

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

BLAKE

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

Blake's Elusive Ladies

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 26, Issue 1, Summer 1992, pp. 30-33





A Lady in the full Dress, & another in the most fashionable Undress now worn.



The Morning Amusements of her Royal Highness the Princess Royal & her 4 Sisters.
Published by J. Johnson, St. Pauls Church Yard, Nov. 1782.

1. Blake's engravings of Stothard's designs for *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book* (1782), in the British Museum (reproduced from the photograph supplied by Robert N. Essick and used in his *Separate Plates of William Blake* [1983]). Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Blake's Elusive Ladies

E. B. Bentley

The angels keep their ancient places
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces
That miss the many-splendored thing.¹

Two engravings executed on one plate by William Blake in 1782 have long been known and mentioned and speculated about, but the book for which they were intended has never been clearly identified. It has even been suggested that the book was never published. The engravings I am dealing with are inscribed "A Lady in the full Dress, & another in the most fashionable Undress now worn" and "The Morning Amusements of her Royal Highness the Princess Royal & her 4 Sisters" (illus 1). These two designs after Thomas Stothard are to be found in the British Museum Print Room. A copy of the book in which the engravings appeared has not been discovered, but I believe that a small

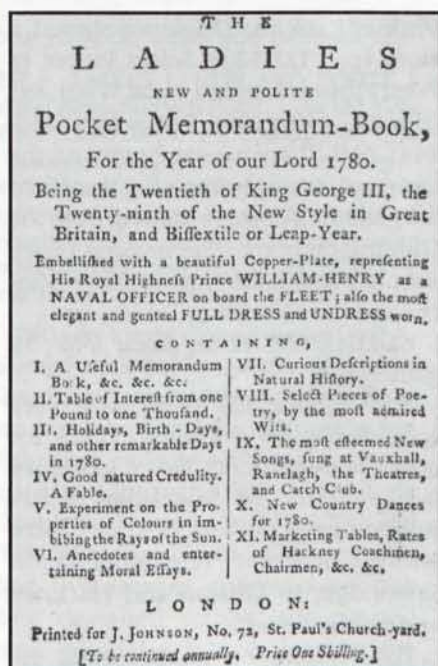
volume in the Huntington Library provides very clear indications of what we should seek and therefore increases the likelihood of turning up a copy of the ephemeral book in which the prints were published.

Those who search for Blake engravings have long known from Gilchrist's biography of the existence of engravings after Thomas Stothard of "two frontispieces to Dodsley's *Lady's Pocket Book*—'The morning amusements of H.R.H. the Princess Royal and her four sisters' (1782), and 'A Lady in full-dress' with another 'in the most fashionable undress now worn' (1783)."² Gilchrist does not specify where he had noticed these illustrations, and the reference to "1783" would appear to be an error. In *Thomas Stothard, R.A.*, A. C. Coxhead said the prints were designed by Stothard for *The Lady's Magazine*, but he does not name any engraver. He based his list on the designs by Stothard which were to be found in the Print Room of the British Museum but confessed that he had not been able to find any copy of the magazine with all the plates intact and

