

# AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

Q U E R Y

## Revising edition of Gilchrist's Life

Ruthven Todd

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"inside story" and has it that Richter was refused as Stothard's pupil. Does anyone know how to untangle this?

(The New York Public Library  
Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street  
New York City, New York)

## 2. From Ruthven Todd, revising his edition of Gilchrist's Life:

For several months now I have been "Going to & Fro and Walking Up & Down" in the world of Gilchrist. I am astonished at the brashness of the twenty-eight year old who had the nerve to claim that the book had been edited and corrected. I am not indulging in false modesty but am stating a fact. I had assumed that because I had found Gilchrist accurate (or at least accurate in his following of an apparently accurate source, however wrong that might be) on matters concerning Blake, he would be equally punctilious about everything else.

I found out how wrong I was when I started looking up and writing in the margins the birth and death dates of each person mentioned. (These dates will become a part of the index, as I think it absurd to hope that the student should look them up, even if he could, as many of them are taking quite a bit of research). I will only quote one example here. On p. 25 (of the Everyman), writing of Michael Moser, Gilchrist says that his fellow artists "voluntarily testified their regard around his grave in the burial-ground of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, when the time came to be carried thither in January 1783." The "January" gives it such an authoritative air that, unless I had made this decision about the dated index, I would have let it pass. Mr. Moser would have been in an advanced state of disintegration by then as he died in 1779.

I also caught Blake out in a slip. In his letter to Hayley of April 25, 1805, he writes "Banks the Sculptor is Gone to his Eternal Home. . . he died at the Age of 75 of a Paralytic Stroke." As Banks, who died on February 2, 1805, was born in 1735, he was only seventy.

After coping with a considerable number of such dating shocks, I made up my mind that I had to check everything that was in any way checkable. Having led a rather varied life I am blessed with friends who are specialists in a great number of different fields. So, although my expenditure upon stamps becomes astronomical, every time I come to a point which I cannot verify from the books around me, I pull up a typewriter and send off a letter asking for help or guidance as to where I can get that help.

All this, I fear, has been a rather lengthy preamble to a few bits of information and some questions. I can assure readers of the Blake Newsletter that, having got rid of it, my future offerings of, or requests for, information will be less long-winded.

I had not yet acquired a copy of G.E. Bentley, Jr.'s "Thomas Butts, White Collar Maecenas" [PMLA, LXXI (1956)] but I knew that he had demoted Butts from his position as Muster Master General to that of a mere clerk. I wondered what other kinds of aggrandizement of his father "Tommy" Butts had indulged in. I knew both Mary and Tony Butts who were, let us say, somewhat frivolous about the family.



Gilchrist, p. 96, says his "house in Fitzroy Square became a perfect Blake gallery." In my early, erratic youth I spent much time in what was then known as "Fitzrovia" along with Dylan Thomas and other good and rakish friends. This "Fitzrovia" had come to describe a rather Bohemian area at the southern end of Charlotte Street, below, say Constable's old house, and centered round the Fitzroy Tavern. I recalled that in the 19th century, however, the upper end of that street and the area around it, had been as fashionable as, for example, Belgravia.

Still chasing accuracy in dates, I looked into John Summerson, Georgian London, Harmondsworth, 1962, p. 173, and found "In 1790 Fitzroy Square had been laid out, and two sides, -- south and east -- built behind decorative elevations supplied by the Adams. This square, whose other two sides were not completed till about 1828, was built in anticipation of the growth of the town northwards from Oxford Street."

An expensive kind of place, obviously. Then I recalled that the Foster's sale catalogue of June 28, 1853 stated "Thomas Butts, . . . his Residence, Grafton Street." Grafton Street (or Way as it has been rechristened) would undoubtedly be included in "Fitzrovia" in the sense current at the time, but it is no more Fitzroy Square than, say, East 38th Street between 3rd and 2nd Avenues is U.N. Plaza.

Sir John Summerson is now Curator of Sir John Soane's Museum, and happens to be one of the friends of my youth. As I am unlikely to get to London for a while, I pass on parts of his letter of July 25, 1968. I can only hope that if anyone is interested enough to get ahead of me, they will pass on their findings.

There is a certain amount of information in London County Council, Survey of London, vol. xxi (Parish of St. Pancras, Pt. 3), 1949. This is one of the more amateurish volumes in the series and none too thorough. But on pp. 52-63 is a description of Fitzroy Square with a list of inhabitants taken from Server Rate-Books and (for later dates) P.O. Directories. Butts is not there, which doesn't surprise one because among the early inhabitants (i.e. 1795 onwards) were a viscount, several baronets, a naval Captain and such like.

I guess that "Fitzroy Square" in Gilchrist really meant Fitzrovia in a narrow sense and Grafton Street (now Way) is, of course, a continuation of the square along its southern side. For Grafton Street the S. of L. gives only two inhabitants, men of mark, and one would have to go to County Hall and the Camden Borough Library to dig out the names of occupants from rate-books etc. No directories help at this date. I have no doubt that with patience Butts's house could be located and his period of residence at it determined. Not much of Grafton Street had been built in 1795 and Butts may well have bought a new carcass from a builder who, in turn, will have had a building agreement with the holder of the head lease (probably two of the surviving Adam brothers) from the free-holder, Lord Southampton. Butts would pay a few pounds "improved" ground-rent to the Adams, I suppose, though I can't confirm this. As to the price he would have to pay for the carcass (installing, normally, his own fire-places etc., to taste) I just dare not guess. I have never come across any good source for information on the house market. Probably I haven't looked hard enough.



