

**THE
SYDNEY SMITH
ASSOCIATION**



NEWSLETTER

Issue 18

October 2013



*Samuel Rogers at his breakfast table. By Charles Mottram.
Sydney at the table, holding a cup.*

A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Although I am the great great great great great grandson of Sydney Smith, I am sorry to say that this fact was not impressed on me when I was young. I was vaguely informed that one of my ancestors was a ‘noted wit’, and that is about all. I had no idea what a wit was, and certainly could not imagine Sydney’s importance and influence. I had heard of his quip about Luttrell’s idea of heaven being ‘eating pâté de foie to the sound of trumpets’ but never investigated his entry in a Dictionary of Quotations, so I had no idea that this was one of a great number. I inherited from my grandfather three volumes of Sydney’s Collected Works, black-bound and dusty, with discoloured paper and fine print, and for many years they dreamed away on my shelves, in company with a few old or well-bound volumes I had picked up here and there. Encouraged by my uncle Lord Knutsford, who lent me biographies and the family tree, I picked up Sydney’s works and started to dip in. One of the first articles I came across was his rant against the teaching of Latin verse in public schools. Sydney estimated the huge number of verses created by the typical schoolboy and measured them against the obvious lack of practical results. ‘Here is a man after my own heart,’ I said to myself. 150 years after his salvo I had been subjected to the same regime. As a schoolboy of fourteen during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when we all thought we were going to vanish in a nuclear flash, I was engaged in translating Tennyson into Latin verse. I had never had a single lesson on the two political and economic systems then playing chicken with each other. Further reading strengthened my admiration: Sydney on female education, on the inadvisability of trying to convert the Hindus, on chimney sweeps, on widening democracy seemed to have anticipated my own opinions with great perspicacity. How did he know I would have such liberal opinions? Or to put it the other way round, could there indeed be a liberal gene? I have been observing my children more closely for evidence of this gene. One seems to have inherited Sydney’s talent for making helpful suggestions and asking awkward questions aimed at gradual improvements, and I expect to be given some witty advice about the future direction of the Association. She suggested reaching out to succeeding generations, so I call on all our members to cease using human chimney sweeps, but to try to convert at least one person under the age of sixty to the value and relevance of Sydney. And by the way, when asked about him, please do not use the expression ‘noted wit’. You will not be understood.

Jeremy Cunningham

FROM THE ACTING-EDITOR

The Newsletter has been produced for the past seven years by Charlie Charters, assisted by Frank Collieson, previously sole editor. Much of the work was done with the hospitality of Peter and Sylvie Diggle at Thornton-le-Clay. With unexpected events making it impossible for Charlie to do the work and Frank Collieson no longer available. Randolph Vigne has produced the 2013 Newsletter in their place as acting-editor. It is hoped that a successor to Charlie Charters will be found to edit the Newsletter in 2014 and succeeding years. Will volunteers please email the Secretary, sydie.bones@btinternet.com?

Randolph Vigne

AGM WEEKEND, 2014

We last gathered in London in 2005, for the AGM and a visit to the refurbished grave of Sydney and his family at Kensal Green. There are interesting places connected with Sydney in London we have never visited and we propose to hold the 2014 AGM there on Saturday 20 September. Details will be announced in the 2014 Newsletter.

AGM WEEKEND IN BRISTOL, 21 and 22 September 2013

In 1828 Sydney Smith left Foston for Bristol, where he spent three years as a Canon of the Cathedral. We will spend just three half-days in the city, catching a glimpse of the architectural environment familiar to fashionable Regency society.

Although our weekend will be centred on the Cathedral, it begins with a short diversion to the Bristol Docks for a tour of the SS *Great Britain*, launched in 1843 as Sydney Smith neared the end of his life, but surely an engineering achievement he would have applauded. This steamship, designed by Brunel, heralded a new era of marine technology and in the 1850s was transporting 700 passengers to destinations as far away as Australia. Its glory was short-lived, however: in the 1880s she was down-graded to a cargo vessel, and was eventually sold to the Falkland Islands where she was abandoned and left to rust. A bold rescue plan, dreamt up in 1970, resulted in the ship being towed back to Bristol into the Great Western Dock where she had been built, and where restoration was completed. A guided tour has been booked for 10.30 a.m. on the Saturday morning, after which we will be provided with a soup and sandwich lunch in a private room on board. On the same site are the Brunel Institute and the MacGregor Library, the latter displaying passengers' letters and diaries in addition to Brunel's original drawings.

First stop in the afternoon will be the Lord Mayor's Chapel, a short stroll from the opposite bank (a ferry runs between docks), notable not only for its architecture and

history, but also because it is the only church in the country owned by a municipal corporation. Founded in 1220 as a hospital almonry, it suffered under the dissolution of the monasteries and in 1541 was bought by the Corporation of Bristol. Since 1722 it has been the official place of worship for the city officials. The Revd John Simpson, a retired Canon of the Cathedral, will be our guide for a short visit. Across the road and up the hill is the Georgian House Museum, a classic Regency townhouse, restored and decorated to its original condition. Built in 1790 as a gentleman's residence for John Pinney, a wealthy plantation owner and sugar merchant, it would surely have been familiar to Sydney Smith and his contemporaries. A word or two of warning: there are three flights of stairs, no lift and no loos!

The Georgian House closes at 4 p.m., allowing plenty of time for a rest before we gather again for the AGM at 6.30 p.m. in the Bristol Marriott Royal Hotel, followed by dinner at 7.30 p.m. We are most fortunate to welcome as our guest speaker Canon John Rogan, historian and author, whose erstwhile official seat in Bristol Cathedral was the Precentor's stall once occupied by Sydney Smith. Well-known in the West Country as a lecturer at Bristol University and at adult education centres such as Dillington House, he has a special interest in the social and economic changes affecting events in the early 19th century, and will be talking about the political background to Sydney Smith's controversial days in Bristol.

Sunday morning is dedicated to the Cathedral. The day starts at 10 a.m. with Morning Eucharist, followed by an introduction to the history and music of the Cathedral from our two by now familiar Canons, John Rogan and John Simpson, both of whom have sat in Sydney Smith's stall in recent years. An official guide is booked to lead us on a tour of the building at 12.15 p.m. after which we will take a ten-minute walk, downhill, to a restaurant in the new dockside development, the Bordeaux Quay, where we are booked into a private room for lunch at 1.15 p.m. And then, sadly, farewell for another year.

Membership Secretary

After many years of charming and quiet efficiency, Dorothy Williams is handing over the duties of membership to Mark Wade. With support and computer input from Ifan, Dorothy has coped with the somewhat idiosyncratic record-keeping of the Association with unflinching good humour. Thank you, Dorothy, for your patience and diligence. In future, enquiries about membership should be sent to:-
Mark Wade, 46 Shipton Road, York YO30 5RF, telephone 01904 644933, email marksheila.wade1@talktalk.net.

MINUTES, EDINBURGH AGM, 22 September 2012

The Chairman, Randolph Vigne, welcomed members to the Annual General Meeting held in the National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh. Twenty-five members were present.

Apologies had been received from Lord Knutsford, Frank Collieson, Colin Law, Celia Moreton-Prichard, Terry Price, Colin Southall, Revd Norman Taylor and Mary Younger.

Minutes of the 2011 AGM, printed in the 2012 Newsletter, were accepted as a true record of the proceedings.

Points arising: none.

The Treasurer confirmed that the final accounts for the year 2011 were submitted to the Charity Commission as required. Finances for the Association continue to be healthy and stable.

Interim figures for the current year, which runs to the end of 2012, show receipts from subscriptions, gift aid and donations of £2105 compared with £2286 for the whole of the previous year. After deduction of outstanding expenses, projected end of year balance is in the region of £5,500.

The committee recommended the following donations: £1000 to the church at Foston; £1000 to the church at Combe Florey; and £1000 to the Library of St Paul's Cathedral. Expenditure was also agreed, if needed, for continuing improvement of the website.

The Treasurer's Report and proposals were adopted by a unanimous show of hands, and accepted *nem con*. The Treasurer was thanked for his Report.

The Secretary reported that membership remains steady at 240, but continues to include a number who do not pay their subscription regularly (N.B. £15 single, £20 double). The Membership Secretary mentioned one new member, James Runcie, whose recent novel features a clerical sleuth, Sidney Chambers, reportedly inspired by Sydney Smith.

Newsletter: the Chairman expressed the Association's appreciation of Charlie Charters' excellent Newsletter, and Frank Collieson's meticulous proof-reading.