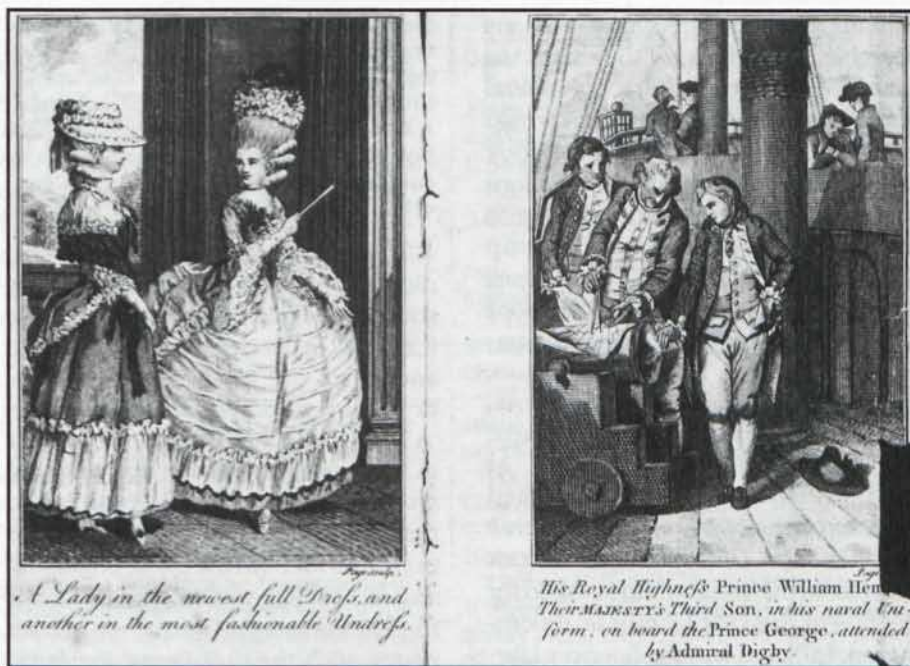
implied that he had not found Stothard's designs of either "Morning Amusements" or "A Lady in full dress" in *The Lady's Magazine*.³

In 1912, Archibald G. B. Russell listed the two Stothard designs with Blake named as the engraver and joined Gilchrist in attributing them to *The Lady's Pocket Book* (edited by Dodsley), repeated Gilchrist's 1782 and 1783 dates, and declared that "The numbers for 1782 and 1783 contain frontispieces engraved in line by Blake after Stothard." This last assertion was simply taken from Gilchrist and was not based on the discovery of these "numbers." He added that the two plates printed side by side on a single sheet were in the Robert Balmanno collection of Stothard's works in the Print Room of the British Museum and noted that the periodical "is not to be found in the British Museum and the writer has been unable to meet with it elsewhere."⁴

Geoffrey Keynes in his 1921 bibliography of Blake also located the elusive ladies in the publication named by Gilchrist, *The Lady's Pocket Book*, and added the imprint information in-



2. Title page of *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book* for 1780 (1779), courtesy of the Henry E. Huntington Library.



3. The two facing prints in *The Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book* for 1780 (1779), courtesy of the Huntington Library.

scribed on the engraving: "*The Morning Amusements of her Royal Highness the Princess Royal & her 4 Sisters. Published by J. Johnson . . . Nov^r 1, 1782 Stothard del Blake Sc.*"⁵ Keynes tried to solve the problem introduced by the Johnson imprint for the design intended for a Dodsley publication by supposing that the publication was "Edited by Dodsley for J. Johnson 1782," but he confessed that he had never been able to find the elusive "volume." He did not say why he thought it was edited by [James] Dodsley for Johnson.

Upon becoming a reader at the Bodleian Library (1953) and the British Museum [Library] (1958), my first tasks were prolonged by fruitless searches for *The Ladies/Lady's Pocket Book* and variations upon the title. When Bentley and Nurmi published their bibliography, they reviewed previous findings about the Pocket Book, added that the Rosenwald collection contained a proof impression of "The Morning Amusements" design, speculated that the publication may have been a descendant of Robert Dodsley's *The Ladies New Memorandum Book*

for 1758, and suggested that Gilchrist's Dodsley must have been Robert's (1703-64) brother James (1724-97).⁶

Blake Books, the descendent of *A Blake Bibliography*, lists the work as "UNTRACED." The entry offers as "prime evidence [that the *Pocket Book* existed] the two plates on one leaf in the BMPR":

1. '*The Morning amusements of her Royal Highness the Princess Royal & her 4 Sisters.*' 'Stothard del.', 'Blake sc.', 'Published by J. Johnson St Paul's Church Yard, Nov^r 1. 1782'. (Design size: 12.6 x 9.6cm). (Proofs are also in the Royal Academy [before title] and the Rosenwald Collection.)

