



CHERRYBURN TIMES

The Journal of The Bewick Society

A NOTE ON JOHN ANDERSON (1775-1807), THE TILLOCH TESTIMONIAL AND THE DIARY OF WILLIAM GODWIN.

by Virginia van der Lande



Title page of *Grove Hill, with a Descriptive Poem Ode to Mithra*,
(30cm) 4to.

Image courtesy of the Walpole Library, Yale University.

The thirty-two octavo notebooks comprising William Godwin's diary (1788 to 1836) are now available in a digital edition. Its importance can be compared with that of Samuel Pepys for the light it throws on middle-class London society, its reading habits, socialising and the concerns of the day.¹ Godwin was an influential radical journalist, author and political philosopher, a networker with a wide circle of acquaintances: his correspondence has also been published.² The cryptic entries record his literary tastes as well as everyone he

met and entertained. Among these were Dr James Anderson, LL.D. of *The Bee* (1739-1808) and four of his sons³

Godwin's unmarried sister conducted a high-class dress-making business ('Mantua maker') at Cullen Street in the City where she often acted as hostess for her brother until he married (29th March, 1797) the feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft shortly before the last of his Godwin entries. Godwin was then living at Chalton Street in Somers Town, in the parish of St Pancras.

Five of the thirteen 'Anderson' entries (1795, 1797) throw interesting light on Dr Anderson's son John, talented ex-pupil of Thomas Bewick. Until recently it has been puzzling that very soon after he arrived in London before any significant wood engravings by his hand had been published, John was among the nineteen experts who vouched for Alexander Tilloch's ability to engrave forgery-proof banknotes for the Bank of England.⁴ John signed a testimonial on 6th July together with Francis Bartolozzi ('Engraver to His Majesty, &c, &c.'), James Basire ('Engraver to the Royal Society, and to the Society of Antiquaries') and six others⁵ The latter was one of the twelve who signed the first one on 5th April. There were five altogether.

Three other sons had already begun their careers in business before Dr Anderson left Edinburgh for London. John joined them sometime late 1795/early 1796 and lived with his father at 22 Hatton Garden.⁶ Although their futures were assured, John's was a problem as he had not completed his apprenticeship and as a newcomer, he badly needed an introduction to the London world of illustrators.

The first contact of the family with Godwin took place on 20th July 1795 when George ['G'] Anderson called. The last was on 4th March 1797, when Dr Anderson dined with Godwin at (Joseph) Johnson's together with Henry Fuseli (painter), Charles Grignion (draughtsman, engraver), William Blake (poet, painter and printmaker and signatory of the Tilloch testimonial) and Arthur Aikin (scientist, writer).⁷ Johnson (of 72 St. Paul's Churchyard) was a leading bookseller and publisher, well-known for the dinner parties he hosted at the Chapter coffee house in Paternoster Row.⁸

Some entries also mention Miss (Hannah) Godwin, God-

win's sister. She was then in her 30s (b. April 1762), a successful businesswoman employing young female apprentices at her City premises. She was better educated than was usual for women at this period and the young men would have enjoyed her company. Perhaps this was especially so for George who appears in six entries and was the first Anderson to have contact with Godwin. ⁹After that, Dr Anderson, himself no mean networker, probably realised it would be advantageous to make his acquaintance.

John ('Jno') is first named on 20th November 1796 when, with his father, he called on Godwin.¹⁰ Four days later '5 Andersons' supped with him at his sister's place. On 11th January 1797, he called on Godwin again, and met him for the last time three weeks later (2nd February). On 15th March Godwin paid an abortive visit to Dr Anderson. Was it because of an emotional entanglement of one of the sons with his sister or was it connected with John's wood engraving skills? The latter is more likely from the composition of the party who supped with him at Johnson's 4th April 1797. The examination of a print of Tilloch's specimen £5 banknote at the Bank had been carried out the same day. The certificate was signed on 5th April by twelve prominent experts who included William Blake who, the previous evening, had attended the dinner party at Johnson's. ¹¹As the first certification was ignored, Tilloch continued to press his claim, supporting it with additional testimonials. Three were signed on 6th (one by John) and a final one by Richard Austin on 10th July. ¹²

This would have given John the publicity he needed for which his father (and brother) takes credit. Two years later (1799) he provided fifteen highly-accomplished wood engravings for the sumptuously produced quarto volume *Grove Hill, with a Descriptive Poem Ode to Mithra*, printed on fine paper by T. Bensley, commissioned by the wealthy Quaker physician and philanthropist, Dr John Coakley Lettsom (1744-1815), FRCP, FRS, FSA, founder of the Medical Society of London. It is noteworthy that the engraver is identified on the title page [Illustrated: 'The Engravings on wood by J. Anderson] for normally he was not named, unless a famous practitioner of the art such as his one-time master, Thomas Bewick.

Aged twenty-four he was now on the threshold of a successful career as one of the leading wood-engravers in Brit-



Detail Title page of *Grove Hill, with a Descriptive Poem Ode to Mithra*

The seated cleric is Maurice's ex-teacher, Rev. Samuel Parr.