Trustees – Existing trustees have agreed to stand for re-election: Treasurer, Secretary, Alan Bell, Sylvie Diggle, Graham Parry, Peter Payan and Norman Taylor. Chairman Randolph Vigne resigned the Chair as expected; Jeremy Cunningham was proposed by Randolph Vigne and seconded by Peter Payan to take on the Chairmanship. Randolph Vigne agreed to remain as a Trustee. All were elected *nem con*. The retiring Chairman expressed the gratitude of the members to those involved in planning the Edinburgh programme, Alan Bell, Sylvie Diggle, Adam Fergusson, and to Mark Wade for its organisation and execution.

Jeremy Cunningham took over the Chair and led the members in appreciation of Randolph's years of dedication and service to the Association. Introducing himself briefly, Jeremy remarked that he had always known that there was someone called

Sydney Smith in his ancestry. When he dipped into some of his books, he recognized a kindred spirit, appreciating Sydney Smith's enlightened wisdom and progressive opinions. He felt that Sydney Smith would approve of the use of modern media (website, twitter) to spread the word about the Association.

AGM in 2013. It is hoped that the AGM will be held in Bristol; place and date will be confirmed as soon as possible.

Before closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked the Treasurer, Secretary, Membership Secretary and those members who organize lunches and other events for their work throughout the year.

AGM WEEKEND, 2012, EDINBURGH by the Secretary, Sydnie Bones

The City of Edinburgh, birthplace of the Edinburgh Review and home to Sydney Smith from 1798 – 1803, sparkled in the autumn sunshine for the gathering of the Association's members on 22 and 23 September. The first visit on what promised to be an action-packed Saturday was to the recently refurbished National Portrait Gallery of Scotland where we were met by our charming and knowledgeable guides. Our intention was to concentrate on portraits of Sydney Smith's contemporaries, especially of those connected with the *Edinburgh Review*. Although there was no painting of Sydney Smith, we were shown superb portraits of Dugald Stewart and Francis Horner by Sir Henry Raeburn, Francis Jeffrey by Colvin Smith, not forgetting another fine Raeburn of Sir Walter Scott. Among the collection of contemporary marble busts was one of Francis Jeffrey sporting the 'shaggy eyebrows' remarked on by Sydney Smith, and one of Henry Brougham whose friendship with Smith was known to blow hot and cold. Paintings of Edinburgh in the 1820s showed the city surrounded by mills, open spaces and women drying linen. The one feature remarked on in Sydney Smith's letters, our guide told us, that could not be illustrated was the foul stench of the city.

The Gallery not only provided us with a small room in which to hold the AGM but also an excellent lunch served in a separate annexe to the restaurant where we could chat and linger before leaving for the visit to Newhailes, a Scottish National Trust property on the outskirts of the city. How many times do Sydney Smith members emerge from the shadows to open doors or shed light on places of interest? On this occasion, it was Adam Fergusson, whose family were former owners of Newhailes; he took over the microphone in the coach and told us of the family history behind the house and its eventual endowment in 1997 to the National Trust of Scotland, and his memories of family life within its walls. The Trust has maintained the house in the same state as it was when handed over, adopting a philosophy of conservation rather than restoration. Grand rooms and intimate corners offered an authentic glimpse of interior design and household organisation as it was a century ago; and

although there were areas which could have benefited from a coat of paint, the rubber-stamp of National Trust immaculate uniformity was happily missing. The magnificent library was the jewel of the building, sadly lacking the books for which it was created.

With hardly time to draw breath, let alone enjoy afternoon tea, members congregated at the premises of the Royal Overseas League in Princes Street for the annual dinner. As usual, this event was a highlight of the weekend with delicious food served in elegant surroundings and, in true Sydney Smith style, company that excels in conversation and good humour. We were indeed fortunate that Professor Will Christie was visiting Edinburgh from his home in Sydney, Australia, and that he had agreed to come and talk to us about his researches into the *Edinburgh Review*. His light touch and amusing asides did not disguise the depth of his knowledge and insight into the political and social context in which the Review was founded. There was plenty of new information for most of us, lively questions at the end, and a handout of quotations from Sydney Smith's letters about the Review; for example: *'It is a sort of magazine of liberal sentiments, which I hope will be read by the rising generation and infuse into them a proper contempt for their parents' stupid and unphilosophical prejudices.'* Professor Christie's talk is published in full in this Newsletter.

If Sunday mornings are conventionally more subdued than the bustle of Saturdays, then this one was exceptional. The programme for the morning did not prepare us for the treats in store. It read: 9.30am Choral Matins at St John's Church, Princes Street. St John's Episcopalian Church, built in 1818, took over the duties of the out-grown Charlotte Chapel in nearby Rose Street where Sydney Smith was assistant preacher during his stay in Edinburgh. The choir had prepared a special service of choral music in recognition of the Association's visit, music such as would have been familiar to Sydney Smith: Boyce (1711-79), Fussell (1728-1804) and Alford (1810-71), with a final trumpet voluntary by Boyce. A short piece about Sydney Smith and the music was included in the Order of Service; we were made welcome by the clergy, choir and congregation and invited



Charlotte Chapel, Rose Street, where Sydney was assistant preacher during his Edinburgh stay.

to return in an hour to hear a talk prepared by one of the choristers. With hearts uplifted, the group headed towards Charlotte Square to visit the Georgian House, another National Trust of Scotland property. This was a gentleman's residence similar to those Sydney Smith would have visited, beautifully restored and authentically furnished.

At noon we reassembled in St John's Church. Eleanor Harris, a chorister, is preparing a PhD thesis on preachers at the Charlotte Chapel, including Sydney Smith, and had initially contacted the Association through the website. When she heard of our forthcoming visit to Edinburgh, she offered to prepare a short talk which could be slotted in after the Morning Service and before lunch. She had chosen to describe two contrasting English clergymen, Sydney Smith and Daniel Sandford, entitling her talk 'Fervour and Frivolity, A Tale of Two English Gentlemen in Edinburgh'. She explained that although their personalities differed enormously, Sandford spiritual and shy, Smith quick-witted and confident, in their five-year collaboration from 1798 to 1803 they both exerted significant influence on the city. Her talk was scholarly and fascinating, and an unexpected bonus. The full text is available via the Association's website.

There was much to mull over while we strolled in the sunshine along Princes Street and eventually into George Street where Sunday lunch was waiting for us in Brown's Brasserie. Crowded round a large table, with an overspill at the edges, it was clear that the weekend had been a huge success. One of the joys for me was to meet a younger generation brought along by long-standing members – a daughter from London and a granddaughter from the USA, studying in Edinburgh. I hope they took away with them a memory of the joy of companionship which is the hallmark of these annual celebrations.

LUNCHESES

LONDON

London lunches are held on Wednesdays at the Boisdale Restaurant, Eccleston Street, off Buckingham Palace Road, SW1. The remaining date for 2013 is 23 October. Provisional dates for Boisdale lunches in 2014 are: 15 January, 17 April, 16 July, 15 October.

A 5-10 minute talk is followed by a brief discussion. Speakers are invited or from members. Robin Price, on 'Hesketh Pearson and *The Smith of Smiths*', will be our forthcoming October speaker,

Prices range from £23 for one or two courses with unlimited soft drinks to £34.50 for three courses with soft drinks/wine and coffee. Members are advised to meet between midday and 12.30pm and place their orders in advance. Bills are settled individually with the restaurant on the day.

If you would like to attend, please contact Celia Moreton-Prichard, email celiamop@celiamop.plus.com, telephone 0208 852 9636, giving at least a week's notice if possible.

Celia Moreton-Pritchard

YORK

We lunch thrice yearly at Middlethorpe Hall, Bishopsthorpe Road, York YO23 29B, telephone 01904 641241. The 17th-century Middlethorpe is a National Trust property, one of the few that offers hotel and catering facilities. The remaining 2013 lunch will take place on Wednesday 20 November.

We aim to foregather at 12.30 pm when a glass of wine will be served in the drawing room. Lunch is at 1 pm in the Pineapple Room. The cost, including the first glass of wine and two courses is £22.50. Pudding, cheese and/or coffee can be ordered on the day for an extra charge. Those wishing to attend please telephone the Hon. Mrs Blacker, 01653 696056, at least three weeks before the luncheon date.

Mary Rose Blacker

SOUTH-WEST

Members living in the west country meet annually for lunch. This year we gathered on 13 March in the Mount Somerset Hotel, near Taunton, for our annual celebration where we enjoyed first-class cuisine and stimulating conversation. Sydie Bones had chosen Mrs Sydney as her theme for the day. This led to a general discussion about the status of women in contemporary society, and a particular commentary on Mrs Sydney's valuable pearls, noting that her jewellers were silversmiths to the royal household and boasted Paul de Lamerie among their former craftsmen. Pearls with a value that could furnish a home were no doubt part of the forfeited 'comforts and luxuries' referred to by her mother. The date of the 2014 lunch will be circulated shortly.

