

*The William Cobbett Society*



***Cobbett's New Register***

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**ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE 2023**  
***COTTAGE ECONOMY***

*John Stevenson and James Grande*

*In celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the publication of Cobbett's Cottage Economy, our two speakers help us to take a closer look at this most enduring work.*

**Part 1**

***COTTAGE ECONOMY***

*Dr John Stevenson*

We are tonight celebrating one of Cobbett's most famous works, his *Cottage Economy*, first published in book form just over two hundred years ago in 1822, and hardly ever out of print since. The most recent printing from 2008, an attractive paperback in a series of 'rural classics' describes it as a 'bible of self-sufficiency'. The cover has a picture of an idyllic smallholding, complete with vegetable patch, pigsty, chickens, cow byre, rabbit hutch, compost heap, and busy bees from the hive. It is a not unfair representation of what Cobbett claimed to set out to do, except that the external scene of smallholding life cannot represent another central aspect of Cobbettian self-sufficiency, the brewing of beer and the baking of bread within the home. The essential ingredients of the *Cottage Economy* were the production, on a modest area of smallholding (no more than a quarter of an acre) of virtually all that was necessary for the sustaining of a family of almost any size; freeing them from the tyranny of wage labour in farm or factory, recourse to Poor Law relief, or the perils of emigration. Not only could a family produce its own food, but also produce for itself the most important elements of the daily diet - beer, bread, milk, eggs - without recourse to publican or shopkeeper and avoiding any taxes on common articles of consumption imposed directly or indirectly by the government.<sup>1</sup>

The first appearance of *Cottage Economy* was as a series of seven pamphlets published between 1821 and 1822, dealing, in Cobbett's own words, 'with the brewing of beer, the baking of bread, keeping of cows, pigs, bees, ewes, goats, poultry and rabbits, and relative to other matters deemed useful in the conducting of the affairs of a labourer's family'. The pamphlets were cheaply priced at three old pence and proved so popular that 30,000 sets sold within a year.<sup>2</sup> Cobbett was even able to boast in

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<sup>1</sup> W. Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, Bath, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> M.L. Pearl, *William Cobbett: A bibliographical account of his life and times*, Oxford, 1953, pp. 119-20.

December 1821 that fifty sets of parts one to five had been exported to France. Following the first edition in book form he attracted favourable reviews even in unexpected places like the austere Whiggish *Edinburgh Review*. Fresh editions followed, like a rolling stone gathering more prescriptions from Cobbett's fertile mind about how the labourer and his family could make a self-sufficient life for themselves. A new enthusiasm was the use of native, English grasses to make straw bonnets, for almost a century in different guises, the fashionable headwear of English women, but hitherto imported in very large numbers from Italy and elsewhere. So engrossed was Cobbett in the possibilities of this cottage industry, that a further pamphlet was produced with illustrations of the English grasses that could be used for bonnet-making. Later editions also encouraged the use of maize, which Cobbett had experienced as a useful food and fodder crop during his time in America. Having demonstrated it could be grown successfully this side of the Atlantic, he advocated 'Cobbett's corn' particularly as a feed crop for animals, especially the family pig whose role he saw a mainstay of the self-sufficient smallholder. Following Cobbett's death in 1835, his daughter Anne published further editions, adding recipes for the use of meal and flour from maize in the cottage kitchen.

Cobbett was setting out in his pamphlets something both highly traditional and also revolutionary in its import. Writing in the midst of what historians would later call the 'agricultural revolution', in which the reorganisation and consolidation of holdings through enclosure, heavy investment in new crops and techniques, and a highly commercialised approach was causing immense upheaval for the rural poor, the offer of a return to a form of peasant proprietorship, a yeoman-freeman existence could look attractive. It offered an alternative to the prospect of pauperised wage labour, the loss of the commons, and the ever-present threat of dependence on parish relief and humiliating task work of the kind Cobbett found labourers engaged in on his 'rides' across southern England in the 1820s.<sup>3</sup> *Cottage Economy* offered a form of restoration, a return to a better way of life than that currently on offer in post-Napoleonic War England, where the rural labourers faced a perfect storm. They faced high taxes, rural unemployment, enclosures, and, in Cobbett's view, a distinct deterioration of the standard of life they had known when he was a boy sixty years earlier, before the long wars with France. Fundamental was his view that

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<sup>3</sup> See for example W. Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, ed. I. Dyck, London, 2001, pp. 294-7 on the poverty of rural workers, and p.307 for people in rags.

the labourer and his family had a right to a decent living, and his belief 'that the affairs of a nation ought to be so managed, that every sober and industrious and healthy man ought, out of his own wages, to be able to support himself, wife and family in a comfortable and decent manner.'<sup>4</sup> But it went beyond material comfort, a return to the ample living and better times he believed had once existed for the labouring people from whom he had sprung, he aimed for a life of independence, self-reliance and dignity, increasingly under threat in a world of commercialised agriculture where farmers no longer ate with their labourers at a common table and were, increasingly, 'new men' made rich from the profits of corruption and stock-jobbing.

But it was revolutionary too in attempting to step aside from the other great revolution that was occurring in Cobbett's lifetime, the rise of industry and the world of the factory. Though essentially a man of the rural south and from the yeoman stock of Farnham where his family had farmed in a small way, he was aware of the growing factory culture already evident in some of the West Country wool towns, and could not ignore the even more dramatic industrial developments which had contributed to the Luddite convulsions in the midlands and north, and the reform agitation in the northern towns after 1815 which had led to events like the Peterloo 'massacre' of August 1819. Smallholding self-sufficiency was an alternative to the machine world, urbanisation and factory life, at a time when it was still possible to believe that the country's future prosperity lay predominantly with agriculture. Cobbett was writing in the age of the turnpike and canal, not of the railway, and the decisive economic predominance of manufacturing in the economy had still to come after his death. Large factories could be found, but the average size of factories as late as the 1840s was about forty employees: the small workshop was still the predominant mode of production across the broad range of manufacturing.

In the world that Cobbett knew, it was resolving the predicament of the rural labourer that was the major issue, and *Cottage Economy* the solution. It offered self-sufficiency in reward for hard work. It involved intensive mixed husbandry: intrinsic to the *Economy* was maintaining a cow to provide milk, butter and cheese. Raising its feed involved sowing and transplanting thousands of cabbage and turnip seeds to provide fodder for the cow and the other livestock. Grain was to be bought in, a quarter of an acre proving too small to grow extensive grain crops (and Cobbett's

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in K.W. Schwiezer and J.W. Osborne, *Cobbett in his Times*, Leicester, 1990, p.145.

prejudice against potatoes prohibiting even a small potato patch), but milled by hand to avoid the extortions and abuses of which millers were widely suspected. Hard work he admits, but possible for a man helped by a sturdy youth. Milk and beer quenched the thirst of the household, the latter the traditional mainstay of households where water might be too dangerous to drink, and a weekly brewing of ale a natural accompaniment to the baking of bread. Milk and 'small' beer were for children and adults alike, avoiding the heavily taxed and unnourishing tea which Cobbett despised as 'a weaker form of laudanum'. But Cobbett was no puritan, the aim was a good life; he saw no merit in unnecessary sacrifice, and was vehement in his denunciation of those who praised up the merits of suffering and misery as worthwhile in their own right. He wanted families happily off, and to be happy the labouring family had to be well-supplied with wholesome food and drink and good clothing. In the introduction to *Cottage Economy* he gives full rein to the enlightened view that mankind has a right to a 'happy' life:

To live well, to enjoy all things that make life pleasant, is the right of every man who constantly uses his strength judiciously and lawfully. It is to blaspheme God to suppose, that he created man to be miserable, to hunger, thirst, and perish with cold, in the midst of that abundance which is the fruit of their own labour.<sup>5</sup>

As suggested earlier, Cobbett was advocating smallholding self-sufficiency at a particularly difficult time for the rural economy. His major preoccupations were still the costs of the long wars against Revolutionary France which, with two short breaks, had been fought for the better part of a generation, from 1793 to 1815. He believed that their costs, through loans, the burgeoning National Debt and devices such as paper money, had been borne by the labouring classes. Extravagant rates of interest were being paid to those who lent money to the Government, supported by a corrupt political and financial class, which had effectively passed the colossal costs of the war on to the common people through taxes on consumption. For Cobbett, high taxation was *the* cause of the poverty he encountered. His support for radical parliamentary reform was so that he could break the stranglehold of the corrupt nexus of politicians and financiers who continued to enjoy the interest payments on the National Debt at the expense of the labouring poor. Cobbett wanted to slash payments on the debt, relieve the poor of unnecessary taxes, and thereby bring their standard of living back to

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<sup>5</sup> *Cottage Economy*, paragraph 5.

what they had once enjoyed. He was faced, however, with a still obdurate, unreformed parliament, which was far from accepting his prescriptions for political and economic reform. In the meantime, a return to smallholding offered a way out of an entrenched system which condemned the labouring poor to a miserable existence.

There was no doubt, from its immediate popularity, that Cobbett's message met with a favourable response, not only from the readers Cobbett had aimed at with his cheap 'twopenny tracts', but also sections of the upper classes who recognised the widespread distress and hardships in post-war England. Cobbett was not alone in seeking to redress the position of the rural labourer. Others, like the radical Thomas Spence sought a wholesale redistribution of land to produce a more egalitarian system of landholding. Ideas of the land as the 'People's Farm' was the subject of philanthropic musing and active experimentation on both sides of the Atlantic during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with various schemes for common ownership attracting both interest and investment.<sup>6</sup> Cobbett, a firm believer in private property, remained at one level more conservative, seeking not a wholesale revolution in landownership, but simply enough land for the labourer to make a secure and happy life for himself and his family. But the relative modesty of Cobbett's proposals was to ensure their enduring legacy.

What Cobbett could not know was that the option for Great Britain to remain a primarily agricultural country was already being overtaken by the progress of industry and urbanisation: the country was inexorably moving towards becoming a predominantly industrial society. As it did so, however, the lure of an alternative remained attractive, particularly when the dislocation of the industrial economy faced people with the reality of the trap that could result from a downturn in trade or the economic cycle - for populations now dependent on the demand for the products they produced in their workshops or factories. These dilemmas were brought home starkly in the so-called 'hungry forties', the decade following Cobbett's death in 1835, when high prices and a downturn in the trade cycle exposed thousands of factory workers to their helplessness in the face of forces over which they had no control. One reaction by the Chartists, advocates of Cobbett's long-cherished but unrealised plans for radical parliamentary reform, who were being

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<sup>6</sup> See M. Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism, 1775-1840*, Oxford, 1988.

blocked in their political objectives, was the Chartist Land Plan.<sup>7</sup> Thousands of factory hands and domestic craftsmen such as handloom weavers, subscribed to a scheme to purchase estates in southern England and farm them on a co-operative basis. Several were set up and their buildings are still evident; and though the scheme fell into financial ruin, it represented a powerful example of the continued hold that the rural dream had for many people in industrial Britain. It did not fade, and even in the late nineteenth century, when the self-confident Victorian economy was faced with further difficulties as foreign competition was beginning to have its effects, some sections of the Liberal Party, with its roots in the reforming tradition, reacted to the onset of periods of unemployment and an increasing awareness of the slum conditions in which many urban workers lived, by voicing the need for a return to smallholding to relieve the pressures. The prominent Liberal leader Joseph Chamberlain in his 'Unauthorized Programme' of 1885, proposed to give local authorities greater powers to purchase land compulsorily in order to let out allotments and smallholdings. Bodies such as the English Land Restoration League and the Land Nationalization League sustained the concept of life on the land as an alternative to an urban existence. An Allotments and Smallholdings Association, formed in 1884, put pressure upon Parliament and local authorities to realise something of the Cobbettian ideas, producing the 1887 Allotments Act. Protagonists such as Jesse Collings MP was the first to popularise the phrase 'three acres and a cow' as the objective of those who sought a return to the land for the rural worker.<sup>8</sup> More generous in its provisions than Cobbett's mere quarter of an acre, it chimed with the powerful 'Land Question' in pre-1914 England in which radical Liberal and socialist attacks upon large landowners, attempts to protect the rights of exiting crofters and small proprietors, and a resurgence of interest in resettlement schemes attracted widespread support.<sup>9</sup>

The issue was not confined to one part of the political spectrum: concerns about the health of the nation, 'national efficiency', the poor health of urban recruits to the Boer War and squalid living conditions among the remaining rural workers in the countryside, led many to question whether healthier alternatives existed. Cobbett's prescriptions

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<sup>7</sup> See A. Hadfield, *The Chartist Land Company*, London, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> J. Burchard, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change since 1800*, London, 2002, pp. 79-84.

<sup>9</sup> See P. Readman, *Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, National Identity, and the Politics of Land, 1880-1914*, Woodbridge, 2008.

received a fresh boost with new editions of *Cottage Economy* in 1916 and 1926, with introductions by the popular essayist and Roman Catholic, G.K. Chesterton. 'Farm colonies', both at home and abroad, were also a prescription of the founder of the Salvation Army, General William Booth, for the urban squalor from which he sought both spiritual and practical escape.<sup>10</sup>

Although the practical results were small, a few hundred acres allocated to allotments and a scatter of farm settlements, the idea of smallholding survived into the interwar years, both in the form of government-sponsored resettlement schemes for ex-soldiers after the Great War, and, in the 1930s, as a viable alternative to the dole queues for the unemployed, with smallholdings provided by philanthropic bodies such as the Pilgrim Trust.<sup>11</sup> But a more pervasive influence of Cobbett's smallholding ideas than the wholesale resettlement of workers was the increasingly entrenched idea that the municipal housing being provided from before the Great War should be modelled with large gardens and sometimes with the additional availability of allotments for those who wanted them: the 'Garden City' and 'Garden suburb' idea of good quality housing set at a low density with large gardens and open space. The idea had a huge influence on the first model estates, such as Bournville, Port Sunlight and the first London County Council estates at Old Oak in East Acton and the much larger Becontree estate completed after the Great War.<sup>12</sup> For the next half century, well into the 1960s, 'council houses' were being built to patterns which provided front and rear gardens, and often additional side gardens for end-of-terrace properties, under the terms of the Tudor Walters Report of 1918, which accepted the idea of an English home as having to have large gardens for the health and wellbeing of the inhabitants. Even in reduced circumstances after the Second World War, the majority of new 'council houses' until the 1970s were not flats or tower blocks, but watered-down versions of a 'cottage home' in which a large garden was available for cultivation or recreation. As late as the 1960s, new council estates were being built with no provision for garages, but with gardens front and back: the

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<sup>10</sup> W. Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, London, 1890. The fold-out frontispiece illustrates both domestic and foreign farm colonies.

<sup>11</sup> See The Pilgrim Trust, *Men Without Work*. London, 1938; Burchard, *Paradise Lost*. pp. 141-9.

<sup>12</sup> See C. and R. Bell, *City Fathers: The Early History of Town Planning in Britain*, Harmondsworth, 1972, pp. 270-86 on Bournville and Port Sunlight; pp. 282-3 commenting on the latter's provision of large gardens and Lord Lever's 'obsession' with gardening. On the L.C.C. see J. Boughton, *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing*, London, 2019, pp. 24-9, 33-7.

British worker was expected to be a gardener, not necessarily a motorist.

