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**BLAKE**

M I N U T E  
P A R T I C U L A R

Blake's Trial Documents

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visionary identification of "Human Forms" in nature. The poem is exceptional in this regard probably because it was conceived and written as an anti-thesis or corrective to Newbery's "How to Laugh," which excludes nature from full and equal participation in human life.

<sup>1</sup> See *Blake: Prophet against Empire* (Princeton, 1969), p. 124. In *Blake as an Artist* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 59-60, Bindman discusses the probable influence on Blake of Stothard's illustration

for "Drinking Song" in Joseph Ritson's *English Songs* (1783). Blake executed engravings after Stothard for this book.

<sup>2</sup> Foster Damon, *William Blake, his Philosophy and Symbols* (New York, 1924), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (New York, 1970), p. 11. The subsequent quotation from Blake is also from this edition.

<sup>4</sup> In "Night," the moon smiles, and a lion speaks. In "A Dream," an emmet and glow worm speak. In "Spring," birds delight-- which may or may not be a humanization.

## BLAKE'S TRIAL DOCUMENTS

By G. E. Bentley, Jr.

**T**he court documents concerning William Blake's trials for sedition and assault at Petworth in October 1803 and at Chichester in January 1804 are set out in *Blake Records* (1969), pp. 127-40. Recently I asked my colleague John Beattie, whose office is next to mine and whose field is the administration of justice in England in the eighteenth century, whether the court documents reported in *Blake Records* were likely to be all that survived and whether they were there interpreted plausibly. After reflecting for an embarrassingly brief time, he replied in as friendly and helpful a way as possible, No, and No. More important, he explained the way trials of the time were recorded and preserved and lent me his copy of a directory of the Sussex Record offices. The most obvious point he made is that the court documents quoted in *Blake Records* are in the West Sussex Record Office in Chichester, while no reference is made to the East Sussex Record Office in Lewes, which preserves materials relating not only to East Sussex but to the County as a whole. I am sorry to say that it had never occurred to me that there might be *another* relevant Sussex Record Office. The tardiness of this note I can only attribute to John Beattie's not telling me so earlier.

I therefore wrote to Lewes and was sent very promptly by A. A. Dibben, County Records Officer of the East Sussex County Council, reproductions of four documents relating to Blake's trial. Two of these are minor; the third and fourth are of major importance but are already quoted in their entirety in *Blake Records* from the transcripts of Herbert Jenkins, who had not indicated the locations of the originals. Using the information so generously provided by John Beattie and A. A. Dibben, the alterations to *Blake Records* should be as follows:

PAGE 127, for the last paragraph read:

On the morning of Tuesday the 16th, Blake, the soldier named Scolfield, his accomplice John Cock, and their lieutenant, who was responsible for preferring the charge, entered into recognizances for their appearance at the Quarter Sessions: . . .

PAGE 128, for the end of the top paragraph and the beginning of the next read:

Blake misremembered Hayley's recognizance as £100 rather than £50. *N.B.* No money changed hands.

Scholfield and Cock had to enter recognizances for £50 each:

No "bonds were taken" from them; they merely acknowledged that, if they didn't appear at the Quarter Sessions, they *would* "be indebted to our Sovereign Lord the King" in the sums specified. No borrowing was necessary, no cash was needed.

PAGE 131, fn 2: Omit

The primary source is in the Sussex County Record Office . . . . The secondary document, which amplifies the primary one and which may be the transcript Blake's lawyer applied for on December 25th 1803 (q.v.), was transcribed, from an original I have not traced, by Herbert Jenkins in a typescript (now in my possession) and printed in his 'The Trial of William Blake for High Treason [*i.e.*, *Sedition and Assault*],' *Nineteenth Century*, 1xvii (1910), 853-5, and *William Blake*, London, 1925. The Jenkins transcript has a few words . . . Sussex County Record Office . . . Sussex County Record Office . . .

Jenkins typescript . . . Record Office . . . Record Office . . . Jenkins transcript . . .  
Record Office . . . Jenkins typescript

In their place read:

The primary source is in the West Sussex Record Office . . . The secondary document, transcribed from a reproduction of QO / EW35 (Order Book) in the East Sussex Record Office, has a few words . . . West Sussex Record Office . . . West Sussex County Record Office . . . East Sussex Record Office . . . West Sussex Record Office . . . West Sussex Record Office . . . East Sussex Record Office. . . . West Sussex Record Office . . . East Sussex Record Office.

As I understand, the main document, the Indenture &c., was inscribed on a parchment roll and annotated as the trial proceeds, e.g., "Trav<sup>d</sup>". The lesser documents such as recognizances were inscribed on paper and often wrapped in the parchment roll to preserve them. Sometimes the paper documents were separated from the parchment roll and even destroyed, but the main parchment document was normally preserved if anything was. However, in this case there seems to be no surviving roll, and the paper documents are widely dispersed.

I ignore most differences in capitalization (the East Sussex document gives "ff" for "F"), punctuation, and size of writing. The substantive differences in the East Sussex document are as follows: PAGE 131, l. 5 of the document adds after "(that is to say)": "SUSSEX, to wit"; PAGE 132, l. 3 omits "said"; l. 7 reads "said said"; l. 13 reads "incite"; l. 16 omits the dash; PAGE 133, l. 17 "(to wit)" is within parentheses; PAGE 134, ll. 3-5 are omitted.

The Jenkins transcript was wrong in giving "would" for "could" on p. 132, l. 30.

PAGE 134, l. 11, for "raise" read "cause"; l. 13, for "Ackw. 100~~£~~" read "Acknd 100<sup>l</sup>"; l. 14, "William Hayley" should not be in capitals; l. 15, for "50~~£~~" read "50<sup>l</sup>"; l. 17, for "Ackwd" read "Acknd<sup>d</sup>".

