

THE
SYDNEY SMITH
ASSOCIATION



NEWSLETTER

Issue 28
Summer 2023

THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION (Charity No. 1121599)

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

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Introduction

Colin Southall

I am enjoying the ending of Covid restrictions and taking the opportunity to go to the theatre and concerts again. Also enjoyable have been lunches with members in the South West and London. Hopefully we will be able to arrange a lunch in York later in the year.

We are planning to hold an in-person AGM this year on 23rd September at New College in Oxford where we hope to be able to see some of Sydney's papers held by the college archive. An invitation will be circulated to members by email when the details have been finalised. **If we do not have your email address, please send details to Sydnie Bones so that she can update the membership list.** Given the increasing cost of postage this is important saving for the Association.

Sydney's use of humour to shame and amuse has been a topic explored by many. In this newsletter we reprint an article by Dr John Walsh, a founding member of the Association who sadly died last year, which was first published in 1997.

We continue to receive enquiries and information via the website which have resulted in a number of new members. Sydnie Bones writes about a letter from Sydney discovered in the Parliamentary Archives, and a debate in the US Congress where a speaker quoted Sydney in when discussing the banking system. Sydnie also provides extracts from a selection of Sydney's letters written in 1832, and a number of references from newspapers that year.

We are very sorry that Gerry Bradshaw, who has been the editing the newsletter since 2015, has stepped down. I wanted to thank Gerry for all the work he has performed to gather and publish the newsletter, and for clearly documenting editorial rules and the production process for others to follow. **Please let Sydnie Bones or me know if you are interested in taking on this role.**

Dr John Walsh

We were saddened to hear of the death in November 2022 of Dr John Walsh, of Jesus College, Oxford, a member of the Association from the early days of its foundation. As a church historian with an additional interest in the history of humour, it is not surprising that he was attracted to Sydney Smith. In a letter to a fellow historian, he wrote: *"The history of humour is a theme that has interested me for a long time, perhaps ever since as a schoolboy I encountered Sydney Smith ... and learned along the way that Lincoln read passages from his works to his cabinet in the dark days of the Civil War."*

Dr Walsh gave the inaugural lecture at our first AGM, held at Heslington Hall, York, in 1996, on the subject of Sydney Smith's views on wit and humour. We are reprinting it here, in tribute to Dr Walsh and for our enjoyment.

The Humorist on Humour

Dr John Walsh – Reprinted from the 1997 Newsletter

We usually think of Sydney Smith as a spontaneously funny man, but in wit and humour, as in most forms of human self-expression, there is the inevitable element of craftsmanship. So it was with Sydney: the humour bubbled up like fresh spring water, but it was skilfully bottled and sometimes discreetly carbonated. Some of his best jokes clearly received a matinée performance. He even claimed of wit that it was not a kind of "lightning flash", an "inexplicable visitation", but something that could actually be learned, like mathematics, or public speaking, (at least if one was prepared to put in a good six hours a day working on it).

And he reflected on his talent. Between 1804 and 1806 he delivered a sensationally successful course of Saturday lectures at the Royal Institution in London, entitled Elementary Sketches of Moral Philosophy. He was diffident about these ("the greatest swindle of the season") and

concocted them largely because he needed the money to decorate his house. Significantly, he never published them, but his widow had them printed after his death, with a nervous note warning the reader “this is very far from a learned book”. Two of the lectures are devoted to Wit and Humour, and show Sydney reflecting, rather uneasily, on the talents which he himself possessed in such luxuriant abundance.

The Elementary Sketches are largely based on the writings of the Scottish philosophers which he had encountered in his recent sojourn in Edinburgh: Hutcheson, Kames, Reid, Adam Smith, Beattie, and his friend Dugald Stewart. Sydney had been impressed by the strenuous intellectualism which he met in Scotland - the only part of Britain, he noted, where moral philosophy was taught in the universities. He always liked the cut-and-thrust of philosophers’ debate: he delighted in a breakfast party of “muffins and metaphysics, crumpets and contradiction”. Nonetheless, the penchant of the Scots for serious philosophizing gave him cause for merriment. He describes hearing a maiden at a ball remarking earnestly “what you say, my Lord, is true of love in the abstract, but...” - here the fiddlers struck up and the rest was lost. After a visit to Edinburgh, he writes to Holland House parodying the vocabulary of idealist philosophers: “I take the liberty to send you two brace of grouse, curious, because killed by a Scotch metaphysician; in other and better language they are mere ideas, shot by other ideas, out of a pure intellectual notion called a gun ... The modification of matter called grouse which accompanies this note is not in the common apprehension of Edinburgh considered to be dependent upon the first cause, but to have existed from all Eternity. Allen will explain”. (Allen was the Hollands’ Scots librarian).

Like the rest, the lectures on Wit and Humour were largely quarried from Scottish writers. There is a nice irony here, for Sydney held a stereotypical view of the Scots as a rather dour people. “It requires a surgical operation to get a joke well into a Scotch understanding,” he claimed. “Their only idea of wit is laughing immoderately at stated intervals.” Yet, paradoxically, it was earnest Scottish philosophers who

had done most to develop the theory of humour, and, indeed, to broaden the scope of its use in polite society.