Moreover, even as the world of TV, cars, and consumer goods overtook the ideals of town planners and public prophets, a new generation revived the notion of a return to the land, or at least being as self-sufficient as modern life permitted. Promoted by TV series like *The Good Life*, smallholding and self-sufficiency was again fashionable by the 1970s, from hippie communes to suburban householders reading John Seymour's *The Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency*, a bestselling handbook of 1976 by a veteran smallholder. In *Cottage Economy* Cobbett had let a genie out of a bottle: a recipe for the difficult times he lived through was to become an insistent and regular theme in the national psyche - a people who had 'lost' their rural roots, but were constantly trying to recapture them in garden, allotment or smallholding. Cobbett has much to do with it.

## Part 2

### FROM *RURAL RIDES* TO *COTTAGE ECONOMY*

*Dr James Grande*

*Cottage Economy* has long existed in the shadow of Cobbett's *Rural Rides*. It is easy to see why *Rural Rides* has retained greater appeal: its vivid descriptions of the English countryside and the window it offers onto the social history of the period, held together through the organising framework of the tour, is a compelling combination. It is also one that has shaped our image of Cobbett as, in the words of the critic John Barrell, 'an habitually *itinerant* man', always out on the road and reporting on what he finds.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, *Cottage Economy* (1821-2) confines itself to the local and intensely practical pursuit of self-sufficiency, presenting itself as an authoritative source of 'information relative to the brewing of BEER, making of BREAD, keeping of COWS, PIGS, BEES, EWES, GOATS, POULTRY AND RABBITS, and relative to other matters deemed useful in the conducting of the Affairs of a Labourer's Family'.<sup>2</sup> This apparently modest work might be seen, however, as just as characteristic of Cobbett's work in the 1820s as the more celebrated *Rural Rides*, and these two books

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<sup>1</sup> John Barrell, 'Clare, Cobbett and the Changing Landscape', in *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Blake to Byron*, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy* (London, 1822), title page.

are in fact closely related, forming part of a common political project. Not content to simply map the post-war countryside and record the deleterious changes to the lives of farmers and agricultural labourers, Cobbett produced an instruction manual for his readers to find their own redress, taking his political analysis down to the level of the cottage. His advice in *Cottage Economy* always has a political aim in view, showing his readers how they could achieve a form of self-sufficiency by baking their own bread, brewing their own beer, reducing their wants, and (particularly important, this) avoiding taxed goods. For Cobbett, independence was itself a political virtue: as he wrote a few years later in *Advice to Young Men* (1829), ‘The great source of independence, the French express in a precept of three words, “*Vivre de peu*”, which I have always very much admired. “*To live upon little*” is the great security against slavery’.<sup>3</sup> And as John Stevenson has shown, the spirit of *Cottage Economy* can be seen in many later attempts to return to the rural ideal, from Feargus O’Connor’s Chartist Land Plan in the second half of the 1840s, the ‘Hungry Forties’, which aimed to resettle factory workers on smallholdings, to the back-to-the-land movements of the twentieth century and beyond.

Cobbett elaborated on this theme of independence in the introduction to *Cottage Economy*:

To live well, to enjoy all things that make life pleasant, is the right of every man who constantly uses his strength judiciously and lawfully. It is to blaspheme God to suppose that he created men to be miserable, to hunger, thirst, and perish with cold, in the midst of that abundance which is the fruit of their own labour. Instead, therefore, of applauding ‘*happy poverty*’, which applause is so much the fashion of the present day, I despise the man that is *poor* and *contented*; for such content is a certain proof of a base disposition, a disposition which is the enemy of all industry, all exertion, all love of independence.<sup>4</sup>

In *Cottage Economy*, producing your own food and abstaining from taxed items such as tea become practical forms of opposition to a corrupt system. Cobbett’s advocacy of ‘cottage economy’ is in dialogue and pointed opposition to the emerging science of political economy, which Cobbett associates above all with Thomas Malthus’s theory of population and the debate on poor law reform which in the 1830s would produce the New

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<sup>3</sup> William Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men* (London, 1829), paragraph 17.

<sup>4</sup> Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, paragraph 5.

Poor Law and the workhouse system. So there was a politics and also a history to Cobbett's advice on home brewing: as Robert Poole observes, contemporary '[p]arallels were drawn with the American colonists' boycott of taxed goods fifty years before', as, in the aftermath of the Peterloo massacre, radicals strenuously avoided excisable goods such as tea and commercially produced beer, sticking instead to water at their meetings and dinners.<sup>5</sup>

Cobbett's vision was of a restoration of what he insisted had been the state of things in the English countryside during his childhood, before political economy, paper money and the long and costly wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France. In his contribution to the collection of essays that came out of the 250th Anniversary Colloquium, the sociologist Craig Calhoun declared that, 'Cobbett might never have been a radical (in the sense of critically challenging what was going on around him) were not the industrial revolution and liberal economics upsetting village life and what he saw as time-honoured principles of economic independence ... Though radical, Cobbett wanted to preserve traditions he thought not just valuable but definitive of English liberty ... His vision was of a society in which those who produced food would always have enough of it to eat.'<sup>6</sup> With these concerns at the forefront of his political agenda, we can see *Cottage Economy* and *Rural Rides* as two sides of the same coin, for all their difference in form and approach. Both works were begun in the latter half of 1821 and published serially over the next few years: the first sixpenny number of *Cottage Economy* was issued in August 1821, while the first of what would become the 'rural rides' appeared in the *Political Register* in November of that year.

One of the purposes of Cobbett's rides was to compare his vision of self-sufficiency set out in *Cottage Economy* with the existing reality. Riding through Sussex, Cobbett is pleased to observe a labourer 'sitting under the shelter of a hedge at breakfast' with 'a good lump of household *bread* and not a very small piece of *bacon*'. Cobbett calls out,

'You do get some *bacon* then?' 'Oh, yes! Sir,' said he, and with an emphasis and a swag of the head which seemed to say, 'We *must* and *will* have *that*.' I saw, and with great delight, a pig at almost every

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Poole, 'The March to Peterloo: Politics and Festivity in Late Georgian England', *Past & Present*, 192 (2006), 109-53 (p. 139).

<sup>6</sup> Craig Calhoun, 'Beyond Left and Right: A Cobbett for Our Times', in *William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment: Contexts and Legacy*, ed. James Grande and John Stevenson (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015), p. 160.

labourer's house. The houses are good and warm; and the gardens some of the very best that I have seen in England.<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere he discovers proof of the reach of *Cottage Economy* and its practical effects; for instance, in Reigate,

I was going, to-day, by the side of a plat of ground, where there was a very fine flock of *turkeys*. I stopped to admire them, and observed to the owner how fine they were, when he answered, 'We owe them entirely *to you*, Sir; for, we never raised one till we read your COTTAGE ECONOMY.' I then told him, that we had, this year, raised two broods at Kensington, one black and one white, one of *nine* and one of *eight*[.] (185)

We might wonder how at moments like this Cobbett is recognised by people he has never met, in a period pre-dating the widespread visual transmission of celebrity: do we believe that this man instantly recognises this passing stranger to be the author of *Cottage Economy*? Elsewhere, Cobbett is not immediately recognised but nonetheless discovers evidence that his book is being read, finding his work, in the critic James Mulvihill's phrase, 'cited in the countryside itself'.<sup>8</sup> And this is particularly true of Cobbett's aim to popularise the domestic manufacture of straw hats and bonnets, previously imported from Italy, advice on which was included from the 1823 edition. In a roadside cottage in Kent, he meets a man who is unable to work in the fields plaiting straw, according to the instructions of '*a little book that had been made by Mr Cobbett*'. Cobbett 'told him that I was the man, and should like to see some of his work', and on further inquiry discovers that, 'some ladies in the neighbourhood had got him the book, and his family had got him the grass', these various activities becoming part of a common endeavour that Cobbett is part of (142-3). This shared activity binds Cobbett and his readers together within the rural economy, a process he describes in quasi-miraculous terms: in the village of Durley in Hampshire, which Cobbett describes as 'one of the most obscure villages in this whole kingdom' he finds girls plaiting straw in the way described in *Cottage Economy* and reflects, 'It is I, who, without knowing them, without ever having seen them, without even now knowing their names, have given the means of good living to a family who were before half-starved' (98-9). We might

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<sup>7</sup> William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* ed. Ian Dyck (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 89-90. Subsequent references to this edition will be given within parentheses in the main text.

<sup>8</sup> James Mulvihill, 'The Medium of Landscape in Cobbett's Rural Rides', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 33.4 (1993), 825-40 (p. 830).

detect, as so often with Cobbett, a little exaggeration here and a canny sense for self-promotion. When he finds a toll-keeper in Sussex whose husband is making a straw hat for harvest, he advises her on how to get better straw and cut the grass, and concludes that '[t]his woman ought to have my *Cottage Economy*', offering to give her a copy of the work for free (92).

*Cottage Economy* and *Rural Rides* are, then, texts in close dialogue, as Cobbett gives advice on rural self-sufficiency as an alternative to wage labour, the factory system and the taxation economy and then looks for evidence that his ideas are taking root and being put into practice in the English countryside. This was, though, just one facet of Cobbett's political project in the 1820s and I want to briefly turn away from *Cottage Economy* to think about where Cobbett was exactly two hundred years ago, in January 1823, to bring in this wider context. While Cobbett's address in *Cottage Economy* was 'to the labouring classes of this kingdom', in January 1823 Cobbett was addressing a very different audience, far from Farnham, away from Surrey, Hampshire and what we usually think of as 'Cobbett Country', speaking to an audience of farmers and freeholders at St Andrew's Hall in Norwich. On 3 January 1823, Cobbett addressed a county meeting attended by 7,000 people, the most ever assembled at such a meeting in Norfolk, which had been called by the large Whig landowners, chief among them Thomas Coke of Holkham, known as the 'greatest commoner in England', to petition parliament for relief from the hardships that were then being experienced by farmers. Cobbett effectively ambushed the meeting and, in place of the mild petition prepared by Coke and others, carried a much more radical petition, outlining a far-reaching programme of reform including the sale of church property and crown lands to pay off the national debt, the reduction of the standing army, abolition of pensions and sinecures and repeal of taxes on malt, hops, leather, soap and candles.<sup>9</sup> Cobbett's parallel career as an orator, established through his 'rustic harangues' and presence at county meetings, is an aspect of his work that often receives less attention than his work as a writer, but it is no less crucial to understanding what Cobbett was attempting to achieve in the 1820s. With his intervention at the Norfolk meeting, Cobbett was persuading farmers to make common cause with agricultural labourers, as part of a united rural alliance, and agitate for reform.

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<sup>9</sup> See George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 419-21.

This was a programme that Cobbett stuck to. As late as 1831, facing prosecution once again for his writings on the Captain Swing riots, and contemplating the prospect of a reformed parliament, Cobbett inserted ‘for the fifth or sixth time in the *Register*’ the ‘NORFOLK PETITION .... agreed to in Saint Andrew’s Hall at Norwich, on the 3d of January 1823’, and reflected that,

Upon reading it again now, I see not one single word to alter. My opinion is, that a reformed parliament will pass acts agreeably to the tenor and the prayers of this petition ... It is just that this measure should be adopted; and it appears to me the only possible means of settling, in a peaceable manner, the troubled affairs of this country. If a reformed parliament should have enough of the old aristocratical leaven in it to induce it to treat the principles and propositions of this petition with scorn, my opinion is, that the troubles of the country, so far from ceasing, will go on becoming greater and greater.<sup>10</sup>

The moment of reform had finally arrived, after a period in which Cobbett’s idea of an alliance reaching from the cottage to the great farmers had come under intense pressure. Soon after the Norfolk petition was carried, and similar resolutions carried at other county meetings, the price of wheat rose, inflation came down, and the immediate difficulties for farmers receded. The condition of the labourers, however, remained critical throughout the 1820s and we can place the success of *Cottage Economy* in his context: there was a genuine appetite for the kind of advice on self-sufficiency that Cobbett was offering. By 1828, *Cottage Economy* had sold almost 50,000 copies at two shillings and sixpence, and doubtless reached a much larger audience through the practices of part publication, reading aloud and sharing copies.

Although addressed to rural labourers, *Cottage Economy* was taken up by readers of all classes: for instance, Jane Welsh Carlyle writes in a letter of being unable to cook when she married Thomas Carlyle and they moved to a remote estate in Dumfries and Galloway: ‘So I sent for Cobbett’s “Cottage Economy”, and fell to work on a loaf of bread.’<sup>11</sup> It had a long afterlife through the nineteenth century, kept in print by Cobbett’s children and supplemented in 1835, the year of Cobbett’s death, by his eldest daughter Anne’s *The English Housekeeper: or, Manual of Domestic Management*, which itself was in its sixth edition by 1851. We might see

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<sup>10</sup> ‘To the Readers of the Register. The Prosecution’, *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*, 14 May 1831.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Welsh Carlyle to Mary Smith, 5 Cheyne Row, Chelsea, 11 January 1857, *The Carlyle Letters Online* <https://carlyleletters.dukeupress.edu/volume/32/lt-18570111-JWC-MS-01>.

Anne's *The English Housekeeper* as the link between Cobbett's *Cottage Economy* and the world of Mrs Beeton and Victorian cuisine. Although Anne insists that 'as a mere Cookery-Book, mine must submit to be placed in a lower rank than some others; because it brings to light no discoveries in the art called *gastronomic*, and it is not designed to favour epicurism', *The English Housekeeper* is certainly aimed at a higher class of reader, the lady with servants, and the somewhat austere diet of *Cottage Economy* is left far behind.<sup>12</sup> Anne's breakfast menu includes lobster salad, potted salmon and wine jelly; while what she describes as a five-course 'fashionable dinner for sixteen or eighteen persons' includes turtle soup, roasted pheasants or grouse, bologna sausages with parmesan, preserved pineapple and a pyramid of sweetmeats.<sup>13</sup> We have come a long way from her father's prescribed diet of bacon, bread and beer.

*Cottage Economy* remained in print into the twentieth century. A preface by G. K. Chesterton was initially added in a 1916 reprint and then included in the 1926 Peter Davies edition and the 1979 Oxford University Press edition. Chesterton claimed that,

William Cobbett is the noblest English example of the noble calling of the agitator. ... What Cobbett attempted to revive ... was really medieval England. For the more immediate purpose of politics, it was rural England. But it was not a Byronic repose in a rural barbarism; it was a quite business-like belief in the possibility, or rather the necessity, of a rural civilisation. He believed that agricultural labour could pay; he even entertained the Quixotic fancy that it might pay the agricultural labourer ... What distinguishes Cobbett from most rural idealists, such as Ruskin, is that he was a realist as well ... For a hundred years after Cobbett's forlorn hope we are confronted again by Cobbett's question. We must go back to freedom or forward to slavery.<sup>14</sup>

If this is what Chesterton made of *Cottage Economy* a century on, how does this book speak to us today? We might conclude it does so most strongly in terms of what we can think of as Cobbett the proto-environmentalist. This is a connection that Raymond Williams was among the first to make, suggesting, with great prescience in his 1983 book on Cobbett – so this is really quite early in the modern environmental

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<sup>12</sup> Anne Cobbett, *The English Housekeeper: or, Manual of Domestic Management* (London, 1835), x.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Cobbett, *The English Housekeeper*, pp. 54-8.

