

The Sydney Smith Association

Aims

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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The Sydney Smith Association Newsletter

Issue 12 April 2007

AGM WEEKEND IN WILTSHIRE, 15/16 SEPTEMBER 2007

In December 1797, whilst curate at Netheravon, Sydney Smith was invited to stay for two weeks at Bowood, the great Lansdowne house near Calne, Wiltshire. He was the guest of William Petty, Earl of Shelburne, who, briefly Prime Minister from July 1782, had by the end of the century retired from politics and was in charge of England's literary salon. It was Sydney's first taste of *avant-garde* society.

The main reason for Sydney's inclusion was to 'be the Imam' at his brother Bobus's marriage to Caroline Vernon – an important occasion for both of the brothers. Through a series of alliances, Caroline Vernon was linked to the Russells, the Foxes and the Lansdownes, three of the foremost Whig families in the country.

Our thanks go to Michael Ranson for organising our AGM weekend around Bowood and Netheravon. Briefly, we can meet for lunch in a private room at the George Hotel, Lacock Village (west of Calne). This belongs to the National Trust. It is totally unspoilt and well worth arriving mid-morning for those who have never visited it before. After lunch we motor five miles to Bowood. There will be a privately conducted tour around Bowood and a talk by the curator on the third Marquis of Lansdowne, Sydney's close and valued friend. This will be followed by tea and the AGM after which we disperse to our respective hotels and meet up for dinner in the Wessex Room of the Corn Exchange, Devizes.

On the Sunday there will be a 10.30am service at All Saints Church, Netheravon, followed by a conducted tour around the church and Netheravon House, the residence of Michael Hicks Beach at the time. After the tour there will be a buffet lunch prepared for us by the parishioners of Netheravon.

An application form is enclosed with this *Newsletter*. Do join the visit.

SYDNEY'S GRAVE RENOVATED: KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY 12 MAY 2007

Thanks to a grant from The Gemini Foundation and other generous donors, it has been possible to renovate Sydney Smith's grave in Kensal Green Cemetery. A service of re-dedication has been arranged.

We will foregather at 11am at the Dissenters' Chapel for coffee and a talk by Henry Vivian-Neal, Chairman of the Friends of Kensal Green. We will then proceed to Sydney's grave where a short service of dedication will be conducted by the Revd Canon John White, Prebendary of St George's Chapel, Windsor, assisted by the Revd Norman Taylor and the Revd Timmy Forbes Adam.

After the service there will be a buffet lunch organised by the Friends of Kensal Green and thereafter guides will be available to show members around.

The General Cemetery of All Souls, Kensal Green, is one of Britain's oldest and most beautiful public burial grounds. One of the world's first garden cemeteries, Kensal Green received its first funeral in January 1833 and still conducts burials and cremations daily. The cemetery was innovative in having most of the site consecrated by the Church of England, but reserving the eastern spur for Dissenters and others to practise their own rites. Today, people of many faiths and denominations are buried throughout the cemetery. Uniquely among British cemeteries, Kensal Green has been managed by the same private joint-stock company since its inception: the General Cemetery Company (est. 1830) still has its offices by the Main Gate. The cemetery now covers some 72 acres between the Grand Union Canal and Harrow Road in west London, and is open to visitors every day of the year.

From the funeral of HRH the Duke of Sussex in 1843 to that of his nephew HRH the Duke of Cambridge in 1904, Kensal Green was the most fashionable cemetery in England. Its notable personalities include some 500 members of the titled nobility and over 550 individuals noted in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Kensal Green is the resting place of the engineers Sir Marc Isambard Brunel and Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the mathematician Charles Babbage, and the novelists Wilkie Collins, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray; Lord Byron's wife, Oscar Wilde's mother, Charles Dickens's in-laws and Winston Churchill's daughter; a cross-dressing Army doctor and the surgeon who attended Nelson at Trafalgar; the creator of Pears' Soap, and the original W.H. Smith; the funambulist Blondin and the Savoyard George Grossmith; the first man to cross Australia from south to north, and the last man to fight a duel in England; the Duke's nephew who ruined the richest heiress of the day, and the English adventuress who became a French *baronne* disgraced by the accusation of murder.

MEMBERSHIP

Most members now pay their subscriptions by Standing Order for which we are very grateful as it saves much time and money. Would those members who pay by other means please note that subscriptions are due on 1 March. It would be appreciated if those who have not yet paid would do so without further prompting. (£15 single membership, £20 joint membership.) Cheques should be made out to The Sydney Smith Association and sent to The Hon. Treasurer, Sydney Smith Association, Belgrave House, 46 Acomb Road, York YO24 4EW.

UPDATE ON THE SYDNEY SMITH WEBSITE (www.sydney-smith.org.uk)

Graham Frater writes: The text selection is near completion, thanks to the help of members, so the focus of the site is now on gathering and publishing photographs of the locations most closely associated with Sydney. It is a venture that all members are most welcome to contribute to.

The photographic 'haves and wants' are as follows:

The Haves:

The site already has a small collection of pictures on display; these include:

Foston/Thornton: Sydney's house and Foston Church. *York:* Heslington, the house that Sydney rented while building at Foston (now the Catholic chaplaincy of York University). *Edinburgh:* The Charlotte Chapel; Rose Street, Buccleuch Place (where the *Edinburgh Review* was conceived), panoramic views of Edinburgh, George Street, 38 South Hanover Street, and Queen Street. (The Hanover Street house numbers have changed, and the location of no.38 is now a touch speculative.) Edinburgh Assembly Rooms. *Bristol:* Bristol Cathedral.

The Wants:

The immediate list is as follows, but if members can think of others to add, their suggestions will be most welcome:

Woodford, Essex: Can we locate and photograph the house where Sydney was born, or the church where he was baptised? *Southampton:* Both research and pictures might be wanted here. Is South Stoneham, which Sydney's father bought and from which Sydney attended local schools, Southampton University's present hall of residence of the same name? *Winchester:* Winchester College. *Oxford:* New College. *Netheravon:* Church, vicarage/curate's house, Netheravon House. *Williamstrip Park, Gloucestershire:* Home of the Hicks Beach family. *North Yorkshire:* Bishopthorpe Palace, York Minster, Castle Howard. *Combe Florey:* House, church. *Bristol:* Lower College Green. *London:* St Paul's, Berkeley Chapel (if it still exists), Holland House and 56 Green Street.

This list is by no means exhaustive; I shall be glad of further suggestions as well as pictures of any relevant sites that I have not mentioned here. The best way to transmit photos is on a disk (CD, DVD, or floppy). I can also scan paper copies, and perhaps - best of all - receive digital photographs via the Internet. Please contact directly: Dr Graham Frater, The New House, Whitcott Keysett, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 8QE, or by Email: grahamfrater@onetel.com

THE AUDEN CONNECTION

When Humphrey Boyle gave his talk at the York lunch last November, he began by recalling a visit to a friend in Oxfordshire in whose spare room he found *The Selected Writings of Sydney Smith* edited by W. H. Auden. He said his French teacher at school, who never actually taught him French, made him recite stanzas of Auden's poetry – after all, he had taught at Gresham's School not only Auden himself, but Britten and Isherwood as well. Humphrey's recollection of discovering Auden's book prompted the arrangement of our special Auden centenary lunch.

Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-73) was born at 54 Bootham, York, on 21 February, the third son of George Augustus Auden (1872-1957) and Constance Rosalie (1870-1941). His father was a physician, classicist and antiquarian. The family moved to Birmingham in 1908 on GA's appointment as school medical officer for the city and Professor of Public Health at the University (*see photos on inside back cover.*)

So 2007 marks the centenary of the poet's birth and the fiftieth anniversary of his *Selected Writings of Sydney Smith* (Faber, 1957). In *W. H. Auden: a tribute edited by Stephen Spender* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), Louis Kronenberger writes: 'We first met during the 1940s in New York, where we both lived: a friend we had in common, Nigel Dennis, had asked me to a party where Wystan would be, and had told Wystan that I'd be delighted if he would edit a volume in a series of Great Letter Writers of which I was general editor. I had barely got to the party when, with a word from Nigel as to who I was, Wystan with a great smile came right up to me, already talking as he came: "Hello!" he said, with an outstretched hand, "'I'd love to do a book for your Letters series, and the letters I want to do are Sydney Smith's.'" I can't recall just what unimpeachable adjectives he showered on Smith, while I in turn expressed unconditional approval. Neither can I recall what we further talked about, but my mounting admiration as we talked, together with my jubilation over Sydney Smith, sent me home happy.' [Footnote: 'Wystan never edited Smith's letters because before he got to work on them a very good edition appeared in England' – this being *Letters of Sydney Smith* in two volumes, OUP, 1953, edited by Nowell C. Smith.]

