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THOMAS BEWICK THE COMPLETE ILLUSTRATIVE WORK BY NIGEL TATTERSFIELD.

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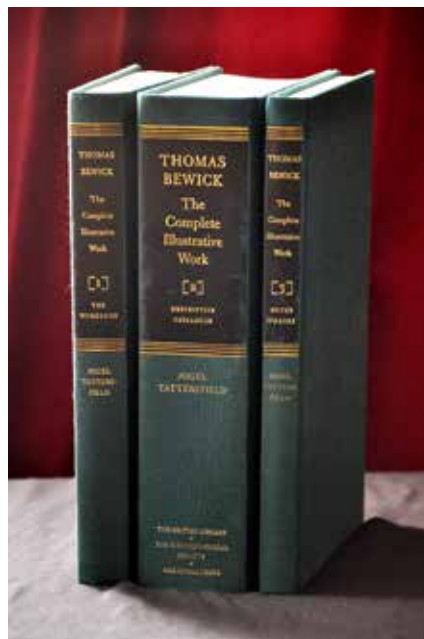
The three volumes of Nigel Tattersfield's *Thomas Bewick: The Complete Illustrative Work* landed with a single thud on the doormat over a year ago. The parcel weighed four and a half kilogrammes. Even the most cursory glance at the contents showed that it was not only weighty metrically, it was clearly the most weighty contribution to Bewick studies that has ever been made, indeed is now ever likely to be made. It is an astonishing achievement, already being quoted in the catalogues of antiquarian booksellers as the most authoritative source of information on the whole printed production of the Bewick workshop. Up to now we have had to depend on the works of the Revd Thomas Hugo, the nineteenth century collector of Bewick woodblocks, or on Sydney Roscoe, the twentieth century solicitor and scholar whose *Bibliography raisonné* of the four major books produced by Bewick did so much to resolve the problems arising from the many different editions of those four books. One great problem, however, has always been the large number of other books carrying on their title pages the name of Bewick and the confused picture they leave us of their production. The reason for this confusion is partly to do with the state of the publishing and printing trade in the Newcastle of the 1780s; but it also partly the way in which Bewick's immediate family cherished and indeed jealously guarded their father's memory – to the point of expurgation. They did not want their father to be seen as a tradesman, because in their eyes that would detract from his status as an artist. It is also partly to do with our failure to understand how the workshop actually worked – increasingly, as time has gone by, to know anything about the culture of the ancient trade

workshop system, with its hierarchy of skilled status: apprentices, journeymen and masters. (It may be an historic irony that the universities incorporated and still to this day embody

a similar hierarchy of bachelors, masters and doctors.) A journeyman was a man qualified by having served out an apprenticeship of five to seven years in a specific trade, usually in a workshop owned by an independent master who had been paid to take on the responsibility of training the youth. The same workshop might be employing several skilled journeymen – the term, from the French *journalée*, means they were paid by the day – and they might be involved with imparting some of their skills to the apprentices in specific jobs. (We are only now, in the twenty-first century, trying to re-create this lost world of trade values.)

The great achievement of Nigel Tattersfield's work is to have corrected our understanding of this system. He has used all the archival resources available in the British Library and the British Museum, the Tyne and Wear

Archives, Cherryburn Museum, the Pease Collection in Newcastle Central Library, the Natural History Society of Northumbria, and several other collections, here and in the USA, to create in these three volumes a most wonderful, exhaustive (and exhausting) and superlatively accessible, analytical account of the full range of the Bewick workshop printed production. The first volume contains a fluent and magisterial narrative of Bewick's life and work in the workshop context, with Ralph Beilby and then all the apprentices and their later careers. The second volume gives a prodigious analytical presentation of the enormous variety of collected Bewick material in the British Museum and elsewhere, collated with



the workshop records in the Tyne and Wear archives, including some categories of production completely unknown to your reviewer, such as copy-book cover designs, etc. The third volume provides the Notes supporting the second volume, plus a list of published sources and another of unpublished sources, an index of subjects and another of titles, and finally an index of names – the whole forming a critical apparatus of substantial value to anyone wanting to understand the great cultural revolution of print at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Our universities should be falling over themselves to offer him a doctorate for these achievements.



The second volume is half as big again as the other two volumes together (948 pages against 392 plus 240). It is a descriptive catalogue in eight parts, the first being of what Tattersfield calls the Primary Works, i.e. the 37 titles produced by the workshop between 1790 and 1847, grouped by title each issue with its catalogue number. There follows part two, the Secondary Works, being 690 items assembled in alphabetical order by short title, mostly with an illustration, all known details of production, and each with catalogue number; all these works were commissioned. Parts three to seven consist of special categories of production: Abandoned Illustrations; Children's Book Cover Designs; Copy-Book Cover Designs; Newspaper Mastheads, etc; Major Single Engravings (Animals, Maps and Plans, Views, Miscellaneous). All the catalogue numbers are prefixed TB, identifying not so much Thomas Bewick himself, but the Bewick Workshop. This must become the standard way of referring to the works, like Köchel numbers for Mozart. Finally, there are five Appendixes, the last being Spurious Pretences: Fraudulent, Misleading & Spurious Titles. These items are all numbered within their respective group, but not ascribed to the workshop with 'TB'. The Introduction to volume 2, all seven pages of text, should be required reading for every person embarking on the adventure of a consultation, and your reviewer found it absolutely invaluable to give close attention to the list of abbreviations on pp. 17 and 18. Tattersfield has grappled with the archival sources consisting of Cash Books, Day Books, Ledgers, Weekly Engraving Work Account Books, Press Work Account Books, Publications Records, Outstanding Debts and Bank Books containing the workshop records from 1767 until 1847 – and we must try to keep tabs on this vast array lest we waste our time.

