



CHERRYBURN TIMES

The Journal of The Bewick Society

THE JOHN LAWS SCRAPBOOK CONSERVED

by the Editors and Tim Gradon.



Figure 1. The book and two parts of the slip-cover before work began.

This issue of the *Cherryburn Times* focuses on the John Laws Scrapbook. Contributions detail Laws' life, work and ornithological interests; examine the Scrapbook and debate its possible history and link images in the Scrapbook to objects in the collection at the Laing Art Gallery.

You can browse through all the pages of the Scrapbook by visiting the Bewick Society page on Flickr: follow the link from <http://www.bewicksociety.org/>.

John Laws seems to have used his scrapbook from the time of his apprenticeship at least until 1843, the year before his death at the age of 79 or 80. It must have been robustly made to survive so long but it is not surprising that it became very worn and began to disintegrate. There is no sign that it was ever repaired in the past. However, over the paper-covered boards a later owner, probably one of the Angus family in the late 19th century, had a decorative leather slip-cover fitted, the date suggested by the style of the leather and the

wide, loose 'yapp' edges which folded over the edges of the book (a style first used in about 1860 and common in bibles after that date). It was labelled 'HERALDRY: T. BEWICK etc.'

By the time it reached the Laing Art Gallery in 1960 the slip-cover had also deteriorated: it had lost most its spine and all of one of the yapp edges. The spine of the book itself was detached from the front board, and the board and several of the pages were detached from the rest of the book. About 70% of the pages remained sewn together over the broken vellum 'tapes' that had once attached them to the boards; the rest were loose. The pages were made of a good quality grey-blue 'sugar bag paper', coarse but strong; each single page with a fold at its inner edge which formed a 'guard' allowing it to be sewn to its neighbours. The guards also added to the thickness of the spine of the book but not of the rest of its page width, thus leaving space for 'scraps' to be pasted in with-

out swelling the book too much. Some of these guards were torn off and lost, and there were several tears elsewhere on a few pages. Fortunately the pages were numbered in an old hand. The paper-covered boards were very worn, but intact, and they retained the pasted-down strips of leather that had formed the attached portions of the spine. A paper label on the loose leather spine was inscribed 'Heraldry Crests &c', probably in the hand of John Laws.

With the agreement of the Angus family it was decided that the money donated to the Bewick Society after the death of Alan Angus should be devoted to the digital recording of the contents and the conservation of the book, retaining every part of it that could be reused and using archival grade materials and where possible old stock compatible with the book. The work was entrusted to Derek Bradford, formerly Conservation Bookbinder to the University of Newcastle, and his assistant Tim Gradon who carried it out with constant discussion with Derek.

Figure 1. (Overleaf) The book and two parts of the slip-cover before work began



Figure 2. The partly detached spine. This was carefully removed and kept until the end of the work when it was cleaned and glued down onto the new leather spine.



Figure 3. Loose pages showing the form of the guards, some of which were missing, and the remains of the vellum tapes or bands on which the pages had been sewn. These tapes and the old sewing thread were the only parts of the original structure that had to be discarded.



Figure 4. Making a new guard. We were extraordinarily lucky that Tim Gradon had a small stock of the identical type of sugar-bag paper of which the books pages were made. This had come to his workshop forming the publisher's loose covers of unbound issues of early 19th century copies of *Newcastle Magazine* which the owner had sent for binding. There was no printing on the backs of these covers, so new guards were simply cut from them and pasted to the damaged pages. These repairs were virtually invisible in the finished book.



Figure 5. The numbered pages were carefully collated, with very sparing and minimal repairs to any minor damage. They were then sewn in order with linen thread onto archival grade tapes as shown, creating the ‘book block’.



Figure 6. The book block with the tapes trimmed.

Two short white sheets, one shown on the surface, were sewn forming part of the block on each side. These took the place of the endpapers which would usually be attached here, and were made of a sheet of old white sugar bag paper chosen to match the old endpapers. At a later stage the inner edges of the paste-down endpapers were carefully lifted from the boards and size-adjusted parts of the short new papers, together with the ends of the tapes, were inserted under the paste-downs and pasted to the boards, forming a final strong connection between the book block and the ‘case’.

Before that the spine of the sewn book block was glued for stability and soon afterwards gently rounded to take the shape required in the final book. The spine was then lined with archival mull and craft paper. This finished book block formed the first part of the book.

The second part, the case, was made from the old boards and a new leather spine. The new leather was carefully chosen to match the strips of the old (retained on the inner edges

of the boards). The leather was cut to size, and the edges pared to form a tapered edge to fit under the old strips without showing a ridge. The strips were carefully lifted from the edge; the new leather was dampened and pasted and then fitted neatly under the strips and pasted to the boards, first on one side and then, with careful adjustment to the correct width of the book, on the other. The upper and lower ends of the spine leather were folded under and the moist leather moulded to a neat shape (known as ‘setting the cap’). Once the completed case was dry it was fitted to the book block and the short end-paper hinges and tapes were fixed as described above. Finally, the preserved old free endpapers (flyleaves) were tipped into place, leaving the new hinges scarcely detectable.



Figure 7. The completed book. The old spine leather was cleaned, trimmed and glued to the new leather spine, retaining the original appearance, including the retained old paper label.

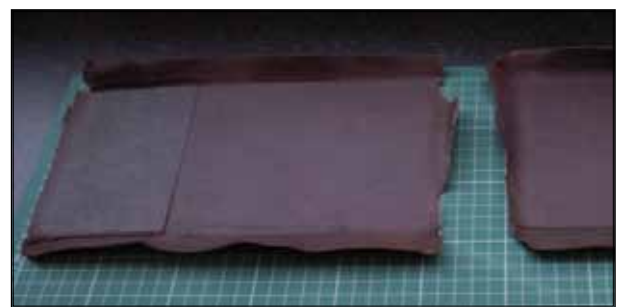


Figure 8. The final task was to repair the slip-cover. This involved finding matching patterned leather. None of the right purple tint was available but it was possible to use a mixture of leather dyes to stain some similar burgundy-coloured leather to the right tint. This was then used to repair both the lost spine and the missing yapp edge. All the leather was treated with leather dressing.

All photographs by the authors 2013, courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus.

Derek Bradford and **Tim Gradon** can be contacted via the **Newcastle Bookbinders** website.

<<http://newcastlebookbinders.wordpress.com>>

JOHN LAWS (1765-1844)

by David Gardner-Medwin



Breckney Hill farmhouse.
Photograph 2013 by the author.

John Laws came from a long line of farmers at Heddon Laws and Breckney Hill farms, eight miles west of Newcastle upon Tyne. At the age of 17 he was apprenticed to the firm of Beilby and Bewick, Engravers and Copperplate Printers, in Newcastle, and throughout his adult life he combined farming with a second career as an engraver of silverware. He was also a keen amateur naturalist.

It was probably during his apprenticeship that he began to keep a pattern book, containing proofs of engravings, the subject of the other articles in this issue. The 'Laws scrap-book' remained in the possession of his descendants and was deposited on loan at the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, by Mr Alan Angus (1920-2002) whose grandmother, Margaret Angus, had been the only known surviving grandchild of John Laws. It was she who kindled Alan's interest in Laws, initially as a collector of birds and their eggs and nests. This led on to enthusiasm for Thomas Bewick and after his retirement Alan Angus became the Bewick Society's first honorary treasurer. He published a number of articles in *Cherryburn Times*, principal among which was a series on the Beilby and Bewick apprentices, including his great great grandfather John Laws. The present article supplements Alan's account of Laws (Angus, 1990).

