



The Southern Johnsonian

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2019 JSA Visit to the NGV

Eighteenth Century English Neo-Classical design and art at the NGV

Sunday 14th April

Meet at 2:15 for 2:30 start.

One of the ways of exploring the world of Samuel Johnson and his friends is through the art and artefacts of the period. The mid -eighteenth century was the time when those who could afford it were beginning to go on a "Grand Tour". On this visit we will be exploring the influence these visits to the ruins of Italy had on design and art in England at the time of Johnson.

Following the study of items in the NGV collection, join fellow Johnsonians for afternoon tea.



Set of candle stands circa 1777, Designed by Robert Adam 1728-1792

Meet in the foyer of the NGV at 2:15 for a 2:30 start
Bring friends and partners

President's Report

The society is in a good position in that we are beginning the year with all our dates, venues and speakers finalised. This means that you can put these in your diary now and include them in your planning. We have some excellent presentations and are looking forward to a good attendance at all our events. An outline of the program is on Page 3.

Website upgrade

We have also done a major upgrade of our website. Our original website, with Bryan Reid as the main contributor, and his son Sam as the designer was set up in 2004. It was innovative at the time and has served us well. However, it was, like a very old car, becoming harder to keep running and now seems a little old fashioned. We have included most of the old features but added some new ones as well and given it a new look. More information about the website is below.

Increasing attendance

Our Seminars and Lectures are always of high quality and the presenters put a great deal of work into them. They deserve a wider audience than we sometimes get and this indicates that we need more publicity on our part. Some

ways in which this could be done are by you using your own networks to publicise our events, and by encouraging friends and associates to visit the website by adding it to your emails. Let any committee member know of any other avenues of publicity you would like us to pursue.

New Section- 'Gleanings'

On the suggestion of our Secretary, Donna Williams, we have a new section in this Newsletter called "Gleanings". As you come across any interesting items in your reading, even if only loosely related to Johnson, please send to me to include in the Newsletter. Please see the Newsletter as another way you can contribute to the Society, either by providing some material for this section or providing an article of your own. See Page 6 for our first item.

AS we enter our 26th year, our success, as always is very dependant on one thing: your involvement in the Society. The Committee are looking forward to a most productive year.

Ian Keese, President

JSA's New Website

As indicated in the President's report we have done a major update of our website, and this has also involved a new address

www.johnsonsonociety.com.au

Some of the new features are apparent on the surface, but there are also some

features 'behind the scenes' that can make it more useful and easier to keep up to date

On the surface it now has a cleaner looking layout and many features that have not been updated for many years, such as including the *current* committee

members and providing *correct* links to other organisations have now been fixed. We have also added links to other Literary Associations in Melbourne and hope they can reciprocate.

Ian Keese and Donna Williams are planning to keep it up to date, and if we have your email address we will notify you when a new item appears.

As well as being accessible on computers, the website can now be accessed on smartphone and tablets. In the latter two cases it will open to the main article and if you want to use the menu to find other pages on your phone, look for the little box at the top with three parallel lines.

What you can do on the website

- We have retained the access to 6 issues of the JSA Papers (Vols 7-12) and it is hoped that we will have others available, as well as some of the Fleeman Lectures. [Click on **Publications**]
- If you are a current member and have PayPal you will be able to renew using this. [Click on **Membership**]
- Access recent Newsletters. [**Newsletters**]
- Make comments on any item
- Contact Committee Members [**About Us**]

Johnson Society of Australia 2019 Program

Sunday April 14 2:30 pm NGV

NGV Visit ; Eighteenth Century English Neo-Classical design and art.

Saturday July 20 Kathleen Symes Centre 2019 Seminar

- Paul Tankard: G K Chesterton and Johnson
- Tim Entwistle: Joseph Banks, Johnson and London at that time
- Ian Keese: Hannah More and the “Blue Stockings”

Saturday September 21 Kathleen Symes Centre AGM & Fleeman Lecture

- Dr Peter Groves: Johnson’s contribution to understanding Shakespeare

Saturday December 7 Mitre Tavern

- Christmas function

Johnson in the Sauna

I conduct an English literature course for the Bayside U#A Group. Earlier this year I had to miss a class. Three capable class members conducted the it based on a small selection of poems I supplied. The group later emailed me a "report" of the class accompanied by a photograph of the discussions being conducted from behind a table laden with copies of Mills and Boon and Barbara Cartland "novels".