This review could not possibly deal with all this material in the second volume by a systematic analysis. It is itself a systematic analysis. We will select a few items within our experience and see how they respond to a search through this vast collation of information. Firstly, a friend approached us with a question about three books he had just re-bound – as to whether they were illustrated by Bewick. They were all three by Robert Bloomfield: the first, *Rural Tales, Ballads and Songs*, 1802, 2nd edition, containing a portrait of the author stipple-engraved on copper by Ridley as frontispiece, plus 12 wood-engraved illustrations, none of which looked

like anything produced in the Bewick workshop; the second, also by Robert Bloomfield, *The Farmer's Boy; a Rural Poem*, 1805, 8th edition, with 18 wood-engraved illustrations, perhaps a bit more like, but still obviously not the workshop; the third was also by Robert Bloomfield, *May Day with the Muses*, 1822, 2nd edition, with 9 wood-engraved illustrations. Only the last item had any indication of the engraver – some were signed 'Willis' and these were quite clearly in a style recognisably related to the Bewick workshop. The first thing to do was check the Index of titles given in volume 3. The first two are there, in the index of titles, referring us to volume 2, p. 933, Appendix 5, where these first two only are mentioned under Specious Pretences (enough said, for these purposes). In volume 1, in the second part devoted to the apprentices, there is a mention of *May Day* as having been illustrated by Edward Willis, who had been apprenticed in the workshop for seven years from 1798, followed by three and a half years as a journeyman before moving to London, then returning to Newcastle to join the workshop for a further three years, then setting up in London again. This information is buried in a four-page treatment of Willis's career, where *May Day* made a late appearance in 1822. It is clear that only one of these three books was marginally and indirectly related to the Bewick workshop.

To take another example, we have before us a dilapidated volume in its original publisher's boards, with a title page proclaiming *Figures of British Land Birds, engraved on wood by T. Bewick. To which are added, a few Foreign Birds, with their Vulgar and Scientific names*. 1800. We can find fairly quickly in the Synopsis of Primary Works on page 23 of volume 2 the item TB 1.15, and the information that in SB (the Subscribers' Book series) the entry: 18 Aug 1800 Birds without the Letter Press Begun to print this Day & finished In about 9 Dec 1800 – Printing 500 copies – 23 Feb 1801 [sold to] Mr Mawman (there follow details of costs and prices realised). – 14 Mar 1811, Mawman returned 76 books... There then follows more than a page of discussion of the various adventures of this publication, at the hands of Beilby, Bewick and Mawman and finally an account of variants and detailed analysis of contents, with source references to Roscoe and Hugo. This is not only a satisfying account of a book we had recently acquired, but it is exhaustively informative and easily tracked down.

A third example: *A Curious Hieroglyphick Bible; or Select Passages in the Old and New Testament, Represented with near five hundred emblematical figures, for the Amusement of Youth, &c., &c.*, London: Printed by and for T Hodgson, 1783. The Second Edition. The index of titles sends us straight to volume 2, p. 178, number TB 2.113. The title page and frontispiece are illustrated, as is p. 35. The Day Book identifies 24 June 1780, Thomas Hodgson as commissioning the work, specifically '46 Hieroglyphic Figures' £4 7s 3d and 4 Covers £3 12s 0d; and then 7 June 1783, for Frontispiece of the Creation & a Cut of the last Judgement £2 2s 0d. The discussion following tells us that this work was popular to the extent of 20 editions by 1812, making Hodgson a small fortune. The cuts made in the Bewick studio are identified, with further complicated detail we can omit here. It seems that the cuts for the Creation and the Last Judgement were done by Thomas Bewick, and several others by John Bewick.