2. '*A Lady in the full Dress, & another in the most fashionable Undress now worn.*' 'T.S. del', 'W.B. sc' (design size: 6.5 x 9.6 cm). (A proof with only Blake's name is in the Royal Academy.)⁷

Blake Books lists nine works with variations of the Gilchrist title which had proved not to be the book with the plates engraved by Blake after Stothard or to contain illustrations which might fit the titles given on those in the Print Room, and also comments: "The title was casually used, and Stothard signed a receipt of 11 April 1795 for

'sixteen guineas [for] two drawings for Lady's [Pocket Book del] Maggazen.'"⁸

Robert N. Essick has not only diligently joined in the search but also has assisted searchers to identify what they were seeking by his meticulous descriptions of the impressions in the Royal Academy, the British Museum and the Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. and by reproductions of the two designs which have proved so elusive.⁹ Like Coxhead, he looked vainly in *The Lady's Magazine*, and he notes the paradox of placing an engraving bearing a Johnson imprint in a magazine published by G. G. J. and J. Robinson.

I cannot claim that the hunt was strongly publicized. When Shelley M. Bennett published *Thomas Stothard: The Mechanisms of Art Patronage in England Circa 1800*, she cited Coxhead's descriptions of our elusive ladies in relation to the *Monthly Magazine*. She also cited Bentley and Essick and said Essick doubts the book was ever published and Bentley lists the book as "untraced."¹⁰

Many librarians are amused by my searches and others try to remind me that this is a search for very "ephemeral stuff." I have long realized that it would probably be by serendipity if the book with Blake's and Stothard's illustrations were ever found, but I have clung to my conviction that it would turn up some time, some where. Over the years I have looked for a *Lady's Pocket Book* in collections in India, China, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Guatemala, Algeria, Austria, France, Germany, England, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. At the Bodleian in July 1991, I checked the microfiche copy of the *Eighteenth Century Short Title Catalogue* without success. In the late autumn I looked for the title at the Lilly Library in Bloomington, Indiana, and the Spencer Library in Lawrence, Kansas. The librarians were eager to help find a *Ladies Pocket Book*, and there was even a lead or two to follow. Alas, the ladies continued to be elusive.

Recently, at the Huntington, I was looking for a book entitled *My Ladies Casket*, and that put me in mind of the old quest. In the card catalogue there was an entry which aroused a flicker of hope, so I called up the book.

This is the title of the book which came to my trembling hand:

THE | LADIES | NEW AND POLITE |
Pocket Memorandum-Book, | For the
Year of our Lord 1780. | Being the Twen-
tieth of King George III, the | Twenty-
ninth of the New Style in Great | Britain,
and Bissextile or Leap-Year. | Embellished
with a beautiful Copper-Plate, representing
| His Royal Highness Prince WILLIAM-
HENRY as a | NAVAL OFFICER on board
the FLEET; also the most | elegant and
genteel FULL DRESS and UNDRRESS worn.
| CONTAINING, | [2 columns: column 1:]
I. A Useful Memorandum | Book, &c. &c.
&c. | II. Table of Interest from one |
Pound to one Thousand. | III. Holidays,
Birth-Days, | and other remarkable Days
in 1780. | IV. Good natured Credulity. | A
Fable. | V. Experiment on the Pro- | per-
ties of Colours in im- | bibing the Rays of
the Sun. | VI. Anecdotes and enter- | tain-
ing Moral Essays. [Column 2:] VII. Curious
Descriptions in | Natural History. | VIII.
Select Pieces of Poe- | try, by the most
admir'd | Wits. | IX. The most esteemed
New | Songs, sung at Vauxhall, | Ranelagh,

the Theatres, | and Catch Club. | X. New
Country Dances | for 1780. | XI. Market-
ing Tables, Rates | of Hackney Coachmen, |
Chairmen, &c. &c. [End of columns.]
| LONDON: | Printed for J. JOHNSON,
No. 72, St. Paul's Church-yard. | [To be
continued annually. Price One Shilling.]
<Huntington: 429524> (illus. 2)