Stuart Tave has described the development through the 18th century of the notion of “amiable humour”, a tradition which Sydney had inherited. (1) Not all humour is amiable. It can be sharp, cruel and destructive. A famous theory of laughter was that posed by Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (1651) which described laughter as a “sudden glory”, triggered off by delight at recognising our own superiority over the misfortunes of others - an idea which had some validity in an age in which cripples and lunatics were considered legitimate objects of mirth. This view was increasingly challenged in the 18th century by new currents of humanitarianism and by Enlightenment views of human nature as essentially benevolent. The stress lay upon laughing with, not laughing at people. Ideally, mirth was seen not as something based on self-love and imagined superiority, but as innocent; as the product of good-nature and good humour. It was therapeutic; it was socially valuable as entertainment. Many of the theoreticians of this quiet revolution were the Scots writers on philosophy and aesthetics whom Sydney plundered for his lectures. Especially important, perhaps, was Francis Hutcheson, who attacked Hobbes directly, distinguishing true laughter from ridicule, and suggesting that the essence of mirth lay in our ideas of the congruity or incongruity of ideas and perceptions. Other writers read by Sydney - like James Reid - developed the debate along this line. (2)

Sydney traversed well-trodden ground when he tried to distinguish between wit and humour. Wit, he argued, rested on the sudden perception of a surprising, clever relationship between ideas, in a way that pleased our intelligence. Of course, not all pleasing resemblances were witty: it was hard to be witty about things which aroused strong emotions, or which had grandeur, like the sublime or the beautiful. He emphasised the crucial element of surprise (here he did agree with Hobbes, with his idea of mirth as a “sudden glory”). Surprise, Sydney claims, is so essential an ingredient of wit that “no wit will bear repetition:- at least, the original electric feeling ... can never be renewed. There is a sober sort of approbation succeeds at hearing it the second

time, which is as different from its original rapid, pungent volatility as a bottle of champagne that has been opened for three days is, from one that has that very instant emerged from the darkness of the cellar". To make a witty remark, we must relate one idea to another in a way that is strikingly fresh: "remote from all the common tracks and sheep-walks of the mind".

If wit depends on a sudden discovery of a relationship between ideas, a pun came from the sudden discovery of a relationship between words. A good pun had two distinct meanings, one of them common and obvious, the other more remote. The pleasure of the pun derived from the little shock which that relationship excited in us. He cites the example of a boy who always read the word "patriarchs" as "partridges": a friend of his teacher remarked that this was making game of the patriarchs. Following his authorities, Sydney professed to despise the pun, (even though he used it himself). It was in bad repute, he said, and deservedly so. The jocosity of language was greatly inferior to the wit of ideas.

Of irony, Sydney was more tolerant. Irony, he says, consists in the surprise which exists in the discovery between apparent praise and real blame. He cites a spoof letter of admiration penned to Oliver Cromwell by a humorous royalist, full of high-flown double entendre. Sarcasm was a species of wit that usually consisted of an oblique invective. It must not be established by direct assertion, but by inference and analogy, and it must have a sting in the tail. He compares it to a swordstick which at first sight looks more innocent than it is, "till, all of a sudden there leaps something out of it - sharp, deadly and incisive - which makes you tremble and recoil".

The second lecture dealt with Humour. Sydney rejects Hobbes' idea that our laughter is necessarily based on perceiving the misfortune of others. Who could laugh when a friend fell ill or lost a fortune? He follows Hutcheson and others in seeing incongruity as a key to humour - "the conjunction of objects and circumstances not usually combined". Wit was caused by seeing a connection between things: humour depended on seeing the incongruities. "If a tradesman of a corpulent and respectable appearance with habiliments somewhat ostentatious, were

to slide down gently into the mud and de-decorate a pea-green coat” we might well laugh. But if a dustman fell into the mud we might well not laugh, because the incongruity was so slight. Surprise was as essential to humour as to wit. It is the sudden and unexpected that makes us laugh. And again it must be a surprise that was devoid of any strong emotion, like tenderness or compassion. Would we laugh if that corpulent tradesman in the mud had broken a leg?

But Sydney did not totally dissociate himself from the Hobbesian theory of humour. Having gone a long way towards emphasising the innocence of laughter, he back-pedalled as he recognised that one could and sometimes should laugh at people. As the reforming journalist of the *Edinburgh Review*, he himself used the weapon of genial ridicule and liked to “barbeque” (his word) those whom he considered dangerously misguided, be they Ultra Tories, persecuting bishops or fanatical Methodists. Ridicule was an important social discipline, for there were very few people who would not rather be hated than laughed at. “In polished society, the dread of being ridiculous models every word and gesture into propriety and produces an exquisite attention to the feelings and opinions of others; it is the great cure of extravagance, folly and impertinence.” He conceded that there was such a thing as the mirth of ridicule, in which the people doing the laughing did feel superiority over the butts of their merriment. But Sydney suggested that as long as people went on laughing at the object of their contempt, things were under control. Humour helped to soften the harshness of criticism and make it more humane.

He did not deny that being funny had its dangers. Heartless wit, flippancy and ridicule could trivialise important human values. This was an especial danger among impressionable young people who could be turned against principles which they knew in their hearts to be good, merely by the mockery of their peer-group.

But wit and humour did much more good than harm. Sydney was convinced that they were given by God to add flavour and perfume to life, “to enliven the days of man’s pilgrimage” and to “charm his pained steps over the burning marle”. Of wit, he wrote, in a final peroration,

“when combined with sense and information ... softened by benevolence, and restrained by strong principle; when it is in the hands of a man who can use it and despise it, who can be witty and something much better than witty, who loves honour, justice, decency, good-nature, morality and religion” more than wit - then it was a wholesome part of human nature in its fullness. He could have been speaking of himself. Sydney’s own wit and humour surely fell into this benevolent category.

Notes

1. Stuart M. Tave, *The Amiable Humorist, a Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries*, (Chicago, 1960)
2. The most accessible version of Frances Hutcheson’s views on this subject can be found in *Reflections upon Laughter* (Glasgow, 1750) which went into several editions. This reproduced essays printed much earlier, to be found in Letters 10 and 11 of *A Collection of Letters and Essays Lately Published in the Dublin Journal*, (1729). For James Beattie’s views and his summary of other theories, see his “*Essay on Laughter*” in *Essays on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, (2 vols, Dublin, 1778).