When I returned I told the group I had taken the message and had consequently decided to vary the curriculum appropriately. And to kick off the change I instituted a short story competition under the title of "Love in the Sauna".

The winning entry, below, was written by a member of the group who is also a JSA member – Geoffrey Dodds.

Barrie Sheppard

Love in the Sauna

Extract from 'Boswell's Life of Johnson' (the rare unexpurgated edition)

After a lively gathering at the Mitre Inn, Hester Thrale, a handsome and wealthy widow, proposed to Johnson and myself that we repair to Sorensen's Sauna Bath, a newly opened establishment in the Strand.

- And pray Madam, what is a 'sauna bath'? Asked Johnson

- Why Sir, how is the word not in your own dictionary? She asked with a smile

- Ignorance Madam, pure ignorance, replied Johnson

Mrs. Thrale explained the operation of the sauna bath and I in my turn urged on him its invigorating properties. After much hesitation Johnson agreed to join us.

- But mind, he said, there is to be nothing immoral in it. I know Boswell's reputation.

- Oh Sir, replied Mrs. Thrale, have no fear of that. I shall appoint myself your moral guardian.

Upon reaching the establishment Mr. Sorensen greeted Johnson and myself with great civility and required us to disrobe. This greatly alarmed Johnson who stated that nudity was against his moral principles.

- Pray Sir, I asked, what is the definition of nudity in your dictionary?

- Why Sir, it is 'want of cover' but what of that?

- Then Sir, I replied, if you retain your wig you will not be in a state of nudity.

We entered a small cabin lined with wood, the floor being covered with a multitude of hot stones upon which Mr. Sorensen cast buckets of water generating vast quantities of steam. We sat side by side on a small bench, the greater part of which was taken up by Johnson's amplitudinous posterior. I asked him how he regarded the experience.



Why Sir,' he replied, it is the same as being in prison but with the additional chance of being boiled alive.

Then, to my amazement, the figure of Mrs. Thrale appeared through the steam, like a figure from the Underworld. She was clad only in a modicum of toweling that barely encompassed her salient protuberances, these being most generously proportioned.

- Sam, oh Sam she cried, advancing upon Johnson with her arms outstretched

- Madam, cried Johnson, pray desist. You are exciting my amorous propensities.

Disregarding Johnson's appeal, Mrs. Thrale continued her relentless advance and I must confess to being desirous of recording for posterity the denouement of that approaching nexus. But Mrs. Thrale's feet encountered the hot stones and with a whoop of pain she tumbled into Johnson's arms. What might then

have transpired I must leave to the reader's imagination. However, malignant fate, that so often shapes human affairs, intervened: Johnson's wig tumbled from his head at the moment of collision and, falling upon the hot stones, instantaneously combusted. Quickly the flames ignited the roof and walls.

- Sir, I cried, we are at risk of immediate immolation. We must act with celerity or perish in most scandalous circumstances.

-Come Madam, called Johnson, or the consequences of your lamentable passion will be fatal to more than our reputations.

Thus it was that we escaped the Great Sauna Inferno of London, barely with our lives and our clothes.

I once invited Johnson to attempt another sauna bath, assuring him that it would be a more favourable experience than the first.

- No Sir, he replied, that would be the triumph of hope over experience..

Geoffrey Dodds

Gleanings



Historically to glean was a practice of poor peasants to go back over the fields after a harvest and collect any left-over grain. Here it is used to describe those little items of interest one comes across in reading when one is really looking for something else. We would like to make this a regular feature of the Newsletter and any of your own 'gleanings' will be very welcome

We have in recent items become accustomed to using "Twitter" for short messages, such as those by which it seems the United States Domestic and Foreign policies are announced, so I was interested to see it being used on two occasions by Hester Piozzi (Thrale) in her *Anecdotes of Dr Johnson*.

