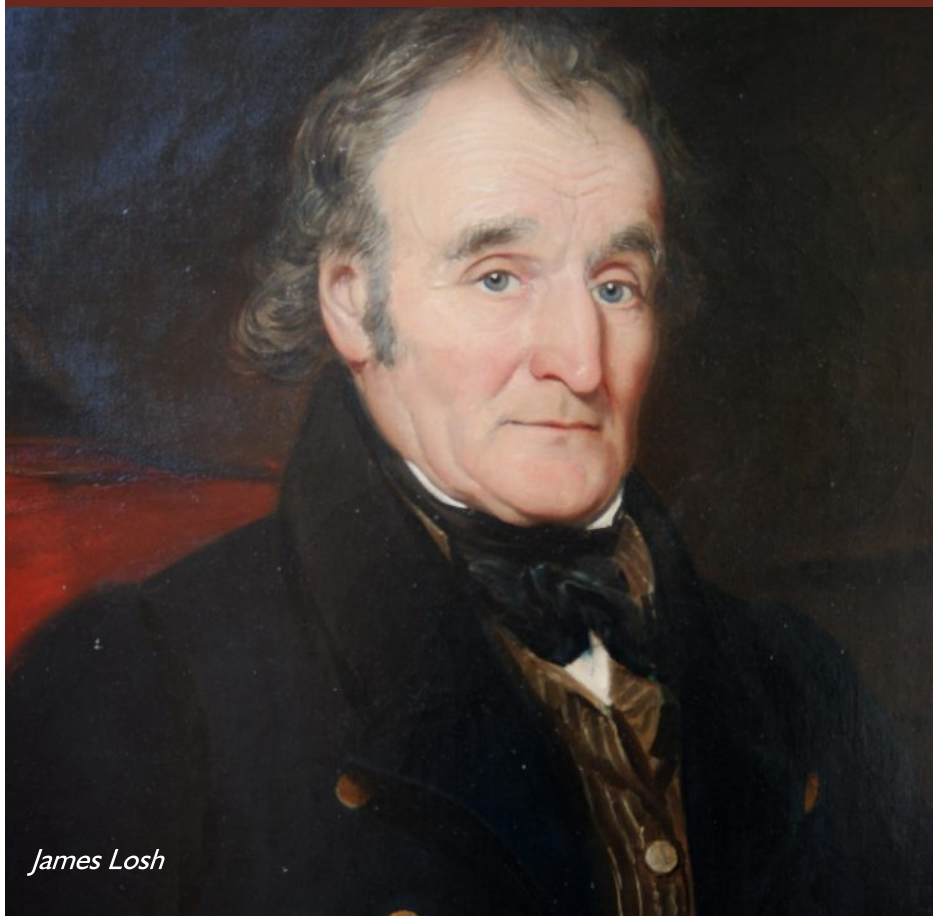


PINE CONE



The Newsletter of The Friends of St Mary's Church, Wreay
Issue No21 October 2020



James Losh

James Losh and the Abolition of Slavery
Sarah Portrait Mystery Solved?
Katharine Statue Restored

DEAR FRIENDS,



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I suspect that television watching went up considerably during lockdown this year as we were unable to pursue our lives as normal. I don't know about you but I enjoy the BBC programme *Fake or Fortune* with Fiona Bruce and art expert Philip Mould investigating mysteries behind paintings. Well in this edition of Pinecone I can report on a bit of investigating to see if it was possible to come up with the name of the artist behind the Sarah portrait. I suspect that Philip Mould might consider the conclusions to be light on provenance but I think that it's an interesting theory.

Another presenter I particularly admire is David Olusoga. His series *A House through Time* demonstrates how to go about historical research in a wonderfully rigorous but compassionate way. The same is true with his series *Black and British: A Forgotten History* which explored how the curse of the slave trade was at the very basis of our country's wealth in the 18th and early 19th centuries. That led me to wondering to what extent the Losh family were involved in the pro or anti slavery lobbies. The speech by James Losh reprinted here will leave you in no doubt.

The Repair Shop is another of my favourites where expert craftsmen pool their talents and resources to restore heirlooms and treasured antiques. David Dunbar's statue of Katharine Losh in the Mausoleum has been undergoing a similar transformation with the disfiguring algae growth being carefully removed by expert conservators. The results can be seen in this Pinecone.