<sup>14</sup> G. K. Chesterton, 'Preface' to William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy* (London: Peter Davies, 1926), vii-x.

movement – that ‘what is now called ecology has a friend in Cobbett’.<sup>15</sup> And this topic has been taken up more recently, for example, in a 2011 article in the *Guardian*, titled ‘William Cobbett: a Green guru?’, and in Katey Castellano’s recent account of what she terms Cobbett’s ‘food politics’.<sup>16</sup> As Castellano writes, ‘Cobbett prophetically analyses the political economy of food with the goal of reducing the public’s dependency on a global agricultural network whose distribution policies neglect the poor.’<sup>17</sup> Cobbett’s environmentalism is of a resolutely practical kind, and we might take him as an early proponent of staying local, growing your own, and reducing your food miles. Indeed, Cobbett perhaps speaks most directly to students and readers today not as a campaigner for parliamentary reform or commentator on the Napoleonic Wars but as an ecological writer, who instinctively resisted the claim that industrialisation represented progress and that other forms of knowledge and ways of life were no longer valid.

## ALL AT SEA WITH WILLIAM COBBETT?

*David Chun*

Leonora Natrass, *Blue Water*, Viper, 2022

Leonora Natrass, the author of *Blue Water*, the latest in a series of historical novels, is well known to Cobbett scholarship. In 1995, she published *William Cobbett, The Politics of Style*, a well-regarded critical analysis of his qualities as a writer. Three years later, she edited a six-volume selection from Cobbett’s writings. As she later recalled, ‘I spent a happy if often exasperated decade in his company, which has left me with an abiding love for home-brew and the cottage economy of vegetables and farmyard animals he advocated.’ Her knowledge of Cobbett, and of the time in which he lived, held her in good stead when, having retired from academia and moved to Cornwall, she began a new career as a writer of historical novels.

Her first novel *Black Drop* (2021) was enthusiastically received. It tells the story of Laurence Jago, Foreign Office clerk as well as, clandestinely,

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<sup>15</sup> Raymond Williams, *Cobbett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 76.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Kent, ‘William Cobbett: a Green Guru?’, *Guardian*, 12 April 2011  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/apr/12/william-cobbett-greens>.

<sup>17</sup> Katey Castellano, *The Ecology of British Romantic Conservatism, 1790-1837* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 11.

reluctant spy, erstwhile Jacobin and, through the laudanum-based Black Drop of the title, opium addict. He encounters political intrigue and murder in eighteenth-century London, against the background of the trial of the real-life radical Thomas Hardy (1752-1832) for treason. *Blue Water* continues the story. Jago, now in semi-disgrace following the events of the first book, embarks on a voyage to America by packet ship, accompanied by his dog Mr Gibbs and William Philpott, a loyalist journalist, to whom ostensibly he is to act as journalistic assistant. However, Jago also has a covert role, to assist the official carrying a treaty between Britain and America, which will help mend the strained relations between the two countries, to get it safely to Congress for ratification. There is a rich cast of characters, representing an eclectic cross-section of eighteenth-century society. They include Captain Morris, the master of the vessel *Tankerville*, the French aristocrat Comtesse Emilie de Salles and her son, who are on the lam from persecution in France, and the alluring Lizzie McKendrick, an Irish actress, and her bear Bruin. The eventful voyage across the Atlantic, which follows a deep looping course via Madeira, the Cape Verde Islands and Bermuda, seems to make a truism of the phrase ‘worse things happen at sea’. The passengers and crew endure shortages of water, survive stormy weather, manage to escape a French frigate, and are twice captured by a French privateer. There are also romantic encounters and suspicious deaths and one character seems destined to meet a grim fate at the end of the book.

For members of this Society, one of the delights of the book is William Philpott, who as the author acknowledges, is based on William Cobbett. He is like him in appearance and dress – ‘he wore a farmer’s suit of uncommon antiquity – long coat with flapped pockets, leather gaiters and a broad-brimmed hat’ - has a wife called Nancy, is a loyalist, as Cobbett himself was in the 1790s, and is the proprietor of a weekly newspaper called the *Weekly Cannon*. He is not meant to be Cobbett, of course, whom one imagines to have been more reserved and hard-edged than Natrass’s creation. It is difficult, for instance, to imagine Cobbett spending hours in the rigging of the vessel, or organising a trial of strength among the passengers to determine who would have sufficient physical strength to carry out a suspected crime. Nor perhaps can we believe that Cobbett would have engaged in a dalliance of the kind that Philpott has with the Comtesse. Likewise, the passages from the *Weekly Cannon* that are reproduced in the novel bear no resemblance to Cobbett’s more serious articles in the *Political Register*. But Philpott perhaps captures something

of Cobbett's affability and vivacity, at least during the years before imprisonment in Newgate altered and embittered him.

And for those readers who, like me, enjoyed travelling with Philpott and Jago, it is good to see signs at the end of the book that they may be about to embark on further adventures, perhaps in America.

### **COBBETT VERBATIM**

*After a detailed description of the method of making and using a rush light, Cobbett finishes his most practical instructions with these words:*

Now these rushes give a better light than a common small dip-candle; and they cost next to nothing, though the labourer may with them have as much light as he pleases, and though without them he must sit the far greater part of the winter evenings in the dark, even if he expend fifteen shillings a year in candles. You may do any sort of work by this light; and, if reading be your taste, you may read the foul libels, the lies and abuse, which are circulated gratis about me by the "Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," as well by rush-light as you can by the light of taxed candles; and at any rate, you would have one less evil; for to be deceived and to pay a tax for the deception are a little too much for even modern loyalty openly to demand.

*Cottage Economy*, London 1822. William Cobbett, paragraph 197.

### **AN UNPUBLISHED COBBETT LETTER**

*David Chun*

About a year ago, I was fortunate to be able to acquire an original letter written by William Cobbett to John Budd in June 1807. I have made a transcription of the letter and this appears below along with a photograph of it (Fig. 1). Many letters written by and to Cobbett are held by institutions, notably the British Library and the library of Nuffield College, Oxford, but privately-owned letters come on the market and can sometimes be acquired for a few hundred pounds. Longer, more detailed ones command much higher prices. At the time of writing this, Peter Harrington, an antiquarian bookseller in Fulham, is offering an 1811 letter written by Cobbett to John Morgan, a business associate, for £2,500.

However, quite a lot of information can be elicited from even a brief letter such as the one below.

June 1807  
Parsons' Green, Monday Morning.

Dear Budd,

It was with great pain that I heard from Mr. Tefant, on Saturday night, that your poor little boy was dangerously ill. I hope you will be able to tell me that he is better; and, I beg you to believe that I am very sorry that my want of room prevents me from offering your child and Mrs. Budd any thing better than mere good wishes. — Mrs. Cobbett joins me in these sentiments and in the kindest respects to Mrs. Budd. — John will bring a word by way of answer (verbally) as to the state of your dear little boy.

I remain  
Your sincere friend  
and devoted servt.

Mr. Budd. }      W. Cobbett.

Fig. 1. Letter from William Cobbett to John Budd. Author's collection.

June 1807-<sup>1</sup>  
Parson's Green, Monday Morning.

Dear Budd,

It was with great pain that I heard from Mr. Tegart, on Saturday night, that your poor little boy was dangerously ill. I hope you will be able to tell me that he is better; and, I beg you to believe that I am very sorry that my want of room prevents me from offering your child and Mrs. Budd any thing better than mere good wishes. – Mrs. Cobbett joins me in these sentiments and in the kindest respects to Mrs. Budd. – John will bring a word by way of answer (verbally) as to the state of your dear little boy.

I remain

Your sincere friend  
and obedient Serv<sup>t</sup>.

W<sup>m</sup>. Cobbett.

Mr. Budd. }

#### Notes on Persons and Places

PARSON'S GREEN: Cobbett seems to have a rented the same house at Fulham in 1805 and 1806, presumably because of the difficulties in travelling to and from Botley in the winter months of 1805/1806 and 1806/1807. The landlord appears to have been a Leonard Lazenby.<sup>2</sup> When Lazenby was made bankrupt in 1810, the 21-year lease of his property at Parson's Green was offered for sale as part of the bankruptcy proceedings. The house was described as 'A Substantial well-built Brick DWELLING, situated at Parson's-Green; and contains four bed-chambers, drawing-room, two parlours, kitchens, dry cellarage; also coach-house, stabling, and spacious malt-house, with large garden attached ...'.<sup>3</sup> This is likely to be the property that Cobbett rented.

BUDD: This is almost certainly John Budd (1756-1812), who was a bookseller and stationer trading from the Crown and Mitre at 100 Pall Mall, and a business associate of Cobbett, selling the *Political Register* and other of his works and assisting him with financial transactions (Fig. 2). He was to be one of Cobbett's co-defendants in the 1810 prosecution for seditious libel – along with Thomas Curson Hansard and Richard Bagshaw – and upon pleading guilty was sent to King's Bench Prison for 3 months. This was the second time he had been sent there, having previously been sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment in 1805 for

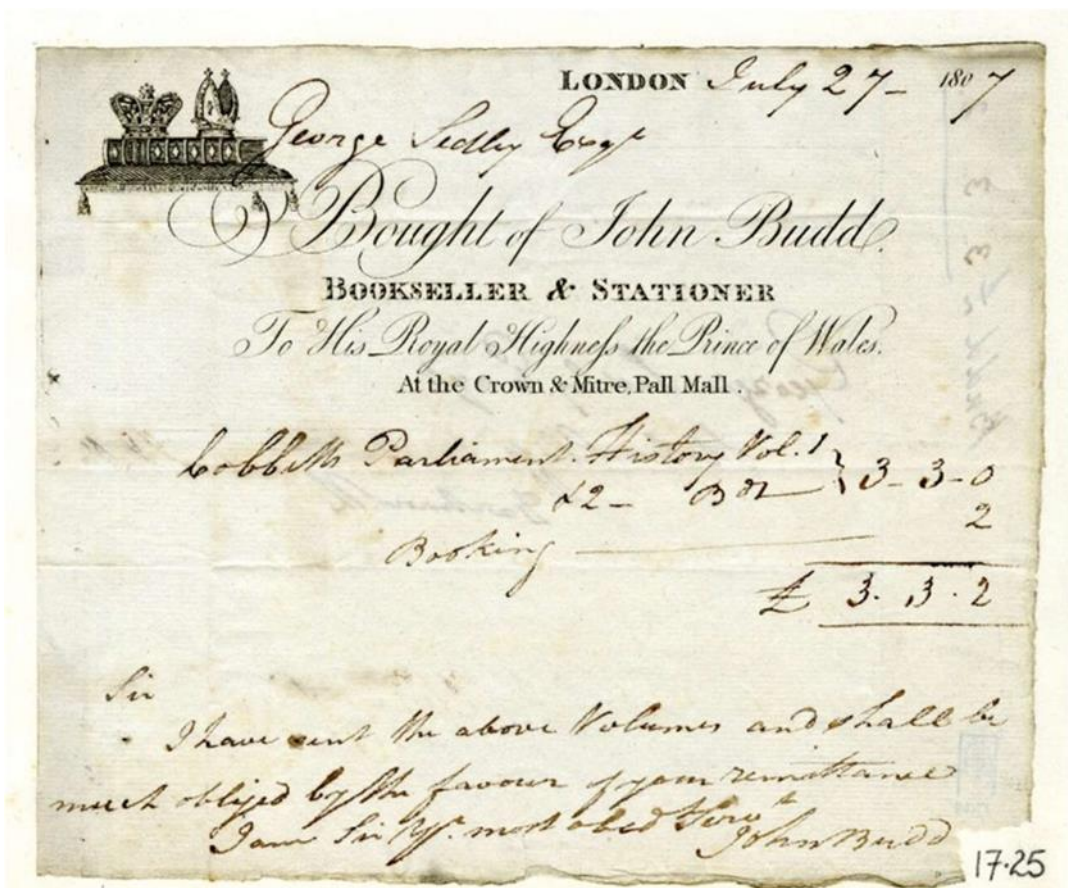
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<sup>1</sup> These words are not in Cobbett's handwriting but in a different contemporary hand, possibly Budd's. The letter is addressed 'To Mr. Budd, Pall Mall'.

<sup>2</sup> See letter from Cobbett to John Wright, 7 October 1806, British Library, Add. MS. 22906, f. 205.

<sup>3</sup> *Morning Advertiser*, 5 December 1810.

publishing a libel against Earl St. Vincent, who had been First Lord of the Admiralty.<sup>4</sup> Budd's bookselling business was by appointment to the Prince of Wales, as the 1807 billhead makes clear, and Budd provided intelligence to Carlton House on press matters. Colonel (later Sir John) McMahon, the Prince's private secretary and press fixer, described Budd as 'an honest artless creature that has proved himself useful on different occasions'.<sup>5</sup> Relations between Cobbett and Budd appear to have been strained after they had been imprisoned, though Budd did acquire Cobbett's share in *Parliamentary Debates*, *Parliamentary History* and *State Trials*. When Budd died in January or February 1812, while Cobbett was still in Newgate, this share in those works was acquired by Hansard.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig. 2. Billhead of John Budd. British Museum, Heal, 17.25, © The Trustees of the British Museum.**

<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, July 3 1805.

<sup>5</sup> Colonel McMahon to William Adam, February 1808 from Blair Adam MSS (private collection) reproduced in Arthur Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, c.1780-1850*, London, 1948, p. 407.

<sup>6</sup> For strained relations between Cobbett and Budd, see Anne Cobbett, *Account of the Family*, London, 1999, p. 40; Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Hist. c.33, f. 45, letter from Cobbett to James Swann dated 2 December 1811. For the purchase of the share in the works, see George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend*, vol. 1, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 253 and 304, note 65.

MR. TEGART: Arthur Tegart (1760-1829), ‘apothecary to the King, of Pall Mall, was an Irishman, a Catholic, and an old friend of Cobbett’. He also provided medical advice to the Cobbett family.<sup>7</sup>

POOR LITTLE BOY: either John Kirvan Budd (b. 1805) or George William Budd (1806-1850), Budd’s two sons. John Kirvan Budd was born on 22 March 1805 and baptised on 18 April 1805.<sup>8</sup> George was born on 29 September 1806 and baptised on 23 October 1806 at St. James’s, Piccadilly.<sup>9</sup> Both boys survived into adulthood.

MRS BUDD: After her husband’s death, Elizabeth Budd inherited his bookselling business, and re-married in 1813. Her second husband was Joseph Calkin, a violinist, and the bookselling business was thereafter carried on as Budd and Calkin, until about 1828.<sup>10</sup>

JOHN: This appears to refer to Cobbett’s servant John Lee.<sup>11</sup> He had been in Cobbett’s service since at least 1804, when he had been in receipt of ‘a suit of clothes’ from his employer, and may have been the ‘harebrained beast of a foot-man-groom’ Cobbett described in a letter to John Wright in August 1804. If so, Lee had certainly risen in Cobbett’s estimation by 1807 when he told Wright that he had a ‘great regard for him’.<sup>12</sup>

*The letter referred to in the above article has now been donated by David Chun to the library at Nuffield College, University of Oxford where it has been added to the Cobbett manuscripts held there under reference XLI/5/1.*

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<sup>7</sup> G.D.H. Cole and Margaret Cole (eds.), William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*, vol. 3, p. 1037. For Cobbett’s request for Tegart’s advice about Mrs Cobbett’s ‘medical applications’, see Gerald Duff, *Letters of William Cobbett*, Salzburg, 1974, p.41.

<sup>8</sup> City of Westminster Archives Centre, London, England. Westminster Church of England Parish Registers; Reference: STJ/PR/1/6, as made available on Ancestry UK. The Wayne Brasch Family Tree available on Ancestry UK’s website contains much useful information about John Budd senior and his family.

<sup>9</sup> London Metropolitan Archives; London, England; Reference Number: DL/T/090/003, as made available on Ancestry UK, for his baptism.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Humphries and William Charles Smith, *Music Publishing in the British Isles*, 1970, p. 96.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Cobbett, *Account of the Family*, London, 1999, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> British Library, Add. MS. 22906, ff. 13 (Harebrained), 22 (New suit) and 242-243 (Great regard). It is very unlikely to be Cobbett’s son John Morgan Cobbett who would then have been only about seven years old.

