

The Mathews as Patrons

BY G. E. BENTLEY, JR.

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1 **H**ARRIET Mathew and her husband, the Reverend Anthony Stephen Mathew, are well known as patrons of William Blake and John Flaxman.¹ As J. T. Smith wrote, about 1784 the house of “Mrs. Mathew, ... No. 27, in Rathbone-place, was then frequented by most of the literary and talented people of the day,”² and Flaxman’s sister-in-law Maria Denman wrote that A. S. Mathew’s wife “was the intimate associate of Mrs. Montague, Mrs. Barbauld, Mrs. Chapone, Mrs. Brooke, &c.”³ However, a search over fifty years revealed no clear reference to A. S. Mathew or to his wife in the records of Anna Letitia Barbauld, James Boswell, Fanny Burney, Mrs. Chapone, Benjamin Robert Haydon, Angelica Kauffman, Mrs. Montagu, George Romney, Hester Thrale, or Horace Walpole, many of them notorious gossips.

2 At Mrs. Mathew’s

most agreeable conversaciones ... I [J. T. Smith] have often heard him [Blake] read and sing several of his poems. He was listened to by the company with profound silence, and

allowed by most of the visitors to possess original and extraordinary merit.

Mrs. Mathew was not only a great encourager of musical composers, ... but truly kind to young artists.⁴

3 One of the singers at these “conversaciones” was almost certainly Harriet, the talented seventeen-year-old daughter of A. S. and Harriet Mathew. Her early decease was commemorated in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*:⁵

1798. March 28. At the house of her father (the Rev. Mr. Mathew) in Rathbone-place, in her 32d year, of a pulmonary complaint, Harriet Baroneſs Silverhelm, wife of Baron S. a young lady of the moſt uncommon and brilliant talents and accompliſhments, amongſt which muſt ever be remembered with peculiar enthuſiaſm her vocal performances, unequalled, for ſcience and expreſſion, except by the firſt Italian profeſſors, when muſick was in its glory. Her elegant and various acquirements were rendered doubly attractive by the unaffected modeſty and innumerable graces of her manners, the exquisite refinement and ſenſibility of her mind, the univerſal benevolence of her heart, and the active virtues of a life devoted, in an exemplary manner, to every ſocial, relative, and pious duty.

According to Joseph Farington’s diary for 6 August 1798, “Miss Mathew daughr. of Revd. Mr. Mathew, was it seems privately married abt. a year before Her death to Baron Silverghem, who was Secretary to Baron Noleken, & to Mr. Asp.”⁶ This is Göran Ulrik Silfverhjelm of the Swedish embassy in London.

With thanks to Angus Whitehead for many favors.

1. A Step¹. Mathew and Harriot Edwards were married at St. Martin-in-the-Fields on 31 January 1764, according to the St. Martin’s registers. For details about the Mathews, see J. T. Smith, *Nollekens and His Times* (1828) (in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004] [hereafter *BR*(2)] 604-06); H. M. Margoliouth, “Blake’s Mr. Mathew,” *Notes and Queries* 196 (1951): 162-63; G. E. Bentley, Jr., “A. S. Mathew, Patron of Blake and Flaxman,” *Notes and Queries* 203 (1958): 168-78, and “John Flaxman and the Mathew Clan,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 67 (1963): 443-54. Their portraits by Flaxman are in *BR*(2), pls. 4-5.

2. See *BR*(2) 605.

3. John Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture* (London, 1829), “A Brief Memoir of the Author,” xiii; the rough draft of the work (British Library Add MS 39785, p. 4ff), apparently in the hand of Maria Denman, omits Mrs. Chapone, suggesting that the names were added more or less at random. Allan Cunningham quotes this passage in his life of Flaxman but does not identify the source.

4. J. T. Smith, *A Book for a Rainy Day* (1845) 81-83, reprinted in *BR*(2) 29-30.

5. *Gentleman’s Magazine* 84 (1798, Supplement): 1152 (under “Deaths”):

1798. March 28. At the house of her father (the Rev. Mr. Mathew) in Rathbone-place, in her 32d year, of a pulmonary complaint, Harriet Baroneſs Silverhelm, wife of Baron S. a young lady of the moſt uncommon and brilliant talents and accompliſhments, amongſt which muſt ever be remembered with peculiar enthuſiaſm her vocal performances, unequalled, for ſcience and expreſſion, except by the firſt Italian profeſſors, when muſick was in its glory. Her elegant and various acquirements were rendered doubly attractive by the unaffected modeſty and innumerable graces of her manners, the exquisite refinement and ſenſibility of her mind, the univerſal benevolence of her heart, and the active virtues of a life devoted, in an exemplary manner, to every ſocial, relative, and pious duty.

6. *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 1044. A reference of 7 Aug. 1805 identifies her as the daughter of Mr. “Matthews” (vol. 7, ed. Kathryn Cave [1982] 2602).

Harriet would have been about sixteen and nineteen when, as “Miss Mathew,” she subscribed to *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho* (1782) and Elizabeth Blower, *Maria* (1785).