Family background

John Laws was born at Heddon Laws, a hilltop farm in East Heddon township, 2 km north of Heddon-on-the-Wall. The township's whole population in early 19th century censuses varied from 23 to 61. The vicar wrote to the landowner, Sir Matthew White Ridley, in 1827, that the Laws family had farmed there for nearly 200 years. Heddon-on-the-Wall's parish records (dating from 1664) confirm that the family had been at Heddon Laws at least from 1670. Throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries the tenancy of at least two, and usually three, of the four farms in the Riddleys' East Heddon Estate (Heddon Laws, Breckney Hill and East Heddon Farm) were held by John's close relatives (Ridley estate papers NRO ZRI/3-57). John's son, his uncles, Jonathan, Anthony and Peter Laws, and some of his cousins, continued to farm at Heddon until the 1850s.

A great table tomb in St Andrew's churchyard in Heddon records three generations, from several of John's uncles, and his father, Ralph, to John himself, his wife Isabella and their four sons. This and the parish records enable us to trace the direct family line back to John's great grandparents, Jonathan Laws of Heddon Law (buried 21 December 1724) and Mary *née* Urwin (buried 24 August 1752).

One mother or three?

The parish register records clearly that John Laws was baptized at Heddon-on-the-Wall on 9 April 1765, the son of Ralph and Elizabeth Laws. But according to his descendant Alan Angus he was born at Heddon Laws, the son of Ralph and *Margaret* Laws (Angus, 1979). The Ridley estate records confirm that his father Ralph and an uncle, Jonathan Laws, were joint tenants of Heddon Laws at that time (NRO ZRI/49/1), and the Newburn parish register records the marriage of Ralph to Margaret Dixon there on 28 May 1760.

But the conflicting information about his mother remains unresolved. Ralph and Elizabeth had three other children baptised at Heddon-on-the Wall (PR):

24 May 1763, Elizabeth
27 August 1767, Ralph
14 December 1769, Mary.

Bracketing the period of these births, Ralph Laws, almost certainly the same for there is no record of another, with his wife or wives named Margaret, had three children baptized in the same parish:

14 April 1761, 'Jonathan'
21 April 1772, Isabell
10 October 1776, William.

I have not found the death of the first Margaret, the marriage of Ralph and Elizabeth, the maiden surname of Elizabeth, her death, or Ralph's marriage to a second Margaret (his widow Margaret died in 1819, aged 78). This is not the place to go into the evidence in detail, but the most plausible explanation, other than repeated uncorrected errors in the parish register or an improbable temporary change of forename, seems to be that Ralph had three successive wives. If so, his son John lost his mother when he was not yet 5 and was brought up by a stepmother, with three full siblings and three step-siblings.

When he was nine the family moved 200 metres south from Heddon Laws to Breckney Hill farm which remained John's home for the rest of his life. His father's first lease was for 9 years from 12 May 1774 at £75 per annum (NRO ZRI/49/1).

The Vestry Minute Book at Heddon records John's grandfather, father and two uncles as church wardens at various times between 1699 and 1798 (NRO EP 37/24). As a child John Laws would have been well used to walking back and forth the 2 km to church each Sunday.

Schooling

John Laws, and his siblings Jonathan, Elizabeth and Ralph were pupils at a school taught by a William Robson. The schoolmaster kept a list of his pupils in a notebook – a photocopy of it is in the Northumberland Records Office (CES 88/4/3). The name of Walter C. Trevelyan of Wallington is inscribed on the flyleaf, with his note 'given to me by Mr Wilson of Morpeth June 1840'. Robson's 'List of Scholars since May 13th 1772' was arranged alphabetically without their ages or dates of attendance. But the Laws children are among the earliest pupils on the list, in the period from 1772 to 1784, at an unspecified place, presumably in or near Heddon. In 1784 Robson moved to Cambo where he taught at another school

until 1807. The list of 759 children has rather few comments, but a few are marked with an asterisk explained as 'The names distinguished by a star were the most docible by far' – John Laws alone of his family was one of these – and most remarkably he is the only child in the whole list who is also marked with a pointing finger. Under the heading 'Remarks', Robson explained this, in a quatrain:

'Mongst all the subjects of my taws
There's but one Index plac'd
And my first Pupil, Master Laws,
Is with that honor grac'd.

This accolade must reflect genuinely exceptional ability, but in what ways John excelled is not mentioned. Interestingly, Robson's handwriting is a very fine copperplate: it seems very likely that it was from him that John learned his own fine calligraphy, well before he arrived in the Beilby and Bewick workshop.

What John did after leaving school and before beginning his atypically late apprenticeship with Beilby and Bewick in 1782, at the age of 17, is not recorded. Might he have assisted Robson as a teacher? Or might he have learned his wood-carving skills, to be mentioned below, at this time?

An early egg collection

In addition to their professional interests, John Laws shared with Bewick a major passion for natural history.

A collection of birds' eggs, made by Laws during his apprenticeship, survives in the museum of the Natural History Society of Northumbria in Newcastle. In a shallow wooden box of numbered compartments are 41 eggs, each set in natural wool, together with his hand-written numbered list of the species. The box may not have been his only one as it contains eggs only of small land birds. Some of them are now extinct or very rare as breeding species in the county – the corncrake, wryneck, quail and red-backed shrike.

With the collection is a little hand-made notebook, its title written in Laws' fine copperplate hand *A Description of the Nests and Eggs of Birds - 1784 - from Experience and frequent Observation*. In this Laws wrote accurate accounts of the structure and siting of the nests and markings of the eggs, admirably justifying the title's claim. 1784 was the third year of his apprenticeship. On the lid of the box is a label:

This collection of eggs was made by a person
the name of Lowes — It afterwards belonged
to Thos Bewick, and a few years after the death
of the eminent engraver, his daughters made
me a present of the collection — John Hancock
This must have been one of the earliest collections of
eggs made in Britain —

In the 1820s, Hancock had been a young admirer of Bewick; evidently he mistook Laws' name at first, but later corrected it in the records of the Hancock Museum to which he in turn donated the collection. Laws' gift to Bewick was remarkable – a clear sign of a bond of interest in birds. Bewick's first recorded mention that he intended to engrave a set of illustrations of birds came in a letter he wrote in 1786 (Newcastle Central Library, Pease 172), and it is tempting to think that conversations with his young apprentice between 1782 and 1789 may have been a part of his inspira-

tion for what later became Bewick's *History of British Birds*.

As for the claim to be 'one of the earliest collections of eggs made in Britain', the collections in the British Museum made by Laws' older contemporaries George Montagu (1751-1815) and William Bullock (d. 1829), and earlier by Hans Sloane 'have perished, or have become so bleached as to be worthless for the purposes of study' (Oates, 1901). Oates therefore admitted to his catalogue only eggs acquired by the BM from 1842 onwards. So Laws' collection may indeed be one of the earliest to survive intact.

In his notebook Laws wrote a remarkably forward-looking resolution:

Take notice of their time of building time of finishing their nests - time of hatching - time of fledging & leaving their nests and their most usual food.

If he did keep to this splendid plan we sadly no longer have his records. But he did record accurate observations of the structure of the nests of various species, and some interesting names. Just one example:

The French Mag, Tom noop or Bee eater is a rare Bird about the size of [a] small Thrush feeds on Beetles, Bees, flies or builds [*ie* birds] generally builds in Briar Hedges, its Nest is made with coarse Roots straw & lined within with fine Roots & Hairs - it lays five Eggs which are whitish lightly tintured with green, with light Olive [*sic*] Colour & bluish spots round the middle of the Egg & at the blunt end.

This bird is identified in a note by Hancock as the red-

backed shrike - now almost extinct as a breeding bird in Britain. In the 18th century it was not particularly rare further south in England, so there is a hint though no proof that Laws' specimen may have been collected locally, adding one to the very sparse breeding records for the county as the bird's range began to contract southwards before 1800 (Rossiter, 1999). The names French Mag and Tom noop are previously unrecorded and are notable additions to the recorded local vernacular of the day.