From the Parliamentary Archives

Sydie Bones

Kelly McDonald, a keen researcher from America, contacted the Association to draw our attention to the following letter, which she had found among her Le Marchant family archive held in the Houses of Parliament. Her ancestor Denis Le Marchant was secretary to Sydney’s long-standing friend Henry (later Lord) Brougham and we assume that this letter was sent to Brougham who at the time was Lord Chancellor.

My dear Lord

Please consider for a moment some of the provisions of your bill respecting the Parochial Clergy and the effect they will have upon us. Our present leave of absence is surely not unreasonable. Clergymen with families are placed often in the most remote and solitary situations – and to get into towns for 3 months is an object of the greatest importance for the education of children who are to live perhaps by those accomplishments which can only be learnt in towns. The parishes are properly taken care of in their absence – and I never heard of any scandal or complaint of these permitted absences where a man resided bona fide the rest of the time. But if you reduce us to two months which I think hard, it is surely a very great vexation not to let us take these two months consecutively – so that a poor devil who comes from Northumberland or Cornwall to spend four weeks in London with his friends is forced to go and return in the middle of his visit to avoid the penalties of the law. You have no idea of the consternation and complaint this occasions among the country clergy – the Bishops will not oppose it because they are utterly careless of the restrictions and inconveniences to which their clergy are exposed if their own power is not abridged, so that it must depend on your own good nature. Your bill for residence and against pluralities was I think inevitable and therefore the consequences are no argument – but those effects will be to make the clergy contemptible in a rich country for their poverty, and vexatious for their fanaticism.

*ever sincerely yours
Sydney Smith*

Combe Florey, Taunton May 23 1834

On the reverse:

*May 1834 15
Rev'd Sydney Smith
Pluralities*

Filed in the Archive of Sir Denis Le Marchant GB61_LEM/1/10/15

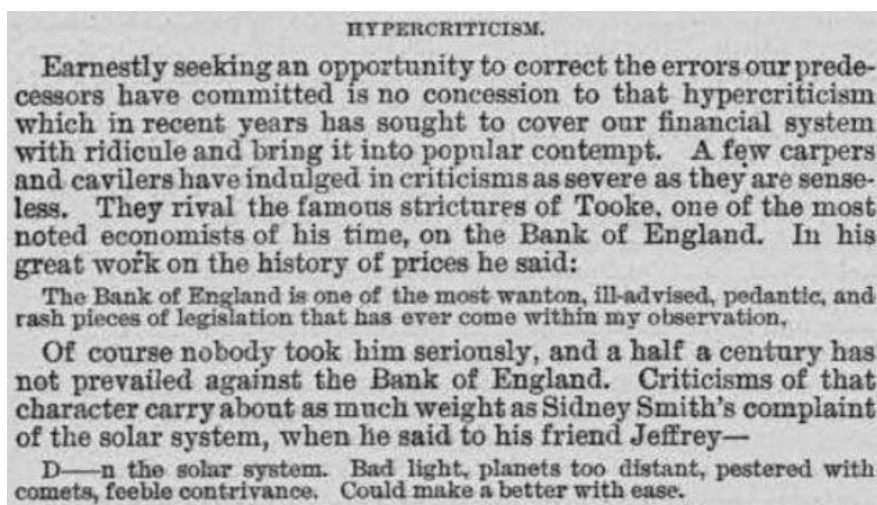
Sydney Quoted in US Congress

Sydie Bones

Mr Faith wrote to us in July 2022 following some research he had been working on using US Congressional records. In a session of the US Congress in 1899 Representative Marriot Henry Brosius was speaking about criticism of the banking system when he shared the following Sydney quote:

“D---n the solar system. Bad light, planet too distant, pestered with comets, feeble contrivance. Could make a better with ease.”

This appears on page 458 of the Congressional Record for December 15th 1899:



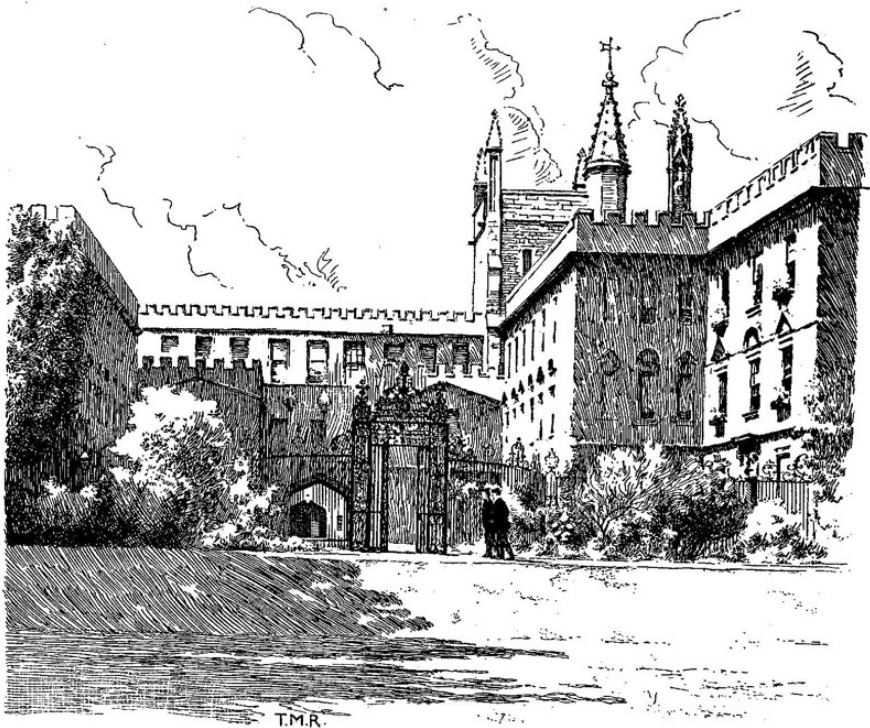
Mr Faith commented that he would like to believe that Sydney would be pleased to know that his witticisms continued to make people smile.

