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**‘Some Scraps of Paper’: The Autograph Manuscript**

**of *Ode to a Nightingale* at the Fitzwilliam Museum**

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ABSTRACT:

This article traces the history of the only surviving autograph manuscript of *Ode to a Nightingale*, composed two hundred years ago in May 2019, and preserved since 1933 in the Fitzwilliam Museum. It tests Charles Armitage Brown’s famous eyewitness account of the moment of composition against the physical reality of the manuscript, and examines its materiality in some detail. It also traces the history of the manuscript’s fortunes through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and examines the role of collectors, curators and conservators in ensuring its survival and its continued presence in the UK.

KEYWORDS:

John Keats, Ode to a Nightingale, autograph manuscript, Fitzwilliam Museum, materiality

2019 sees the bicentenary of one of the remarkable periods of creativity in British literary history – the five (seven?) months during which Keats composed the ‘great Odes’.[[1]](#footnote-1) The *Ode to a Nightingale* comes early in this sequence, in May; and unlike the other poems, there was a (self-proclaimed) contemporary witness to its composition. Moreover, an autograph draft does survive, at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.[[2]](#footnote-2) What can the two small half-sheets of cheap paper that form the earliest surviving, and only autograph, version of the text tell us? And how did they come to form part of the collections of a fine art museum?

We owe the story – some might say myth – of the composition of the *Ode to a Nightingale* to one of the close circle of friends who formed for Keats a kind of substitute family. Charles Armitage Brown (1787-1842), who had walked with Keats through Scotland and Ireland in the early spring of 1819, was a faithful friend in life and an utterly devoted admirer and promoter of Keats’s posthumous legacy.[[3]](#footnote-3) In perhaps the happiest, though most financially precarious period of his life, when he had abandoned medicine for poetry and begun to publish regularly, Keats was living with Brown – who was eight years older and without money worries – in one half of the house Wentworth Place, Hampstead. The other half was owned by his friend Charles Dilke, but had recently been rented out to the Brawne family, including their daughter Fanny.

May 1819 enjoyed exceptionally fine weather, the kind of weather that Keats seems to have found particularly conducive to writing.[[4]](#footnote-4) When Brown recalled that period in his *Life of John Keats* – first delivered as a lecture at the Plymouth Athenaeum nearly sixteen years after the poet’s death (29 December 1836) and not published until 1937 – he recounted the composition of the Ode in this carefully worked vignette of inspiration and friendship:

I observed that every short poem, which he was tempted to compose, was scrawled on the first piece of paper at hand, and that it was afterwards used as a mark to a book, or thrust anywhere aside. In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from breakfast-table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded and this was his *Ode to a Nightingale*, a poem which has been the delight of every one. Immediately afterwards I searched for more of his (in reality) fugitive pieces, in which task, at my request, he again assisted me. Thus I rescued that *Ode* and other valuable short poems, which might otherwise have been lost. From that day, he gave me permission to copy any verses he might write, and I fully availed myself of it. He cared so little for them himself, when once, as it appeared to me, his imagination was released from their influence, that it required a friend at hand to preserve them.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Brown’s words can seem a little self-aggrandizing. He is keen to portray himself as the saviour of Keats’s work, and therefore, to justify himself as the best guardian of his literary legacy, and the right biographer, after years of hesitation and hostility from other friends.[[6]](#footnote-6) But his words alert us to an important point – Keats was not the best custodian of his own work. However, by virtue of his genius not only for poetry but for friendship, it survived. The scholarly survey of Keats manuscripts puts it as follows: ‘To an extraordinary extent, given Keats’s youth, modest means and relative obscurity – Keats and his poetry were served and cared for, both during and after his short creative live, by devoted friends and admirers’.[[7]](#footnote-7)

So, in the case of the *Nightingale*, we find that the poem was transcribed twice in the very month of its composition by Richard Woodhouse, legal advisor and reader for John Taylor and James Hessey, the deeply humane men whose publishing house issued Keats’s second and third volumes of poetry, and who supported him financially wherever they could.[[8]](#footnote-8) Woodhouse wrote out the poem neatly in a notebook he kept of Keats material, then, with due lawyerly caution, made a back-up copy in another notebook.[[9]](#footnote-9) It was also copied out in May 1819 by Charles Wentworth Dilke on blank leaves at the rear of his copy of *Endymion* (1818).[[10]](#footnote-10) The following winter, in January 1820, George Keats, back in England from America for three weeks, borrowed a notebook from his brother, copied *Ode to a Nightingale* in it, kept the notebook, and added poems by other writers in the years ahead.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Behind all these devoted transcriptions lies the unique autograph original, housed at the Fitzwilliam Museum. Does the detail of what Brown says about the moment of composition tally up with its physical form? In other words, do Brown’s narrative and the material evidence match up?

