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THOMAS BEWICK IN SCOTLAND

by Peter Quinn



Alexander Nasmyth: *Edinburgh seen from Calton Hill*, 1825.

Bewick visited Scotland on two occasions: 1776 and 1823. It is often assumed that the early visit gave Bewick a life-long enthusiasm for Scotland and all things Scottish and that in later years he made a sentimental journey northwards. Later biographers have often thought the 1776 trip insignificant. David Croal Thomson, for instance:

It is not necessary to follow Bewick in this excursion, which he details in his writings as the experience gained by it in an artistic way is inconsiderable.

Occurring at the beginning and end of Bewick's career there is a temptation to simply contrast the two visits, emphasising the change that time, circumstance and fame had brought. The visits have been seen as two great Caledonian book ends

to a life spent mainly on Tyneside. However, these visits introduce us to a world and set of concerns which Bewick shared with Scots throughout his life, pre-dating even his first great walk northwards.

In 1776 Bewick was 23 years old; in 1823 he arrived in Edinburgh on his 70th birthday. He provides accounts of each trip in the *Memoir*: Chapter 6 dealing with 1776 was composed during his spell of writing confined at home with an attack of the gout: 29 May–24 June 1823. He visited Edinburgh in August 1823, writing an account of the trip during his last writing effort between 1824 and January 1827.

We left Edinburgh on the 23rd of Augt 1823 & I think I shall see Scotland no more...



'The Cadger's Trot': Thomas Bewick's only lithograph, drawn on the stone in Edinburgh in 1823.

However, it is typical of Bewick's approach to the later chapters of the *Memoir* that he then back-tracks, recalling his trip to Messrs Ballentine and Robertson Lithographic Printers, where he made his one and only lithographic print: 'the Cadger's Trot'.

Bewick was a great enthusiast for all things Scottish. He illustrated the poetry of Burns, Fergusson and Thomson. His favourite song was written by Allan Ramsay. He and his son collected Scottish pipe tunes. His daughter read Walter Scott to him. Did Thomas Bewick even sound Scottish? For southern English observers Bewick was easily confused with his Scottish friends and neighbours. This clearly irritated him greatly.

Wherever I went the ignorant part of the Cockneys called me Scotchman.

Dovaston felt that Bewick's *Memoir*, of which he was an early, privileged reader, was full of Scottish turns of phrase.

The style is nervous, sinewy and broad, like his conversation, a good deal garnished with Northumbrian & Scottish provincialisms, which, in my estimation, particularly when he reads it aloud, strengthen the efficiency.

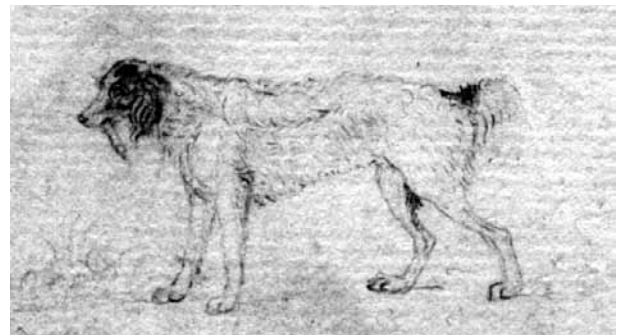
George Atkinson in his manuscript memoir of Bewick takes great exception to Dovaston's account of Bewick's accent. Atkinson's language tells us more about his own set of values than Bewick's. The engraver's accent we are told was not 'low Scotch' but a 'genuine and not offensive Northumbrian.'

June - August 1776.

Bewick's Scottish journey of 1776 was apparently the result of a series of spontaneous choices and was largely unplanned: he failed to take his engraving equipment for instance and he talked of it afterwards using terms such as 'zig-zag' and 'wild goose chase.' Once his apprenticeship

page two

ended on 1st October 1774 he worked from Cherryburn until June 1776. Out angling he suddenly decided he should see more of the country. He told his mother he was going to Cumberland to see his uncle. She sewed three guineas into his trousers. Surprisingly, although he fails to mention this in his memoir, he took his dog 'Witch'.