SYDNEY SMITH AND W. H. AUDEN by Graham Parry

A strange pairing - a strange coupling - and Auden was inclined to couple with any stranger he met - so how are we to explain and justify their connection? There is the accidental connection: that both have links with York, Sydney having lived for many years in Heslington, and Auden having been born a few yards from here, at 54 Bootham, one hundred years ago today. (But he moved on after six months.) Then there is the purposeful connection: Auden admired Sydney Smith both as a letter-writer and as a reformer, and he published a selection of his writings in New York in 1956 and in London the following year. Rather surprisingly, Auden gave prominence to the polemical writings, and played down the overtly humorous side of Smith. He reprinted the Peter Plymley Letters on Catholic Emancipation, and the Archdeacon Singleton Letters about the reform of Church revenues. He included the protests against the Game

Laws and man-traps, against the mistreatment of prisoners and the maltreatment of chimney-sweeps. And he used the introduction to explore what it meant to be a liberal in Sydney's time, and what it meant to Auden in the 1950s, with the interesting reflection that liberals and reformers don't have to come from the left of the political spectrum.

What might they have made of each other, had they met in an imaginary conversation? What were their notable affinities and differences? For a start, they were both gay. Sydney in the traditional sense of the word, Auden in the modern. Sydney had a gaiety of spirit, which we can still share from his letters and remarks, and it has brought pleasure and delight to successive generations. Auden's gayness was a private affair which brought him pleasure, and shaped his life, but was not easily communicable. Auden would not have enjoyed Sydney's benevolent humour, for he preferred a more acidic kind. Sydney would not have approved of Auden's relentless promiscuity, nor his tendency to use people for his own convenience. As a man who moved in an eminent Regency circle, Sydney would have been appalled at Auden's personal grubbiness and disarray. His rarely changed clothes, saturated in cigarette smoke, would have kept Auden barred from any house that Sydney frequented. The squalid conditions that Auden could effortlessly create for himself, his lack of consideration for his friends, his lack of family life, his copious drinking - one cannot imagine that Sydney would have taken to Auden with the same pleasure that Auden showed for Sydney.

Auden's private life is depressing to hear about. But one doesn't judge poets by their private life, and Auden was an exceptionally fine poet. He found the unforgettable words for so many moods and dilemmas that we who live in what he called 'The Age of Anxiety' are familiar with. Yet, as he wrote in his elegy on Yeats, 'Poetry makes nothing happen', - whereas prose does. Sydney, by means of the writings that Auden reprinted, did help to change his society, to make it more humane and just. The causes he wrote for - Catholic Emancipation, the Abolition of Slavery, Reform of Parliament, reform of social abuses - these causes prevailed. Sydney was part of a great process of social improvement.

Auden had no great causes to promote. He kept his distance from politics, did not commit himself to a party or to a programme or an ideology, even in the Thirties. He went to wars, but did not fight. He feared Fascism, and expressed his loathing for it, but he moved to America in 1939 when many thought he should have stayed in England. He wrote about what it was like to be an educated thoughtful man living through times too tumultuous to comprehend or to influence. He wrote about the hopelessness of the public world, about the shadows it cast over the individual, and about the need to support and strengthen the private self in an ugly time. He wrote much about love and its frailty:

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm -

Public distress made him turn to religion, and in the early Forties he moved gradually back to the Anglicanism of his parents. Here, surely, Sydney would have understood and approved.

Auden had a tremendous range as a poet, and his poetry undeniably enhances the pleasures of consciousness, and challenges an indifferent conscience. His phrasing of experience is often so memorable that you begin to see the world in his terms - something that can only be known by exposure to his poetry, and for that you need time. His language has not aged, and his expression now is as powerful and immediate as it was when it was first put into print. Whatever Auden's personal shortcomings, his poetry will survive, as will Sydney's prose, for,

Time that is intolerant
Of the brave and innocent
And indifferent in a week
To a beautiful physique

Worships language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives;
Pardons cowardice, conceit,
Lays its honours at their feet.

Time that with this strange excuse
Pardoned Kipling and his views,
And will pardon Paul Claudel,
Pardons him for writing well.

And now, since this is his 100th birthday, let us lift our glasses of *Vin Audenaire*, and toast him!

- *Graham Parry, Emeritus Professor of English at York University and a committee member of the Sydney Smith Association, gave this talk at the York lunch on 21 February 2007.*

OUR OXFORD AGM, SEPTEMBER 2006

We met in New College where the arrangements for our comfort were admirably carried out by the friendly and helpful college staff. An exhibition, rich in Sydney-related material, was especially mounted for our delight: we warmly thank Jennifer Thorp and Naomi van Loos, respectively New College archivist and librarian, for arranging this treat. Another undoubted highlight of the meeting was the paper given by Mark Curthoys, which we reproduce below. We are extremely grateful to him for a fascinating talk so agreeably delivered.

SYDNEY SMITH AND OXFORD by Mark Curthoys

In the week that Sydney Smith was admitted a member of New College, Oxfordshire's newspaper – *Jackson's Oxford Journal* – chose to report the matriculation of just one undergraduate: the Honourable Thomas James Twisleton, second son of the Baron Saye and Sele of Broughton Castle. As the son of a peer, Twisleton came up with the status of a nobleman, which gave him certain privileges – an elaborate gown, a cap with gold tassels, permission to dine on high table, to bring his own servants, and to own a horse – for which he paid the university higher fees than other undergraduates. The newspaper was interested in Twisleton less because of the lustre which his presence conferred upon the university, than his potential as a source of custom for Oxford's tradesmen, who would have hastened to the newcomer's society – in Twisleton's case, St Mary Hall, now part of Oriel – to solicit his custom. Although Smith was recorded in the matriculation register as *armigeri filius* – son of a man entitled to display a coat of arms – a founder at New College, with a limited income, was a less newsworthy arrival.

The Oxford that Smith entered was expensive. Undergraduate debt was addressed by such half-hearted measures as a resolution by the governing body of New College in 1791 to limit undergraduates' expenditure within college to £6 10s a quarter – a sumptuary restriction doomed to failure as most debt was incurred in dealings with outsiders. The problem was never solved in Smith's lifetime, either in Oxford or Cambridge, as his own later difficulties with his son Windham at Cambridge showed.

Oxford was also socially hierarchical and aristocratic. This was evident enough at the annual Encaenia ceremony, held in the Sheldonian Theatre at the end of Trinity term as a festivity to mark the conclusion of the academic year. Unlike its present form, the ceremony was then a gathering of virtually the whole university – undergraduates seated in the upper galleries, doctors and noblemen in the semi-circle, and the floor areas crammed with MAs – both resident fellows and alumni. If Smith had attended the ceremony in June 1792 (and he would have been in residence then) he would have witnessed the conferment of an honorary MA upon Henry Richard Fox, third baron Holland – later, of course, to be Smith's host and friend. The notion of an eighteen-year-old receiving an honorary degree is now startling – but Georgian Oxford was willing to confer them upon the nobility at the termination of their university careers (Holland had come up to Christ Church as a sixteen-year-old) without subjecting them to the ordinary proceedings required to qualify for a degree.

At the following year's ceremony, in July 1793, Smith would have witnessed another figure who was to feature in his later life, first as an adversary and later as a colleague in the chapter of St Paul's. Edward Copleston, a seventeen-year-old scholar from Corpus Christi College, recited before the assembled dignitaries the Latin verse composition for which he had been awarded the Chancellor's prize. Sydney, of course, had very decided views about the value of classical versification in education – but Copleston's own precision of thought did not suffer from the exercise, and he later used his well-honed mental abilities against Smith to decisive effect.