Image courtesy of the Walpole Library, Yale University.

ain.¹³ That he failed to make use of this opportunity is another story.

Sources

Myers Victoria, O'Shaughnessy David and Philp Mark (eds), *The Diary of William Godwin*, (Oxford: Oxford Digital Library, 2010). <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>

Clemit Pamela (ed.), *The Letters of William Godwin* Volume I: 1778-1797, OUP, 2011.

Bentley G.E., *Blake Records*, Yale University Press, 2004

Lau, Beth, 'William Godwin and the Joseph Johnson Circle: the evidence of the diaries', Wordsworth Circle, 2002, vol.33(3)

Pettigrew J. *Memoirs of the life and writings of the late John Coakley Lettsom*, 1817,

Notes

1. Myers Victoria, (2010). <http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk> Edward Pope's website complements the above with genealogical investigations into the identity of the thousand-odd unidentified persons recorded [<http://www.edpopehistory.co.uk/content/about-site>].

2. Clemit Pamela (2011). No Anderson correspondence is recorded.

3. Thomas Carlyle, John Constable, the Earl of Buchan, William Hazlitt, Charles Fox, Charles Babbage, Charles & Mary Lamb, William Wordsworth, Jeremy Bentham, Humphrey Davy, John Wesley, William Pitt, Percy Bysshe Shelley [Godwin's future son-in-law], Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Richard Sheridan are among the many notables. Dr Anderson's sons were 'A' (Alexander, b.1769), 'G' (George, b.1773), 'J' (James, b. 1776) and 'Jno' (John, b.1775).

4. John Anderson's involvement with the Tilloch testimonial was first noted by Nigel Tattersfield. The European Magazine and London Review, vol.73, 1818, pp.62-67 transcribes the five certifications but incorrectly lists all nineteen for the first, among them the poet, painter and visionary William Blake (1757-1827). For many years, with much publicity in periodicals of the day, and supported by almost every artist of standing in Britain, Tilloch petitioned Parliament in vain for recognition, claiming that the process the Bank eventually adopted was his own [Bentley G.E., 2004, p.78].

5. The third testimonial with John Anderson's signature (one of eight) reads: 'London, 6th July, 1797. We whose names are hereto subscribed, not having been at the Bank to witness the comparison there made on 4th inst. between Mr. Terry's Imitation and Mr. Alexander Tilloch's Specimen of an Art invented by him to prevent Forgery, and not having seen the wood-cut Imitation, can say nothing respecting it; but we have examined the copper-plate Imitation then produced by Mr. Terry, and we hereby declare, that we perfectly agree in opinion with the Gentlemen who having signed the preceding Declaration of this date respecting the merits of Mr. Tilloch's Invention – the security that its adoption would afford to the Public, and the great difference between his Specimen and the copy produced by Mr. Terry. And we further declare, that we give this testimony from the same motives that influenced the Artists who signed the preceding declaration'.

6. John's letter from Edinburgh to 'Mr Thompson at Mr Bell's, Woolen Draper, Newcastle' is dated 'Oct 9 1795'.

7. Also named in the Anderson entries: James Marshall ['M'], writer; Thomas Cooper ['C'], actor; Miss Louisa Jones (temporary housekeeper to WG); Joseph Fawcett (Presbyterian minister); Miss Davis (unidentified).

8. Lau, Beth, 'William Godwin and the Joseph Johnson Circle: the evidence of the diaries', Wordsworth Circle, 2002, vol.33(3)9. pp.104-109

9. Had Hannah kept a diary more meetings might have been re-

corded. John was certainly interested in the opposite sex. From Newcastle he wrote to his brother 'I hope to have a smiling wife and a comfortable fire side' [Aberdeen University Library Archives: MS2787/5/2/5/4] and en route to Botany Bay, he jumped ship in Rio de Janeiro in 1805, having fallen for the charms of 'a young Portuguese lady of a respectable family who brought him a little money' [AUL: MS2787/4/8/1/55].

10. It is unlikely that the entry 'Anderson and sons' for 30 September 1795 included John for, although his apprenticeship had ended, he was still in Newcastle [Note 6.].

11. Four of the twelve signatories of the first testimonial were engravers to the Royal Family (James Heath, James Fittler, Sir Edwin Henry Landseer, and Francis Hayward). The eminent engraver James Basire, 'Engraver to the Royal Society, and to the Society of Antiquarians' and his ex-pupil, William Blake, also signed.