But let us turn back to the first volume, which is much more than a simple ‘life and work’ account. Itself in two parts, the first part focuses on what Tattersfield rightly calls ‘Wood Engraving Reborn’, encompassing the lives and work of Ralph Beilby, and Thomas and Robert Bewick; the second part of this first volume concentrates on the thirty-five apprentices trained in the workshop, covering not only their work while indentured in the workshop, but also their careers as engravers after they left Bewick and indeed Newcastle. This review will discuss in particular the aspects of the story that offer new ideas and information to the reader; the framework of the narrative is familiar to most readers of *Cherryburn Times*, but there is so much new material that we feel we must try to give a sense of this. Tattersfield opens his account with a scene-setting citation of Horace Walpole’s dismissive treatment of wood engraving in his *Catalogue of Engravers*, where he advises his readers to refer to the French classic treatment of wood engraving by Papillon. This tells us something about the audience Walpole was writing for – the educated French-speaking upper classes. Walpole was the great arbiter of Taste of his time in the second half of the eighteenth century and his dismissal of wood engraving as a medium for art represents the sophisticated taste of his age, not only in Britain, but also in France and the rest of Europe. Dying at the age of 80 in 1797, it is not known whether he ever saw any of Bewick’s mature work. Tattersfield makes an emphatic point when he compares Bewick’s approach to contemporary artists such as Hogarth, Stubbs, or Constable: although they shared attitudes to nature – they were, so to speak, in the air at the time – unlike them, Bewick’s intended audience was the common man. This is the most important overall perspective of Bewick’s work: his pursuit of excellence was far removed from the fashionable values of his time, in thrall to notions of superior refinement and exclusivity of audience. The values of the social hierarchy had dictated for too long the aesthetic values of artistic production. His scorn for the ‘book-mad gentry’ was not just a temporary, superficial aggravation; it was an ingrained attitude at the heart of his making and dissemination of images. It is what made him a genuine cultural revolutionary of the most pervasive power, commanding a new kind of attention to pictorial communication. The accepted conventions of the late eighteenth century would have relegated his subject matter to the realm of banality, the level of everyday ordinariness and vulgarity. But Bewick’s technique of wood engraving made the ordinary glitter with fascinating detail so that without any aesthetic education readers could find their minds engaged with the higher values of common existence. This was the moral imperative at the centre of Bewick’s values.

Bewick’s apprenticeship with Ralph Beilby is related with close attention to the realities of the relationship between apprentice and master, including many points new to this reviewer – for example, the fact that Bewick, living with the Beilby family, was exposed to the life of a genteel family with a circle of acquaintance that was educated and cultivated, forming the intellectual upper crust of Newcastle society.

Bewick felt that Beilby’s large family looked down on him as something of a country bumpkin – which he certainly was, at least to begin with – though the strict discipline enforced by old Mrs Beilby (Ralph’s mother) on the whole household would have rubbed off his sharper edges. He was anxious to please, but it was important for him also to know his place. When Beilby married in 1780, Bewick by then a full partner in the business, the new Mrs Beilby always looked down on all the members of the workshop. Tattersfield emphasizes: ‘Beilby was not Bewick’s patron; he was his master and as such worked him relentlessly.’ Nevertheless, the range of skills he could impart to his apprentice, though broad enough to ensure his business, was not deep enough to establish a reputation beyond that of doing decent, workmanlike jobs in silver or copper engraving. In both of these Beilby’s forte was in lettering. There was, and remained throughout the existence of the shop, i.e. until the middle of the nineteenth century, a demand for engraving on silver, especially decorative initials on items of cutlery, etc. The rising wealth of the middle classes was often expressed in the acquisition of silverware, but it was an easily stealable commodity and marks of ownership executed in elegant lettering would always provide income for the workshop. Although Beilby was not interested in wood engraving, he soon noticed that Bewick both enjoyed it and was good at it. When Charles Hutton, the mathematician, asked for some woodcut diagrams for his new book *A Treatise on Mensuration* the job was given to Bewick – and Hutton it was who introduced Bewick to the practice of using the end-grain of boxwood, and instead of cutting it with a knife or gouge, using the same burin used in copperplate engraving. This technique enabled a much more precise control of the line cut into the very hard, polished surface of the boxwood block; oddly, Bewick does not mention Hutton’s rôle in his *Memoir* and this is new information to your reviewer. Bewick then discovered that he had engraved beyond the capabilities of his printers to deal with such blocks. Inking the blocks and supporting them, damping the paper and drying it required more care and attention than the local pressmen were accustomed to. This was to remain a problem throughout his life; when it came to printing the books for which he became famous, he would insist on being present when his blocks were being printed, to make sure that the printers knew how to get the best impressions from the blocks.



Tattersfield loves to list things to evoke a strong sense of his topic. When dealing with the London that Bewick was to visit for eight and a half months from October 1776 until June 1777, he surpasses himself. There

teemed an unholy riff-raff, a motley crew of mountebanks, sharpers, vagrants, hucksters, beggars, tricksters, quacks, pickpockets, crimps and whores

where

arguments erupted, rancour abounded, rumour flew, fishwives cursed, costermongers shrieked, dogs yelped, churchbells tolled, ponderous signboards creaked and squealed on their mountings, postmen blew horns and rang bells, barrel organs, fiddles and hurdy-gurdies sawed and droned.

The overpowering qualities of everyday existence in London are given full rein and it is easy to see how Bewick recoiled from this reality of life in the metropolis.

