

The Sydney Smith Association Newsletter

Issue 13 April 2008

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

We meet at Castle Howard (where Sydney Smith was always warmly received when he was rector of the Foston parish) on the Saturday afternoon for the AGM at 5.15pm. Dr Christopher Ridgeway, Curator at Castle Howard, will give a talk following the AGM as a prelude to a reading of selected letters between Sydney and Lady Holland, presented by the actors Sïan Phillips and Moray Watson (see below).

After this performance there will be a reception in the Great Hall at which a selection of Sydney's letters will be on view. Then at 8.30pm we take Dinner in the Grecian Hall.

On the Sunday a service will be held at 10.30am at Foston Church, after which Jim and Sarah Walsh have invited members to visit the Old Rectory. The weekend concludes with a buffet lunch in Thornton le Clay village hall.

An application form is enclosed with this *Newsletter*. We encourage you to join the visit but as space is restricted for both events we would be grateful if you could confirm as soon as possible to avoid disappointment.



Elizabeth Vassall Fox, Lady Holland [top left]; Henry Richard Vassall Fox, 3rd Baron Holland and their (formidable) housekeeper Mrs Brown. From a pen and wash by Landseer, c. 1833, at the National Portrait Gallery.

'DEAR LADY HOLLAND'

This performance, the reading of a selection of some of the most amusing correspondence between Sydney and Lady Holland, the wife of the Whig host of Holland House, will surely be one of the highlights of the AGM weekend.

Sydney's correspondence will be read by the actor Moray Watson who has completed over one hundred performances of *Ancestral Voices*, a one-man show based on the diaries of James Lees-Milne. He has also appeared in TV series as wide-ranging as *Miss Marple*, *Minder*, *The Professionals*, *The Darling Buds of May* and the 1980 production of *Pride and Prejudice* as Mr Bennet.

Sïan Phillips, a member of our Association, will read Lady Holland's letters. In 2000 Ms

Phillips was awarded a CBE in recognition of her outstanding career, which has taken in roles as diverse as Marlene Dietrich in the West End play *Marlene*, a Tallulah Bankhead-type actress in *Goodbye, Mr Chips* and the radio panel show *Call My Bluff*. She remains best known for her role as the evil Livia in the BBC adaptation of *I, Claudius*.

As a teaser, we include a typically sparkling back-and-forth between these two amusing and provocative correspondents:

Sydney: 'My dear Lady Holland, I love warm weather, but it is impossible to feel affection above 78 degrees, or below 20 degrees of Fahrenheit. Human nature is too liquid or too solid beyond these limits. God send that the glass may fall, and restore me to my regard for you, which, in the temperate zone, is invariable.'

Lady Holland: 'I am extremely languid and peaking to-day from having sat seven hours and three quarters behind the red curtain in a very small space during the debate in the House of Lords. Nothing but long winded speeches upon currency, corn, consumption, the silver standard and such topics. [Lord Grey, the Prime Minister] is sustained marvellously without air or exercise, mind always harassed, and living in a most noisome, foul atmosphere; for Downing Street is the sink of London, really, not metaphorically.'

NEW PATRONS

We are happy to welcome two new patrons of the Association: The Hon. James Stourton, a Deputy Chairman of Sotheby's, whose mother's family owned Heslington Hall, now site of the University of York. And Jim Walsh, who lives with his family in the Foston rectory designed by Sydney and whose role in closely supervising its construction in 1813-14 meant 'my whole soul was filled with lath and plaster'.

MEMBERSHIP

Thankfully, 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 were 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.

CHARITABLE STATUS FOR THE ASSOCIATION

Members will be interested to know that the Association was granted Charitable Status by the Charity Commission and entered in the Central Register of Charities as Number 1121599 with effect from 14 November 2007.

As a charity we are required to have a governing document, in our case a Constitution for a Charitable Unincorporated Association, which contains administrative provisions that are suitable for our type of organization. These include the Objects of the Association as agreed at our last AGM on 15 September 2007. The governing body, or management committee, comprises Trustees elected by members of the charity at a general meeting. The current Trustees are the committee.

As part of our Constitution we are required to circulate yearly accounts to members. For 2007 a summary of the accounts appears in this *Newsletter*.

Any donations we receive from taxpayers are eligible for Gift Aid and we would encourage potential donors to contact the Treasurer for further information on how to proceed.

FROM THE MINUTES OF THE 11th AGM AT BOWOOD HOUSE, WILTSHIRE, 17 SEPTEMBER 2007.

- The Chairman, Randolph Vigne, welcomed the 34 members present and circulated the minutes of the 2006 AGM.
- The Chairman summarized the events of 2007. As well as the ceremony at Kensal Green there had been the excellent lunches with talks in London and York, thanks to the local organizers, and a well-attended meeting in Devon.
- Arnold Arthurs, Hon. Treasurer, was unable to be present and the Chairman read his report:



Bowood House, as it would have looked in Sydney's life, from Morris's County Seats (1880). On the right is the Big House, demolished in 1955. The wing on the left is what remains.

- The current balance in the Bank was £5808
- Main receipts came from subscriptions and amounted to £2209
- Main payments had been:
 - Donation of £1000 to Foston Church Sydney Smith Trust.
 - Donation of £1000 to Friends of Combe Florey Trust.

Contribution of £786 towards restoration of Headstone at Kensal Green.
Newsletter 2007, production costs of £367

- *Charitable Status*: the Chairman then explained the important matter of the Association's current application. The original wording contained some phrases outside the remit of charitable status. Although we had originally discussed an object of supporting the upkeep of churches associated with Sydney it appeared that this could result in our having to produce detailed evidence and accounts, whereas this could be simplified if one of our aims was described as 'to promote the Christian religion'. The Commissioners suggested rewording Clause 3 so that registration could proceed.

This would now read: Clause 3 – The Objects:

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

Discussion followed, after which Alan Bell proposed a Resolution: The rewording of Clause 3 be accepted, and the Association apply for charitable registration. This was seconded by the Revd Norman Taylor.

- Of the 34 members present at the meeting, 32 voted in favour, with one vote against and one abstention. The requirement of more than two-thirds of those present voting in favour having been met the Resolution was carried.

OUR WILTSHIRE AGM, SEPTEMBER 2007

Michael Ranson writes: Members assembled for lunch at the Red Lion in Lacock, a charming village of lime-washed, half-timbered houses. Now owned by the National Trust, the village is the location for a number of films requiring 18th and 19th-century



The south front of Lacock Abbey.

settings, including *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* and *Cranford*. Members who had not visited Lacock before had been urged to arrive in time to explore before lunch. Lacock Abbey, originally a convent of Augustinian nuns (canonesses), was founded in 1232 and was converted into a house in 1540 by Sir William Sharrington, who incorporated much of the monastic work, including the cloisters and a chapter house. These have featured in the Harry Potter films and the recent *The Other Boleyn*

Girl. The 16th-century stable yard contains a clockhouse, brewery and bakehouse. Pioneering work on photography was carried out here by William Fox Talbot (1800-77). His descendants gave the Abbey and village to the National Trust in 1944.

After lunch, members took the ten-minute drive to Bowood House, the home of the Lansdowne family since 1754, where we were met by the Curator, Kate Fielden. The grounds were laid out by ‘Capability’ Brown. Kate, after telling us something of the history, took us on a very thorough and fascinating tour of the house, which contains many unique items, including Queen Victoria’s wedding-chair, the Keith jewellery collection and Napoleon’s death mask. We were shown the laboratory where Dr Joseph Priestley, who was tutor to the 1st Lord Lansdowne’s sons, discovered oxygen in 1774. Kate also showed us the fine period library, which contains over 5,000 leather-bound volumes, and the chapel with its fine organ. Sydney Smith was a regular visitor to Bowood during the time of the 3rd Marquis; another was the Irish poet Tom Moore. It was about Moore that Mr Jerry Nolan, a member of the William Beckford Society and currently writing a biography of Moore, gave a fascinating and highly entertaining talk. This revealed a degree of friendship between Sydney and Moore of which most members were previously unaware. On the road from Bowood to Devizes lies the village of Bromham, where Moore and his family lived for many years in a cottage belonging to the Marquis. A number of members took the opportunity to visit Moore’s grave and monument in the churchyard there, where they listened to John Betjeman’s poem. [The first two stanzas are quoted in Nolan’s article *Tom Moore and Two Friends*, later in this *Newsletter*.]

On Saturday evening members met in the old Corn Exchange in the centre of the picturesque and largely Georgian town of Devizes, to enjoy an excellent dinner. On the Sunday morning we drove to Netheravon where Sydney, after graduating from New College, was curate from 1794-97. According to Lady Holland he did not greatly enjoy the experience:

‘Once a week a butcher’s cart comes over from Salisbury; it was only then he could obtain any meat, and he often dined on a mess of potatoes sprinkled with a little ketchup. Too poor to command books, his only resource was the squire and his only relaxation long walks over the interminable plains, on one of which he narrowly escaped being buried in a snowdrift.’