Drawings of New College, Oxford

Jonathan Ouvry

This book with drawings by TM Ronaldson and an introduction by Leonard Woolley was published in 1906. It contains 23 views of the College. Woolley notes:

... [P]erhaps the fact that in 1788 the buttery ceased to battel strong beer was not without result; at any rate a change was to come with the century's ending. In 1793 Sydney Smith was steward of J.C.R. – that is all that is known of the college life of the most famous literary man upon our register ...



The Garden Quadrangle, plate 15

Sydney Smith and Music

Colin Southall

Janet Unwin spoke at the 2020 AGM about Sydney's time at St Paul's:

We know that he had very little time for music. He could listen to it if it was melodious, and not too loud, and did not go on too long - he could on occasion be seen tiptoeing from the room when music was being played.

Later in life he mellowed, and his views changed. He began to take a real interest in music. Thomas Moore, the famous Irish poet songwriter and singer was a great friend, and frequently stayed at Combe Florey.

Yet in 1844 he wrote: *"If I were to begin life again, I would devote much time to music. All musical people seem to me happy; it is the most engrossing pursuit; almost the only innocent and unpunished passion."*

What caused this change? I was interested to find out if it was driven by personal enjoyment or by increased access to music.

Winchester and New College

Both institutions Sydney attended were heavily focussed on the classics, and there is no mention of music tuition.

Protesting against this focus on the classics, Sydney said:

Classical literature is the great object at Oxford. Many minds so employed have produced many works, and much fame in that department: but if all liberal arts and sciences useful to human life had been taught there; if some had dedicated themselves to chemistry, some to mathematics, some to experimental philosophy; and if every attainment had been honoured in the mixt ratio of its difficulty and utility; the system of such an University would have been much more valuable, but the splendour of its name something less.

So he would choose chemistry but not music, and while liberal arts get a mention it is at the expense of the institution's splendour.

Professional Music

In the eighteenth century London's wealth attracted many musicians from the continent and provided employment for some 1,500 performers.

Concerts outside London started to be organised by local music societies in the early 1700s, e.g. Gloucester, Hereford, Worcester, Wells, York and Exeter. Societies were mostly amateur, sometimes paying a professional to lead the band or to take a solo part. They played vocal and instrumental music. Vicars in rural areas often formed music clubs to overcome problems of cultural isolation, as experienced by Sydney at Netheravon.

These local music societies, similar to the meetings organised to discuss current events or scientific developments, e.g. the Lunar Society of Birmingham, arose from the entrepreneurial spirit that grew in the eighteenth century. Wedgwood attended the Lunar Society meetings in part because he was interested in making white glazes.

Economic growth spurred the growth of regional centres and the construction of assembly rooms which could be used for meetings and concerts. Touring musicians from the capital were heard by wider public audiences in the provinces chiefly, but not exclusively, in the summer months. They took advantage of the opportunities presented by a developing provincial concert culture and the emergence of the festivals. Events in London were widely reported in local newspapers further fuelling the demand for provincial performances, especially Italian opera. Oratorios became popular, driven by works by Handel.

York Assembly Rooms

The York Assembly Rooms were designed by Lord Burlington and completed in 1735. It contained the Egyptian Hall which provided a grand meeting and performance space:



When he was at Foston Sydney was expected to attend the York Music Festival: *"Nothing could be more disgusting than an oratorio. How absurd to see 500 people fiddling about Israelites in the Red Sea."*

Despite these protestations, Sydney attended events there. For example the Yorkshire Gazette dated Saturday 24th September 1825 contained the

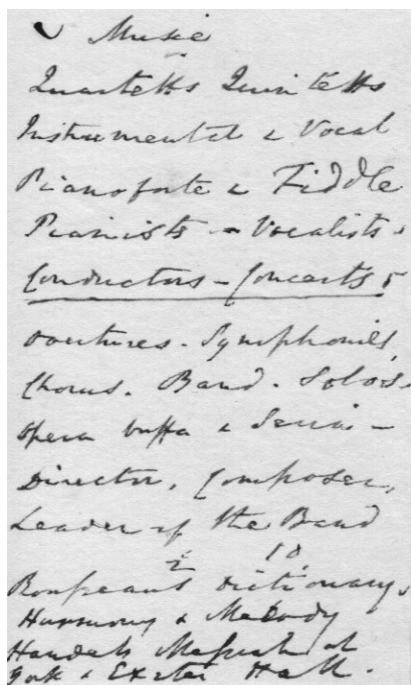
following description of the family attending the Yorkshire Music Society grand fancy ball:

Rev. Sydney Smith
Mrs Sydney Smith, full dress
Miss Smith and Miss Emily Smith, Virgins of the Sun

He appears in the newspapers frequently, commenting on events, working to support prisoners and their families, and engaging on the topics of the day. No comments on music however.

Todd's Johnson's Dictionary

I have been shown a copy of Todd's edition of Johnson's dictionary which contains Sydney's bookplate for 56 Green Street. It has been heavily annotated and contained a number of lists, one of which was headed Music:



Music
?
Instrumental & Vocal
Pianoforte & Fiddle
Pianists & Vocalists
Conductors & Concerts
Overtures & Symphonies
Chorus, Band, Soloist
Opera buffa & seria
Director, Composer
Leader of the band
2 10
?
Harmony & melody
Handels Messiah at
York & Exeter Hall

This raises the intriguing question of whether Sydney attended a performance of the Messiah at York or in London.