12. Eight of the nineteen signed more than one testimonial, four of whom were Royal Family appointees.

13. *Grove Hill...* has two unrelated sections illustrated by John Anderson from drawings by George Samuel, landscape painter and topographical draughtsman (fl. 1784- d. 1823). The poetical text was by Thomas Maurice. *Grove Hill* (forty-six pages) has thirteen full page engravings describing the house and garden in Camberwell, Surrey, belonging to Dr John Coakley Lettsom. *Ode to Mithra* (twenty-nine pages) with two of John's most technically-accomplished wood engravings, illustrates poems Maurice composed in memory of the Classics teacher of his schooldays, Rev. Samuel Parr [Gent. Mag. Vol.94, part I, 1824, pp.467-473]. Maurice (1754-1824) was a noted oriental scholar who became Assistant Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum. He composed the poems in return for the hospitality he received from Lettsom while he was writing his monumental *Indian Antiquities*. Lettsom is not named in the Godwin diary. However, he knew Dr. Anderson [*The Bee*, vol. 1 (1791); vol. 10 (1792)] describing him as '...a gentleman of candour and liberality, with a disposition laudably inquisitive' [Pettigrew, T.J. (1817) p.45].



Trade card of John Anderson, engraved on wood, c.1800.

From Tattersfield N. (2011) *THOMAS BEWICK, The Complete Illustrative Work*, The British Library, The Bibliographical Society, Oak Knoll Press, Vol. One p.212.

Tattersfield gives an account of John Anderson's apprenticeship and subsequent career. Vol.1 pp.211-7.

The Bewick Prize

2013

The winner of the Bewick Prize for 2013 was Rosamund Fowler with her print **Tulip Vase** (16x8cm illustrated).

The prize is awarded annually at the Society of Wood Engravers exhibition.

Born in Edinburgh in 1963 Rosamund grew up in the North East of England. She trained at Edinburgh College of Art and graduated in 1985. She worked for many years as a professional illustrator before trying her hand at wood engraving. She has become a regular exhibitor with the Society of Wood Engravers.

You can see more of Rosamund's work in wood engraving and illustration on her website www.rosamundfowler.co.uk

THOMAS BEWICK AND HIS APPRENTICES: PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS AND PRINTS

LAING ART GALLERY, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

30 NOVEMBER 2013 – 9TH NOVEMBER 2014

By Marie-Thérèse Mayne

Assistant Keeper of Fine & Decorative Art
Laing Art Gallery

Thomas Bewick has been described as Northumberland's greatest artist. Today, he is best-known for the intricately detailed wood engravings he and members of his workshop produced, often published as illustrations in books. Less well known are the many drawings and paintings also made by these artists, sometimes as preparatory studies for engravings on wood or metal, but also for their own sake as artworks, and it is this aspect of their work which is explored in *Thomas Bewick and his Apprentices: Paintings, Drawings and Prints*, an exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery. Drawing on the extensive collections held at the Laing, together with selected loans from private collections, the exhibition features a range of work made by Thomas Bewick and some of his most talented apprentices, including John Bewick, Robert Johnson, Charlton Nesbit and Luke Clennell.

Between 1775 and 1828, Thomas taught about 30 apprentices in his workshop. Most apprenticeships lasted seven years, although there were exceptions. His own apprenticeship with Ralph Beilby (1743-1817) began in 1767, when he was fourteen years of age, and lasted until 1774. It was Ralph who recognised and encouraged Thomas's talent for wood engraving, and who later worked with him on his first great undertaking *A General History of Quadrupeds*, published in 1790, while the two were business partners. This book was so popular that several editions were published, and displayed in the exhibition are volumes from 1792, 1807 and 1820. The 1807 edition is open at the page showing the Cart Horse, demonstrating the format Ralph and Thomas adopted for the book – each animal was described through a main engraving, followed by the text, and finished, if there was still space on the page, with a vignette or tale-piece. With typical attention to detail, Thomas has chosen the accompanying tale-piece very carefully (Illustrated). It shows the terrifying



Robert Johnson, *George Gray in America*, about 1790, pencil and watercolour on paper, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums)

scene of a small child pulling the tail of a large, angry-looking horse. The child's mother is in the background, running towards it and screaming, but she is too far away to prevent the child being kicked, and the resulting tragedy is left to the viewer's imagination. Also typical is that Thomas keeps his subjects and models close to home, as the child is believed to be a portrait of his younger brother, John Bewick.

As well as being an occasional model, John Bewick (1760-1795) was also Thomas's earliest apprentice, taken on in 1777 after Thomas had gone into partnership with his former master Ralph Beilby. John, unlike his elder brother, had not shown any particular interest in art as a child, and so Thomas was delighted to discover he had a real talent for drawing and painting, and encouraged him to develop these new-found skills. Included in the exhibition is a watercolour



Robert Johnson, *A North View of St. Nicholas' Church*, about 1795,
pen and ink and watercolour on paper, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums)

drawing *The Fieldfare* believed to be by John. Very similar in style to studies Thomas made for his *History of British Birds*, it is beautifully detailed, with expressive lines and delicate colouring. The bird balances on a branch in a snowy landscape, and a bunch of bright red berries contrasts with its speckled plumage. John's apprenticeship lasted only five years, instead of the usual seven, and then in 1786 he moved to London, where he established himself as a wood engraver and book illustrator. His work was in great demand, and during his career he contributed illustrations to at least sixty different books. His career was cut short through ill health, and he returned to Ovingham in Northumberland where he died of tuberculosis in 1795, aged only 35. The display includes a copy of *Blossoms of Morality*, a collection of short stories edited by Richard Johnson (1733/4 – 1795) and intended to provide moral instruction for young boys and girls. It contains 47 illustrations, all designed and engraved by John. He completed the designs just before his death, and they were published posthumously in 1796.