But Tattersfield is not only good for the occasional verbal firework display as seen here – it does make for enjoyably lively narrative description. He can also write penetrating analysis, adding far-reaching perspectives on Bewick’s psychology. Noticing in Bewick’s *Memoir* his comment on the division of labour in the London trade scene, Tattersfield points out what he must have felt about his own prospects in such a situation. Trained as an all-rounder, he ‘could never be his own man in London as he could in Newcastle.’ He must have realised that his future in the capital would consist of illustrative engraving for other artists, not for his own designs. ‘Despite all his promises of fame and fortune London would diminish his reputation, not enhance it. The artist-craftsman would inevitably progress down the scale to hack worker.’ This remark is all the more poignant in that after Bewick’s death this was in fact to be the fate of even the best in the trade, as Tattersfield goes on to show later in his narrative. He gives very good accounts of the developing industrial revolution, both the general picture in Britain and the particular effects in Newcastle itself. He never fails to do this in ways clearly related to the development of the engraving workshops, both as businesses and as cultural producers. The industrialization of printing was to proceed at pace throughout the nineteenth century; the greatest new invention which finally impacted mortally on the engraving workshops was to be photography. (It is worth noticing, however, that at first wood engraving *from photographs* was established as a useful half way house from 1848 in the *The Illustrated London News*.)

A most interesting emphasis not realised before by your reviewer is that

comparatively little activity [in the workshop] was devoted to the illustration of books... the plain fact is that book illustration formed an insignificant part of the workshop’s turnover alongside the engraving of silver tableware, watchcases, clock faces, sword blades, ‘phlegms’ (properly ‘fleams’ or lancets), thimbles, dog collars, rings, hairslides, buckles, buttons, commercial trade cards and invoices, banknotes, horse blinker plates, visiting cards – all of which were on metal, be it silver, gold, brass or copper... Wood was unloved, not precious, not metal.

It is Tattersfield’s ability to enumerate such details that gives his account such power and such truth. It enables him to refer to historians’ generalities such as the ‘democratization of consumption’ with a vivid sense of the social realities of the milieu in which Bewick was active. In order to show the modern reader the real contemporary meaning of the notion of private property he tells the story so shocking to modern ears of Jeremy Bentham’s footman, who had stolen two silver teaspoons from his master at Christmas, 1779. The servant had worked for him for five years. Nevertheless, Bentham, who had argued against capital punishment in his book *Rationale of Punishment*, prosecuted the man – who was hanged for it in 1780. Property was sacrosanct to the middle classes.

It is surprising to learn that Newcastle was the most important provincial centre for printing and publishing in eighteenth century England, though not so surprising that one of the most active printers here was Thomas Saint. This printer and bookseller did not scruple to plagiarise titles produced in London, especially the highly popular children’s books pub-

lished by Newbery and Carnan. Tattersfield points out that Bewick was, at this stage in his career, quite content to collude in these piracies by producing his own (and much better) versions of the pictures. At this stage it seems that Beilby was not really interested in the wood engraving and was satisfied to leave Bewick to his own devices. The workshop was of course being paid for this work executed by Bewick. The small cuts were charged at eighteen pence (a thirteenth of a pound) and the larger oval cuts were five shillings (a quarter of a pound). Much later in his life, when his own reputation was well established, he was very conscious of his copyright. Later too, Bewick was to take a dim view of his work in this decade because he came to claim that his work of any significance as engraving only commenced with the single block of the ‘Chillingham Bull’ of 1789 and the *Quadrupeds* of 1790. But Tattersfield argues very convincingly that Bewick’s work in the *Select Fables* of 1776 and his *Fables by the late Mr Gay* of 1779 are already showing his characteristic skills. ‘In Bewick’s hands wood was beginning to rival copper in its ability to transmit a range of tones in the grey register (Bewick called it ‘colour’), something woodcuts had never previously managed to achieve.’ Furthermore, by 1783, woodcuts by Bewick for Thomas Saint were to account for half the workshop’s income (£63-10s out of £121) – and Beilby himself had contributed not a single woodblock to the workshop’s output.



This same decade was to see many changes to Bewick’s domestic life, including moving house in 1781 to his ‘little cot on the Forth’ where he was to live for thirty years, in 1785 the deaths of both parents (whom he had visited every weekend at Cherryburn), his marriage in 1786 to Isabella Elliot of Ovingham, the births of his four children (Jane 1787, Robert 1788, Isabella 1790, Elizabeth 1793). In the midst of all this life and death he developed an idea and persuaded Ralph Beilby to collaborate in a history of animals that was finally to be published in 1790 as *A General History of Quadrupeds*. Apparently it was conceived as a children’s book, but the printer and publisher Samuel Hodgson, proprietor and publisher of the *Newcastle Chronicle*, persuaded both Beilby and Bewick to make it for an adult audience. Hodgson was so keen on the project and his experience as a publisher so much appreciated that he was offered a third part of the proceeds of the book. (This was to be a bone of contention with Hodgson’s widow after his death in 1800.)