Smith himself famously described Netheravon as ‘a kind of healthy grave’. It was a remote place that offered little of the cultivated social life which Sydney so much enjoyed. However, he set about doing all he could to improve the lot of the villagers, setting up a Sunday school and arranging for girls to be taught to sew. He also enjoyed the friendship of the local squire Michael Hicks Beach, and tutored his children. In 1797 Beach made Sydney travelling tutor to his eldest son (the grandfather of the first Lord St Aldwyn). A year later Smith found himself in Edinburgh, where his social and intellectual gifts were to have greater scope.



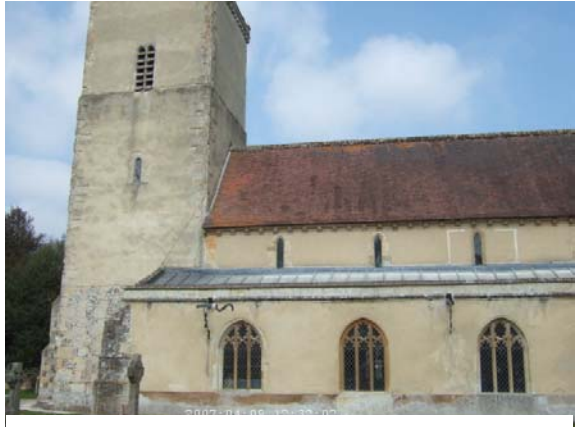
Dr Joseph Priestley (1733-1804) lived in Colne, Wiltshire between 1773-80.

William Cobbett mentions Netheravon in *Rural Rides*:

‘We were coursing at Everley and one of the party, saying he had seen “an acre of hares” at Mr Hicks Beach’s, we who wanted to see the same sent a message to beg a day’s coursing, which being granted we went over next day. He took us into a wheat stubble by his paddock, his son took a gallop round, cracking his whip at the same time; the hares started all over the field - running like a flock of sheep and we all agreed that the flock did indeed cover an acre of ground.’

Unlike so many 18th-century parsons, Sydney was not interested in field sports (Woodforde was a great courser and keeper of greyhounds). If he had been, the dull days at Netheravon might have been more enjoyable. Nor did he have the money at that early stage of his career to enjoy the other love of Woodforde’s life, namely an endless succession of fine meals.

The church and its immediate surroundings have changed little since Sydney’s time. It is simple but charming. The main interest lies in the tower, which probably contains Saxon work (typical long and short work and the little doorway in the north side). The tower has massive arches east and west, which may indicate it was once central. Higher up it has 13th-century windows and a parapet dating from 1626. The nave is 13th-century.



Netheravon Church, little changed since Sydney’s time.

Our hosts were the Vicar, the Revd Colin Fox and his congregation. After a service taken by Colin, and which included a fine address by our own Norman Taylor, we proceeded the short distance to Netheravon House, formerly the seat of the Hicks Beach family.

More recently an Army officers’ mess, it is now undergoing restoration and conversion into apartments. We were kindly given a guided tour by the present owner. The early Georgian house (originally built by the Duke of Beaufort as a hunting lodge) and its extensive stables remain essentially intact, and the renovation is being sympathetically conducted.

After our tour of the house, we enjoyed an excellent buffet lunch in the village hall provided by the ladies of Netheravon. Our Chairman, Randolph Vigne, thanked our hosts warmly and presented a substantial donation to the vicar and the Church Committee. After lunch members dispersed, apparently well pleased with the events of the weekend and grateful that the weather had been so kind.

TOM MOORE AND TWO FRIENDS by Jerry Nolan: a talk given at Bowood House in September 2007

In a letter written home to his mother in Dublin during May 1800, shortly after his arrival in London to study law, a twenty-one-year-old Tom Moore was beside himself with excitement: 'I have got the Prince's name, and his permission that I should dedicate my Anacreon to him. Hurra! hurra!'

Three months later, Moore was again writing euphorically to his mother: 'I was yesterday introduced to his Royal Highness George, Prince of Wales. He is beyond doubt a man of very fascinating manners. While I was presented to him, he said he was very happy to know a man of my abilities; and when I thanked him for the honour he did me in permitting the dedication of Anacreon, he stopped me and said, the honour was entirely his, in being allowed to put his name to a work of such merit. He then said that he hoped when he returned to town in the winter, we should have many opportunities of enjoying each other's society; that he was passionately fond of music, and had long heard of my talents in that way. Is not all this very fine?'



Tom Moore (1779-1852).

Not only was young Moore's encounter with the Prince of Wales fine and remarkable but it marked an Irish debutante moment in the meteoric rise to the English Royal Court of one who started from the humble social beginnings of a Catholic grocer's son in 12 Aungier Street, Dublin. As a child, Moore grew up during a very optimistic period in



Henry Grattan (1746-1821).

Dublin when there was economic and cultural revival under the leadership of Henry Grattan and the parliament in Dublin exercised a measure of independence from London. Grattan convinced his fellow-Protestants that the choice before them was to be either an English colony or an Irish nation. The spirit of Grattan's parliament espoused many of the causes associated with the Whigs in London, especially on the issue of Catholic Emancipation. Consequently Grattan's supporters supported the cause of a new form of Irish nationalism which, over two decades, began to transform Dublin into a prosperous and fast-growing city - something of the spirit of which can today be glimpsed materially in the classical elegance of the city's surviving 18th-century grand public buildings, squares, and terraces.

In this Dublin, where wealth and power belonged to the Protestant aristocracy, Moore grew up as a Catholic in a shop that happened to be only a few minutes' walk from

Trinity College which was the centre of Protestant intellectual life. Moore's parents quickly realized just how talented musically, intellectually and theatrically their very small, curly-headed son was. Moore would never grow above five feet. This diminutive appearance, allied to his sunny temperament and zest for life, was to help him become a spectacular success at school. Moore's grammar school education took place in a school off Grafton Street run by Samuel Whyte, an accomplished poet who had briefly taught Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and a drama teacher who put on theatrical performances in which young Moore excelled as both actor and singer. The schoolboy Moore was soon performing at the private theatre in the grand Dublin house of a Lady Borrowes. In 1794 Moore enrolled as a student in Trinity College, where he studied Latin, Greek, French and Italian. He made friends easily among his contemporaries, many of whom saw him as a carefree performer always eager to please. One friend, Craddock, the son of the librarian of the historic Marsh's Library, arranged for Tommy to use the library out of hours. It was there Moore worked on his translations of the odes of Anacreon, which he found in a facsimile of a Vatican manuscript dating back to the sixteenth century. Another Trinity College friendship was with republican-leaning Robert Emmet who would later be arrested in Dublin as the leader of a rebellion against the Union of Britain and Ireland. Moore participated in the many student debates about the need to preserve Grattan's parliament in Dublin and was questioned during the Lord Chancellor's enquiry into sedition among the students. However, Moore's overriding interest at Trinity College was in his own translations of Anacreon and in his own musical performances which were encouraged by another friend, Edward Hudson. With great enthusiasm both Moore and Hudson performed the traditional Irish airs that had just been collected, arranged and published by the young Edward Bunting in 1796. When Moore graduated with a B.A. in 1799, he valued most of all his translations from the Greek in which he managed to interest the Provost of Trinity College, Dr Kearney, who complimented Moore on his versions of Anacreon's celebration of love, wine and song which would be 'liked very much by the young'. The Provost went on to write a strongly worded letter of introduction to important patrons in London, to which city Moore was determined to go, nominally in search of legal training at the Middle Temple, but actually determined to interest the most important people in English society in his talents for poetry and song. Moore boarded the boat for Holyhead, at the same time that Grattan's Dublin parliament was being systematically destroyed by London and replaced by the disastrous Act of Union between the countries.

Queueing in London

The Dublin pattern of people queueing up to help young Moore was repeated in London. The Secretary of the Irish Ordnance Board, Joe Atkinson, an aspiring Irish dramatist, was so impressed by the singer and poet that he introduced Moore to the Earl of Moira, under whom Atkinson had served in the American War of Independence. Moira had large estates in Northern Ireland and a great country house at Donington Hall, near Derby. Moore became a frequent guest at Donington Hall. Moira organized after-dinner musical recitals at Donington at which Moore performed and made friends with John

Stevenson, the Director of Music at St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, with whom he would, a little later, begin to produce the long stream of Irish Melodies for which Moore first became world-famous. Moira took the lead in organizing the imposing list of subscribers for the publication by Stockdale's (Piccadilly) of the Anacreon *Odes*. The list of subscribers included the Prince of Wales, two dukes, sixteen earls, nine viscounts, and a long tail of lesser nobility. It was Moira who persuaded the Prince of Wales to accept the Dedication at a time when the Prince was still *persona grata* to the Whigs. The idealized Grecian past of the *Odes* appealed more than the recently published *Lyrical Ballads* and ran into nine editions within the year. There was gossip in London drawing-rooms that an Irish laureateship might well be created for 'Anacreon' Moore who continued to pour out verse. Moira decided that his protégé should have a government post which would enable the poet to see something of the world and to make some money as the Moores in Dublin were not a wealthy family. The post offered by the Admiralty was to be the registrar for the British naval court in Bermuda which, with the prospect of new horizons, was quickly accepted. Shortly after



Francis Rawdon-Hastings, 2nd Earl of Moira (1754-1826).

