The Mathews as Patrons

By G. E. Bentley, Jr.

G. E. Bentley, Jr. (gbentley@chass.utoronto.ca) has been publishing about William Blake and his circle since 1954.

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

2 At Mrs. Mathew's most agreeable conversaziones … I [J. T. Smith] have often heard him [Blake] read and sing several of his poems. He was listened to by the company with profound silence, and allowed by most of the visitors to possess original and extraordinary merit.

3 One of the singers at these "conversaziones" was almost certainly Harriet, the talented seventeen-year-old daughter of A. S. and Harriet Mathew. Her early decease was commemorated in the Gentleman's Magazine: "Miss Mathew daughr. of Revd. Mr. Mathew, was it seems privately married abt. a year before Her death to Baron Silverghem, who was Secretary to Baron Noleken, & to Mr. Asp." This is Göran Ulrik Silfverhjelm of the Swedish embassy in London.

With thanks to Angus Whitehead for many favors.


2. See BR(2) 605.

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


5. Gentleman's Magazine 84 (1798, Supplement): 1152 (under "Deaths").

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

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


2. *LETTERS OF THE LATE IGNATIUS SANCHO, AN AFRICAN.* IN TWO VOLUMES. TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED, MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE. LONDON: PRINTED BY J. NICHOLS; AND SOLD BY J. DODSLEY, IN PALL-MALL; J. ROBSON, IN NEW BOND STREET; J. WALTER, CHARING-CROSS; R. BALDWIN, PATERNOSTER ROW; AND J. SEWELL, CORNHILL. MDCCCLXXII [1782].

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

3. *Elizabeth Blower]*, *MARIA: A NOVEL.* IN TWO VOLUMES. BY THE AUTHOR OF *GEORGE BATEMAN.* VOL. I-II. LONDON: PRINTED FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND. MDCCCLXXV [1785]. It includes an engraving by Blake after Stothard. The subscribers include Mr. [Richard] Cosway (miniaturist), Mrs. [Maria] Cosway (artist), Mr. John Flaxman (sculptor), William Hayley, Esq. (author and patron), Mr. [John] Hawkins (patron of Blake), Mr. Oziros Humphrey (painter), Mr. Jeremiah Meyer (miniaturist), “Mrs. Mathew | Miss Mathew | Mr. F. Mathew [unidentified],” Sir Joshua Reynolds (painter), “Mr. [George] Romney [artist],” 6 copies; R. B. Sheridan, Esq. (dramatist and politician), 6 copies; Mr. [Thomas] Stothard (book illus-