It was with sadness that we had to cancel the Friends Open Day this year but clearly we had no option with the restrictions during the pandemic. Hopefully by September 2021 things will be back to normal and perhaps we will then be able to celebrate education in Wreay through the ages.

Raymond Whittaker

PORTRAIT MYSTERY SOLVED?



In the previous Pinecone I put out a plea for help in tracking down the artist who painted the portrait of Sarah Spencer Losh that hangs at the back of St Mary's. The recent cleaning of the painting has meant that the artist's signature is more legible and I believed it to be Linssset or Linsser but couldn't find any reference to an artist of that name. Geoff Gray was more successful in his internet searching coming up with a Dutch artist called Linssen - was that elusive last letter not a t or r but an n?

Frans Hendrik Linssen, 'Henri', was born in 1805 in the town of Roermond in the south east of the Netherlands. He was a student at the Royal Academy of Art in Antwerp from 1824 to 1828 before moving to Paris in 1830 where he studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He lived in Paris throughout the 30's exhibiting regularly at the Paris Salon. In 1843 Linssen was appointed director of the City Drawing School back in his home town. He retired in 1861 and continued living in Roermond until his death 8 years later. Was this the artist of our portrait? Is it not a little far fetched that the creator of the portrait of the Cumberland born Sarah Spencer Losh was a Dutch artist?

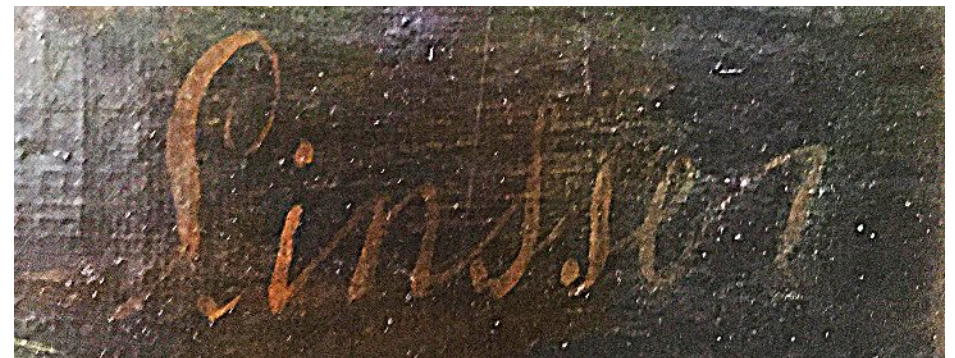
It is likely that the portrait was painted on the occasion of Sarah's wedding in 1830 which took place in Paris where the family had lived for some time. She married her cousin, William Septimus Losh, who was a student in Paris at the time, indeed at the very time that Henri Linssen was studying at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Henri and Sarah were both 25 in 1830, William was 20. Is it possible that they knew each other and that the Loshs commissioned Henri Linssen, then a young up and coming painter, to mark their wedding?

The internet revealed that a number of portraits by Henri Linssen are held at the Stedelijk Museum in Roermond and so the next step was to email them attaching a picture of our portrait and a close up of the signature asking them to compare it with the signature on the portraits in their collection. I received a response from a curator, Annemieke Broeke. She reported that only one of the portraits had a signature - 'Portrait of an Unknown Man' painted in 1832. The attached photograph showed a close up of a signature not dissimilar to that on



Signature on Portrait of an Unknown Man

Sarah's portrait. Yes there were differences - the first s was written in the flowing form of an f which was common at the time, the final n was distinctly an n. But both signatures are written in cursive style (a style that was still being taught when I first attended Carlisle Grammar School!) with looping L and s and flowing connections between letters. Whilst trying to stay objective and rational, my gut feeling is that these two signatures are by the same hand and Annemieke agrees with me!



Signature on the St Mary portrait

Looking at the 'Portrait of an Unknown Man' my eye was drawn to the landscape to the right of the sitter, a Romantic landscape of hills, trees and a lake or river not dissimilar to the landscape in our Sarah portrait. This is a landscape that is familiar to us here on the edge of the Lake District but a landscape that would be rather foreign to an artist who had been brought up in the Low Country. This leads me to a further speculative leap. Is the 'Unknown Man' actually William Septimus Losh? Has Linssen set him in his home landscape? Does the fact that he is holding a book imply that he is a student? This may be a leap too far but is an interesting theory. As far as I am aware there are no other portraits of William to compare the likeness.