This publication is an excellent candidate for what has been so long sought. The title of the second print in it, 'a Lady in the newest full Dress, and another in the most fashionable Undress,' is remarkably similar to Blake's 'A Lady in the full Dress, and another in the most fashionable Undress now worn.' The style of the lettering is also remarkably similar. J. Johnson is the publisher for both the Blake engraving and this "1780" edition. The format of the fashion images is the same in both plates, with the 'full Dress' figure on the right and the 'Undress' figure on the left. The size of Blake's plate for the "1783" edition and that for "1780" is the same, while the royal scenes are the same height and clearly intended to be folded when bound into the book.

It is a very small book (12.2 high x 7.6 cm wide) with tattered boards only barely hanging on, and the engravings are very close in size to the Blake prints in the British Museum.

There are two anonymous plates engraved by Page, the platemarks are invisible (frame for the images 9.5 x 6.5 and 9.5 x 6.5), the first of "A Lady in the newest full Dress, and | another in the most fashionable Undress" and the other of "His Royal Highness Prince William Henry, | Their MAJESTY's Third Son, in his naval Uni- | form, on board the Prince George, attended | by Admiral Digby" (illus. 3).

CONTENTS; Titlepage (p. 1); Simple Interest at 5 l. per Cent. from 1 Pound to 1000 (p. 2); Laws at Quadrille (pp. 3-4); Good Natured Credulity. A Fable (pp. 4-6); Entertainment [experiments, anecdotes, &c] (pp. 6-11); Rules to be observed respecting Hackney Coachmen (p. 12); Memorandums for the beginning of the Year 1780 [largely blank, to be filled in] (pp. [13-15]); Memorandum pages for January 1780-December 1780 (pp. [15-120]); The

Pride of Rank and Opulence abased, a story (pp. 121-126); Select Pieces of Poetry [from Sheridan, Isaac Watts, &c] (pp. 127-140); New Songs (pp. 140-144). N.B. There is a catchword on the last page, strongly implying that there is a gathering or more missing from the Huntington copy. The missing pages should contain the New Country Dances and the Marketing Tables, &c.

COLLATION: 12° in sixes: A-M⁶; 12 gatherings.

This volume has been used very sporadically by a contemporary for notes, appointments, &c., e.g., Friday January 28th: "M^r Sawbridge and F. Sawbridge set out for Hackney"; there are repeated other references to Mr. Sawbridge, to Weston and Hackney and Portland Place.

The Huntington pocket book arrived in 1973 with 50 similar items. There must be many others still in existence. The nature of the publication strongly suggests that there were issues for other years, and other copies for this and other years must be extant.

Having found a book which fits with the Johnson name, the illustration of "FULL DRESS and UNDRRESS now worn," I'm convinced we have found the correct series. *The National Union Catalog* and the British Library catalogue supplements were rapidly consulted with no new discoveries. Searches in the various computer listings were followed eagerly. Through RLIN, the on-line Research Libraries Information Network, I located and saw at the Folger Shakespeare Library

THE | LADIES | NEW AND POLITE |
Pocket Memorandum-Book, | For the
Year of our Lord 1778. | ... | Embellished
with a beautiful Copper-Plate, repre-
senting the NINE LIVING MUSES of
GREAT BRITAIN, | in the Temple of Apol-
lo, viz. Miss Carter, Mrs. | Barbauld, Mrs.
Montagu, Mrs. Angelica Kauffman, | Mrs.
Macauley, Miss More, Mrs. Lenox, Mrs.
Grif- | fiths, and Mrs. Sheridan. | Also the
MOST ELEGANT | and GENTEEL FULL
DRESS and UNDRRESS worn. | ... | LON-
DON: | Printed for J. JOHNSON, No. 72,
St. Paul's Church-yard [1777]. | [To be con-
tinued annually. Price One Shilling]