Bewick's later drawing of *Witch*, his companion on his first visit to Scotland.

Bewick set off for Haydon Bridge where he spent two days with the schoolmaster, radical and philosopher Thomas Spence. Spence took a holiday and the pair rambled over the hills together. Spence turned homewards when the pair reached Haltwhistle. On his own Bewick found Naworth Castle interesting. He lost his way (the first of many meanderings) and eventually found his relatives' home in Ainstable. In the week he spent there he fished and visited nearby Kirkoswald. Walking to Carlisle with his cousin he met Mr Graham—'a kind of scamp,' 'one of those vapouring fops.' Together they begin the journey to Scotland. They took the standard route, but Bewick tired of the scamp's visits to pubs in Longtown and Langholm. He pressed on alone to Hawick, Selkirk, 'and from that place, next morning by Dalkeith to Edinburgh.'

His account of his Scottish journey is not a travelogue: he

tells us little of the places he sees. It is rather focussed upon his experience of the place. Bewick's account of his time in Scotland has echoes of the picaresque tales of Smollett or Fielding: the journey as a coming of age. As such, it may also suggest journey as personality-shaping, in the manner of later works such as Wordsworth's *Prelude*.

Bewick arrived in Edinburgh an innocent. He went to George Inn, Bristoe Port, in the old town. It had been recommended to him by Mr Robertson, a Scottish silversmith working in Newcastle. This was the general coaching inn for arrivals from Carlisle and London. There he drank his first beer, served by a bare-footed, bare-legged, good-looking girl. A beer 'almost the size of a half leg of a Boot—this I thought I could not empty in a week'. The inn clearly would not suit: 'As I found I could not remain in this place...' Luckily, he met the respectable Mrs Hales, widow of former coachman of Baron Ord, and she put him up for the two nights he spent in the city.

His tour guide the next day was Hector Gavin, an engraver he found in Parliament Close. In 1823 Bewick was to visit his successors. Then he walked to Glasgow, where he found a 'clever Cutler' from Newcastle. The young Bewick was again among drinkers: 'he was not like me—for he could drink plenty.' Glasgow, he tells us, had many handsome buildings but it was not as charming as Edinburgh. He then walked to Dumbarton, spent a day there and went to view the 'print-works' at the River Leven; but he was refused admittance, so he carried on to Smollett's monument at the village of Renton.

This is one of the few landmarks mentioned by Bewick and he paused to record its literary significance.

'Here I stopped for I had read Smollett's works and almost adored him as an author...'



Tobias Smollett, c.1770 (artist unknown).

We know that he had read Smollett's histories: they were in his library. He also owned a copy of *The Adventures of Roderick Random*. Published in 1748, Bewick later owned an edition of 1778. The hero of *Roderick Random* is a Scot and the novel features some scenes (in chapter VIII) set in Newcastle. There is a lot of fun in the ensuing chapters with encounters with Highwaymen, cases of mistaken identity, travellers parted then re-united. In his Preface, Smollett calls his novel a 'satire' and cites the tradition of Cervantes. The two volume novel is a long, rambling tale, or series of tales, and recalls Hogarth's serial works such as *A Rake's*

Progress (1735), or *The Idle and Industrious Apprentice* (1747). In his introduction to the current Penguin Classics edition, David Blewett writes of the 'double vision' of the work: 'the dark vision of the oppressive malice of the world and the bright vision of Roderick's triumph and restoration at the end'. Smollett's Britain is a morally corrupt and chaotic place in which grotesque characters (with names such as Potion, Crampley, Weazel) prey upon the innocent abroad. However, in Smollett's moral world the hand of providence guides the hero to his just reward and all is set to rights.



Old coloured postcard of Smollett's monument at Renton.