Summer Heat in the Sheldonian

The Encaenia of 1793 was an especially grand occasion, for it marked the formal installation of the duke of Portland as Chancellor of the university. Numerous honorary degrees were awarded to politicians and noblemen, and a succession of undergraduates recited poetry composed for the occasion. The 3,000 or so participants who packed the theatre suffered in the summer heat – undergraduates smashed the upper windows of the Sheldonian to let air in, and Portland ‘relieved many of the company from their embarrassment’, as the newspapers elegantly put it, by cutting short the proceedings. Afterwards several watches and purses were found to be missing, London pickpockets in hired MA gowns having infiltrated the gathering.

Beyond its local significance, Portland’s election as chancellor by Oxford’s graduates was of great significance in confirming a shift in the university’s political alignment. The Tory prime minister Pitt was seeking to wean Portland’s anti-radical Whigs away from Charles James Fox and his followers; and Pitt hoped that election to Oxford’s Chancellorship would help seal Portland’s allegiance to the governing party and its policy of war with revolutionary France. In this, Pitt was largely successful. Perhaps the experience of Portland’s defection was in Smith’s mind in 1809 when he worried that the election of Grenville to the same Chancellorship, following Portland’s death, would compromise another Whig leader with the forces of Conservatism.

Having for much of the eighteenth century stood in opposition to the governing regime, and even dallied with Jacobitism, Oxford in the 1790s stood firmly alongside the Hanoverian dynasty and Pitt’s government. This is rather vividly illustrated by an incident during Sydney’s Oxford residence. In response to the huge popularity of Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, a royal proclamation, drafted by Pitt’s ministers, was issued in May 1792. Referring to the spread of ‘wicked and seditious writings’, raising ‘jealousies and discontents’, the Proclamation commanded all magistrates in the kingdom to ‘make diligent inquiry to discover the authors and printers’ of such writings, as well as those who distributed them, and to carry the law vigorously into effect against such persons.

Attending upon the King at St James’s Palace

A modern university might be expected to protest against such curtailment of free expression. Not so the Oxford of 1792. In June Dr Cooke, president of Corpus and vice-chancellor of the University, led a delegacy from the faculties, ‘accompanied by diverse persons of First Distinction’, to attend upon the King at St James’s Palace. They presented an address applauding the Proclamation:

‘Impressed with a just sense of your paternal care and solicitude for the security, welfare, and happiness of your people’, the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars begged leave to approach the sovereign ‘most graciously to acknowledge Your Majesty’s wisdom and grace in issuing a proclamation to check and suppress these wicked and seditious publications which are disgraceful to every moral and civilized state, and which subvert

the necessary subordination which alone can give strength and efficacy to legal authority.

‘Placed in a Seminary instituted for the education and instruction of youth in the pure and unsullied principles of the civil and religious establishments of our country, we feel ourselves in a peculiar manner called upon to express our utter abhorrence of all such bold and inflammatory writings as are calculated to interrupt the present peace and harmony of the wise and virtuous; and which, by dissolving every sacred tie, must eventually contribute to poison the minds and corrupt the hearts of the rising generation.

‘Happy in the substantial enjoyment of a constitution (humanly speaking) the most pure and perfect, we view with concern and indignation the intemperate zeal of wild theorists and will strenuously exert the utmost efforts, directed as we are by Your Majesty’s great example, to transmit the same untainted and unimpaired to our latest posterity.’

The address recalls that memorable passage in Smith’s *Edinburgh Review* article of 1809, quoted in Peter Virgin’s *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Smith:

‘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.’

It is not perhaps surprising, therefore, that in such a climate the more independent spirits of Smith’s Oxford generation did not thrive at the university – the future *Edinburgh Reviewer* Francis Jeffrey spent an uncongenial year at Queen’s College in 1791; Robert Southey found little to stimulate him during his two years at Balliol between 1792 and 1794, when he emigrated to the USA; Walter Savage Landor’s career at Trinity College was terminated after a shooting incident in 1794. And, of the university’s senior members, the democrat Thomas Beddoes left his chemistry readership in 1793, under suspicion of sedition.

Religious conformity was a condition of entry to the university: at his matriculation Smith, like other undergraduates, had been required to affix his signature to a book prefixed by a copy of the 39 Articles of the Church of England. Precisely what this meant was disputed by contemporaries – generally, it was taken to be a requirement of assent to those Articles, even though the signatory may not have read – let alone understood – them. In practice, it was taken to be an undertaking not to be in opposition to the doctrines of the established church, and a submission to instruction on that basis. On graduation, he would also have been required to subscribe to the same Articles to which the clergy subscribed on ordination – such as an undertaking to use the forms of the Book of Common Prayer.

Sydney's Exact Dates of Residence Uncertain

These formal actions of matriculation and graduation are some of the few things known about Smith's Oxford career. Even his exact dates of residence are uncertain. This obscurity has long puzzled commentators. Writing in the original *Dictionary of National Biography*, in 1897, Leslie Stephen briskly observed, 'Nothing is known of Smith's Oxford career.' Accounting Smith as one of 'the few really famous names in literature which New College can boast', the early twentieth-century historians of the college, Hastings Rashdall and Robert Rait, could find no specific allusions to the college in Smith's life or works, and said no traditions of his college days survived. G. W. E. Russell's biography of Smith, published in 1904, concluded that Smith's residence at Oxford 'is buried in even deeper mystery than his schooltime at Winchester'. The historian of the university, Sir Charles Mallet, who had a keen eye for Oxford's association with literary figures, was obliged to note that Russell had set out probably the most that could be said. My impression is that this obscurity remains largely the case.

There are several reasons for this. Unless an undergraduate were involved in a notable incident, or formed influential friendships with those who were likely to preserve correspondence, there was little likelihood of any record being preserved of their Oxford careers. There were as yet no honour examinations in which distinction could be publicly conferred; there were no organized sports (and, bearing in mind Smith's views on athletics in public schools, it is unlikely that he would have sought a Blue, had such things been invented); and there were no public debating societies, of the type of the Oxford Union, which in later periods propelled individuals to wider celebrity. Nor, it should be emphasized, can college archives come to our aid. These mainly preserve financial records, both internal and external. Accounts of breakfasts and dinners consumed often survive from earlier centuries – how students were taught, what their individual circumstances were, and so on, go largely unrecorded. Rare exceptions occur where, for example, a collection of papers preserved by a family has subsequently come into a college's hands. In the main, however, colleges did not preserve records of their members.

Eighteenth-century 'Stagnancy'

These general factors were magnified by the extreme isolation of the college to which Smith belonged. If eighteenth-century Oxford was, in many respects, a backwater, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to describe New College as stagnant. The college comprised a warden, 70 fellows, 10 chaplains, an organist, 3 clerks, a sexton, and 16 choristers, plus an indeterminate number of servants. Admissions were a trickle: sufficient simply to replenish the number of fellows. By the statutes which laid down the nature of the college's foundation, additional high-born undergraduates could be admitted as noblemen or gentlemen commoners – but few, if any, in this period did so. For such youths, the object of coming to Oxford was principally for sociability in ordered surroundings. But there was little point in going to New College where there were so few men to socialize with.

New College was a remarkably self-contained and inward-looking institution. Notoriously, it claimed until 1834 the right to present its undergraduates for degrees without them having to undergo the University's examinations, however lax those were in the eighteenth century. It was effectively its own degree-awarding institution. Unusually, it had a Junior Common Room, of which Sydney was steward – most colleges did not have such an institution until the 1880s, and sociability took a looser form. One might surmise New College men had less cause to look outwards. Anyway, as G. W. E. Russell pointed out, Smith's limited means would have severely reduced his opportunities to socialize – and it does appear that, unlike Southey for example, Smith formed no significant friendships at the university.

