

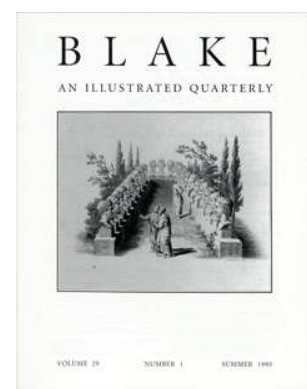
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A R T I C L E

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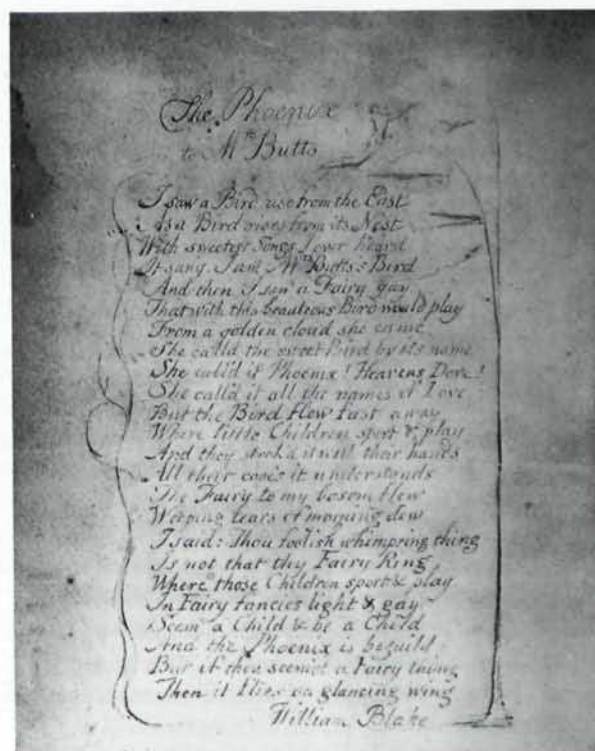
In "William Blake's 'The Phoenix': A Problem in Attribution," Robert N. Essick argues that "The Phoenix / to Mrs Butts," a manuscript poem discovered in 1981 and first attributed to Blake by Geoffrey Keynes, was indeed written by Blake for Mrs. Butts and is not a forgery, as Morton Paley and David Bindman had suspected ("Phoenix" 366).¹ Essick bases his argument on the bibliographical and technical features of the work, and not on the style of the poem or the provenance of the artifact, though he uses the provenance to support his conclusion. And therein lies a potential problem, for the provenance given to Keynes by the poem's owner is impossible. A mistaken provenance does not necessarily mean that the artifact is bogus, but it does raise red flags. In this brief note, I argue that "The Phoenix" is authentic and the provenance mistaken because two families directly connected to Thomas Butts have been unknowingly conflated. Only one of these families, however, is known to Blake scholars, and thus, by correcting the provenance of a minor work, I hope also to shed light on Blake's patron, his patron's family, and the way in which works from the Butts collection were distributed. (These are the subjects of two forthcoming studies.)

Keynes, the first to record the provenance, identifies the

owner . . . [as] Mr Owen D. Long, resident in Wales. It came to him through his grandmother, whose maiden name was Mary Anne North, daughter of Mrs North, formerly Miss Cooper, who by her second marriage became Mrs Butts. I had not been aware that she, born Cooper, had made a previous marriage as Mrs North, and this is all that the owner knows of his descent, but it is quite plain that the document signed William Blake and addressed "To Mrs Butts" has been traced to its authentic origin. (1021)

The idea that Mrs. Butts had been previously married may have been news to Keynes, but it was first noted in 1956 by Bentley in "Thomas Butts, White Collar Maecenas" (1053n7). Bentley infers the second marriage from the fact that Butts, in his will (p. 8), bequeathed rings and ten pounds to "Mary Ann the wife of my said son Thomas Butts a Ring of the value of nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and six pence . . . to Mrs Maria North, the daughter-in-law of my said wife [Elizabeth], to Mr Charles Long, to Mrs Mary Anne Long his wife and who is a daughter of my wife, to Mr

¹ Keynes's article was written just before his death but published two years later. The poem is included in Erdman 517. The manuscript, which is described in detail in Essick's "Phoenix" article, is MS 63583 in the British Library, Department of Western Manuscripts. The provenance given to Keynes is the same as given to Dr. Daniel Waley, the Librarian of the Department of Manuscripts.