Sydie Bones

TERRY PRICE (1921-2013)

Terry Price, born in Gloucester on 7 January 1921, died earlier this year on his 92nd birthday. From the Crypt School, Gloucester, he won a scholarship to Queens' College, Cambridge, where he read natural sciences. War work with the Admiralty Signal Establishment took him from Haslemere to Ceylon; there he met Jean Vidal, a Wren, destined to become his wife of more than 50 years. On leaving the navy, he embarked upon a distinguished career as a nuclear physicist, at the Atomic Research Establishment, Harwell, specialising in radiation protection and reactor development. In 1960 he joined the Civil Service as a member of the Joint Intelligence Committee, climbing the professional ladder to the post of Chief Scientific Adviser. Later, he was appointed the first Director General of the newly created Uranium Institute, now known as the World Nuclear Association, finally retiring in 1987. During the 1970s and early 1980s, he also worked closely with government advisory groups, notably Sir Keith Joseph's Centre for Policy Studies.

Terry was a man of many talents, rower, skier, rally-driver, sailor and amateur pilot, but his abiding love was of music. As a schoolboy, he became an accomplished pianist and organist, accompanist to his father's operatic society and organist at the beautiful Parry church at Highnam. Subsequently, the Harwell orchestra and choir came under his baton, Jordans village enjoyed the high standard of his music programmes, and budding singers were always welcomed to stand and sing by his beloved Bluthner while he played whatever music they put in front of him. He became an active member of the Sydney Smith Association from the year that the London AGM held its dinner in his club, The Athenaeum. He met Sydie Bones at the AGM held in New College, Oxford, and they became great friends and companions, sharing a love of music and competitive conversation. We welcome Terry's son-in-law, Dr Harry Yoxall, as a member.

EDINBURGH AGM LECTURE

SYDNEY SMITH AND THE *EDINBURGH REVIEW* by William Christie, University of Sydney

'To barbique a poet or two or strangle a metaphysician'

Let me start with a moment very late in Sydney Smith's life – in 1844, about a year before he died. The occasion was the republication by Francis Jeffrey of a selection of his Contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* and the dedication says it all:

TO THE REVEREND SYDNEY SMITH, THE ORIGINAL PROJECTOR OF THE
EDINBURGH REVIEW, LONG ITS BRIGHTEST ORNAMENT, AND ALWAYS
MY TRUE AND INDULGENT FRIEND I NOW DEDICATE THIS
REPUBLICATION; FROM LOVE OF OLD RECOLLECTIONS, AND IN TOKEN
OF UNCHANGED AFFECTION AND ESTEEM.

F. JEFFREY

It is, sadly from my point of view, with the exception of a couple of letters, the only substitute we have for Francis Jeffrey's correspondence with Smith, but for a lecture on Sydney Smith and the *Edinburgh Review* it will serve its symbolic and dedicatory purpose.

The Edinburgh Review

It is common knowledge that *The Edinburgh Review or Critical Journal*, was launched forty-two years earlier in October 1802 by 'a distinct and marked set' of energetic and talented, but politically disfranchised, young Scottish Whig lawyers - Francis Jeffrey, Francis Horner, John Archibald Murray, Thomas Thomson, Henry Brougham. But as Randolph made clear recently in the *Times Literary Supplement*, it is less well known that the idea and instigation for the *Edinburgh* came from one member of this group of friends who was neither a Scot nor a lawyer: the Rev.

Sydney Smith, visiting the Scottish capital at the time as tutor to Michael Hicks Beach. 'It happened to be a tempestuous evening,' wrote Jeffrey's friend and biographer, Henry Cockburn, in 1852, 'and I have heard Jeffrey say that they had merriment at the greater storm they were about to raise.'

Cockburn wasn't there at the time, of course, and accounts differ widely as to how the Review began and who exactly was involved at the planning stage along with Smith and Jeffrey. The philosopher, Thomas Brown, and lawyers Thomson and Murray were certainly part of it, as was the Whig physician and ideologue, John Allen, though by the time planning got under way Smith had hooked Allen up with Lord and Lady Holland and they were touring France and Spain. Henry Brougham ran hot and cold and was only intermittently involved in the planning stages, though he rewrote himself back into the centre of negotiations in his *Life and Times*.

Accounts also differ as to how it was managed in these early days, before Jeffrey was installed as the editor of the third number, although it is very apparent to anyone who reads the early correspondence that survives that Jeffrey was always a consistent point of consultation. Smith was not right about being the first editor, but the two things about which we can be confident are that it was Smith's idea to found the Review in the first place, and that the storm anticipated in Cockburn's colourful account did in fact eventuate. Some clever, scathing, but well-informed and well-argued reviews - and in Smith's case, certainly, some extremely funny reviews - saw the Edinburgh erupt into the intellectual life of early nineteenth-century Britain. Before the end of its first year, the Review was in the way of becoming both a successful publishing venture and a cultural phenomenon, and indeed it probably was, as Smith himself surmised at the time, 'the first in Europe.' (SS to Francis Jeffrey, 30 November 1803)

Why? Why was it so successful? Well, part of the answer surely lies in the social and educational and political coherence of this original group of Whig intellectuals, their shared cultural literacy and shared convictions. Nor did it weaken their collective sense of purpose that for the entire period of Jeffrey's editorship - which is also the period of Smith's contributions - the Whigs were in opposition. There is nothing like being in opposition to generate a sense of collective purpose.

Another part of the answer lies in Edinburgh's geographical and intellectual distance from the larger, politically and economically dominant London, which gave to Edinburgh's Review its critical advantage or vantage point. 'This town, I am convinced,' Smith wrote, 'is preferable to all others for such an undertaking, from the abundance of literary men it contains, and from the freedom which at this distance they can exercise towards the wits of the South.' That was written in April 1803, six months after the foundation of the Review, in a famous letter to Archibald Constable in which Smith laid down the conditions that would ensure the Review's continuation and success.

As well as just instigating the Review, in other words, Smith also deserves credit for mandating the set of editorial and business practices that ensured the triumph of the enterprise. I don't have to convince the Sydney Smith Association that Smith inherited his father's business instincts. But before we look at the business of the Review in more detail, I want to introduce you to the phenomenon of periodical reviewing - and first among equals - to the *Edinburgh Review*.

The first periodical in Britain devoted exclusively to publishing reviews of books had been the *Monthly Review*, established by Ralph Griffiths in 1749. The *Monthly* was followed by the *Critical Review*, founded in 1756 and edited and managed by the Scottish novelist, Tobias Smollett - unless, of course, you include the *first Edinburgh Review*, which ran for only two numbers in 1755-56. Many more Reviews would follow, as publishers became more reliant upon reviewing, and reviewing became more central to the whole network of institutions servicing the publishing revolution of the late eighteenth century. The existence and health of periodical Reviews is contingent on the production of books, and there was plenty of that going on in the eighteenth century.

In spite of the commercial pressure, however, the centrality and influence of periodical reviewers had never been limited to the promotion of reading generally, or of specific books. From the beginning they were also engaged in the culture of ideas and of ideologies - 'philosophy' and 'politics', to use their own terms. Along with the other periodical Reviews, the *Edinburgh Review* mapped and commented on all the traditional and emerging knowledges - philosophy, literature, mathematics, medicine, physics, astronomy, geology, chemistry, history, anthropology, foreign policy, political economy, education, and comparative linguistics. It did so in argumentative ways, fuelling political and cultural wars that had become more open and divisive after the French Revolution. Any one issue of the *Edinburgh* will be found to engage critically, often provocatively, with many diverse disciplines and intellectual and political issues.

Indeed, it's been suggested that the 'Age of Romanticism' should be renamed the 'Age of Reviews' because the Reviews dominated not just what people read, but what they thought. And it was the changes to reviewing practice introduced by the *Edinburgh Review* that proved so revolutionary and enabled periodical Reviews to become such powerful forces in the early nineteenth century.

First of all, there was its selectivity. The earlier *Monthly* and *Critical* had tried to discuss or at least 'to register all the new Things in general, without exception to any', with the result that they were bound to remain in service to the book trade. The *Edinburgh*, on the other hand, was determined 'to be distinguished, rather for the selection, than for the number of its articles' and declined 'any attempt at exhibiting a complete view of modern literature'. The cause and concomitant of this change was

the *Edinburgh's* decision to appear quarterly rather than monthly. Quarterly publication allowed the big Reviews to escape the restless accumulation of notices into which the *Monthly* and the *Critical* occasionally degenerated, and to become more discriminating and exclusive, choosing to notice some books and writers but not others.