By this time Bewick was beginning to appreciate his own value as can be seen in a letter to Samuel More, secretary of the Society of Arts in London – the man who had written to Bewick in 1776 announcing his winning of a prize for one of his woodcuts. Now in 1788, Bewick was to write to him of the *Quadrupeds* project:

Considerable progress is now being made in the Work, in a Style, I think, not inferior to the choicest piece of typography. Its novelty (and I hope I may add without vanity its elegance and utility) cannot fail attracting the notice of the Curious – if I am not mistaken, it is, the first modern attempt in letter press Printing, to unite with the description a decent Figure of the Animal described; a plan which while it lessens the price, will enable the publishers to introduce more abundant materials.

It is quite clear from this that Bewick was foreseeing the growing popularity of wood engraving exactly because it was offering to publishers an opportunity to make more money by cutting down the costs of printing illustrations and increasing the attractiveness of the books. His appeal to ‘the notice of the Curious’ is not a reference to the casual reader whose interest has been piqued by the unusual, but rather to the educated upper-class reader who would be assembling a cabinet of valued curios (curiosities) with which he could show off and entertain his visitors. These would normally include books illustrated by copperplate engravings that had to be printed on a different kind of press and on different paper, and inserted into the printed text as whole pages by the binder. This was clearly a much more expensive operation than the printing of wood engravings on the same press, and at the same time, and on the same paper as the letterpress text. This was what unleashed the illustration revolution of the nineteenth century. Bewick knew what he was doing, though Samuel More did not reply to the letter and may not have appreciated the implications.

Tattersfield gives a very full account of the positive critical reception accorded to the *History of Quadrupeds*. The most influential periodicals of the time all ran full-length articles on it and they were all full of unstinting praises.

We never heard of Mr Bewick or his history, yet perhaps both deserve to be better known. Figures on wood have been despised since the art of engraving on copper has been carried to its present degree of perfection ... the present engravings on wood have a delicacy and clearness also which we have not seen displayed in similar attempts.

Thus the *Critical Review*. *The Analytical Review* was rather more fulsome:

[The woodcuts are] executed with a degree of taste and simplicity, superior to anything of the kind we have before seen in this country ... besides the subjects of this history, many little elegant vignettes, simple transcripts of nature, adorn the volume, calculated to engage the attention and cultivate the taste.

This seems to be the first formal appreciation of the innovative vignettes that begin to appear in this work. In fact there are quite a few of the traditional type of vignette in *Quadrupeds*, i.e. small still-life compositions showing, say, a couple of musical instruments entwined with plant forms or arabesques, often with a hint of the grotesque about them; they were space-fillers. But there are many of the new narrative vignettes here, depicting scenes of and observations on nature, usually having little connection to the text that they punctuate. They have a quiet moral to the story unfolded to the imaginative reader. Tattersfield makes a point that surprised at least one reader: ‘many of these scenes involve pain and suffering, cruelty and hardship; stupidity and misfortune predominate.’ Could it not be that the whole tenor and condition of life for ordinary people at that time would be tough and demanding – even cruel – to modern eyes? There is a certain grim humour to many of them, of course, but Tattersfield recognises that the several scenes of fishermen among the vignettes show more tranquil and contemplative scenes; in the main, however, he thinks the vignettes show life as a ‘vale of tears.’



First edition of *Quadrupeds* in its original publisher's boards — as it appears now, 222 years later.

The first edition of 1,600 copies of *Quadrupeds* sold out within a few months. The workshop cashbooks show its sale more than doubled the income: from £305 in 1789 to £674 in 1790. But although this was an unmistakable sign of success, there were some unexpected consequences, such that the demand on the workshop for new blocks actually fell away. Bewick had never been interested himself in cutting blocks to other people's designs, though he was prepared to allocate such jobs to his apprentices and to supervise their work. Furthermore, his prices were roughly twice the going rate in London. (Another surprise.) Most importantly, however, his own time and efforts were being devoted to the *History of Birds*, the first volume of which was to appear in 1797. It was during this work that relations between Beilby and himself began to fray, not least because he felt that he was doing all the real work of research and engraving while Beilby's contribution to the writing was needing editorial amendment by Bewick himself. The mid-nineties were also the period when his brother John had had to leave London and come back home to die of tuberculosis. He had brought a number of engraving jobs with him, hoping to complete them. These commitments were mainly with William Bulmer, an old friend of Bewick's, now running the famous Shakspeare Printing Office in Cleveland Row, London, and specialising in fine printing. Bewick felt John's death very deeply and the obligation on him to complete the work was heavy, though it amounted only to the actual cutting of the blocks since John had completed the drawings on the blocks before his death. These engravings were for new editions of Somerville's poem *The Chase* and Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. Bulmer clearly appreciated the combined work of the two brothers and spoke handsomely of them in his foreword to Goldsmith:

The ornaments are all engraved on blocks of wood, by two of my earliest acquaintances, Messrs. Bewicks, of Newcastle upon Tyne and London, after designs made from the most interesting passages of the poems they embellish. They have been executed with great care, and I may venture to say, without being supposed to be influenced by ancient friendship, that they form the most extraordinary effort of the art of engraving upon wood, that ever was produced in any age, or any country. Indeed it seems almost impossible that such delicate effects could be obtained from blocks of wood.