Exeter Hall (1831 – 1907) stood on the Strand opposite the Savoy Hotel, and was then rebuilt as the Strand Palace Hotel. It was the YMCA headquarters, was used for meetings of the Anti-Slavery Society, and was the concert hall for the Sacred Harmonic Society. For many years it had been the custom to perform oratorios twice a week during Lent in the theatres, but these were given up when the new hall was opened, and it at once became the temple of music in London. This lasted until the 1880s when the Albert Hall was opened.

Writings and Letters

As noted, there are few references to music in Sydney's writings and letters:

- Collection of Sermons (Edinburgh 1800)

"I am very glad to find that we are calling in, more and more, the aid of music to our service. In London, where it can be commanded, good music has a prodigious effect in filling a church; ... those that come for pleasure may remain for prayer."

Here he appears happy to use music as a means of filling churches, but recognises that it must bring pleasure to achieve this.

- Elementary Sketches in Moral Philosophy - Lecture XIII (1804-6)

"I shall begin the analysis of the beautiful with music, a subject which I cannot pass over, but in which I must beg for great indulgence, because it is impossible for any one to be more completely ignorant of that art than I am. ... it proceeds from an original power in sound to create that feeling."

-
- Edinburgh Review (January 1810 – Female Education)

“The object is to give children resources that will endure as long as life endures – habits that time will ameliorate, not destroy... There may be some women who have a taste for the fine arts, and who evince a decided talent for drawing, or for music. In that case there can be no objection to the cultivation of these arts; but the error is to make such things the brand and universal object...”

- Foston - Letter to Lady Holland (1817?)

“I did not go once [to the Festival]. Music for such a length of time (unless under sentence of a jury) I will not submit to. What pleasure is there in pleasure, if quantity is not attended to, as well as quality? I know nothing more agreeable than a dinner at Holland House.”

- St Paul’s (From 1831)

As Janet highlighted in her talk, at St Paul’s Sydney resisted all attempts to increase the size of the choir.

However, he did pay attention to the music performed there. Finding minor keys depressing, he would not allow music in a minor key to be introduced into any of the services when he was in residence.

In a letter to Lady Morley he commented: *“I did the duty at St Paul’s; the organ and music was excellent.”*

- Letter to Thomas Moore (1831)

“I swear that I had rather hear you sing than any person I ever heard in my life, male or female.”

However, the letter was written to apologise for not having attended a dinner to which he had been invited.

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- Letter (October 1835) - From Paris

"The Ambassador lent us his box yesterday ... The opera, by Bellini, 'Puritani', was dreadfully tiresome, and unintelligible in its plan. I hope it is the last opera I shall ever go to."

- Letter to Lady Holland (November 1842)

"I love music very little, - I hate acting; I have the worst opinion of Semiramis herself, and the whole thing (I cannot help it) seems so childish and so foolish I cannot abide it."

- Letter to Archbishop of York (July 1843)

George Russell tells us that Sydney took lessons on the piano, and often sang with family at home. In 1843 Sydney wrote *"I am learning to sing some of Moore's songs, which I think I shall do to great perfection."* We are told by Saba that when he had once learnt a song, he sang it very correctly.

Conclusion

As we have seen, even late in life Sydney is expressing strong dislike of music as a source of pleasure.

He held that the parallelogram between Oxford Street, Piccadilly, Regent Street, and Hyde Park, *"enclosed more intelligence and ability, to say nothing of wealth and beauty, than the world had ever collected in such a space before."* Nothing about music there.

To me, the clue is in the letter to Lady Holland in 1817: *"I know nothing more agreeable than a dinner at Holland House."* He thrived on discourse on the topics of the day and was not amused by frivolity or escapism. Music could be a useful means to an end – full churches – but that was all. Singing at home was a diversion to be enjoyed when he was not in public.

London Bridge

The mediaeval London Bridge was home to over 500 people and was one of the City's main shopping streets. From beginnings in the early 13th century it evolved until the increase in traffic led to the removal of the houses in 1761 and the widening of the bridge. In 1823 an Act was passed to build a new bridge upstream of the mediaeval one. The new bridge was completed in 1831 and the old bridge demolished.

EW Cooke made many drawings of the bridge works during this period which give a good idea of the scale of the upheaval.



EW Cooke, View of traffic on old London Bridge heading north with St Paul's in the distance, 1826 (© London Metropolitan Archives 78794)

An excellent new study *London Bridge and its Houses* by Dorian Gerhold was published in 2021 which uses Bridge House records to construct plans for nearly all the houses on the bridge and to trace their evolution.

Sydney provides few details of London in his letters, probably because of his focus on politics and life in the parallelogram between Oxford Street, Piccadilly, Regent Street, and Hyde Park. However, during his visits to

St Paul's he must have seen the major works in progress on the Thames as the new bridge emerged and the old bridge was demolished but not thought them worthy of mention.

Sydney in Bristol in 1831

Further Communications from Dr Paul Main

Following on from the article in last year's Newsletter Dr Paul Main, committee member of the Clifton and Hotwells Improvement Society, sent us further details concerning Sydney's residence in Bristol.

He had contacted the Bristol Archives who confirmed that it is entirely possible that the name of one of the streets around Gloucester Row, or indeed part of that street itself, once went by the name of Gloucester Place. They could not find any evidence of this, however, but noted that Gloucester Mews was at some point renamed Gloucester Street.



George Ashmead's 1855 map of Bristol

It could be that a row of buildings, or a single building, may for a time have been called Gloucester Place. This is supported by the existence of a

building plan from 1866-7, listed as being of two houses at Gloucester Place, Gloucester Street.

However, today the buildings on Gloucester Street are numbered 15 to 22, and we know that Sydney was at 8 Gloucester Place.

The Bath Hotel, on the west side of the block was the location for the public breakfast served up by the Committee before the ground breaking ceremony marking the start of work on the Clifton suspension bridge. Would Sydney have been tempted by a free meal?