Then, under the editorship of Jeffrey, the book review gradually expanded. Beginning with twenty-nine reviews in its first number in 1802, the *Edinburgh* was publishing only nine reviews in the same number of pages by the time of the last issue under Jeffrey's editorship twenty-seven years later. What in 1802 might have occupied two or three, at most ten pages, say, was soon running to twenty or thirty or even (by the 1820s) as many as fifty or sixty pages. Macvey Napier was determined to reverse this trend when he took over in 1829, but still found himself obliged to publish reviews by Macaulay on Warren Hastings and Bacon of 96 and 104 pages respectively. We know what Sydney Smith would have had to say about that, with his constant chiding of Macaulay about his verbosity. (In his idea of heaven, remember, Jeffrey would speak more slowly and Macaulay would be silent.) Like Smith himself, I mention this parenthetically and jokingly, but you may be aware that the length of the reviews was in fact a source of some contention between Smith and his editor. Just how long, after all, should a book review go on? Well, the answer turned out to be 'about as long as a piece of string.'

One of the reasons for this progressive expansion was that, with the *Edinburgh Review*, the priorities of book reviewing changed. In many, if not most cases, the reviewer and his ideas on the topic in question took priority over the publication under review, which often became the occasion for a political and cultural essay. The Scottish lawyers and other professionals who launched the *Edinburgh Review* drew on their intellectual heritage in the Scottish Enlightenment. They drew on its inductive approach to an encyclopaedic range of ideas and disciplines; they drew on its 'conjectural' or philosophical historicism; they drew on its political economic priorities, and the result was a genre that was initiated by the *Edinburgh Review*: the review essay. This was a sustained, historical interpretation of contemporary culture designed to intervene and change its direction. History and economics were brought to bear on cultural and intellectual phenomena and events. Jeffrey meditates on the causes of the French Revolution or on changes in literary culture since the Elizabethan period; Brougham on European foreign policy or on method in the experimental and observational sciences; Smith on Methodism or the history of the English in Ireland; Horner on the gold standard; John Playfair on the effects of the French Revolution on the language of mathematics; William Hazlitt on 'The Periodical Press' itself; Thomas Carlyle on German literature or on 'The Signs of the Times'; Thomas Babington Macaulay on colonial policy and on the legacy of the seventeenth-century.

'I hope M. Foscolo will be able to give us an article before the end of July ... in reviewing the literature of Italy it would certainly be desirable that he showed so much acquaintance with that of other countries - as to give his judgment authority with their natives ... The more he mixes too of philosophy and speculation the better - the more he can connect peculiarities of taste with peculiarities in the history and governments of different nations - or trace back the operation of these great causes that are the common sources of whatever distinguishes one [nation crossed out] people from another - I conceive in short ... that Mr F. will do most justice to his own talents and principles in going as often as he can beyond the narrow boundaries of mere literature.'

Francis Jeffrey to John Allen, 15 June 1817, British Library Add MS 52181, ff. 98-9

Now Smith didn't just object to the length of the reviews, he also, famously and hilariously, resisted what he took to be Jeffrey's characteristically Scottish predilection for 'philosophy and general speculation': 'The Scotch, whatever other talents they may have', he wrote to Lady Holland in May or June 1819, 'can never condense; they always begin a few days before the flood, and come gradually down to the reign of George the third, forgetful of nothing but the shortness of human life, and the volatility of human attention'. To be fair to Smith, what instigated the comment was a fifty-two page review by Henry Brougham of one of Henry Brougham's own works! But 'Scotch philosophers', as Alan Bell says in his biography, 'like Scotch smells and Scotch itches', were 'a perpetual object of amusement for him.' (Bell, 1980:19)

However much he might have disapproved, however, it was Smith who was indirectly responsible for the reviews taking themselves so seriously and going on at such length because, thanks to him, Archibald Constable paid well: 'I have no manner of doubt,' he wrote in the famous letter to Constable of Spring 1803, 'that an able, intrepid, and independent review would be as useful to the public as it would be profitable to those who are engaged in it. If you will give £200 per annum to your editor, and ten guineas a sheet, you will soon have the best review in Europe'. Ten guineas a sheet (= 16 printed pages) was three to five times the rate offered by the eighteenth-century reviews, and five years later it was raised to fifteen guineas and, in 1812, to twenty five. As editor, moreover, Jeffrey had the freedom to boost payment.

Sydney's habitual response was more than a personal or psychological trait. It was a conviction and a value, one that recognized social or civic priorities and the limits of individual human pretension and aspiration - the lighter side of a Christian pessimism, if you like, ruefully acknowledging the world as fallen. In an audacious age like the Romantic age, Sydney Smith's sense of the limitation and ridiculousness of human life made him inclined to distrust people who took themselves too seriously and to shrink from the egotism it saw rampant and romanticized on every

side. I say Jeffrey 'of all people' should have recognized this because Jeffrey had the same attitude as Smith to the egotism and earnestness of their period, and his own reputation for what they called 'pocourantism'. Both Smith and Jeffrey hated Napoleon, for example. Jeffrey, with no taste for the 'sublime in character', preferred tyrants he could laugh at to those who frightened him - a point worth making because the one aristocratic house with which Smith was most associated when living in London was, of course, Holland House and the Hollands were notoriously Bonapartist. Like Jeffrey, Smith would have none of it: 'I want to get rid of this great disturber of human happiness,' he insisted, and, when, on the defeat of Napoleon, John Allen expressed anxiety about the future, Smith asked him, accusingly: 'How can any man stop in the midst of the stupendous joy of getting rid of Buonaparte, and prophesy the little piddling evils that will result from restoring the Bourbons?' (SS to John Allen, 10 March 1814).

Jeffrey and Smith's disagreement 'on the subject of raillery' and what should be allowed in the Review cannot be called a falling out (SS to Francis Jeffrey, 17 March 1822). Only nine days after that trenchant self-defence, Smith acknowledged receipt of a 'kind wise and gentlemanlike letter' from his friend (SS to Francis Jeffrey, 16 August 1819). But it was more than that. The truth is that for the term of their adult lives, Smith and Jeffrey retained an extraordinary affection and regard for each other, one that never seriously diminished. The reasons Smith gives Jeffrey for his continuing to review are entirely characteristic: '1st. the love of you; 2nd. the habit of reviewing; 3rd. the love of money - to which I may add a fourth, the love of punishing fraud or folly.' (SS to Francis Jeffrey, 18 November 1807). Anyone reading through the quite extensive collection of letters Smith wrote to Jeffrey must remain utterly convinced of all those loves.

Like the rest of their crew, Smith and Jeffrey were both instinctive liberals and, as in the case of Napoleon, agreed on just about every major issue of the day: they agreed on religious toleration and the emancipation of the Catholics, on freedom of speech and economic freedom, on education, secondary and tertiary, and on the *Edinburgh's* major issue, parliamentary reform, where at around the same time the two of them came to a realization of the need to seek a compromise with the radicals to avert industrial and political disaster.

And they agreed that something needed to be said and done about all these things. Smith might have been inclined on occasion to think of his involvement in the *Edinburgh* as little more than 'a Game of Fives or billiards', but both men took great pride on occasion in what they felt the *Edinburgh Review* had achieved:

'It pleases me sometimes to think of the very great number of important subjects which have been discussed in so enlightened a manner in the *Edinburgh Review*. It is a sort of magazine of liberal sentiments, which I hope will be read by the rising

generation and infuse into them a proper contempt for their parents' stupid and unphilosophical prejudices.'

(SS to Francis Jeffrey, 2 April 1819)

Sydney Smith thought his friend Jeffrey too sceptical on occasion. He thought his reviews went on too long and that he tended to 'overpraise all Scotch books and writers,' so he told him so; on the other hand, it was 'almost superfluous to praise' what Jeffrey wrote, Smith confided to him in one of his letters, 'for you write everything in a superior manner.' (SS to Francis Jeffrey, 3 September 1809)

And so, of course, did Smith: consistently engaging, consistently funny, but consistently thought-provoking. And there was a host of other 'superior' minds. In Jeffrey's time, the *Edinburgh Review* numbered amongst its contributors, besides the original set of friends, Walter Scott (who would abandon it in 1809 to help set up the *Quarterly Review* in opposition); Thomas Moore; the essayists, William Hazlitt and Richard Payne Knight; political and social commentators James Mackintosh and James Mill (who would also abandon it, and later set up the *Westminster Review*); historian Henry Hallam; classicists Peter Elmsley and Charles Blomfield; orientalist Alexander Hamilton; scientists Humphry Davy, John Playfair, John Leslie, and Gregory Watt; political economists Thomas Malthus, John Ramsay McCulloch; Francis Palgrave, Thomas Carlyle, and Thomas Babington Macaulay.