Indeed, Laws' bird names are some of the earliest recorded for the North East (only Wallis, 1769, was earlier). Sometimes he is at a loss for a name - for example he calls the wryneck 'Woodpecker - the common grey sort' and the wheatear 'by the country people called clod Hopper'. His 'Flaxen Linnet' is a name not recorded in the standard reference works on bird names or Northumberland dialect but probably denotes the Common Linnet (*Carduelis cannabina*).

America

On 21 March 1789 John Laws' apprenticeship ended and, after a period as journeyman, he left the workshop in May 1790 (Angus, 1990). He was 25. Perhaps it was then that he gave Bewick the present of his eggs.

There are two intriguing gaps in the records of his life - from May 1790 to February 1794 and again from July 1801 to November 1802. The latter period is a hiatus in a ledger



John Laws' collection of birds' eggs;
collection of Natural History Society of Northumbria.

of his engraving work, kept from 1794-1844 and formerly in possession of Alan Angus.¹ In one or other of these gaps he seems to have travelled to America. Two newspaper reports of 1884 give conflicting accounts of this. On 14 June 1884 a report of the donation of Laws bird specimens to the new Hancock Museum appeared in the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, with a short account of John Laws and his journey:

... On leaving Mr. Bewick he travelled for some time in America, where he made considerable additions to his egg collections, finally settling down in life at the farm at Breckney Hill.

Another news story on the same occasion (known only from an unidentified news cutting in Newcastle Central Library: Local Biography File, Vol 3, p234v) told a different story:

... After leaving Mr Bewick, he commenced business as an engraver on his own account; work flowed in upon him. About the end of last century he resolved on visiting North America, to get a release from the close confinement calculated to impair the eyesight and health, and was accompanied thither by Mr W. Reed, son of a neighbouring farmer. He remained a few years in America, where he purchased and cleared some land.

...

Confirmation from a much earlier source, tantalisingly imprecise, was a brief mention in the unpublished journal of a visit to Shetland in 1832 by the wealthy Newcastle naturalist George Clayton Atkinson (1808-1877):²

Mr Laws, Bewick's friend and mine, found the eggs of the Great Northern Diver in North America, on an island in one of the lakes; and that of the Red Throated Diver, which is not uncommon in Shetland and chooses these sort of situations for its nest.

The Great Northern Diver (Loon) bred in Canada and sparingly in the northern United States, a clue to Laws' whereabouts. But the Red Throated Diver bred only in the far north, in Labrador and west of Hudson Bay, so if Atkinson's ambiguous statement was intended to say that Laws also found the eggs of this species in America, his travels would have been on a heroic scale.

When did he go? Alan Angus thought he went in 1801-02, but if he really bought land and cleared it, the earlier, longer period seems more likely. An unpublished miniature portrait formerly in the possession of Alan's cousin, Ian Angus, shows John as a young man, dressed in the very forefront of fashion for 1790 and still in the vogue for the early 1800s. It was customary for families to have a portrait painted before a young man set off on a potentially dangerous voyage, and the portrait of John may well be in this tradition. The Angus family consulted Kenneth McConkey, Professor of Fine Art at the University of Northumbria and a former chairman of the Bewick Society, who identified this portrait as probably the work of Robert Johnson. This is surely correct as Johnson was a noted painter of portraits and was a close colleague of John's during their apprenticeships. Furthermore the portrait is framed back to back with another miniature painting, of a woman sitting by a tomb in a moonlit churchyard, very probably also by Johnson (Angus *et al.*, 2002). An engraving by Charlton Nesbit 'executed from one of his [Johnson's] own designs' was printed on a memorial card for Johnson issued by the family after his death in October 1796 – and it is quite likely that the miniature painting is the one that Nesbit used

for this engraving. In the latter the design is almost the same and the grave is inscribed 'In Memory of R Johnson 1796' – it is reproduced in Robinson (1887, page 255). Johnson's death in 1796 thus adds to the probability that John Laws' voyage to America was in 1790 rather than in 1801



Miniature watercolour of John Laws, probably by Robert Johnson.

Formerly in the possession of the late Mr Ian Angus.

The Bewick Society has been unable to discover the present ownership; news of this would be welcome and will be acknowledged

Early Career

On his return from America John's ledger shows that he embarked on his very busy silver-engraving career. But for a while he seems also to have made, or at least carved, furniture. His *Newcastle Courant* obituary on 23 August 1844 (as copied by Angus, 1979) called him 'likewise an excellent carver on oak'. The unidentified 1884 newscutting mentioned above says:

... Whenever a friend or acquaintance was about to enter into wedlock he always requested them to send their silver spoons, &c, to be engraved, for which he never made a charge. Many specimens of his work are still to be found in the district. He was also an excellent carver in oak and did some marvellous work in this line.

The only other mention is by John Crawford Hodgson (1899a) who, in a collection of manuscript pedigrees, includes a sketchy tree, showing only John Laws, his wife and three of his four sons, all un-named but identifiable by brief comments; William was omitted. His source of information was 'Miss Hedley of Sunnyside', an elderly lady whose aunt Mary Hedley had married John Laws' brother-in-law, John Gilhespy, as his second wife. As a source he is perhaps not wholly reliable, but he is the only one we have for some stories about John and his sons. Of John himself Hodgson wrote:

John Laws of Breckney-hill, near Heddon-on-the-Wall, a man of genius who carved some of the oak furniture preserved at Warkworth Castle, also an engraver on silver, some specimens

of which are in the possession of Miss Hedley, was a naturalist and went to America for the purpose of procuring certain birds eggs.

There are twelve pieces of elaborately carved mock Elizabethan oak furniture in the Duke's private rooms at Warkworth Castle. They are believed by English Heritage to have been made in the 1850s, and these rooms 'were entirely renovated in 1853-1858' (Hodgson, 1899b) – well after the death of John Laws. The provisional conclusion must be that most and perhaps all of the furniture now in the castle was made after the death of John Laws, and that Hodgson's information from Miss Hedley was mistaken.

Farming activities

On 24 January 1800 John's father, Ralph Laws, died aged 63; he was buried at Heddon (PR). His widow Margaret continued the tenancy of Breckney Hill, and when the lease expired she and Ralph's eldest son Jonathan Laws renewed it from 12 May 1806, to run for 7 years at a rent of £170 p.a. to be paid half-yearly & tenants to pay all taxes (NRO ZRI/54/8). It was this tenancy that John took over, after Jonathan married in 1807 and moved to Shotton.

From about 1808 until his death in 1844 John was the tenant farmer of Breckney Hill. The present farmhouse is Georgian, built possibly as early as 1780-1800 (*vide* Hugh Dixon), probably by the landowner since East Heddon and Heddon Birks farmhouses are of a very similar design. One of the older outbuildings appears to be a re-used traditional Northumberland long-farm. At Heddon Laws the long-farm, John's birthplace, remained and has since been modified into a bungalow.

Breckney Hill farm was just over 135 acres in extent – the smallest in the estate, but was later increased to 161 acres (Heddon tithe awards NRO EP 37/50). His father's tenancy agreement in 1797 had included conditions copied from generation to generation: to have in tillage in any year no more than a quarter of the whole; of this to fallow one third each year, and while in fallow to spread 3 cartloads of clod lime.



John Laws' fleam.

In the collection of the National Trust at Cherryburn, donated by the late Mr David Angus.

No hay or straw to be carried off the premises – on pain of a fine of 60s per cartload (NRO ZRI/41/3).

The Ridley estate records provide little information about the crops grown at Breckney Hill – potatoes, turnips, and an undated fragment mentions 18 acres of wheat and 27 of oats, while the other farms also grew barley (NRO ZRI/45/8; ZRI/54/8). The three quarters of the land not in tillage were presumably hay meadows and pasture. We know that John kept pigs, geese, cattle and horses. His ledger shows that he bought about 20 cattle and seven horses in 1810, but records no later purchases. I have found no mention of sheep, though his cousins had flocks. One precious relic of his farming is his fleam, beautifully engraved with his name in his tell-tale copperplate script (formerly in the collection of Mr David Angus, now in the National Trust's Cherryburn collection).