The first was when people commented on his ignorance of Greek, despite him not claiming to be an expert:

I have, however, often thought Dr. Johnson more free than prudent in professing so loudly his little skill in the Greek language; for though he considered it as a proof of a narrow mind to be too careful of literary reputation, yet no man could be more enraged than he if an enemy, taking advantage of this confession, twitted him with his ignorance.

The second was when Hester asked him whether, despite his fondness for his wife, he ever 'disputed with her:

'Perpetually,' said he: 'my wife had a particular reverence for cleanliness, and

desired the praise of neatness in her dress and furniture, as many ladies do, till they become troublesome to their best friends, slaves to their own besoms, and only sigh for the hour of sweeping their husbands out of the house as dirt and useless lumber. 'A clean floor is so comfortable,' she would say sometimes, by way of twitting; till at last I told her that I thought we had had talk enough about the floor we would now have a touch at the ceiling'

I then went to Johnson's Dictionary to see in what way 'twitting' was being used at that time:

To twitter

- (1) To make a sharp tremulous interrupted noise
- (2) To be suddenly moved with any inclination. A low word.

His example for the second meaning was:

A widow which had a twittering towards a second husband, took a gossiping companion to match the job.

Ian Keese

I flew into London via Iceland and by late afternoon on September 18, with my friend Brian Grimes, was ensconced at Goodenough College. It was good to be back in this lovely place. The following day we made our way to Gough Square to spend time in Dr. Johnson's house. After a refreshing pot of tea and a "catch-up" on happenings at The House, the Donald Hyde Curator Celine McDaid, very kindly took us to lunch at Fleet Street's famous El Vino Lovers of Rumpole of The Bailey will know this as "Pomeroy's Wine Bar" where Rumpole would consume a bottle of "Chateau Fleet Street" after a stressful day in court Little has changed in 13 years at this fine old establishment save that ladies may now be served at the bar and the food is tapas style. We enjoyed squid, meatballs, grilled peppers and other delights with an excellent Argentinian Verdelho before returning

to The House. Here Celine showed us one of the rarities of the collection in her care. In or about 1927 R B Adam presented to The Johnson Club a spectacular Johnsonian keepsake now in The House (I suspect via Cecil Harmsworth). It consists of brilliant Sangorski & Sutcliffe binding. On the inside of the top and bottom boards respectively are inlaid a miniature portrait of Johnson (painted on ivory) and a lock of his hair. The contents consist of some pages of text (all executed by an expert calligrapher) into which are set a manuscript of a prayer in Johnson's hand and two Johnson letters. It is a stunning object and deserves to be much better known. I was unaware of its existence and it makes me wonder what other treasures remain hidden in the storage shelves.

The next day saw us off to Oxford for a visit to Pembroke College where we were met by Professor Lynda



Pembroke College, Oxford

Mugglestone who gave us morning tea in The Senior Common Room. After a long chat we left for lunch, having made arrangements to return for further discussions later in the day. With Brian in tow it was off to The Eagle & Child (a.k.a The Bird & Baby) for a pint with the ghosts of The Inklings. As we enjoyed our beer alongside the famous fireplace I am certain they were all around us. We then crossed the road to The Lamb & Flag for lunch. Dating from the 17th century this was a favourite haunt of Graham Greene. It has a particularly fine, listed, 18th century fire place in the room where we had a good ploughman's lunch and a pint of Oxford Gold. Back at the College the librarian, Laura Cracknell, showed us the plans for the proposed new library which is to have enough shelf space for the scholarly collection and display space for the rare books. We were the first outsiders to see these plans and our views on those plans (as collectors) were sought and noted. We were then shown the Vernon collection of Johnson material, a gift to the College about which little is known. I was allowed to rummage through it and, in the limited time I had, I found three of the highly collectable OUP Johnsonian facsimiles from the 1920's which were not listed in The College collection. No doubt there are other undiscovered treasures amongst this hoard and I have been asked to come back to spend more time examining this gift. I hope to do so later this year. One final delight remained. We were shown the manuscripts of Johnson's prayers. Brian mentioned the manuscript we

had examined at The House the previous day. This excited some comment as the College believes it has ALL the manuscripts. Brian undertook to do further research and to notify Laura of his findings.