The East Sussex document continues:

*THE SAID WILLIAM BLAKE late of the Parish of ffelpham in the County of Sussex Designer and Engraver came here in Court in his own proper person and desired to hear the Indictment of Record against him Read why he on the twelfth Day of August in the fforty third year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland now King with fforce and Arms at the Parish of ffelpham aforesaid in the County aforesaid in and upon one John Scholfield in the Peace of God and of our said Lord the King then and there being Did make an Assault and him the said John Scholfield then and there Did beat wound and ill treat, so that his life was greatly despaired of and other wrongs to the said John Scholfield then and there did, to the great Damage of the said John Scholfield and against the Peace of our said Lord the King his Crown and Dignity, And having heard the same Read says and pleads that he is thereof not Guilty and for his Trial puts himself upon the County and William Ellis Gentleman Clerk of the Peace for the said County who for our Sovereign Lord the King in this behalf prosecute &c doth so likewise therefore the Sheriff of the said County is Comanded &c to cause to Come a Jury &c To try &c*

*Plea  
not  
Guilty*

*Recogn<sup>d</sup>  
to  
prosecute*

*AND the William Blake Acknd.  
AND William Hayley of ffelpham aforesaid  
Esquire and Joseph Seagrave of Chichester  
in the said County Printer . . . . . Acknd<sup>d</sup>*

*100<sup>l</sup>  
50<sup>l</sup> each*

*UPON CONDITION for the said William Blake to appear at the next Sessions and try his Traverse with Effect &c Then &c Otherwise &c // . --*

This True Bill was also reported upon a printed form:

Add at the bottom of the page:

It should be noticed that the violence of these statements concerning Assault ("his Life was greatly despaired of") is in the printed part of the document and is merely a matter of form.

If Blake had pleaded Guilty to the Indictment (a rare occurrence in 18th Century rural courts), the case would have been tried immediately. When the accused pleads Not Guilty, however, 'the officer of the court asks the party whether he be ready to try then, or will traverse [put off the trial] to the next sessions', as was normal. Blake clearly denied his guilt and chose to be tried for sedition and assault at the next Quarter Sessions in January 1804, so the Bill was marked 'Trav<sup>d</sup>'

And in the summary of the proceedings in the Minute Book was recorded:

W <sup>m</sup> Blakes Ind. <sup>t</sup> for Sedit. <sup>n</sup>	}	Ind. <sup>ts</sup> trav <sup>d</sup>
D <sup>o</sup> for an assault		
W <sup>m</sup> Blake's 2 Trav <sup>s</sup> tried--		

Purged of redundancies, 'said' and 'to wit', what Blake was alleged to have said was:

The English know within themselves that Buonaparte could take possession of England in an hour's time, and then it would be put to every Englishman's choice for to either fight for the French or to have his throat cut. I think that I am as strong a man as most, and it shall be throat cut for throat cut, and the strongest man will be the conqueror. You will not fight against the French. Damn the King and Country and all his subjects. I have told this before to greater people than you. Damn the King and his Country; his subjects and all you soldiers are sold for slaves.

PAGE 134, fn. 1: Omit paragraph 2 and all but the first sentence in paragraph 1 as being no longer necessary.

PAGE 134, fn. 2: Richard Burn, *The Justice of the Peace, and Parish Officer*, rev. George Chetwynd (1825), V, 541.

PAGE 134, fn. 3: East Sussex Record Office QM / EW 16 (Minute Book).

PAGE 135, fn. 1 should read:

These sums [£1,000] are absurdly exaggerated, for in Jan 1803 and Oct 1804 Blake's recognizance was for £100, and those for Hayley and Seagrave, his two sureties, were for only £50.

PAGE 140, l. 7: for "registered the indictment" read "taken the evidence."

PAGE 140, in the indented quotation read:

ffogden . . . premised [*for premises*] . . . Assault [*not Assualt*] . . . alledged [*not alledged*]

PAGE 145, at the end of the first paragraph add:

As a last formality, Hayley, Seagrave, and Blake were discharged from their recognizances, since they had appeared at the trials:

Sussex / s[ession]s / Epiphany Sessions at Chichester on Tuesday the 10<sup>th</sup> Day of Janry 1804--

In Co<sup>t</sup> last Sess W<sup>m</sup> Blake of Felpham Cōm Sussack<sup>o</sup> 100<sup>l</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Hayley of the same place Esq & Joseph Seagrave of Chichester Cōm p<sup>r</sup>ōēd printeruc<sup>k</sup> 50<sup>l</sup> ea. Disch<sup>d</sup> Cond[iti]ōn for s<sup>d</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Blake to app<sup>r</sup> at the next Sess & try his traverse with effect for Sedition

D<sup>o</sup> The s<sup>d</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Blake ackn 100<sup>l</sup> & the s<sup>d</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Hayl[e]y & Joseph Seagrave ackn 50<sup>l</sup> Cond<sup>n</sup> for s<sup>d</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Blake to app<sup>r</sup> at the next Sess & try his traverse with effect for an Assault on John Scholfield--

WILLIAM BLAKE of Felpham Cōm Suss [*in the County of Sussex*] Designer & Engraver ackn 100<sup>l</sup> William Hayl[e]y of the same place Esq<sup>re</sup> Joseph Seagrave of the City of Chichester Printer ackn 50<sup>l</sup> ea. Cond<sup>n</sup> for s<sup>d</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Blake to app<sup>r</sup> & answer to the above---<sup>1</sup> Disch<sup>d</sup>

PAGE 145, fn. 1: Quoted from a reproduction of QZ / EW 9 (Recognizance Book) in the East Sussex Record Office.