Smollett died whilst in Italy in 1771; he is buried at Livorno. The Renton monument was only two years old when Bewick visited. Various sources describe it as 'a Tuscan monument.' It was commissioned by Tobias's cousin, James Smollett, Esq., of Bonhill, for the village of Renton.

The village had been created in 1762 as model accommodation for cloth workers employed nearby in the bleach and print works. It was named after Cecilia Renton, the daughter-in-law of Tobias's sister (i.e. she had married the author's nephew). Puzzling over the long Latin inscription (provided by Professor George Stuart of Edinburgh and Mr Ramsay of Ochertyre, with corrections by Dr Johnson), Bewick is helped by an anonymous Highlander, 'a leish [supple] clever young man.. smartly dressed in the garb of his country...' to make a translation.

This scholarly Highlander then guided Bewick up the western side of Loch Lomond towards Inverary. They stayed in a farm house and Bewick decided to travel without visiting any major towns or cities: a wild goose chase he says, zig-zagging. So a random encounter at the base of the monument to the author of *Roderick Random* leads to a deliberately random exploration of the Highlands. As he visits no towns or castles, or, it seems, even landmarks, it is hard to tell how far Bewick walked. He did not leave the mainland, however.

Eventually he arrived at Stirling hungry and sun-burnt

and ate a midnight meal of hard boiled eggs. He describes the Highlands as a place in which he is met with great kindness and hospitality. He is clearly attracted by the homely appearance of some of the cottages. But he is also aware that he was seeing a country in the grip of social change: people were being driven off the land, replaced by sheep. Here we hear Bewick at his most radical:

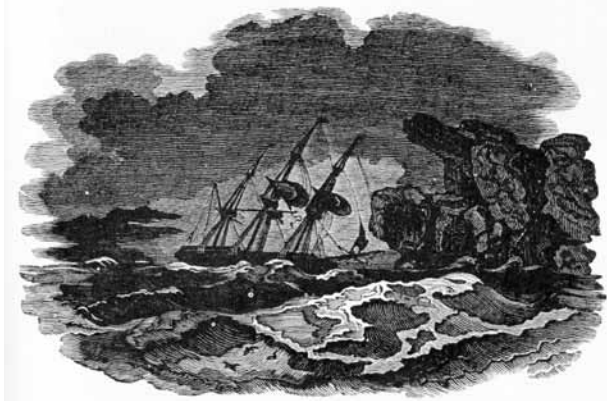
Property in every country ought to be held sacred, but it ought also to have its bounds, & (in my opinion) to be in a certain degree held in trust jointly for the benefit of its owners & the good of society of which they form a part—bejond [*sic*] this is despotism, the offspring of misplaced aristocratic pride.

If the land and the people taught Bewick a political lesson, the women of the Highlands left him confounded. He tells us the Highland folk were reluctant to accept any payment for board and lodgings. After one enjoyable night staying with a family in which they sang songs and played the pipes, he returning the favour by whistling Northumberland tunes, he tried to press some money into the hands of the children of the family. He was pursued by a young woman who wished to give him the usual present of bannocks and scones to eat on his journey.

I had not got far from the House 'till I was pursued by a beautiful young woman, who accosted me in baddish english, which she must have got off by heart just before she left the house, the purport of which was to urge my acceptance of the usual present. This I wished to refuse, but she pressed it upon me, with such sweetness & with a face & neck blushed with scarlet, while I thought, at the same time she invited me to return—on which (I could not help it) I seized her & smacked her lips—she then sprung away from me, with her bare leggs, like a Deer, & left me fixed to the spot, not knowing what to do—I was particularly struck with her whole handsome appearance, it was a compound of loveliness, health & agility—her hair I think had been flaxen or light, but was tanned to a pale sandy brown, by being exposed to the Sun—this was tied behind with a ribbon & dangled down her back, and as she bounded along it flowed in the air—I had not seen her while I was in the House, & felt grieved because I did not hope ever to see her more.