1 William Blake, "The Phoenix / To Mrs Butts, c. 1800-03. Courtesy of the British Library.

Henry Baker and to Mrs Caroline Matilda Baker his wife, who is also a daughter of my wife."² From this passage, specifically the mention of a daughter-in-law named North, Bentley reasonably inferred that Mrs. Butts was married to a Mr. North before marrying Butts.³ In the will, Butts does not mention his wife's maiden or married name, but *Burke's* and Ada Briggs identify her as Elizabeth Cooper (93).

The will implies that Butts married a woman who had previously been married. Bentley and Essick reasonably assumed that the will's Elizabeth is Elizabeth Cooper and that she had married a Mr. North before marrying Butts and thus was the mother of the Butts children as well as the mother of the North children. But if her children with Mr. North came before those with Butts, then they were born before or no later than 1783, since Joseph Edward Butts, Butts's eldest child, was born 4 February 1784 (*Burke's*). If so, Owen Long's math fails to add up. It is nearly impossible

² Bentley records "Maria" as "Mary" (1053n7). Butts's will was proved on 23 June 1845; it is #2019 in the Public Records Office, Chancery Lane, London. The 15 unnumbered pages of the document are here numbered for convenience.

³ Essick constructs the same lineage: "The 'Mary Ann Long' in that document is the 'Mary Anne North' (her maiden name) who Owen Long states was his grandmother from whom he inherited the 'Phoenix' manuscript. Mary Anne's husband and the grandfather of Owen Long was evidently Charles Long, the 'son-in-law' (i.e., the husband of one of his wife's daughters by her first marriage) to whom Butts lent

for a daughter of Mrs. Butts born before 1783 to have a grandchild living in 1981.⁴

At first glance, only Owen Long's math and not the lineage itself appears incorrect. Either Mary Ann Long was Owen Long's great grandmother—that is, at least one remove more than he imagined—or she was born after the Butts children. But in fact it is the lineage and not only the chronology that he has confused. According to the International Genealogy Index (IGI), Mary Ann Long was Mary Ann Delanney, baptized 25 January 1802 and married to Charles Long on 24 November 1827 in the parish of St. Pancras, Euston Road, London. Her mother was Elizabeth Delanney, who married Thomas Butts on 15 June 1826 in the parish of St. Pancras, which, according to Butts's will (p. 6), is his parish. The record in the marriage register of St. Pancras provides the proof that the groom is Blake's patron:

Thomas Butts of this Parish Widower and Elizabeth Delauney of this Parish Widow were married in this Church by Licence . . . this fifteenth Day of June in the Year One thousand eight hundred and Twenty Six By me J. Brackenbury Curate. This Marriage was solemnized between us Thos. Butts [and] Elizth Delauney In the presence of John G Fearn[,] Mary Ann Delauney [,] Caroline M Delauney⁵

The names of the female witnesses prove that the widower is Blake's patron. As noted, in his will Butts identifies Mary Ann Long and Caroline Matilda Baker as "daughters of his wife," and Mary Ann's maiden name was Delauney (or Delanney). Further search through the IGI reveals that Caroline Matilda Delauney (or Delanney) married Henry Baker in the parish of St. Pancras, Euston Road, on 24 June

money" ("Phoenix" 375-76). Butts lent Charles Long 1500 pounds "on Mortgage of a freehold house in Landsdowne place . . . in the county of Sussex," and he lent him 850 pounds on mortgages of the leasehold houses at "nos. 30 and 35 North Street Battlebridge and 87 and 25 Carlisle Street Portman Market," London (will p. 3-4).

⁴ According to *Burke's*, Tommy Butts was born 27 September 1788, which means that he was 18 when he began working with his father in December 1806 (Bentley 1058). Apparently, Joseph Edward was 15 in 1799 when he began working with his father (Bentley 1057).

⁵ The discovery of Butts's second marriage in the International Genealogy Index and the examination of the marriage register for the parish of St. Pancras, Euston Road were made by Keri Davies and Ted Ryan. I am grateful for their assistance here and for their examining army lists for me in my research on Butts's family. The register was verified by Lilian Gibbens of Heritage Research, who believes that the name is Delauney and not Delanney (as recorded by Davies, Ryan, and the IGI). *Burke's* does not mention the second marriage, perhaps because there was no progeny, but possibly because the Captain died in 1905 and whoever provided the information to *Burke's* (presumably Captain Butts's wife Mary Jane, or less likely, his daughter Mary, who was born in 1891), was unaware of the marriage. Nor does *Burke's* record the second marriage of Thomas Butts's father, a marriage verified by Butts's will and probably the one recorded in IGI in 1767 (see "Green House").

