[Sitter]

**Thomas Thirlwall, 1763/4–1827 [DRAFT]**

Thomas Thirlwall is generally remembered as father of his distinguished son, Connop Thirlwall (1797–1875), historian of Greece and Bishop of St David’s, but was himself notable as a religious writer and a public moralist, as a speaker and in print.

The family claimed a link with the Thirlwalls of ruined Thirlwall Castle near Hexham and, according to Thomas’s obituary in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (pt. 1, pp. 568–9, June 1827), his father Thomas had preceded him at Brasenose College, Oxford, and became vicar of Cottingham near Hull. This fiction may have started with the latter’s August 1808 death notice in the same source (*GM,* pt. 2, p.757) in which misspelling as ‘Thomas Thirlwell, M.A., of Brazenose College’ points to the greater error on both occasions that the vicar of Cottingham, 1789–1808, was Stephen Thurlwell (b. 1751), who is also not listed as attending either Oxford or Cambridge universities.

Thomas Thirlwall was in fact the third son, and fourth child of six, of John Thirlwall (1716–76) and his wife Elizabeth (née Maddison, *c.*1730–1819). They had married on 13 April 1754 at Monk Hesledon, Durham, just six weeks before the baptism there on 28 May of their eldest child, Hannah (1754­–1833). Their second and third were sons John and Liddle. The latter, from about 1788 a prosperous London linen-draper in St John Street, West Smithfield, was baptised at St Cuthbert’s, Darlington, on 9 September 1761, as was Thomas on 14 March 1764 and two final sisters; Elizabeth on 15 October 1766 and Ann on 16 August 1769. The last three and their father’s burial record, also at St Cuthbert’s, show he was an Excise officer. Thomas was therefore either born early in 1764 or possibly late in 1763 into a respectable family but not a ‘professional’ one in contemporary terms. The 1808 error that by 1827 led to misidentification of his father gave him a spurious social pedigree: even if his children knew this, public correction would not have been to their benefit.

Thomas certainly did well to gain a place at Brasenose, aged 16, in April 1780, graduating as BA in March 1784 and MA in November 1786. He was appointed curate of Mentmore, Bucks., in 1788 and at St Dunstan’s, Stepney, from 1790 to 1814 where he was the parish ‘Lecturer’. About 1803 he also appears in sermon press notices as curate of Little [Holy] Trinity in the Minories, although this is not listed in the clergy database. From at least 1798 he was also chaplain to the Mile End Volunteers, though his formal militia appointments there are only noted later (*London Gazette* 1800 and 1803). Around 1810 press advertisements also refer to him as Minister of the Tavistock Chapel in Long Acre. In 1814 he was presented by John Curtis Esq.– presumably the local landowner – to the rectorship of St Margaret’s, Bowers Gifford, Essex, and gained the further benefice of stipendiary curate of Pitsea from 1815.

On 19 June 1792, Thirlwall married at St Dunstan’s to Susanna (sometimes ‘Susannah’) Connop. Born about 1755, she was widow of William Connop (1752–90) a Mile End surgeon and apothecary and son of a father of the same name, also a surgeon there. The Connops were reportedly Welsh and Susanna – whose maiden name was also Connop – appears to have been a cousin of her first husband, whom she had married at St Dunstan’s on 8 October 1776. They had one son, also William (b. 1778 but fate unclear) and when widowed she was left with ‘a good fortune’ that probably helped support her new partner’s non-stipendiary activities. The Thirlwall marriage was conducted by the Revd Thomas Wigzell, who at that time was a Bristol curate and later held livings in Suffolk. Why he was officiating as ‘Minister’ at St Dunstan’s is not clear but he was probably a friend since he became namesake if not godfather to Thomas and Susanna’s eldest son. Thirlwall’s linen-draper brother, Liddle, was also one of the marriage witnesses.

In 1795, Thirlwall’s first reported publication was *The Alarming Situation of the Times, a Fast Sermon preached at Stepney*. The title is indicative of the moralistic, conservative views for which he found many platforms to express, including as a speaker at East India House and the Middlesex elections, as well as from various pulpits, as a Middlesex JP from 1811 and one in Essex after his move there. He was a prominent member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice and became notable in a long rear-guard campaign in its name to close the Royalty Theatre, Wellclose Square (1787–1826), the only one then existing on the eastern edge of the City of London. In 1803/4 (and usually noted in the second edition of 1804) he published *A Solemn Protest against the Revival of Scenic Exhibitions and Interludes at the Royalty Theatre* [etc…] together with objections to several popular plays of the day and spoke against its annual applications for licensing by the local bench, though ultimately unsuccessfully. Advertisement of a counter-pamphlet by John Percival (advertised in the *Morning Chronicle*,19 April 1804) pilloried his position as ‘The Resurrection of Cromwell!’