New College/Winchester College

But the most pronounced feature of New College's inwardness was its recruitment from just one school, Winchester College. School connexions with colleges were common enough: Merchant Taylors' with St John's, Westminster with Christ Church, Abingdon with Pembroke, and a host of others. In no other college, however, was the intake drawn exclusively from one source. New College was literally an extension of a school and the transition between the two was virtually seamless. This experience, it could be argued, coloured and perhaps distorted some of Smith's educational writing, in which he tended to merge school with university practices to an extent that the experience of other colleges did not entirely bear out. It was not until he went to Edinburgh that Smith experienced some of the forms of intellectual life that distinguish universities from schools – and which contemporaries in other colleges (Christ Church in particular) were likely to have encountered.

One measure of New College's standing in this period can be gathered by surveying those of its alumni who are recorded in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* – not a wholly scientific survey, of course, but a rough measure of those who achieved some sort of noteworthiness in later life. This can be done simply enough by searching the online dictionary. Smith emerges as one of 13 dictionary subjects born in Woodford, Essex; and one of 10 who lived in Green Street, London; there's a fourteenth-century rector of Foston; and sundry residents of Netheravon and Combe Florey. And over fifty subjects educated at Winchester in the 1780s and a hundred at Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century.

To return to New College's standing. Twenty men born in the fifteenth century and educated at New College have entries in the dictionary; 100 born in the sixteenth century; then the post-Civil War decline, 54 in the seventeenth century, and only 50 from among those born in the eighteenth century. The nadir came in the early nineteenth century, when only 24 New College men have entries. But then, witness the effect of what was called 'reform' – the opening up of New College to all-comers, by merit – 173 New College men born 1850-99 are in the dictionary. More, that is, than in the previous 250 years.

Or, Smith's specific generation can be reviewed – that is, those who were up at Oxford as undergraduates in the period 1789-94, when Smith is known to have been in residence. A search on the online dictionary for people fulfilling these criteria produces a list of about 80 lives – of these, nearly one half were members of Christ Church, an intellectual power-house under Dean Jackson who almost single-handed formed the political elite of the early nineteenth century – Canning, Lord Liverpool, Peel, and sundry members of their cabinets. The remaining colleges produce sprinklings – no more than five apiece. Bearing in mind its very low admissions, New College's five is not unimpressive – Smith himself, John Shute Duncan and his brother Philip Bury Duncan, the antiquary John Walker, and John Wooll, Thomas Arnold's predecessor as headmaster of Rugby. But one might observe that Smith was the only one who cut a figure in the wider world. The Duncan brothers were successively keepers of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, where they rearranged the collections to illustrate Paley's *Natural Theology* – John Shute also published, as Alan Bell notes, a treatise of *Hints to the Bearers of Walking Sticks and Umbrellas*. Walker remained a fellow of New College until 1819, occupying himself by compiling a four-volume *Selection of Curious Articles* from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, before his appointment to a college living. Now, as Smith himself showed by his *Edinburgh Review* list of eminent men not educated at public schools, one can manipulate this sort of data about education and later career in ways that suit whatever argument one happens to be constructing. But compared to Dean Jackson's movers and shakers - and again, Smith excepted – these New College figures of the 1790s, notable as they were, had somewhat circumscribed horizons, and can hardly be said to have been leaders in either public life or scholarship.

On Fellowships

Perhaps a clue to this lies in the nature of fellowships in this period, and New College's in particular. Modern usage automatically identifies fellowships with tutorships – that is, as an employment relationship with teaching duties. But such a usage is – in Oxford terms – comparatively recent (i.e. the 1880s). Originally, fellowships were intended as supports for study. By Smith's time it is perhaps most appropriate to describe them as pensions, for which the holder had to jump through various hoops, at prescribed intervals – such as taking degrees or entering holy orders – and desist from certain things – marriage, or the possession of ecclesiastical preferment above a certain annual value.

To modern eyes, this is curious enough. New College's fellowships were even odder, in that they were tenable by undergraduates – eighteen-year-olds were offered the possibility of an income, of sorts, for life. Most New College fellowships were, in fact, vacated: either on marriage or when the holder was fortunate enough to be presented to a living, either by the college or by some other patron. Adam Smith made some severe remarks, based on his Oxford residence earlier in the eighteenth century, on how endowed income reduced the motive for exertion. New College's fellowships, awarded without competition at so young an age, might well have blunted ambition. The amiable indolence of Parson Woodforde, who gained his sought-after place on the New College foundation in 1759, is a well-documented case in point.

Of those who held fellowships in Smith's time – and this is true of all colleges – only a tiny minority were actually occupied in teaching. Just two of New College's 70 fellows held college tutorships, for there were only a handful of undergraduates in New College requiring tuition. In addition, three fellows held bursarships, administering the college's estates and internal economy. It should be noted that in these years, New College's income was rapidly increasing, as shortages pushed up agricultural prices and increased the demand for timber grown on the college estates – that latter doubled in value between the 1760s and 1790s, and nearly doubled again by the 1810s. These substantial accretions of corporate wealth seem to have done nothing to reinvigorate the place as an educational institution. There were architectural improvements – the plastering of the altarpiece was completed in 1789 – and in 1791 the college moved with the times to the extent of deferring the hour of dinner from three until four in the afternoon.

The two wardens who held office while Smith was in residence, were primarily men of business, but in no sense innovators. John Oglander, who died in January 1794, resisted any relaxation of the religious tests required on admission to the university, and was not otherwise notable. His successor, Samuel Gauntlett, was elected in February 1794. He published nothing, but some idea of the qualities which contemporaries esteemed in such a figure is contained in his obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine*: 'He was a man of strong intellect, and a benevolent heart; in classical learning accurate; in Divinity sound; as a Governor exemplary in his conduct; considerate in the exercise of discipline; attentive, punctual, and exact in concerns of Collegiate business.' He was also a pluralist, holding two livings and a prebendal stall.

The Drones Club?

Most of the fellows, meanwhile, were non-resident (a survey in 1842 showed that only twenty-nine of New College's seventy fellows were resident). Non-residence was not, in turn, considered an abuse – rather the reverse, those who remained were more liable to be regarded as 'drones'. For bachelors living in college, without duties, and without the impulse to undertake scholarly work, there was a greater hazard that they would turn into cantankerous nuisances – as some undoubtedly did. So Smith's time in Netheravon would have been regarded as a very proper use of his fellowship.

In view of Sydney's later exile in Foston, it is worth reflecting on why he did not succeed to one of the college livings to which fellows could look forward. In 1789 New College owned the patronage of thirty-three livings, mainly in the Home Counties – seven in Buckinghamshire, five in Essex, six in Oxfordshire, one (Long Ditton) in Surrey – not inconvenient for Holland House. But though this might look a healthy number of openings, the longevity of incumbents would have required considerable patience – and, of course, the deferral of marriage. Sydney's contemporary John Walker had to wait until 1819 before landing Hornchurch in Essex. And then there were politics to consider. Some colleges filled their livings by seniority. But from Woodforde's diary it appears that New College did so by votes of the governing body – and Smith was a Whig in a predominantly Tory college. His best bet lay elsewhere.

So far, this account has focused on the rather peculiar nature of Smith's formative experience of Oxford. Though the personal details remain obscure, the context is clear enough. And the implicit thrust is at least to qualify, if not wholly to discredit, Smith's standing as a commentator of the Oxford of his day. This is of some importance to establish, because it helps to explain the reception of Smith's *Edinburgh Review* article published in October 1809.

'Cambridge ... not so bad as Oxford'

Smith's contribution was notionally prompted by the appearance of a treatise on Professional Education by the Irish educationist R. L. Edgeworth (though in fact the book was largely written by Edgeworth's daughter, the novelist Maria Edgeworth). But Smith's article was widely seen as an instalment in a concerted campaign by the *Edinburgh Reviewers* to draw attention to Oxford's educational deficiencies. Francis Jeffrey had started the ball rolling in 1808 with an article, which quoted a Cambridge fellow as commenting that his own university was 'bad enough, Heaven knows, but not so bad as Oxford'. In the same issue the professor of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh, John Playfair, made scathing remarks about the archaism of Oxford's mathematical curriculum. These were followed in July 1809 by the art collector and traveller Richard Payne Knight's review of the Oxford University Press's new edition of the ancient geographer Strabo. Edited by Thomas Falconer, an Oxford contemporary of Smith's, the Oxford Strabo was denounced by Knight as 'a ponderous monument of operose ignorance and vain expense'.