*Portrait of an
Unknown Man
Henri Linssen 1832
Stedelijk Museum,
Roermond*

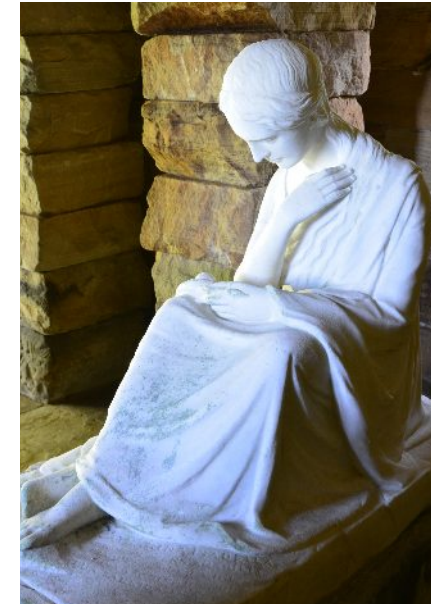
I doubt whether we can ever be conclusive about the artist behind our portrait but there are many happy coincidences which build up to a fascinating, if speculative, conclusion. Henri Linssen and William Septimus Losh, students abroad in the frenzy of 1830s revolutionary Paris. William swept away by his older cousin, Sarah Spencer, aged 25, the same as Henri. The Loshs, celebrating their marriage and wanting to mark the occasion but being careful with their limited resources, approach Henri, a fledgling artist eager for commissions and affordable. Henri paints his friends being careful to set them in the landscape of their homeland. A Romantic and romantic scenario.

Raymond Whittaker

CONSERVATION OF THE MAUSOLEUM SCULPTURES



Statue of Katharine Losh before



and after conservation work.

Conservation and restoration work on the David Dunbar sculptures in the Mausoleum was carried out during September by Graciella Ainsworth and Will Collier of Graciella Ainsworth Sculpture Conservation Ltd from Edinburgh. The marble has visibly deteriorated in the past within the damp environment and the surface is now granular which has encouraged organic growth.

The sculpture of Katharine Losh was cleaned with water and a biocide solution followed by the use of a conservation-grade steam cleaner. Whilst the majority of the grime and organic growth was removed some remains ingrained beneath the weathered marble surface. A final application of biocide will lessen growth in the short term. The old repair to her nose was removed and remodelled with Paraloid B72 mixed with fine marble dust to match.

The three marble relief portraits were treated with Arbocel paper pulp and cotton wool poultices to reduce the ferrous staining from previous corroded iron fixings. Small repairs were carried out to the nose and chin of Isabella and the neck area of John.

The work has left the statue and reliefs in a much better state though it is noted that continued conservation work will be required with an annual biocide treatment. The cost of this specialised work has been covered by the Friends.



Conservation work in progress



Before



and after nose repair work



Isabella



John



George

Low relief portraits after conservation

JAMES LOSH & THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY by Raymond Whittaker

"They'll be pulling the church down next!"

It was mid June this year and a neighbour had stopped his car to share with me his views of Black Lives Matter activists toppling monuments to those who had made their fortunes from slavery in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It was true that, if every statue, every building and every structure that had been built from the riches of slavery were to be pulled down then our Georgian cities - Bath, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle and, closer to home, Whitehaven - would have the appearance of teeth eroded by too much consumption of sugar. Would that include our St Mary's Church? Were not the Losh family on the side of right? Not thinking quickly on my feet I did not put up a defence but vowed to investigate further.

First port of call was the online catalogue of *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* being collated by University College, London to name and so shame those who had been involved with and profited from the horrors of slavery within the British Empire. Two Losh came up: Hannah Hall Losh and John Losh. John Losh! Surely not the father of Sarah? With some relief I read that he was a resident merchant of Port of Spain many miles away from rural Woodside. There was James Lowther, 1st Earl of Lonsdale, and arch political opponent of the Losh family, who had inherited plantations in Barbados from his father, Robert and owned the colonial trading port of Whitehaven. But there was no record of a Cumbrian Losh having any interests in colonial slavery.

Quite the opposite. James Losh, second son of John Losh of Woodside, uncle to Sarah Losh, was a key player in the abolition of slavery between 1810 till his death in 1833.

