

MINUTES OF MEMBERS' MEETING HELD AT WESLEY'S CHAPEL, CITY ROAD, ON SATURDAY 10TH JANUARY, 20

Chairman: Dr Freya Johnston

Speaker: Dr Lucy Peltz

1. Welcome: to Members and friends to the first meeting of 2009
2. Apologies for absence: have been received from: Mrs Rees and Mrs Bartlett
3. Notices:
 - L The speaker in February will be: Dr Garry Headland on:
"ARTHUR MURPHY AND SAMUEL JOHNSON: A CASE OF INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY."
 2. Committee Members are reminded that the next Committee meeting will be on February 14th at 12.30pm, before the usual meetings. Refreshments will be provided, as usual. Nominations for the Committee should be sent to the Hon. Secretary by this date.
 3. 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, December 13th 2008 were read and signed by the Chairman after approval.
6. Introduction of the speaker: Dr Lucy Peltz is Curator of 18th Century Collections at The National Portrait Gallery where she co-curated the exhibition "*Brilliant Women; Eighteenth Century Bluestockings*," in the Spring of last year. She is currently working on an exhibition on the work of Thomas Lawrence which opens at the National Portrait Gallery in autumn 2010. She is also working on a book on extra-illustration and portrait print collecting in eighteenth century Britain.

Dr Peltz said that Catherine Macaulay was one of the Bluestocking Circle, a metropolitan-based network of intellectual women who, in the 1750s and 60s met at the houses of Elizabeth Montegu. Through acts of patronage, wealthy hostesses, like Montegu helped numerous women to pursue their vocations in the world of art and literature.

Classical history and Mythology were often invoked to justify contemporary behaviour and a positive view of modern female

creativity was made by reference to the nine Muses. Richard Samuel visualised this analogy in his painting "*Living Muses of Great Britain*," showing them in the Temple of Apollo, a patriotic group of learned and creative women under Britannia's watchful gaze.

Macaulay was one of the leading political activists of her time. Her eight-volume study of the "*History of Great Britain*" was initially welcomed as a radical Whig answer to David Hume's Tory "*History of Great Britain*." It was the masculine style of her work that excited admiration. Edmund Burke exclaimed, "*the Virago was the greatest Champion*" of American Patriots, clearly intending a sleight on her femininity. Macaulay and her supporters used a variety of media to establish her as a spokesperson and figurehead for the radical cause. Cipriani's engraving of her as *Libertas* links her with the feminine personification of Liberty. Robert Edge Pines's portrait of her was seemingly intended as a counterpoint to that of her brother, John Sawbridge, showing her wearing a purple sash, the mark of a man belonging to the ancient Roman Senate of legislature.

Satires that convey the recriminations that began to abound against Macaulay focussed on her unconventional living arrangements with her elderly admirer, Reverend Thomas Wilson. Hume believed that she was after Wilson's money. She was satirized in the "*tete a tete*" series, she was also represented as a deluded old widow with unseemly fascination for make-up and fashion. Wilson's marble statue of "*Catherine Macauley as History*" is now housed in Warrington Public Library.

The following year Macaulay married William Graham, the twenty-one-year old brother of her quack doctor. A flurry of salacious satires exposed the marriage as an abomination. The wood-cut satire, "*The Auspicious Marriage*," presented the match as unnatural and sinister. John Wilkes condemned her as a "*monster*."

Montagu thought that her politics made her "*History*" unreadable and claimed, "*All this has happened from her adopting masculine opinions and masculine manners*." Transgressions of gender and propriety shaped Macaulay's public reputation.

In 1784 she journeyed with Graham to America, where she was feted by leading figures of the War of Independence, including George Washington. Before she died at the start of 1791 she made a foray into feminist debate with her "*Letters on Education*," and wrote "*Observations on the Reflections of the Rt. Hon. Edmund Burke*." These attracted the attention of Mary Wollstonecraft, who praised her "*Letters on Education*" for its "*sound reason and profound thought*" on the raising and education of children, finding parallels with her own views on the importance of parental nurture and the coeducation of girls and boys. In a letter to Macaulay in December 1790, she writes "*I respect Mrs Macaulay Graham because she contends for laurels whilst most of her sex only seek for flowers*."

Wollstonecraft's pamphlet, "*Vindication of the Rights of Men*". moved her into the masculine terrain of political discourse.

The etching, "*Don Dismallo running the Literary Gantlet*," published by William Holland portrays Burke as Don Dismallo, the deluded knight from "*Don Quixote*," dressed in fool's costume running past a line of his detractors who are beating him with whips. All the people in the print are linked by their support for the French Revolution.

Richard Polwhele's critique of late eighteenth century feminist writers, "*The Unsex'd females*" identified and attacked women who went as far as to demand equality with men. Casting Wollstonecraft as the devil, Hannah More was his saintly figure in the war against radical feminism. While she shared the view that a proper education was necessary in rendering women more useful and productive members of society, the idea of equality between men and women was anathema to her. Instead of calling for women's rights, she assigned women a central role as agents of the philanthropic action that would re-animate the dormant powers of active piety. Dr Peltz concluded that, in the early nineteenth century it was this model of middle-class female activism that enjoyed ascendancy in Britain.

After a lively discussion Dr Peltz was warmly thanked by Mr Bundock for her interesting, wide-ranging and entertaining paper.