

Thomas Hutchinson Reconsidered

Back in the March 2003 issue of *Endpapers* I wrote an essay called “Deliberations on a Letter” which not only dealt with a letter from Lionel Johnson which appeared tipped into a copy of his *Poems* (1895) but also helped to unravel who was the recipient and owner of the book. The forepart of the 2 ½ page letter rails against “a ruffian in America... the rascal” who printed Robert Bridge’s *Growth of Love* and included Johnson’s essay on Bridges taken from the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* of October 1891. That essay also dealt with the owner of that book and letter, Thomas Hutchinson, whose peculiar hand-drawn mark of ownership (a hand-printed and box-framed ownership mark serving as a bookplate with his name and acquisition or shelf number) was accompanied by newspaper and magazine clippings, photographs, and the tipped in letter from the author. Who was this Thomas Hutchinson?

My research guided me toward contacts in England and to the West Coast, in Berkeley, CA after being referred to an authority on minor Victorian poets, authors and other Victorian figures in the British literary world. Hutchinson was a collector from Morpeth, England, a minor versifier who penned a few late 1890s books of poetry, and apparently the editor of numerous works on British authors including Wordsworth, Coleridge, Browning, Shelley, Lamb, and Burns. All one and the same man. Mystery closed, or so I thought.

Advance forward to October 1, 2010. In my mailbox I found an unexpected large brown envelope from England. Upon opening there was a two-page letter dated 13 September 2010 beginning with:

My attention has been drawn, rather belatedly I’m afraid, to your ‘Deliberations on a Letter’ which appeared on the Internet some time ago, and particularly to the references to Thomas Hutchinson. He was my Grandfather and lived in Northumberland all his life. He was not however the Thomas Hutchinson who edited ‘The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth’, or Shelley.

When I get deeply involved in something my peripheral vision melts away into strict tunnel vision. “This is going to be interesting,” I said to myself as my eyes were riveted to the page. Now with the author’s permission, I am quoting a major portion of the rest of this letter, not because I could not paraphrase or reformulate the content, but because I think the content is well laid out and entertaining, particularly insightful, and because I wish the reader of this essay to see what I saw before me that first day in October. (N.B.: I have exercised minor editorial privilege in making small changes for readability) And so the letter continued:

I have been in touch with the Archivist at the Oxford University Press, who cannot give much information about the editor, but in two letters he was referred to as a Master of Arts, and there was a suggestion that he might be a graduate of Oxford. My Grandfather did not attend university, he was a graduate of a teacher training college in Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1877, aged 21, and immediately began teaching in a junior school in Pegswood, near Morpeth, Northumberland. Within two years he was appointed Headmaster and remained there until he retired in 1920, and died in 1938.

The OUP letters were a request from Oscar Birley in 1961, for information about the other TH, as he was engaged in historical research, but they were unable to give any as 'our files were subject to a ruthless filleting process after the war'. Whether Birley produced a book about him I don't know.

Grandfather was however a poet and published, at his own expense and in small numbers, the books to which you refer, *Fireside Flittings, Jolts and Jingles, Ballads of a Bookworm* and also *An Essay on the Life and Genius of Robert Burns*. These are the ones of which I have copies. There is also a mention in *Jolts and Jingles of A Dream of Shelley, and other Poems* "in preparation", but I don't think this, nor any other books were published. He did however continue to write. He became a notable literary figure in Northumberland and wrote for the local newspaper, *The Morpeth Herald*, and I have copies of poems which they printed in 1923 dedicated to the Morpeth Cricket Club.

He was also a book collector and sold two libraries, one at Sotheby's, and the second in 1921 at Newcastle-on-Tyne. This catalogue had 978 lots, most of which were of several volumes, and lot 306 has Johnson (Lionel), *Poems*, 8vo, boards (1895) along with 13 others which could well be the copy you have. My Grandmother was probably the instigator of this sale as they moved on his retirement!

His correspondence with many literary figures of the day was well known locally and, as you say, he was prone to adding their replies along with newspaper cuttings, photographs, notes and also a plain and rather ugly bookplate inside the covers of their books. [Ed. Note: some of his books carry a 2 3/4" x 2 1/4" printed bookplate with his name and catalogue number, but others carry only Hutchinson's hand-drawn ownership mark & number]

The Johnson letter which you have was obviously from my Grandfather's collection but was probably written before the *Works of Wordsworth* was published. I wonder if Johnson was also confused between the two? I can sympathize with him though for I believe that, to establish copyright, Arnold Bennet, of whom I am a Society member, also published in America before, or at the same time, as he was published in England, having been 'pirated' with his first book. I hope it wasn't Mosher! [Editor's note: It wasn't, and this procedure shows just how easily any English author could protect his work in America—a step which many an author or his publisher disregarded]

Grandfather was known to the other TH, as there is an anecdote in the family that a reply from Robert Louis Stevenson addressed to "Thomas Hutchinson, England" first went to the other TH who passed it on.

Accompanying this letter was a photocopy of Thomas Hutchinson's (hereafter TH) early February obituary, probably from the *Newcastle Journal*. Some of the more salient portions of the obituary note that TH was Headmaster of the Pegswood School for 42 years and retired in 1921 (his grandson indicated 1920). He "had a remarkable library, indeed so great was his collection of books, that when on his retirement from his school they were sold, the sale occupied three days." He was a member of the "Morpeth and District Burns Club" and drew upon Alfred Austin and Andrew Lang for his own inspiration in writing pre-eminently Victorian verse.