The short coalition parliament of 1806-7 had passed the bill abolishing the slave trade in the British Empire but with so much of society relying upon income from colonial plantations there was still a long fight for the abolitionists. In Newcastle non-conformism was prevalent with a strong community of Methodists, Unitarians and Quakers. It was from their ranks that the abolitionists' cause grew. The Literary and Philosophical Society, where the educated middle class met, formed a focus for their campaigns. The Unitarian and radical lawyer James Losh was active in Newcastle society, where the family's industrial interests were founded, and became vice-president of the Lit & Phil in 1802.

On 29th January 1833 James was introduced to William Knibb, by the Quaker William Beaumont. The Baptist missionary, Knibb, was visiting the area to

recount his personal experience of the bloody Jamaican Rebellion of 1831. Knibb invited Losh to address a public meeting for the abolition of slavery in the British colonies the following day at the Brunswick Place Chapel in Newcastle with John Brandling, Major of Newcastle, presiding. The speech was published in 1833 and what follows are extracts that illustrate his passion for the cause.



Brunswick Place Methodist Chapel, built 1820



William Knibb

“The object of our present meeting, Sir, is one of the greatest importance that the human mind can conceive. It is a question which has agitated this country and the world for a great number of years, and it is of no less consequence, than whether our fellow-creatures shall be raised to the rank of men; or whether they shall remain, as they are now, the instruments - the property of certain persons, who claim a right of property in that of which no human being has a right to be possessed (*applause*). The motives from which those individuals who are friendly to negro emancipation have acted, have been treated in a manner which, though I will not say I feel indignant at, yet, I cannot but designate as extremely unfair and improper. It has been boldly asserted that we proceed upon wild and fanciful theories; that we have no object in view but to make ourselves conspicuous, and increase our small importance; and that we are willing to assume a character for being friendly to benevolent objects at the expense of others. Now, Sir, there is not one syllable of truth in all this. The question has been agitated in parliament for a number of years. The most distinguished statesmen have held the same opinions upon it which we venture to express; and the completion of a measure of emancipation has only been retarded through interested motives and objections, which originated in the selfish passions, and not in the minds, of their projectors. Pitt, Fox, Paley, and many others, the most distinguished ornaments of their time, have strongly and eloquently deprecated the abominable abuse of slavery; and I will ask, who are we (for I venture to class myself with the highest of these great men in my desire to extirpate this evil) that our characters are to be maligned after this fashion? Look at our private and at our public characters, and weigh

them with those of our opponents, and I will at the least venture to say that we shall not lose in the balance.

But let us consider what slavery is in itself. Has there ever been a period when slavery was not the curse and ruin of everything that is good? I recollect saying once, and I now repeat it, that slavery is doubly cursed - it curseth alike the owners and the slaves themselves. The very nature of the relative positions which they hold with respect to each other, proves that nothing good can arise out of the degrading intercourse. The slave must detest his master. It is not in human nature to submit patiently to oppression: and I hope my countrymen will ever have the spirit to resist oppression and tyranny (*loud applause*). The condition of the slave is calculated to rouse in his breast a deep feeling of indignation against the person who owns him, and calls himself his master. We are told by the planters themselves that the slave is a creature actuated by hatred, cunning, and every species of deceit. And what else can be expected from him?

Such is the slave: and what is his master? He knows that he is holding a fellow-creature in bondage which he has no right to do, and for which he is necessitated to adopt measures repugnant to every well-regulated mind. This gives him, also, an opportunity of gratifying every species of licentiousness - a temptation which human nature is not likely always to resist. I do not mean to attack the characters of the holders of estates in the West Indies. I personally know a great number of them, every one of whom I do not hesitate to describe as honest and honourable men. But they are deceived. They are prejudiced upon the subject. They have been brought up from their youth in the notions they entertain of slavery, and we all know how difficult it is to cure first impressions. Many of them live in this country, and know comparatively little of what is going on in the colonies. They derive their information from interested and consequently partial sources; and hence they are led to draw conclusions contrary to facts. But be that as it may, it is nothing to us. Our duty is to set the slave free (*loud applause*); to follow up, and not to desert, those principles which, as Christians, we are bound to pursue. Wherever the Christian religion has spread, slavery has gradually disappeared. It is the very nature of that sacred dispensation to remove those three great prominent evils which have ever in their progress involved the ruin of mankind - I mean, in the first place, War, which is contrary to all the principles of Christianity, and which has been kept up in a great measure by slavery; secondly, it is calculated to destroy Slavery itself, which is the root and cause of most of the mischief and misery in the world; and, thirdly, to frustrate the degradation of woman, and raise the female sex, for all good purposes, to an equality with the other.