Re-reading Sydney's article, one sees that Oxford was not the sole, initial focus. His target was the more general one: what he termed the 'excessive abuse of classical learning in England'. The early paragraphs are measured and conciliatory, acknowledging the many benefits of studying the ancient languages. What Smith objected to were the excessive lengths to which this was taken. From the ages of six or seven to twenty-three or four, the young Englishman was occupied with the intrigues of the heathen Gods: 'With whom Pan slept? With whom Jupiter? Whom Apollo ravished?' He especially censured the high importance attached to the largely artificial activity of Greek or Latin versification – and the preoccupation with forms of language rather than substance of ideas. Young men's minds could as beneficially be sharpened – and perhaps more usefully so – by studying modern languages, modern history, experimental philosophy (what would later be called physics), geography, chronology, and mathematics.

All this is utterly compelling and convincing to a modern readership. It was inevitable that the exclusive dominance of the classics in education would be challenged – it happened throughout Europe. In twentieth-century Britain, the challenges of industrial and imperial decline produced recurrent phases of criticism of university education and its neglect of modern or vocational subjects.

It is remarkable, then, that at the time the Scotch *Reviewers* were felt to have mishandled their case, and indirectly reinforced their target. Edward Copleston, the prize-winning versifier of 1793, and now a tutor at Oriel, which was spearheading competitive elections to fellowships, published a devastating retort. Playfair was shown to be simply wrong; Payne Knight was demolished, his own scholarship being exposed as faulty. Smith's arguments received the bulk of attention, though, for they were most wide-ranging. They were somewhat less susceptible to factual refutation – though Smith did later retract his allegation that a course of lectures on political economy would not be countenanced. If one looks again at the Oxford men of the 1780s and 1790s in the *Oxford DNB* it is interesting to note how many took an interest in, say, the currency question, or the poor laws – Copleston himself published on both. But whereas the Pittites tended to grapple with these problems of government, it was the Whig grandees with whom Smith now consorted who tended to hold aloof from such concerns.

Isolation ... 'rustication' at Foston

It was of course a Christ Church Tory, Sir Robert Peel, who took up these questions most resolutely – in November 1808 he gained spectacular success in the final honour examinations, taking firsts in Literae Humaniores and Mathematics. The timing here is important. Isolated in New College, and then resident either in Edinburgh, London, or what Peter Virgin describes as 'rustication' at Foston, Smith seems to have missed the momentous changes that had taken place at Oxford in the twenty years since his own admission. Many colleges had begun to tighten their internal discipline, introducing rigorous tests called collections. Others began to select scholars and fellows by examination rather than patronage or succession. Most far-reaching of all, the university in 1800 introduced a rigorous new procedure for examinations, which were held – terrifyingly – in public. Failure now began a real hazard; but for those who excelled, there was an opportunity to obtain honours in the class lists, which of course survive to the present.

The subjects of those examinations were principally in the classics and Smith chose, rather provocatively, to attack those whom he termed 'ecclesiastical instructors' for imposing an inappropriate curriculum on the nation's youth. Many would have agreed the general sentiment. But in the light of the spectacular success of the new examinations, his attack seemed misdirected. Moreover, in the post-1789 climate, religion was seen as an important bulwark against subversion; and the role of the clergy in public life was enhanced (as Boyd Hilton's recent volume in the *Oxford History of England* series points out). Smith's article appeared at precisely the moment when Oxford education was not only re-energized, but was acknowledged as being so. Matriculations began a rapid rise in 1810, reflecting parental satisfaction with what was on offer. Meanwhile, Edinburgh's position had begun to wane.

The *Reviewers* might have made more impact if they had focused their criticism of Oxford elsewhere – particularly towards the misapplication of the great wealth which the colleges enjoyed through their historic endowments. Internal reformers appreciated that

this was where the real problems lay – New College underwent an intellectual revival after 1850 not through dropping the ancient classics, but as a result of opening up its foundation to competition. As a beneficiary of those endowments Smith would have been more aware of this question than most. As Peter Virgin has pointed out, he had a blind spot when it came to his own enjoyment of the ample loaves and fishes of the Church establishment. One might observe Smith's same tendency as regards university reform.

After this episode, it appears that Smith's involvement with the university largely ceased. He did not keep his name on the books of New College – which involved paying annual dues to the university and college. As a result, although he held an MA, he was not qualified to vote in parliamentary elections for the university's MPs, or in elections of the University Chancellor, or in votes of Oxford's Convocation. His name, therefore, does not appear in the published list of voters in the celebrated by-election of 1829 - Sir Robert Peel, standing on a pro-Catholic Emancipation platform, was defeated by Sir Robert Inglis in a bitter contest. Voting was open and recorded in a poll-book. New College, it is interesting to note, voted on that occasion in what Smith would presumably have regarded as the right way – 21 New College voters were recorded as supporting Peel, 16 Inglis. Under warden Shuttleworth, who succeeded Gauntlett, the college was assuming a more Whiggish hue.

If uninvolved in Oxford affairs, Sydney was not unaffected by them. The election of 1829 finally broke the consensus under which Oxford had been governed during the previous generation, and unleashed the religious zeal of youthful churchmen who were to form the so-called Oxford Movement. The row created by those enthusiasts, along with their more orthodox seniors, against the appointment of the allegedly heterodox R. D. Hampden as regius professor of divinity in 1836, finally blighted Smith's chances of a bishopric. Smith had no time for the 'Puseyites', as the young high churchmen were known. But, paradoxically, their actions served to open the university to those forces of free thought and unrestricted speculation, which Smith had so fervently advocated.

Snow-bound Sheldonian

A week before Sydney's death, in February 1845, occurred what has been described as one of the most celebrated incidents in the history of the Victorian church. The occasion was a meeting of Oxford's Convocation; the venue was the Sheldonian Theatre, on this occasion – in contrast to Portland's sweltering installation fifty years earlier – snow-bound. Over one thousand graduates – mainly clergy – assembled to decide on actions proposed to be taken against William George Ward, a fellow of Balliol College. Ward had published a work entitled *The Ideal of a Christian Church*, which argued that the Roman Catholic Church alone trained up conscience into the holiness necessary to eternal salvation. Flagrantly inconsistent with the 39 Articles, to which Ward had subscribed, his book was condemned by the university authorities, who brought forward a motion to strip him of his degrees. Although the motion was carried, the majority was small, and Ward's supporters included many liberals, who objected to such tests of

belief. Oxford's denominational exclusiveness was fatally weakened. Within a decade the form of subscription which Smith, along with generations of undergraduates since the sixteenth century had been obliged to make, was swept away. The university was opened to men of any denomination – or none – and one senses that Smith would have approved. But the pioneering advocate of female education would perhaps have regretted that full membership of the university was withheld from women until the twentieth century.

- Dr Mark Curthoys was co-editor, with Michael Brock, of two volumes of The History of the University of Oxford, covering the period 1800 to 1914, and is now a research editor on The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

**From SYDNEY SMITH AND FOOD by Nigel Forbes Adam:
a York lunch talk in May 2006**

It goes without saying that Sydney loved good food and wine, and when he was sent to that place in Yorkshire that was – yes, you've guessed it – 'twelve miles from a lemon', he determined to learn how to grow what he could in these cold northern climes. He ploughed, churned, drilled beans and fattened poultry. Once he fed his pigs on fermented grain and reported that they were very happy in their styes, 'grunting the National Anthem'.

He taught himself to cook and was confident that he could feed a man into virtue or vice. Character, virtues and so on 'are powerfully affected by beef, mutton, pie-crust and rich soups'.

His greatest triumph was, perhaps, his salad dressing. He loved making it for his aristocratic friends and such was its success that he felt impelled to write a poem about it. [Regrettably, space precludes our reproducing this twenty-line epic, which ends: 'Serenely full, the epicure would say, "Fate cannot harm me, I have dined today"'.]

