

Editorial note

Mary Chubb (1903-2003) was the great-great-granddaughter of John Chubb (1746-1818) the Bridgwater artist. She was the daughter of John Burland Chubb, (1861-1955), A.R.I.B.A. to whom eventually descended the archive of John's art and a collection of family letters.

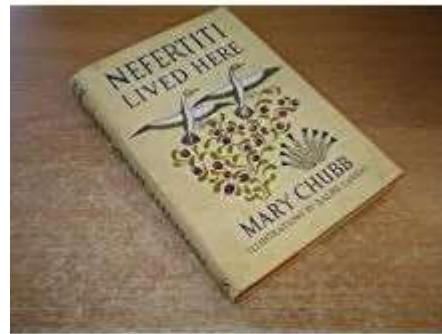
She took a job at the Egypt Exploration Society to fund her study of sculpture at the Central School of Art in London, and not because she had an interest in archaeology or Egyptology.

Mary Chubb left her job at the Egypt Exploration Society and volunteered herself as a "secretarial dogsbody" to their excavation of Tell el-Amarna in Egypt. She slowly developed skills and became an important member of the team. Her administrative work "helped to set new standards in archaeological publication". After the end of the dig at Amarna, she joined the excavations in Iraq, at Ur and Eshnunna, run by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago; she held the title *Field Secretary to the Iraq Expedition of the Oriental Institute*. She then spent 1938 at the University of Chicago writing up their recent excavations.

Following a serious road accident just after WW2 she turned author and wrote a number of books on archaeology for the general public and also wrote a number of children's books on people of the ancient world. She also branched out into journalism, writing for magazines such *Punch* and for the BBC. Books in which each letter was a word linked to the book's topic and a paragraph followed that explained the word; for example, in her *An Alphabet of Ancient Egypt*, the letter C was for Cartouches and this was followed by a basic explanation of how to read hieroglyphics Her two main books were published in the 1950s; *Nefertiti Lived Here* (1954) and *City in the Sand* (1957). These books are about her involvement in the 1930s excavations of Tell el-Amarna in Egypt, and of Ur and Eshnunna in Iraq, so auto-biographical. They were republished in the 1990s with new introductions and added epilogues .

See *Wikipedia* for more detailed biography and list of her books.

No portrait has yet been found,



The Chubb archive came to her father after the death of Hammond Chubb in 1904. and the family soon established links with the town.

Dr W. H. Powell in *The Ancient Borough of Bridgwater*, 1907, pp. 297-8, noted he had been shown the drawings and paintings by John Burland Chubb.

In the 1930s John Burland Chubb loaned a number of Chubb's topographical paintings to the museum.

T. Bruce Dilks wrote *Charles James Fox and the Borough of Bridgwater*. Bridgwater Booklets series, No. 6, 1936 This comprises transcripts of some twenty letters and commentary and acknowledged John Burland Chubb for access to the letters.

In 1977 Revd Nicholas Chubb (1933-2012) to whom the collection has passed, loaned a number of portraits the Museum.

In 2004 the family sold the collection to the museum.

Mary Chubb's *Countryman* account of the collection is the only we have we giving an overview of both the art and the manuscripts. The articles were well illustrated with monochrome versions of John Chubb's drawings, but these have been omitted here.



BRIDGWATER was a tranquil country town when my great-great-grandfather was born there in 1746, although the old people then must still have had memories of violent times: memories of the false and fascinating Duke of Monmouth, sixty years back, whom their parents had so

misguidedly welcomed and lodged in the Castle the week before the Battle of Sedgemoor — memories, too, of the assizes after the rebellion, when eleven Bridgwater men were executed and many transported.

John Chubb's daughter must have been one of those charming people who are 'born interested'; for luckily she collected and preserved so many family oddments, notebooks, letters, ink sketches and water-colours that it is possible to build from them a clear picture of the life of this eighteenth-century merchant and his family, living by the Parret river on which his wares sailed up from the Bristol Channel. As a boy he badly wanted to shake free from his rural setting and study to become a professional painter. Although he never achieved this, he had undoubted talent and produced an immense amount of amateur work, of country scenes and people, and studies of his family and friends, often with a strong touch of caricature.

