rewley House, Oxford.*

**Apologies** had been received from Mary Beaumont, Alan Bell, Gerry Bradshaw, Sylvie Diggle, Graham Parry, Celia Moreton-Prichard, Tessa Reitman, Ralph Rochester, John Simpson, Ruth and Norman Taylor, Jane Urquhart, Dorothy and Ifan Williams, Catherine Till, Eddy York, Harry and Nicky Yoxall.

**The Chairman** opened the meeting.



- **Minutes** of the 2015 AGM were accepted as a true record of the proceedings. Deirdre Bryan-Brown was thanked for preparing last year's Minutes.
- **Points** arising: there were no points arising from the Minutes.
- **The Treasurer** presented his interim financial report (attached) noting that the Association had been a charity for ten years. Finances for the Association continue to be satisfactory and annual donations to the churches are expected to be made as usual at the end of the financial year. The Chairman thanked the Treasurer for all his work, including dealing with the Charity Commissioners.
- **Membership:** Mark Wade reported a further decline to around 125 paid up members, with a small number of honorary additions. After a short discussion, it was suggested that members could be asked to enrol one recruit, preferably under the age of 60, to bring new blood into the Association. Special mention was made of three members who had died during the year: The Hon. Mary-Rose Blacker who organised the York lunches for many years; Frank Collieson, former editor of the Newsletter; and Randolph Vigne, former Chairman. A short tribute to Randolph was read by the Secretary. The Membership Secretary was thanked for all his work.
- **Lunches:** local organisers continue to arrange lunches during the year. Members from other areas are most welcome to attend.
  - London: Celia Moreton-Prichard, assisted by Peter Payan, hosts lunches three times a year at the Boisdale Restaurant.
  - York: Mark Wade has taken on organising lunches at the Middlethorpe Hall; talks are usually printed in the subsequent newsletter.
  - South-West members' lunch is organised by Sydnie Bones, usually with a speaker.
- **Newsletter:** the Chairman recorded thanks to editor Gerry Bradshaw.
- **Website:** thanks were also recorded to Alison Vickers who maintains the site.
- **Sydney's Letters:** the Chairman continues to negotiate with OUP over the 800 unpublished letters by Sydney Smith, and is actively pursuing the search for an academic editor.
- **AGM 2017** will be held in Combe Florey, Somerset, in September as usual, date to be decided to avoid clash of dates with other local events. Sydnie Bones will explore possible visits to places associated with Sydney Smith and his father.
- **Trustees:** Alan Bell has resigned after 20 years' service; all other existing trustees have agreed to stand for re-election: Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, Sylvie Diggle, Peter Payan, Norman Taylor. Deirdre Bryan-Brown and Robin Price volunteered to serve as trustees, bringing the total number to eight.
- **Any Other Business:** none.

### **Treasurer's Financial Report**

I confirm that the final accounts for last year 2015 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 2016,

*show receipts from subscriptions and gift aid of £1874 compared with £1915 for the whole of last year. Donations of £150 were also received last year, but none this year so far.*

*When the expenses of the AGM are available we shall be in a position to decide on our donations to Foston and Combe Florey. My hope is that we can make donations in the region of £500 to £600 to each of the churches.*

*Arnold Arthurs, Hon Treasurer, Sydney Smith Association, 6 September 2016*

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**Finally, one quotation from Sydney's letters, now on our website, from a letter to Lord Valentia, encouraging him to visit him in Yorkshire (11 July 1810)**

***'The people here are converted to the Christian faith, wear clothes and understand the principle of truck or Barter. Justice is generally to be obtained by applying to the Sheik or Mayor of York and the stories of Cannibalism are utterly without foundation'***



*An infinite quantity of  
talent is annually  
destroyed in the  
Universities of England*

