

John Chubb's Commonplace books

INTRODUCTION

By Tony Woolrich

Documents A/CSC/1/2 and A/CSC/1/3 are part of the Chubb collection in the Somerset record office at Taunton. They cover much the same ground, with one being a copy of the other. The documents (with others) were retrieved from the Archive by Mike Searle, Hon Curator of the Blake Museum, and digitised by him on equipment at the Museum. Without this effort, publication now would not be possible.

The archive catalogue describes these at Commonplace Books, but this is not strictly accurate, as such books are similar to scrapbooks filled with items of many kinds: adages, maxims, quotes, letters, poems, tables of weights and measures, prayers, legal formulas, and recipes. Documents A/CSC/1/2 and . A/CSC/1/3 comprise the texts of verses only and the latter is in chronological order.

The former document appears to be a loose assembly of disbound pages; some appear missing and others lack page numbers. Others are out of order. The latter document appears to be a fair copy of these, made by the same hand and is a complete manuscript book. The last page number of the former document is 162, the last page number of the latter is 207.

The latter also has some loose sheets inserted at the beginning in French, with translation, of the verse "Jamais, et Pourtant, ou conversation with Madame Gertrude," par Mr Carnot.¹ The author was Lazare Carnot (1753-1823). The date of publication has not been discovered. It was set to music by Henri Blanchard in 1857. A transcription may be read in Series 2 of the Chubb letters on this website.

At the beginning of documents are indices. That for A/CSC/1/3 follows this introduction, as it is fuller. To this has been added the page number where document page appears in this transcription, and the date noted.

John Chubb's times

Chubb was born in 1746, and lived through momentous times, which were dominated by George II and George III. Warren Hastings and William Pitt were active politically, as was Chubb's friend and confidant, Charles James Fox, the Whig politician. The period saw the war with France, and the American colonies became independent; there were troubles in Ireland. The British East India company was founded. It was concluded by the French Revolution, then Napoleon, to be followed by more French wars and the Battle of Waterloo in 1815

John Chubb was born in Bridgwater on 9 May 1746. A precocious child, John displayed a talent for art but did not take it up professionally. By 1778 he was a burgess and so a councillor, and was elected Mayor of Bridgwater in 1788. He was a Radical and supported the Whig cause and was active in promoting Bridgwater's anti-slavery petition to Parliament in 1785 He was one of the promoters of Bridgwater Infirmary, and served as treasurer to the time of his death in 1818.

He married Mary Witherell (1765-1812), from Wells, and they had three children, Morley (1788-1855), Lucy (1794-1867) and Charles James (1797-1872). John Chubb died 2 February 1818, after an illness lasting two years.

¹ Notice bibliographique Madame Gertrude, ou conversation que e'eus l'autre eour avec cette dame sur ces deux mots : eamais et pourtant. Chansonnette pour voix de baryton. Paroles de Lazare Carnot | BnF Catalogue général - Bibliothèque nationale de France

Carnot is much better known as a French mathematician, physicist, military officer, politician and a leading member of the Committee of Public Safety during the French Revolution. His military reforms, which included the introduction of mass conscription (levée en masse), were instrumental in transforming the French Revolutionary Army into an effective fighting force. (See Wikipedia)

It is not known where John Chubb was educated – it must be presumed it was at Bridgwater Grammar School, but he was proficient in Latin and French, from a young age.²

At the time of Chubb's death in 1818, Romantic poetry had arisen, with the works of Byron, Shelley and Keats. Chubb had become a friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge who was based for a while at Nether Stowey on the Quantocks and William Wordsworth was living at Alfoxton.

The verse

It is not known if Chubb was the author of all the verses, and how many might be copies of work by other writers. There are occasional deletions and subtle suggestions for alternative words. Chubb made indiscriminate use of capital letters, not just to begin a line but also in the body of the text and also the use of the Ampersand – & – in place of the word “and”.

The text is written in a cursive hand, but in some instances words are rendered in imitation of a typeset word. These are indicated here by a change of font.

Some of the verses have a Somerset theme, such as *Glastonbury*. (pp 115-128), and three relating to architectural features at Hallswell Wood. (pp, 80, 81 & 82) One of these being written in Mock Gothic script.