This feeling for brush and pencil has come out in every generation since; so perhaps he derived his talent from much farther back, for there is in the collection one letter of earlier date, giving just such a hint. It is written by Chubb's maternal great grandfather John Morley, clearly in a state of great stress, to his wife in near-by Petherton. Headed Bridgwater, it is dated June 15, 1685, only a few days after Monmouth had landed at Lyme. He was even then approaching Bridgwater, and King James's army, too, was moving rapidly on the town to quell the rebellion. After some agitated directions to his 'Dearest Heart', John Morley scribbles in one corner: *'Take the little booke of pictures in the study, and the coloured one with a wooden sockett, and hide them in a safe place for fear of a search'*.

What were the pictures in that 'little booke', that it was so dangerous to leave them in the study? Could they have been cartoons and caricatures, more witty than wise, directed against the unpopular king whose army was much too close for comfort? Of course this is guesswork, but it is possible that this hurried postscript traces right back to the sixteen hundreds. a family knack for knocking off a

telling likeness. Even without this intriguing sentence the letter is thrilling with its vivid urgency; the brown ink, still sprawling where it was thrown nearly three hundred years ago, evokes the puffed old ancestor, stabbing at the paper, one ear already cocked for the sound of distant drums.

His grand-daughter Mary Morley married a merchant of Bridgwater, Jonathan Chubb; and John was their only son. Jonathan's notebooks contain a mass of information about his trade, written in a marvellously small neat hand. Interspersed among the countless details of prices and duties and foreign exchange, and how they affected his shipments of Norwegian spruce, Dutch oak, staves from Hamburg, wine from Portugal, rum from the British plantations, prices and types of gloves and mittens and ribbons, there are moral precepts and details about his children, as one by one they appear on the scene — rather as if they, too, were small wares landed at his wharf:

Ducape Ribon is like Taffety, but exceeding rich, 'tis Paduzoy hard struck. Wears well.

Trust no one more or farther than there is occasion, and then with caution. This too must be observed in buying and selling.

Black Grogram is such as cockades are made of.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 1746 May 9 | Son John born, 3 in the Morn. |
| 1749 Sept | John can tell most words, and read properly almost any of Gay's fables and can write the Alphabet but not words |
| 1750 Dec | Can write almost as well as this, can read English especially Verse, better than one half of the Parsons and other men who are supposed able to read. Knows a great many Latin words, and can read Greek with but little hesitation. |
| 1751 Mar 1 | Was inoculated for the smallpox which he had without any sickness (except being lazy two days in the pustules coming out) their Number about three hundred. |

It is interesting to find even this very crude

form of inoculation, by direct infection from a smallpox sufferer, which had been introduced into England from the East about thirty years earlier by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, being already matter-of-factly practised in a small West Country town. It was more than forty years before Jenner, working on his observations that milkmaids never took the smallpox, was to prove his theory that the much milder complaint of cowpox could give the same immunity.

On May 9, 1751 Jonathan, who was till now his son's only teacher, wrote with justifiable pride:

Jack is now five years old, and can construe and parse the first Georgick of Virgil, with very few Blunders.

On the first page of another worn old notebook, which contains a collection of John's verses, there is an invitation written by him on his tenth birthday to his best friend.

To Joseph Burroughs

9th May 1756

*Dear Sir, you'll come & spend with Mirth .
The lucky day that gave me birth,
Lucky that first my breath I drew
Just as the world was blest with you.*

And it ends:

*Nor shall the solemn name of Friend
Like others, with our Childhood end.
For whether length of Land or Sea
Shall seperate my Friend & me
Or Worlds & Universes part
Still shalt thou dwell within my heart.
Distance & Death are just the same
In both we part to meet again.*

When John was thirteen, he went to London to stay with an uncle and aunt in Cheapside for several months. It must have been a great adventure, because a letter from his father shows that the boy was setting out with a deeper purpose than a social visit:

You left the country with ambitious hope to soar above any station here. But is a Life of business and hurry, or retirement and leisure best? Of luxury or simplicity? riches or mediocrity? Grandeur and fatigue or plainness and ease? How? In what degree?