In January 1839, the Riddleys unsuccessfully tried to auction the whole East Heddon estate describing it as '868 acres in occupation by Jonathan Laws [a cousin], John Laws, John Crow and Henry Armstrong as tenants from year to year ... in fine sporting country'. So by then the old nine-year leases had gone.

Every year at Whitsuntide John hired two men and a woman as 'servants', no doubt traditional 'hinds' (farmhands) and recorded their names and wages (ledger, T&WA DX1109). It was not until the 1841 census, the first with people's names, that we learn anything more about the Laws household and staff: three of their four sons were at home that night with two female servants and a 15-year-old farm labourer. The other farms had more resident labourers and perhaps these men worked on more than one farm. Earlier John's widowed mother-in-law, Margaret Gilhespy, had stayed with the family at Breckney Hill until her death in 1835 at the age of 81 (PR).

When John Laws started farming there was an ongoing dispute between the tenants of East Heddon estate and the vicar (miscellaneous papers and correspondence at NRO ZRI/45/8). The Revd Thomas Allason, the incumbent from 1796-1830, had been in post for ten years when on 22 November 1806 he wrote a letter to the landowner, Sir Matthew White Ridley (the first baronet), claiming that his tenants owed unpaid tithes of calves and lambs. Ridley replied that Anthony Laws (John's uncle) had told him that his family had been at the farm 'for he believes 150 years' and there was no record of the tithe now demanded ever having been paid. So Ridley supported his tenants against the claim.

Allason persisted. Eight years later he submitted a 'schedule of arrears of tythes' claimed to be due to him. For example, for the years 1807-1814 he claimed that Peter Laws owed on a total of 190 lambs at 5s each; and 5 or 6 calves each year at 15s each; and that for the years 1808-1814 John Laws owed tithes on from 3 to 6 calves per year, a total of 30 calves at 5s or 6s each; total arrears £9-1-0.

In October 1816 Allason arranged to meet Ridley in Newcastle, and Ridley came away from the meeting thinking he had persuaded the vicar to drop the demands for arrears. But no, after two more years, on 18 June 1818, John Laws received the following letter from Allason's solicitor:

Sir,

I am desired by the Vicar of Heddon to inform you that it is his intention to file a Bill of Chancery against you for the recovery of the value of the Tythes within the said Parish due from you

unless you immediately liquidate the same – I trust however you will prevent these unpleasant measures being resorted to by a speedy settlement thereof.

I am Sir your obedient
Chris Fenwick.

At this the landowner showed his mettle:

July 1818. Draft letter from Sir Matthew White Ridley [the second baronet] at Grafton Street, London, to Allason:

Sir,

I have received the enclosed letter forwarded to me thro' my steward, Mr Turner, from my tenant John Laws at Heddon. Recollecting our correspondence on the subject to which I beg to refer you, I cannot conceal from you my surprise at the communication it contains and the threat it holds out & I can hardly bring myself to believe it can have received your sanction. John Laws and the rest of my Tenants at Heddon are willing and desirous of paying you everything that is due according to the accustomed manner of Tything and consistent with the Mode specified in the Parish Terrier. They have offered and signified their readiness to do so. I must beg you to recollect that in consenting to pay the Tythe you [illegible word] removed I never acknowledged any legal right you had & only came to an agreement with a sincere wish & hope to avoid all litigation.

If myself and tenants are to be thus harassed by continual threats and new demands, the sooner Mr Fenwick carries what he terms your intentions into effect the better for all parties.

I will steadily adhere to my promises & to the strictest letter of our agreement. It remains for you to decide what part you choose to adopt.

The advice I have acted on has carried me with success thro' one Tythe suit & I have no apprehensions as to another.

I beg Mr Fenwick's letter may be returned to me.

That seems to have put an end to the matter. It may be not unrelated to this dispute, however, that as we shall see, both John Laws and his cousin Jonathan at East Heddon farm had their children baptized at the Presbyterian Church at Stamfordham rather than by the vicar of Heddon.

Natural history – gifts to museums

As he farmed Laws retained his passion for birds. He continued to collect them and their eggs and nests. A specimen of a Pied Flycatcher with atypical plumage that he shot near Heddon Laws, in June 1810, got a mention in Mackenzie's *History of Northumberland*, 1825. In about 1820, in June, he visited the Farne Islands with his friend Richard Wingate, where he collected the eggs of the Shag, then a much less common bird there than it is today (Hancock, 1874). On 12 February 1835 John Laws collected a young female Hen Harrier 'in first plumage' on The Cheviot and presented it to the young John Hancock; it remained on display at the Hancock Museum at least until 1899 (Howse, 1899; p. 16). Intriguingly John Hancock (1874) wrote 'The late Mr. John Laws of Breckney Hill, a pupil of Mr. Thomas Bewick, took up [a Little Auk] alive in a turnip field in that locality, ten miles from the sea.'

In 1836 Laws presented a more mundane specimen, a House Sparrow, to the recently completed Newcastle Museum. A quarter of a century earlier, in 1810, he had 'presented

... John Wingate with "curiosities" for his newly-opened, privately-owned, "Newcastle upon Tyne Established Museum". Sadly that museum survived only two years, and was sold at auction in July 1812.³

One of Laws' important gifts was of a pair of Twites, from very near to home, which in 1821 he gave to his old master Thomas Bewick whose *History of British Birds* had not until then included the bird. They arrived just in time to be published in the 1821 *Supplement to the Land Birds* a few months later, and appeared in all subsequent editions. Bewick wrote of 'The Mountain Linnets, or Twite':

A pair of these birds, male and female, with their nest and six eggs, were obligingly presented to this work, by my late pupil, Mr John Laws, of Heddon Laws, Northumberland. He shot them on Callerton Fell, near their nest, on 15th June, 1821; their stomachs were both filled with the seed of the dandelion.

Many years later Alan Angus was amused to find in his family papers letters to John Laws from his friend and fellow bird enthusiast Richard R. Wingate (d. 1859), the brother of John, one of them with the jocular address to 'John Laws, President of the Oological Society, Northumberland'. Wingate was the most expert taxidermist in Newcastle. Alan Angus understood that Laws too had stuffed birds for his own collection. If so he may well have learned the skill from Wingate, but it is also possible that he got his friend to prepare them for him.

Alan Angus, who collected birds' eggs himself in his youth, recalled seeing many Laws specimens in the Hancock Museum in the 1930s – birds, eggs and nests, only a few of which can be traced today. Most of them were probably from the combined collection of the younger John Laws, John's son, whose widow in 1884 had presented thirty cases of stuffed birds, British and foreign, and a collection of eggs and nests to the recently opened Hancock Museum. Disappointingly nothing seems to survive, or to have been documented, from John's voyage to America.

Marriage and children

On 19 August 1813 John Laws, bachelor, married Isabella Gilhespy, spinster, at Heddon-on-the-Wall 'with the consent of the parents' (PR). She was 'of Dalton Lodge' (Angus, 1979) in the neighbouring parish of Newburn. John was aged 48, Isabella 24. The witnesses were Thomas Gilhespy and Thomas Gilhespy junior, almost certainly her uncle and her elder brother (PR). Isabella had been baptised on 6 April 1788, the third daughter and sixth child of William and Margaret Gilhespy who married at Heddon on 11 July 1774 (PR). The family gravestone is on the south side of the church at Heddon; from this it appears that Isabella's parents had moved from Heddon to Dalton, but were buried in Heddon, he in 1832 and she in 1835 – the grandparents had lived at the delightfully named 'Sunny-Breeze', presumably in Heddon parish but I have not discovered where.