The Bristol archivist noted that there is a Gloucester Place near Brunswick Square. Though this is nearer the cathedral, it is a cramped mews development with only four buildings shown on Ashmead's map, and it would be a stretch to describe this as being in Clifton. Today the block is occupied by a large office building.

Given this, it is likely that Gloucester Row was Sydney's residence. We may get confirmation of this if further letters from Bristol come to light.

From the Archives

Letters from 1823

Although resident in Foston and fully engaged with pastoral duties, Sydney Smith's correspondence from two hundred years ago shows that he maintained close friendships with friends far and wide. Distance appears not to dampen his desire to see his friends, nor to dissuade them from visiting him in Yorkshire. Among the unpublished letters, with originals housed in libraries all over the world, is plenty of evidence of personal and political involvement with the world around him.

In January, he wrote to his former pupil, William Hicks Beach:

My dear William, About three weeks since I wrote to you at Netheravon, where from antient (sic) recollections I conjectured you to be, to remind you of your promise to pay us a hunting visit. ... Think nothing of the frost – it comes before your visit on purpose that you may not be interrupted.

Corn is very cheap, therefore poultry is very plentiful, therefore foxes are very strong – and therefore sport is very good.

Sydney's neighbours at Castle Howard had soon come to appreciate their local rector. Lord Carlisle wrote in March to congratulate him on a recent legacy:

I have ever regarded the establishment at Foston with admiration and surprise, and not being above knowing, to a shilling, the monthly consumption and expense of this house; and then I have thought of my friend Fitzwilliam who has erased the word Comfort out of the Wentworth dictionary, as neither he nor any about him could ever comprehend its meaning.

Another letter among the unpublished collection caught my eye, from Sydney to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth, thanking him for the gift of the living at Londesbrough, a small Yorkshire village. Ever ready to grasp an opportunity to seek support for a current campaign, Sydney made sure that most of the letter was concerned with the petition he was organising in favour of emancipation of the Catholics. It would appear that this petition was at the top of Sydney's agenda for 1823: it is mentioned in a letter to Francis Jeffrey, detailing an invoice for three articles (46 pages, for the sum of £129.5s.6d – "all executed in the best manner, witty and clear of Scotticism, and very provoking according to order"); and in two notes to Francis Wrangham complaining about the delay in the presentation of the petition to Parliament.

Josiah Wedgwood and his family were planning a visit to Foston in the summer, with letters passing to and fro about dates and clashing commitments. A letter from Sydney to Edward Davenport in August warns him of a potential coincidence of visits. He writes:

There are substances in life called fluxes, the use of which is that they cause true substances to unite, that if left alone would be perfectly inmixible (sic!).

I am of some use as a flux as you will see when you find at my house Mrs Wedgwood the potter and her three daughters – whom I certainly should

not have selected for the society of so fashionable a rake as yourself – I need not however point out to a man of your quickness and ingenuity that by paying court to these people you are sure of coctile and fictile vessels for life upon endless credit – creampots without end. Washing basins unnumbered and other things rather to be filled than mentioned. ... Come before them, with them or after them as best befits your stock of earthen ware and pottery and the state of your finances but my opinion is that three or four crates of earthen ware and a set of Portland Vases upon credit, are not to be overlooked.

A November letter to Lady Morpeth, well known to us as Lady Georgiana, recipient of the much quoted advice on how to avoid low spirits, describes a recent visit by Sydney to Harewood:

I was pleased with my visit to Harewood. Lady Harewood I found extremely agreeable, his Lordship straight forward, sensible, unaffected, and good natured; the young ladies very amiable and polite, the place beautiful, the dinners too good and Lady Louisa Lascelles a lively clever person. The house was warm also which was more than I expected. But they have bad potatoes I mean not mealy which is a dreadful oversight, and the salads were poor and insignificant till I gave them a lesson, which (considering it was the first visit) was a strong measure. But it is difficult for a person like myself who has turned his attention to salads to witness without instruction and remonstrance the dreadful mistakes and follies which are every day committed with salads.

Letters that are to be found in the collection edited by Sarah Austin, published together with Saba's Memoir of her father in the revised edition of 1855, are mostly addressed to the ladies – Lady Grey, Lady Holland and Mrs Meynell. To Lady Grey in January 1823, claiming to be a modest man, “*never afraid of giving my opinion upon any subject ... my opinion is that there will be some repeal of heavy taxes, and not a great deal of ill-humour, ... no reform, no revolution ... prices to rise after the next harvest.*” And in February to Mrs Meynell: “*I am afraid we shall go to war: I am sorry for it. I see every day in the world a thousand acts of oppression which I should like to resent, but I cannot afford to play the Quixote. Why are the English to be the sole vindicators of the human*

race?" The subject of impending war was on his mind in his next letter to Lady Grey: *"For god's sake, do not drag me into another war! I am worn down, and worn out, with crusading and defending Europe, and protecting mankind."*

A lighter tone is adopted in the autumn for letters to Lady Holland: *"Nothing can be more disgusting than an Oratorio. How absurd, to see five hundred people fiddling like madmen about the Israelites in the Red Sea! Lord Morpeth pretends to say he was pleased but I see a great change in him since the music-meeting."* And in another letter: *"I distinguished myself a good deal at M.A. Taylor's in dressing salads; pray tell Luttrell this. I have thought about salads much, and will talk over the subject with you and Mr. Luttrell when I have the pleasure to find you together."* Lastly, a delightful letter written to a young friend of his youngest daughter:

Dear little Gee, ... I remember that you came to see us, and we all thought you very pleasant, good-hearted, and strongly infected with Lancastrian tones and pronunciations. God bless you, dear child! I shall always be very fond of you till you grow tall, and speak without an accent, and marry some extremely disagreeable person.

