

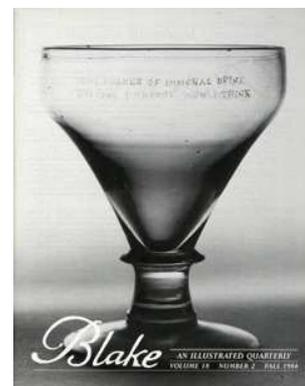
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The Daughters of Albion and the Butts Household

G. E. Bentley, Jr.

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MINUTE PARTICULARS

The Daughters of Albion and the Butts Household

G.E. Bentley, Jr.

Thomas Butts was a munificent patron of William Blake in 1795–1810 and perhaps longer, paying him regular sums for books and pictures to be delivered and filling his walls to overflowing with designs such as "Samson Breaking Bonds" and "The Sons of God Shouting for Joy." Blake used to go regularly on Tuesday evenings to the spacious Butts house in Marlborough Street, round the corner from where he had lived at No. 28 Poland Street in 1785–90, and in 1801–09 he painted miniature portraits of Mrs. Butts, Mr. Butts, and Master Tommy Butts.

We know something of Thomas Butts's profession as clerk in the office of the Commissary General of Musters, of his income, and of his property at his death,¹ but we know little of his household. Some surprising light is thrown on this by the printed census return filled out in manuscript in 1801 for the city of Westminster.² The house of Mr. Butts (at No. 9) on the North side of Great Marlborough Street, five houses from Blenheim Mews (the houses were not numbered in the return), was occupied by a single family of *twenty-two* persons, consisting of three males and "19" females. Among the members of this family, none was occupied in Agriculture, there were three "Persons chiefly employed in Trades, Manufactures, or Handicrafts," and "19" persons, presumably the females, were not employed at all.

The three males pose little problem. One must be Mr. Thomas Butts the clerk in the Muster Master General's office, another may be his son Tommy, then thirteen years old, who was later (from 1805) trained by Blake as an engraver and also employed in his father's office, and the third may be an otherwise unknown son or, more probably, a servant such as a butler, coachman, or bootboy.

But who can all those nineteen females have been? A wife and perhaps a daughter or so we may grant readily enough, and even a few parlormaid, tweenies, and female cooks might be permitted, despite the fact that all the females in the Butts family were said to be unemployed. But this leaves us with at least ten females

still unaccounted for, and perhaps as many as eighteen.

Can Butts have taken in female relations on an heroic scale? Did he provide lodgings for female orphans? Can his wife have had a little boarding school? (Almost next door to him in the 1790s lived Thomas Martyn, who had a house full of boys whom he trained to engrave and color his natural history designs for his extraordinarily beautiful books.) Can Butts, then forty-three years old, have had nineteen children, eighteen of them female? Can he have had a harem—did Butts agree with Blake that, as Crabb Robinson reported of Blake in 1826, "Eine Gemeinschaft der Frauen statt finden sollte"?³

What were all those females doing in his house? I don't know,⁴ but William Blake must have, though he gives no hint of the explanation in his letters to Butts of 1800–03. Such a number of females must have dominated the arrangements of the house. Here are enough women to represent all the Daughters of Albion. Can Blake's *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793) have been, as it were, addressed to Thomas Butts's household? Was it at his house in Great Marlborough Street that "The Daughters of Albion hear her [Oothoon's] woes & echoe back her sighs?"

¹ "Thomas Butts, White Collar Maecenas," *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 1052–66.

² Westminster Public Library Archives, Buckingham Palace Road, London; pressmark D1742.

³ *Blake Records* (1969), 332; Robinson translated this in 1852 as "wives should be in common" (p. 548).

⁴ The figure is unlikely to have been a simple clerical error, for the numbers are repeated in the census-return; 22 in the family, 3 males, 19 females; 3 in the family employed in Trades, 19 unemployed, 22 in all.

An Unrecorded Colored Copy of Young's *Night Thoughts*

James McCord*

In their two-volume study, *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's Night Thoughts* (Oxford, 1980), the editors write that "at present twenty-three coloured copies are believed to exist."¹ Their census includes twenty-two copies, the twenty-third being Moss-Bentley G, which is discussed briefly in the "Introduction" and described in footnote 81; it was omitted from the census apparently because it was untraced. Another copy, Bentley T, is not mentioned at all, and it may still be owned,