This is a formidable array of independent intellects, I think you'll agree. And yet for all this intellect and all this independence, the *Edinburgh* still managed a collaborative balance and coherence that was as real as it was rhetorical. This was largely the result of the sheer quantity of the contributions by Jeffrey and Brougham – and by Smith himself, who of all the original conspirators was the most prolific after Brougham and Jeffrey. Between the three of them, they produced over 40% of its pages, reviewing with information and authority on just about every topic covered in its pages. As well as the literary articles on Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, Wordsworth, Swift, Burns, Joanna Baillie, Southey, Byron, Crabbe, Maria Edgeworth, Tommy Moore, Felicia Hemans, Jeffrey writes on the influence of the *philosophes* on the French Revolution; associationist aesthetics; geological vulcanism versus neptunism; the economic and political state of the British nation; China and Chinese penal laws; the impotence of metaphysical speculation; travels in Egypt and Africa and Russia and South America; slavery and on Quakerism - and so on, and so on - 230 review articles in about 5000 pages. '*De omni [re] scibili,*' as Smith says in his letter to Mackintosh foreshadowing the Review: 'on every knowable thing.' And Henry Brougham, even more prolific, was no less various. Brougham hammers away - Smith brilliantly described his articles as 'long and vigorous like the Penis of a Jackass' - on fluxions; foreign affairs; glaciers; optics since Newton; the slave trade and slavery; oxymuriatic acid (chlorine); Britain's trade policy; on liberty of the press; Mechanics' Institutes; English criminal law; -

indeed, on the need for reform in just about every area of political and civic endeavour. Smith writes (famously, controversially) on the Methodists; Catholic Emancipation; missionary activity in India; public schools; prisons; chimney-sweepers; the proceedings of the Society for the Suppression of Vice; the Game Laws; and Botany Bay.

I spoke earlier of the many and various reasons why the *Edinburgh Review* turned out to be such a successful enterprise, highlighting, along with Sydney Smith's editorial and business arrangements, 'the social and ideological coherence of this original group of Whig intellectuals'. This is what I meant. But it was more than that. The real reasons for the success of the *Edinburgh* and the ones I want to emphasize in closing, in the light of what we know of Sydney Smith's and Francis Jeffrey's relationship throughout the twenty-seven years of Jeffrey's editorship, are the ones that Jeffrey singled out when he dedicated his essays to Smith in 1844: 'true and indulgent' friendship, and 'unchanged affection and esteem'. For Sydney Smith, as he assured Sarah Austin, that dedication 'was the greatest Comp[limen]t I had ever received in my Life' (SS to Mrs Austin, 23 January 1844).

[Recommended reading: William Christie, *The Edinburgh Review and the Literary Culture of Romantic Britain: Mammoth and Megalonyx* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), ED.]

THE YARBURGHS OF HESLINGTON by the Hon. James Stourton, Patron. At a London lunch

Somebody once congratulated Sir Sydney Cockerell on the marvellous new wing of the Fitzwilliam Museum to which he replied “not a wing, merely a feather” and that is I'm afraid what you are going to get today. Thank you for asking me to do this very brief talk on the Yarburgh family who have the distinction of having been the subject of one of Sydney Smith's best descriptions. My mother was a Yarburgh which is my sole credential for talking to you and the fact that I have in my possession nearly all of the paintings I'm going to show you.

The Yarburghs are indissolubly associated with Heslington Hall which as many of you will know is today the senate house of the University of York. What you see is the bones of the Elizabethan house considerably tarted up in the Victorian era.



View of Heslington Today

The builder of Heslington was Thomas Eynns who made his money out of the dissolution of the monasteries which as a Catholic I can't approve of but as a businessman think it was one of the best things that ever happened. At the end of the 16th century the house passed to the Hesketh family who were already established in York.

This is Sir Thomas Hesketh who was mayor of York and looks suitably shrewd.



Sir Thomas Hesketh

And these are his sexy sisters in this rather amazing dynastic portrait which is about two York girls advertising themselves as Elizabethan “it” girls. The girl on the right’s great-granddaughter married James Yarburgh which is how Heslington came into my mother’s family.



The Hesketh Sisters



Sir Thomas Yarbrough

The Yarburghs had been for many centuries settled in Lincolnshire and South Yorkshire. They are an extraordinarily unremarkable family but fame touched them twice in the 18th century by association, firstly with Sir John Vanbrugh and secondly with Sydney Smith.

This is Sir Thomas Yarbrough who achieved a modest court position. His son was even a godson of James II. In fact the Yarburghs might have risen high at the Stuart court but perhaps a lack of ability held them back. Certainly Sir Thomas's son was regarded by his glamorous son-in-law, Sir John Vanbrugh, as a great bumpkin. Anybody who has seen restoration comedies and particularly those by Vanbrugh himself will be aware of the rich vein of comedy that the town found in the country.

How did Vanbrugh get entangled with the bumpkin Yarburghs? He was up in Yorkshire working on Castle Howard and first appears to have been courting Mrs Yarbrough. He was 54, twelve years older than her, and Lady Mary Wortley-Montague wrote to a friend "Tis credibly reported that he is endeavouring at an honourable state of matrimony and vows to lead a sinful life no more". "But you know Van's taste was always odd: his inclination to ruins has given him a fancy for Mrs Yarbrough". However after her death he turned his attention to the daughter, Henrietta Maria, whom he married when she was 26.



Sir John Vanbrugh



Portrait of Heslington

in the Assembly Rooms at York, until it should give them in marriage; and its sons to the militia, or on to the racecourse and to the cockpit”.

It was Henry Yarburgh (owner 1789-1825) and his wife Anne who caught the eye of Sydney Smith then living in Heslington pending the completion of his new vicarage at Foston. Smith wrote, “I fixed myself meantime at a small village two miles from York, in which was a fine old house of the time of Queen Elizabeth, where resided the last of the squires, with his lady, who looked as though she had walked straight out of the Ark, or had been the wife of Enoch. He was a perfect specimen of the Trullibers of old; he smoked, hunted, drank beer at his door with his grooms and dogs, and spelt over the country paper on Sundays. At first, he heard I was a Jacobin and a dangerous fellow, and turned aside as I passed: but at length, when he found the peace of the village undisturbed, harvests much as usual, Juno and Ponto uninjured, he first bowed, then called, and at last reached such a pitch of confidence that he used to bring the papers that I might explain the difficult words to him; actually discovered that I had made a joke, laughed till I thought he would have died of convulsions, and ended by inviting me to see his dogs”.



Henry and Anne Yarburgh

This is their portrait by Henry Singleton and I hope that it is either Juno or Ponto whose paws are in those of his mistress.



Drawing of Heslington

Here we see a nice view of the door where Henry Yarburgh “smoked, hunted and drank beer with his grooms and dogs”. We can see the two wings developed as stabling and outhouses.

By the end of the century the wings have become fully domestic in this rather charming painting by William Marlow and the front wall has been built up to keep out prying eyes.



Marlow Painting



Great Hall

What did the house look like inside? Here is the Great Hall which is almost identical today but missing the portraits. The two big portraits at the end are Ramsays of George III and Queen Charlotte and are today at Kinross House in Scotland. You can just see in the top right-hand corner the double portrait of the Hesketh sisters.

And these are the Hall chairs you can identify in the drawing. I still have the set of them with the Yarburgh arms.



Hall Chairs

What became of the Yarburghs? They might have remained bog squires but in 1862 Mary Elizabeth Yarburgh married Charles Bateson, 2nd Lord Deramore of Belvoir Park, Belfast. The Batesons were a rich Northern Irish protestant family but the children of the marriage decided to change the family name to de Yarburgh-Bateson and made Heslington Hall their main home. They brought in the architect Hardwick to make extensive alterations to the house which took away much of the pleasing patina of the building. However, they left the ancient topiary garden which may still be seen today. The family lived there until World War II when the Hall was taken over by the RAF. The last great family event at the house was my mother's wedding in 1952, Shortly afterwards the house and park were sold by my grandfather who was the 5th Baron Deramore for £10,000 to the Morrell Trust who donated it to become the University of York. With considerable optimism my grandfather requested that one of the colleges be called Yarburgh. As probably the least academic family that ever lived it is not surprising that this never happened but they did name a college after Sir John Vanbrugh and I would like to finish with a suggestion that should they ever need to name another college, it should be called Sydney Smith.