And the on-line ESTC (1992) directed me to an edition for 1789 in the

John Johnson Collection in Bodley:

THE | LADIES | NEW AND POLITE |
Pocket Memorandum-Book, | For the Year
of our Lord 1789. | ... | Embellished with
a beautiful Copper-Plate, representing |
two Ladies in the most fashionable Dresses
now worn; | also an elegant Engraving of
Somerset-Place from the | Water [missing
in the Bodley copy]. | ... | LONDON: |
Printed for J. JOHNSON, ... [1788].

We now know that an annual publication entitled *The Ladies New and Complete Pocket Memorandum-Book* was published by Joseph Johnson beginning as early as 1777 and continuing at least through 1788. Of the three copies now located, for 1778, 1780, and 1789, those for 1778 and 1780 certainly have two images engraved on one plate designed so that the printed sheet could be folded, leaving the prints to face one another, like Blake's, and that for 1789 apparently did so (the second engraving announced on the title page is missing from the Bodley copy). Each of the three editions offers fashion illustration, two of them using the same wording as in Blake's engravings: "Full Dress and Undress worn." The two illustrations of royalty (1780, 1783) and the one of the muses of Apollo (1778) show a related interest in elegant subjects.

Now we know we should be looking for a copy of the memorandum book for the year 1783, since presumably such annuals were published before the new year so that they could be sold in time for use on 1 January. The November 1782 date in the imprint of Blake's plate fits such a pattern. I am convinced that copies will turn up and will continue my pursuit.

What we should expect to find is this:

THE | LADIES | NEW AND POLITE
| Pocket Memorandum-Book, | For the
Year of our Lord 1783. | Being the Twenty-
third of King George III, and the | Thirty-
second of the New Style in Great Britain. |
Embellished with a beautiful Copper-Plate,
representing The Morning Amusements of
Her Royal Highness | the Princess Royal &
Her 4 Sisters; also a Lady | in the FULL
DRESS & another in the Most Fashionable
UNDRESS now worn. | CONTAINING,
| [2 columns: column 1:] I. A Useful Memo-
randum | Book, &c. &c. &c. II. Table of
Interest ... [End of columns.] LONDON:
| Printed for J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St.
Paul's Church-yard [1782]. | [To be con-
tinued annually. Price One Shilling.]

COLLATION: 12° in sixes: A-N⁶; 12.2 x 7.6 cm.

There has to be a *Ladies New and Polite Pocket Memorandum-Book* . . . for 1783 . . . Printed for J. JOHNSON waiting for us somewhere.

¹ Francis Thomson, "The Kingdom of God," stanza 4.

² Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, "Pictor Ignotus," 2 vols. (London and Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1863) 1: 51 and 2: 259.

³ A. C. Coxhead, *Thomas Stothard, R.A.* (London: Bullen, 1906) 42-47.

⁴ Archibald G. B. Russell, *The Engravings of William Blake* (London: Grant Richards, Ltd., 1912) 142.

⁵ Geoffrey Keynes, *A Bibliography of William Blake* (New York: The Grolier Club, 1921) 226.

⁶ G. E. Bentley, Jr., & Martin K. Nurmi, *A Blake Bibliography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964) 136.

⁷ G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 591.

⁸ The receipt is in Princeton University Library (*Blake Books* 592).

⁹ Robert N. Essick, *The Separate Plates of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 239-41 and figures 108-09. They are omitted from his *William Blake's Commercial Book Illustrations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), because he excludes "plates probably executed for publication in books but known only through separate impressions" (vi).

¹⁰ Shelley M. Bennett, *Thomas Stothard* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988) 65-66. The "1778 volume" of *The Ladies Complete Pocket Book* which she locates in the "British Library (P.P. 2469 cl [II])" is, according to the British Library Catalogue, for 1769, not "1778."