This Highland beauty is the opposite of the Edinburgh bar servant, with her boot-sized glass of beer. The Highland girl is seen as a force of nature that passes in this alluring manner before the young traveller. He tramped on, never to return, feeling forever separated from this natural beauty.

His journey ended back in Edinburgh. En route from Stirling he saw the Carron Works and the new canal near Falkirk (the wonder of the new industrial age). He decided to take a Leith sloop home. The sea was rough and all the pas-



sengers were overcome with sea sickness. Bewick, hardy and dependable, was literally left holding a baby, which he nursed through the night while its un-named mother was dismally sick on deck. He arrived back on the 12th August 1776, an innocent no more.

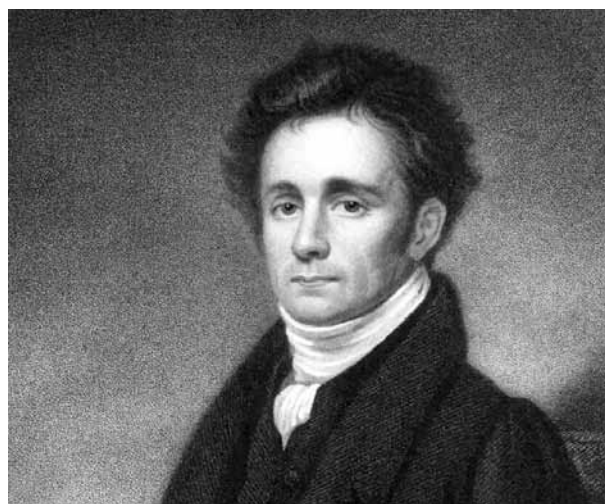
Edinburgh, 11th to 23rd August 1823.

Montague Weekley thought that the trip of 1823 was planned well in advance. Jane and Robert had visited Edinburgh in September 1821: 'perhaps this was a reconnaissance.' They had stayed at 39 Hanover Street in 1821 and Weekley assumes they did the same in 1823.

Edinburgh had seen many changes since his first visit. Bewick visits one year after the landmark visit of King George IV in 1822 (the first ever visit of a Hanoverian monarch to Scotland). Paintings of the event were being finished off in studios around the city: Nasmyth, Ewbank and Carse all depicted the King's days out, some wearing the kilt. Bewick echoes the views of many visitors:

I always thought highly of Edinburgh & its bold & commanding situation—but the new Town (or City of palaces, as it is now sometimes called) had been added to it since that time, but all these splendid buildings, are of trivial import, compared with the Mass of intellect & science, which had taken root & been nurtured & grown up to such a height as to rival & perhaps outstrip every other city in the World.

Chapter 21 contains many names of those called on during the visit. Bewick formally listed his Edinburgh contacts in terms of their status: Professors at the top, engravers at the foot. Whilst he does not name the 'scientific establishments' he tells us he visited, he does name 'the Rooms of the splendid exhibition of the paintings of the late Sir Henry Raeburn Bar' and 'the painting Rooms of others, who were absent.'



Professor Jameson (1774-1854).

Top of Bewick's list of those he visited is Professor Jameson (1774-1854). Best known for his interest in minerals, he was the Professor of Natural History at University of Edinburgh. Posterity remembers him as a tremendously dull lecturer thanks to the account left by a former student, Charles Darwin. Others remembered him more fondly. For instance three years after the Bewick visit, Audubon was amazed by

the Professor's morning hairstyles:

A most splendid house, splendid everything, a good breakfast to boot. The professor wears his hair in three distinct different courses, when he sits fronting the south, for instance, those on the upper forehead are bent westwardly, towards the east, those that cover both ears are inclined: and the very short sheared portion behind mounts directly upward ... like the quills of the 'fretful porcupine.'...