Ever very affectionately yours, Sydney Smith

Literary Notices

From the British Newspaper Archive

JOHN o' GROAT JOURNAL Scotland, July 1842

Rev. Sydney Smith and the Railway Proprietors

This witty and facetious divine has again taken the field in the cause of humanity, and bids fare to become as great a terror to railway companies as he has already proved himself on several occasions to lay statesmen and the bench bishops.

NAVAL & MILITARY GAZETTE London, September 1838

Rev. Sydney Smith

At one of the Holland House Sunday dinner parties many years ago, Crockford's Club, then forming, was talked of and the noble hostess observed that the female passion for diamonds was surely less ominous than the rage for play among men; upon which Sydney Smith wrote the following impromptu sermon most appropriately on a card:

*Thoughtless that all that's brightest fades
Unmindful of that knave of Spades;
The sexton and his subs
How foolishly play our parts;
Our wives on Diamonds set their Hearts
We set our hearts on Clubs.*

SUSSEX ADVERTISER January 1867

The Rev, Sydney Smith

As he was one of the wittiest so was he one of the soundest; as he was one of the wisest so was he of the best of men. His censure was always generous, his sentences ever just. Prudent, considerable, charitable and humane, he was the very opposite of those social ameliorators who are good Samaritans in words, omitting only the penny and the oil ... by the wayside!

PALL MALL MAGAZINE March 1901

Castle Howard by Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower

This lengthy illustrated article describes the history and contents of Castle Howard. It ends as follows:

Here is a suggestion for those who visit Castle Howard for the first time, if they drive, as I should advise them to do, from York. Let them leave the carriage road at Welburn village and mount the hill that rises at the back

of the pretty little church on the left; when the hill is ascended the visitor will see the view of Castle Howard which Sydney Smith was wont to gaze on, and which that witty divine named "Exclamation Point."



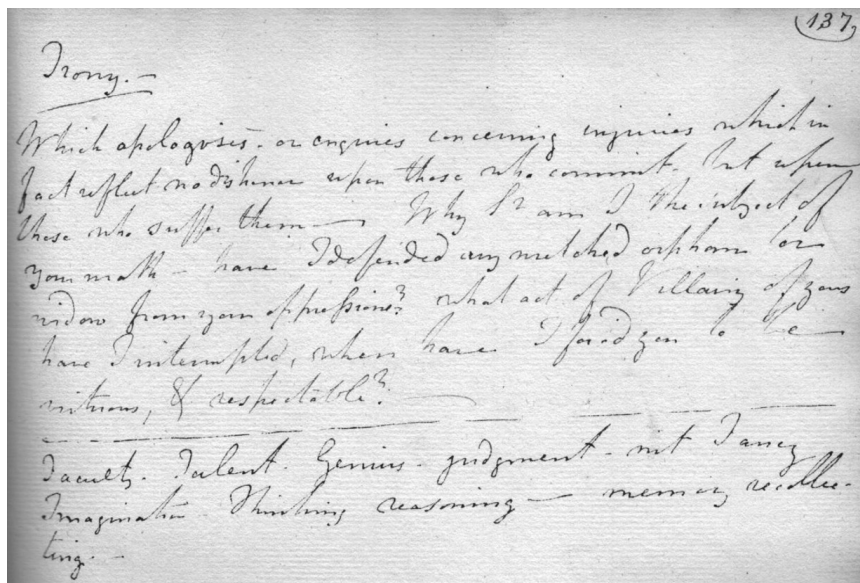
Castle Howard from the South Lake

Sydney's Common Place Book

We are in discussion with the British Library to arrange for Sydney's common place book to be scanned. Jeremy Cunningham has provided a number of excerpts from its pages in past newsletters and some page images are available on the Association's website. However, the low resolution, cramped writing style and faint ink on some pages make it hard to read.

The intention is to provide higher resolution greyscale images which can be used to provide transcriptions of Sydney's entries which range from lists of books he thinks he should read, chemistry and agricultural experiments, recipes, and details of his tea diet.

As an example of what is possible (and illustrating a point made in Dr John Walsh's article), the entry headed Irony on page 137 is shown below along with a tentative transcription.



Irony

Which apologies or enquiries concerning injuries which in fact reflect no dishonour upon those who commit but upon those who suffer them. Why Sir am I the subject of your wrath - have I defended any wretched orphan or widow from your oppressions? What act of villainy of yours have I interrupted, when have I forced you to be virtuous and respectable?

Faculty - Talent - Genius - judgement - not fancy

Imagination - Thinking reasoning - memory recollecting

St Mary's Woodford



St Mary's included an article to commemorate Sydney's baptism there in 1771 in their Autumn 2021 newsletter.

A plaque commemorating Sydney Smith was unveiled at St Mary's in May 2000 with an address by Lord Runcie (reported in the 2001 Newsletter).

The plaque reads:

SYDNEY SMITH
1771 – 1845
Reformer wit and priest
was baptised in this church
2nd July 1771

Kensal Green Cemetery

Members visited Sydney's grave in Kensal Green cemetery in 2005.

Thanks to a grant from The Gemini Foundation and other generous donors, it was renovated in 2007 following which a service of re-dedication was held.

As Peter Ryan noted in his report on the 2005 AGM weekend Sydney lies "surrounded by an army of eminent Victorians such as Thackeray, Trollope, Wilkie Collins and Isambard Kingdom Brunel."



To perpetuate
While language and marble still remain
The name and character of
THE REV. SYDNEY SMITH
One of the best of men
His faults, though admitted to by his contemporaries
To be great,
Were surpassed by his unostentatious benevolence,
His fearless love of truth, and his endeavour to
promote the happiness of mankind
by religious toleration and rational freedom

THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION

Minutes of the AGM - 18th September 2022

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

Apologies: Arnold Arthurs, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, David Chamberlain, Sylvie Diggle, George Ewart, Peter Fox, Celia Moreton-Prichard, Robin Price.