[INSERT FIGURES 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4]

Brown’s comment that Keats was in the habit of using ‘the first piece of paper at hand’ is significant – it is plain to see that the two sheets of the Fitzwilliam autograph have been torn from a notebook; they have damage to their edges typical of pages sewn in and subsequently torn out.[[12]](#footnote-12) In Brown’s scenario, Keats, armed with these hastily gathered sheets of paper, set to work. It is possible that the phrase ‘Small, winged Dryad’ (now upside down at the foot of fol. 2r), represents a first attempt to begin.[[13]](#footnote-13) Having abandoned this, Keats took up the other sheet of paper and began again. Working with his customary intense speed and concentration, he wrote what we now know as stanzas 1, 2, and stanza 3, lines 1-6 on the first page (fol. 1r), but did not turn the paper over to carry on with stanza 3, but continued on a second sheet (fol. 2r), having turned this second sheet around so that the aborted opening line was now at its foot. On it he wrote the remainder of stanza 3, and stanzas 4 and 5. He then ran out of paper, but rather than re-entering the house to seek more, turned instead to the back (verso) of the first sheet (fol. 1v, stanzas 6 and 7), and finally, the verso of the second sheet (fol. 2v) where the poem ends (stanza 8). These are pages written in the full flood of concentrated inspiration – Keats did not know as he wrote how long the poem was going to be or what the end point was.

But can we be sure they are the very sheets written in the Hampstead garden, as Sidney Colvin argued so compellingly in 1903? [[14]](#footnote-14) We have here two sheets, while Brown (writing, it must be said, at a distance of sixteen years) talks of ‘four or five’. Scholars and editors have necessarily focussed on the status of the text preserved on these pages, but a closer inspection of their materiality can yield some insights too. Working with a paper facsimile produced by printing out digital images at actual size, and following exactly the crease and fold lines still visible in the now carefully conserved and flattened sheets, we arrive at a small concertina of material that might easily be remembered as four or five disordered scraps of exactly the right size and shape to be ‘thrust’ behind some books. In other words, the surviving physical evidence, though not conclusive, might be seen to support Brown’s recollection.

The manner in which Keats moved the paper around as he wrote is powerful evidence that, even if these sheets cannot conclusively be said to represent the very first draft, they are at the very least a crucial witness to the discussions and transcribing that took place at Wentworth House that day. In either case, the process of making the poem that we read in print is plainly there before us. In the first stanza, we see Keats rejecting certain expressions, and rapidly reformulating. The famous opening lines, for example, may have turned out – ‘Heart aches and a fearful numbness fell my sense’ – but he rejected the easy alliteration of ‘fearful’ and ‘fells’ and instead deploys the terms we are all familiar with – ‘drowsy’ and ‘pains’. He opens the poem with ‘My’ turning ‘heart aches’ into a verbal phrase ‘my heart aches’ – then cancels ‘My’, creating the plural noun ‘heartaches’. In the published version, he has reinstated the ‘My’, pulling the focus of the poem immediately onto the poet’s singular voice and perspective. There are many more examples, but some of the most significant occur in the third stanza, where ‘youth grows pale and thin and old’ is transmuted, or as Sidney Colvin put it, ‘vitally strengthened’ into ‘Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies’; at the beginning of fourth stanza where ‘Away, away, for I will fly with thee’ is changed ‘fly *to* thee’ (my italics) with all that this entails for the separation of nightingale and poet; and in the last stanza where again, the focus on the poem’s ‘I’ is intensified by the change from ‘to toll one back’ to ‘toll *me* back’ (my italics).[[15]](#footnote-15)

The paper on which these changes are made is in itself is interesting. Scholars have noted that from 12 March 1817, Keats used paper – cheap paper – made at the mill of Joseph Ruse and Richard Turner at Upper Tovil, near Maidstone, Kent.[[16]](#footnote-16) The paper used here consists of two half sheets, both bearing the second half of a watermark [RUSE AND T]*URNERS* / [18]*17*.