Moore's departure from Portsmouth on the frigate 'Phaeton' in 1803, his university friend Emmet was executed for treason in Dublin.

Moore used the Bermuda adventure as the opportunity to write much occasional verse during the slow progress of his voyage to the Azores. There was a period in Norfolk, Virginia before Moore eventually docked at St George's Harbour, Bermuda. He devoted some time transacting the business of his post, but he was soon caught up in many social gatherings where he often sang and played to great applause. Bored with his job, Moore maintained his prolific output of verse and, having appointed a deputy to do much of his work, sailed for Norfolk, Virginia via New York in April 1804. Moore proceeded to visit Richmond and went on to visit Washington. In Philadelphia, he looked up his old friend Hudson; in New York he arranged his passage back to England. He proved popular among the Oneida Indians when in Saratoga and at Niagara Falls he descended by the New Ladder to view the 'awful sublimities' from the bottom of the gorge. Then Moore, via the St Lawrence River, visited Montreal, Quebec and Halifax whence he began the long voyage back to England. During this he worked to improve the poems about his travels, the first drafts of which had already been dispatched to many friends in English high society. Moore would publish these poems in 1806 as *Epistles, Odes and Other Poems* and dedicate the volume to his patron Francis, Earl of Moira.

For most of 1807 Moore worked on the project of the *Irish Melodies* at Donington Hall. In 1809 Moore met a fifteen-year-old actress Bessy Dyke while he was playing Peeping



George IV (1762-1830) was one week old when made Prince of Wales. This Sir Thomas Lawrence portrait was painted during the nine-year period starting in 1811, when he served as Prince Regent, probably 1814.

Tom to Bessy's Lady Godiva at a private theatre in Kilkenny, Ireland. In 1810 and ever struggling financially, Moore discreetly married the penniless actress in a London Protestant church. The marriage was to last for forty-two years. Also in that year, the Prince of Wales, still Moore's unfallen idol, became Regent. At first Whig hopes were raised, especially on the important issue of Catholic Emancipation, and Lord Moira's hopes of becoming Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland mounted. By now, Moore had become a frequent guest of Lord Holland at Holland House. Suddenly the Prince of Wales, in an infamous letter to the Duke of York, came out in favour of the Tories. This correspondence Moore parodied, writing 128 rhyming lines for private circulation among the Holland House circle, who acclaimed this a very witty indictment of all the Regent's inconsistencies, personal and political. In 1812, Moore and his family moved to a cottage in Kegworth, a village on the River Soar six miles from Donington Park, in order to have easier access to Lord Moira's library as he began work on his ambitious, long Oriental poem *Lalla Rookh*.

Moore needed more

When Moira was appointed in 1813 to be Commander-in-Chief in India and Governor of Bengal, Moore considered travelling to India as Moira's secretary. But Moira did not share the Whig distrust of the Prince Regent and began to distance himself from his former protégé. His gift to Moore of fifteen bottles of wine before departure for India was not sufficient to rescue the friendship. Soon Moore was writing a stream of biting satires for the *Morning Chronicle* around the same time that Moore, Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt were joining up to what became known as the 'light cavalry' of the Whig assault on the Prince Regent.

Now a popular figure in the Holland Park circle, Moore seems to have become friendly with a tall man about his own age - Lord Lansdowne, who had been briefly Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary in Lord Grenville's government of all the talents in 1806-7. Lansdowne was very much opposed to the Tories' oppressive and tyrannical approach to government; a great champion of Catholic Emancipation; a campaigner for justice in Ireland where his family held estates in County Kerry and an enthusiastic

patron of the arts, literature and education. It was during 1817, which saw the enormously successful publication of Moore’s long-awaited masterwork *Lalla Rookh*, that Lansdowne mentioned to Moore he was looking for a suitable dwelling for him near



The 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne (1780-1863) from the Illustrated London News (1863)

Bowood. Moore wrote in high spirits to his mother: ‘Lord Lansdowne last night at Lady Besborough’s said, he should feel delighted if I would fix my residence near his house in the country. Could anything be more pleasant or flattering than this?’ The advantages to Moore of such a move were readily apparent. He would have ready access to Lansdowne’s fine library and the opportunity of enjoying the society of Lord and Lady Lansdowne and their many guests. The arrangement was that Moore rented Sloperton Cottage from the Revd William Goddard, a thatched house only three miles from Bowood. The Moore family, himself, Betsy, Hannah the maid and his three-year-old daughter Anastasia, moved into the cottage in November 1817. This was to be Moore’s permanent residence until his death in 1852, and his widow’s until her death in 1865. From his arrival Moore was a frequent guest at the fashionable lunches and dinners held at

Bowood, where some of the most intellectual, socially elite, and politically involved figures of the age gathered for good food, sparkling conversation and songs which Moore often provided. He used the Bowood library as a place for research and writing, and when Moore needed to stay overnight, he slept in a pleasant, rectangular room set aside on the ground floor, which had a small single bed with a canopy. Lansdowne was occasionally invited in verse to join the Moores for dinner in their cottage:

If Lansdowne will but deign to share
 My humble feast, tho’ rude the fare,
 Yet seasoned by the salt he brings
 From Attica’s saliniest springs,
 ’Twill turn to dainties – and the bowl,
 When brightened by his beams of soul,
 Like Baucis’ cup, when touched by Jove
 Will sparkle, fit for Gods above.

Lansdowne proved an ever-helpful friend to Moore at times of crisis. In early 1817 the poet was summoned by the Admiralty to be told that his deputy Goodrich in Bermuda had absconded with the proceeds of a ship and a cargo, and that the Admiralty would be holding Moore responsible. On the advice of his friends, Moore fled to Paris until the affair was ended when Lansdowne arranged a court settlement with the angry American creditors. His exile lasted until the end of 1821, although he returned to England in disguise at least once. At this time Moore was busy writing his long poem *The Loves of the Angels*.

Grate tragedy in Albemarle Street

Another crisis occurred following Byron's death in May 1823. Byron's memoirs had been given to Moore who had in turn passed them to the publisher John Murray as a guarantee against a loan of 2,000 guineas. With Byron dead, his family now wanted to buy them back. Outmanoeuvred both by Murray and John Cam Hobhouse, who wanted the memoirs destroyed for the sake of the Byron family, Moore was horrified to witness the burning of the memoirs in Murray's house in Albemarle Street, London. Not only was Moore upset that Byron's gift to him had been destroyed, he was doubly hurt that the widely circulated but misguided opinion was that he himself had been to blame for the destruction. Lansdowne advised Moore during this very difficult period.

A far happier time for both of them was their joint visit to Ireland during 1823 when they visited the Fitzmaurice estates in County Kerry, near where Moore's father had been born: Moore was inspired to write his satire of English misrule in Ireland in his novel *Memoirs of Captain Rock*. He was ever grateful for Lansdowne's generosity. In a letter he writes: 'My dear Lord Lansdowne, There is no end to my thanking you – but if the charm of obligations is their sitting easy upon one (like a well-made ascot) you certainly have the art of fitting the shape of the mind so as not to let them pinch anywhere.'

In his early sixties, Longmans published Moore's *Collected Works* in ten volumes and, after thirty years of friendship, Moore requested that Lansdowne accept the dedication. Characteristically, he apologized for giving such short notice: 'I myself think that a Dedicatee can by no means be thought responsible for the progeny of the Dedicator throughout ten whole volumes – but I thought it right to lay the case before you, and am only sorry that my delay in doing so should make the matter now so inconveniently pressing.' Needless to say, Lansdowne did not mind in the least being inconvenienced by his friend, and expressed thanks for the great favour!

The political diarist Charles Greville gave a graphic account of a visit to Bowood in December 1840, which showed how attractive the atmosphere was in that hospitable country house. Greville had just been at a party held at the Duke of Bedford's Woburn Abbey where he had found only 'idle, ignorant, ordinary people'. In Bowood, Greville encountered Moore, Samuel Rogers, Thomas Macaulay, Lord John Russell and Fanny Kemble. Moore was singing some of his *Irish Melodies*, Fanny reading from plays, Macaulay endlessly talking with Russell, Rogers seeming to be overawed by Macaulay's eloquence in argument. In her own memoirs,



Fanny Kemble, actress and author (1809-93).