Jameson was in charge of the University collection which since 1812 had been known as the 'Royal Museum of the University'. He had fostered the habit of purchasing collections and examples through a network of University contacts. Jane tells us in an unpublished letter:

We spent three hours and half in the Museum, there is a great addition to the Quadrupeds & they are fitting up an Apartment for a collection of Insects – Robert must tell R. Wingate that comparisons were made greatly to his advantage in the ornithological department & that I have something to tell him which will please him exceedingly – My Father has just come from Professor Wallace with whom he is much pleased. He has again visited the Museum & seen Wilson the Stuffer, who is busy with several treasures brought by Cap E Franklin...

Wilson the Stuffer was John Wilson, the Janitor at the museum. There are several accounts cited by Chalmers which testify to the Stuffer's enthusiasm for natural history. He had his own private collection, some of which was bought by the University on his death. R. Wingate was Richard Routledge Wingate of Newcastle. Bewick's three and half hours at the Museum included some controversy over one bird, the reed wren which Bewick felt had been incorrectly placed among the foreign birds. (Dr Gardner-Medwin comments that Bewick was perhaps being rather over-confident in his bird identification skills.)

Bewick also visited Jameson's associate Mr Patrick Neil (1776-1851).

He shared Jameson's views on Geology, being a fellow member of the Wernerian Society. His company, based in Fishmarket Close, printed the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Neil wrote the Encyclopaedia entry on Gardening and kept a menagerie in his own garden at Canonmills. A keen flower grower he had 2000 pot plants. Bewick particularly admired his tamed birds and 'other curiosities'. The menagerie included a kittiwake, a cormorant, a gannet and a greater black-backed gull. He was an active antiquarian and archaeologist and a founder of the Caledonian Horticultural Society. He left his mark on the Edinburgh of today in the form of the Royal Botanic Garden and East Princes Street garden.

Another Jameson associate was Professor William Wallace (1768-1843). Professor of Mathematics at Edinburgh University from 1819 to 1838, he was a self-educated man who published widely on mathematical subjects. He invented the eidograph, a form of the pantograph. Bewick was very interested in this labour-saving device.

Professor Wallace has invented an Eidograph (now making in London) for the purpose of reducing Drawings, a most valuable discovery for Robert. Lowrie the Engraver was charmed with it. My Father has brought in 2 Drawings copied or reduced by the Professors Son, correctly reduced in a very short time. – Proportioning compasses, squares & Pentagraphs will now be entirely set aside by this instrument, for which it



Wallace's Eidograph, a device for scaling down drawings and maps, etc.

is likely a patent will be taken out. – The Professor said to my Father Oh why did na ye bring the young Ladies wi ye – he was intimately acquainted with our Neighbour M'Connell & had passed our Door.

Jane spends much of her letter to Elisabeth regaling her sister with details of the entertainment they enjoyed at the Jameson Household. Jameson was unmarried, living with four unmarried sisters, one widowed sister, his blind brother and five orphaned nephews and nieces.

we breakfasted on friday with Professor Jameson at his elegant mansion in the Royal Circus & as they say here the entertainment was a 'perfect delight'. I do not mean eating & drinking, but the intellectual part of the banquet.

On the Saturday Miss Rachel asked them round for the evening after dinner. They went at 8 and were served with cups of tea and unbuttered twigs.

(one of the Ladies made Tea in the large Drawing room—folding doors between that & the front thrown open) two or three cups at once are handed about on a large Silver Salver by a neat Maid servant. The footmen handed the bread (Sponge Cake, fruit Cake, & twigs cut in pieces, cold & unbuttered) upon another.

They heard Italian music and 'Oh My Lady Fair': 'but I am sure to find Scotch Music is considered quite ungentill.' Bewick, though, favoured it, however ungentil. His favourite song was Allan Ramsay's 'Waulking of the Fauld'. He praises Ramsay in the *Memoir*, quoting 'Habbies Howe.'