1837.⁶ Their mother, the widow Elizabeth Delauney, had married Peter Delauney in the church of St. George, Hanover Square, Westminster, on 25 October 1791. Elizabeth's maiden name was Davis. Her daughter Caroline's birth and christening dates are not recorded in IGI (which means that it most likely occurred in one of the many parishes that have yet to enter the IGI).

The "Elizabeth Butts" mentioned in Butts's will was his second wife and not Elizabeth Cooper, the mother of his children and the woman, according to Briggs, known as "Betsy."⁷ This second marriage solves a minor mystery in Blake studies: Mrs. Butts's age at the time of her death and the place of her death. Her obituary in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for February 1852 records her date of death as 24 December 1851 at 81 years, implying a birth year of 1770. This is much too late for Elizabeth Cooper—unless she married Butts when she was still a child, or lied about her age when she died. The birth year, however, is consistent with Elizabeth Delauney. The obituary also records her dying outside her own home, "In Upper Gower St," despite being the "relict of Thomas Butts, esq. of Grafton-st." She apparently died at the home of her daughter Caroline Baker, who lived with her husband Henry, an architect, at 11 Upper Gower Street. In the 1840s, the Bakers lived at 25 Grafton Street, a few doors down from the Butts's at 17 Grafton. Upon Butts's death in 1845, Tommy Butts inherited the Grafton residence and, according to the will, Mrs. Butts was required to vacate the premises three months after her husband's death (p. 2). She apparently moved in with her daughter Caroline.

Mrs. Delauney, if 81 when she died, was around 56 when she married Butts. Butts has been mistakenly believed to have been born in 1757 (Bentley "Butts" 1052) and thus Blake's exact contemporary. But he was the third son named Thomas born to Thomas Butts and Hannah Witham. The first was baptized on 13 March 1746, the second on 12 July 1756, and the third, born 15 December 1759, was baptized on 9 January 1760.⁸ Apparently, the first two children died in infancy.⁹ Hence, he was two years younger than Blake and

⁶ In addition to the IGI, see the more powerful CD-Rom Family Program (which is not available in England but is available in the NYPL and the Family Research Centers of The Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints).

⁷ Briggs was the sister of Captain Butts's much younger second wife, whom he married in 1889. Her knowledge of the family a hundred years earlier is unreliable and seems based on family lore and the relics in her sister's house. She does not mention a second marriage for Butts and may be conflating histories. Her brother-in-law the Captain was born in 1833 and knew his grandfather's wife and not his biological grandmother.

⁸ The birth and baptism are recorded in the baptism register of the parish of St. Luke, Old Street, Finsbury, which is in the Greater London Records Office; the IGI records only the baptism year. *Burke's* records the correct day and year of birth.

⁹ Butts's parents were married on 19 May 1746 in St. Andrew by the Wardrobe, London (IGI). Infant mortality was high, as any cursory

was 66 years old at the time of his second marriage, with all of his children gone, but possibly with a new stepdaughter, Caroline Matilda Delauney, still at home.¹⁰

The second marriage of Butts supports—though only barely—Owen Long's claim that he inherited "The Phoenix" from his grandmother, Mary Ann Long, since she was born to Butts's second rather than first wife, in 1802 rather than before 1783.¹¹ The second marriage, however, also refutes Long's lineage, because Elizabeth Delauney's maiden name was Davis and not North, and there is no record of her ever marrying a North between Peter Delauney (1791) and Thomas Butts (1826). She was remarried as Mrs. Delauney, and her daughter Mary Ann was also married as a Delauney.