Fanny Kemble included recollections of Bowood, describing Lord Lansdowne as 'a man of the finest taste and civilisation'. She reported that the clever, witty and brilliant conversation of Moore and Rogers sometimes gave her a brain-ache, that Macaulay on the hearth-rug always used his full, sonorous voice to upstage adversaries in argument. Kemble approved of Sydney Smith's humorous and good-humoured rages, which were 'always very funny'.

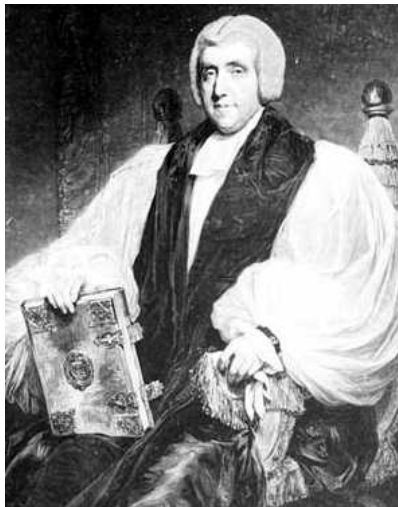
When Sydney met Tom

Sydney Smith probably first met Moore at Holland House. His earliest recorded observation to Moore occurred in 1819 when dining together at Paternoster Row: 'My cousin Longman always licks his lips when your name is mentioned' – a reference to the publisher's record sales of Moore's romance *Lalla Rookh*, which was a great international success.

Smith's most dramatic involvement with Moore occurred in December 1825 when he published a review of Moore's *Memoirs of Captain Rock* in the *Edinburgh Review*. In this Sydney referred to England's record in Ireland as 'steady baseness, uniform brutality, and unrelenting oppression'. Reading this particular review, the seventh Earl of Carlisle, residing at Castle Howard, was deeply disturbed by Sydney's opinion that the civil disabilities of Irish Catholics would never be removed till they were removed under the pressure of fear. As a former Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, Carlisle viewed this as nothing less than 'sedition', which should be prosecuted by the Attorney-General. He conveyed his opinion to the Archbishop of York, Edward Venables-Vernon-Harcourt, who immediately summoned Smith to the palace at Bishopthorpe. In private, Sydney took the greatest exception to this attempt to silence his independence and to suppress the general truth of the matter. When Moore sat for his portrait by Gilbert Stuart Newton in 1826, Moore noted that when Sydney came to view the portrait in progress, he

exclaimed: ‘Couldn’t you contrive to throw into his face somewhat of a stronger expression of hostility to the Church Establishment?’

In 1831 Sydney remarked good-humouredly to Moore: ‘By the beard of the prelate of Canterbury, by the cassock of the prelate of York, by the breakfasts of Samuel Rogers, I swear I would rather hear you sing than any other person, male or female. For what is your singing but beautiful poetry floating in fine music, and guided by exquisite feeling?’ When in London, Moore was on the guest list to Sydney’s breakfasts at 56 Green Street. An 1842 invitation reads as follows: ‘I have a breakfast of philosophers tomorrow at ten punctually: muffins and metaphysics, crumpets and contradiction. Will you come?’ Needless to say, Moore loved to talk and talk at such breakfasts.



*Edward Venables-Vernon-Harcourt
(1757-1847) and Archbishop of York
for forty years from 1807.*

By 1842, Moore’s memory was beginning to decline. He visited Sydney at Combe Florey in the summer of 1843 and, once he had returned to Sloperton, he received a letter from his host:

‘Dear Moore, the following articles have been found in your room and forwarded by the Great Western – a right hand glove, an odd stocking, a sheet of music paper – a missal – several letters, apparently from ladies – an Elegy on Phelim O’Neil, a bottle of eau de Cologne. What a careless mortal you are. God bless you - ’ Moore had not yet lost the knack of responding in verse, as these five lines from a twenty-line response show:

Recollections unnumbered for sunny Combe-florey;
Its cradle of hills, where it slumbers in glory;
Its Sydney himself, and the countless bright things
Which his tongue or his pen from the deep-shining springs
Of wisdom and wit ever-flowingly springs.

When Sydney died two years later, Moore’s friends immediately suggested that he, as the brilliant biographer of the Irish dramatist, Richard Brinsley Sheridan; of his friend Lord Byron, and of the 1798 rebel Lord Edward Fitzgerald, was the best man to write Sydney’s biography. (This was just after Moore had completed his four-volume history of Ireland.) Unfortunately Moore’s state of mind was deteriorating: his absent-mindedness increased, with forgotten engagements, mistaken identities and frequent misunderstandings. He became more and more depressed at the thought of his five children who had all died. In 1845 he gave up writing letters, and keeping his journal in 1846. By 1848 – at the age of sixty-nine – Moore was suffering from senile dementia and was nursed in Sloperton Cottage for another four years by Bessy. She would insist her husband not be buried in Ireland but near to Bowood where they had lived happily

for so long. The final tribute, in the form of a tall Celtic cross in dark Irish granite, was erected above the grave years later. On this were carved in Celtic lettering the opening lines of Moore's farewell to the *Irish Melodies*:

Dear Harp of my country! In darkness I found thee,
 The cold chains of silence had hung o'er thee long,
 When proudly, my own island I unbound thee,
 And gave all thy chords to light, freedom and song.

One of Moore's most perceptive biographers, the American Howard Mumford Jones, visited Bowood and Bromham during the early 1930s and concluded his 1937 biography with these words: 'The quiet of the Wiltshire countryside lies all around. The little valley stands as it did when the hearse and



Sloperton Cottage. Undated engraving from the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.

one carriage of mourners came to the graveyard; stately Bowood rises in dignity amid its ancient trees. To the grave of the Catholic buried in a Protestant churchyard, of the Irishman at rest in Wiltshire, of the genius once thought to be immortal and now no longer read, almost no one comes.'

Betjeman at Bromham

One Englishman who did visit the grave in 1954 and wrote about Moore was John Betjeman whose seven-stanza poem was entitled 'Ireland's Own or the Burial of Thomas Moore'. The two opening stanzas of the poem are as follows:

In the churchyard at Bromham the yews intertwine
 O'er a smooth granite cross of Celtic design,
 Looking quite out of place in surroundings like these
 In the corner of Wilts 'twixt the chalk and the cheese.
 I can but account you neglected and poor,
 Dear bard of my boyhood, mellifluous Moore,
 That far from the land which of all you loved best
 In a village in England your bones should have rest.

As for myself, I visited Bowood and nearby Bromham for the first time in the summer of

2006. I was researching into why it was that Moore, Ireland's greatest 19th-century poet, had effectively been discarded. About the same time I discovered that Moore is still being travestied in the English press – just as in the old days of the vicious Tory attacks on him. In the *Spectator* review of a recent, generally sympathetic book *Ireland's Minstrel* by Linda Kelly, about the Irishman who composed the *Melodies*, the reviewer pronounced Moore a simpering versifier, a peddler of Oriental Tales, an Irish Tourist Board sentimentalist, a self-proclaimed Irish patriot too much at ease in English Society. Towards the end of this tirade, obviously provoked not by the book itself but by the very thought of Moore, the reviewer, David Crane, paused to ask himself 'Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?' - before unexpectedly confessing to a degree of puzzlement: 'Moore's total eclipse seems less of a mystery than his strange dominance over the age of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Hazlitt, Jane Austen, Peacock, Sydney Smith and Leigh Hunt.'



The Celtic Cross remembering Tom Moore, from a June 2007 photo on www.findagrave.com.

There are various ways of approaching this 'Moore mystery'. Unfortunately one of the least tried ways is to study the substantial scholarly research at the heart of Moore's exploration of relations between Western and Eastern cultures. Another way forward, obviously a much more immediately attractive one, is to view Moore through the eyes of his best friend Lansdowne and close friend Sydney. Both men may well have been captivated by Moore's personal and social charms, but they would also have grasped the admirable strength of Moore's self-exiled version of Romantic Irishry, which became such a vibrant feature of creative turmoil in the Regency Age.

- *Jerry Nolan is a London-based freelance writer. Primarily concerned with the reputations of those Irish writers who have been marginalized in standard accounts of the Irish Literary Revival, he has also written about William Beckford. For more information see www.jerrynolanwriter.com*

MY VIEW OF SYDNEY SMITH, by Peter Payan: from a talk at a London lunch, January 2008

Whenever we meet we regale ourselves with examples of Sydney's wit and wisdom because we love and admire him. When asked what I personally find most attractive about him I choose his determination to make the best of things; not to grumble, curse his fate or be obviously resentful of unfairness 'when every effort seems fruitless, and integrity and talent appear to count for nothing in the eyes of those who have the power to help'.