The S. of L. covers Buckingham Street which is (just) in Marylebone. The Flaxman House still stands and has an honorific tablet. It looks like a new house of 1794 but here again confirmation could be obtained from rate-books (well-serviced in the Marylebone Public Library).

I am naturally more than grateful to Sir John for so interrupting his own work in order to supply these pointers.

My feeling is that, as it will take some time to complete this extensive re-editing, I might as well pass on such interim information as I dig it up. There will, I trust, be enough material completely new to the edition to lead people to get that too, and not merely to dismiss the book, thinking they've seen it all in Blake Newsletter.

The last paragraph of Sir John's letter, incidentally, is in answer to my query about how the newly returned Flaxman could afford a house in that area. I, of course, am expected to realize (as I do, being an ex-Londoner) that a house in Marylebone, at that date, even if just over the borderline, cost rather less than one in Fitzrovia!

This brings up a pertinent matter. I would like to have the opinion of people on the subject of overnoting. Frederick Pottle, in editing Boswell's London Journal, had to face the same problem, and decided that, in books of transatlantic circulation, it was advisable to add notes which the British might dismiss as tautological. My inclination, since I lived in America for years and am an American citizen, is to go along with this. The more information that the student can get from the book in the hand, without having to move to find another, the better?

I am afraid that my curiosity remains insatiable. In his new edition of The Letters of William Blake, London, 1968, p. 18, Sir Geoffrey Keynes writes of Butts, "His salary for this employment was very modest and it is difficult to see how he could afford the generous patronage he gave to Blake unless he had other sources of income. He did, in fact, die a wealthy man and it seems probable that he was a judicious investor in commodities and real estate."

About the real estate, the rate-books mentioned by Sir John Summerson might give some information. But I still feel a little bit suspicious. The 18th Century attitude to what would now be called graft was, perhaps, rather more permissive than that of today. I wonder what opportunities a clerk in the office of the Muster Master General might have enjoyed.

Gradually, from all possible sources, I am compiling a list of people who had any possible connection with Blake. This, I am afraid, "the world shall have whether they will or no." Such a list may open up fields of inquiry. Many of the names are not too common, and descendants may be traced.

Although, in this mountain village, I have no telephone, I do happen to have the current phone books of both Manhattan and London. More or less picking out of my non-existent hat, I choose two names.

Edward Denny, who wrote a letter to Blake on Nov. 4, 1826 (ivmy MS. (Bentley & Nurmi, p. 51: not yet printed?) and who also paid Linnell,



Oct. 31, 1826; £5.5s for a copy of Job proofs and £2.12s.6d. for Blair's Grave (Keynes, Letters of WB, ed. cit., p. 145). The Manhattan book has 22 entries for Denny and London, as might be expected, considerably more -- 102. In both cases there is apparent duplication of home and office.

Then there is Mrs. E. Iremonger, whose copy of Songs of Innocence and of Experience, which had been used by Crabb Robinson, was sold by King & Lochee, April 23, 1813. The Manhattan phone book offers NO Iremongers and London has only 4.

This seems to be a line of investigation which, once I offer my list, could be followed by someone younger and more energetic than myself.

Having offered an unconscionable amount of verbiage to little protein, though I hope I may have planted some seeds, I would like to ask a few preliminary questions (I have many more) under the heading of WHERE ARE THEY?

The copy of Barry's Account of a Series of Pictures, 1783, with Blake's drawing of Barry; sold at the George C. Smith sale in 1928.

"The Dogs of War" -- the pencil drawing.

Colored Night Thoughts -- Moss Copy sold in 1937, A.E. Newton copy sold in 1941.

"The Last Supper" -- watercolor (presumably).

Fuseli's drawing for his Lectures, 1801, known to A.G.B. Russell and seen by Keynes about 1912.

Blake's own engraving, preceding that by R.H. Cromek, for Malkin.

Blake's "Head of Romney" engraving. When I noted that this was in the collection of Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald, I was in error. I think my error came from the catalogue of the 1939 Philadelphia exhibition, but my copy of that is unavailable to me at the moment.

The copperplates of "Joseph of Arimathea," "Christ Trampling Urizen," and George Cumberland's calling-card, which are known to have been in existence during this century.

"The Canterbury Pilgrims" copperplate is not, despite Bentley & Nurmi, in the Carnegie Institute of Pittsburgh. Mr. Fred A. Myers, Assistant to the Director, wrote me, July 15, 1968: "To the best of my knowledge, Carnegie Institute does not own the copper plates [sic] for William Blake's The Canterbury Pilgrims. In fact, we do not have a print by that title." Where is it?

(Ca'n Bieló  
Galilea, Mallorca  
Spain)