In his foreword to Somerville addressed ‘To the Patrons of Fine Printing’, noting that John Bewick had

finished [the drawings] on wood, the whole of the designs, except one, which embellish the Chase [...] In executing the Engravings, his Brother, Mr Thomas Bewick, has bestowed every possible care; and the beautiful effect produced from their joint labours will, it is presumed fully meet the approbation of the Subscribers.

(It is interesting to notice Bulmer does not use the word ‘illustrate’ or ‘illustration’, words not found in print before about 1800.)

Bewick did much of the engraving for the *History of Birds* at home in the evenings because there was so much other work to do in the workshop. He surely had strong proprietary feelings about the *Birds*, so Beilby’s efforts to get his name on the title page were resisted stoutly. Since Beilby felt equally strongly that Bewick’s insistence was a humiliating brush-off, he suggested that they should dissolve the partnership. Bewick was glad to do this and Tattersfield hints that Bewick may have intended to precipitate this outcome by his intransigence. When completing the yearly account book on 31 December 1797, Bewick wrote a simple epitaph: ‘Finis to Beilby & Bewick’s Partnership.’ Tattersfield does not try to conceal those features of Bewick’s personality that made him an awkward, indeed truculent character, with a solid sense of what was owed to him. He had even fallen out with his old friend Bulmer over the price he charged for the blocks for *Poems by Goldsmith and Parnell* – as mentioned above, the London trade generally charged only half of what Bewick demanded. Bulmer, one of the most important fine printers in England, who clearly appreciated Bewick’s skills, only once again asked him for any blocks. Tattersfield goes on to cite another case showing the master’s attitude: the copper-engraved title-page to Richard Wallis’ *Happy Village* of 1802 is signed ‘Tho^o Bewick Sculp’, though it was actually cut by Robert Nicholson, brother of William Nicholson, the portrait painter. Nicholson was paid 14 shillings; Bewick’s charge to Wallis was £3 13s. 6d. Everything that was produced by the workshop was nominally produced by Thomas Bewick. He had allocated the work, instructed and advised the engraver, inspected the work produced (in modern parlance, ‘quality-assured’ the work) before allowing it to bear his name...

Tattersfield deals also with the protracted dispute with Sarah Hodgson, the widow of Solomon. She was a doughty personality, with printer’s ink running in her family veins. She had inherited Solomon’s share in the *Quadrupeds*, this meaning that she could and did claim one third of the proceeds of any reprinted editions. She was an adventurous and entrepreneurial force in the trade of the time. The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle has in its collection a bible entirely printed in Arabic in 1808 – a particularly beautiful piece of printing, with Sarah Hodgson credited on the title page and at the end as the printer. Such an achievement shows a publisher of ambition. (Your reviewer would like to find out where she acquired the fonts for this job, as well as who could have set the type.) Beilby still had his own third share unaffected by the dissolution of the partnership; not having much stomach for a fight that he foresaw would run and run, he sold his share to Bewick for £95. The case went to litigation, expensive of course for both parties. Sarah sold her share to the London publisher Longmans for £30 – determined to frustrate Bewick. It seems that Bewick had met his match in intransigence.



By 1805 the number of wood engravers in Newcastle had grown considerably. Apprentices out of their indentured time could and did set up on their own, some of them working part-time for the Bewick workshop as journeymen. It was lucky for all concerned that Newcastle was throbbing with industrial and commercial undertakings. The burgeoning wealth of the region was generated by ‘steam engine manufacturers, boiler-makers, chemical works proprietors, by those at the forefront of the financial revolution such as banks and insurance companies, and by manufacturers and suppliers of products catering to the newly emergent consumer demand for luxury commodities such as tea, coffee, spirits and soda water.’ The second volume of *Birds* had appeared in 1804, to universal acclaim. The *British Critic* remarked on ‘the very ingenious devices, which are frequently made the subjects of vignettes or tail-pieces: subjects of common and familiar life, such have not been touched by other artists, but full of characteristic truth, and frequently of original humour.’

Tattersfield remarks that ‘To all intents and purposes, the publication of the second volume of the *History of British Birds* signaled the end of Bewick’s career as an artist-engraver.’ This bold statement can be justified in the context of the era of change that came over the workshop in the years following the publication. Several apprentices completed the terms of their indentures, while new apprentices were taken on. The most important ‘newcomer’ was his own son Robert on 26 May 1804 proudly entered in the Cashbook: ‘My Boy bound this day – Indenture 15s.’ We remember that their work had to cover the full range of all the workshop activities. It was to turn out that Robert preferred copper to wood. And then, after getting notice to quit his rented house where he had lived for thirty years, Bewick had also to face all the problems of moving house. Most of all, however, was a serious illness striking him in April of 1812 putting him out of action for many months. The details of his symptoms and the nursing by his wife and daughters are recounted with a sympathetic understanding of the medical knowledge of the time; the notes make clear that Tattersfield has consulted current medical opinion to establish that acute pneumonia and ensuing pleurisy were the basic conditions, with an empyema, or gathering of pus in the pleural cavity, which had to discharge through the chest wall. It was not until the end of 1814 that he was able to put in a full day at the workshop. He must have had the constitution of an ox to recover without the help of modern medicine, though obviously the women of his household were the mainstay of his recovery.