Looking back upon Sydney's life it is all too easy to conclude that a man of such qualities could not fail, that his success was inevitable. Sydney himself did not take this roseate view. 'I start up at two o'clock in the morning, after my first sleep, in an agony of terror, and feel all the weight of life upon my soul. It is impossible that I can bring up such a family of children, my sons and daughters will be beggars; I shall live to see those whom I love exposed to the scorn and contumely of the world!' His beloved Kate knew this tendency well; she wrote of his 'moments of dreadful despondence', which 'sunk his commonly buoyant spirits to a most afflicting degree'.

When was Sydney's ability to make the best of things called upon in the highest degree? Perhaps first on leaving Oxford, when he had to choose a profession. He was strongly inclined to follow brother Bobus into the law, where he would, without doubt, have succeeded. 'His silvery voice, his dignified appearance, his unfailing self-command, his masculine common sense, his occasional eloquence, his ever-present humour, formed a union of strength and beauty which would under any circumstances have been appreciated by an English jury.'



*Robert Percy 'Bobus' Smith
(1770-1845)*

How staggering, then, must have been his disappointment when old Mr Smith denied him the opportunity, saying: 'You may be a college tutor or a parson.' Sydney agreed, without enthusiasm, to enter the Church and 'gallantly addressed himself, to the best of his ability, to his noble and self-denying work', evincing 'greater patience and cheerfulness ... than many a man displays who has deliberately chosen the sacred vocation'. Had he any idea of the opposition, the spite and envy he would arouse? Perhaps he had, sensing a challenge worth taking up.

'Sydney's ecclesiastical superiors looked coldly upon him. They were dazzled by his brilliant common sense, and alarmed at the freedom with which he applied it even to such venerable personages as themselves. He was regarded, in the prim and decorous circles of the day, as a dangerous man, and a dangerous man he was... so far as all clerical, political or social pretence and injustice were concerned. But straightforward people, high and low, from earls and marquesses to farm labourers and village children, opened their hearts to welcome a man who placed the precious things of his creed in circulation, not only in good words, but likewise in the more tangible coin of golden deeds.'

'It would be difficult to imagine a more uncongenial lot for a young man of Sydney's spirit, culture and tastes than the curate's lowly round of labour in a remote Wiltshire village.' He spent between two and three years in Netheravon 'but if occasionally disheartened by his new surroundings, he never allowed the sense of loneliness or lack of sympathy to stand in the way of the manful discharge of his duties'. In one letter he wrote: 'Nothing can equal the profound, the immeasurable, the awful dullness of this place, in the which I lie, dead and buried, in the hope of a joyful resurrection in the year

1796.’

He did not merely survive in Netheravon. The Squire, Mr Hicks Beach, on receiving Sydney’s written comments on the really poor of the village, invited him to his house in Fairford, Gloucestershire. They agreed that schools should be established in the neighbourhood, starting with a Sunday school and paid teacher. In the hot summer weather, Sydney suggested, tuition should take place in the cool of the church.

From this beginning an ‘Industrial School’ followed, ‘and into it the girls and young women of the poorest families in the district were gathered, and taught by a competent person the homely mysteries of knitting, sewing and darning ... Toiling among the poor of a Wiltshire village with cheerful good will it was not long ere he convinced all about him that he had in no mere official sense their interests at heart.’ He would do whatever he could to improve their lot.

The next instance of his making the best, the very best, this time of a heaven-sent opportunity, occurred in Edinburgh in charge of the Hicks Beach boy, Michael. In what he was to describe as ‘the peculiar felicity of his early life’, he fell in with a crowd of



Sydney began the process of formal education for the children of Netheravon, which had led, at the time of this photo c.1905, to the creation of a full-time church school. From the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.

clever and ambitious young men, friends all, brimming with political fervour. He could have simply supervised his young pupil and taken his salary. Instead he suggested the idea of the *Edinburgh Review*, became its first editor and to start with wrote most of it.

At length, and with heavy hearts at leaving their friends, the family set out for London, Catharine knowing that professional advancement could never occur in Edinburgh. Sydney was starting again, hoping to become financially independent through preaching. He was eventually much in demand, but it was an uncertain existence, and though an ever-welcome guest at Holland House he and Kate never could or would conceal their poverty.

A change in the political wind led to his being offered the living of Foston. Finding themselves unable to afford the architect, he told Kate to 'take your rule and compass, and so arrange these by a scale so that we can do without this great man'. They thus embarked on building their own home. Sydney acquired his materials, supervised the construction, and in the spring of 1814 moved with his family into the first house they had ever owned.

There had been no Rector in Foston since the reign of Charles II. For some years Sydney entertained hope of exchanging this living for one nearer London, but once reconciled to his situation characteristically set about to improve the lives of everyone about him. During the whole time he was at Foston, Sydney was, in his own words, 'village parson, village doctor, village comforter, village magistrate, and Edinburgh Reviewer'. He was immensely popular with his parishioners and never lost a servant except from marriage or death. Stories of this time were still circulating when Reid published his *Life and Times* in 1884.

His fifteen years in Foston showed Sydney's finest qualities as a minister and as a man, and in his remaining years some of the worldly rewards he so richly deserved came to him. His unworthy opponents in the Church are long forgotten, and his moral courage in the face of adversity is an example to us all.

[Quotations, when unidentified, from Stuart J Reid's *Life and Times of Sydney Smith* (1884)]

- Dr Peter Payan is a committee member of both our Association and the Byron Society. He is actively engaged in the local museum in Twickenham where he lives.

THE PARSON DOCTOR by Geoffrey Kremer: a York lunch talk in November 2007

In the permitted few minutes, I can give you the mere bones and gravy of Sydney's medical career, keeping the meat to myself. The broad outlines are, after all, in the standard biographies.

When he was at Oxford from 1779, he attended out of general interest – as did many

students – the anatomy lectures of Christopher Pegge, an undistinguished but fashionable physician, who at one point advised Sydney to be a doctor. But, as we know, Sydney had already been destined by his father for the Church.

As it happened, Oxford and Cambridge were at that time among the worst places in Britain for medical studies. Oxford and Cambridge degrees were (through Charles II's Clarendon Code) restricted to members of the Church of England, and were still a prerequisite for membership of the Royal College of Physicians. The two set books at the Oxford school were the Ancient Greek Hippocrates and Galen, physician to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. The mass of 18th-century medical students, and certainly the finest ones, went abroad or to Scotland, where the student intake included Dissenters (including Sydney's future son-in-law Henry Holland) and came from a wider social range. At the time, most practitioners had taken no degree at their university, or had learnt their craft as apprentices - and this is to ignore the vast numbers of charlatans.

While tutoring in Edinburgh from 1801 and editing the *Edinburgh Review*, Sydney paid to attend the medical lectures of Professor Gregory at the Medical School, where they still have the registration signature of a Sydney Smith of Oxford. Saba reports that he also attended clinical demonstrations or ward rounds, where signatures were not required of those not intending to graduate.



Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), the founder of clinical teaching, was also a specialist in the dangers of vomiting and excessive eating.

The great Boerhaave in Leiden had led the world in his teaching students in the vernacular, by means of bedside instruction as well as lectures, and irrespective of religious persuasion. And it was from his pupils that the pillars of the Edinburgh school were drawn.

Medicine had by and large emerged from the Middle Ages without becoming much more effective. Influenced by Isaac Newton (d. 1727) – a distant relative of Sydney's - experimental natural philosophy offered a persuasive scientific model. Major experiments had been conducted on the processes of digestion and respiration, and also on blood pressure (here we encounter another cleric, the Revd Stephen Hales). Morgagni in Italy had dissected corpses to find out what were the crude physical causes of many diseases.

Semi-official drug lists (*Pharmacopoeia*) had only recently abandoned many of the semi-magical biological preparations such as spiders' webs, crabs' eyes, human fat, and moss from human skulls.

Methods to prevent smallpox and scurvy were already well established. Leeches and bleeding were still widely used, but a few traditional local remedies had been accepted into the *Pharmacopoeia*. There was digitalis (foxglove leaf); colchicum from the autumn crocus root was becoming accepted; while willow bark preparations (in effect, aspirin)

were denied acceptance despite reasonable clinical evidence.

The old superstitions were, as often happens, replaced by new ones. The new science of chemistry beckoned, and chemical concoctions – such as mercurous chloride, euphoniouly known as calomel – were adopted without any proven benefit provided they seemed to produce major temporary effects on the body without immediately killing it.

According to Saba, Sydney studied medicine in order to care, medically as well as physically, for his future flock. This implies that he foresaw his future life as rural and not metropolitan. Religion had always been connected with medicine, and Papal practice continued after the Reformation with medical licensing by bishops. The last Episcopal licence in Britain was issued in 1775; and many of those practising medicine, licensed and unlicensed, were in fact clergy, both established and dissenting.

Sydney's practice can be deduced from his treatment of the family, 'who', Saba wrote, 'rarely summoned any other medical man to their aid'.