John and Isabella Laws had four sons, all baptised at Stamfordham Presbyterian Church (PR):

Ralph, born 29 June 1814, baptised 1 July 1814;

William, born 19 September 1816, baptised 7 January 1817;

John, born 20 January 1819, baptised 16 February 1819;

Thomas, born 18 May 1822, baptised 3 July 1822.

Stamfordham is just over two miles from Dalton; and its Presbyterian Congregation had met for services in Dalton before the first meeting house was built at Stamfordham (Dodds, 1926). So the choice of the place of baptism of their children may have been Isabella's. However in 1809 Jonathan Laws, John's step-brother and in 1818-1823 another Jonathan Laws, of East Heddon farm, his cousin, also had their children baptized at Stamfordham Presbyterian Church. The title dispute between the vicar of Heddon and the farmers may well have been a factor in the decision of three farming members of the Laws family to have their children baptised elsewhere.

were buried at Heddon, he on 18 August 1844 and she on 16 June 1846 [PR]. They left no wills.

On 23 August, an obituary appeared in the *Newcastle Courant* (as copied by Alan Angus, 1979).

Died on Wednesday, the 14th inst. at Breckney Hill, (which farm is now occupied by the fifth generation under Sir Matthew White Ridley, bart.) in the 80th year of his age, Mr. John Laws, a celebrated engraver on silver, which he followed up, it is feared, with too great an application, until within a few months of his death. He was a pupil of the late Mr. T. Bewick, by whom he was much esteemed, and as a bright engraver stood at the head of his profession. The last specimen of his talents and skill was on a silver cream jug, richly ornamented



John Laws Scrapbook Page 187
Photographed 2013, courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus

Death

John Laws seems to have remained in good health until near the end of his life. The unidentified Newcastle newsclipping of 1884 described him:

He followed his occupation of engraving up to the last. Singular to relate his hand continued steady as in youth. The last articles he finished were a silver teapot and cream jug for Mr Walton, silversmith, Painter Heugh, in this city. The entry in his own handwriting, the last he did, bears date June 8, 1844, a few weeks prior to his death. Silver chasing had then, as practised by Mr. Laws, become extinct as a trade, and then being over eighty years of age, it was only at the urgent request of Mr Walton that he undertook [the] execution of the work which, when finished, was for [some] time on public view and greatly admired. [The words in brackets are torn away in the cutting.]

On the 14th of August 1844 John Laws of Breckney Hill died, aged 79 years. Isabella, his wife, died nearly two years later on 13 June 1846, at the age of 57 (gravestone). They

with four different patterns, which an eminent artist on viewing declared that none in the district could have done it but himself. He was likewise an excellent carver on oak, and a good naturalist, and has left behind him a very choice and beautiful collection of the nests and eggs of the British Birds. His private character was that of a virtuous man, being humble, meek and mild, and was highly respected by a large circle of those who knew and valued his worth. He was strictly honourable in all his dealings, and to his acquaintances there never was a more sincere or a kinder-hearted man than John Laws.

The sons of John and Isabella Laws

Ralph Laws (1814-1854) took over the tenancy of Breckney Hill after his father's death. At the time of the 1851 census he was there, unmarried, a 'farmer of 150 acres employing 4 labourers'.

Two months after the census, on 27 May 1851, he married Mary Ann Watson, a spinster aged 35 of Albion Place,

Newcastle. On 11 June 1852, Isabella, daughter of Ralph and Mary Ann Laws was born (recorded by Ralph in the Laws ledger); she was baptised on 29 August at Heddon-on-the-Wall (PR). She was the first grandchild of John Laws, but her subsequent history and that of her widowed mother are unknown. ‘Ralph Laws, son of John Laws, aged 40 years’ died on 16 December 1854 (gravestone) and was buried at Heddon on 18 December [PR].

All the East Heddon estate tenants after the 1830s had continual arrears of rent. John Laws owed £321-8-5 at his death; under his son Ralph’s ten-year tenancy the debt increased to £1269-8-7. Hodgson (1899a) did not learn Ralph’s forename from Miss Hedley’s rather gossipy information: he recorded only ‘— Laws, eldest son, did badly’.

William Laws (1816-1897) became a master brewer in Newcastle whose career can be traced in the censuses, directories and electoral registers. Angus *et al.* (2002) record William as a millwright in 1851, but William the millwright was in fact the eldest son of John Laws’ brother Ralph.

By 1861 William the brewer had married and was living at Hawthorn Terrace, Elswick (census). They had no children. As a widower, in 1891, he lived with the family of his niece Margaret Angus, at Summerhill Terrace, and later in Tynemouth where he died on 16 July 1897, aged 81 years (gravestone). He was buried at Heddon on 20 July (PR). William seems to have been the last surviving member of his dynasty to bear the surname Laws.

John Laws (1819-1878). John had a varied career, as an agent, then in the 1850s as a partner of his cousin the millwright; in 1861 as the manager of a Cement Works, living at Ashfield Terrace, Elswick with his wife Marian. They had married on 29 December 1858 (Angus *et al.*, 2002). Their only child, Margaret, was born on 4 November 1859 (*ibid*). Then in the 1870s John is recorded as a ‘cattle dealer’. ‘Cattle salesman’ was also recorded as his occupation on his death certificate (*fide* Angus *et al.*, 2002). He may have taken over the business from his brother Thomas, the cattle dealer, who had lived at the same address, 25 Ashfield Terrace East, but had died in 1874. Angus *et al.* say that in the 1850s John went to Prussia – ‘he was acting as steward or agent for the Bates family of Heddon, well-known breeders of shorthorn cattle, who had an estate there’. Strangely however, Angus *et al.* give no account of the youngest brother, Thomas, and they may have confused the two brothers.

John died on 15 October 1878 and was buried at Heddon on 18 October (PR). He had shared his father’s passion for collecting birds and in 1884 his widow donated his collection to the Hancock Museum. She then went to live with her daughter Margaret Angus, first at 5 Summerhill Terrace, and by 1901 at 37 Percy Park, Tynemouth (census) where she died on 23 September 1905 aged 87 (gravestone). It was at Percy Park in the 1920s that young Alan Angus visited his grandparents, and, intrigued by the very lifelike heron that stood in a glass case on the landing, first learned about the man who had stuffed it, his ancestor John Laws.

Thomas Laws (1822-1874). Hodgson (1899a), relying on Miss Hedley’s patchy memory, stated that a son of John Laws

(surely Thomas) was ‘steward or manager of the estate of the Bates of Heddon afterwards an importer and sales ma [*sic*] of foreign cattle in Newcastle in which trade he did well’. The trade directories confirm this career; his office was in Broad Chare near the Quayside. He died unmarried on 19 March 1874, aged 51 (gravestone) and was buried at Heddon on 23 March.

The last of the Laws at East Heddon

The death of Ralph Laws in 1854 was the end of the Laws tenancy of Breckney Hill and of the long history of farming in East Heddon by the Laws family. At East Heddon Farm the rental book (NRO ZRI/41/4/4) shows that John’s cousin Jonathan (1778-1860) had left the farm, heavily in arrears with the rent, some time after May Day 1851. Peter (1825-55), his only child to have survived infancy, died before him. Peter had briefly carried forward one tradition that would have pleased John Laws: in August 1850 he was elected a member of the Tyneside Naturalists’ Field Club (Trans. Tyneside Naturalists’ Field Club II: 4; 1854). One can imagine that his interest in natural history had earlier been inspired by his father’s elderly cousin a couple of fields away at Breckney Hill.

In the same year ‘Peter Laws, farmer, East Heddon’ published *The Prize Essay of the Newcastle upon Tyne Farmers’ Club, on Draining Strong Clays* (Laws, 1850). In it Peter Laws described himself as ‘Farmer’ and as having been ‘more accustomed to the plough than the pen’, but in March the following year the census described him as an ‘engineer and surveyor’, and within a couple of months both Peter and his father had left Heddon. Peter died unmarried at the age of 30, in 1855 (Angus *et al.*, 2002). In 1861 no Laws was living in East Heddon township for the first time in more than 200 years (census).