Where, then, does Owen Long come up with the name Mary Ann North? Did Mr. Long know Bentley's article, which mentions that Mrs. Butts was born Elizabeth Cooper and was previously married to a Mr. North (1053n7)? Did he, in other words, deliberately construct a false provenance? Like Essick ("Phoenix" 376), I think this is unlikely, since Bentley recorded the long "L" of "Long" as an "S," which it very closely resembles, and thus identified the daughter-in-law as Mary Ann Song. If Owen Long read Bentley, then he would have not found the name Long. For that he would have had to examine the original will, and correct what the trained eye of one of Blake studies most astute scholars missed. No, we are not dealing with a very sophisticated forgery. Admittedly, my suspicion of the provenance made me suspect forgery and forced me to examine

examination of the burial registers of London parishes demonstrates. The repetition of the same name for children to the same parents in the IGI suggests the same. (Sometimes, however, male children would be given the father's name but be known by their middle name to increase the chances that the name on a leasehold dwelling would remain unchanged.) The Buttses also had two Elizabeths, baptized on 14 January 1750 and 26 September 1757. (For a genealogy of the Butts family, see Viscomi, "Green House.")

¹⁰ I have not been able to locate the place and date for the death of Mrs. Cooper Butts. Unfortunately, the burial register for parish of St. Pancras, Euston Road, for the years 1810-17 are not available for consultation, and the microfilm of them in the Greater London Records Office is overexposed and much of it I could not read. The death may have been after 1816, for Tommy appears to have lived at home at least till then. His schoolboy friend Seymour Kirkup records visiting him and the Butts collection between 1810 and 1816 (Bentley, *Blake Records* 220-21). Kirkup refers to the "Buttses" and to "they," but he is not clear if he is referring to Mr. and Mrs. Butts, or to father and son. Would it be surprising if she had died c. 1810-11, when Butts appears to have stopped buying Blakes?

There are no letters between Blake and Butts after 1803, only receipts, the last extant one in December 1810. Blake mentions in an undated letter to Linnell, c. April 1826, that Butts visited him and purchased at discount (for lending the watercolors) a copy of the *Book of Job* (Erdman 777). Blake makes no mention of the forthcoming second marriage.

¹¹ Mary Ann Long had two sons, Edwin Williams Long in 1832 and Charles Albert Long in 1829. For either man to have been Charles Long's father means he sired him very late in his own life.

the will and the poem. I can verify that the surname is "Long" (as Bentley now also acknowledges) and, after a close inspection of the poem, that I believe it was written—both invented and executed on paper—by Blake. The only conclusion, then, is that Owen Long's memory played tricks on him, that he conflated various people in Butts's first and second families into one direct descendent. According to Keynes, the poem's provenance was "all that the owner knows of his descent." Apparently, Mr. Long knew even less than that.

Did his grandmother Mary Ann Long marry a Mr. North after 1845, the year Butts's will was proved? While possible, it seems too much of a coincidence that Mrs. Delauney Butts's "daughter-in-law," was also named Maria North. One possible explanation for Long's mixing up Long and North is suggested by the marriage of Cornelius Delaney and Mary Ann Mickeburg in the parish of St. Pancras, Euston Road, in 1829. This is the parish of Butts and the Delauneys, which suggests that Cornelius may have been a son of Elizabeth and Peter Delauney (the name was not common in any of its spellings). If so, then Mary Mickeburg would be Mrs. Delauney Butts's daughter-in-law, Mary (or Maria). She may have remarried a Mr. North before 1844, when Butts wrote his will, and have been referred to by her new married name. Owen Long may have confused his great aunt Mary Delaney-North with his grandmother, Mary Ann Delauney Long. If Long knew his grandmother, born in 1802, he would have been very young and she very old. It seems more likely that they had never met. Family lore may have conflated the two Marys, who were sister-in-laws. A similar kind of conflation has happened in Blake studies with the two Elizabeth Butts's, Ms. Cooper and Ms. Delauney.

Knowing that the Elizabeth of Butts's will is his second wife forces us to re-examine not only the poem's provenance but also its date. Was "The Phoenix / to Mrs Butts" written for the first Mrs. Butts, c. 1800-03, when he wrote the Butts's regularly and even composed another poem to Mrs. Butts (E 714)? Or was it addressed to the second Mrs. Butts, c. 1826-27—a comment on the second and resurrected marriage bed?