While John Bewick was Thomas's earliest apprentice, it was John Laws (1765-1844) who he always referred to as 'our first apprentice', as he was taken on in 1782, shortly after Thomas and Ralph had finalised their business partnership. Law's training was shared between the two of them and, unusually, he started his apprenticeship at the late age of 17

(most apprenticeships began at age 14). The son of a farmer at Heddon Laws, near Heddon-on-the-Wall in Northumberland; throughout his career, Laws combined farming with his work as a silver engraver, as well as being a keen amateur naturalist. John Laws was recently the subject of a special edition of *Cherryburn Times* (volume 6, number 5, Spring 2014), exploring his life and work, and centred around the conservation of his scrapbook, a remarkable object which features in this exhibition, alongside examples of the type of bright-cut engraving work which Laws specialised in.

Not long after taking on John Laws as apprentice, Thomas also took on a pupil – Robert Johnson (1771-1796). Robert was the son of a maidservant at Cherryburn, and Thomas's parents were his godparents. Thomas agreed to take Robert on as a pupil under his "fostering care" in 1784 at the early age of 13, and so his 'apprenticeship' was longer than usual, lasting until 1794. Robert suffered from poor health - Thomas described him as a "pale, pasty, sickly" child - and so he encouraged him to work out of doors, drawing in the open air. Robert blossomed under Thomas' care, and became a skilled draughtsman and colourist, producing exquisite landscapes such as *Tanfield Arch*, delicate sketches of local characters including *A Milkmaid* or amusing caricatures such as *George Gray in America* (Illustrated). George Gray, the Newcastle fruit painter, was a friend of Thomas Bewick's, a respected

drawing master, geologist, chemist and botanist. An eccentric in both his dress and his habits, Robert shows him on one of his many scientific trips to South America. In his hand is a plant specimen, while a snake slithers out of the bush behind him and two deer bound away. Robert did not like wood engraving, but much preferred drawing, copper-engraving, and working with watercolours. Describing Robert's work, Thomas later said:

‘...I conceived he could hard be equalled, in his water coloured drawings of views and landscapes, by any artist...’

Thomas often gave him rough sketches to work up into coloured drawings, which would then be engraved by Thomas himself or another apprentice. Robert produced a series of studies featuring important Newcastle buildings and several are displayed here, including *The General Infirmary* and *Black Friars*. These may have been intended for working up into engravings, although this was never carried out. Also displayed are two large watercolours of *St Nicholas' Church, Newcastle upon Tyne*, dating from about 1795. Almost identical, they show the Cloth Market square in front of the church (which received Cathedral status in 1882). Robert shows it at the beginning of the day, before the stalls, stacked in the middle of the market-place, have been set up for the day's trading. Normally this area would have been crammed with stalls and traffic moving between the Tyne Bridge and the Newgate, but

at this time it is relatively empty, and the elegant carriage in the foreground of one of the paintings can make its way unimpeded (Illustrated). In a whimsical touch, two ragged urchins are cheekily catching a ride on the back axle of the carriage - their funny and animated faces are not in Robert's style and it has been suggested that Thomas may have painted them. *St Nicholas' Church* takes on an added poignancy as it was one of the last paintings that Robert produced. Completing his apprenticeship in August 1794, he tragically died just over a year later, aged 25, after catching a fever while copying paintings in Scotland. However, the painting came to hold a particular significance for a fellow-apprentice of Robert's, Charlton Nesbit.

Charlton Nesbit (1775-1838) was the son of a keelman, and was apprenticed to Thomas Bewick in 1789 at the age of 14. He quickly showed a talent for wood engraving, and assisted Thomas with many of his tale-pieces. It is probable that he engraved some of Robert Johnson's designs, and the two apprentices seem to have held each other in high regard, as after Robert's death in 1796 Charlton engraved a memorial woodcut for his fellow-apprentice. Furthermore, after he had finished his own apprenticeship, in 1798 he engraved a large block after Robert's watercolour of St Nicholas' Church. This engraving, *A North View of Saint Nicholas', Newcastle upon Tyne* (Illustrated) was one of the largest wood engrav-



Robert Johnson and Charlton Nesbit, *A North View of Saint Nicholas', Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1798, wood engraving, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums)



Luke Clennell, *Sportsman with Gun and Dog*, about 1804, watercolour on paper, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums)

ings ever attempted in the detailed style of Bewick's Workshop, measuring 15 inches by 12 inches. An astonishing undertaking, when it was displayed it earned Charlton the lesser silver palette of the Society of Arts and great critical acclaim. However, he gave all the profits from the sale of the print to Robert's parents.