Practical courage was shown when he attended his brother – despite Catharine's objections – when Bobus was sick of a contagious fever, said to be typhus. (I confess to being uncertain whether this was typhus in the old sense of prostrating fever, or true typhus fever, of which the mortality at that time was about seven per cent.) Sydney treated his parishioners during a dangerous epidemic with the same consideration as he had his brother, tirelessly taking food and medicines into their mean houses. No doubt food was the more useful of the two. When the village men refused out of fear to carry infected bodies to the grave, Sydney shamed them into action 'by threatening to be one of the bearers himself'.

Mrs Marcet warms our hearts in describing how Sydney spent half an hour every morning with a young workman dying of tuberculosis. 'Part of that time', he said, 'was spent in preparing him for another world, and part in endeavouring to render his last days as cheerful and happy as he could.'

When Saba was six months old she had an attack of croup for which the eminent Dr Hamilton prescribed hourly treatments of calomel, the poison mercurous chloride. The local doctor, however, said he would give no more after eleven hours, because of the possibility of killing the child. Sydney took on the responsibility of continuing the medication. As Saba wrote, 'The child was saved. She regarded this episode as an example of Sydney's moral courage. With the advantage of 150 years of hindsight, we know that calomel is an ineffective preparation, and croup a condition which usually remits spontaneously. If I gave such a preparation to my dog nowadays, I'd be committed to prison.'

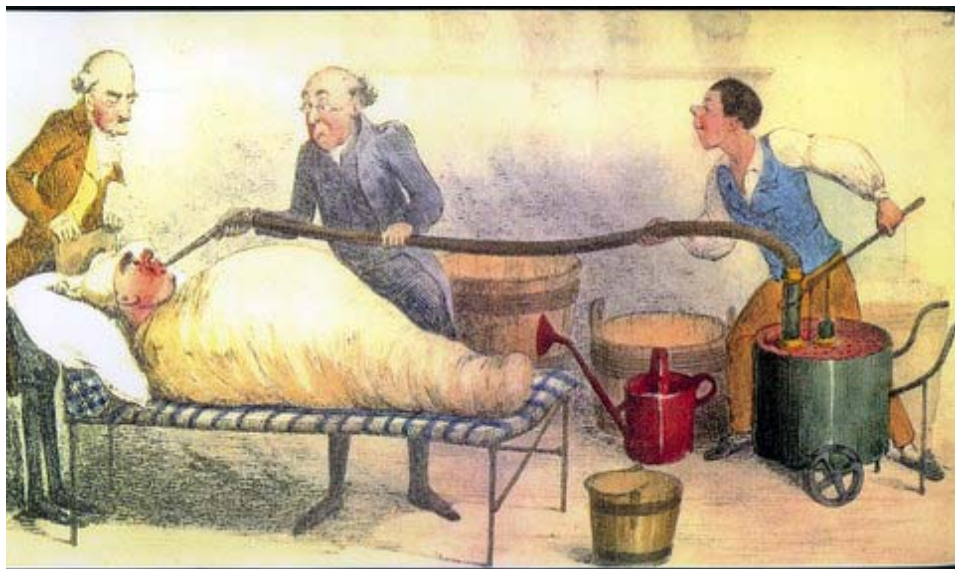
Another example of inappropriate medication of the time is the episode in which he interrupted his breakfast to christen a newborn babe believed to be dying. 'Why', said Sydney, 'I first gave it a dose of castor oil, and then I christened it; so now the poor child is ready for either world.' Poor child indeed.

He celebrated his successful use of the stomach pump on a footman who had accidentally swallowed poison. It must have been satisfying to use this elaborate piece of equipment at least once. By courtesy of the Manchester Medical School museum I have here pictures of a stomach pump such as Sydney would have used, and also a caricaturist's idea of a stomach-pumping procedure.

Perhaps Sydney's best health measure was his part in the allotment movement that had gathered strength in the course of the 18th century. We must not think of him as an innovator but almost always as a progressive. I think we would all, at that time, have been happy with him as a country doctor, even if he rarely (very rarely) cured. Doctors' reputations have always benefited, then as now, from *vis medicatrix naturae*: the healing powers of nature.



- Dr Geoffrey Kremer is a retired G.P. who was in practice in Bracknell, Berkshire. He studied Medicine in London after taking a degree in English at Oxford and shares with Sydney a passion for politics and good humour.



WILLIAM WILBERFORCE AND THE REVD SYDNEY SMITH

by Charlie Charters: a York lunch talk in August 2007

What would the Revd Sydney Smith have had to say of the fuss being made over his near-contemporary William Wilberforce and the role he played in the abolition of slavery more than two hundred years ago? Today Wilberforce seems an Untouchable, residing somewhere in the pantheon of greatness between Mother Teresa, Abraham Lincoln and Nelson Mandela. Last year's movie on his life was variously subtitled *God's Politician* and *Hero for Humanity*.

Probably Sydney would find this hoop-la amusing. He would dash off a note or two to prick a few reputations. Perhaps noting how ridiculous it was that Wilberforce, five-foot five on a good day and so short-sighted he once almost killed Pitt when the two of them were shooting partridge, was being played by the muscular and perfectly sighted British heart-throb Ioan Gruffud.

Of course, on the issue of slavery there was no difference between them. Sydney called slavery the 'greatest of all human abominations'. Similarly both would both go against the grain of conventional wisdom by championing Catholic Emancipation. But how the two of them came to their respective positions of prominence tells a bigger story of the times in which they lived. Members of this Association will know of Sydney's modest family background. Wealth, sufficient to put him out of reach of poverty, came only late in life.



William Wilberforce (1759-1833). This portrait by Hickel is believed to date from around 1794 when he was 35 and already a 14-year veteran of the Commons.

By contrast, Wilberforce, who was twelve years older than Sydney, was born in 1759 into a Hull family that had grown rich through the Baltic trade. As a young man, the early deaths of his father and uncle made him their sole heir, with the huge income of £8,000 a year. This wealth allowed Wilberforce to be a political insider for the whole of his career: winning the Hull seat in 1780 (while still studying at Cambridge) cost Wilberforce £9,000. Whatever Sydney's dreams may have been, he was to remain the consummate outsider for the rest of his life.

At Cambridge and as a 21-year-old MP Wilberforce happily gambled and partied with his contemporaries in an age notable for its dissipation. But this would change once he converted to an evangelical style of Christianity that saw him, like Sydney, grow frustrated with the existing Church and all that it stood for. Even though both would regularly tangle with the Anglican hierarchy, they did so from opposite directions. No matter what they did agree on, Wilberforce and Sydney would never share similar visions on the nature of Faith.

In 1797, just as Sydney was beginning his attachment to Netheravon, Wilberforce articulated his particular Christian vision. Stern and unbending:

‘We must be deeply conscious of our guilt and misery, heartily repenting of our sins, and firmly resolving to forsake them ... [and] thus penitently flying for refuge to the hope set before us ... we must found altogether on the merits of our crucified Redeemer our hopes of escape from their deserved punishment, and of deliverance from their enslaving power.’

This is such a completely different vision of Christianity from that ministered by Sydney, who once wrote:

‘I endeavour to give more cheerful ideas of religion: to teach that God is not a jealous, childish, merciless tyrant; that He is best served by a regular tenor of good actions - not by bad singing, ill-composed prayers, and eternal apprehensions.’

Wilberforce’s first legislative initiative came in the summer of 1786, the same year as his evangelical conversion and at least twelve months before he discovered the cause of slavery for which he became famous. (Sydney was still at Winchester.) He introduced a strangely gruesome Bill entitled *For Regulating the Disposal after Execution of the Bodies of Criminals Executed for Certain Offences, and for Changing the Sentence pronounced upon Female Convicts in certain cases of High and Petty Treason.*

The first part was designed to assist anatomical study. As the law stood, only the bodies of executed murderers could be used by surgeons for dissection and research and the relatively small number of these had resulted in a black market developing in corpses. The Bill proposed to extend the legitimate availability of the bodies to include those executed for rape, arson, burglary and robbery, in addition to murder. The second objective of the Bill was to bring about a humanization of one form of capital punishment: normally a woman convicted of treason was sentenced to be burnt. Wilberforce’s proposal was that this sentence be modified to the less prolonged death of hanging.



Wilberforce’s memorial statue in Westminster Abbey where he is remembered next to Pitt, and a long way from Kensal Green.

Perhaps a strange case for the great Wilberforce to kick off with. And one that no doubt would have amused Sydney had he been moving in literary and political circles at this time.

In the end the Bill failed. Its significance lies more in the supposition that it was probably while preparing this legislation that Wilberforce was first alerted to the large number of executions being carried out. Perhaps this prompted a thought-process: if these executions were proof of some national moral malaise, they could only be ended by championing what he was later to call the Reformation of Manners.

In effect Wilberforce was to back his way into fighting slavery, his most celebrated cause, because of this abiding concern about moral decay. This found its voice in an organization he created in 1787 called the Proclamation Society. This same society, and many of its supporters, would in time become the organizational, religious and political locus of the anti-slavery movement in Britain. This was the so-called Clapham Sect, as jokingly described by Sydney because of the affluence of where they chose to live (by turn-of-the-19th-century London standards) and the unblinking earnestness of their worship.