Some interesting points can be made about Bewick's enthusiasm for Scottish music and for the poetry of Allan Ramsay. Gilbert Gray (1704-94), the Newcastle bookbinder, had worked in the shop owned by the poet. Gray had encouraged the young Bewick to read and so probably introduced Bewick to Ramsay's poetry. He is called by Bewick in the *Memoir* 'the most valuable (perhaps the most invaluable) acquaintance & friend I ever met with...' Ramsay's poetry was seen as authentic folk poetry, transcribed from the living museum of the shepherd communities of the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh. Its reputation persisted after the poet's death. Originally published in 1722, a de-luxe edition of the *Gentle Shepherd* appeared in 1788, illustrated by David Allan with 12 whole-page illustrations. The preface famously drew attention to the authenticity of the shepherd voices recorded by the Edinburgh poet.

David Allan (1744-96) had been trained in Rome by Gavin Hamilton. On his return to Scotland he produced im-



David Allan: 'Glaud & Peggy', scene from *The Gentle Shepherd*, 1789.

ages of the ordinary folk of Edinburgh and the Highlands with an eye to treating them as historic curios, links with an archaic past. He saw that past as the Scottish equivalent of the Greco-Roman culture of Mediterranean Europe. Scottish eighteenth century culture was fascinated by the possibilities of 'discovering' a northern tradition of ancient poetry and art. James MacPherson (1736-96) notoriously published his Ossian poetry in the 1760s and much Scottish art and poetry became fascinated with the idea of a Northern hero. Allan Ramsay wrote of the 'natural Strength of Thought and Simplicity of Style' of the Northern Bards. Both David Allan and Alexander Runciman (1736-1785) (the leading illustrator of Ossian) sought a deliberately archaic look to their art: simple expression rather than elaborate technique. Compare their etchings with the simple uncluttered look of a Bewick woodcut.

Bewick's own illustrations of Scottish poetry include the 1814 volumes of *The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson*. Robert Fergusson's poetry often contrasted the moral and sustaining life of the peasantry with the mean-spirited, money-grabbing townsfolk. This vision is shared by Ramsay's 'Penny Wedding'. Interestingly, in discussing Allan's illustrations of the 'Penny Wedding', Duncan MacMillan cites a book written in Newcastle by the Reverend John Brown in 1763. Brown saw music and dance as symbols of social and natural harmony. Various passages in the *Memoir* show that Thomas Bewick shared this outlook.

By 1823, however, polite Edinburgh circles mistrusted the music of old Scotland. In the wake of the King's visit with its pageantry co-ordinated by Walter Scott, a new set of Scottish pre-occupations were emerging. It took some trouble to acquire an old collection of piping tunes for son Robert.

Sir Henry Raeburn (1756-1823), the portrait painter,



David Allan: *The Penny Wedding*, 1795.

had died just a few weeks before Bewick's visit. His death was sudden and he had left commissions unfinished on his studio easel, including a portrait of Sir John Maxwell of Pollok. Bewick visited his painting rooms. Could a Bewick associate replace the late master portraitist? James Ramsay, not a Scot, had been working at Bewick portraits that year. Should he move to Edinburgh to take over from the recently deceased Raeburn? Jane reported that Mr Reid the Leith bookseller had had a letter from James Ramsay asking what he thought of the possibility of a move. Jane writes: 'my father thought it all right !!!' [her exclamations] By the 18th it was clear to others that the succession was settled.

I forgot to tell you that when Mr Reid asked Mr Constable's opinion of Mr Ramsay coming here he at once said Oh no, it would be a hazardous experiment—Philips R.A. is here & I should suppose will succeed to Sir Henry—Ramsay will not find himself at N.C.—Grandeau is here & is successful.

Bewick's visits to artist's studios may have been inspired by his own recent foray into exhibition organisation. In 1822 Bewick had been on the committee over-seeing the first exhibition of the Northumberland Institution of The Fine Arts. Edinburgh artists had sent work to the 1822 show, among them John Ewbank who contributed five works. Perhaps Bewick was soliciting a greater number of submissions?