When Charlton first completed his apprenticeship he moved to London, where he quickly became well known for his excellent reproductive engravings from artists' drawings, and worked on many commissions for book illustrations. However, he was also a skilled draughtsman and painter in his own right, as is beautifully demonstrated in the exhibition by a charming miniature *Portrait of James Rome*. An inscription on the back tells us that it shows James Rome, aged 24, and was painted on 7th February 1829. An engaging and lively portrait, it shows James' head and shoulders, and he looks out at the viewer with an interested gaze. By 1818 Charlton had returned to the North East, settling at Swalwell in Durham, although he continued to work as a wood engraver for the London and Newcastle booksellers. Moving back to London in 1830, he remained there until his death at Brompton in 1838.

One of the best represented of Thomas' apprentices in the exhibition, and also one of the most accomplished, is Luke Clennell (1781-1840). The son of poor parents, he was at first apprenticed to his uncle, a grocer. It soon became obvious that Luke thought of nothing but drawing and painting, and so his uncle generously set him free from his indentures to follow his dream of becoming an artist. Taking him on as an apprentice in 1797, Thomas quickly recognised his talent and did everything possible to encourage him. He also looked after Luke very well, lending him money and buying him clothes. This care and attention bore fruit, and between 1799 and 1803 Luke acted as Thomas' principal assistant on the second volume of his *History of British Birds* – a testament to his skill and ability. Among the tale-pieces he engraved for

this was *Sportsman with Gun and Dog* (Illustrated) and the watercolour scene it was based on features in the exhibition, along with several other small drawings and paintings later used as designs for bookplates or tale-pieces.

After completing his apprenticeship, Luke stayed with the Workshop for a few months, and then moved to London to set up in business for himself. He became known as a skilled wood engraver, and in 1806 was awarded the gold palette of the Society of Arts for an engraving of a battle scene. However, his aim was to become recognized as a painter, and in about 1810 he gave up engraving to concentrate on painting, becoming a member of the Associated Artists, and showing his work at the British Institution in 1811. It was about this time that he was commissioned to produce most of the illustrations for Walter Scott's book *The Border Antiquities of England and Scotland*. Engraved by J. Greig, they were first published in 1814, then reprinted in 1815, and the Laing is fortunate to have many of the original watercolours in its collection. Examples on display include *Mitford Manor House*, *Carlisle Castle* and *The Interior of Lanercost Priory*, together with some drawings from the same series which were not used for the final illustrations, including *Warkworth Hermitage*, and an unfinished *Hotspur Tower, Alnwick*. In 1812 Luke sent his first work to the Royal Academy, and began





Luke Clennell,
The Baggage Wagon, 1812, oil on canvas,
 Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums)

experimenting in oil painting, producing work such as *The Baggage Wagon*. (Illustrated)

This was so successful that in 1814 he gained the patronage of the Earl of Bridgewater and his first major commission for an oil painting – a group portrait of the Banquet given for the sovereigns of Britain, Russia and Prussia and their generals at the Guildhall, London on 18 June that year. A pencil sketch for this monumental work is displayed in the exhibition, and Luke completed portrait sketches of the almost four hundred people present.

His success seemed guaranteed, but this commission was to prove his downfall. The work proved incredibly difficult to complete, and in 1817 he began to suffer from depression and delusions, which worsened after the death of his wife. In an effort to help provide for Luke and his three young children, the Earl bought the picture in its unfinished state, and it is believed to have been completed by Edward Bird R.A. (the work is now part of the Guildhall Art Gallery collection). However, Luke never recovered from this trauma. He returned to Newcastle and lived for a time with his brother, but in 1831 suffered another mental breakdown and was confined to the Newcastle asylum. He continued to draw and paint, occasionally exhibiting his work locally, such as with the Newcastle Society of Artists, but his health remained pre-

carious and he was frequently confined to the asylum until his death in 1840.

Luke Clennell is today regarded as Thomas' most gifted pupil, and had his career not been cut short by his illness, he would have undoubtedly become a leading figure in British painting. He and his fellow apprentices have often been disregarded or dismissed because of their primary medium, engraving being seen as a mechanical and reductive artform. However, the work displayed in this exhibition leaves the viewer in no doubt as to the range and scope of the talent nurtured in the Bewick Workshop.

The Laing Art Gallery is open Tuesday-Saturday 10am-5pm, Sunday 2pm-5pm (closed Mondays, except Bank Holidays).

There will be a special event on **Saturday 18th October at 2pm**, when you can join members of the Bewick Society Committee for a tour of the exhibition. Admission free – please contact June Holmes (The Bewick Society, c/o The Natural History Society of Northumbria, The Great North Museum: Hancock, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PT. Tel no. 0191 208 5834 or email <bewick.society@newcastle.ac.uk>) for further information.

STRANGE POLITICS

TRADITIONALIST AND RETROSPECTIVE RADICALISM

BY PETER QUINN



'The Newcastle Arms on a Boundary Stone,'
engraving for the title page of *A History of British Birds: Land Birds* (1797).