With the support of George III, the Proclamation Society's initial campaign urged all persons of honour or authority both to set a good example themselves, and to help reform 'persons of dissolute and debauched lives'.

For instance, the playing of dice, cards or any other game on the Lord's Day was prohibited and all the King's subjects were to attend the worship of God. Those guilty of drinking to excess, of blasphemy, of swearing, cursing, lewdness, and of profaning the Lord's Day, were to be sought out and prosecuted. Judges and sheriffs were to suppress all public gaming, disorderly houses, unlicensed places of entertainment, and the publishers and vendors of loose and licentious prints and books were to be punished. By 1802 the name of the Proclamation Society was changed to the Society for the Suppression of Vice.

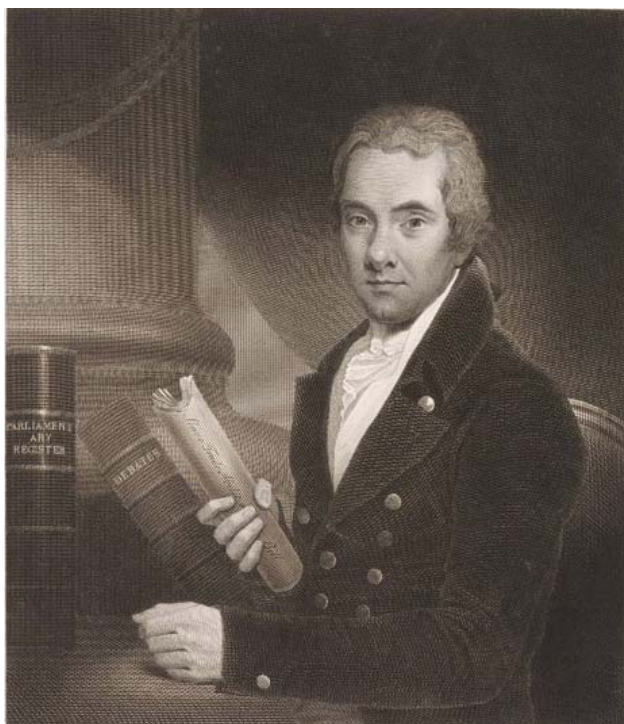
Sydney was now in Edinburgh, but he was fully aware from his time in Netheravon of the wretched condition of the rural poor. Typically he suggested that Wilberforce's high-minded outfit ought to be called the 'Society for the Suppression of Vice among persons with less than £500 a year'.

His barb hit the mark. Sydney's thoughts chimed with those of William Cobbett who called Wilberforce 'the prince of hypocrites, who praised the benefits of poverty, from a comfortable distance'. (To Cobbett's point, Wilberforce had written that Christianity 'renders the inequalities of the social scale less galling to the lower orders, whom also she instructs in their turn to be diligent, humble, patient: reminding them that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences'.) As Sydney correctly predicted, the rich proved impervious to Wilberforce's challenge. Their status made it safe for them to sin with impunity, while the vices of the poor were rigorously attacked.

Of course, these were heated times. The French Revolution and its impact were playing out in real time and there was a widespread horror of mob-justice and mob-rule. It was in this tense and fearful climate that the moral aims of Wilberforce's Society and the political ones of successive Tory administrations became easily conflated.

With Wilberforce's support, the government imposed censorship, launching 42 prosecutions of publishers, editors and writers between 1809 and 1812. It became a criminal offence to write that the Prince of Wales was fat (he was), or to report that Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh had ordered the flogging of Irish peasants (he had). He would consent to a government ban on the meetings of the Literary Society of Manchester and the Academical Society of Oxford. Even those of a mineralogical society on the grounds that the study of mineralogy could lead to atheism.

Wilberforce championed reform but in very specific causes. By contrast Sydney's campaigns were broad-based and often saw him attacking the very fabric of society. Could one imagine Wilberforce, who had effectively bought his way into the Commons and would remain ensconced there for almost 50 years, ever writing of the parliamentary system as Sydney did?



This 1807 etching shows Wilberforce holding the Bill announcing the abolition of the slave trade.

‘Of all the ingenious instruments of despotism, I most commend a popular assembly where the majority are paid and hired, and a few bold and able men, by their brave speeches, make the people believe they are free.’

Sydney's sharp words and unerring sense of right and wrong were both a strength and obvious weakness. For this betrayed another crucial difference between these two men. In terms of effecting change Wilberforce had one supreme advantage. Ready access to the levers of power. Thus it was in 1807, when the immediate horrors and distractions of the French Revolution had passed, that the legislative passage of the anti-slavery bill was assured.

And with this, of course, Wilberforce's reputation was sealed. Amongst the many living testimonies to his work is the existence of Wilberforce University located in Wilberforce, Ohio. The university is the first one in America owned by African-American people, and is historically a black college. Various churches within the Anglican Communion commemorate Wilberforce in their liturgical calendars including the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

One final question. What if: given what Wilberforce was able to achieve in his long years of parliamentary campaigning, what if, for a second, we imagine that Wilberforce's wealth and political opportunity were instead bestowed on Sydney ... then how much greater a legacy would we be celebrating today?

- Charlie Charters was born in London, brought up in Fiji and now lives only two miles from Sydney Smith's Foston Church. For the last three years, Charlie has been attempting – unsuccessfully – to get a publisher for his racy, airport-style thrillers.

SYDNEY SMITH: SEEN AND HEARD

Moved to Words

The Editor was very grateful to receive a poem in honour of Sydney written by member Mary Holtby, whose late husband Robert, once the Dean of Chichester, was the catalyst behind the formation of the Association. We reproduce this below, with thanks, for your enjoyment:

APOTHEOSIS OF SYDNEY SMITH

The trumpet shall sound – and Sydney will rise
To feast with the souls of the witty and wise;
There's laughter in Heaven and cries for a toast
To London's adornment and Edinburgh's boast.
But those whom St Peter is charged to admit
Have not earned their entrance by wisdom and wit.
The curate who lived by the gospel he preached
Had the letterless taught and the trouserless breeched;
The classical scholar not only made hay
With the rules, but encouraged mere females to play;
The champion of freedom, whatever the cause,
Fought social injustice and punitive laws.
So his place is assured – but the angels rejoice
That virtue is blessed with so vivid a voice:
His language so lively, his heart so profound,
For sociable Sydney the trumpet shall sound.

Singing Easter Praises

In the Easter weekend edition of the *Financial Times*, columnist Matthew Engel wrote candidly about his hero, the Revd Sydney Smith. The article – entitled *The Irreverent Reverend* – touched on many of the reasons Sydney remains so relevant to us today, even while his reputation remains tragically neglected. We are delighted to reproduce the article here:

“It being Easter, let's forget the troubles of the world and give ourselves a treat. Well, give me a treat, anyway. I want to tell you about my hero.

He was a clergyman, and not a very successful one either: he never became a bishop or a dean or an archdeacon. He was not even particularly pious, at least not in the conventional sense. Ask what he achieved, and it would be hard to explain it simply.

However, in his day (1771-1845) he was one of the best-known figures in England. He was famous, above all, because he was exceptionally funny. What makes him heroic is that underpinning his wit was a love of humanity, liberty and common sense. All the accounts emphasize his personal kindness and lack of pretension, in person as well as in print. His unmemorable name was Rev. Sydney Smith.

In a sense, Smith bridged the generational gap between Dr Johnson and Charles Dickens. He was right more often than Johnson and pithier than Dickens. But he didn't have a Boswell to note down his conversational fireworks, and he didn't have Dickens's work ethic. His *bons mots* generally came at the dinner table, in review articles, in letters or in sermons.

Much of his preaching, though, came in obscure country pulpits, because the establishment refused him the promotion his fame and intellect merited. The rich and powerful adored his company, but distrusted him: if they had given him a bishopric, he might have told jokes in the cathedral or the House of Lords; worse still, he might have uttered inconvenient truths. As he said himself: ‘There is an association in men's minds between dullness and wisdom.’

And he loathed hypocrisy, in religion as in anything else. For him, Christianity, as one biographer put it, was simply ‘a practical code for behaviour’. As a young curate in a poor Wiltshire village, he began to translate that into action by opening a school to teach young women needlecraft.

Then the squire hired him to tutor his son, and accompany him to Edinburgh. And there Sydney helped found the *Edinburgh Review* and began to make his literary reputation.

Over the years, he inveighed against the restrictions on Catholics and the employment of chimney-boys. He campaigned for electoral reform, legal aid for defendants, enlightened treatment of the mentally ill, and feminism: ‘Half the talent in the universe runs to waste,’ he said. Smith did help to stop the practice of keeping the mentally ill chained up, though women's rights took a little longer.