But for the moment London had gone to John's head. He tells his father that he wants to stay and study to be a painter, backing up his

plea with a host of arguments, among them that, *'As a painter one has the pleasure of looking at pretty ladies'*. Jonathan replies drily: *'Looking properly at one pretty lady is better than a thousand'*.

To his sister Kitty, aged eleven, John writes:

There is a church here bigger than all Bridgwater, and a river as wide as the sea. Today the Dr. was so kind as to take me with him on the Water down to Greenwich, where I have seen that Grand Hospital, fine Paintings etc. but what pleases me most is to see the noble grand rich Shipping which England abounds in, and which is its Glory.

Kitty was a gay girl, and she was thrilled with John's travellers' tales. At Christmas 1759 she wrote to him:

My dearly loved loving lovely Brother,

You can't think how many kisses I have had on your account this Xmas. Dressed in your velvet Breeches, black coat, etc. etc. I make so smart a lad as to pass for my Brother with many, who make me a hundred questions about London, to which I boldly answer as well as I can, magnifying everything there, and despising everything here as low and paultry. I am no longer your loving sister Kitty but

Jacky Chubb.

John, clinging to London and with Kitty's letter in mind, writes:

Honoured Papa,

If it were not to see you, my dear Mama and Sisters I should wish never to see Bridgwater more. I cannot perceive how a Person who has any Spirit . . . can bear to live in the Country. A continuance of Pleasure in the same object cannot last very long. So to be sometimes in the City and sometimes in the Country would be more pleasing than a continuance of either. Kitty playing the Character of me her brother answered in a very similar manner, as would

Your Son, John Chubb.

Jonathan kept calm and merely replied:

It is natural for you to be somewhat intoxicated with the Pleasures of the Town. Kit with her usual humour made very merry with your letter and says that you ought never to marry since you say that A continuance of Pleasure in the same object cannot last very long.

With the end of the London visit, the letters cease, so there is no knowing what pressures or perhaps counter-attractions caused John to settle down in Somerset for good. Perhaps he felt there might be truth in his father's comment in one letter that *'the Pleasure of Poetry, Musick & Painting, & especially the last, greatly abates when we labour at it for Bread'*.

Anyway, here he was as a youth back in Bridgwater, learning a merchant's trade in the old house with its back windows overlooking the wharf and the river. Painting was relegated to a life-long hobby. It must have been his great refreshment, after hours of wrestling with the intricacies of exchanges and brokerages and duties. He took to painting landscapes and villages and details of agriculture that caught his observant eye. He walked all over Somerset. At Glastonbury, perched high on the Tor, he brooded on the ruins below, looked far away to Athelney and thought of Alfred and turned it into long, solemn (and not very good) rhymed couplets. Yet there are a few lines in this high-flown effort which do come to life over the years, as he looks out towards the distant spire of Bridgwater:

*Yonder Tower that strikes my view
Former youthful scenes renew
There my earliest infancy,
Burroughs, join'd my heart to thee.*

At the foot of the page is a little note: *'My dear friend Joseph Burroughs who died in London the 20th August 1762 aged 19'*.

But, after all, John was young and gay and, though Bridgwater must often have seemed a sleepy little place after his glimpse of London, there were friends all round him, especially James Coles, the vicar's son, to lark about with. A glimpse of John as a high-spirited young man is revealed in this letter which he received during the course of a Bridgwater election for a mayor:

Sir,

I am creditably Informed by my friend Mr Cox That you are the author of That there eppigram That was hung up against the Cross the Other night if you are So you are a impudent raskel and Durty Scoundrel besides you Have called my son in law Mr Charles Anderton the mayor capon Which is a lye as my dafter says he is No more a capon then yourself Which she is reddy to make oth of at Any Time you had better Mine your own business not Abuse your betters & my friend Mr Cox bids me tel you he is no More a rogue then yourself, and i tel you one thing more if you and Mr James Coles do go about As you has don before now maken lude noises at night & desturbing the repose of the Town i wil comit you Both to cock moile and so take care What you does for I wil be as Good as my word. Which is all at presant from

Yours as you behaves

C. Gardiner Mayor Elect.

Fryday too a Clock.