## WILLIAM COBBETT'S *COTTAGE ECONOMY*: THE FUTURE IS MATERIAL

*Samuel Young*

By chance I recently acquired a copy of William Cobbett's classic text of self-sufficiency, *Cottage Economy*. Originally published as a series of pamphlets in 1821 and still widely available today, *Cottage Economy* was intended as a practical guide for the independent smallholder seeking to live sustainably from the land. It resembles a kind of homesteading encyclopaedia, providing information on everything a stout yeoman could need to maintain his family on less than an acre of land. From raising poultry to building ice houses, brewing ale to weaving bonnets – Cobbett covers it all.

*Cottage Economy* is not, however, just a nineteenth-century DIY manual. It is also a fiercely polemical defence of smallholding as a way of life. Cobbett – who served as a Radical MP from 1832 to 1835 – cannot resist the call of the political in his writing. Sober farming advice frequently gives way to impromptu rants about the political mismanagement of Britain or diatribes against the many perceived enemies of smallholding folk. Few seem to escape Cobbett's ire: governments, big landowners, industrialists, book-learners, tea-drinkers, fashion-lovers, the French, the Methodists, men who can't milk cows and women who can't bake bread – all these and more receive their share of abuse in *Cottage Economy*.

Cobbett was certainly a man of strong opinions. In his introduction to the 1916 edition of *Cottage Economy*, the critic G.K. Chesterton describes Cobbett as 'the noblest English example of the noble calling of the agitator'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite the sharpness of his writing, Cobbett's politics is surprisingly difficult to identify. Reading *Cottage Economy* for the first time, I was struck by the sheer *incoherence* of his views. For example, Cobbett's opposition to state interference in citizens' lives is matched by a desire for greater market regulation. His firm belief in private property is tempered by a scathing critique of the aristocracy, while his proto-Victorian remarks on the 'idle poor' sit awkwardly with his sympathy for those impoverished by land enclosure. Whatever he is discussing (and Cobbett covers just about everything), he seems to indulge in constant contradiction.

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<sup>1</sup> G.K. Chesterton, 'Introduction', in William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy* (London: Hampshire House Workshops, 1916). <http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/intro-cobbett-cottage-economy.html>

This makes it near impossible for the modern reader to apply a clear ideological framework to Cobbett. The man is resistant to such labelling, occupying instead a strange intellectual space in which one's opinions, so long as they are explained well, have no need of a common overarching structure. I found reading *Cottage Economy* frustrating for this very reason. My twenty-first-century brain strained to assign Cobbett an ideological label – Liberal? Libertarian? Old Tory? Proto-ecologist? Anarchist, even? – but every few pages he would produce another conflicting opinion, sending me back to square one.

This got me thinking. Perhaps it is not Cobbett who is at fault here, but me as a reader in 2022. When approaching new political ideas, I feel an underlying temptation to corral them into an abstract ideological framework, to place them within a greater school of thought, regardless of how resistant the text is to such ideological categorisation. My thinking is locked in abstracts. Caught up in the political theorising of the last two hundred years, it tries to spot patterns within Cobbett's work and use them to tie him to a specific ideology.

I'm not sure where this style of thinking comes from. Perhaps it is a postmodern thing, tied to that arrogant 'End of History' feeling that everything has already been said and that our job now is simply to categorise and critique. Or perhaps it just stems from spending too much time on Twitter, assigning people ideological labels based on the clumsy expression of a single point of view. Whatever the case, it's certainly not helpful.

Cobbett, by contrast, probably wouldn't have thought in such abstract terms. This is not to say that he *couldn't* – he was, after all, a rigorously self-educated and politically active figure writing in the aftermath of the Enlightenment – but rather that such political abstractions would have been alien to his chosen way of life. Cobbett makes it clear in *Cottage Economy* that he is a man of the purely material world. He has little time for theorising, be it political or spiritual, and notably criticises those who rely on books (rather than physical labour) for their education. Cobbett exists in a world guided entirely by material interaction: he tills the soil, milks the cow, knocks together an icehouse from straw and a few planks of wood. Anything that exists outside this hard, material realm is superfluous – and, to the smallholder, superfluity is suspect.

Cobbett must therefore be read in material terms. Abstract ideological structures have no relevance to his politics because Cobbett did not think

in abstracts. He was not guided by ideas of ecology, liberty, or social justice – regardless of how often he unknowingly engages with them. As such, the reader must instead search for a *material* centre to Cobbett’s political world in order to give coherence to his views.

I would argue that the smallholding, as a physical space, constitutes that centre. The small, independent farm, consisting of even just a quarter of an acre, is the hub for all of Cobbett’s political views, the central point around which ideas gather to form a political whole.

His dedication to the smallholding certainly explains Cobbett’s hatred of industrialisation, his support for protectionism, and his criticism of idle landowners, among other strongly held views. More importantly, the common material structure of the smallholding allows us to spot coherence in the more oppositional of Cobbett’s ideas. For example, his views on women appear illogical: while he views women as socially inferior, he also maintains an earthy respect for them that appears more progressive than contemporary bourgeois norms. Cobbett’s smallholding acts as a bridge between these ideas – while the farm is undoubtedly a patriarchal space, it also cannot exist without the fulfilment of reciprocal (and material) obligations between its members, based on their ‘natural’ abilities. To Cobbett, a smallholding cannot thrive without a woman there to bake bread, milk cows, mend garments and, of course, raise children (this is 1821, after all). The physical site of the smallholding thus affords her some respect, despite her inferior position in Cobbett’s mind.

We see the smallholding’s ideological power at work again in Cobbett’s views on nature. Cobbett’s approach to the natural world appears disharmonious: on the one hand he is convinced of man’s capacity to master nature, while on the other he maintains a fearful respect for nature’s might, encouraging his readers to treat the natural world with care (Cobbett particularly despises those who inflict unnecessary cruelty on animals, labelling any such individual ‘an abuser of the authority which God has given him’).<sup>2</sup> Again, the smallholding provides a material structure that brings a coherence to these opinions. Fruitful management of a smallholding clearly requires a careful and highly scientific approach to nature. At the same time, it also places the smallholder in a direct relationship with nature, meaning that – for all his apparent mastery of the

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<sup>2</sup> William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy* (Abbey Dore: Verrey & Von Kanitz Publishing, 2000), p. 126 (para. 168).

natural world – the farmer is still reliant on nature’s whims and should not abuse the land or animals around him.

As well as providing a common structure to Cobbett’s varying opinions, the material unit of the smallholding also acts as the basis for Cobbett’s wider political worldview. In the introduction to *Cottage Economy*, Cobbett criticises the rise of ‘a system of paper money’ in Britain, which has detached currency from the actual material value of goods and labour and impoverished millions via inflation.<sup>3</sup> A national economy run in the style of a smallholding, where everything is judged on its immediate material value, would never cause such widespread social misery. As Cobbett remarks: ‘[e]conomy means management, and nothing more; and it is generally applied to the affairs of a house and family, which affairs are an object of the greatest importance, whether as relating to individuals or to a nation.’<sup>4</sup> By contrast, an economy run on abstracts leads to social disaster.

The smallholder’s inclination towards thrifty engagement with the material world likewise underpins Cobbett’s approach to politics itself. Cobbett is cautious of extremism – most notably religious, though he never really differentiates between religious and political fanatics. In his view, extremism is always caused by ‘[w]ant, horrid want’, and the best way to avoid this problem is to reconnect people with the land so that they are able to maintain control over their own supply of food and goods.<sup>5</sup> The smallholding thus acts as a defence against the fanatic, allowing workers to ensure comfort in their own lives and thereby dodge the predatory calls of extremists.

In short, reading Cobbett with the material unit of the smallholding in mind allows us to transform his seemingly chaotic opinions into a single political worldview. It may not match our modern abstract notions of ideology, but it nonetheless represents a coherent way of understanding the problems of society and provides Cobbett with a political framework for tackling them.

While we might disagree with his more egregious nineteenth-century opinions, Cobbett’s use of the smallholding as a material basis for his political thought may be of use to us, particularly in matters of ecology. The way we think about politics and economics is too often trapped in

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<sup>3</sup> Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, p. 4 (para. 7).

<sup>4</sup> Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, pp. 1-2 (para. 3).

<sup>5</sup> Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, p. 10 (para. 18).

abstraction, divorced from the material consequences of our decisions. This view is gaining traction in modern ecological thought, particularly in discussions around degrowth economics<sup>6</sup> and the ‘Great Simplification’ theory, which seek to address the precarious and ecologically destructive global supply lines that prop up our profoundly unnatural on-demand society.<sup>7</sup> Cobbett shows us a possible way out of this disconnected existence. Rather than indulging in abstract fancies, blissfully unaware of their real-world impact, Cobbett demands that we reconnect with the earth, with the material resources that feed and clothe us. By rejecting the luxury of abstraction and instead regaining a sense of material reality, we might begin to fix what Cobbett calls ‘this once truly great and happy land’.<sup>8</sup>

## IT’S IN THE CARDS: *CHANGEABLE PORTRAITS*, GAMES AND POLITICS IN 1819

*Elayne Gardstein*

A recent acquisition for the William Hone Collection at Adelphi University Libraries is a possibly unique set of cards from circa 1819. William Hone (1780-1842) was a radical writer, publisher, and contemporary of Cobbett. Adelphi’s large Hone Collection overlaps with that of Cobbett, especially in visual materials.<sup>1</sup> This game, entitled *Changeable Portraits*, includes a likeness of William Cobbett (see front cover of this issue of *Cobbett’s New Register*). What is the set, whose portraits are included, and who may have published it?

### **Physical Description is Part of Cataloging**

Cataloging Special Collections materials requires a physical description to aid researchers and to provide consistency in contributing information to bibliographic records in online catalogs. *Changeable Portraits* consists of a container and cards. The original treen box has its interior divided into

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<sup>6</sup> <https://theconversation.com/life-in-a-degrowth-economy-and-why-you-might-actually-enjoy-it-32224>

<sup>7</sup> For further information on degrowth economics, see Jason Hickel, *Less Is More: How Degrowth Will Save The World* (London: William Heinemann, 2020). For information on the ‘Great Simplification’, a good place to start would be Jason Bradford’s report *The Future Is Rural: Food System Adaptations to the Great Simplification* (Post Carbon Institute, 2019), or alternatively ‘The Great Simplification’ podcast, hosted by Nate Hagens: <https://www.thegreatsimplification.com/>

<sup>8</sup> Cobbett, *Cottage Economy*, p. 4 (para. 7).

<sup>1</sup> Elayne Gardstein. “Cobbett in the Hone Collection at Adelphi University.” *Cobbett’s New Register*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2018, pp. 24-32.

three parts with crimson red paper lining and measures 11 x 7.5 x 2.8 centimeters or 4.3 x 2.9 x 1.1 inches (fig. 1). “The word [treen] is used specifically ... as pertains to small wooden-ware objects.”<sup>2</sup> A sliding wood lid has a portrait of Alderman Wood (1768-1843). There are 16 portrait cards, each cut horizontally in three parts to fit in the box sections: hair, forehead and eyes; nose and ear; mouth, chin, neck and upper garment. The cards are hand-colored aquatint prints on paper.



**Fig. 1. Treen box for *Changeable Portraits*. circa 1819. William Hone Collection, University Archives and Special Collections. Adelphi University Libraries, Garden City, NY.**

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<sup>2</sup> Mango, Frank. “Design and Execution of Unusual, Attractive and Useful Boxes.” (1968). p. 2. Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed January 30, 2023 from Rochester Institute of Technology Scholar Works: <https://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses/1394>

## The Players

The cards depict sixteen Regency period polemicists and political figures (fig. 2). Each person is identified by name at the top of the card and the card parts are numbered. They are:

1. Sir William Curtis (1752-1829)
2. Duke of Wellington Arthur Wellesley (1769-1852)
3. William Hone (1780-1842)
4. Sir Vicary Gibbs (1751-1820)
5. Sir Murray Maxwell (1775-1831)
6. Robert Waithman (1764-1833)
7. Henry Hunt (1773-1835)
8. Viscount Robert Stewart Castlereagh (1769-1822)
9. Baron Brougham and Vaux Henry Brougham (1778-1868)
10. Sir Matthew Wood (1768-1843)
11. T. J. Wooler (1786?-1853)
12. Baron Edward Law Ellenborough (1750-1818)
13. William Cobbett (1763-1835)
14. Sir Francis Burdett (1770-1844)
15. Sir John Silvester (1745-1822)
16. John Cam Hobhouse (1786-1869)

**Fig. 2. (Opposite and overleaf.) *Changeable Portraits*. circa 1819. William Hone Collection, University Archives and Special Collections. Adelphi University Libraries, Garden City, NY.**





## ***Changeable Portraits in Context***

Neither the treen box nor its contents have a label to identify its origin and date. However, a bookseller's recent suggestion proposes a supplier to Rudolph Ackermann (1764-1834).<sup>3</sup> According to biographical information from the British Museum, Ackermann was born in Saxony, Germany and became a naturalized British citizen in 1809. He was a lithographer, draftsman, publisher and caricaturist and had shops at various Strand addresses in London.<sup>4</sup> In early 1819, Ackermann published two card game sets: *Changeable Portraits of Gentlemen* and *Changeable Portraits of Ladies*.<sup>5</sup> The original label on *Changeable Portraits of Ladies* states the set was published on January 1, 1819 by R. Ackermann, London: "In each Box is contained the astonishing number of TWENTY-ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-TWO different Portraits!!" All this was possible by uniting the separate pieces in different combinations. Adelphi's *Changeable Portraits* set has twelve fewer subjects, 16 rather than 28. According to the law of combination, multiplying 16 X 16 X 16 results in 4,096 possible portraits for a complete set.<sup>6</sup>

*Changeable Portraits of Ladies* included Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary and "Catharine II" [Catherine the Great]. A paper label on the ladies' set at Princeton University advertised "*Boxes of CHANGEABLE GENTLEMEN, as Companions, are also to be had, each in distinct Boxes, containing as Heads, in 84 Parts; price 7s. 6d.—sold by R. ACKERMANN, 101, Strand, London; and may be had of all the Booksellers in the United Kingdom.*"<sup>7</sup> Ackermann's other set, *Changeable Portraits of Gentlemen*, is equally intriguing with images such as Henry VIII, Voltaire, Lord Nelson and Bonaparte. In keeping with the times, Ackermann observed, "...it is hoped that the physiognomical apparatus here to the public will afford a very curious and almost inexhaustible fund for Lavaterian experiments."<sup>8</sup> This reference was to the Swiss writer Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801), who related character traits to

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<sup>3</sup> Until further research into 19<sup>th</sup>-century printsellers' ephemera reveals otherwise, attribution to publication by Rudolph Ackermann remains a possibility.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG16836>

<sup>5</sup> Examples of both are in collections at the Yale Center for British Art, the Cotsen Children's Library and the Graphic Arts Collection at Princeton University, the Osborne Collection at the Toronto Public Library and at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

<sup>6</sup> Email of January 30, 2023 from Robert Bradley, Adelphi University Professor of Mathematics. Adelphi's set is lacking only one piece: Lord Ellenborough's nose. Repositories of the larger sets note many more missing pieces. Thus, the total number of combinations would be less than in complete sets.