The following day we took the train to Lichfield to take part in the Johnson Birthday celebrations. We attended drinks in the Council chambers in the evening then joined our fellow members of The Johnson society for dinner at a local restaurant. The following day (Saturday 22 September) we again assembled at the Council chambers from which, with all the local dignitaries in formal robes, and led by The Mace Bearer, we marched to the town square for the annual Civic Ceremony. This is always a moving occasion with music provided by a choir from Johnson's old school and a large crowd present. In the evening we attended the Annual Supper where Henry Hitchings, the celebrated author was installed as President. He gave an excellent address, "Johnson's Dictionary as a Guide to Life" and I had the honour of moving the Vote of Thanks. This Supper was notable as the first time five Presidents were present, Henry Hitchings, Michael Bundock, Kate Chisholm, Peter Martin and me. At the conclusion of the Supper we were each presented with the new and redesigned Society tie, a most handsome gift.

Earlier in the day we had lunch with Peter and Maureen Martin. Readers will know of Peter as a biographer of Johnson, Boswell and Malone. We had not seen each other for four years and it was a great joy to see them both again. Later we went to the Birthplace where the curator, Joanne Wilson, placed us in the library and gave us unfettered access to the

treasures held there. We spent some hours here and later, at the Supper, Joanne and her husband were at our table. Both are great company.

On Sunday we attended a Choral Eucharist in the glorious Lichfield Cathedral to mark the 309th anniversary of Johnson's birth. A large congregation was present, the music superb and the sermon very good. The Canon Precentor and the Canon Chancellor led The Johnson Commemoration in which a wreath is laid at the Samuel Johnson Memorial in St Michael's Chapel. At the conclusion of the Service sherry and light refreshments were served. Later we gathered at the eighteenth century George Hotel for lunch. Here I was delighted to be asked by Zandra O'Donnell, Secretary of The Johnson Society of London, to lay the wreath at Johnson's tomb in Westminster Abbey on December 14, 2019 and then to give the Richard Thrale Oration at the Society's annual luncheon. Although I have been a member of the Society for many years I have never attended this event but now I shall make my first winter visit to England to do so.

The Chairman of The Johnson Society (Lichfield) is Phil Jones. Phil kindly invited Brian and me to view his small but very choice Johnson collection. He would never describe himself as a collector but he has gathered a fine "cabinet collection" of first editions. We saw and handled the Dictionary, *Rasselas* (first issue), a stunning set of *The Rambler*, *Lives of The Poets* and Boswell's "Life". A delightful way to finish the day!

Monday was a glorious summer's day and Phil Jones drove Brian and me through pleasant country side to Uttoxeter for the Penance Celebration. Henry Hitchings was unable to attend and I had been asked, as a former President, to deputise for him. I accompanied the Mayor as a wreath was laid on the Johnson Memorial in the market place and I gave the address. Later we were entertained in the Town Council building to the traditional O.P. Rum and oatcakes followed by lunch. This is always a great day. We then took the train back to London and returned to Goodenough College for the remainder of our stay together.

The following day we were joined by Ole-Jacob Vindedal who had flown in from Norway the previous evening. Together we went to The House for a visit and to take the curator to lunch at The Cheshire Cheese where the ale, food and atmosphere are always good. We spent the afternoon book hunting and made our first stop at Maggs now in new premises at 48 Bedford Square. I managed to escape unscathed and we moved on to Jarndyce where I was delighted to purchase "The Poetical Works of Richard Savage/ in two volumes/ with the Life of the Author", duodecimo, 1791, John Bell, London. The set has the bookplate of the Reverend Henry Thompson in both volumes and cost a modest £38. The "Life" is by Johnson. I also obtained "Further Poems" by the Johnsonian scholar Mary Lascelles. The book is inscribed to the literary scholar Kathleen Tillitson at Christmas 1982 and, on the inside back cover the author has

inscribed a verse of one of her poems. I purchased this little book because it contains the poem "Johnson by Candle-Light". I plan to read it to you at our Seminar. Our day finished with an excellent dinner at Cafe Murano in Tavistock St., Covent Garden where we hosted Michael Bundock and Kate Chisholm for an evening of delicious food, fine wines and good Johnsonian talk.