MRS SYDNEY SMITH by Sydnie Bones, at the South-West luncheon

Sunday was Mother's Day and I was thinking what we might have as a theme for today's lunch – what about Mrs Sydney? I knew very little about her so took out my books in the hope of finding out a bit more.

I've always had the impression that theirs was a good and stable marriage: after all, Sydney had written that marriage was 'like a pair of shears, so joined that they cannot be separated, often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing anyone who comes between them'. They were married for 45 years: Hesketh

Pearson, who hardly gives Mrs Sydney a mention, writes that they were ‘a well-paired and happy couple’.

She was Catherine Amelia Pybus, ‘Kate’ to Sydney, daughter of a rich banker and a friend of Sydney’s sister. Sydney described her at length in a letter of 1799: ‘of excellent disposition, extremely good sense, very fond of music, and me – a wise, amiable woman as will quietly for years and years make the happiness of a husband’s life’. As indeed it turned out. However, although her widowed mother was fond of Sydney, her brother, a Tory MP, objected to the groom-to-be on account of his poverty, lack of preferment, and his liberal tendencies. Catherine recalled her mother’s words: ‘If you choose to forgo the comforts and luxuries to which you were born, you alone are to be the sufferer; and of your ability to decide that which will constitute your happiness, there can be no more doubt than of your right’. So - she was expected to have a mind of her own, and on 2 July 1800, at the age of 22, she and Sydney were married, in Cheam, Surrey. They set up home in Edinburgh, where the first two children were born. Kate strongly opposed Sydney’s remaining in Edinburgh, ‘exhorting him’ she writes in her narrative, ‘to settle in London where I felt sure of his success’. When they moved into Doughty Street in London, they were hard up; in her memoir she wrote: ‘I took my pearls to Rundell and Bridges, and sold them for £500. This was converting them to a much more useful purpose, and all we most wanted was obtained.’

By all accounts, she was an outstandingly cheerful and capable wife, with a quiet sense of humour;

Alan Bell writes that she was ‘fully capable, socially and intellectually, of accompanying her husband as he rose in life’. Certainly, there is plenty of evidence that she accompanied him to all the great houses where Sydney was a valued guest, and friendship also with her is acknowledged in their many letters, especially Lady Holland. An American friend mentioned Mrs Sydney in a record of his visit to Combe Florey: ‘I ought before now to have spoken about Mrs Smith, as a most amiable and intelligent lady, highly cultivated by reading, and a long life spent in the society of the most distinguished persons of both sexes in Great Britain and of the foreigners who throng London ...’

Although there is scant acknowledgement of Mrs Sydney’s contribution to the success of her husband’s life, there are hints of significant input. We learn from their daughter Saba that Sydney relied on her intellectual judgment: he was an apparently indifferent speller; when he finished a review he would toss it over to her, saying ‘Kate, just look over it - dot the i’s and cross the t’s.’ And he would go out for a walk and leave her to finish it off. ‘He was perpetually coming to her with something for her sympathy and consultation; and richly did she deserve that happiness from her devoted love and admiration’. She would read his sermons and

make suggestions if she felt he ought to temper one of his outbursts. His success as a preacher gave her huge satisfaction – before Sydney’s attachment to the Berkeley Chapel in Mayfair, she wrote, ‘it was almost deserted; in a few months, not a seat was to be had!’

She also had a hand in planning the new parsonage in Foston. In a narrative she kept for her grandchildren, she talks of Sydney’s dismay at the expensive estimate from an architect. ‘We both knew what we wanted, and the number and size of rooms which we wished to have.’ Sydney asked her to get out her ‘rule and compass’ so that they could do without the cost of ‘this great man’. ‘This I did’ she continues. ‘We sat in judgment over our plan, hired an excellent carpenter and mason, and our home was begun; when finished we had not made one mistake’. When one reads that Sydney Smith built his own rectory at Foston, perhaps we should add – with rather a lot of help from his wife.

There is a record also of her activities in the village of Foston, far beyond the duties of a rector’s wife. When Sydney established a boys’ club, she drew on her skills as an accomplished musician and started singing lessons for the girls, and later a class for making bonnets. After they left, she corresponded with former neighbours, letters full of good-natured chatter and humour, though Alan Bell does note that she could be critical in ‘a quietly crushing way’ – unlike her husband.

The Smiths had five children, losing one who died shortly after birth, and another, Douglas who was so mourned by Sydney. Mrs Sydney home-schooled the girls, Saba and Emily, and reigned over a happy household where there was fun and laughter, thanks to their games-playing father. Sydney died in 1845, Mrs Sydney on 7 July 1852, in Green Street, London, aged 77. Behind every great man ... etc. One day, perhaps someone will write about her.

SYDNEY SMITH AND THE ART OF THE INSULT BY By Sam Taylor, local history teacher and former history master at Queen Margaret’s School, York.
At a York lunch

The Regency world of Sydney Smith was very disrespectful. Think of the very explicit cartoons of Rowlandson, Cruikshank and Gillray; think of the savage and scurrilous printed comments on public figures by the likes of Shelley and Byron, and Leigh Hunt. Mostly these criticisms were ignored by their targets: people, it seems, had thicker skins then. When they had recourse to law, juries increasingly refused to convict – though Leigh Hunt did spend two years in prison for publishing a completely accurate description of the Prince Regent’s lifestyle.

Sydney was very much part of this world. He was rude about individuals, about institutions, about professions, about entire nations (and one in particular.) His friend Lord Carlisle was disturbed by this misuse of his gifts. He wrote to Sydney: ‘Why run amok at every component part of society? Order, Class, Professions, the Bar, the Bench, rural residents, West Indian proprietors [a nice euphemism this], brother magistrates! For God’s sake consider that what often is forgiven from the tongue is not endured from the pen.’

Let me remind you of a few examples of Sydney in critical mode – all of which you will know. Sydney in the company of the Bishop of Exeter is passing a butcher’s shop which has a sign saying: ‘Tongues cured here.’ Sydney turns to the bishop and says sweetly: ‘Shall we go in my Lord?’ Was it the same Bishop of Exeter of whom Sydney said: ‘I must believe in the Apostolic Succession: there is no other way of accounting for the descent of the Bishop of Exeter from Judas Iscariot?’

This is an example of what we might call ‘the insult inclusive’: the insulter includes himself as part of the target, and thereby softens the blow a little. In the same category as the first of these quotes perhaps comes Sydney’s mischievous suggestion to the chapter of St Paul’s (of which he was a member) when the proposal for paving the forecourt of the cathedral with wood blocks was mooted: ‘The dean and canons need only to lay their heads together and the job will be done.’ And again: ‘The observances of the church concerning feasts and fasts are tolerably well kept- since the rich keep the feasts and the poor keep the fasts.’

You will have noticed that all of the examples I have cited are directed against the higher clergy – for their garrulity, their ignorance, their greed. The lower clergy got off much more lightly; in fact when they came under attack Sydney was quick to defend them. A particularly obnoxious squire said to him: ‘If I had a son who was an idiot, by Jove I would make him a parson.’ ‘Very probably,’ replied Sydney, ‘but I see your father was of a different mind.’ This is ‘the insult instantaneous’.

Sometimes - I think rarely – Sydney overstepped the mark and succumbed to the temptation to make an obvious personal gibe. The very earnest and not very handsome Harriet Grote, for example, was ill-advised enough to appear at a reception in a rose-pink turban. ‘Now I know the meaning of “grotesque”’ said Sydney. This is an example of ‘the insult insensitive’.

Many of his insults were reserved for his friends. Of Macaulay, an almost unstoppable talker, he said: ‘He has occasional flashes of silence that make his conversation perfectly delightful,’ – illustrating another Sydney technique - of wrapping the insult up in a compliment - ‘the insult insulated’ perhaps. He compressed two barbs into one short phrase when he referred to his friend Lord Carlisle’s mansion as ‘that little cottage at Hinderskelfe’ (*the* name of the village

that Carlisle's ancestor had removed from the landscape and the map in order to create his picturesque landscape setting for Castle Howard).

In terms of group insults, apart from bishops, it was the Scots who suffered most from Sydney's tongue and pen. Two examples:

- 'It requires a surgical operation to get a joke well into a Scotch understanding. Their only idea of wit is laughing immoderately at stated intervals.'

- (This has more than an echo of John of Gaunt's famous speech on England) 'That garret of the earth, that knuckle-end of England, that land of Calvin, oatcakes and sulphur' (a perfect iambic pentameter that the Bard himself would not have been ashamed to pen).