<sup>7</sup> *Changeable Ladies* label:

<https://graphicarts.princeton.edu/2020/01/09/21552-portraits-in-a-treen/>

<sup>8</sup> *Changeable Portraits of Ladies* label:

<https://graphicarts.princeton.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/158/2020/01/ladies11.jpg>

physical appearance in his *Physiognomische Fragmente* (1775-1778) and *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789-1798) and whose theories were popularized in France and Britain.<sup>9</sup>

Adelphi's set comprises early 19<sup>th</sup>-century rather than past historical figures and depicts controversial men during the height of radical expression, as exemplified by the two Williams - Cobbett and Hone. Cobbett lived on Long Island from 1817-1819 and did not return to England until late November of that year. Nevertheless, he was included among the cards with other leading radicals. By the end of 1819, the pamphleteer William Hone gained notoriety for his publication of *The Political House that Jack Built*. Others in this category include orators Henry Hunt and Robert Waithman. Cards for literary men are present: T. J. Wooler, publisher of the satirical *Black Dwarf* and Henry Brougham, a founder of the liberal *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett and Brougham were ardent defenders of Queen Caroline as was Matthew Wood, former mayor and then M.P. for the City of London. Wood has a card and also graces the sliding cover of the treen box. There are cards for the radical leader John Cam Hobhouse and his friend Francis Burdett, advocate of Parliamentary reform. Military heroes include the Duke of Wellington and Murray Maxwell.

Harsher depictions are present for William Curtis, crony of King George IV, and Castlereagh, a supporter of repressive measures linked to the Peterloo Massacre later that year. Judges did not fare well: John Silvester, Recorder of London and judge at the Old Bailey; Vicary "Vinegar" Gibbs, the judge presiding in Lady Webster's allegations against Wellington in 1816 and attorney general and prosecutor in Cobbett's 1810 trial for seditious libel; and Lord Chief Justice Ellenborough, judge in the aforementioned Cobbett trial and unsuccessful judge in Hone's profane libel and profane and seditious libel trials of 1817.<sup>10</sup> As Ellenborough died on December 13, 1818, it is possible the metamorphic set slightly predates the larger ones brought out by Ackermann. In addition to the Wellington libel case, Nicholas Knowles suggested other relevant events for the set's

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<sup>9</sup> See Britannica for basic information on Lavater:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Johann-Kaspar-Lavater>. Britannica's entry on physiognomy (divination) defines it as "the study of the systematic correspondence of psychological characteristics to facial features or body structure." <https://www.britannica.com/search?query=physiognomy>

<sup>10</sup> David Chun reminded me about Cobbett's trial of 1810 and the roles of Gibbs and Ellenborough. See George Spater. *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend*. Volume I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 239. Spater mentions a description of Gibbs, the attorney general who conducted the prosecution, as "'a little irritable, sharp-featured, bilious-looking man.'"

named political contemporaries: attempts to repeal taxes and the 1819 Westminster Election.<sup>11</sup>

## Games People Played

In what context do metamorphic card sets belong?<sup>12</sup> *The Historian's Toybox: Children's Toys from the Past You Can Make Yourself* illustrates the popularity of 19<sup>th</sup>-century paper amusements such as rolled panoramas of historic events and changeable portraits. The latter, popular for children and adults, were packed in boxed sets; "The addition of new cards gradually expanded the possible number of combinations that could be put together."<sup>13</sup> Jill Shefrin described the high quality of craftsmanship present in late 18<sup>th</sup>- and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century games. Engraving, hand-coloring, careful assembly, and presentation in wooden boxes were hallmarks of these expensive sets.<sup>14</sup>

## Rudolph Ackermann's Attribution as Publisher

Robert Patten, in his meticulous study of the caricaturist George Cruikshank, noted that Rudolph Ackermann was a prolific publisher of satirical prints only until 1816.<sup>15</sup> However, Ackermann was well acquainted with leading caricaturists of the day, such as Rowlandson and the Cruikshanks. As Patten explained, publishers "...commissioned, or borrowed, frontispieces for pamphlets, books, broadsides, song sheets, and other ephemeral publications...."<sup>16</sup> Caricatures by George and Robert Cruikshank and Charles Williams could well have inspired an artist commissioned for the card game. Stylistically, Adelphi's cards have greater immediacy, with three-quarter rather than profile views prevalent in other Regency Era sets and include upper body clothing such as collars, lapels, uniforms and judicial robes.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Email from Nicholas Knowles, March 29, 2023. Nick Knowles, a Rowlandson scholar, offered analysis for the dating, context and artistic style of the card set.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Nick Knowles verified use of the term "metamorphic" by the 1800s. Example: *The Protean Figure and Metamorphic Costumes*, a paper doll set dated 1811 at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene F. Provenzo and Asterie Baker Provenzo. *The Historian's Toybox: Children's Toys from the Past You Can Make Yourself*: Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1979, p. 219. Accessed online: <https://www.arvindguptatoys.com/arvindgupta/historians-toybook.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Jill Shefrin. "'Make it a Pleasure and Not a Task': Educational Games for Children in Georgian England." *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*. Vol. 60, No. 2 (Winter, 1999), p. 252. Accessed via Jstor, August 24, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Robert L. Patten. *George Cruikshank's Life, Times, and Art: Volume 1: 1792-1835*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992, p. [187].

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Email from Nicholas Knowles, March 29, 2023, notes a similarity between George Cruikshank's portrait of Wooler and the Wooler game card. David Chun provided scans of adverts by the publisher Darnton (1854) listing "Cruikshank's Changeable Heads of Gentlemen, variable at pleasure, upwards of 80,000 changes in a neat box" and from the bookseller Bottrill (1878) "Box of Changeable Heads by G.

Ackermann's shop in the Strand sold all manner of artworks, supplies, books, boxes and furniture. Katherine Harris has described the business as a highly successful mixture of art and commerce. He arrived in London in the 1780s and by 1796 assumed the lease at 101 Strand, formerly occupied by the political lecturer John Thelwall. After running a drawing school for ten years, he established the site as Ackermann's Repository of Arts, with tea room, lending library and space for evening talks. In addition to in-house printing and bookbinding services for publications, he was well-known for producing hand-colored aquatint prints and, by 1818, had a lithography press.<sup>18</sup> Three Ackermann catalogues do not list playing cards among other ephemera such as "transparencies" and "medallions".<sup>19</sup> The larger portrait sets and Adelphi's set are finely printed and colored aquatints. They were, to paraphrase Ian Haywood's words, fun parlour games.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, political commentary symbolized by *Changeable Portraits* cards for Cobbett and other Radicals, may be seen as a forerunner to today's social media.

## **COTTAGE ECONOMY EDITIONS IN THE WILLIAM COBBETT COLLECTION AT ADELPHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

*Elayne Gardstein*

Adelphi University in Garden City, New York has sixteen volumes of *Cottage Economy* on its Cobbett Collection shelves, dating from 1822 to 1979. Celebration of the bicentennial of its publication warrants commentary about this title's history. Originally, the contents were

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Cruikshank." However, Knowles noted that sellers could have attached famous artists' names to anonymous works to attract collectors, in this case the Wooler portrait attributed to Cruikshank. However, the card set is not listed in Albert Cohn's 1924 catalogue raisonné of George Cruikshank. David Chun and I found other similarities between contemporary portraits and satirical prints depicting the card characters, most notably Henry Hunt and William Cobbett. Extensive research could reveal more appropriation by the *Changeable Portraits* artist.

<sup>18</sup> Katherine D. Harris. "Rudolph Ackermann." *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature* (2012). Open access via San Jose State University SJSU ScholarWorks, January 18, 2023. For more details, see Tom Devonshire Jones. "Ackermann's Repository' 1809-28." *The British Art Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2010), pp. 69-74. Accessed January 18, 2023 via Jstor.

<sup>19</sup> Email of March 29, 2023 from Nicholas Knowles. Ackermann's 1802 catalogue lists these two types of novelty prints. Ackermann catalogues dated 1802, 1815 and 1830 do not list metamorphic card sets.

<sup>20</sup> Email of June 7, 2022 from Ian Haywood, author of *Romanticism and Caricature*. In an email of March 10, 2023, he sent a scan of an 1820 advert from the satirical print publisher John Johnston (active 1809-1823): "Amusement for Winter Evenings, Neatly done up in a Box, producing at least Thirty Thousand Portraits, Price only 4s. MOVEABLE CHARACTERS, with hats and wigs, So that the most laughable and grotesque Figures may be brought to view...."

serialized in numbers, from August 1, 1821 to March 1, 1822.<sup>1</sup> Cobbett announced the series in the July 7, 1821 issue of his *Political Register*, with a plan for advice to the family on brewing beer economically. However, the passage of the Six Acts in 1819 placed restrictions on Cobbett's publishing activities. "...SIX ACTS are a bar in my way; for they will not allow me to publish any thing in numbers at less than *sixpence*, unless I do it once a month and *no oftener*."<sup>2</sup> His plan for *Cottage Economy* notes, "The first number of this little work, price 3d. was published last week." "There will be about *Six Numbers* in the whole; and, I think they will be extensively useful; for, though my object is to contribute, as much as I can, towards the happiness and independence of the *Labouring Classes*, my work necessarily points out numerous things of great consequence to the families of *tradesmen*, and of persons especially who have *small pieces of land*, and more particularly near to great towns."<sup>3</sup> Never shy of publicity, he concluded, "This little work promises to have a very wide circulation, which is very gratifying to me."<sup>4</sup> By 1822, there were seven numbers, an eighth part in 1823 and more sections to follow. During his lifetime, Cobbett made additions to the practical information he imparted in the form of new editions in book form.

### **From Serials to Books**

At Adelphi, the first edition of *Cottage Economy* in original boards, stitching and spine label was printed and published by C. Clement, No. 183, Fleet Street. Its original price was 2s. 6d. There are 207 numbered paragraphs and an index for ease of reference to various subjects. This is a stereotype edition, its process described as "making a mould of a page or forme of type and casting its identical image as a thinner metal plate ... with the "advantage of locking up the type of a book often printed...."<sup>5</sup> In addition to advice on keeping cows, pigs, bees, geese, ducks, turkeys and fowls, brewing beer and making bread, Cobbett wrote an introduction and explained the advantage of time in the concept of economy. He stressed, "Economy means management, and nothing more; and it is generally

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed information about most editions at Adelphi, see M. L. Pearl. *William Cobbett: A Bibliographical Account of his Life and Times*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953, number 115, pp. 119-121 and Pierce W. Gaines. *William Cobbett and the United States, 1792-1835: A Bibliography with Notes and Extracts*. Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1971, number 83, pp. 141-143.

<sup>2</sup> *Political Register*, Vol. 39—No. 14, July 7, 1821, p. 1002. All references to the *Political Register* were accessed online via Hathitrust.

<sup>3</sup> *Political Register*, Vol. 40—No. 1, July 21, 1821, pp. 204-205.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 206.

<sup>5</sup> John Carter & Nicholas Barker. *ABC for Book Collectors*. Eighth edition. New Castle, Delaware and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2010, p. 210.

applied to the affairs of a house and family....”<sup>6</sup> *Cottage Economy* immediately received a lengthy, twenty-one-page review in the February 1823 issue of *The Edinburgh Review*. While unsigned, the reviewer was identified as Henry Brougham (1778-1863), the radical Whig writer and parliamentarian.<sup>7</sup> Brougham deemed it “an excellent little book” replete with “most valuable information” to benefit “by far the most numerous and important part of society—the labouring classes.”<sup>8</sup> In addition to a lengthy summary of its practical contents and praise for its entertaining style, Brougham was quick to provide a cautionary opinion of Cobbett’s viewpoints on restriction of education and distribution of religious tracts and to ask Cobbett to refrain from these debatable issues in his book. Brougham also encouraged the wealthier classes to advocate use of such helpful publications.

### **New Editions During Cobbett’s Lifetime**

By 1823, a new edition was printed for J. M. Cobbett, Cobbett’s son James. There are important additions. First, the volume begins with a list of Mr. Cobbett’s Publications, published by J. M. Cobbett at 183, Fleet Street. The sixth title on the list is a description of *Cottage Economy*, boasting sales of 30,000 copies. An eighth section appears in the book: “Selecting, cutting and bleaching of the Plants of English Grass and Grain, for the purpose of making Hats and Bonnets.” This is accompanied by a special frontispiece plate, described in Cobbett’s text as “3 Sorts of Grass” (illustration 1): figure 1 (Sweet-scented Vernal Grass); figure 2 (Crested Dog’s Tail); figure 3 (Bonnet Grass or Ray Grass). Arnold Muirhead, a Cobbett bibliographer, noted, “The plate was incorporated in a new edition, 1823, but omitted from later editions, which therefore makes this edition much sought after.”<sup>9</sup> In fact, Adelphi’s copy of the 1824 American edition brought out by Stephen Gould and Son in New York City in boards has the illustration pasted into the book facing its title page. The Goulds were law booksellers located “at the Old Stand, Sign of Lord Coke, Corner of Wall and Broad Streets, Opposite the Custom-House.” Joseph P. Gould of Genesee-Street in upstate Utica, New York was also listed as publisher.

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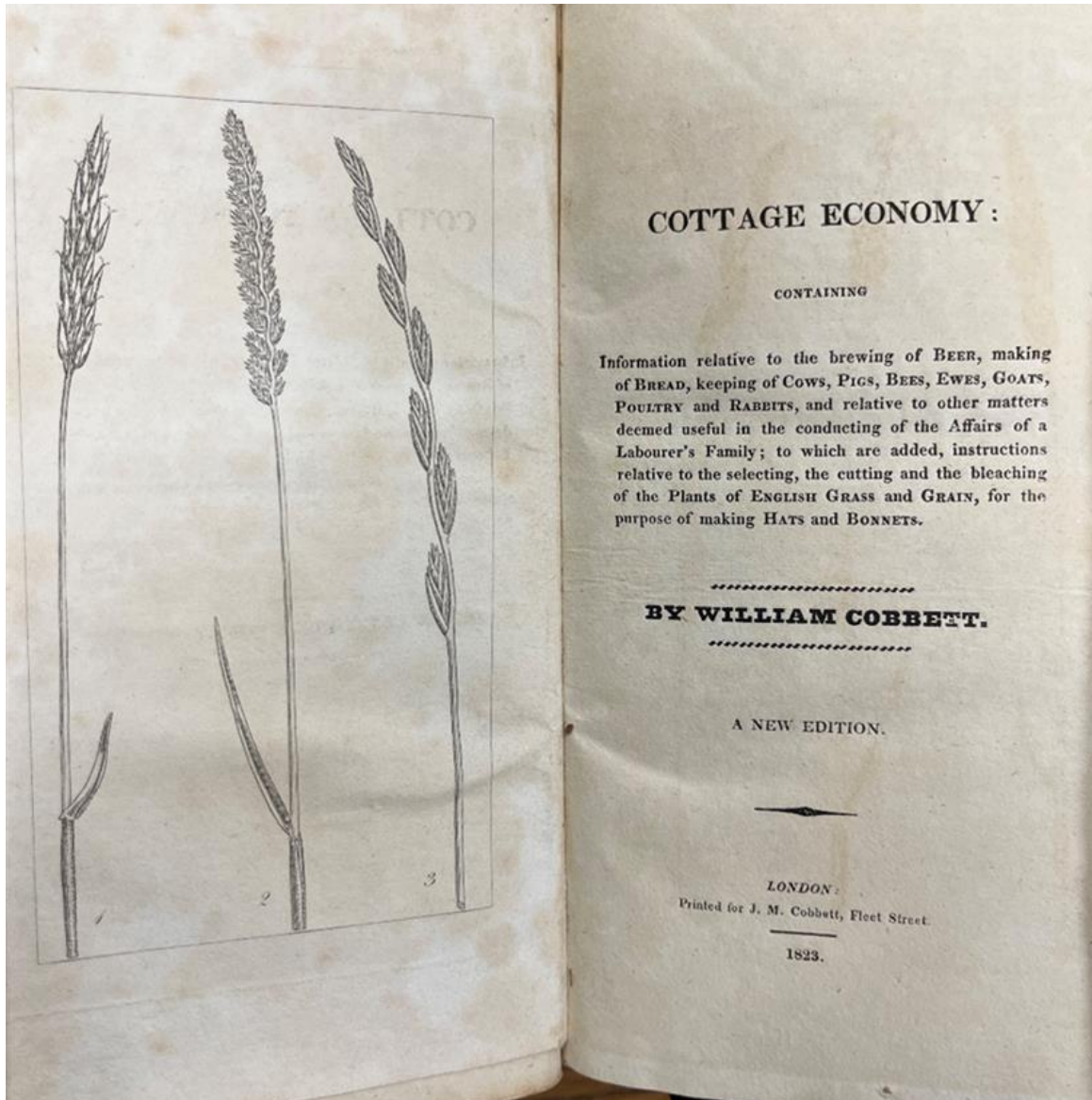
<sup>6</sup> William Cobbett. *Cottage Economy*. London: C. Clement, 1822, paragraph 3.