John Laws Scrapbook Page 187, detail
Laws written in pencil
Photographed 2013,
courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus

Acknowledgements

I have depended heavily on two papers published by the late Alan Angus (1979 and 1990), and much additional information compiled by Alan and his cousin the late Ian F. Angus was very kindly supplied by Alan's cousin-once-removed Mr Alistair Angus, who also commented on an early draft of this paper. Hugh Dixon gave a very helpful expert opinion on the probable date of Breckney Hill farmhouse based on my photograph. The archivists of the Northumberland Record Office as always were helpful and supportive. I am grateful to them all.

Sources

Angus, A.S. (1979). 'John Laws of Breckney Hill (1765-1844)'. *Journal of the Northumberland and Durham Family History Society*, January issue.

Angus, A. (1990). 'John Laws of Breckney Hill – Bewick apprentice'. *Cherryburn Times*, vol.1, no.8; pages 4-6.

Angus I.F., Angus A.S. and Angus A. (2002). The Laws Family. Informal and unpublished family history information supplied by Mr Alistair Angus, June 2013.

Census records accessed on <<http://www.ancestry.co.uk>>

Dodds, M. Hope, editor (1926). *A History of Northumberland*, Volume 12 (Newcastle: A. Reid & Co.)

Dodds, M. Hope, editor (1930). *A History of Northumberland*, Volume 13 (Newcastle: A. Reid & Co.).

Hodgson, J. (1832). *A History of Northumberland*. Part 2, Volume 2. Newcastle: printed by C.H. Cook for the author.

Hodgson, John Crawford (1899a). *Hodgson's Pedigrees* Volume C page 398; manuscript in Newcastle City Library, Local Studies (his information on Laws was collected in 1899).

Hodgson, John Crawford (1899b). *A History of Northumberland*. Volume V. Newcastle: A. Reid.

Howse, R. (1899). *Index-Catalogue of the Birds in the Hancock Collection*. Newcastle: Natural History Society of Northumberland, Durham and Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Laws, Peter (1850). *The Prize Essay of the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Farmers' Club, On Draining Strong Clays*. Newcastle upon Tyne: F.W. Dodsworth.

Mackenzie, E. (1825). *An Historical, Topographical, and Descriptive View of the County of Northumberland ...* Second Edition. Newcastle: Mackenzie and Dent; Vol. 1, page 117.

Oates, E.W. (1901). *Catalogue of the collection of birds' eggs in the British Museum (Natural History)*. Volume 1 [of five]. London: Trustees of the British Museum.

Parish records for Heddon-on-the-Wall, Newburn and Ovingham, Northumberland Record Office.

Ridley estate papers, Northumberland Record Office (NRO ZRI/3-57).

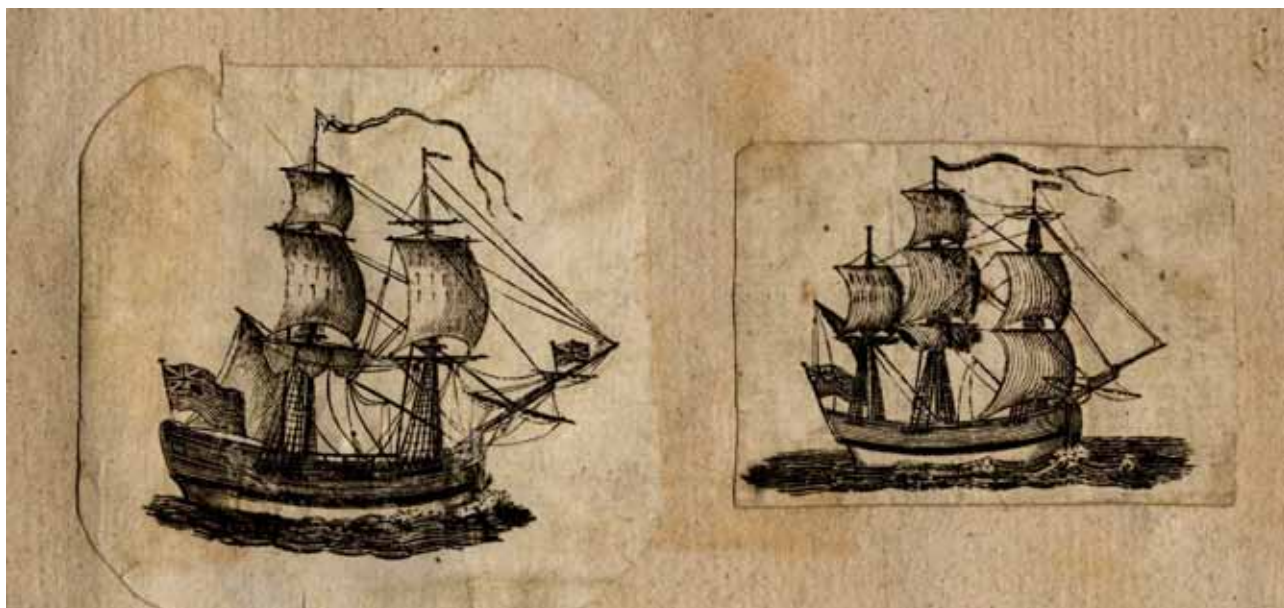
Robinson, R. (1887). *Thomas Bewick: his Life and Times*. Newcastle: for the author.

Rossiter, B.N. (1999). 'Northumberland's birds in the 18th and early 19th centuries: the contribution of John Wallis (1714-1793)'. *Trans. Nat. Hist. Soc. Northumbria* 59: 93-136.

Tattersfield N. (2011). *Thomas Bewick: the Complete Illustrative Work*. London: British Library.

Notes

1. Given by him to the National Trust and now deposited at Tyne & Wear Archives (DX1109).
2. The journal is in private hands. The Revd David Quine kindly gave a transcript to the Natural History Society of Northumbria in 2002 (coll. NHSN, NEWHM:2011.H110).
3. Tattersfield (2011, vol 1 p. 203), quoting from John Wingate, *A Guide to the Newcastle upon Tyne Established Museum* (Newcastle, 1810).



John Laws Scrapbook Page 205 detail
Photographed 2013,
courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus

SCRAPBOOK, PATTERN BOOK, CATALOGUE OR SOUVENIR?

JOHN LAWS' REMARKABLE COLLECTION

by Peter Quinn



John Laws' Scrapbook, page 13.
Bookplates by Ralph Beilby and Thomas Bewick.
Photographed 2013,
courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus

John Laws was an apprentice in the Bewick workshop from 1782-9 and a journeyman engraver there for one more year. Bewick called him 'our first apprentice' as he was the first apprentice of the joint Beilby and Bewick partnership of 1777. Laws was a late starter in 1782: most boys started an apprenticeship at fourteen. He was seventeen. A year later the partnership took a 12 year old (John Johnson) on probation for a year before becoming a 'trainee apprentice' and then an apprentice at 14. The following year the young Robert Johnson joined the firm: Bewick kept to a pattern of overlapping apprenticeships thereafter. For most of Laws' time the workshop also employed one or two journeymen to work a printing press or do simple engraving tasks.¹ It was 4 years before John Laws' name appeared in the ledgers as having completed an engraving job on his own: a tea pot in June 1786.²

Looking at the well-known watercolour by the late Victorian painter John Eyre you would assume that Bewick and his apprentices led an idyllic existence. *The Master Engraver* was shown to some acclaim at the Royal Society of British Artists in 1896 and was engraved for the *Illustrated Lon-*

don News.³ Eyre had been shown the workshop room in St Nicholas's Churchyard and had done a small sketch. The rest (the stuffed birds, the game, the rifle, the litter of sketches) was fantasy, a nostalgic homage to wood-engraving's receding past.