For some time in the early 1800s Thirlwall was also chaplain to Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore (1729–1811), editor of the *Reliques of early English Poetry*. Percy reportedly helped him start preparing an edition of the works of Jeremy Taylor (1613–67), Chaplain to Charles II. Longman’s issued the first printing of *Holy Living* in 1807, with a second in 1810, and in 1814 it was again included with one of Taylor’s *Discourses*. Thirlwall’s edition of Taylor’s *Holy Dying* followed in 1819 (though this was possibly also a reprint). In 1809 he dedicated to Percy a pamphlet of essays and poems titled *Primitiae*, demonstrating the early talents of his eleven-year-old son Connop as their author: it saw three printings in that year. In 1802 he also published an augmented Latin edition of Joseph White’s *Diatesseron* or treatise on the Gospels which was reissued in English in 1803: a second English edition appeared in 1815. Other publications included an edition of the works of Sir Matthew Hale (1805), further sermons and contributions to the *Orthodox Churchman’s Magazine.*

In 1817 Thirlwall was called to answer at the bar of the House of Commons for breach of Parliamentary privilege in remarks made (primarily on p. 108) in his *A Vindication of the Magistrates acting in and for the Tower Division, from the Charges contained in a printed work entitled, ‘A* *Report of the State of the Police in the Metropolis* …’ This was published in in February, in response to that Parliamentary Committee police report, and when he appeared on 17 May he explained that the ‘libel’ was unintentional, the product of haste and that his pamphlet, based on his prior experience as a Middlesex magistrate, had achieved much wider notice than he had expected. The House reprimanded him but accepted his ‘manly and respectful’ apology without further action. He was perhaps lucky, since he had by then also published a second pamphlet refuting criticism of his initial one in another by a Mr Beaumont (*Morning* *Post,* 4 April 1817)

Thirlwall’s elder sons were Thomas Wigzell Thirlwall, also a clergyman (1793–1846) and John Pyefinch Thirlwall (b.1794): the latter was apprenticed to a Cornhill ironmonger in 1808 and became a Freeman of the Ironmongers’ Company in 1819, then a merchant at Quebec in the 1820s and 1840s, and on St Vincent in the Caribbean in the 1830s. Both he and his wife Carrington (née Henderson, 1803–52), though overwhelmingly her except in respect of two individuals, received compensation as slave-owners in St Vincent after Abolition in 1833. Her ownership was one of estate inheritance from her father John Henderson, of whom her husband was executor and a co-trustee. John Pyefinch was in Quebec in 1848 and probably still alive in 1852 though his death date is not yet certain: his youngest son John (b. 1830) briefly attended Exeter College, Oxford, in 1848 before becoming a barrister. Thirlwall’s third son, Richard (1795–6), died in infancy leaving Connop, the fourth, as youngest survivor. The common belief that his first names were ‘Newell Connop’ appears to have originated largely through his original entry in *DNB* (1893). He was only baptised Connop but did have an older cousin called Newell Connop who, with Connop’s brother Thomas and mother Susanna (Newell’s aunt) was a co-executor of Thomas senior’s will in 1827: it is not clear how the ‘Newell’ also attached to him.

At the time of Thirlwall’s death, aged 63 at Bowers Gifford on 17 March 1827, his son Thomas Wigzell was a Fellow (1816–33) of St John’s College, Cambridge, where he graduated as BA in 1815, MA in 1818 and Bachelor of Divinity in 1826. In 1835 he was appointed rector of Pirton, Herts., and by the time of his mother Susanna’s death in January 1843, she was apparently living with him and his family at Ickleford Rectory, Herts. A brief *Gentleman’s Magazine* notice (April 1847, p. 444) following his death at Baldock, aged 54, on 21 December 1846 after an apoplectic seizure, states that earlier in that year he was presented to the rectorship of Ickleford-cum-Pirton by J.W. Peers Esq.: this must be an error, since he was already living at Ickleford Rectory at the 1841 census. His mother and a female Carrington Thirlwall (age stated as 30 and ‘independent’) were also there for the census. Despite some date uncertainties, this was probably his brother John’s wife.

Thirlwall’s *Gentleman’s Magazine* obituary itemizes other issues in which it reviewed some of his works, though sometimes at second rather than first printing. It may also be source of the general later error of calling Connop Thirlwall his second son, when in fact third survivor. All four boys were baptised at St Dunstan’s, Stepney. The register a little unusually gives their ages at the time in days, from which probable birth dates can be derived: Thomas Wigzell Thirlwall, bap. 19 June 1793 (b. 29 April); John Pyefinch Thirlwall, bap. 11 July 1794 (b. 4 June); Richard Herbert Thirlwall, bap. 5 November 1795 (b. 2 October), buried at St Andrew, Enfield, 5 February 1796; Connop Thirlwall (*sic*) bap. 5 May 1797 (b. 13 February by count but usually stated as 11 February).

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