Castellano, K., 2013. *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790-1837*. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York. Part Two, Habitation, Chapter Three: "Thomas Bewick's *A History of British Birds* and the Politics of the Miniature" pp. 65-90.

Introduce a group of novices to the work of Thomas Bewick and two topics are sure to come up: size and politics. The tiny size of Bewick's images confounds our expectations of significant art. Twentieth century modernism favoured the monumental not the miniature. Furthermore Bewick is an uneasy fit with present day labels of left and right, radical and reactionary. Well-worn speculations can be trotted out. Increasingly however writers are trying to formulate an account based upon close reading of available sources.

The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790-1837 treats Bewick's work alongside that of admirers and contemporaries: Burke, Wordsworth, Edgeworth, Cobbett and Clare. Chapter Three, '*Thomas Bewick's A History of British Birds and the Politics of the Miniature*' can seem a challenging read not least because the writer dazzles us with a wide range of references. It is not every text on Thomas Bewick which footnotes Claude Lévi-Strauss, Walter Benjamin, Franz Kafka, EP Thompson, David Simpson, Mary Louise Pratt, Gallagher and Greenblatt, Harriet Ritvo, Tobias Menely, Max F Schulz, Michel De Certeau, John Brewer, and David Collings. My attempt to summarise her argument short circuits the scholarship behind her observations however I offer it here to alert readers to an interesting contribution to our understanding of Bewick's natural history and politics.

Eighteenth century natural history is closely linked to colonial expansion: new systems are put in place to classify the ever-expanding field of knowledge. Contrary to this Bewick's *History of British Birds* favours the local. The local influences Bewick's choice of classification system, his descriptive passages and his commitment to detail and realistic depiction. Bewick sees birds in terms similar to humans. This is not sim-

ply "free as a bird" but a complex reading of our relationship to nature and to each other. Birds' second nature rests for Bewick on sets of custom. The bird's relationship to nest, the season, the food chain can tell us much about human society.



A General History of Quadrupeds showed Bewick's "disregard of system" preferring a practical guide to animals and one shot through with references to the landscape of his own locality. The Chillingham wild cattle for instance represent "modern remains" of ancient custom and practice. Wordsworth and Audubon both saw Bewick as a "son of nature", a person with inbuilt vision rooted to his own locality. In this reading of Bewick the vignettes can appear nostalgic images of a bygone time. Actually in his descriptions of birds Bewick is sure to offer both local and global knowledge: his texts are amalgams of reading, correspondence and local folklore. The form is best seen as a type of bricolage. *A History of British Birds* was an ongoing project which would fill the rest of Bewick's days and one to which many of the high and low in society felt they could contribute. Samples, - live, shot and stuffed - were sent to Bewick's door as were testimonials and observations. This lively communal activity can be characterised as artisanal and craft based - Bewick did not own this information he facilitated its sharing.

The title page of *A History of British Birds* (1797) features 'The Newcastle Arms on a Boundary Stone.' A blackbird sits on a branch apparently observing comings and goings on the Tyne. Birds are our "constant neighbours, or attendants on



THE SPARROW

(*Fringilla domestica*, Linn. - Le Moineau, Buff.)

the habitations of men. They are the subtenants of the cultivated world". Indeed nest-building is seen as architecture, clever, well-constructed yet built out of readily available materials. Bewick admires birds' persistence and invention in nesting often against all the odds. His intense engravings of human "nesting", such as the headpiece to the Introduction of Volume One *A History of British Birds* 1797, can seem nostalgic. Seen together however Castellano wishes to characterise these images as not simply nostalgic but as showing a life lived harmoniously yet dependent upon customary rights



A traveller with pack and stick sits back against a rock and drinks from the flaps of his hat. Water flows over a rock covered with bushes and inscribed with 'Grata sume' and a heart.

A History of British Birds, Land Birds (1797) p.xxx

such as to gather water (Grata Sume), take game or fish. They contrast with those few images of collieries and coal staithes. In these she argues there is little sign of nature, modernity threatening the ecology of the past.

Bewick was concerned with the loss of common rights on the poor. The gentry were neglecting their traditional roles: enclosure, war, greed and short-sightedness were causing hardship. Bewick returns again and again to the walls, fences, gates which symbolize property, the private. The birds enjoy natural liberties. The poor do not. Rooks, crows, tomtits, jays and sparrows were considered to be pests. Bewick, unlike Buffon, defends these birds arguing that we should look closely at the contribution they make, for instance sparrows

destroy harmful insects. Indeed sparrows should teach us all a lesson: they are cheerful despite the fact they neither sow nor reap but live off man or the natural bounty of the earth.

"Bewick's strange politics, hovering between radicalism and Burkean conservatism" are likened by Castellano to the "traditionalist radicalism" described by David Collings. This accounts for Bewick's opposition to land nationalisation as suggested by Thomas Spence but also his criticism of the Game Laws. Bewick saw natural history as a key to understanding: "a good naturalist cannot be a bad man" he tells us. Castellano ends her chapter with the example of a talepiece in *Water Birds*. The Virgillian slogan is engraved on a rock 'flumina amem sylvasque inglorius' ('may I love the woods and streams'). Two men fish in a picturesque spot, however they are not alone as a heron fishes alongside them.