The following day, I set off with Brian for Hampstead Heath. We had lunch at The Spaniards Inn (built in 1541) where Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick, Shelley, Byron & Keats drank. It was once owned by Dick Turpin's father. Black Bess, the highway man's horse, haunts the garden. Dickens knew the low beams and sloping stone floors well. He set a scene from "Pickwick Papers" here. We then went to Keats House, once two semi-detached houses built in 1816, but now one building. Originally Keats occupied one residence and Fanny Braune's family the other. Set in a delightful garden, in which grows the mulberry tree under which Keats wrote "Ode to a Nightingale", this is a house which is a "must" when you are next in London, a lovely quiet place. One of the treasures that we saw was Keats' copy of "Paradise Lost" heavily

annotated by him. That evening we dined, together with Ole-Jacob, at Ciaobella near the College, and said our farewells as we were to go our separate ways the following day, I to Spain on my Hemingway journey. That adventure will be in the next newsletter.

Before closing I must tell you about an important addition to my library. I have just received "Samuel Johnson's Unpublished Revisions to the Dictionary of the English Language/A Facsimile Edition" edited by Allen Reddick and published by Cambridge University Press in 2005. A substantial folio, in a protective box, it was supplied through Hill of Content Bookshop, Melbourne. Johnson revised all editions of the Dictionary published in his lifetime but his major revision was to the fourth edition of which I have a fine copy in my library. For some unknown reason some 120 pages of Johnson's handwritten revisions were not included when the fourth edition was published in 1773 so that this volume by Reddick is, in fact, a first edition of "the largest collection in existence of unpublished material by the great eighteenth century writer" (to quote "the blurb"). It promises much fascinating reading.

From the Archives

Occasionally we will feature an item from our archives. The item on the following page comes from Volume 10 No 3 (December 2003) written not long after Barbara Niven began her illustrious period as JSA Secretary.

Barbara Niven, who was recently appointed to the JSA committee, has on occasions at our Christmas parties delighted us with the reading of some racy excerpts from The Memoirs of William Hickey, the 18th Century rake who would have given Boswell a good run for his money in the licentiousness stakes. Her introduction to Hickey, however, caused something of a stir during one of her first postings as a secondary school teacher, as she tells us here in this account of her interest in Johnson and his times.



For a young teacher, Hickey was tricky

My first direct contact with Dr Johnson was as an undergraduate at Melbourne University, when I had to read *The Lives of the Poets* at one sitting the night before an English exam. I found the book unexpectedly fascinating so I went back to it later and read it properly.

Eventually, I taught 18th century British and European histories at University High School. This brought me much closer to Dr Johnson, although he was more a part of my landscape than the centre of my attention, but my curiosity about him was growing.

At this time I accidentally acquired *The Memoirs of William Hickey* edited by Peter Quennell. Always on the lookout for books that would augment the syllabus, I read a review of this book and ordered it for the library. The librarian was so shocked that she insisted on locking it up, which meant that students had to sign for it. Naturally, every Year 12 history student made a point of reading it. However, I was

obliged to take it with me when I left as the librarian refused to take responsibility for it. I am forever grateful to this librarian. These memoirs cast a wonderful light on the society in which Johnson and Boswell lived and thanks to a very good friend, I now have all four volumes of the original.

Then, for twelve years, I taught British and European eighteenth century histories at the Council of Adult Education. This was when I developed a fanatical interest in all things eighteenth century — which of course included Dr Johnson and James Boswell and their circles.

Membership of the Johnson Society has supplied a very happy extension of this interest. In London in 2000 I visited the Cheshire Cheese and later went to Lichfield, and in 2001 I followed much of the route of the Tour of the Hebrides, explored some of Boswell's Edinburgh haunts and spent some time in Oxford scanning bookshops and taking a look at Pembroke College.

However, I've barely scratched the surface.

I still have much to learn about them both, a lot of places to visit and a lot of reading to do.

Being a member of the committee will be a further enhancement of this interest. I look forward to it.

“ I read a review of this book and ordered it for the library. The librarian was so shocked that she insisted on locking it up, which meant that students had to sign for it. Naturally, every Year 12 history student made a point of reading it. ”



Johnson Birthplace Museum Lichfield

(See Pages 8 and 9)

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