Sydney enjoyed his visits to Paris and loved French food but he complained several times about 'the lack of tablecloths in the coffee houses and private houses', and 'the want of W.C.s is one of the most crying evils in Paris'. Then, as now.

Even when he was beginning to succumb to his last illness he was able to write jokingly about his diet. At much the same time, when he knew he was dying, he wrote to a friend: 'Did I ever tell you my calculation? I found that between ten and seventy years of age, I had eaten forty-four loads of food and drunk more than would have preserved me in life and health. It occurred to me that I must, by my voracity, have starved to death fully a hundred persons.'

Sydney had the inestimable gift of finding enjoyment in almost everything, and food and drink he enjoyed as much as anybody could. Inevitably he summed up his feelings better than anyone else: 'Talk not of those who in the senate shine/ Give me the man with whom the jovial dine/ and break the ling'ring day with wit and wine.'

THE FAMILY LIFE OF SYDNEY AND CATHARINE SMITH

by Michael Knutsford

Sydney and his wife Catharine had three sons and two daughters but it is only their daughters, Saba and Emily, who are of interest to us, for only they married and had children.

Saba Smith, the eldest of the family, was born in 1802. She was called after the Queen of the Sabaeans, a rich trading nation, now the Yemen. The name Saba is synonymous with Sheba and recalls that spirited piece of music by Handel, 'The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba', bringing gifts of gold, precious jewels and spices to King Solomon in Jerusalem (1. Kings 10)

When Sydney was asked why he had given his first born such an unusual name, he replied, 'anyone with the surname of Smith ought to have an uncommon Christian name by way of compensation'.

However, the name did not find favour with subsequent generations. My grandfather, who was a leading breeder of Labrador retrievers here at Munden, called one of his best breeding bitches Saba, and there have been more than one Sheba.

Saba married, as his second wife, Dr Henry Holland (later created a baronet), who already had three children, the eldest of whom was Harry, the 1st Viscount Knutsford.

Dr Holland was already forty-six and Saba was thirty-two when they married. The story goes that Saba invited Henry Holland to stay at Combe Florey. One morning Henry was looking for Saba and found her in the Rectory dispensary, mixing rhubarb and magnesia for the village people. The eminent doctor was so impressed that he fell in love with her there and then. 'Beauty, benevolence and pharmacy combined could not fail to charm.'

Henry and Saba had two daughters, Caroline and Gertrude, neither of whom married.

Dr Henry Holland had known his new father-in-law, Sydney, for a considerable time and they were good friends. They both belonged to a small select dining club, singularly called 'The Club'. This was a highly prestigious literary club founded in the 18th century by Samuel Johnson and David Garrick, and still flourishing today. Holland remarked that the peculiar features of his father-in-law were never more strikingly displayed than at the Club dinners:

'The provocation to put forth wit, wisdom and learning was felt and fully answered and every dinner was enlivened by Sydney. His death in 1845 was not only a loss to London society but to the sound practical sense and conduct of English public life. The power and diversity of his wit was greater than that in any man I have ever known.'

It was a coincidence that Lord Holland, the Whig host of Holland House, was also a member of the Club. Although they shared the same name they were unrelated, for the former was Henry Fox, 3rd Baron Holland, whereas Holland was Sir Henry's family name.

Sydney and his son-in-law often met dining at Holland House for the visitors there were not exclusively Whigs or politicians – 'indeed it was ever a matter of rejoicing to Lady Holland when she could catch a stray Tory to mingle with them'.

Emily Smith, who was five years younger than her sister Saba, resembled Sydney in character more closely than any of his other children. She was clever, cultivated and well read and, having passed her life with clever people at home and in society, was a delightful companion.

On New Year's Day 1828, Emily was married in Foston church by the Archbishop of York to Nathaniel Hibbert. After the wedding, Sydney felt he had 'lost a limb and were walking about with one leg', an ungracious remark when he was gaining a son-in-law who had a good career as a barrister and was described as 'well-bred, liberal, spiritual and affectionate'. Nathaniel also had the prospect of inheriting Munden, which he did thirteen years later.

Emily and Nathaniel had three children, but only the younger daughter Lizzie married and had issue, the line from which I am descended.

Combe Florey was, to some extent, boring to the restless Sydney. Young people were necessary to his existence. He wrote, 'if I was a rich man, I should like to have and would have twenty children'. Did he pause to question what Catharine would have thought about that?

However, they did amass eight grandchildren, natural or adopted, for Henry Holland's three by his first marriage were always included in the family circle. There were only sixteen years between the age of the eldest and the youngest.

The great event of the year was their summer visit to the grandparents at Combe Florey. The railway did not reach Taunton until later, so their journey from London of about 150 miles took three days by road. The great excitement for the children was sleeping in inns and dining in the carriage as it bounced and swayed along the bumpy roads.

At Combe Florey, life was fairly quiet and regular. Even Saba had to admit that punctuality with her father was rigid enough to be called a vice. The house was run by the clock. Prayers at nine, a carriage drive at ten, lunch at one, dinner at eight. Then, summer and winter, he visited his horses to see that they were fed and comfortable, accompanied by the elder grandchildren. When they were staying with him, Sydney called them in to lunch and dinner with the speaking-trumpet, through which he had bawled instructions to his farm workers at Foston. The grandchildren were seldom unpunctual more than once.

In the course of the day, particularly if it was wet, Sydney would send for the little girls into his library to play funny games, 'Pull Basket' or 'Naughty Girl, Get Out of the Room'. The greatest treat was to have Thomas, the footman, in with his fiddle, and to dance, which grandpapa himself would join in with all his heart and a good deal of effort, for he was in his late sixties and very heavy. In the evening, after dinner, Lizzie Hibbert and her sister Katie used to sit at the library table, each with a thick copy-book and immense red pencils given them by their grandpapa.

At times, so many children staying in the rectory was too much of a good thing – 'all in a dreadful state of perspiration and screaming'. Sydney liked girls better than boys – 'all little boys ought to be put to death' – so it was perhaps fortunate that Parker Hibbert was his only grandson.

Sydney was especially fond of Saba's elder daughter Caroline, known affectionately as Coo. Coo was a thoughtful child with a poetic and precociously intelligent streak. One morning Sydney was walking in the garden with his arms behind his back, clutching his faithful black crutch-stick. He heard Coo roaring in an upstairs bedroom. Saba explained that the child was unable to grasp some detail about the lives of the ancient Hebrews. Coo was only four! Sydney smiled to himself, continued his walk, but two hours later was found in his library, surrounded by maps and books, with Coo perched on his knee. The difficulty about the Hebrews was being resolved.

Another amusing incident involved Coo. At the time there was a fashion for keeping giant turtles. Sydney and Coo visited some friends to look at them. While the grown-ups were talking, Coo went out into the garden and began stroking the turtle. Sydney followed her out, bent down and whispered in her ear, 'Why are you doing that?' Coo's reply, 'To please the turtle.' Sydney's face was wreathed in smiles. 'Why, child, you might as well stroke the dome of St Paul's to please the Dean and Chapter.'

Munden was where Nathaniel and Emily moved after his mother's death in 1841, only four years before Sydney Smith died. Munden has plenty of spacious rooms, the river running by and a large garden ideal for children. Furthermore it is only twenty miles from Hyde Park Corner, and Sydney habitually spent eight months of the year in London, at 56 Green Street, near Marble Arch. The roads were well surfaced by then, some even tarmacked, and the journey would have taken Sydney and Catharine only three hours by carriage.

It was natural therefore that the Hibberts invited Saba and her Holland family, with their parents, to stay at Munden. The elder of Saba's two stepsons was Harry. Emily writes in 1840: 'I happened to tell Lizzie that Harry Holland was coming to stay a few days with us and that I had no doubt he would play with her and read to her. Her face brightened all over at the notion.' He would have been fifteen and Lizzie only six.