Ridding mankind of its taste for war was even less fashionable. He said there was no such thing as a wise war, though he added - in a classic Sydneyism: 'We must have a small massacre of magistrates; nothing else will do.'

For a while, Smith managed to delight the London dinner-party circuit while officially vicar of Foston-le-Clay in Yorkshire. But the arrival of a new, sterner archbishop forced him to move to his remote and - by his epicurean standards - deprived parish ('12 miles from a lemon,' as he put it), where the practical Christian in him finally got the better of the social butterfly.

He planted orchards and set aside allotments for the benefit of the villagers, and also functioned as an amateur doctor who was more effective than the charlatans and sawbones of his day. For them, his contempt was bottomless: 'The Sixth Commandment is suspended by one medical diploma.' He also became a magistrate himself, and thoroughly irritated his colleagues by his consistent leniency to poachers.

Eventually, he became rector of the Somerset village of Combe Florey (later the home of another great wit, Evelyn Waugh), which was less of a hardship posting, and finally was made a canon of St Paul's, which gave him a smidgin of the clerical glory he had been denied. London society adored him, but his last years were clouded by the death of his son Douglas, and by the dawn of a new era in which clergymen were to be far more unctuous and less fun.

Then, if anyone ever does, he went to heaven, a place he defined, in perhaps his most famous remark, as 'eating pâté de foie gras to the sound of trumpets'. When the musicians rested, I hope God had the graciousness to laugh at Sydney's definition of piety.

'What is real piety? What is true attachment to the Church? How are these fine feelings best evinced? The answer is plain: by sending strawberries to a clergyman. Many thanks.'

The Editor notes: Matthew Engel is appropriately Sydney-like in the breadth of his enthusiasms. While writing for the *Guardian* newspaper for nearly twenty-five years he reported on wars, elections and the fall of the Berlin Wall as well as countless major sporting events, ranging from three Olympic Games to the world tiddlywinks championships. He is editor of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* and relishes the fact he writes the *FT's* least fiscally aware column.

Once again, we are governed by wind

The *Financial Times* column seemed particularly apposite. So much so we wrote a few words of thanks to the editor. This letter was published a week later:

"Sir, The Reverend Sydney Smith would delight in the knowledge that he was honoured in the Easter weekend pages of the *Financial Times*.

Matthew Engel is right that Sydney did not have a Boswell to fan the flames of

popularity or carve him a permanent legacy. Nor (thankfully) would it have been in his nature to try. Which explains why his reputation has been tragically neglected - dismissed by some as a humorist and others as a lightweight epicurean.

The Sydney Smith Association has been created to set the Reverend's life in a more meaningful context and to bring to the 21st century some of the bite and verve and clarity with which he attacked the issues of his day and with which we still contend.

More than anything else he was a resolute champion of common sense. A virtue which then, as now, would appear to be in short supply. This set him on a life-long path that offered nothing but the prospect of innumerable collisions.

Writing more than 200 years ago, Sydney's words on the precariousness of our position ring as true today in an age of global financial distress as they did when the danger was Napoleon and Irish discontent:

‘The British empire at this moment is in the state of a peach-blossom - if the wind blows gently from one quarter, it survives; if furiously from the other, it perishes. . . . Such is the miserable and precarious state of an anemocracy, of a people who put their trust in hurricanes and are governed by wind.’”

Talking Common Sense

We were pleased to have an immediate and direct reply to our letter from Mr RJ Wade of Oxfordshire.

“Having been a fan of Sydney Smith, I was interested to read your *Financial Times* letter. The application of common sense to politics and economics is so vital – and it nowadays seems to be out-of-fashion.

For example:

The Falklands War would not have happened if both governments had realized the likely reaction of each other to what would be about to happen.

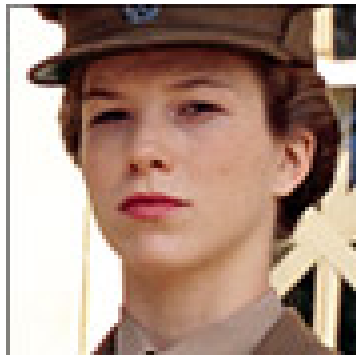
We would not be stuck in Iraq, as now, if the invading governments had foreseen the probable outcomes of their actions.

The Northern Rock debacle would not have happened if common sense had foreseen the likely consequences of stupid City gambling. I could go on.

All I can do is try to tell my children and grandchildren the importance of common sense. One happy result, incidentally, is that a daughter has been selected as a parliamentary candidate for York, where I hope she can instil common sense into the political scene!”

The Editor notes: According to the *York Press*, Susan Wade Weeks, selected by the Conservatives to contest the York Central seat at the next election, is related to Sir William Wade, Lieutenant in the Tower Of London at the time of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot.

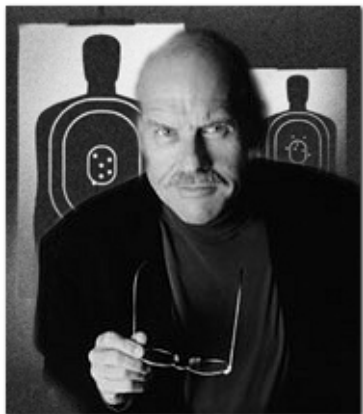
Ms Wade Weeks, who is also mother of *Foyle's War* actress Honeysuckle Weeks (pictured), faces an uphill task. There is a projected majority of more than ten thousand in favour of sitting Labour MP Hugh Bayley in this newly redrawn constituency.



Read 'em and Choke

Sydney makes an unlikely appearance in one of the first-ever stories written by celebrated American crime writer Lawrence Sanders (pictured below), named a Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America in 1993. This honour brackets Sanders in a lifetime achievement category alongside such greats as Agatha Christie, Mickey Spillane, Dick Francis and Ed McBain.

Armed with a Beretta and his trusty pipe, private detective Ed London is heading off in his Chevy convertible to a serious confrontation with a well-to-do hoodlum about a dead blonde. But venturing out of New York, to a town called Avalon in up-market and rural Suffolk County, leaves him feeling distinctly vulnerable ...



'The towns were smaller there, the buildings lower and further apart. I had the top down and the fresh air was choking me. My lungs weren't used to it. I drove through the countryside and tried to pretend that it wasn't really there. I remembered a line out of Sydney Smith to the effect that the country is a sort of healthy grave. Sydney Smith was right.'

Coward's Kiss (1961) is included in a 2005 Orion anthology simply titled *Lawrence Sanders Five Great Novels*.

THE SYDNEY SMITH LUNCHESES

London Four lunches are held each year, always on a Wednesday, at the charming Boisdale restaurant in Eccleston Street, off the Buckingham Palace Road entrance to Victoria station. The food and décor are, like the proprietor, Scottish, reflecting the days when Sydney as a young man was a founder of the *Edinburgh Review*.

Our Summer lunch will be held on 23 July when Deirdre Bryan-Brown will present her 'My Sydney' talk, while the Autumn lunch will take place on 22 October.

Members and guests are asked to be present by 12.30pm (the bar opens at noon) and choose either a three-course lunch with soft drinks and coffee only for £27.50; a three-

course lunch with wine and coffee for £35.50 or a two-course lunch with wine and coffee for £31.50.

If you would like to sample a London lunch, please telephone Mary Beaumont at (020) 8318 3388 or Email: mary@maryb.demon.co.uk no later than three weeks before the event. Cheques should be made out to The Sydney Smith Association.

York Once again, we thank Jeremy and Vivian Cassel and their staff at the Grange Hotel and once again we are grateful to our interesting and entertaining speakers including Ronnie Duncan, Charlie Charters on 'Sydney and William Wilberforce' and 'The Parson Doctor' by Dr Geoffrey Kremer (both appearing in this issue). In February, Philip Chapman spoke on 'Sydney and Toleration', which, due to limitations of space, will be fully reported in *Newsletter 2009*.

Our remaining 2008 lunches are scheduled for Wednesdays on 21 May, 27 August and 12 November. Please apply to Mary Rose Blacker, Huttons Ambo Hall, York YO60 7HW. Telephone (01653) 696056.

South-West The 2008 annual lunch will take place at 12.15pm (for 12.30) on Wednesday 7 May at the Spreadeagle Hotel at Stourhead. This will be followed by a Sydney-like perambulation around the lake.

To give you a flavour of this always-convivial occasion, last year's lunch at Chardstock included salmon and roast beef, followed by a pudding devised for the occasion and named 'Scotch Mist'. A roundtable discussion on Education was introduced by a quotation from Sydney's *Works*: 'If there are millions of Englishmen who cannot spell their own names, or read a sign-post which bids them turn to the right or left, is it any answer to this deplorable ignorance to say, there is an Act of Parliament for public instruction?'

If you would like to join this year's lunch at Stourhead, please apply now to Sydnie Bones. Telephone (01297) 35525, or by Email: sydie.bones@btopenworld.com