In his *Memoir* Bewick admits that he had originally intended to work alone, with no apprentice to bother him:

I had formed a plan of working alone without any assistance from Apprentices, or of being interrupted by anyone – and I am not certain at this day whether I would not have been happier in doing so than in the way I was led to pursue – I had often in my lonely walks, debated this business over in my mind, but whether it would have been better or worse, I can now only conjecture – I tried the one plan and not the other – perhaps each way might have had advantages and disadvantages – I would not have experienced the envy and ingratitude of some of my pupils, neither should I on the contrary have felt the pride & the pleasure I derived from so many of them having received medals or premiums for the Encouragement of Arts – & also of their taking the lead, as Engravers on Wood in the Metropolis.⁴

The stories of the boys who worked in the Bewick workshop feature the ill (Robert Johnson, 1770–1796), the ungrateful (Abraham Hunter, 1760–1808), the roguish (Charles Hickson, 1779–18?), seducers (Henry Fulke Plantagenet Woolocombe Hole, 1782–1852), depressives (Luke Clennell, 1781–1840), and the unlucky (nephew, John Bewick, 1790–1809). It is tempting to wallow in the melodrama of it all. John Laws was however a long-standing favourite.

We greatly respected him for his honesty, sobriety, civil deportment and attention.⁵

Things might have been very different. Abraham Hunter (1760–1808), former Bewick apprentice, tried to tempt Laws to join him in open competition with their old master. Bewick's brother John got wind of the scheme:

... I am sorry that you shou'd be so beset with your lads and Mr Hunter as it must be particularly disagreeable, but however such matters as may tend to his improvement I shou'd (if that's the case) keep from them - I was informed by Jacob Rile who had been at N.Castle some time ago, that Jno. Laws he believed was going to Hunter as soon as he was at liberty but whether he had it from Jno. or not I cannot say...⁶

Alan Angus traced John Laws' last days with the workshop:

What trouble Abraham Hunter was causing is not clear, but in any case John Laws must have had second thoughts. The Cash Book shows that he received his first week's payment as a journeyman on 21 March 1789, when he was paid 18/-, and the additional expenditure of 6/- to mark the occasion suggests that there were drinks all round! [TWAS1269/2] He continued to work in the Beilby/Bewick workshop for more than a year; perhaps Bewick persuaded him to stay until work on the Quadrupeds was completed, for his eventual departure coincided with its publication. His wages during this period

amounted to approximately 18/- per week, although payment was irregular and the amounts varied considerably: on 31 October 1789 he received £15, a large sum for those days. His name appears on the wages list for the last time on 19 June 1790, when he was paid £6.17.0 as "Ballce. in full to May 22nd." [TWAS 1269/2]⁷

We also know Laws walked away from the workshop with something under his arm: a scrapbook collection of samples of engraving.

What is in the Scrapbook?

The contents, stuck in with glue which still holds fast, are examples of trade engraving. Since Iain Bain's landmark publication of 1979,⁸ scholars have been keen to acknowledge Bewick's activities as a trade engraver. The Scrapbook has a wealth of examples of the sort of work carried out in the workshop during the Laws apprenticeship. It is a sample of the visual culture of the day, the printed matter needed by the busy commercial town and models for engraving on silver, Laws' speciality. The Scrapbook also gives us a glimpse into the fugitive world of shopping, trade and industry in the late eighteenth century.

The Scrapbook has the following sections, separated by blank pages

1. Bookplates including those of several circulating library plates.
2. Decorative and heraldic work.
3. Sailing ships of various sizes.
4. Coal certificates and stock certificates
5. Shopping ephemera: trade illustrations for a hatter, tobacconist, paper maker, glass manufacturer, ironmonger, nail manufacturer, hosier, woollen draper, a biscuit baker,



Ralph Beilby's illustrated receipt for Port of Sunderland.
John Laws Scrapbook Page 95. Photographed 2013, courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus.



Thomas Bewick illustration for Woollen Draper, post-1800.
 John Laws Scrapbook Page 134.
 Photographed 2013, courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus.

a button factor, a sadler, a (kilted) tea and tobacco merchant, an upholsterer, a brandy merchant, a ship's chandler and an artist (Joseph Bell).

6. Watch papers
7. Examples of lettering and decorative work
8. Lions, unicorns, griffins, a phoenix, deer
9. Some ships to end.

At first glance it does not seem a very personal book.⁹ There are a few scrawls in pencil, hand-made numbering and some practice attempts with a pair of compasses. However there are no notes, no dates and no captions. The book includes the signature of John Laws inside the front cover beneath an attempt in pencil to combine a J and an L. There are a small number of other pencil jottings, towards the end of the book (page 198 for instance). A few of its pages are torn and a number have stains perhaps from previous re-arrangements of the contents. As the book is organised into un-named sections separated by blank pages, it appears to be a work in progress. Whilst the material is largely from the period of John Laws' time with the workshop, there are a small number of examples from outwith this time (for instance the advertisement for the Imperial Fire Insurance Company clearly bears the date 1843).

The Scrapbook is not a sketchbook then. No other scrapbook by an apprentice has survived. It is difficult to be certain of the role this volume may have had. Laws worked as an engraver on metal: illustration and wood engraving were not his forte. He collected few examples of these. Did he find certain types of work inspiring, interesting, too hard to resist? Some items were clearly collected and placed in the book in hom-

age to his masters. Page 13 (Illustrated Page 13 of this issue) for instance has Beilby's 1789 work for Thomas Wentworth alongside Bewick's for Martin Barber. Bewick and Beilby however were not running an art school: boys were trained to be careful craftsmen working closely to the patterns set down by the master. They were not expected to be independently creative nor were they expected to challenge the master's authority. Bewick was particularly hurt for instance by Robert Johnson's attempt to claim authorship of designs for the Earl of Bute.¹⁰

Was the book a reference work from which the apprentice copied the best of the workshop activities? Was it his log book of work done? It may have been intended more simply as a private *aide memoir*: some of the heraldry for instance has the name of the family written in ink on the print of their insignia. The book is arranged rather sternly: items are placed in rows with little sense of 'arrangement' or composition. If this is a 'scrapbook' it is not a very scrappy selection: it is organised and clearly deliberately open-ended. Was it largely put together during his apprenticeship and then smuggled away? Or is this an album of scraps assembled together later as a testimony to his years at Amen Corner?

On one of the flyleaves Laws makes several false starts before inscribing elegantly his name and beneath it the word 'Engraver'. Surely this faintest of evidence (the pencil marks are easy to miss and hard to photograph) indicates the volume's history as the pattern book of a young man hesitantly starting out on his own? As a pattern book it must have been part of the day to day working of Laws' engraving business. Possible customers would be delighted to see the standard

of work he had been associated with in the past. The lack of titles or prices is unremarkable.¹¹ Larger undertakings would have had printed catalogues of their work. Laws produced this custom-made item. Its survival is remarkable.

Notes

1. **Tattersfield, N.** (2011). *Thomas Bewick: The Complete Illustrative Work*, (London : The British Library, the Bibliographical Society, Oak Knoll Press) vol 1, page 203.
2. **Angus, A.** (1993). *Thomas Bewick's Apprentices*. History of the Book Trade in the North. PH 62. (Wylam: Allenholme Press). Page 8.
3. **Donald, D.** (2013). *The Art of Thomas Bewick*, (London: Reaktion Books) pages 221-3. The watercolour is now in the collection of Tyne and Wear Museums.
4. **Bewick, T.** (1975). *A Memoir of Thomas Bewick*, (London: Oxford University Press.) page 79.
5. **Bewick, T.** (1975) page 195.