On Oct. 27th I again received a letter with an accompanying photocopy of TH's book sale. The auctioneers were Anderson & Garland (sale catalogue No. 1342) handling the "Valuable Library which will be sold by auction at the New Market Street Auction Rooms, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne" on June 7-9, 1921. As indicated, there were 978 lots, but most of the lots were comprised of multiple volumes. A disclaimer printed on p. [3] of said catalogue indicates there are notes, inserted portraits, etc. to be found in many of the books. Also accompanying his letter were two photographs of TH, one taken around the time he was publishing his books, and the other around 1918.

In this letter it was noted that about 1,500 of TH's books are now at the Stockton-on-Tees Museum, although most of these are associated with his work as a Headmaster. He also confirmed that there was a Sotheby's sale of February 23-25 in 1905 in which "more than 450 of his books were sold." That's sixteen years before the final sale of 1921. I haven't found a copy of that Sotheby's sale, but anyone wishing to search for it now knows that it did take place.

Again on December 7th another letter arrived dated Nov. 28. Most of this letter was in reaction to my latest email sent to Norman after which he usually--except for one instance--replied by snail mail. Good thing that snail mail because I usually received some interesting photocopies of material. In this last letter I found enclosed a photocopy of some material relating to Thomas Hutchinson's charming book, *Fireside Flittings: A Book of Homely Essays* (London: Stanesby & Co.; and Derby and Nottingham: Frank Murray, 1890). My own copy is No. 7 of 60 copies, but the photocopy from Norman's copy indicates that there were 145 small



Hutchinson, 1918

paper copies, 60 copies on large paper, 2 copies on printed on Japanese vellum, and “one pure vellum” all “for Subscribers only.” In addition there were photocopies of three printed inserts Hutchinson placed with some copies: a “Ballade of a Poor Book-Lover,” “Ballade of a Bachelor,” and “My Books: An Epistolary Fragment.” In an accompanying note Norman noted “Although I know you are ‘A man who on the bindings prate’, I hope also that ‘The books you buy you like to read’. Blame Grandad for prate, poetic license!” Indeed, Grandfather wrote in his “Ballade of a Poor Book-Lover” that

Their books tho’ tool’d in style ornate,
Oft worms upon the content feed
Whilst some men of the bindings prate—
The books I buy I like to read...

I stand somewhat suspect in this regard, but truth be told, I actually do read from the contents of many of those bindings on Mosher books which I’ve collected over the years. I must also add for poor ol’ Grandad’s sake that worms take no heed as to whether in ornate tooled cover or simple plain wrapper, they indiscriminately love to nibble inside and out.

In another loose insert entitled “My Books: An Epistolary Fragment” we again encounter the impecunious theme that pops up repeatedly. “To rehearse e’en in doggerel what chiefly I prize / Tho’ few volumes are mine a rich connoisseur buys.” Thomas Hutchinson might not have been able to afford his books in fine bindings given his headmaster’s salary, but he certainly turned his ravenous biblio-appetite to those first editions and other imprints he could “purchase for less than a crown” to help satisfy his catholic interests. Of these he did indeed read, and drew inspiration enough to write and revel in the written word, and to add clippings, photos, and letters of response from their authors.

Yet another but more lengthy photocopy of a Thomas Hutchinson obituary appeared in the Morpeth *Herald & Reporter* of February 4, 1938, but it adds little to the TH story other than information on his retirement, those attending the funeral, and “An Appreciation” written by one J.B. who was most likely Mr. J. Barrow, a headmaster in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea who attended the funeral. Laudatory praise for Hutchinson emanates from his positive influence on the “hundreds of scholars [who] passed through the school during Mr. Hutchinson’s time...” but little is added about his writing, book collecting, and correspondence with authors.

So some of the information I previously supplied on TH back in 2003 necessarily has to be corrected by what has been pointed out by his

grandson. Most important is the fact the there are two Thomas Hutchinsons, one the subject of this essay, and the other differently educated and editor of numerous volumes of English authors' works. Both TH and his family were aware of this distinction, although authors like Lionel Johnson and others often got them confused—or rather because they didn't know there were two. Another rectification is that our TH died in 1938 and not 1919 as I had erroneously stated in 2003. To the plus side, we have more information on some of TH's books, for example the limitation size of *Fireside Flittings* (1890), and lastly, TH's grandson's fond desire to make his grandfather's accomplishments more widely known has hopefully been advanced. I also trust that the several institutions who have TH books in their special collections will benefit by knowing more about what at one time seemed to be a mysterious bookplate or hand-drawn ownership mark in certain books which were also crammed full with letters, photos, manuscript poems, and news clippings. Indeed, TH was a different sort of collector privately reveling in his literary times, corresponding with his literary contemporaries, actively creating his own association copies, assembling his library, and recording his own poetic thoughts all the while accomplishing a life-time of devoted educational service. For these things we are certainly beholden to TH, and our own book collecting or institutional holdings are obliged beneficiaries of his one-time activities there in distant Morpeth of Northumberland. I know I am singularly indebted to him for that letter from Lionel Johnson, and to his grandson for helping to make his story a bit clearer.

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15 January 2011

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