It would be interesting to find out the meaning of 'moile'. The rest of the letter is all too clear, and it was delightful to come upon the 'eppigram' in John's verse book. It is hardly surprising that the mayor elect was goaded into what, on the face of it, must have been a prodigious effort of penmanship.

*On the Election of a Mayor of Bridgwater
Twas a question if Symes, or if Cox should be Mayor,
If a Fool, or a Rogue, should be plac'd in the Chair.
Split the difference, says – and 'tis easily done,
Let Gard'ner be Mayor – and you'll have both in one.*

James Coles's father, the Reverend John Coles, vicar of Bridgwater for forty years, was a choleric little man. At one election the town clerk said of him that he was *'Exceeding busy and clamourous, unbecoming the Cloth'*. He used to carry, a knobby stick, with which he was said to belabour any parishioner who disagreed with him. John Chubb painted a convincing little picture of him, knobby stick and all.

If the elections provided opportunities for fun, so did the race meetings and the fairs, Bridgwater Fair being justly famous. It lasted a week, and almost everything movable that had any sale value was brought there from far and wide. People from the surrounding villages would take lodgings for the whole week. Thrifty housewives would lay in stores of cloth and woollen goods and boots for a whole year ahead. Country tailors came to buy their cloth. People tried on their new shoes and coats in the road, for every other place was full. There was singing and dancing in the streets, which were transformed with stalls and decorations. Out of the windows hung ribbons on poles and little toy ships and pumpkins and all kinds of baubles to show where food and drink could be had. *'Now, Master John, do you beware, And don't go kissing the girls at Bridgwater Fair.'* So runs the old folk song – a caution which, I feel sure, had no effect whatever on our John.

Now his painting album contains one 'pretty lady' after another, delicately tinted, girls with merry eyes and enchanting hats and hair-dos and

frills. One appears again and again—a gentle rounded face with great limpid blue eyes—for John had discovered at last the, truth of his father's words of long ago, that 'looking properly at one pretty lady is better than a thousand'.



MY great-great-grandfather John Chubb, merchant of Bridgwater, lived by the river Parret. There in his office, with windows overlooking the water, he dealt with the wares which were shipped to his wharf from all parts of the world, to judge from his business notebooks. He had given up a boy's dream of becoming a professional painter in London. Instead he took over the family business from his father, old Jonathan Chubb, who still lived with him in the house and had long ago counselled his son that '*the Pleasure of Poetry, Musick and Painting, and especially the last, greatly abates when we labour at it for Bread*'. Whether John agreed with this in his heart, or whether the choice had been bitterly hard, no-one can tell; but he settled down to secure his living by trade, filling his leisure hours for the rest of his life in tireless 'pursuit of those three arts *'and especially the last*'.

Perhaps poetry is too ambitious a word to describe his efforts in this direction; he mainly followed the eighteenth-century mode of neat verse imbued with a satirical flavour. His love of music found expression in glee parties at the house which, another ancestor of mine said, '*were a memory to all who were present*'. But of all his activities painting was the favourite. He developed a style of small, almost miniature, portraiture in line touched in with delicate colour—keenly observed little studies of his family and friends and countless acquaintances. It is as if a ghost carrying a colour-camera had managed to slip back two hundred years and get shots of the unaware folk of Somerset at their work and play. But John's observant and merry eye went deeper than a mere recording of feature; a caricaturist in the best sense, gently mischievous without overmuch exaggeration, he hit off the quirks of his subjects, bringing this microcosm of eighteenth-century England

vividly to life.

If I were to meet them today I would recognise them at once: the toady M.P., Mr Benjamin Allen, hopefully doffing his tricorne to a potential supporter at the next election; poor little Parson Sealey, with feet splayed out and a rent in the elbow of his jacket; Mr Cass the bookbinder, hard at work at his press, lining the spine of a book with a page torn from Holy Writ; and John Hicks, sinister scarecrow in shabby coat but wearing a gold ring on the hand that grasps an ugly-looking bludgeon. Looking at these little paintings with their intriguing details, I feel as if I know my ancestor's habit of mind as surely as he knew his sitters.

I can hear the laughter, which I think was never buried very deep, bubbling up in him as he completed to his satisfaction a telling likeness.