The Chairman opened the meeting, explaining that it was being recorded to assist Minute-taking.

- **Minutes** of the 2021 AGM were accepted as a true record of the proceedings.
- **Points arising:** Chairman and Jeremy Cunningham will liaise on exploring establishing an accessible Twitter presence; website entries for Sydney's Commonplace Book require further development; a volunteer is still sought to organise images on the website.
- **Chairman's Report:** Noting that we are entering a new Carolean Age, Colin has searched for possible parallels in Sydney's advice to Queen Victoria on her accession, finding Education and Peace as similar topics for discussion. The slow decline in membership is difficult to counter: we do not have a regional or hobby-based attraction. The website attracts enquiries but rarely a new member and the absence of lunches has also lessened opportunities for new introductions. A question from a member on how many biographies of Sydney exist led to a lively exchange of information on the comprehensiveness of commonly accessed sources, especially Wikipedia, which the trustees will be asked to examine and expand where possible. It was noted

that many of Sydney's works were available online via the Gutenberg Project.

- **Treasurer's Report:** The Treasurer presented the accounts for 2021. Subscription income has held up well as although numbers had fallen many more members were now paying the current rates. Expenditure had been low as there was no AGM and the website now just needs routine maintenance. Printing and distributing the Newsletter costs a little over £400 each year. After contributions of £750 to each of Foston and Combe Florey churches the closing balance for the year was £1,512, up from £953 at the end of 2020.
- **Membership:** Numbers continue to decline and now stand at 139. Leaflets about Sydney Smith and the Association are placed in churches associated with his ministry. Discussion centred on how best to exploit mentions of Sydney or quotations which appear in books, journals or via search engines. Looking for relevance to current subjects of interest could create opportunities for contact with individuals or organisations; for example, Sydney's advice on coping with low spirits and today's focus on mental health. His relevance as an important figure in the development of British political humour could be emphasised.
- **Lunches:** Local organisers are continuing to explore with members the prospect of relaunching lunches in autumn 2022.
- **Newsletter:** The Chairman thanked Editor Gerry Bradshaw. Articles are always needed for the newsletter and members are encouraged to send items for publication to Gerry. It was agreed to continue to produce a printed copy as not all members have internet access. Members were encouraged to pass on any references to Sydney that they find.
- **Website:** Enquiries via the website continue to come mainly from overseas, mostly asking for information and occasionally drawing our attention to an unfamiliar reference. The most rewarding enquiry

this year concerned a family connection which led to an introduction to a current member with shared family links.

- **Election of Officers and Trustees:** The Chairman reported that Sylvie Diggle has resigned as Trustee; she was thanked for her significant contribution to the Association. All other Officers and Trustees have expressed their willingness to stand again for the coming year. They are: Chairman (Colin Southall), Treasurer (Harry Yoxall), Secretary (Sydie Bones); Arnold Arthurs, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Jeremy Cunningham and Robin Price (Trustees)
- **AGM 2023:** It was agreed that the AGM would be held on September 23rd 2022, location yet to be determined. A speaker will be sought and details emailed to members in due course.
- **Any Other Business:** None.

Financial Report

I confirm that the final accounts for last year 2021 were submitted to the Charity Commission as required. The finances of the Association continue to be sound. The closing balance for the year was £953.

Interim figures on 31 July for the current year, which runs to the end of 2022, show receipts of £2550; expenditure of £518; and a balance of £2985.

Harry Yoxall, Hon Treasurer, Sydney Smith Association
1 October 2022

Association News

Luncheon Dates

York: Graham Frater will contact members to see if a lunch at Middlethorpe Hall Hotel can be arranged later in the year. As postage by Royal Mail has become prohibitively expensive, it would be much appreciated if members in the York area could let Graham have their email addresses - grahamfrater@madasafish.com.

West Country: Malcolm Flower-Smith writes:

An invitation from Sydnie arrived in the Inbox in October 2022 asking West Country members living locally to join her for lunch to meet our Chairman who was stopping on his way back from Exeter. The call was heeded by Harry and Nicky Yoxall, Charlotte Wilson-Pepper, Priscilla and Malcolm Flower-Smith who with Colin and Sydnie made a comfortable table of seven for an excellent lunch and entertaining conversation on Friday October 14th. Priscilla who is currently researching her mother's experiences as a missionary in Africa in the 1930s, recalls an interesting chat on the subject of Filariasis, a tropical disease – Hardly a Sydney Smith topic!

A further lunch is being planned.

London: Celia Moreton-Prichard.

Celia has organized two London lunches at Boisdale. The first, in February 2023, was attended by five members, and the second, in April 2023, was attended by nine members. At the latter Jonathan Ouvry brought a book of Drawings of New College, Oxford and Jeremy Cunningham brought Sydney's Commonplace Book – see newsletter articles above on these items.

A further lunch in July is planned, to be followed by further meetings in the autumn.

The newsletter report of the original meeting at the Boisdale in 1999, 24 years ago, states:

LONDON: WEDNESDAYS 2ND JUNE AND 1ST SEPTEMBER 1999

Arrangements have been made with our member Ranald Macdonald yr of Clanranald to reserve a small private room, the Jacobite Room at the Boisdale Restaurant, 15 Eccleston Street, London SW1 (five minutes walk from Victoria Station) for lunch on the first Wednesdays of June and September, at 12.30 pm. The room will accommodate 15 to 16 people and we will be well looked after by the owner, who was early introduced to the works of Sydney Smith by his father, who used to read extracts to his family after dinner. The cost would be from £19.50 for a good two-course lunch.'

The lunches were organised by Alan Bell, who added "*... these two lunches, if popular, could be the precursor of others.*" How right he was.

Website

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

Newsletter

We depend on you for material for our Newsletter.

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

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

Show me a deep and
tenacious earth – and I
am sure the oak will
spring up in it.