The poem's visual style does not rule out a late date. The text was written in blue ink and gone over in four colors, giving it a multi-colored appearance not unlike that of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* copy H, which was first printed in c. 1790 but finished in Blake's late coloring style with the text rewritten in colored inks, presumably in c. 1821 for John Linnell. No other work produced in the 1790s has this much rewriting in colored inks, but nearly all early copies of *The Book of Thel* and many plates in the early copies of *Songs of Innocence* have texts that were rewritten in matching and sometimes nonmatching colored inks to salvage a poorly printed line (see Viscomi, *Book* ch. 15). The lettering in the motto of early copies of *Thel* (e.g., B, E, and G, among others) was touched up in colored inks for purely

decorative purposes. So the rewriting of text per se is not out of place c. 1800-03. Indeed, the poem, placed between a thin willowy tree and cascading tendrils, looks like a page from *Innocence* or *Thel* (illus. 1); the writing, drawing, and rewriting seem of a piece. The difference between this private poem and Blake's public works is that it was executed on paper and is truly a unique manuscript, and not on copper, where such poems exist as "printed manuscript" (Essick, *Language* 170).

Essick dates the poem c. 1794 not only because of its resemblance to early illuminated pages ("Phoenix" 377), but also because Gilchrist states that Butts probably met Blake as early as 1793 (1: 115). But Gilchrist offers no evidence for his claim, and a meeting this early seems very unlikely. The facts that four of Butts's 10 illuminated books were acquired from Cumberland's auction of 1835 (Bentley, *Blake Books* 657), that three of them were produced after 1810 (*Milton*, *Ghost of Abel*, and a posthumous copy of *Jerusalem*), that one, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* copy E, was purchased in 1806, and that two early works, *Thel* copy L and *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* copy F, were acquired at unknown dates and are without receipts—and possibly not acquired by Butts (see Viscomi "Marketplace 1852")—strongly suggest that patron and artist had met after Blake's great period of illuminated printing, 1789-95. Blake's first reference to Butts is in a letter to Cumberland in 1799, where he is presumably the patron paying Blake one guinea apiece for the biblical temperas (Keynes, *Letters* 11).¹² Blake began writing the Butts's only when he left London for Felpham, between 1800 and 1803. The poem was probably written during this period, when he wrote poems to Butts, Mrs. Butts, Flaxman, and Mrs. Flaxman (see Erdman 707-23, 733). Mr. Butts also wrote Blake a poem, included in a September 1800 letter, explicitly acknowledging his affection for Catherine Blake and Blake's affection for Mrs. Butts—acknowledgments not without double entendres (see Keynes, *Letters* 25-27). Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the couplets of Blake's other verses have three or five beats to the line, whereas those of "The Phoenix" have four, the same number of accents as in the couplets of Thomas Butts's poem to Blake (Keynes, *Letters* 26-27).¹³

"The Phoenix" was probably written c. 1800-03 to Mrs. Cooper Butts. After she died, the poem appears to have come into the possession of Butts's second wife. In his will, he bequeaths "all articles of plate jewelry trinkets and furniture whether useful or ornamental whatsoever which be-

longed to her at the time of our marriage or which I may have since presented her with" (p. 1). Or perhaps the poem was simply "inherited" by or left over for the new Mrs. Butts, who gave it to her married daughter, Mary Ann Long, whom Owen Long misidentified as Mary Anne North, possibly confusing her with a great aunt. This minor poem's provenance reveals that Butts's family was more extended than previously realized and demonstrates how works of Blake's—especially those of little monetary value in the mid-nineteenth century, including watercolors selling at auction for less than or only slightly more than the original purchase price of one pound—could exit the Butts collection through members of Butts's second family and not solely through Thomas Butts, Jr. Knowing now that Mr. Long's claim may be a bit confused but at least plausible strengthens the argument that other works exited in like manner, including (as I discuss in the forthcoming articles, "Blake in the Marketplace 1852" and "A 'Green House' for Butts") a collection of Blake's illuminated books, illustrated books, and watercolors that was sold anonymously at Sotheby's in March 1852, and a collection of biblical watercolors and half the 1808 series of *Paradise Lost* that sold at Sotheby's in June 1852 as part of Charles Ford's collection.

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¹² For a more detailed discussion of the first meeting of artist and patron, see my "Green House."

¹³ Keynes's *TLS* article was accompanied by an announcement that a longer version of the article and a color reproduction of Blake's manuscript poem, along with a note on the dating by Michael Phillips, was available for L14 (1022). Unfortunately, the pamphlet was not issued. On stylistic grounds, Phillips dates the work c. 1803 (private correspondence).