A large rock in mid river, a blasted oak and bushes on top, a black surface is inscribed 'Flumina amem sylvasque inglorius' and 'TB'.

A History of British Birds, Water Birds (1804) p.370

Castellano's text will be read alongside the recent contribution of Professor Diana Donald to this area. Donald (pp.124-135) employs Raymond Williams's phrase 'retrospective radicalism' ['a conviction that the benevolent concern for the wellbeing of the labouring classes that they attributed to the medieval church and to Britain's ancient families had been destroyed by the new, harsh, commercial spirit.' (p.130)] Unlike Castellano however, Donald marshals archive material to demonstrate that Bewick's opposition to enclosure was not absolute. She cites the Bewick family enthusiasm for a canal scheme that would have cut through Prudhoe, Eltringham and Mickley. Bewick was also friendly with a number of agricultural improvers who promoted intensive farming and bonded labour. Donald's nuanced presentation



A horse leans back on its traces, having drawn its cart almost under a gallo. A noose hangs ready.

A History of British Birds, Land Birds (1797) p.110

alerts us to the fact that as Bewick aged the rural community he remembered from his childhood was increasingly under pressure: war, enclosure, game laws, reform and industrialisation all taking their toll. As a result Bewick's vision of people and landscape gained in power for later readers especially the Victorians.

Both Donald and Castellano use Bewick's writing and images as evidence. They treat Bewick seriously as a thinker dismissing the stereotype 'son of nature' label. Professor Donald's text will have a much larger readership not least as she has been well served by her publisher Reaktion books who have produced a well-designed book with many illustrations. Castellano's text sadly has only a few illustrations; these are poorly printed inside uncharacteristic frames.



A man has dropped his pack to the ground and holds his walking stick in both hands to fend off a dog.
A History of British Birds, Water Birds (1804) p.84

A full review of Professor Donald's text will appear in the next *Cherryburn Times*. Whereas Castellano bases her study on the standard published material on Bewick, Donald has been at some pains to mine the archives for new or hitherto neglected material. Her footnotes alone are a treasure-trove for future researchers: German translations (p.199), American migration (p.43), forging French banknotes (p.42) and a ghostly Victorian Bewick (p.188) caught this reader's eye.

Sources

Castellano, K., 2013. *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790-1837*. Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York. Part Two, Habitation, Chapter Three: "Thomas Bewick's A History of British Birds and the Politics of the Minature" pp. 65-90.

Donald, D., 2013. *The Art of Thomas Bewick*. Reaktion Books, especially Chapter One 'Truth is to bend nothing but all to her' Bewick as a Naturalist.

Captions for the vignettes illustrating this review were created making use of the *The First Part of an Inventory of the Vignettes of Thomas Bewick and the Beilby-Bewick Workshop*. Created by Dr David Gardner-Medwin and Peter Osborne, this useful pdf file is available from the home page of the Bewick Society (<http://www.bewicksociety.org/>). It is hoped that this pdf file will form the basis of an image database in the near future.

New Publication Thomas Bewick *Graphic Worlds* Nigel Tattersfield

The British Museum Press, May 2014 144 pages,
100 engravings ISBN 978 0 7141 2691 3 Paperback £9.99



Policy heading for the Newcastle upon Tyne Fire Office, engraved on copper by Thomas Bewick, 15 February 1783 at a charge of £3 3s. 0d.
105x142mm. Private Collection.

'When William Wordsworth wrote enviously in his Lyrical Ballads of 1800, a few years after Thomas Bewick's History of British Birds first saw the light of day, 'Oh now that the genius of Bewick were mine / And the skill that he learn'd on the banks of the Tyne', he crystalized the notion, current ever since, of Thomas Bewick as an unlettered genius, communing with Nature, remote from the tawdry world of commerce. Though it makes for fine poetry, nothing could have been further from the truth.'
(From the *Introduction* p.6)



Heading for a Handbill engraved on wood by Thomas Bewick for Thomas Denton's 'Grand Mechanical Exhibition' 27 May 1786 at a charge of 10s 6d 75x112mm, British Museum 1882, 0311.4148.

“Although many during the Regency period would deny it, everyone was up for a show. Thanks to concessionary rates offered by showmen, typically ‘Ladies and Gentlemen 1s, Tradesmen 6d., Servants 3d.’, this was where farm workers, butchers, serving wenches and apprentices rubbed shoulders with the middling classes and the wealthy. Social distinctions crumbled when curiosity was piqued, and few discriminated between ‘low’ (popular) and ‘high’ (classical) entertainment, to the despair of more sensitive souls such as William Wordsworth. He railed against Bartholomew Fair and its ilk, where ‘all out-o’-th’-way, far-fetched, perverted things / Of Man’ were all ‘jumbled up together to make up / This Parliament of Monsters.’