<sup>7</sup> [Henry Brougham]. “Cottage Economy.” *The Edinburgh Review*. Volume 38, No. 75, February 1823, Article V., pp. 105-125. See Ian Dyck. *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 249, note 1. Ian Dyck refers to ‘Letters of Timothy Tickler’, p. 223 for authorship of Brougham. [listed in Dyck’s bibliography as “Tickler, T., ‘Letters of Timothy Tickler, Esq.’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 14, no. 78 (September 1823).]

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Arnold Meadowcroft Muirhead. *An Introduction to a Bibliography of William Cobbett*. London: Bibliographical Society; Oxford: Reprinted by the University Press, 1939, p. 27.

A four-page supplement followed Cobbett's text and listed English and American law books, law blanks and stationery for sale. Gould was a major source for the professional needs of New York lawyers, and that included a myriad of printed blank documents.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Gould published, printed and sold other titles. Waldo Lincoln, in *American Cookery Books, 1742-1860*, lists Gould's "First American from the first London edition" of *Cottage Economy*.<sup>11</sup>



**ill. 1 3 Sorts of Grass (frontispiece) and Title Page to 1823 edition of Cottage Economy. William Cobbett Collection, University Archives and Special Collections. Adelphi University Libraries, Garden City, NY.**

<sup>10</sup> M. H. Hoeflich. "Law Blanks & Form Books: A Chapter in the Early History of Document Production." *Green Bag*. Vol. 11, No. 2 (Winter 2008), p. 195. Accessed online December 26, 2022. [http://www.greenbag.org/v11n2/v11n2\\_hoeflich.pdf](http://www.greenbag.org/v11n2/v11n2_hoeflich.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Waldo Lincoln. *American Cookery Books, 1742-1860*. Revised and enlarged by Eleanor Lowenstein. Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society and New York: Corner Bookshop, 1953, p. 29. Accessed online December 26, 2022 from <https://forgottenbooks.com> : [https://forgottenbooks.com : AmericanCookeryBooks17421860\\_11247286.pdf](https://forgottenbooks.com/AmericanCookeryBooks17421860_11247286.pdf)

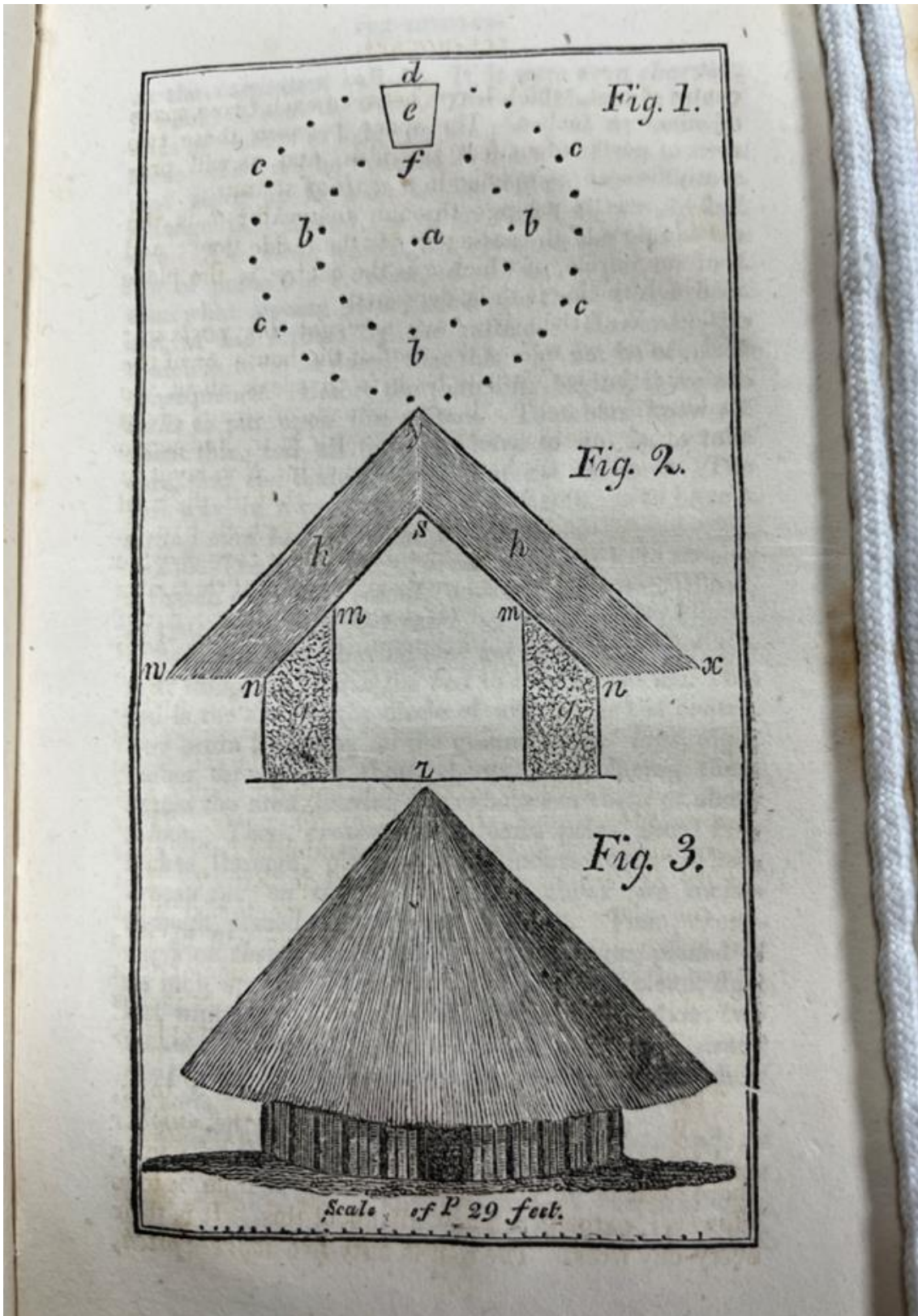
The 1824 London edition, with leather spine and corners and marbled boards, was printed for the author and published by Charles Clement at 183, Fleet Street. It bears two bookplates, that of William Delves and an orange bookplate of Nathaniel Hornby of East-India College, Hertfordshire. From 1806-1858, the latter institution trained young men for administrative positions with the East India Company. While one wonders why *Cottage Economy* appealed to a student or teacher attached to civil service, the inclusion of beer brewing by Cobbett could well have been the attraction.

In 1826, Cobbett published another “new edition” in boards and cloth spine. This volume has a surprising presentation inscription, “A Valentine for Miss Jones of Denbigh from R. Humphrey Jones 14<sup>th</sup> Feby, 1827.” R. Humphrey Jones was an alderman in nearby Ruthin.<sup>12</sup> Cobbett added “instructions for erecting and using Ice-houses, after the Virginia manner” to the text and a topical index with coordinating paragraph numbers. By 1831, in a copy published by Cobbett at 11, Bolt-Court, Fleet Street, there was a Section IX “Constructing and Using Ice-houses” comprising paragraphs 236-253. On the page facing paragraphs 239-242 is an illustration consisting of three figures (illustration 2). In the first figure, and beginning in paragraph 241, Cobbett describes the circular plan for construction. He details the second figure’s rafters beginning in paragraph 245 and doors beginning in paragraph 249. This volume, in boards and green spine, was presented by John French in August 1918. Possibly this was Sir John French (1852-1925), the well-known Commander-in-Chief of Home Forces during World War I and brother to six sisters.

In 1831, John Doyle of 12 Liberty-Street in New York City published an edition of *Cottage Economy* bound with *The Poor Man’s Friend* in gray-green marbled boards with a brown leather spine. Conner & Cooke produced this stereotyped edition. Two additions to the text were “Mangel Wurzel” (paragraphs 254-256) and “Cobbett’s Corn” (paragraphs 258-265). The first was the beetlike root vegetable used as keep for cows, preferable to Swedish turnips, and the second was Indian corn. Following his Long Island sojourn (1817-1819), Cobbett determined to cultivate American corn upon his return to England. Interest in *Cottage*

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<sup>12</sup> R. Humphrey Jones, at a town hall meeting on February 21, 1826, made a motion to honor Warden Richard Newcome. *Ruthin Local History Broadsheet*. Issue No. 20, December 1989.  
<https://www.ruthinhistoryhanesrhuthun.org/broadsheet-no-20>



ill. 2. Ice-House illustration from 1831 edition of Cottage Economy. William Cobbett Collection, University Archives and Special Collections. Adelphi University Libraries, Garden City, NY.

*Economy* included its paragraphs on farm animals. In October 1832, during its first year of publication, *The Dublin Penny Journal* printed excerpts about fowls, ducks, milk, and cows.<sup>13</sup> By 1835, the year of William Cobbett's death, a volume of *Cottage Economy* was nonetheless brought out under his name at Fleet-Street, with the 11 Bolt Court address crossed out. At this juncture, the book reveals evidence of another Cobbett, ready to continue the family publishing effort—his daughter Anne (1795-1877).

### **Anne Cobbett Takes to the Press**

The 1835 edition of *Cottage Economy* contains a 12-page list following the index: "All the books undermentioned, are published by A. Cobbett, at No. 10, Red Lion-Court, Fleet-street, London: and are to be had at W. Willis, Manchester, and all other Booksellers."<sup>14</sup> The final page of the supplement advertises a new and improved edition of Anne's book, *The English Housekeeper; or Manual of Domestic Management*, at a cost of 6s. in boards. There is also a full-page advertisement with reviews of Anne's popular book tipped inside the front cover of *Cottage Economy*. Adelphi owns a copy of the 1851 sixth edition of *The English Housekeeper*, bound in green cloth with an elaborate pictorial gilt cover design and frontispiece, printed by George Peirce at 310 Strand. At the end of Anne's final chapter, "Cookery for the Poor", she notes, "In 'Cobbett's *Cottage Economy*' there will be found a variety of receipts for cooking Indian corn meal."<sup>15</sup> Thus Anne continued her father's legacy for self-help guides.

The lists of Anne Cobbett's publications of William's books are models of advertising organization. For example, the fifteenth edition of *Cottage Economy* published in 1838, has a supplement printed by G. Peirce, 310, Strand beginning with "Selections from Cobbett's Political Works". In six volumes, the latter comprised an abridgement of the writings of Peter Porcupine and the *Weekly Political Register* and included an index as well as notes, historical and explanatory, by her brothers John M. Cobbett and James P. Cobbett, Esqrs, Barristers-at-Law. Anne continued with a list of titles in "The Cobbett Library" in six headings: "Books for Teaching Knowledge, Books on Domestic Management and Duties, Books on Rural

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<sup>13</sup> "Cobbett's Cottage Economy." *The Dublin Penny Journal*. Vol. 1, No. 15 (Oct. 6, 1832), p. 120; "Method of Keeping a Cow upon a Quarter of an Acre." *The Dublin Penny Journal*. Vol. 1, No. 18 (Oct. 27, 1832), pp. 143-144. Open Access via jstor.org, January 5, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> "List of Books." *Cottage Economy*. London: Published by William Cobbett, 1835, p. A.

<sup>15</sup> Anne Cobbett. *The English Housekeeper. or, Manual of Domestic Management*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. London: the Author, 1851, Chapter XXXIII, p. 388.

Affairs, Management of National Affairs, History, and Travels.”<sup>16</sup> By 1843, Anne published a sixteenth edition of *Cottage Economy* in boards with a green leather spine. Adelphi’s copy was inscribed “Carr’s Hill, 15<sup>th</sup> April 1866 Presented to Mr. Thos Hodgson By a Friend”. In the nineteenth century, the Carr’s Hill property, once owned by Thomas Jefferson’s grandson, became part of the University of Virginia.<sup>17</sup> Anne Cobbett’s supplement had two new categories added to “The Cobbett Library”: “Law and Miscellaneous Politics.”

### **Another American Edition**

In 1854, Silas Andrus and Son of Hartford, Connecticut brought out a dual edition of *Cottage Economy* bound with *The Poor Man’s Friend*. In brown cloth with embossed cover and gilt spine, this edition referenced the earlier American publication in a statement facing the table of contents: “Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1833 by John Doyle.”

Although Silas Andrus was active as a publisher as early as 1820, his firm was bankrupt by 1839 and then active again from 1844 until about 1855.<sup>18</sup> An image of St. George and the Dragon is opposite the Contents list. The 68-page addition of *Cobbett’s Poor Man’s Friend* includes three numbers from 1826, dated 22d August, 22d September and 13<sup>th</sup> October.

### **Twentieth-Century Editions**

A rare excerpt was printed and published by St. Dominic’s Press of Ditchling, Sussex in 1919: *Brewing Beer to Make 9 Gallons of Ale: (According to the Directions Given in Cobbett’s “Cottage Economy”)*. At only eight pages, the pamphlet’s text covered twelve points of instructions. A list of recommended materials includes malt, hops, soft brook, spring or rainwater and yeast; necessary tools and utensils are copper and earthenware, crocks and pans, a mashing tub, plug stick, birch bundle, weight, stirring stick, cleft stick and strainer. On page seven, there is a wood-engraving of St. George and the Dragon by the artist Eric Gill (1882-1940). Gill, who was once associated with the British Arts and Crafts Movement, was a printmaker, typeface designer, stone cutter and sculptor. He went on to establish medieval-type craft communities, with one at Ditchling Common in Sussex named the Guild of St. Joseph and St.

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<sup>16</sup> “Selections from Cobbett’s Political Works” and “The Cobbett Library” in William Cobbett. *Cottage Economy*. London: Published by Anne Cobbett, 137, Strand.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://carrshill.virginia.edu/1906-jefferson-and-1800s>

<sup>18</sup> For “Firms Out of Business” The Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas references the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 49, 1986, p. 22. See [https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/Watch/fob\\_search\\_results\\_next.cfm?FOBFirmName=A&locSTARTROW=35](https://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/Watch/fob_search_results_next.cfm?FOBFirmName=A&locSTARTROW=35)

Dominic. St. Dominic's Press was founded by Hilary Pepler (1878-1951) at Ditchling to advance social reform and traditional crafts, thus providing need for Gill's printmaking and typographic skills.<sup>19</sup> At the foot of *Brewing Beer's* page seven, there is an advertisement for an edition of *Cottage Economy* with an introduction by G. K. Chesterton priced at 2s. 6d.