6. **Angus, A.** (1993) page 8. And **Tattersfield, N.** (2011) p.202 and note.
7. **Angus, A.** (1993) page 8-9.
8. **Bain, I.** (1979). *Thomas Bewick. an illustrated record of his life and work*, (Newcastle: Laing Art Gallery, Tyne and Wear County Council Museums). Reissued as **Bain, I.** (1989) *The Workshop of Thomas Bewick. A Pictorial Survey*, (Newcastle: the Thomas Bewick Birthplace Trust). This text expanded upon the broadsheet given to visitors at the Laing Art Gallery exhibition of 1978 *Thomas Bewick Artist and Naturalist 1753-1828*, Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1978.
9. You can view the Scrapbook on the Bewick Society pages on **Flickr** <<http://bit.ly/1diqPgy>>
10. Diana Donald on the Johnson controversy: **Donald, D.** (2013) pages 263-7.
11. See **Berg, M.** (2005) *Luxury & Pleasure in Eighteenth Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press) esp pp186-7 and 277-8.



Page 158 of the John Laws Scrapbook
 Photographed 2013, courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus

Pages 157-161 of the Scrapbook feature examples of engraving for Watch & Clock Makers, Shoemakers, a Hat Maker, a Chemist and a Furrier. Customers came from nearby (Newcastle, Sunderland, Morpeth, Gateshead, Houghton-le-Spring) and further afield (Wigton, Prestonpans, Aberdeen and Tønsberg, Norway.) The Norwegian script seems to have caused some difficulty as a pen correction has been added.

THE JOHN LAWS SCRAPBOOK: BRINGING DESIGNS TO LIFE

By Marie-Thérèse Mayne

Assistant Keeper of Fine & Decorative Art

Laing Art Gallery



John Laws Scrapbook Page 9 including a Bookplate for J. Brand, courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus.

Passed down through generations of the Laws family, the Scrapbook has been on loan to the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, since 1960. Until recently the Scrapbook was too fragile to display. However, it has now been conserved and repaired with assistance from the Bewick Society and the Angus family, in memory of the late Alan S. Angus (1920-2002), great, great grandson of John Laws, and formerly Honorary Treasurer to the Thomas Bewick Birthplace Trust and the Bewick Society.

While John Laws was apprenticed to both Thomas Bewick and Ralph Beilby, it seems to have been largely Beilby whose work he emulated, and he soon excelled in engraving on metal. The technique of 'bright engraving' was developed in Birmingham during the late 18th century, and was applied chiefly to the decoration of precious metal. The engraving tool or 'graver' has a double edge, so that when a line is cut into the surface of the metal it produces a smooth, polished, faceted decoration which catches the light – hence its name. This technique was perfect for the type of engraving on silver which the Workshop was commissioned to carry out, and produces stunning results in the hands of a skilled craftsman

such as John Laws.

As has been stated elsewhere the Scrapbook gives us a fascinating insight into the type of engraving work the Workshop was producing at this time. There are many designs for bookplates, including some very fine examples by Ralph Beilby – on page 9, for instance, is an exquisite scene produced for John Brand, the Newcastle antiquary, showing picturesque ruins with the distinctive lantern spire of St Nicholas' Church in the background. Between pages 67 and 95, we see receipts produced for various coal firms, detailing the numbers of wagons or 'chaldrons' of coal delivered to ships, and then we see receipts and notices produced for local businesses, many centred around the Workshop's location at Amen Corner, but also further afield, in Durham, Sunderland, and Penrith: labels for hats and shoes, watch papers, receipts for tobacconists, ironmongers and cabinet makers – the list goes on.

One of the larger designs, to be found on page 17 of the Scrapbook, shows a rather forlorn looking St Andrew, leaning against his 'X' shaped cross. He stands in a very Northumbrian-looking landscape, a pile of fish at his feet, while

behind him fishing nets are hung up to dry. The image is not signed, but we are fortunate in being able to date it fairly accurately through reference to the Workshop's Account and Day books (held at Tyne & Wear Archives), and also the silverware it was designed to embellish. The design was made for a set of church plate, commissioned for St Andrew's Church, Newcastle upon Tyne, and added to over a number of years. The first items were a pair of large Communion flagons, made by the silversmith John Langlands.

The image of St Andrew is engraved large on the main body of each flagon, and the work was carried out by Ralph Beilby himself, noted in his Day Book for 4th October 1776. These were followed eight years later by an alms dish, made by John Langlands and John Robertson, with the same design engraved in the well of the dish – presumably to match the flagons. While we do not know exactly who engraved this design, it was entered into the Workshop's account books as being carried out on 1st November 1784. Finally, there is a large dish and two smaller alms dishes, made by Robert Pinkney and Robert Scott in 1787 or 1788, and once again engraved to match the earlier pieces. Unfortunately the Workshop records for those years are missing, but it is fairly certain that once again the Beilby-Bewick Workshop was commissioned to carry out the engraving work. All of these pieces are still in the possession of St Andrew's, but are on loan to the Laing Art Gallery, and currently displayed in the 'Beilby Workshop' section of the Northern Spirit gallery.



St. Andrew Flagon, made by John Langlands c.1775, engraved at the Beilby-Bewick Workshop, courtesy of St Andrew's Church, Newcastle upon-Tyne



Page 178 of the Scrapbook, detail, showing a 'mirror-image' proof. Photographed 2013, courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus.

Another item of silverware with close links to the Scrapbook is the Trotter tankard, in the collection of the Laing Art Gallery and also on display in Northern Spirit. Here we see the use of what is perhaps the most extensive part of the collection, the large number of heraldic designs which appear crammed onto many of the pages. These would have been used either for bookplates, or for engraving directly onto metalware, and their proliferation within the pages of the Scrapbook is the reason that the title 'Heraldry' was stamped on the loose leather cover made for it in the 19th century. The Trotter tankard was made for the Trotter family of Morpeth by John Langlands and John Robertson in 1780, and engraved by the Beilby-Bewick Workshop with the boar's crest of the Trotter family and the initials 'RMT'. The initials suggest it was probably made for the Rev. Robert Trotter, and one of Thomas Bewick's notebooks describes this engraving work being carried out on 30 December 1780. While there is no exact match in the Scrapbook for this design, there are very similar crests gathered on page 175, and designs for monograms and initials on pages 178-179. Interestingly, the prints for many of these initials are mirror-image, suggesting that they may have been 'proofs' taken off engraved objects – and also useful tools for training in copperplate engraving, where the plate had to be cut in reverse, to ensure the final printed image was the correct way around!

The Scrapbook will be displayed in '*Thomas Bewick and his Apprentices: paintings, drawings and prints*', an exhibition at the Laing Art Gallery from **30th November 2013 – 19th October 2014**.



John Laws Scrapbook Page 17 including St Andrew design,
 Photographed 2013 courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus.



The Trotter Tankard (side view), made by John Langlands &
 John Robertson, 1780, engraved at the Beilby-Bewick Workshop,
 Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (Tyne & Wear Archives &
 Museums)



The Trotter Tankard
 detail of engraved crest,
 Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne
 (Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums)

FROM THE SCRAPBOOK



Detail from Page 121 of the Scrapbook,
Receipt for William Smith and Co., Manufacturers and Wholesale Dealers in Paper, Newcastle,
photographed 2013 courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus.



Page 55 of the Scrapbook,
three examples of Heraldic decoration,
St. George and the Dragon
and a Crown for the Imperial Fire Insurance Company.
The latter bears the date Dec.21, 1843.
Photographed 2013
courtesy of the family of Alan S. Angus.

Cherryburn Times is normally published twice a year. Contributions are invited particularly (but not only) from members of the Bewick Society. The preferred digital format is 'Rich Text Format' (.rtf) or Microsoft Word (.doc) and images in jpeg or tiff: print resolution 300 d.p.i. (8 cm wide or larger). Visit our webpage <<http://www.bewicksociety.org>>
Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Flickr.
Email: bewick.society@newcastle.ac.uk
Graphic Design: John L. Wolfe.
Consulting Editor: David W. S. Gray.
This issue has been edited by Peter Quinn.
Printed at Northumbria University.