Certainly Newcastle, especially during Race and Assizes weeks, had its share of delegates to this ‘Parliament’. Albinos abounded, as did dwarfs, giants, fire-proof ladies, ‘Spotted Boys’, stone-eaters (their meals could be heard chinking in their stomachs ‘as if in a Pocket’), double-headed heifers and sagacious animals of all sorts. Some entertainers brought a measure of learning with them. Appearing as a performer with Banister and West’s circus in the North East in 1810, the ‘celebrated Patagonian Sampson’, Giovanni Battista Belzoni (late renowned as an explorer of Egyptian Antiquities and occasionally claimed as the model for Indiana Jones), not only displayed his stupendous feats of strength but also exhibited ‘Hydraulic Experiments on the Power of Water.’”

(From *Entertainment*, p.96)

Recently published by the British Museum Press, **Thomas Bewick *Graphic Worlds*** presents a new approach to Thomas Bewick, highlighting his brilliant engravings designed for the world of the Industrial revolution.

Thomas Bewick is acknowledged as the foremost wood engraver not only of his generation, but of all subsequent generations. His images of animals and birds, published as *A General History of Quadrupeds* and *A History of British Birds*, have charmed generations of readers as well as dramatically influencing the development of the illustrated book both in Britain and America. Yet Bewick was no isolated genius communing with nature or toiling in an artist’s atelier, but a jobbing engraver busily plying his trade in the heart of Newcastle upon Tyne at the very moment when the Industrial Revolution was beginning to change the world.

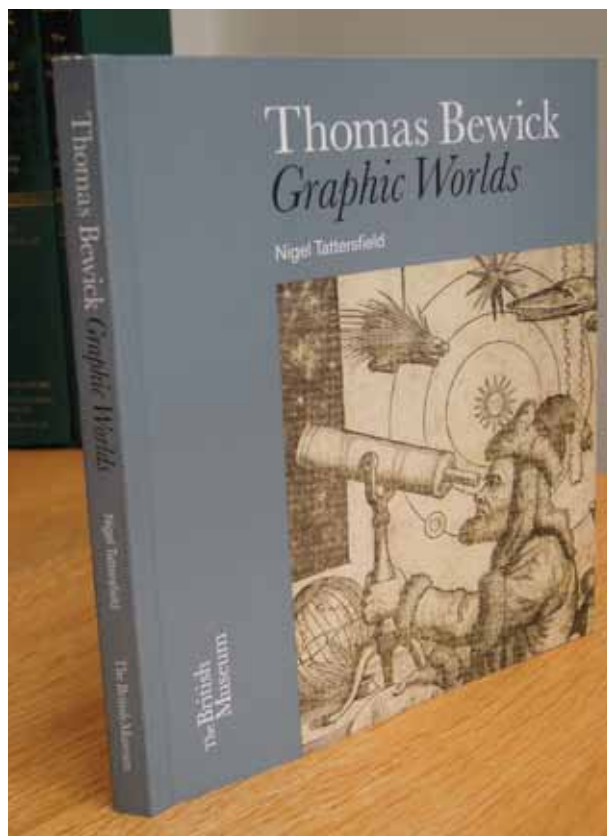
As an artist-craftsman Bewick possessed an exceptional talent, but his workshop was a business, catering for the demands of local customers, from the gentry who wanted crests on silver cutlery to clockmakers who needed engraved dials. However, Newcastle was also an important printing centre, so Bewick received commissions for illustrations for children’s books, showmen’s posters, tobacco wrappers and a host of other commercial items, which he infused with his own flair for originality. Over the ensuing years this ephemeral material has been unjustly marginalised, most notably by the Victorians, keen to promote Bewick as an artist pure and simple.

This book reinstates Thomas Bewick in the world of trade and material culture, revealing his long-forgotten contribution to the development of what we would today call graphic design. Illustrated with examples from the unrivalled collection of the British Museum, some never previously published, **Thomas Bewick *Graphic Worlds*** allows a rare

glimpse of his everyday commissions and provides a historical perspective to the images displayed.

Author Nigel Tattersfield is an independent scholar and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. He has written extensively on Thomas and John Bewick and his most recent publication is the three-volume *Thomas Bewick: the Complete Illustrative Work* (2011).

A full review of *Thomas Bewick: Graphic Worlds* will feature in *Cherryburn Times* in the near future.



Thomas Bewick

Graphic Worlds

Nigel Tattersfield

The British Museum Press, May 2014

144 pages, 100 engravings

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Cherryburn Times is normally published twice a year. This year has been a year of transition. We have a new editor and the ambition to publish three times a year. David Gray has agreed to continue to share his knowledge and experience as Consulting Editor, for which we are immensely grateful. As ever contributions are invited for future issues particularly (but not only) from members of the Bewick Society.

The next issue of the *Cherryburn Times* will be a celebration of the life and work of Dr. David Gardner-Medwin (1936-2014).

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