Over the years, Harry's visits to Munden became ever more frequent and his affection for Lizzie soon blossomed into love. Lizzie grew into a lively, original and sweet-tempered girl with a sense of fun and good humour inherited from her grandfather,

Sydney. She shared a taste for drawing and yet more singing in a beautiful soprano voice.

Both Harry and Lizzie's parents were worried that Lizzie 'was too young to make up her mind and had met few young men' and it was not at all certain that Dr Holland would give his son, a struggling barrister, a marriage allowance.

However, the young couple's radiant love for each other overcame any misgivings. Dr Holland relented and gave his son 'an income which together with Lizzie's small fortune made up an amount which was thought to justify an establishment for life'.

The following August, in 1852, Harry and Lizzie were married in Aldenham church. A daughter, Edith, was born the next year followed by twins, Sydney and Arthur, in 1855. Two weeks after the twins were born, Lizzie was taken ill and died a week later at the age of 21. The younger twin by five minutes was Arthur, my grandfather.

- Viscount Knutsford is a patron of the SSA and his talk was given in June 2006, after an SSA visit to Munden and luncheon, kindly hosted by Kate and Henry Holland-Hibbert (see photos on inside front cover.)

SYDNEY SMITH AND EDITH WHARTON by George Ramsden

The invitation to write something on this unlikely subject came from your Vice-Chairman Peter Diggle when we happened to coincide at an auction in Malton last November. There had been some local publicity about the return of the library of the American novelist Edith Wharton (1862-1937) to her former home in Massachusetts, The Mount, just over one hundred years after it was built. I had reassembled the majority of her books over a period of twenty-one years and, after much faffing about, a deal was struck with the Americans.

At the auction, Peter secured a wardrobe and I got a rug. Our efforts to furnish our houses were trifling in comparison with those of either Edith Wharton or Sydney Smith in the domestic line. They both built houses from scratch.

When shown the plans for his house at Foston, Sydney Smith famously remarked to the architect, 'You build for glory, Sir, I for use.' He handed the plans back to the man and paid him off. Then he got to work with rule and compass and designed his own rectory. He baked bricks but they disintegrated, so he went to Leeds and bought more bricks and timbers. Work was commenced in June 1813 and was completed in March 1814, during which period Smith said 'my whole soul was filled with lath and plaster'. The result was an admirable plain house—pink brick (Flemish bond), no cornices, good fires, a bow-window in the drawing-room, many mounted (not framed) prints on the walls, full of practical devices—with which Smith was pleased. Any of his habitations might have been named *The House of Mirth*, the title of Edith Wharton's best-selling novel written soon after she moved into The Mount.

Edith and Teddy Wharton first employed Ogden Codman as their architect but he found them—particularly Teddy—maddening to work for and they fell out. She and ‘Coddy’ had successfully collaborated on her first book, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) whose basic precepts were unwittingly followed by Sydney Smith off his own bat and through sheer good sense. The book dismissed the cluttered, heavily curtained and upholstered interiors of the intervening Victorian period, the style of decoration that Edith Wharton had known in her New York childhood. She too favoured good natural light and clear architectural lines. Proportion and fittingness are advocated in *The Decoration of Houses*, a ‘pioneering work’, which reads well today, though the illustrations are unexpectedly grand.

Edith Wharton too was delighted with The Mount, a middle-sized, essentially Palladian mansion, based on Belton in Lincolnshire, and in every way superior to the Scotch baronial imitations that her millionaire neighbours were building in the Berkshires. She lived there for eight years, always interspersed with long stints of European travel, before her husband went off his head and the marriage broke up. Like Sydney Smith, though on an opulent scale, she took to the land. Her husband ran the farm, they had dogs galore, and she became a locally prize-winning horticulturalist.

Smith and Wharton both loved books, depended on them, and had book-filled houses. For him, so gregarious and metropolitan by nature, they must have provided much consolation. He had been presented with the living of Foston, having made his name in Edinburgh and London, whereas Edith went voluntarily to live in the country. Her friend Henry James also chose to rusticate, at Rye, and for a time enjoyed playing the role of the country cousin. But he was always strongly drawn to London, especially during his last wartime years when he couldn’t bear to be out of the swim and suffered from loneliness. He corresponded prodigiously and was one of the first to have a telephone installed in Rye.

Consider the *non*-countryman living in the country today, someone hardly involved in rural life, perhaps a bad shot like Sydney, and a bit unsocial. How is he or she to endure the country? One solution might be to live in one’s own world. This was successfully practised by, for instance, Kenneth Monkman, the Laurence Sterne expert who revived Shandy Hall as a shrine to his literary hero. Though Mr Monkman died in 1998, his imaginative life had been spent in the eighteenth century. He must often have thought about meeting Sterne in the hereafter. Even my own involvement with Edith Wharton gives rise to such thoughts as how she might be getting on with Sydney Smith. As far as I know, she didn’t have him in her library in any shape or form. Actually his shape and form boded rather well for their posthumous relationship because like Henry James he was a rotund, even orotund, talker. Edith might have tired of Smith’s torrents of silliness. But the sort of pastoral advice both men could dispense—and that they were minded to do so—suggests that they were of the same kidney. Sydney Smith’s counsel to Lady Morpeth about countering low spirits (‘see as much as you can of those friends who respect and like you, keep good blazing fires, don’t expect too much from human life,’

etc.) is too well known to be quoted at length in your *Newsletter*, but here is James's advice to Grace Norton in 1883, less practical, less memorable, but weighty in its way: 'Before the sufferings of others I am always utterly powerless, and your letter reveals such depths of suffering that I hardly know what to say to you (. . .).

'Sorrow comes in great waves—no one can know that better than you—but it rolls over us, and though it may almost smother us it leaves us on the spot, and we know that if it is strong we are stronger, inasmuch as it passes and we remain. It wears us, uses us, but we wear it and use it in return; and it is blind, whereas we after a manner see (. . .). Don't think, don't feel, any more than you can help, don't conclude or decide—don't do anything but wait. Everything will pass, and serenity and *accepted* miseries and disillusionments, and the tenderness of a few good people, and new opportunities and ever so much of life, in a word, will remain. The only thing is not to *melt* in the meanwhile. I insist upon the necessity of a sort of mechanical condensation—so that however fast the horse may run away there will, when he pulls up, be a somewhat agitated but perfectly identical G.N. in the saddle. Try not to be ill—that is all; for in that there is a failure.'

So, Edith Wharton and Sydney Smith had sensible ideas about houses and might have got on well together. Gossip connects them too, but at one remove. Sydney's co-founder of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1802 was the lawyer Henry Brougham who became Lord Chancellor and died and was buried in Cannes in 1868. He had a chateau there and was extremely hospitable, indeed he put Cannes on the map as a resort, it having been just a quiet fishing village.

The natives erected a statue to his memory. The Wharton family certainly made several returns to Cannes where her official father, George Frederic Jones, breathed his last at the age of sixty-one. Edith eventually had her own chateau down the coast at Hyères. Every Wharton biographer refers to the possibility that Lord Brougham was her father. Since he would have sired her in his mid-eighties, it is odd that such a rumour ever arose. They both had red hair (rarer then) and were intellectually brilliant and versatile. Edith's mother used to tease her daughter about her big feet and hands. Edith felt like a changeling child. She was much cleverer than her siblings and did not look like them. She was an afterthought, born twelve years after her older brother, and her mother was undoubtedly a snob. Paternity secrets are a recurrent theme of Wharton's fiction.

Well, it's a thought; but out of respect for the privacy she insisted on in her lifetime - and being parsimonious - I'm not going to have Edith Wharton posthumously DNA'd.

- Edith Wharton's unique library, painstakingly reassembled by SSA member George Ramsden, was purchased by the Wharton estate following an anonymous donation of £1.5 million. The 2,600-volume collection was recently unveiled by the wife of the US President, First Lady Laura Bush, who counts Wharton as one of her favourite authors.