Several of the texts have Masonic themes, including a Masonic hymn sung on St John's day at St Mary's, Bridgwater in 1775, and others spoken at Masonic events at Exeter. (pp 153, 169, 171, 173) Others are pieces for delivery at Actors' Benefit performances. (p 159) Other texts are translations of Roman writers, such as Horace and Ovid.

Chubb wrote much in rhyming couplets and also blank verse. A few are humorous: one is *The Visitation*, describing the activities of Bishop Moss and the nearby Anglican clergy which may be found elsewhere on this website.

Another concerns the appointment of Chubb's brother in law, Rev David Webber, as rector of Pedomer near Yeovil: ... This is a sample verse: (pp 68-70)

Swains who in PENDOMER dwell,
Sound your Bells — I mean your Bell.
See, your jolly Rector comes,
Leave, ye Farmers, leave your homes.
Be your Wives or Daughters fair
Leave, ye Farmers, leave them there
See the Rector looking big!
See him ogle the tenth Pig.³
See himself a very swine
Studying deep — on what to dine
See him on the Sur loin leer;
See him swell with muzzy beer
See him stuff at every feast
See him — in one word — a Priest.
Swains who &c.

Footnotes: A number of the Footnotes were originally written when the project was active between 2004– 7, to be stopped when the work was abandoned on the handover of the Museum to the Town Council. The remaining notes were added after the project was

² He appears to have been home-educated. Johanathan Chubb's notebook, A/CSC/1/1 Page 26, says – Information on John

1749 Sept. can tell most words; & read properly, almost any of *Gays Fables* ; & can write Alphabet , but not words..(* Was a popular Children's book of the period written by John Gay)

1750 Dec. can write almost as well as this, can read English, especially verse, better than one half of the Parsons & other men who are supposed able to read. Knows a great many Latin words & can read Greek with but little hesitation.

1751 May, Jack is now five years old, & can construct & pass the 1st Georgick of Virgil, with very few blunders.

³ Tenth Pig: the Rectorial tithe, the land tax for the use of parish clergy.

recently revived. Chubb himself also wrote notes to a number of the verses. These are marked with a dagger – †.

This version The text of document A/CSC/1/2 was first transcribed as was the document of Ref A/CSC/1/3, which follows it. The poems there are in a slightly different order, and have a number of additional poems added at the end. Some verses have additional annotation by Chubb. Being written in a very clear hand, it allowed for proof-checking, so must be taken as the definitive version presented here.

A note is made of the page numbering of the manuscript, and the items are separated by a swelled rule thus: —*—

Many of the verses in document A/CSC/1/3 have minor variations in wording. In some, the titles are expanded with more detail. Names are expanded– for example “XXXX XXXX of Wells”, in A/CSC/1/2 , becomes in A/CSC/1/3 to read “Miss Pain of Wells”. A number were dated and show a few were written when he was a teenager or in his early 20's.

Publication It is far from clear if Chubb published any of his work. There are no clues in his papers. However, he might well have published pseudonymously or anonymously. He was brother in law of the writer, Captain Thomas Morris (1732-1808,) who came from a literary family. (See Wikipedia).

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⁴ Quintus Horatius Flaccus, (65BC – 8BC), known in the English speaking world as Horace, was the leading Roman lyric poet during the time of Augustus (also known as Octavian).

⁵ *The Metamorphoses* is a Latin narrative poem from 8 CE by the Roman poet Ovid. It is considered his magnum opus. It is considered his magnum opus. The poem chronicles the history of the world from its creation to the deification of Julius Caesar in a mythico-historical framework comprising over 250 myths, 15 books and 11,995 lines.

⁶ *The Phædrus*, written at the time of Plato is a dialogue between Socrates and Phædrus, an interlocutor in several dialogues. The Phædrus was presumably composed around 370 BCE, about the same time as Plato's Republic and Symposium.

⁷ Anacreon (c. 575 – c 495 BC) was a Greek lyric Poet, notable for his drinking songs and erotic poems.