Although he produced some masterly one-liners, Sydney really needed space in which to develop his talent for demolition. The best example I know, as near perfection as you can get, building gradually to a climax with the pay-off in the very last word, is Sydney's recall of Henry Yarburgh, owner of Heslington Hall. [This gem is quoted on p 19 by Yarburgh's descendant, the Hon. James Stourton. – ED.]

SYDNEY SMITH AND THE ART OF THE COMPLIMENT by Sam Taylor, local historian and former history master at Queen Margaret's School, York. At a York lunch

This short talk is by way of being a penance. The last time I spoke at one of these lunches I took as my subject 'Sydney Smith and the Art of the Insult'. It was intimated to me, ever so politely, that perhaps I might be in danger of undermining the reputation of our hero. That was certainly not my intention. But if that was the effect of the talk, I am here today to make amends: this is all about S being nice to people.

This he found extremely easy to do. He had a sincere love of his fellow men; he found it easier to dwell on their virtues rather than their vices; he was not embarrassed to pay compliments as many of us are; and he possessed the words and wit to do this gracefully and memorably. He did find it easier to be nice to women than to men (whom incidentally he found it easier to insult.) He admired women, especially if they were young, pretty, intelligent, titled and gave good dinners; he was very susceptible to female beauty. So what follows – and I did not start off with this intention, I assure you - is a more or less uninterrupted catalogue of the flattering things Sydney said to women.

Let's start with some generalizations:

'I hardly know any man who deserves any woman.'

‘Women have infinitely more philosophical endurance than men. Ask a wife to drink a cup of poison for some good which would accrue from it to her husband and children, and she will swallow it like green tea.’

From the general to the particular:

Sydney’s social life, when he was in London, centred on Holland House, in the middle of what he called ‘The Sacred Parallelogram,’ when glittering gatherings took place under the beady eye of the brilliant but imperious Lady Holland. This is from a letter written early in his Yorkshire exile (1810) to Lady Holland.

‘Some of the best and happiest days of my life I have spent under your roof, and there may be in some houses, particularly in those of our eminent prelates, a stronger disposition to pious exercises and devout lucubrations, but I do not believe all Europe can produce as much knowledge, wit and worth as passes in and out of your door under the nose of Thomas the porter.’

His eye for feminine beauty:

Although he disliked tragedies, he was full of admiration for the great tragic actress Sarah Siddons (who was so convulsed with laughter at one of Sydney’s dinners that she had to be helped from the room).

‘But what a face she had,’ said Sydney. ‘The gods do not bestow such a face as hers on the stage more than once a century.’

Of the Countess of Morley he said: ‘I have more tenderness for her than it would be ecclesiastical to own.’

Sometimes flattery becomes a little dangerous: [At a reception] a lady entered dressed in a crimson velvet gown. Sydney started up exclaiming: ‘Exactly the colour of my preaching cushion!’ Leading her forward to the light he pretended to be lost in admiration saying, ‘I really can hardly keep my hands off you! I shall be preaching on you, I fear etc., etc’ Not my ‘etc.s’ but the editor’s, exercising a little necessary discretion. Sometimes the flattery sounds more than a little contrived, charming though it is:

‘A young woman in a garden is admiring, from a distance, a sweet pea. She turns to Sydney and says: “Oh Mr Smith, this pea will never come to perfection!” Sydney takes the girl by the hand and says, “Permit me, then, my dear, to lead perfection to the pea.”

Sydney was perhaps anticipating another great 19th century wit, Benjamin Disraeli, who said, you will remember, ‘Everyone likes flattery. When you come to royalty

you should lay it on with a trowel.’ Substitute for ‘royalty’ ‘women’ and Sydney would nod his approval.

Sydney was capable of admiring women for qualities other than their physical beauty. Elizabeth Fry’s religion was not his, nor was her attitude to prison reform, but he could write this:

‘ Mrs Fry is very unpopular with the clergy. Examples of living active virtue disturb our repose and give birth to distressing comparisons: we long to burn her alive.’

And this he wrote only three years before his death to Lady Wenlock at Escrick. (You can still see her effigy in St Helen’s Church at Escrick.)

‘The constant kindness and attention I have received from Lord Wenlock and yourself have bound me over to you and made me sincerely your friend...I beg to be remembered to Miss Lawley [her daughter] whom Mrs Smith and I have fairly fallen in love with: so affable, so natural, so handsome – you will never keep her for long, for I should think it a perfect infamy in any young man of rank and fortune to be three days in her company without making her an offer.’ [Miss Lawley married four years later an ambitious lawyer and politician James Stuart-Wortley, bore him nine children and died aged 80 in 1900.]

Coda: the greatest disappointment of his visit to Paris in 1835 was : ‘ I have not seen one pretty Frenchwoman.’ [He was aged 64.]

If we are looking for compliments paid by Sydney to members of his own sex, the task is harder. The only ones recorded as far as my researches took me, are to members of the race of whom he was most critical - the Scots. He remained loyal to the very gifted friends of his youth in Edinburgh, almost all lawyers - Jeffrey, Horner, Brougham, Allen – the people he regularly insulted. (But then who else but those you like or love do you most frequently insult?). Here are two examples, one general, one particular. Sydney is fondly reminiscing in later years about the heady days of his youth, the time of the founding of *The Edinburgh Review*:

‘Never shall I forget the days I passed there [in Edinburgh] amidst odious smells, barbarous sounds, bad suppers...excellent hearts, and most enlightened and cultivated understandings.’ This is the good cop/bad cop approach isn’t it? You batter your reader or auditor with a volley of insults and then while they are still reeling, you soothe them with a string of extravagant compliments so that they are ready to fling their arms about your neck in gratitude.

And here, to close, is one personal compliment which I especially like. It was written at Foston in March 1814, at exactly the time that S and his family were going

through the trauma of the move from Heslington - which incidentally the Association ought to mark in some way on its 200th anniversary. He has just received a letter from John Allen, doctor and polymath in Edinburgh:

‘It is very pleasant in these deserts to see the handwriting of an old friend: it is like the print in the sand seen by Robinson Crusoe.’

A FORGOTTEN LUMINARY – SAMUEL ROGERS by Mark Wade. At a York lunch

Perhaps I may be permitted to make a few random observations centred on the figure of Samuel Rogers, a friend and to some extent a rival of Sydney, both habitués of Holland House, that extraordinary salon and seat of political moderation and social influence where for the best part of half a century Lord and Lady Holland did so much to ensure that Britain did not follow the French down the bloody path of revolution.

That great house is sadly no more having been set to ruin by the Luftwaffe in 1940. All that remains to remind us of a once glorious epoch is a remnant of the estate, little more than 50 acres, now Holland Park, a fine statue of the 3rd Lord Holland, seated, looking slightly dishevelled, still gazing contentedly at his now non-existent Jacobean mansion and near-by in the Dutch garden, a small plaque bearing the words penned by Holland.

Here Rogers sat and here forever dwell
With thee the pleasures that he knew so well.

Together with Sydney and one or two others he belonged to that small group of intimates referred to by Lady Holland as ‘*les affidés*’ who stayed regularly at Holland House and visited the family during their prolonged sojourns in Paris and were perhaps principally valued for ensuring that those assembled did not take themselves too seriously.

Samuel Rogers was a popular, influential and ubiquitous figure in Regency society. Poet, for some years the best known poet in the kingdom, patron. Wit, connoisseur and banker, his life was much facilitated by his very considerable wealth. He inherited his family bank at an early age but tiring of such work by the time he was 40, he retired at the turn of the century and devoted himself to the hobbies of a wealthy bachelor, not neglecting to award himself a pension of £5000 per annum. – an income which compares favourably with that of a fictional contemporary, Mr D’Arcy, that young man in possession of a fortune.

Rogers lived in St James which in those days was the heartland of establishment territory and it was there that for 40 years he held his weekly literary breakfasts amidst a profusion of works of art by Velasquez, Rembrandt, Rubens, Reni together with busts and marbles and furniture all reflecting the impeccably fine taste for which he was held in high repute. The literati and cognoscenti vied for places at his table, an invitation to which was seen as a formal entry to the London literary world. Numbers were always limited to a maximum of eight. An engraving by Mottram entitled 'Samuel Rogers at Breakfast' is entirely fictitious as it portrays an assembly of about 25 but served to illustrate the extraordinary concentration of literary talent to be found in London at that time. The figures include Scott, Sheridan, Mackintosh, Byron, Coleridge, Turner and indeed Sydney, the names of virtually of all those portrayed being instantly recognizable today with the strange exception of the host, the mention of whose name usually gives rise to looks of perplexity.

