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1. LITERARY DISCOVERIES IN THE BROOKS COLLECTION

An examination of the Society's Brooks Manuscript Collection has revealed the presence of a number of unpublished letters by eminent persons, the significance of which appears hitherto to have remained unrecognised.

During the course of research into the work of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, I noted that an autograph letter by Shelley was listed as being held at Northumberland Record Office as part of the Brooks Collection.¹ Upon obtaining permission to examine this, I found that the document was a double-sided manuscript letter written entirely in Shelley's own hand. Subsequent research showed the letter to be unpublished, and consultation with authorities such as Dr Bruce Barker-Benfield of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, showed it to be genuine. A transcript subsequently appeared, with the Society's permission, in the *Times Literary Supplement* and a full account of the discovery and authentication of the letter is due for publication in the *Review of English Studies*.² Some months later, an account of a group of letters from Lord Byron and his family, which are also in the Collection, was published in the *TLS*.³

Further examination of the Collection revealed dozens of other manuscript letters and notes written by important historical figures from the world of literature, politics, and the sciences. These include an Elizabethan parliamentary warrant signed by Lord Burleigh, a Treasury note from Sir Isaac Newton in his capacity as Master of the Royal Mint, a military order from the Duke of Marlborough, an unpublished poem by Felicia Hemans, and numerous other formal letters, signed official documents, and hastily scribbled notes from

figures as diverse as Charles Dickens, Jenny Lind, and Edward Jenner. Although the contents of the collection has been catalogued to some extent, the significance and historical value of the individual documents (other than their value as autographs) has hitherto remained unrecognised.

The Brooks Collection consists of a dozen large leather-bound albums. The various autograph documents are gummed into the leaves of the volumes, in alphabetical order by the subject's surname, and are often accompanied by pictures, cuttings from newspapers and books, and other ephemera. The handwritten Donations Book held in the Society's library at the Black Gate records that the collection of 'Portraits & Autographs & Letters' was presented to the Society by Mr J. C. Brooks V.P. on 31st January 1894. The gift is also recorded in the minutes of the Society's meeting which took place on that date.⁴ The collection is there described as;

A magnificent and extremely valuable collection of portraits and autograph letters ... including portraits and autographs of our sovereigns from Henry VII to Victoria (except Mary and Edward VI) ... [and] most of the presidents of the United States.⁵

A letter from Mr Brooks was read to the meeting in which he stated the conditions under which the gift was made; the proposer and seconder of a vote of thanks both noted the financial, as well as the historical, value of the gift, which was then estimated at £1500. The donation was subsequently acknowledged in the report for that year, which states: "The council gratefully records its high appreciation of the gift, by Mr J. C. Brooks, one of the vice-presidents, of his large and valuable collection of portraits and autographs."⁶

John Crosse Brooks was born at Chatham in 1812, where his father held a government

appointment in the naval yard.⁷ He was educated at Bowes Hall school in Yorkshire – a rival establishment to the one notoriously portrayed as Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Brooks himself later wrote of his alma mater as being of; "... a noble appearance; but as to its inside comforts, I must remain silent." Indeed, he was removed from the school when, upon his return home one holiday, his back was found to be covered with scars.

In 1830, Brooks came further north to the Tyne to start work as a clerk and draughtsman in the shipyard of William Rea at Walker. As the industry converted from the use of wood to that of iron and steel for shipbuilding, the yard was taken over by a Mr Coutts of Aberdeen. Brooks was by now a book-keeper, and found himself working in the company of Charles Mitchell and William Swan, both of whom were later to achieve some degree of eminence on the Tyneside industrial scene.

Brooks' career prospered, and he became owner and manager of a number of vessels trading from the Tyne to Europe, to which he travelled frequently. From early youth, he had been a keen collector of coins, engravings, and works of art of various kinds. The gift from an uncle of a collection of autographs would seem to have been the basis of the collection he was later to present to the Society. During the course of a long life, Brooks added to this, as is suggested by the presence of what appear to be cuttings from auction sale catalogues alongside many letters in the collection. So far, a search of auction catalogues at the British Library has failed to link any item in the collection to a specific sale.

Having lived for most of his adult life in Wallsend, Brooks retired to a house at 14 Lovaine Place, Newcastle, in 1882. He died at that address, aged 85, on 13th March 1897.

Christopher Goulding

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¹ D. C. Sutton (ed.), *Location Register of English Literary Manuscripts and Letters: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, II (K-Z), London: British Library, 1995, 862.

² C. Goulding, "Shelley from Pisa", *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 July 1999.

³ C. Goulding, "From Byron to Babbage", *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 October, 1999.

⁴ *PSAN*², 6 (1893–1894), 130.

⁵ Current members of the Society have advised that most of the autographs of US Presidents went missing in the 1970s – apparently stolen by an American student.

⁶ Report for the year 1894 in *AA*², 17 (1895), xi.

⁷ The following details are extracted from Brooks' autobiography in *AA*², 19, 143–6, where there is also a portrait photograph.

2. PUBLIC HIRE CHAIRS IN NEWCASTLE

It appears probable that Newcastle was served by public hire chairs ('sedans') for at least a century (fig. 1). For part of that time they may have been the main, if not the only, form of public transport. Sydney Middlebrook implies so in his history: 'In Pilgrim Street, just below Anderson Place, stood a row of sedan chairs waiting for hire.'¹ As late as 1838 there were few hackney coaches and no cabs in the town. 'Consequently the sedan chairs which Hodgson said had been much in use in Newcastle at the beginning of the [nineteenth] century were a long time in disappearing from the streets.'²

The 'Hodgson' referred to was the Reverend J. Hodgson and the authority his *Picture of Newcastle* which first appeared in 1807.³ By the time the second edition was published in 1812 Newcastle's population, according to the census of the previous year, was 27,587, making it one of the 15 English provincial cities and towns with more than 25,000 people.⁴ In size and population however it still remained far smaller than London. The capital's relentless growth, to 864,845 inhabitants in 1801, had for some time been outstripping the range of its sedan chairs no matter how stalwart their bearers. In April 1791 Horace Walpole had written to Mary Berry: 'Indeed the town is so extended, that the breed of [sedan] chairs is almost lost; for Hercules and Atlas could not carry anybody from one end of this enormous