SYDNEY SMITH: SEEN AND HEARD

Test of Time

In a recent review in the *American Weekly Standard* of *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900* (Andrew Roberts, HarperCollins), the reviewer Edward Short notes: 'The 19th-century English wit Sydney Smith once confessed that he entirely understood why an American might say, "I will live up to my neck in mud, fight bears, swim rivers, and combat with backwoodsmen, that I may ultimately gain an independence for myself and children." This is why Smith was what he called a *Philoyankeist*: "I doubt if there ever was an instance of a new people conducting their affairs with so much wisdom." [Andrew] Roberts, too, may be described as a *Philoyankeist*. He writes with unusual sympathy and balance about a people whom many of his compatriots simply don't get.'

Berry Amusing

Peter Payan writes: No date is given for the following letter, but it is addressed to Devonshire Cottage, which Mary and Agnes Berry used to rent from Lady Caroline Lamb during the last years of Sydney Smith's life. In *Bygone Richmond* by H. M. Cundall (John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1925), the author notes: 'The witty Sydney Smith delighted in punning on the name of Berry, and always distinguished Mary from her sister by the name of Elder-Berry.'

'Dear Berries,

I dine on Sunday with the good widow Holland, and blush to say that I have no disposable day before the 26th, by which time you will, I presume, be plucking gooseberries in the suburban region of Richmond, but think not O Berries, that that distance, or any other, shall prevent me from following you, plucking you, and eating you, for whatever pleasure men find in the raspberry, the strawberry, or the coffee-berry, all these pleasures are, to my taste concentrated in the Mayfair Berries.

Ever theirs, Sydney Smith.'

Jane Again

Jane Austen, no stranger to these pages through her conjectural meeting with Sydney in Bath in 1797 and his possible inspiration for Henry Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, is back with a vengeance in the cinema and on television. We report this because two productions used as a location the Irish home of our members Christopher and Hanne Gray. The film *Becoming Jane* has Anne Hathaway as the twenty-year-old JA flirting with feeling in Hampshire with young Irishman Tom Lefroy. Conjecture is again rife in this handsomely produced romance. In ITV's adaptation of *Northanger Abbey* the heroine Catherine Morland is played by the fragile beauty Felicity Jones, more widely known as Emma – no, not Jane's, but the wayward mother of fought-over Georgie in 'The Archers'. We were delighted to meet her in September on location when for a second time last year Christopher and Hanne's atmospheric house (amidst 'the hushed fields of our most lovely Meath' which poet F. R. Higgins knew so well) became a corner of Ireland that was for ever England.

Laugh a Minute

Randolph Vigne writes: Thomas Campbell, the Scottish poet (we all remember *Lord Ullin's Daughter* and *Ye Mariners of England...*) told a correspondent, somewhat censoriously: 'Your friend Sydney Smith called on me for a few seconds - I can scarcely say minutes - talked about a thousand things and went away laughing. I don't think the worse of his heart for his flighty ways; it is his head that is distracted by the multitude of his engagements and acquaintances in London'. (*Life and Letters of Thomas Campbell*, ed. William Beatty, London 1853.)

The Last Great Party at Holland House

Dorothy Williams writes: In *Last Curtsey* (Faber, 2006) Fiona MacCarthy, biographer of Byron, William Morris, and Eric Gill, tells of her 'coming out' in 1958. The chapter on London dances includes this description of the last great party at Holland House in 1939. What a pity she doesn't mention Sydney's connection with the house!

'The Cubitt ball drew its glamour from Holland House's historic connotations, its accretions of memory. The pre-ball dinner was held in the long library. The hosts received the guests at the top of the grand staircase. Dancing was in the formal white and gold ballroom and supper in the Joshua room where Sir Joshua Reynolds' portraits of eighteenth-century grandees gazed down on the current Queen of England, who was wearing a white crinoline, Queen Eva of Spain weighed down with rows of pearls, and the intrepid old hostess Mrs Ronnie Greville who was now so decrepit she had to be borne in by two footmen but was still dressed to kill in diamonds and blue silk. It was a pouring wet night, rather dampening the splendour. No flirting on the terraces or walking in the formal Italian gardens below the house. Is it only with hindsight the event seems melancholy, a swell party that spelled the end of English social continuity and aristocratic confidence? A year later, in September 1940, Holland House was almost totally destroyed by German bombers.'

Timeless Reminder

Humphrey Boyle struck a particularly poignant note in his November talk about a famous Sydney Smith campaign, the terrible use of little boys for chimney sweeping.

'Sydney wrote: "Little Boys for Small Flues" is a common phrase in the cards left at the door of itinerant chimney sweepers.

'They were sent up the chimney if it caught fire and often never returned. When I mentioned this to our chimney sweep the other day he told me his grandfather in the 1920s found several tragic little skeletons in old chimneys.'

Sydney's Grave: Old Words Re-cut

When SSA members meet at Kensal Green Cemetery on Saturday 12 May, we shall witness the completion of the renovation of Sydney's grave. The original words used on the gravestone to memorialise Sydney have been preserved (including 'Contemporaries'), and these are reproduced below:

To perpetuate,
While Language and Marble Still Remain,
The Name and Character of
THE REV. SYDNEY SMITH
One of the Best of Men.
His Talents, though Admitted 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.
He was born the 3rd June 1771.
He became Canon Residentiary of St Paul's
Cathedral, 1831.
He died February 22nd 1845

This inscription totals 391 individual characters, which is of significance as the engraving is priced at £2.50 per character, plus VAT. The cost is being shared between the SSA, in accordance with its Aim, 'To perpetuate the memory and achievements of Sydney Smith', and the contributions of generous donors, including The Gemini Foundation.

THE SYDNEY SMITH LUNCHESES

London These are held at the Boisdale restaurant, which is, in spirit, ownership and atmosphere, a small sector of Scotland, where Sydney began his (eventually) influential career. Our private dining room can sit just sixteen for lunch, so our gatherings are small but sparkling. We arrange three lunches each year, sometimes four, and sometimes we have a special guest. In July 2006, thanks to our Chairman Randolph Vigne, we enjoyed the company of the MP and QC Bob Marshall-Andrews, scourge of pomposity and humbug, controversial and entirely entertaining.

Our October 2006 lunch featured an introduction to the marvels of Munden, by Dr Peter Payan, inspired by a members' visit in June. The first lunch of 2007 was held in January

when we welcomed Alan Bell, after a two-year absence due to pressure of work and a family move to Edinburgh. He promised to be with us more this year and updated us on his monumental task of collating the entire collection of Sydney Smith's letters. Eventually the entire collection will be available on the Internet in collaboration with the University of York, and a shorter version, still including thousands of letters, will be published.

Members interested in getting details of the London lunches should contact Mary Beaumont on (020) 8318 3388.

York Again, we have been able to have our lunches at the Grange Hotel in Bootham and we are very grateful to Jeremy and Vivian Cassel and their staff for making us feel so welcome and always providing an excellent meal.

We are also very grateful to our speakers who all introduced topics that were extremely interesting and entertaining. In May, Nigel Forbes Adam spoke on 'Sydney Smith & Food'. In August Nicholas Younger's subject was 'Sydney and the Athenaeum'. Humphrey Boyle spoke in November on 'A Poet's View of Sydney Smith'. On 21 February 2007 – the centenary of the birth of the poet down the road at 54 Bootham – Professor Graham Parry's topic was 'Strange Meeting – Sydney Smith and W. H. Auden'. There was great interest in this subject and we managed to fit in 30 people by having three round tables instead of our usual long one. After Graham's talk, while we had coffee, he kindly and illuminatingly answered many questions.

Future lunches in York will be on Wednesday 23 May, Wednesday 15 August and Wednesday 14 November. Please apply to Mary Rose Blacker, Huttons Ambo Hall, York YO60 7HW. Telephone (01653) 696056.

South-West The annual South-West Area lunch will take place on Wednesday 25 April. The venue will be the George Inn at Chardstock, a delightful fifteenth-century inn on the borders of Devon, Somerset and Dorset. Unlike our Sydney Smith bonanza at Combe Florey last year, there is nothing Smithian in the neighbourhood, but there is Forde Abbey where both house and garden are well worth a visit. If any member who may not have received an invitation would like to attend they can be assured of a warm welcome. Those interested please apply to Sydie Bones. Telephone (01297) 35526, or by Email: sydie.bones@btopenworld.com