Peter Davies, Limited of 30 Henrietta Street in London brought out an edition of *Cottage Economy* in 1926. It was far more modest than the three-volume set of *Rural Rides* that he published four years later.<sup>20</sup> Printed at The Westminster Press at 411a Harrow Road, London, it was bound in boards with a green leather spine. In a note about the Ice-House illustration, "The block on page 185 has been engraved on wood by Eric Gill after the original. The scale of feet given at the bottom has been corrected."<sup>21</sup> Of interest are the final chapter and the preface. Prior to the index, there are 18 pages of "Instructions for Using the Meal & Flour of Indian Corn, published by the late Mrs. Cobbett in 1846". The chapter presented a wide variety of corn recipes.<sup>22</sup> The Cobbett biographer G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) wrote the preface and praised Cobbett's realistic vision of the thrifty cottager as "master of his cottage".<sup>23</sup>

At Adelphi, two later volumes were reprints of Davies' 1926 edition with the Chesterton preface. The first, bound in sienna cloth with black label, was published in 1970 by Augustus M. Kelley of New York. Kelley (1913-1999) brought out facsimiles of older editions in a series entitled Reprints of Economic Classics. This particular example has its title-page imprint covered by a square label with his initials, A M K; it covers Peter Davies' 1926 imprint. To add a bit of confusion, another label was pasted inside the book: "Reprinted 1966 by Cedric Chivers Ltd., Portway, Bath, to whom the Copyright has been transferred, at the request of The London

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<sup>19</sup> See Wikipedia entry on Eric Gill and "Collection: St. Dominic's Press (Ditchling, Sussex)" Blackfriars Gallery and Library, Berkeley, California. <https://www.artworkarchive.com/profile/christopher-renz/collection/st-dominic-s-press-ditchling-sussex?page=2> . Accessed online December 28, 2022. Harry Douglas Clark Pepler was known as Hilary Pepler.

<sup>20</sup> See Elayne Gardstein, "Rural Rides on the Shelf at Adelphi University Libraries in Garden City, New York." *Cobbett's New Register*, Vol. 12, No.6, 2022, pp. 28-31 for information about Peter Davies and the deluxe edition of *Rural Rides*.

<sup>21</sup> William Cobbett. *Cottage Economy*. London: Peter Davies, Limited, 1926, p. xi.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 201-217: Indian Corn Bread, Johnny Cake, Pone Cake, Mush, Polenta with Cheese, Minestra, Zuppa, Suppawn, Samp, Hommony, Plum Pudding, Suet Pudding, Dumplings, Buttermilk Pudding, A Nice Pudding, Yorkshire Pudding, Griddle Cakes, Buckwheat Cakes, French Pie, A Nice Cake, and Indian Corn Biscuits.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. vii-x.

& Home Counties Branch of The Library Association...ECM – Anton Hain K.G. Printed in Germany”.<sup>24</sup>

Its popularity not waning, a paperback edition of *Cottage Economy* was published by Oxford University Press in 1979. In addition to Cobbett’s text from the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of 1850, there is more information about the Chesterton preface. It was added to a reprint edition brought out by Pepler in 1916 and again by Davies in 1926, from which this 1979 volume was reproduced.<sup>25</sup> The bucolic cover illustration depicts *Landscape with Cottages and Tinker* of 1828, an oil painting by Cobbett’s contemporary George Vincent (1796-ca.1831) from the Nottingham City Museum and Galleries.

The range of *Cottage Economy* editions, from 1822-1979, underlines its enduring appeal and encourages the search for more examples to add to the William Cobbett Collection at Adelphi University Libraries.

## **COBBETT SOCIETY DAY OUT 2022 AT GILBERT WHITE’S HOUSE AND GARDENS**

*Katharine Stearn*

At 10.30 on Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2022, a group of Cobbett Society members arrived for a day out at the beautiful house of the Reverend Gilbert White, nestling in the picturesque village of Selborne. Owing, once again, to the long shadow cast by the COVID pandemic, we had chosen a different format from the usual Rural Ride: rather than travelling all together in a coach, members made their own way to a single venue. The day was masterminded by Rob Sykes with help from his wife, Anne, to both of whom we are extremely grateful.

Members arrived to be greeted with coffee, served in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century barn, and a talk from the curator of the Gilbert White Museum.

Selborne was a place well-known to Cobbett – he mentions it in his *Rural Rides* in November 1822 and August 1823. The reading from 1822, given below, mentions a certain “parson of the name of *White*, brother of Mr.

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<sup>24</sup> William Cobbett. *Cottage Economy*. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970, verso of title page.

<sup>25</sup> William Cobbett. *Cottage Economy*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979. See <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/landscape-with-cottages-and-tinker-47141>

*White*, so long a Bookseller in Fleet-street.” This was in fact Benjamin White, the foremost publisher of books on natural history in England at the time: Cobbett was quite right. It was striking to stand and look at the hangars that Cobbett described in such detail in 1822 – and imagine him following his struggling horse down them on foot – clutching at branches as he went!

Gilbert White was born in 1720, so was Cobbett’s senior by 40 years; he died in 1793 while Cobbett was living in America. However, Cobbett and White had more in common than might at first appear. Both were born in the depths of the countryside – White, the grandson of the Vicar of Selborne, grew up in a tiny, two-up two-down cottage surrounded by trees and fields, and the love of nature his early life engendered never left him.

Although White went on to study natural sciences at Oxford, he was a largely self-taught naturalist up to that point. He was ordained as a clergyman in 1749, but while he held many positions as curate, it is clear that his heart lay in discovering and recording the natural world around him.

Gilbert White came to live in his father’s house in Selborne 1758. He was barred from holding the permanent living in the village, as it was in the gift of Magdalen College - and he'd studied at Oriel. So, rather than go elsewhere, he remained simply a curate at Selborne. This appears to have suited him perfectly, as he could spend his days helping out when needed by the Vicar of Selborne, meanwhile following his own pursuits. This involved making his observations of nature and planning the gardens, both kitchen and pleasure, of his house.

White spent much of his time among the local villagers and labourers and clearly held them in high regard. In his will it is recorded that he wished his coffin to be carried by six labourers of Selborne, and that they were to be paid ‘for the trouble’. White seems to have shared Cobbett’s disdain for public statuary: he refused to be buried in the Church at Selborne (his grandfather has a prominent floor plaque in front of the altar), describing it as ‘inappropriate’, and insisting instead on a simple gravestone next to the church in the graveyard.

Enlightened by the talk, the group was next taken on a tour of the gardens by the Head Gardener.



The group reassembled after lunch in the beautiful barn overlooking gardens and fields, where a number of Cobbett readings were read:

**First reading, Rob Sykes** - November 24, 1822. (Sunday.) From Hambledon to Thursley.

Thus ended the most interesting day, as far as I know, that I ever passed in all my life. Hawkley-hangers, promontories, and stone-roads will always come into my mind when I see, or hear of, picturesque views. I forgot to mention, that, in going from Hawkley to Greatham, the man, who went to show me the way, told me at a certain fork, "That road goes to *Selborne*." This put me in mind of a book, which was once recommended to me, but which I never saw, entitled "The History and Antiquities of Selborne," (or something of that sort) written, I think, by a parson of the name of *White*, brother of Mr. White, so long a Bookseller in Fleet-street. This parson had, I think, the living of the parish of Selborne. The book was mentioned to me as a work of great curiosity and interest. But, at that time, the THING was biting so *very sharply* that one had no attention to bestow on antiquarian researches. Wheat at 39s. a quarter, and Southdown ewes at 12s. 6d. have so weakened the THING'S jaws and so filed down its teeth, that I shall now certainly read this book if I can get it. By-the-bye if *all the parsons* had, for the last thirty years, employed their leisure time in writing the histories of their several parishes, instead of living, as many of them have, engaged in pursuits

that I need not here name, neither their situation nor that of their flocks would, perhaps, have been the worse for it at this day.

*Rural Ride Through Hampshire, Berkshire, Surrey, and Sussex, Between 7th October and 1st December, 1822, 327 Miles.*

**Second reading, Richard Thomas** – Selborne (Hants), Thursday, 7th August, Noon, 1823.

At Tisted I crossed the turnpike road before mentioned, and entered a lane which, at the end of about four miles, brought me to this village of Selborne. My readers will recollect that I mentioned this SELBORNE when I was giving an account of Hawkley Hanger, last fall. I was desirous of seeing this village, about which I have read in the book of Mr. White, and which a reader has been so good as to send me. From Tisted I came generally up hill till I got within half a mile of this village, when, all of a sudden, I came to the edge of a hill, looked down over all the larger vale of which the little vale of this village makes a part, [...]

The village of Selborne is precisely what it is described by Mr. White. A straggling irregular street, bearing all the marks of great antiquity, and showing, from its lanes and its vicinage generally, that it was once a very considerable place. I went to look at the spot where Mr. White supposes the convent formerly stood. It is very beautiful. Nothing can surpass in beauty these dells and hillocks and hangers, which last are so steep that it is impossible to ascend them, except by means of a serpentine path. I found here deep hollow ways, with beds and sides of solid white stone; but not quite so white and so solid, I think, as the stone which I found in the roads at Hawkley. The churchyard of Selborne is most beautifully situated. The land is good, all about it. The trees are luxuriant and prone to be lofty and large. I measured the yew-tree in the churchyard, and found the trunk to be, according to my measurement, twenty-three feet, eight inches, in circumference. The trunk is very short, as is generally the case with yew-trees; but the head spreads to a very great extent, and the whole tree, though probably several centuries old, appears to be in perfect health. Here are several hop-plantations in and about this village; but for this once the prayers of the over-production men will be granted, and the devil of any hops there will be. The bines are scarcely got up the poles; the bines and the leaves are black, nearly, as soot; full as black as a sooty bag or dingy coal-sack, and covered with lice. It is a

pity that these hop-planters could not have a parcel of Spaniards and Portuguese to louse their hops for them. [...]

As I was coming into this village, I observed to a farmer who was standing at his gateway, that people ought to be happy here, for that God had done everything for them. His answer was, that he did not believe there was a more unhappy place in England: for that there were always quarrels of some sort or other going on. This made me call to mind the King's proclamation, relative to a reward for discovering the person who had recently shot at the parson of this village. This parson's name is COBBOLD, and it really appears that there was a shot fired through his window. He has had law-suits with the people; and I imagine that it was these to which the farmer alluded. [...]

Here Rob explained that Cobbett went on to talk about the hop tax. As the tax was gathered in each year, people bet on the quantity – it was a sort of futures market. Cobbett, describing it as a form of gambling, is deeply unimpressed and continues:

This vile paper-money and funding-system; this system of Dutch descent, begotten by Bishop Burnet, and born in hell; this system has turned everything into a gamble. There are hundreds of men who live by being the agents to carry on gambling. They reside here in the Wen; many of the gamblers live in the country; they write up to their gambling agent, whom they call their stockbroker; he gambles according to their order; and they receive the profit or stand to the loss. Is it possible to conceive a viler calling than that of an agent for the carrying on of gambling? And yet the vagabonds call themselves gentlemen; or, at least, look upon themselves as the superiors of those who sweep the kennels. [...]

In such a state of things how are you to expect young men to enter on a course of patient industry? How are you to expect that they will seek to acquire fortune and fame by study or by application of any kind?

*Rural Ride through the South-East of Hampshire, back through the South-West of Surrey, along the Weald of Surrey, and then over the Surrey Hills down to the Wen. 1823.*

**Third reading, Katharine Stearn** - November 24, 1822. (Sunday.) From Hambledon to Thursley.

*In November 1822, Cobbett was told that the route he was planning to take to Hawkley, near Selborne, was “impossible to get along.” Needless to say, he took it anyway, and here he describes the journey in vivid detail:*

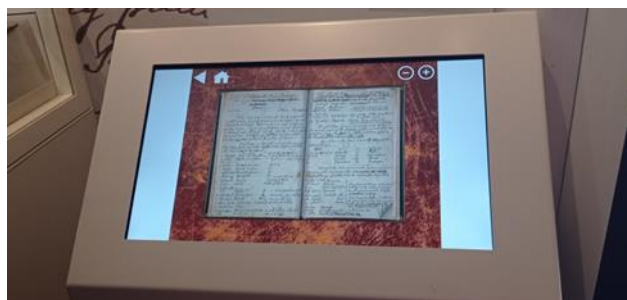
On we trotted up this pretty green lane; and indeed, we had been coming gently and generally *up hill* for a good while. The lane was between highish banks and pretty high stuff growing on the banks, so that we could see no distance from us, and could receive not the smallest hint of what was so near at hand. The lane had a little turn towards the end; so that, out we came, all in a moment, at the *very edge of the hanger!* And never, in all my life, was I so surprised and so delighted! I pulled up my horse, and sat and looked; and it was like looking from the top of a castle down into the sea, except that the valley was land and not water. I looked at my servant, to see what effect this unexpected sight had upon him. His surprise was as great as mine, though he had been bred amongst the North Hampshire hills. Those who had so strenuously dwelt on the dirt and dangers of this route, had said not a word about beauties, the matchless beauties of the scenery. These hangers are *woods* on the sides of *very steep hills*. The trees and underwood hang, in some sort, to the ground, instead of *standing on* it. Hence these places are called Hangers. From the summit of that which I had now to descend, I looked down upon the villages of *Hawkley, Greatham, Selborne* and some others.

From the south-east, round, southward, to the north-west, the main valley has cross-valleys running out of it, the hills on the sides of which are *very steep*, and, in many parts, covered with wood. The hills that form these cross-valleys *run out* into the main valley, like piers into the sea. Two of these promontories, of great height, are on the west side of the main valley, and were the first objects that struck my sight when I came to the edge of the hanger, which was on the south. The ends of these promontories are nearly perpendicular, and their tops so high in the air, that you cannot look at the village below without something like a feeling of apprehension. The leaves are all off, the hop-poles are in stack, the fields have little verdure; but, while the spot is beautiful beyond description even now, I must leave to imagination to suppose what it is, when the trees and hangers and hedges are in leaf, the corn waving, the meadows bright, and the hops upon the poles!

From the south-west, round, eastward, to the north, lie the *heaths*, of which Woolmer Forest makes a part, and these go gradually rising up to Hindhead, the crown of which is to the north-west, leaving the rest of the circle (the part from north to north-west) to be occupied by a continuation of the valley towards Headley, Binstead, Frensham and the Holt Forest. So that even the *contrast* in the view from the top of the hanger is as great as can possibly be imagined. Men, however, are not to have such beautiful views as this without some *trouble*. We had had the view; but we had *to go down the hanger*. We had, indeed, some *roads* to get along, as we could, afterwards; but we had to get down the hanger *first*. The horses took the lead, and crept partly down upon their feet and partly upon their *hocks*. It was extremely slippery too; for the soil is a sort of *marle*, or, as they call it here, *maume*, or *mame*, which is, when wet, very much like *grey soap*. In such a case it was likely that I should keep in the *rear*, which I did, and I descended by taking hold of the branches of the underwood, and so *letting myself down*. When we got to the bottom, I bade my man, when he should go back to Uphusband, tell the people there, that *Ashmansworth Lane* is not the worst piece of road in the world. Our worst, however, was not come yet, nor had we by any means seen the most novel sights [...]