The accepted view of how the *The Fables of Aesop* got under way is that while convalescing, Bewick turned his mind to a longstanding ambition of his, to bring out his own version of the *Fables*. Tattersfield’s close reading of the workshop records shows that from May 1811 – a year before the illness struck – the workshop was engaged in cutting blocks for the projected publication. One of the new apprentices in particular, William Harvey, was to play a significant rôle in this. Tattersfield thinks that Bewick’s powers of invention were flagging and he makes some telling points about the problems of the subject matter in relation to his well-known strengths:

Fables are an artificial world, circumscribed by precedent and convention. Whereas he had brought great gusts of fresh air to the delineation of the natural world, liberating animals and birds from the

visual stereotypes of the past and portraying the countryside and its inhabitants in all their authentic heterogeneity, he found himself unable (or unwilling) to break the fable mould even to the extent of dispensing with the customary graphic oval-within-spandrel presentation.

The headpiece blocks were monitored and sometimes finished by Bewick and he was still inventing vignettes, though it is interesting that a noticeable number of these fall back on the iconic device of a stone or slab with a carved message on it, at times quite a long one, usually expressing a moral sentiment, or even the hint of a jaundiced view of human nature. However, the reception given to the first edition of *Aesop* in 1818 was disappointing, in Bewick's view mainly because the printers had not done justice to the engravings. A second printing in 1823 was a clear improvement, but Tattersfield tells us that over forty per cent of the copies failed to sell and were remaindered in 1844 to a London bookseller, Henry Bohn, for the trifling sum of £120.

Tattersfield deals summarily with the claims that Bewick was 'a radical' by emphasising some of the things he did not deal with in his depictions:

No vignette of Bewick's, although many pointed the way to the gibbet for the marginalised and criminalised poor, ever pointed the moral at enclosure-rich landowners or at opulent coal owners whose refusal to put safety before profits cost many a pitman dear. No vignette ever ventured beyond the mildest social criticism of Bewick's 'betters', and even then cloaked it in coded and veiled references.

He was obviously aware that the sort of people who bought his work were not themselves radical in their political attitudes. The fact that Bewick never had the vote himself, nor Beilby either (though his son Robert did in 1837), comes as something of a surprise. It means that his politics had nowhere to go. In between 1819 (the year of 'Peterloo') and 1821 there had been one hundred and twenty prosecutions launched on charges of seditious and blasphemous libel. This was enough to make sensible men hold their tongues – Tattersfield's telling of the story of Bewick's friend and admirer John Ambrose Williams, the editor of the *Durham Chronicle*, shows how such prosecutions had a deterrent effect. Williams was found not guilty of two of the charges, but guilty of the third – though never sentenced. Bewick was struck by 'this wicked persecution' and it certainly seems a frightening story to the modern reader. In fact Bewick's death in 1828 happened at the cusp of some fundamental changes in the constitution – the repeal of the Test Act, which removed the disadvantages of not being an Anglican for Jews, Roman Catholics and Non-conformists, the great Reform Act of 1832 which would have given him the vote had he still lived, the Factory Act of 1833 – all these are put in context by Tattersfield, giving further depth to the account.

Rather more unexpected were the religious and philosophical views expressed by Bewick in the *Memoir*. Although written in the early 1820s it was not in fact published until 1862 because Jane Bewick wanted to protect the reputation of her father. This led her to edit the text, ruthlessly removing mention of almost all the apprentices, many of his friends, and toning down severely the social and political commentary. But she left in the 'philosophical' speculation showing Bewick's way of looking at the world, which was remarkably advanced for his times. Tattersfield makes some enlightening points about the contemporary intellectual atmosphere of Newcastle:

There the nexus between geology and mining was central to the local economy and provided much of the discussion, which so animated the town's Literary and Philosophical Society... (of which Beilby had been a founder member and Bewick a member since 1799)... On his home ground, Bewick was unexceptional in many of his evolutionary beliefs.

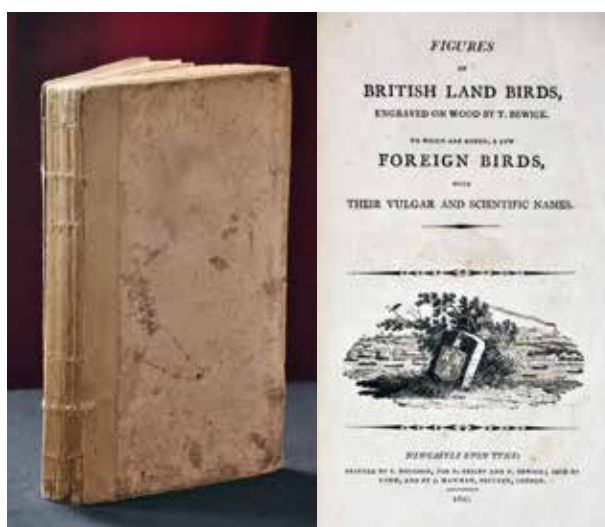
In this capital of Coal there was an appreciation of geology that would have made the biblical account of the age of the earth seem ridiculous. Tattersfield's treatment of Bewick's religious philosophy sent your reviewer back to the full text version of the *Memoir* (restored with minute attention to the original manuscript and published by Iain Bain in 1975) to be struck all over again by the astonishing imagination and advanced thinking there displayed – and the limitations of Jane Bewick. Tattersfield's view of Jane in this matter is clear and just:

Beyond censoring her father's troublesome political and religious philosophizing lay a hidden agenda: to present her father to mid-Victorian England as a natural self-taught artist rather than as the jobbing tradesman-engraver he actually was.