- 4 We have no evidence beyond J. T. Smith’s about Mrs. Mathew’s patronage of the arts and her sponsorship of Blake’s *Poetical Sketches* (1783). Her familiarity with the fashionable world has not been confirmed in letters and diaries among the beau monde, and her only known patronage of literature has been her remarkable fostering of *Poetical Sketches*.⁷ But she was a patroness of literature, at least in the modest form of subscribing to books. She appears in the subscription lists of

1. *Part of the Spiritual Works of the Celebrated Francis Fenelon, Archbishop of Cambrai, Author of Telemachus, &c.*, trans. Richard Houghton, 2 vols. (Dublin: S. Powell, 1771).

2. LETTERS | OF THE LATE | IGNATIUS SANCHO, | AN AFRICAN. | IN TWO VOLUMES. | To which are prefixed, | MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE. | — | VOL. I[-II]. | — | LONDON: | Printed by J. NICHOLS: | And sold by J. DODSLEY, in Pall-Mall; J. | ROBSON, in New Bond Street; J. WALTER, | Charing-Cross; R. BALDWIN, Paternoster- | Row; and J. SEWELL, Cornhill. | MDCCLXXXII [1782].

The 1,200-some subscribers include “Mr. Mathew,” “Mrs. Mathew,” and “Miss Mathew,” plus many duchesses, countesses, dukes and lords, and William Beckford, Esq. (author and patron), Henry Bunbury, Esq. (artist), Mr. G. Cumberland (dilettante, friend of Blake), Right Honourable Charles James Fox (M.P.), Edward Gibbon, Esq. (historian), Samuel Ireland, Esq. (author and engraver), and Mrs. Jane Matthews (probably Flaxman’s aunt, the printseller).

3. [Elizabeth Blower],⁸ MARIA: | A NOVEL. | IN TWO VOLUMES. | BY THE AUTHOR OF | GEORGE BATEMAN. | VOL. I[-II]. | LONDON: | PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND, | M.DCC.LXXXV [1785]. It includes an engraving by Blake after Stothard.

The subscribers include Mr. [Richard] Cosway (miniaturist), Mrs. [Maria] Cosway (artist), Mr. John Flaxman (sculptor), William Hayley, Esq. (author and patron), Mr. [John] Hawkins (patron of Blake), Mr. Ozias Humphrey (painter), Mr. Jeremiah Meyer (miniaturist), “Mrs. Mathew | Miss Mathew | Mr. F. Mathew [unidentified],” Sir Joshua Reynolds (painter), “Mr. [?George] Romney [artist], 6 copies,” R. B. Sheridan, Esq. (dramatist and politician), 6 copies, Mr. [Thomas] Stothard (book illus-

trator), and Josiah Wedgwood, Esq. (pottery manufacturer).

4. [A. Gomersall],⁹ ELEONORA, | A NOVEL, | IN A SERIES OF LETTERS; | WRITTEN BY | A FEMALE INHABITANT | OF | LEEDS IN YORKSHIRE. | — | VOLUME FIRST [SECOND]. | — | LONDON: | PRINTED FOR THE AUTHORESS, | BY THE LITERARY SOCIETY AT THE Logographic Press, | AND SOLD BY | J. WALTER, No. 169, PICCADILLY; AND W. RICH- | ARDSON, ROYAL-EXCHANGE [1789].

Among the 220 subscribers (including 21 “Jamaica Subscribers”) is “Mrs. Mathew, Rathbone Place.”

5. Amelia Bristow, THE | MANIAC, | A TALE; | OR, | A VIEW OF BETHLEM HOSPITAL: | AND | THE MERITS OF WOMEN, | A POEM FROM THE FRENCH: | WITH | POETICAL PIECES ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS, | ORIGINAL AND TRANSLATED. | — | BY A. BRISTOW. | — | Some good, more bad, some neither one nor t’other. | MARTIAL, Epigram 17, Book 1. | = | LONDON: | PRINTED FOR J. HATCHARD, | BOOKSELLER TO HER MAJESTY, 190, OPPOSITE ALBANY | HOUSE, PICCADILLY. | 1810.

The 204 subscribers (for 277 copies) include

Rev. Anthony Stephen Mathew, Russel Place, Fitzroy Square.

Mrs. Mathew, ditto, 2 copies.

William Henry Mathew, M. D. ditto.

Mrs. W. H. Mathew, ditto, 4 copies.

Master Henry Albert Mathew, ditto.

Dr. William Henry Mathew is Harriet Mathew’s son, his wife is Dorothea, and Master Henry Albert is their son. Notice that they all seem to live together at Russel[ly] Place, Fitzroy Square.

- 5 So Harriet Mathew did patronize literature after the time of her salons in 1784 recorded by J. T. Smith. Three of the works to which she subscribed are by young women from the provinces, and most of them attracted subscribers of social and artistic significance.

7. Neither she nor her husband is known to have owned any literary or artistic work by Blake.

8. The dedication is signed “E. B.,” and the author is identified as Miss Eliza Blower in [John Watkins and Frederick Shoberl], *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland* (1816).

9. At the end is an advertisement for “THE CITIZEN, A NOVEL; IN LETTERS, By Mrs. GOMERSALL, AUTHOR OF ELEONORA.” *Eleonora* is available in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco>>.