If so, he was relatively unsuccessful. William Nicholson (1781-1844) would become a regular exhibitor from 1827 – 41 and as Secretary of the Scottish Academy an important contact for Richardson and Parker, the Newcastle show organisers. Bewick already knew him: he had painted Bewick in 1812. Nicholson was from Newcastle, had moved away to Hull and London for a time before moving to Edinburgh in 1814. Nicholson only started sending pictures to Newcastle however once he became Secretary to the Scottish Academy. He was, however, a Bewick favourite: 'I am always pleased with the thouts of meeting Mr Nicholson anywhere.'

Beside each other on the list of visits are Ewbank and Mr Thos. Coulson. Coulson, a decorative painter, had trained Ewbank in Newcastle. Both master and apprentice had moved to Edinburgh. Although Bewick praised Coulson his subsequent career is not known. Not even his name survives on the remaining copy of his trade cut. Ewbank (1799-1847) however would become notorious: an artist whose career was ruined by alcoholism. Born in Gateshead, he originally intended to be a priest. On moving to Edinburgh Ewbank took lessons with Bewick's 'old friend' Alexander Nasmyth.

Ewbank showed at the Newcastle exhibitions between 1822 and '34 — sometimes being savaged by the critics for sloppiness. 1825 would see the publication of a series of 51 drawings by Ewbank for Dr James Browne's *Picturesque Views of Edinburgh*. These were engraved by W.H. Lizars, another Bewick contact. The book is celebrated for its detailed and idiosyncratic images of new and old towns. Among the views: Royal Circus, where Professor Jameson lived.

The most intriguing name on Bewick's list of artist-visits is Alexander Nasmyth. Bewick explicitly calls him 'my old friend, Mr Nasmyth the excellent Landskip painter'. How old was his friendship with the painter?

Alexander Nasmyth is often remembered as a passenger on the first steam-boat as it set out across Dalswinton Loch in 1788. On board that day were, among others, William Symington and Patrick Miller—the inventors of the new form of transport—and the poet Robert Burns, a tenant of Miller's. Did Nasmyth already know Bewick? The leading authority on Alexander Nasmyth makes no reference to Thomas Bewick. However, they did have the opportunity to meet in London as young men.

Nasmyth was born in fairly humble circumstances in 1758. Aged 16, i.e. in 1774, he went to London as apprentice to Allan Ramsay (1713-1784), where he remained until 1778. This Allan Ramsay was the son of the poet and the leading Royal portrait painter of his day. Thomas Bewick (five years Nasmyth's elder) was in London at the same time: 1st October 1776—22 June 1777. Also in London at the time, and a good friend of Bewick, was William Gray, then a bookbinder in Chancery Lane. William was the half-brother of George Gray and the son of Gilbert Gray. Perhaps William Gray introduced Thomas Bewick to the circle of the apprentices of the leading portrait painter of the day, Allan Ramsay? Perhaps not; further research is needed.

An apprenticeship with Allan Ramsay in those years was not the ideal arrangement as might at first appear. Ramsay's painting career had effectively ended the year previously when he broke his arm.

Interestingly for us, 'Nothing of Nasmyth's personal life is known while he was in London...' Scotland and the Scots, however, were not far from Bewick's thoughts when in London. Throughout Chapter Seven of the *Memoir*, Bewick is keen to contrast London and Scotland. He relates going to the defence of the Scots character in discussions at the George Inn, Brook Street. Whilst towards the end of the chapter he clearly indicates that he had seen something of the best art available in the capital, he gives no details of any visits, let alone one to the painting rooms of the King's portrait painter. This is typical of the *Memoir*: Bewick makes a moral point about the society of his day rather than spend time and ink on giving us dull facts.