Yes, it is said, all this is very good; but how is the extinction of slavery to be beneficially accomplished? I answer, by immediate emancipation only

(loud applause). Though attended by precautionary measures, the change I seek for may justly be called immediate. For what have we been about during the last 40 or 50 years? The question has been brought forward a hundred times in parliament, and the attention of the British public has for many years been directed to it. I should be the last person on this or any other occasion to advocate the adoption of a measure from which danger and confusion might ensue, with certain injury to the very individuals on whose account that measure was to be taken. But I am certain that no danger can arise from immediate abolition, if it be properly conducted.

But we are told that this would be the direct infringement upon private property. I think otherwise. I believe that every acquisition of moral and religious feeling by the great body of the slaves, must be for the advantage of the planters themselves. I do not mean to say, that there will be no cases in which loss has been sustained by the masters, and in which some compensation may be fairly given; and whenever such cases occur, of sacrifices having been made in carrying manumission into effect, I trust the public will be prepared to make up the loss; But it is for the sufferers from the measure, if there be any, to prove this. We must assume, prima facie, that the slaves are free: if any injury accrue in consequence, it is for the injured party to prove it, and then we will talk of compensation. Such is my view of the case; and I ought to add, as my firm conviction prompts me to do, that the slaves employed in rearing cotton and sugar cost their masters, in point of fact, more money than free labour would do.

Sir, I must beg pardon for having trespassed so long upon your attention. I meant merely to state broadly the outlines of this great and important question: its details will be filled up by other gentlemen much better than I can pretend to do. All I wish is, that we should support government steadily and firmly, in calling upon them, in the name of the nation, to propose the immediate emancipation of all the slaves in the British colonies, that is, without ceasing, without stopping. It would be to wrong the public characters of the great men who form the present administration, to doubt their anxiety to meet the feeling of the nation on this subject; and whilst I naturally refer you to them, I fear nothing on their account, for in their hands the question seems to me to be perfectly safe (applause). I remember that on the question of abolishing the slave trade, the same opposition was made, the same arguments used, the same species of – I will not say abuse – but the same harshness of expression employed towards the advocates of that measure, by its opponents, as have been brought into action at the present day. I will remember these things – I recollect, for instance, that it was said Jamaica would be lost to us if the slave trade were abolished: and that a petition was presented to the House of Commons, declaring that the instant this trade was withdrawn, not a ship would navigate the seas, and the liberties of our country would be gone! (laughter and applause).

Another objection urged at that time was, that Liverpool would be ruined. But let me ask, did Liverpool lose her importance when the slave trade was abolished? Did her ships vanish from the sea – I had almost said from off the earth (laughter). On the contrary, the town doubled in point of population, and tripled in importance. And what will be the consequences of abolishing slavery altogether? I may not hope to see it, but I am perfectly persuaded that shortly after such a blessed consummation, Jamaica will become a flourishing colony, and ultimately, it may be, a free state.

The progress of freedom will not be stopped – the example will not be lost. If we liberate our slaves, can we doubt that North America will do the same? If the good deed be achieved by us, it will be a strong argument for the Americans to follow our example – for it will tend to promote their interests, a species of argument which they understand as well as any men. I will venture to assume, then, that the United States will follow in our footsteps; and let but Great Britain and America achieve this victory of humanity over prejudice, error, and cruelty, and the lesser states must adopt the same line of conduct; so that, at no distant day, we may hope to see freedom in the possession of every man in every nation, and slavery driven from the face of the earth (loud applause). Sir I shall not trouble you further.”

On the motion, proposed by James Losh and seconded by WS Batson, it was unanimously resolved, “that the system of British West India slavery, originally founded in wrong, and since maintained by oppression and cruelty, is not only revolting to our feelings as men, but a most grievous sin in the sight of Almighty God, who has made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.”

Six months later Parliament passed The Slavery Abolition Act. Two months after that James Losh, aged 70, died from a stroke.



< The 18th century anti-slavery brooch designed and manufactured by Josiah Wedgwood inscribed 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?'

James Losh by David Dunbar in Newcastle
Lit & Phil >