Rogers, it has to be said, was something of an oddity, a man of eccentricities. Invited to the grandest balls and dinners, he would take a pair of galoshes and insist on walking home even in the vilest weather. It was universally agreed that he was ugly, uncommonly ugly. 'The ugliest man in Europe', said some. 'Nay, the ugliest man since the days of Adam' averred others. There was something corpse-like about his appearance which was said to shimmer with a silvery phosphorescence of decay.

'Should have been buried long ago', said Mrs Carlyle.

'Where do you dine tonight, Lord Alverley?'

'Tonight, Madam, I dine with Samuel Rogers.'

'How can you dine with Rogers this hot weather? He has been dead these 30 years and cannot be expected to keep.'

Society, it seemed, never tired of making cadaverous jokes about the poor fellow both behind his back and to his face. Sydney, when asked by him what pose he would advise him to adopt for his forthcoming portrait, replied that he should be painted at prayer with his hands completely covering his face.

Rogers knew only too well what was being said about him and seemed in no way discountenanced. Sydney was in any case too close to him but others were wary when in earshot for it was well known that Rogers could wield his tongue with the same facility that D'Artagnan wielded his rapier. He had the ability to demolish people which he did without ever raising his voice. He excused himself by saying that he possessed such a small voice that no one would bother to listen if he said pleasant things about people. Those in the know who attended his breakfasts would endeavour to manoeuvre themselves in such a way as to avoid being the first to leave and thereby risking their reputations which, when the mood so took him, Rogers might decide to shred for the entertainment of those left behind. Yet undoubtedly his tongue belied his nature and there were few, if any, ready to deny his kindness of heart and generosity. Sydney whose witticisms about Rogers were

the most cutting of all said that he knew no one kinder, more fun, with better manners or more integrity, and that if he had to choose which Englishman he would most willingly stumble on when abroad it would be Rogers.

Macaulay on one occasion at Holland House seated in close proximity to both Samuel Rogers and Sydney noted their distinct styles. Rogers's humour laced with sarcasm, his witticisms carefully prepared like the highly polished lines of his verse. Sydney, in contrast, ever exuding an inexhaustible sense of fun and speaking from the impulse of the moment with a bonhomie which ensured that even his mockeries rarely gave offence.

As late as 1850 Rogers's literary standing was sufficiently high for him to be offered the post of Poet Laureate on the death of Wordsworth.. He refused and as some wag later remarked, this was just as well for if he had not done so we would not have 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. It was Tennyson, of course who accepted the post.

REVIEWER, GOSSIP AND HOST IN A LETTER by Randolph Vigne and Celia Moreton-Pritchard. At a London lunch.

Celia Moreton-Pritchard read Sydney Smith's letter from Heslington of 12 July 1813 – 300 years ago – to John A. Murray, editing the *Edinburgh Review* in Jeffrey's absence for his second marriage in New York*. Randolph Vigne added comments as did others round the table.

My dear Murray,

I understand you are one of the Commissioners for managing the *Edinburgh Review*, in the absence of our small-bodied, great-minded leader. He has made to me a very affecting appeal for assistance, and for such as I can afford will not make it in vain; the difficulty is to find a book, and I will review any two of the following – Clarkson's *Life of Penn*, Buchanan's *Colonial Establishment*, Thompson's *Travels in Sweden*, Graham's *Residence in India*, or Horsley's *Speeches*. Have the goodness, if you please, to tell me *which* of these I shall take, and at what time I shall send them, giving me all the time you can, as I really am distressed for that article.

My situation is as follows: - I am engaged in agriculture without the slightest knowledge of the art; I am building a house without an architect, and educating a son without patience. Nothing short of my sincere affection for Jeffrey, and pity for his transatlantic loves, should have induced me to draw my goose quill. Jeffrey knows elegant women when he sees them.

As I know you love a bit of London scandal learn that Lady Caroline Lamb stabbed herself at Lady Ilchester's Ball for the love of Lord Byron, as it is supposed. What a charming thing to be a poet. I preached for many years in London and was

rather popular, but never heard of a Lady doing herself the smallest mischief on my account.

If ever you feel moved to pack up your books and make a long Visit, we shall be delighted to see you, and I will tell you very fairly whether our house is free from engagements..

My new Mansion springs up apace, and there I will really have a pretty Place to receive you in and a pleasant County to shew you. Remember me very kindly to all friends, and believe me my dear Murray ever most sincerely yrs.

Sydney Smith

The letter was written at a key moment in the Smiths' family life, still trailing clouds of their London days, though it was at Lady Heathcote's waltzing party that Lady Caroline did herself two months earlier the mischief Sydney pretended to envy, not Lady Ilchester's. He was still fully involved with the *Edinburgh Review*. I look forward to an hour or two in the London Library to see if he reviewed any of the books he listed, and how long he took for the lengthy contributions Professor Will Christie amazed us with at his Edinburgh lecture. The editor, after his first, founding year, the five-foot Francis Jeffrey. had lost his beloved first wife in 1805. His second, Charlotte Wilkes, great-niece of the wicked John, was in New York with her parents when they married. Jeffrey's journey to the wedding and return in 1814 were delayed by our being at war with the U.S., which seemed to have caused no other difficulties. British troops gutted the White House on 24 August 1814 – six months after the Jeffreys' departure. He, or the first editor of his letters, perhaps his daughter Saba, regretted the eight lines after his reference to Jeffrey's taste in 'elegant ladies' – they are indelibly scored out. Might Alan Bell find some way of x-raying the original and shocking us with Sydney's unseemly side?



Lady Caroline Lamb

The Smiths had been ordered to his Yorkshire parish by the Archbishop of York in 1809 but came to the newly-built rectory at Foston only in 1814. It was his son Douglas, aged eight, that he was tutoring. Douglas, the apple of his eye, caused him 'the first real misfortune which ever befell me' at his death at 24, at the start of what might have been a notable legal career. He doesn't mention the imminent arrival of another son, Windham, four days later. The opposite of Douglas, Windham was to cause his parents the greatest misery and was eventually banned from his mother's house.

Lady Caroline Lamb's mischief to herself gives the letter its spice. It might be mentioned that he was her friend, wrote a fond farewell when he moved to his 'preferred tranquillity' in Yorkshire, and did his best to counsel her when she published her scandalous novel *Glenarvon* in 1816. Her response is unrecorded though she did once go to a fancy-dress party clothed as none other than the Revd Sydney Smith.

Randolph Vigne

* *Selected Letters of Sydney Smith*, ed. Nowell C. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 69-70

BOOKS

The Wry Romance of the Literary Rectory

Deborah Alun-Jones (Thames & Hudson, 2013, £13.95 from Littlehampton Book Services. ISBN 978 0 500 516775)

Deborah Alun-Jones explores the background to eight rectories with literary connections, including Foston and Sydney Smith. She argues that some of the greatest writing in English has emerged from rectories such as these – from Tennyson and Rupert Brooke to Betjeman and de Waal. Sydney Smith is afforded generous coverage, with eight illustrations, numerous quotations not all of them familiar, and many delightful anecdotes.

Holland House: A History of London's Most Celebrated Salon

Linda Kelly, illustrated, published by I.B. Tauris, 2013. ISBN 9781870764498. £25.00. This fascinating account of the hub of London society and political debate, described by Antonia Fraser as 'a sparkling picture of Whig society in the years running up to the Reform Bill' sets the background to the familiar correspondence between Sydney Smith and Lady Holland. There are numerous references and quotations, including Sydney's assessment of Lord Holland's 'ludicrous ignorance' of sheep-rearing skills: 'You are a statesman, a scholar and a wit, but not a butcher'. There is a wealth of information of specific interest to members, not least indicators to places of significance which may be useful for our plans for a London AGM. Moreover, Sydney Smith was a guest of the Hollands on his first visit to Paris, in their apartment in the Rue de la Grange-Batelière, an address which we may be able to find on our projected visit to Paris in 2015. This is a work of academic excellence, an entertaining exposition of intrigue and manipulation in early 19th-century political life, and a valuable addition to any collection of books related to Sydney Smith.

Sydie Bones

The Sydney Smith Association

Objects

- To advance the education of the public in the life and works of Sydney Smith.
To advance the Christian religion by the preservation and upkeep of churches connected with Sydney Smith, in particular but not exclusively, the parish churches of Foston in North Yorkshire and Combe Florey in Somerset.
To help in the preservation of manuscripts and memorabilia relating to him and his family.
To arrange periodic events, receptions and services in keeping with his inclinations.

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*'I never read a book before
reviewing it; it prejudices a
man so'*

