

MINUTES OF MEMBERS' MEETING HELD AT WESLEY'S CHAPEL, CITY ROAD.  
ON SATURDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2008.

Chairman: Ms Kate Chisholm.

Speaker: Ms Karin Fernald.

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Cambridge, Dr Vickers, Mr & Mrs Ogden, Mrs Bennett, Dr Johnston and Mr Brian Rees.

Notices:

1. In April the Speaker will be Professor Lynda Mugglestone on, "THE DICTIONARY AS WATCH."
2. Information leaflets of interest to Members are displayed on the side as usual.
4. Tea and biscuits are available after the meeting at the modest price of 50p a cup.
5. Minutes of the meeting held on Saturday, February 9<sup>th</sup> 2008 were read and signed by the Chairman, after approval.
6. Introduction of the speaker: Karin Fernald is well known to us as a Member of the Society, who has delighted us with several performances in the past. She trained at RADA and has played many roles in the theatre from Sally Bowles in *"Cabaret"* at Perth, to the Dormouse in *"Alice in Wonderland,"* at Stratford on Avon. She then specialized in the portrayal of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, diarists and artists, beginning with her one-woman show on Fanny Burney.  
She is also keen on Hester Thrale and has put together several pieces on her, including the talk, *"A Heap of Rubbish in a Vulgar Style,"* which is how Horace Walpole described Mrs Piozzi's writing. Karin will be giving this talk next Wednesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> at Dr Johnson's House. She has a very popular talk in Hans Christian Anderson, with slides and, her most recently researched subject is Florence Nightingale.  
  
She has lectured frequently for the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies for twenty years, twice visiting Australia for them, going as far as Cairns, and inaugurated a new Branch in Auckland, New Zealand. She has been invited four times to Kyoto, Japan, to speak to universities and schools on Jane Austen and Fanny Burney.  
  
She and Colin Pinney are performing their Pope show at Dr Johnson's House on June 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. She is giving her talk on Mrs Thrale, as distinct from Mrs Piozzi, to the Jane Austen Society in Lichfield on September 6<sup>th</sup>.

Ms Fernald quoted from Mrs Piozzi in Bath, *"My resolution is to*

*Serve God better than I did last year and to thank him today for bringing me to this year"*

After the death of her husband, Gabriel Piozzi, of whom she said, *"twenty years passed in his enchanting society seems like a happy dream of twenty hours,"* Hester tried to organize her life, Summers in Wales, Winters between London and Bath. Used to bereavement she remembers Johnson's advice, *"Be not solitary, be not idle, keep busy and you will, in time, one day be happy."*

She has a project, to copy out her poems, written from girlhood, for the benefit of her protégée, her husband's nephew, John Salisbury Piozzi, whom they adopted at five years old.

Henry Thrale had left her a life interest in Streatham Park, so she was responsible for its upkeep.

Her protégée, whom she had hoped would be a gentleman, a Christian and scholar, was not happy at Christchurch and wanted to settle down, get married and be a farmer in Wales. She gives him the family home in Wales, as she wanted him to be happy and moves into two back rooms in Bath where, embarrassingly, she receives a visit from Madame D' Arbley. She wanted to give up her life interest in Streatham Park to her daughters, her *"first husband's representatives,"* as she calls them, but they do not want to be responsible for its upkeep. Her protégée, whom she calls, *"the son of her soul,"* suggests that she sell the life-interest and give the money to him, but in the event, she sells the contents, lets it out at a reduced rent and moves into a house in Gay Street, where she says she, *"shall exist a true Bath Cat for the short remainder of my life."*

Mrs Piozzi has been lionized in Bath, largely, though not always, on account of the Johnson connection. She has several doctor friends in Bath, her favourite was Sir James Fellows, a traveller, linguist and raconteur, whom she appointed her literary executor.

She was brought up bi-lingual, speaking Welsh and English, interested in etymology, an interest partly sparked off by Johnson. She always took much interest in history and current affairs. In later years she takes less of an interest in new writers than in philosophy and science. She prefers George Crabbe to Keats and Shelley and was interested in Lord Byron as he knew her Grandmother.

She describes the uncommon Spring of 1794, and that of 1781, when people walked down Bond Street in February, with umbrellas to shade them from the sun, like Naples! She describes the Queen's visit in 1817 as *"a monstrous plague"* and describes the effect on Bath of the death of Princess Charlotte, after giving birth to a still-born son.

She abhorred violence and deplored the new spirit of democracy, but had very wide sympathies, especially the poor people's bad hay and corn harvest in the bad Summer in Wales in 1799.

She urged females of Great Britain to take on their share of National Defence, her comments suggesting familiarity with the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft.

Always a great Bible reader, she saw Napoleon as the *"Beast of the Apocalypse"* and is appalled by his popularity in England after his final defeat.

She and her friend, Sophia Pennington befriended the young actor, William Augustus Conway, who later committed suicide.

Her need to be the centre of attention may have contributed to the failure of the daughters and her protégée becomes jealous of her new friends, particularly the young actor.

Two years before her death, concluded Ms Fernald, she writes, "*'tis foolish to leave this world without knowing what's done in it, especially as eternity will be passed in that which is to come.*"

After a lively discussion, Ms Fernald was warmly thanked by Mr Bundock for her entertaining and enjoyable talk, giving us, through her skill as an actor, a new insight into Mrs Piozzi.