

BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL BLAKE MUSEUM



John Chubb self-portrait

THE CHUBB COLLECTION - A BRIEF GUIDE

John Chubb was born in 1746, the son of Jonathan Chubb, a Bridgwater timber and wine merchant. John wanted to become a professional artist, but his father did not approve of the idea, and eventually he carried on the family business. John took an active part in town politics, and was Mayor of Bridgwater in 1788. Later in his life he was active in the local campaign to abolish the Slave Trade. He was a Dissenter but was not overly religious, being typical of the type of person so common in the Age of Enlightenment.

While his father ran the family business, John Chubb had plenty of spare time to spend on drawing and writing poetry. He painted not only local scenery, which makes an important record of what Bridgwater and its surroundings looked like in the late 18th and

early 19th centuries, but also many portraits of his family, local businessmen, doctors, clergy, local Members of Parliament and suchlike. Many of his portraits relate to working tradesmen and craftsmen working with their tools. Some of his writings contain witty pen portraits of local figures – and as he was not being paid for the work he did not have to flatter them!



Possibly Miss Webber

As a teenager, John visited relations in London and more than 50 letters between him and his family from that time are in the collection. It includes correspondence to Chubb from a leading politician of the time, Charles James Fox, and a letter from the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, written at Nether Stowey in 1797 – at the time when Coleridge was writing one of his most famous poems “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” - as well as Chubb’s own comments on local politicians in verse. There is a memorandum book, showing Chubb Senior’s activities in a busy merchant town. There are also personal letters written by the Chubbs shedding light on their lives.

Three hundred and sixty sketches and finished drawings and a number of documents were kept together by his daughter after his death in 1818, and were, most unusually, kept together by the Chubb family afterwards. Thee collection dates mostly from between 1761 and around 1800 although there are also some letters written by Chubb's Somerset ancestors going as far back as the 1650s.



Mr Wise

For the past 50 years, sixty of the pictures have been on loan from John Chubb’s descendants to the Blake Museum. At the end of 2002, the family decided to sell the entire collection and offered it in the first instance to Blake Museum. Thanks to local support and help from a number of national grant-giving bodies, in 2004 Blake Museum reached its appeal target of £123,000 to save over 300 unique historic original water-colour paintings and documents with an important link to Bridgwater’s history.

The Heritage Lottery Fund contributed £88,000 in the light of local contributions from Sedgemoor District Council, the Friends of Blake Museum and other local organisations and individuals, which amounted to about £9,700. Other national organisations that contributed were the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund (£15,000), and the National Art Collections Fund (£10,000).

The paintings by John Chubb which we have at Blake Museum are crucial to visitors’ understanding of Bridgwater in the late 18th century. We have documents and tombstones that give us names of Bridgwater people, but only Chubb’s portraits tell us what they actually looked like.



Mr Jeffery

The way in which John Chubb portrayed the people around him really brings the town to life. He painted for his own enjoyment, not for commercial gain, so he depicted whatever subjects appealed to him. Also he painted local characters who would not have been able to afford an artist to paint their portraits. The pictures have many uses in Blake Museum, and their acquisition has been a big gain in telling our visitors about the history of Bridgwater.



Miss A. Follett

As well as material about Bridgwater, the Museum covers the villages in the area extending from just south of Burnham and Highbridge in the north, to Thurloxtton in the south, and from Ashcott in the east to beyond Nether Stowey in the west. The Museum has collections relating to archaeology, local history, Robert Blake, the Duke of Monmouth and the Battle of Sedgemoor, the local merchant and artist John Chubb (1746- 1818). There is a large photographic collection.

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