But we should still see that it was the sisters' jealous guardianship of the workshop papers which has ensured the survival of the archives used for these three books.



We have not time or space here to consider the very enlightening second part of the first volume, that devoted to the apprentices, all thirty-one of them. Suffice it to say that much of it was new information to your reviewer, and it is a fitting way to round off the subject of the workshop production. Reading Tattersfield's *magnum opus* over the past months has been both a deep delight and a wide education to this reader. But we cannot forbear to mention also the beautiful and inspiring typographic design and layout of Iain Bain, the President of our Society, whose initials appear at the bottom of the reverse of the title page, with the modest 'IB Typ' that is his professional signature, with an acknowledgement to the font used, named after the William Bulmer who has figured in the story several times. This, too, was a *big work*.



The *Figures of British Land Birds*, 1800, in the original publisher's boards (as discussed on page 2). All the vignettes used in this edition of *Cherryburn Times* have been taken from this copy.

Obituary

ALEX FOTHERINGHAM

(born 22 May 1940, died 13-14 June 2012)



Pumpkin helping Alex to compile a recent *catalogue*.

Tall, pony-tailed and gregarious, Alex came as a surprise to many people who dared penetrate the distinguished portals of Marlborough Rare Books in the late seventies and eighties. For whatever the depth of your purse, here was a Bond Street antiquarian bookseller who made you feel welcome and who put you at ease amidst the serried ranks of polished folios. A bookman through and through, he was equally at home discussing the finer points of early editions of St Thomas a Kempis, the graphic achievements of his fellow countryman Thomas Bewick, or the merits of some choice little Italian restaurant he had discovered just around the corner.

Bond Street was not a world into which Alex had been born. He originated from Earsdon on the outskirts of Newcastle upon Tyne, won a place at Newcastle's Royal Grammar School (where David Steedman, a fellow pupil, though some years younger, remembers him as an excellent athlete), and then proceeded to King's College, Cambridge where he read English. On graduating, he took employment initially as a teacher in the south of England. One of those he taught in the mid-sixties at King's School, Bruton, in Somerset, was Mike Crump, perhaps best known to the fraternity of book-lovers for heading up the ESTC project at the British Library. He recalls Alex having a greater measure of success coaching the cross-country running team (of which Mike was captain) than in instilling a love of Dryden. Following a few more teaching appointments, the world of bookselling beckoned and Alex joined Marlborough.

After some twenty-five years or so, when the old order at Marlborough changed, Alex made a break for the border, abandoning the throng of fashionable Bond Street and the suburban streets of Dollis Hill and returning to his old Northumbrian haunts. Here home was in a comfortable stone-built cottage in the isolated hamlet of West Woodburn on the borders of Kielder National Park.

It quickly became evident that this return to his roots did not signal Alex's retirement. From his chosen fastness, he could survey the riches offered by the auction houses of Edinburgh, Newcastle, Carlisle and Alnwick to say nothing of the stock on the shelves and in the back rooms of local antiquarian booksellers, all of which he vigorously pursued. His catalogues, broad in scope, measured in tone, and assiduously detailed, continued unabated.

In recent years he was perfectly placed to benefit from the dispersion of the enormous aggregation of eighteenth and early nineteenth century documents, relating principally to the north-east, which came onto the open market from an old-established attorney's office in Alnwick. Here was a wealth of printed and manuscript material – estate maps, ledgers, wills, correspondence, invoices, bills, judgements, proceedings – the like of which has not been seen for many, many years. Alex immediately recognized the value, social, economic, historical and political, of such a resource and, though bemoaning the fact that the whole collection had not been deposited in its entirety in a local record office, proceeded to make hay while the sun shone. Here Alex truly came into his own, combining an intense interest in and enthusiasm for his natale solum with an appreciative eye for the historical and commercial value of the riches on offer, amply reflected in his catalogue entries and in the typically idiosyncratic mix which he displayed at book fairs.

Those who visited his stand at the Novotel PBFA fair at the end of May this year would have found Alex in fine fettle. His untimely death, a little over a fortnight later, has come as a most unsettling shock.

Nigel Tattersfield



This vignette shows Cherryburn in the background, with pall bearers carrying the coffin down to the ferryman who is waiting to take the coffin over the Tyne to Ovingham churchyard. Jane Bewick thought that this was the last block that Bewick worked on before he died. It was first published in the *Memoir*, 1862.

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).

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