The local clergy seem to come in for the toughest handling, as if they roused even in his essentially kind heart something more than derision. From what one reads of the worldly ways of eighteenth-century country parsons, perhaps John Chubb was ahead of his time in implying that more spiritually minded clergy around Bridgwater would have been an improvement. Several of the clergy he painted are also mentioned in a long poem of his, describing the visitation by the Bishop of Bath and Wells to Bridgwater in 1785, to look into the behaviour of his incumbents. Needless to say, the proceedings as described by John Chubb are entirely imaginary, but they give a good idea of his own opinion of the worthiness of the neighbouring clergy; and his verbal descriptions are beautifully complemented by sly details in the pictures. '*The Visitation*' begins:

When the Preacher had ended, the Clergy all sable,

Like Rooks, nestled round the old Bird at the Table.

The muster-roll call'd, as they came man by man

Their Diocesan drill'd them, and thus he began.

I hear, Mr Tooker, you lead a sad life—

How comes it to pass you don't live with your Wife?

And what is the cause you reside not at Spaxton?—

Then Tooker replied—

My Lord, let Bridgwater or Spaxton decide,

And by them I'll be tried,

But it signifies nought at which I reside,

*For reside where I will there is no-one can call
The life that I lead any living at all.*

Then comes the turn of the vicar of
Cannington:

Well how, Mr George, do you manage your Flock?

*Do the Cannington sheep bring of wool a good stock ?
Do you shear them and fleece them ? —My Lord, I do both
Else how could I answer my Pastoral Oath?*

The Reverend George Rowley seems to have been John Chubb's *bete noire*; he was a conceited little man who 'pretended to teach Latin'. As an example of John's care for detail, all his drawings of Rowley show a small gap in the right eyebrow. Part of the Bishop's interview with him goes:

Are you, Mr Rowley, the Bridgwater Vicar?

*Quoth Rowley— There's no-one could start for it quicker
When Wollen & I ran a Heat for the Gift.*

*(But the Race is not always, my Lord, to the swift !)—
So though I nigh rode myself into a pleurisy,
As yet am I doom'd to remain in a curacy.*

This is a dreadful pun, for there is a note at the foot of the page: '*Rowley's constant method of pronouncing the word "inaccuracy"*'.

I feel sure John kept some of the letters which have survived simply because their illiteracy amused him. They must have been written by humble folk, to whom writing and spelling were something of an awesome mystery. This fact makes them interesting, because the phonetic rendering of some of the words shows how the writers talked in Somerset two hundred years ago; 'z' is written for 's', for instance, as one hears it today. One such letter, dated 1793, is about a rascally James; he seems to have been menacing two men who are afraid to inform on him. Part of it goes:

*. . . bot if you think fet we oul Get them in Thersdey if
You oul zend along a bet of a lein or to the oul think thay or
a blicht to Com you zend it by the Bearer if you Pies I think
that the oul be the best wetneses that we Got for won of
them zeth that James Dreten to Lether hem if hegh ouden ze
zow and zow I zed James Go wing to Dow it from your
hombel sarvent Joseph Drew*

Some of this is clear, but a transcription—
should I say translation ?—may be helpful:

*. . . but if you think fit we will get them in Thursday; if
you will send along a bit of a line or two they will think they
are obliged to come. You send it by the Bearer if you please.
I think that they will be the best witnesses that we got, for*

*one of them saith that James threatened to leather him if he
wouldn't say so and so. I said James (was) going to do it.
From your humble servant Joseph Drew*

John married Mary Witherell, a girl from Wells with gentle rounded face and great limpid blue eyes, and they had three children. Morley was born in 1788, the year his father was Mayor of Bridgwater, Lucy in 1794 and Charles James in 1797, named after the illustrious Fox, who had become a good friend of Chubb's. Politics stood high among his interests, and he first came to Fox's notice when he was entrusted with conveying Bridgwater's Petition to Westminster, part of a nation-wide campaign against certain abuses of Royal privilege. Later Fox consented to stand as Whig candidate for Bridgwater and was unpleasantly surprised when he came bottom in the poll; but as he had not once appeared during the campaign, and as electoral corruption was becoming a scandal in that part of the country at the time—one candidate was said to have paid £50 to a blacksmith to have his horse shod—there were at least two good reasons for the result. Although Fox had little use for Bridgwater thereafter, he was still an enthusiastic Steward of its race meetings and became a life-long friend of John Chubb:

*. . . I do assure you that it is no small compensation for
the trouble and disappointment. I have experienced from the
Business that it has been the means of making me acquaint-
ed with so many zealous and valuable friends to the good
cause, and particularly that it has procured to me the
pleasure of your acquaintance. I shall in the course of next
month be making a tour in the West, but as I shall have a
Lady with me, I shall as well for that as many other reasons
avoid Bridgwater; but perhaps if I were to let you know in
time on what day I am likely to be at Piper's Inn you may be
so good as to come and take a dinner with us. If you do, I
shall be very happy to see you. I am very sincerely, dear Sir,
Yours ever,*

C. J. Fox

At seven young Morley was shaping as a gay spark and, though perhaps not quite so advanced in scholarship as his father at the same age, already wrote a fine bold hand. Later he spent three years at a boarding school at Nether Stowey, near Bridgwater, and a few of his letters to his father, and of John's to him, survive. John

praised him heartily for refusing to accept a shilling which someone had given him to help overcome homesickness:

. . . and that you may be no loser by it I enclose you one in its stead, which you need not squander however in marbles or gingerbread, for I suppose there are some poor people in Stowey to whom a halfpenny would be a comfort now and then.

Oddly enough it is only from this small boy's letters that any echoes sound of the great events that were stirring the world just then. One written when he was still only seven begins:

There was a small mob here on monday when Sir Philip Hales came to have the corn carried away but there was no damage done; we were none of us suffered to go out of the house.

This must have been one of the disturbances caused by the rocketing corn prices due to the French war. And again in a letter two years later, dated March 1797, when Morley was nearing his ninth birthday:

Dear Father, I am very glad to hear I have a Brother, I wish much to know what his name will be. Mr Wood teaches us our exercise and we have little wooden guns . . .

At this date England was in the greatest possible peril. If the Fleet once lost command of the Channel there was nothing to stop invasion. Perhaps Mr Wood felt that the sooner small boys in his care learned to handle even dummy firearms the better.

Just at this time John Chubb had another correspondent living in Nether Stowey. In 1797 he received a long letter, asking if he could help find a cottage in the neighbourhood for the lecturer, Thelwall, lately tried for treason and still under a deep cloud of suspicion because of his revolutionary ideas:

. . . some odium and inconvenience must be incurred by those who should be instrumental in procuring him a cottage. But are Truth and Liberty of so little importance that we owe no sacrifices to them? And because with talents very great and disinterestness undoubted, he has evinced himself in activity and courage superior to any other patriot, must his country for this be made a wilderness of waters to him ?

The letter is signed S. T. Coleridge. One wonders how John Chubb reacted; it was a tricky request, however liberal-minded the recipient,

and Coleridge clearly realised this. Whatever happened, they remained friends, for we hear of Coleridge at the Chubb home ten years later in 1807, when John was sixty-one. Old Jonathan had died only two years earlier at the age of ninety. Morley was now a young man. De Quincey had gone to Stowey to meet Coleridge for the first time, had missed him there and was directed to Bridgwater. He describes his first sight of Coleridge, who was standing in reverie under his host's gateway:

The hospitable family with whom he was domesticated were distinguished for their amiable manners and enlightened understandings; they were descendants from Chubb, the philosophic writer, and bore the same name. For Coleridge they all testified deep affection and esteem — sentiments in which the whole town of Bridgwater seemed to share.

John lived for another eleven years. In the same little book in which Jonathan had proudly written in 1746 'May 9th. Son John born 3 in the Morn', there is an entry in Morley's hand :

1818. Feb. 2 Monday Evening about 8 o'clock died our beloved father (John Chubb) after a lingering illness of two years.

So the simple tale is told: that of an obscure, yet cultured merchant; a skilful amateur artist; a kindly man with a shrewd and humorous outlook. Humble himself, he yet had the friendship of a great statesman and a renowned man of letters. Although his life lay in the quiet ways which he had accepted; in the small town lying between Sedgemoor and the Quantocks, he lived that life so fully that much of it has brimmed over beyond his time, to our great enjoyment today.