Bewick and Nasmyth were already pretty friendly in 1807: there is an unpublished letter from Edinburgh 10 Nov 1807 which mentions a visit to Newcastle and the fact that Nasmyth owned three unspecified Bewick volumes. The letter shows us that at that early date Bewick spoke of planning a visit to Edinburgh with his daughter. Two names mentioned in the letter show two of the connections between the Scottish artist and Thomas Bewick.

Sometime ago I received three vols of your Elegant Works,

which I begged Mitford to remind you of.

Mitford is Robert Mitford (1781-1870) who, in 1807, was a Commander in the Royal Navy. He would eventually become an Admiral. His brother-in-law was the High Sheriff of Northumberland, the ornithologist Prideaux John Selby (1788-1867). Mitford helped Selby with his *Illustrations of British Ornithology* published between 1821 and 1833. Mitford had come to the Bewick workshop to learn how to etch.

..if you see Mr S. Kemble in your walks I begg my Compts to him and Mrs Kemble.

This is Stephen Kemble (1758-1822) the actor and theatre manager, part of the Kemble acting dynasty; his mother was said to have been on the stage playing the pregnant Anne Boleyn when her labour pangs began. Kemble had appeared on the Edinburgh stage in 1785. He returned to the city as manager of the Theatre Royal in 1792 but his time there was full of controversy. A court case caused him to open a rival theatre before leaving for Newcastle where he managed that town's Theatre Royal from 1792-1805. His Edinburgh and Newcastle activities overlapped so it is no surprise he knew both Nasmyth, a set designer at this time, and Bewick. Bewick mentions him in chapter fifteen of the *Memoir* as part of the convivial atmosphere at the Sign of the Unicorn. Kemble was a gargantuan figure weighing eighteen stones by 1807.



Alexander Nasmyth at the age of sixteen (Engraving after Reinagle).

Nasmyth was well known for his radical sympathies. His son's autobiography claims his father gave up his portrait practice in the 1790s when his political opinions became too controversial for his likely patrons. Whilst modern scholarship challenges these assumptions made by Nasmyth's son, landscape painting, scene painting, landscape design and teaching became Alexander's preferred areas of activity thereafter. What did he and Bewick share? A liking for speaking their mind in difficult times; independence of thought; a knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the work of Robert Burns, bolstered in Nasmyth's case by a personal friendship with the poet.

Further, Nasmyth's landscape art incorporates a number of key Scottish cultural concerns which Bewick would have



Alexander Nasmyth: *Edinburgh from Princes Street with the Royal Institution under Construction*, 1825 (cropped to fit).

recognised: an interest in observed reality; the landscape as a meaningful terrain in terms of history and society; a belief that all social orders be represented in the project of the nation. Duncan MacMillan explicitly links Nasmyth's art—in particular 'Edinburgh from Princes Street with the Royal Institution under Construction', 1825—with the ideas of the philosopher Thomas Reid.

The picture is an expression of the philosopher Thomas Reid's idea of man taking his place within the order of nature through the proper exercise of his gifts....

Macmillan characterises Nasmyth's approach as Utopian. Whilst Bewick was not a great reader of Scottish philosophers (he explicitly tells us he had never read Hume or Miracles, for instance) Reid's Common Sense Philosophy is close to his own vision of the life of an artist or poet expressed in chapter 24 of the *Memoir*. For Bewick, the artist should live close to nature and study it well. The artist should also have faith in the workings of 'superintending providence' guiding new generations of artists to out-do their predecessors.

Indeed Bewick may have felt that it was in Scotland that these ideas were being attended to most closely. There is a hint of Caledonian Utopia in his farewell to the Scots:

We left Edinburgh on the 23d of Aug 1823 & I think I shall see Scotland no more—I think so well of these our northern countrymen, both English & Celtic, that in most things they may serve as a pattern of both good sense good conduct worthy of imitation by the other less civilized nations of the World.

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