*Rural Ride through Hampshire, Berkshire, Surrey, and Sussex, between 7th October and 1st December, 1822, 327 Miles.*

The rest of the afternoon was spent visiting the Gilbert White Museum. A number of ideas seemed of interest for the Museum of Farnham, in particular a digitised version of White's manuscript for visitors to browse:



How nice it would be to examine the Cobbett manuscripts held at the Farnham Museum in this way!

Heartened by a perfect English summer's day in the rolling Hampshire hills, and stimulated by thoughts of Cobbett and the great naturalist Gilbert White, the Cobbett members made their way home. Our thanks once again to Rob and Anne Sykes for organising such an inspiring day.

## **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE WILLIAM COBBETT SOCIETY 2023.**

*The meeting was held via Zoom on May 13<sup>th</sup> 2023.*

The meeting began at 11.00 with the Chairman welcoming about 20 members on zoom. Most were relatively local; those that were not included Elayne Gardstein in America, Brendan Whyte in Australia and Daniel Rafferty in South Uist.

The agenda had been circulated by email. The Chairman checked that everyone had seen the report of the last AGM (published in the 2022 *Cobbett's New Register*). This was accepted as a true record and there were no matters arising which were not to be covered in the current meeting.

Apologies had been received from Dr John Stevenson and Rev Andrew Tuck.

### **Chairman's Report May 2023.**

Welcome to the 2023 AGM. After starting the last two Chairman's reports explaining why we have had a couple of fallow years it is a relief to be able to report that this year has been more productive. Covid is now officially in abeyance but the effects of it are still around. We have, nevertheless, some achievements to report. They include an enjoyable Rural Ride, an excellent Annual Lecture, another first-rate New Register and some interesting media exposure.

Let me report these in sequence. The Rural Ride was not (thanks to COVID) a coach trip but a gathering at Gilbert White's house at Selborne on the 13<sup>th</sup> July. A group of 15 of us came in a variety of cars to Selborne and assembled at their Education Centre (a 16th-century barn) at the top end of the grounds. There we had an interesting talk with readings, followed by lunch. After lunch came a guided walk around the gardens, looking at the various vegetables (some of historic interest) and fruit bushes as well as the flowers. The walk ended at the house itself where we were able to enjoy an interactive display of Gilbert White's writings as well as admire the house and immediate gardens. White died in 1793 so never met Cobbett, but Cobbett did read White's book. He stayed in Selborne on the 7<sup>th</sup> August 1823 where he had time to admire the Yew tree in 'the most beautifully situated churchyard' and say rather patronisingly that 'the village of Selborne is precisely what it is described by Mr White'. Whyever not?

The next Rural Ride will be on Friday June 9<sup>th</sup>. It will revive the earlier plan to visit Romsey and Mottisfont. The date chosen should enable us to see Mottisfont's famous roses at their best.

The latest Annual Register was produced in July 2022 by Katharine Stearn. It has the usual collection of fascinating articles and shorter pieces. John Stevenson and James Grande have produced summaries of their introductory talks to the Annual Lecture in October 2021 on *The Making of Rural Rides*. One of our most regular contributors in recent years has been Elayne Gardstein, and in the 2022 edition she has provided us with two pieces on *Rural Rides* - one focussing on the Cobbett holdings at Adelphi University NY. David Chun, another regular contributor, has contributed a forensic piece on Cobbett's Hampshire estate at Botley. Katharine will be producing the next *New Register* over the next few months and is, as ever, looking for new material. She has also, I am delighted to say, agreed to continue as editor of this increasingly important journal.

We were not able to hold the 2022 Annual Lecture in the autumn but were forced, (mainly because the Maltings could not accommodate us on a suitable evening) to move it to January 2023. This turned out rather well as a slightly smaller audience meant that we had more audience participation and a feeling that we were attending, with friends, a most enjoyable seminar. As last year, the joint speakers were John Stevenson and James Grande, this time talking about Cobbett's *Cottage Economy* which was published in 1822 - a hundred years ago. Because it went so well, we have decided to keep to the January date. The talk next year will be on Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 2024. The speaker will be Dr Tim Clayton who has written a very well-reviewed book on James Gillray. Many of the things Gillray attacked in his cartoons were also things which enraged Cobbett. It will be an evening to look forward to.

The Cobbett Society has, for some reason, attracted the attention of the media. In the Chairman's report last year, I mentioned a contact with the BBC World Service. This came to fruition in August 2022, when Katharine and I, with two other contributors, participated in a *Forum* programme on the BBC World Service, chaired and led by Bridget Kendall, a well-known BBC journalist. The final programme is, in my opinion, excellent. Recording it was not easy as the contributors were in 3 separate studios, but it all seemed to work technically. To find it type: BBCWS Forum Cobbett (or follow the link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3ct38t0>) into your phone/laptop and up it will come. It is overall quite balanced, but

in the section on Cobbett's racism the points Katharine and I made to explain (rather than excuse) Cobbett did not make it past the final edit.

The BBC daytime programme *Antiques Road Trip* paid a visit to Farnham in 2022. Part of their model is to find a local historical person or building on which to peg a bit of tourism. As a result, your chairman was interviewed in the William Cobbett Pub in Church Lane (near St Andrews Church), and in the museum Gardens. There are between 5-10 minutes on Cobbett - so it does not interfere too greatly with the antiques. It was broadcast at 3.45 on BBC on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2023. Two minor points: presumably because of COVID we were not allowed to shake hands; and the crew were not, as a general rule, allowed to take pictures of churches, so my suggestion that they showed Cobbett's grave, even in long shot, was not taken up.

Finally, on the media front, a retired BBC journalist, Max Cotton, has, partly inspired by Cobbett's *Cottage Economy*, decided to spend a year eating only what he has produced on his small-holding in Somerset. He is filming his adventures with a young colleague and publishing a 15-minute video of his progress every month. He visited Farnham last summer before he started, and we had a lengthy chat at (of course) the Cobbett Pub. I visited him in Somerset just before Easter this year and found him hungry but still going. Some of his travails (rats eating his barley, for example) make good TV, but what impressed me most is that his family lead a normal life. For example, he had nettle tea while giving me a mug of real tea, and one of his sons was cooking a family stew for lunch while he was having (again) his own leek and potato soup.

You can find Max Cotton on: YouTube: Max Cotton, No Milk Today, [[@NoMilkTodayProject](#)]. There are two preview episodes in which he explains what he is doing and why. His visit to Farnham is in the second of the previews.

Other topics of relevance to the Chairman's Report such as the ongoing saga of the Citizens/Museum Project will be discussed later in the meeting. On the other regular topic of the committee there is, after a number of years, something positive to report.

That ends the report from the Chair.

Thank You,

Richard Thomas

## **Hon. Treasurer's Report. Stewart Edge**

The key point of the report was that, since we had had a quiet year, the accounts were not significantly different from the previous year. We had a closing cash balance of £5,290, up £66 from last year. We used our funds to subsidise the Rural Ride, and will be doing so again this year. There were also the regular printing costs and some expenditure on the website.

**Membership:** Subscriptions were down a little because although we added seven members to the society, eleven had either lapsed or not paid up. The current membership is 99.

### **Election of the Committee.**

The current chairman had declared that, after a decade, it was a time for a change of leadership. Both Stewart Edge and Katharine Stearn had agreed to become joint chairpersons while the current chair has offered to continue as a committee member. The joint chairmanship was proposed by David Chun and seconded by Jenny Thorpe. It was unanimously voted for by the members. The nomination of the other members of the committee, now to be Dr Robert Sykes and Dr Richard Thomas, was supported *nem. con.* David Chun stated that while he would continue helping with the *Register* he did not, currently, wish to join the committee.

### **Discussion of core activities.**

- i) **Cobbett's New Register:** Katharine reported that this year's edition encompasses a celebration the *Cottage Economy* with thought-provoking reflections from several authors, as well as some very exciting pieces of original research.
- ii) **New Registers Online:** During the discussion, the issue of the website, and the need to put the *Registers* online, was raised. It was agreed that this was a priority for the Society. It was also agreed that some of the Society's financial surplus should be spent on this. Having the *Registers* online would make some of the unique material in early *Registers* available to scholars and demonstrate that the Society is active. There was also reference to making other Cobbett material accessible online through the website. A recent visit to the Farnham Museum has established that a *Cobbett Society Newsletter* was first published in 1976 and that it morphed into the *New Political Register* in 1985.

- iii) **ISSN Number:** David Chun reported that the issue of an ISSN number for the *New Register* had now been resolved and that the number would appear on the next *Register*.
- iv) **Rural Ride:** Robert Sykes confirmed that the Rural Ride to Romsey and the rose gardens of Mottisfont was scheduled for June 9<sup>th</sup>. He said that since spaces were still available and since it was being subsidised, he hoped people would encourage friends to join the trip.
- v) **Annual Memorial Lecture 2024:** The lecture will be given by Tim Clayton and will be on James Gillray. David Chun showed us his copy of the book and reported that it was excellent. We will ask Dr Clayton to bring copies for sale at his talk on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2024. Since it costs £45 on Amazon, we hope that by then it will be out in paperback.

### Other issues:

- a) **Museum/Citizens Project.** Stewart Edge reported that after years of disappointment and the Museum's continuing failure to recognise Cobbett (including the failure to make available to visitors the Citizens Project video) there was now some reason to hope, since all levels of management had changed in the last year, and doubts about the Museum's building had been resolved. At a meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> May Richard Thomas and Stewart Edge met the new management. We were received politely, but there did not seem to be much appetite for any significant initiatives. Despite this disappointing news it was agreed that the Society would keep up the pressure and revisit the museum in about six months' time to see what progress had been made.
- b) **Website:** (see above) Stewart reported that good intentions expressed at the last AGM (and good ideas from Elayne, Brendan and Charles) had not yet been converted into action. Given the earlier discussions in this meeting it was agreed to make sure something did happen in this coming year, involving professional support (and reasonable expense) as necessary.
- c) **Publications.** The Chairman reported that the Booklet *Cobbett: A Celebration* was on display at Waterstones in Farnham and continued to sell 15-20 copies a year. It was now featured alongside a new paperback entitled *Famous Farnham Figures* which has a chapter on Cobbett. In addition, we have now sold all of our copies of *The Opinions of William Cobbett* (Grande, Stevenson, Thomas). It is still

available from the publishers who now ‘print on demand’, at a cost of about £37.50 before the author’s discount. **Update:** we have just acquired a new consignment of *The Opinions of William Cobbett* which we can offer at the exclusive price of £15 per copy [Ed.].

### **Any Other Business:**

Brendan Whyte reported that The National Library of Australia has recently digitised *The Detector*, an anti-Cobbett tract from 1817 that lasted for four issues. His report is given in full below.

The formal AGM closed at a few minutes to noon.

After a short break Richard Thomas gave an illustrated talk on ‘Cobbett and Hunting - and the Beginnings of the Animal Welfare Movement’. An edited version of the talk will feature in next year’s *New Register*.

After an extensive Q & A the meeting closed at 12.55pm.

### **Additional Note from Brendan Whyte:**

The National Library of Australia has recently digitised *The Detector*.

Our copy consists of all 4 issues bound in a single volume. No. 1 is missing the title leaf (pages 1 and 2), and in its place is bound a single-leaf pamphlet (verso paginated "2") titled *Cobbett prostrated! And his seditious views fully brought to light*. As this rejoices in Cobbett's emigration to the United States, it must post-date issue 4, which was issued prior to Cobbett's departure becoming known (via Cobbett's 28 March letter from Liverpool published in the *Political Register* of 5 April).

Our copy of no. 4 is also missing the final leaf (pages 17-18) with colophon, but in its place is bound a poem: *Lockhart the brave; and the base pamphleteer* (Bloomsbury: E. Thomas, 1817), another anti-Cobbett item by the editor of *The Detector*.

The catalogue record for *The Detector*, with a link to the page images is here: <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/2142808>

And for Lockhart the Brave is here:

<https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/5019459>

The images can be downloaded free as jpg, pdf or txt files. The text on each page has also been OCR'd, although imperfectly, so you are welcome to correct the OCR text.

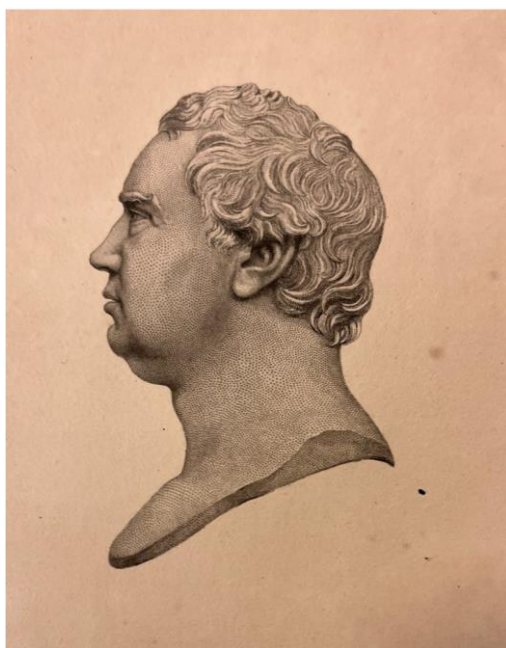
## BOOKS FOR SALE

1. ***William Cobbett in America 1794-1835: This Happy Land*** by Molly Townsend. This book documents Cobbett's thoughts about America and his attitude towards the Americans. £15.00, £10.00 to members + £3.00 p&p
2. ***The Life of William Cobbett by Himself: Intended as an encouraging example to all young men of humble fortune; being a proof of what can be effected by steady application and honest efforts.*** Written by Cobbett when he was living in America, this is a faithful reproduction of Cobbett's 1809 edition by member Trevor Purnell. £4.50 + £1.50 p&p
3. ***The Jolly Farmer? William Cobbett in Hampshire 1804-1820*** by Barbara Biddell. *Hampshire Paper No 15*, published in 1999 by the Hampshire Record Office. A detailed study of Cobbett's life in Hampshire and of his own farming practices, tree planting and relationship with his labourers and with the poor in the parishes. £3.00 + £1.50 p&p
4. ***Account of the Family*** by Anne Cobbett. Anne, Cobbett's eldest daughter, provides a fascinating account of the financial hardship and difficulties which the family endured. £3.00 + £1.50 p&p
5. ***William Cobbett 1763 - 1835: A Celebration: Writer, Radical, Reformer, The Greatest Journalist of his Age.*** Stewart Edge, Katharine Stearn, Charles Stuart and Richard Thomas. £2.50 + £1.50 p&p
6. ***The Opinions of William Cobbett.*** James Grande, John Stevenson and Richard Thomas. Ashgate, 2013. Commentary on the main themes of his life with extended extracts from his writing. £15 + £2.50 p&p
7. ***William Cobbett, Romanticism and the Enlightenment.*** Edited by James Grande and John Stevenson. [Routledge.com/9781848935426](http://Routledge.com/9781848935426).  
20% discount to members – use the code WCS15 at checkout.
8. ***The Cobbett Club*** by Penny Young. Benjamin Tilly served Cobbett as secretary and factotum, and was instrumental in founding the Cobbett Club in 1838. This newly discovered record of the Club's objectives and rules, as well as its published letters and articles, meticulously preserved by Tilly, is examined in this short pamphlet. £2.00 + £1.25 p&p

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**Back Cover: Portrait of William Cobbett by Peter Rouw.** Frontispiece to the 1853 edition of *Rural Rides*. William Cobbett Collection, University Archives and Special Collections, Adelphi University Libraries, Garden City, NY.



For further information on the William Cobbett Society:  
[www.williamcobbett.co.uk](http://www.williamcobbett.co.uk)

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