⁸ Decimus Magnus Ausonius. (c. 310 – 395) was a Roman poet and teacher of rhetoric from Burdigala, Aquitaine, now Bordeaux, France.

⁹ *Pastor Fido: or the Faithful Shepherd* is a 1676 tragicomedy by the English writer Elkanah Settle. It was first performed by the Duke's Company at the Dorset Garden Theatre in London. It is inspired by Giovanni Battista Guarini's pastoral work *Il pastor fido*.

¹⁰ Gil Blas is picaresque novel by Alain-René Lesage published between 1715 and 1735. It was highly popular, and was translated several times into English, most notably as *The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane*, by Tobias Smollett in 1748

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¹¹ *The Lottery* is a play by Henry Fielding, and was a companion piece to Joseph Addison's *Cato*. As a ballad opera it contained 19 songs and was a collaboration with Mr Seedo, a musician. It first ran on 1 January 1732 at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane

¹² This might relate to the epigram *Lines inscribed in a Lady's Pocket Almanac* by Robert Burns, 1703

¹³ This relates to the release from gaol of John Wilkes, MP, the leader of the Whigs. He was tried and found guilty in absentia of obscene libel and seditious libel, and was declared an outlaw on 19 January 1764, but returned in 1768 and was elected as Member for Middlesex.

¹⁴ James Wolfe, (1727-1759)

¹⁵ Stoicism is one of the four major schools of thought established in the Hellenistic period. It was founded in the ancient Agora of Athens by Zeno of Citium around 300 BC. The stoics believed that the practice of virtue is both necessary and sufficient to achieve a well-lived flourishing life. The Stoics identified the path to achieving it with a life such as courage or temperance and living in accordance with nature.

¹⁶ Horatii and Curatii, in Roman Legend, two sets of triplet brothers whose story was probably fashioned to explain existing legal or ritual practices. During the war between Rome and Alba Longa in the reign of Tullus

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Hostilius (traditionally 672-642 BC), it was agreed that settlement of the dispute should depend on the outcome of combat between the two groups of brothers.

¹⁷ This clearly relates to Mary Witherell, of Wells, who Chubb married

¹⁸ Hugh Downman, (1740 – 1809) was an English physician, poet and dramatist. 'Editha, a Tragedy,' Exeter, 1784 was founded on a local incident, and performed for sixteen nights. It was published in one volume as of his plays titled 'Tragedies, by H. D., M.D.,' Exeter, 1792, 8vo

¹⁹ As note 17, above

²⁰ John Hammond, rector of Tolland, died there in April 1757 when he was in his 67th year. He was survived by his wife and at least two of his children. His only surviving son, John Hammond, was also destined for an ecclesiastical career. He may well have remained an insignificant footnote in history, were it not for the death in 1786 of 71-year-old bachelor George Lucy, his first cousin once removed. George Lucy, who was a nephew of Alice Lucy, John's paternal grandmother, had himself unexpectedly come into his family's inheritance (including the Charlecote estate) after the death of his own uncle William Lucy (his father Fulke having been disinherited for being a drunkard and a gambler, and his elder brother being barred from the succession for being an "epileptic"). But George Lucy himself vowed never to marry, preferring to keep mistresses and enjoy the pleasures that life could afford him. On his death, the main Lucy line became extinct and, lacking close relations, he bequeathed his properties to John Hammond, the grandson of his paternal aunt, but on the condition that he use the Lucy surname from then on. Thus, in 1787 Rev. John Hammond became Rev. John Lucy, and took up residence in Charlecote.

²¹ See above

²² Peter Pindar was the pseudonym of John Wolcott, (1738– 1819) a physician who had taken Holy Orders. He wrote much satirical and bawdy verse lampooning the Royal family, in particular. (see Wikipedia).

²³ Robert Dodsley 1703 – 1764 was an English bookseller, publisher, poet, playwright, and miscellaneous writer. The Oak and the Willow is his version of Aesop's fable, the Oak and the Oat, and published in his book, *The Select Fables of Esop* (1761).

John Chubb's Commonplace Books Ref A/CSC/1/2 and Ref A/CSC/1/3 Introduction

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