[INSERT FIGURE 2.5]

He used exactly the same paper – that is, half sheets with this watermark – in a long narrative letter composed over several weeks, to his brother George and his wife Georgiana in America.[[17]](#footnote-17) Written in thirteen dated sections from 16 February to 3 May 1819, in other words in the immediate run up to the composition of the *Nightingale*, this journal letter contains the autograph drafts of several poems, including *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and the *Ode to Psyche*. It also contains details of a two-mile conversation that Keats had with Samuel Taylor Coleridge when he encountered the older poet while walking from Hampstead to Highgate. He noted it down, with characteristic humour, in the evening of 15 April, a fortnight or so before he wrote the *Ode to a Nightingale*:

Brown is gone to bed – and I am tired of rhyming ... Last Sunday I took a walk towards highgate and in the lane that winds by the side of Lord Mansfield’s park I met Mr Green our demonstrator at Guy’s in conversation with Coleridge – I joined them after enquiring by a look whether it would be agreeable – I walked with him a[t] his alderman-after dinner pace for near two miles I suppose In those two Miles he broached a thousand things – let me see if I can give you a list – Nightingales, Poetry – on Poetical sensation – Metaphysics – Different genera and species of Dreams – Nightmare – a dream accompanied by a sense of touch – single and double touch ....[[18]](#footnote-18)

As today, the first publication of much poetry in the early nineteenth century tended to be as single pieces, in journals. In the case of the Nightingale, it was first published anonymously in *Annals of the Fine Arts*, a short-lived periodical edited by the architect James Elmes, Surveyor of the Port of London and a mutual friend of the spectacularly irascible painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, who included portraits of Keats (and Wordsworth) in his monumental oil painting of the Entry of Christ to Jerusalem.[[19]](#footnote-19) On his sketch of Keats’s head for the painting, Haydon added a note after Keats’s death: ‘Keats was a spirit that in passing over the Earth came within its attraction (and fell on it, against its will! and spent like a wounded bird, he worried himself) and expired in fruitless struggles ... to make its dull inhabitants comprehend the beauty of his soarings’. This dramatic rhetoric reflects the intensely polarised political and literary context into which the Ode was launched, and hints at how radical the diction and forms of Keats’s poetry seemed to his some of his contemporaries.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Published again with a few changes in *Lamia* in 1820, the Ode now had its own public fortune.[[21]](#footnote-21) The physical fate of the sheets was an entirely separate matter. Keats does not seem to have valued his compositional drafts as important in their own right – he certainly was not his own best archivist! He often trusted unique drafts to the post, and seems to have sent the two sheets bearing the *Ode to a Nightingale*, probably as an enclosure in a letter, to another trusted member of his inner circle of friends, John Hamilton Reynolds (1794-1852).[[22]](#footnote-22) Reynolds, a mercurial character and fellow poet, was another keen champion of Keats’ work, during Keats’s life and after his death. He was also a privileged witness to one stage in the long evolution of ideas that led to the distilled moment of inspired composition in the Hampstead garden. The *Enchanted Castle* of Claude Lorrain (1605-1682), acknowledged as the visual source for the ‘magic casements’ and ‘faery lands’ of stanza 7, formed the subject of a long poem that Keats sent to Reynolds in a letter from Teignmouth on 25 March 1818: ‘You know, I am sure, Claude’s Enchanted Castle and I wish you may be pleased with my remembrance of it’.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Reynolds must have treasured the two small sheets, and they passed intact to his sisters – first Marianne and then Charlotte, both of whom had also known Keats. They then moved down a generation, first to Charles son of Charlotte, and then to his brother, the watercolourist and illustrator, Henry Towneley Green, who died in 1899.

This is the critical moment in the fate of the *Nightingale* manuscript. On Monday 13 May 1901 and the day following, Towneley Green’s collection of *Valuable Autograph Letters and Historical Documents* were *sold by order of the executors* at Sotheby’s. Lot 236 was described in the following terms: ‘KEATS, John, “Ode to the Nightingale”, 4pp. 8vo (slight tear in the paper), EXTREMELY RARE.’

It is important to remember that 1901 is the height of the so-called ‘Gilded Age’ for American collectors in Europe, with buyers wielding their breath-taking wealth in the rare book and art markets of London and Paris.[[24]](#footnote-24) Indeed, letters preserved in the archives of the Fitzwilliam Museum make it clear that there was real anxiety that the manuscript would leave the country. They were written by Sidney Colvin, first director of the Fitzwilliam from 1876 to 1884, but in 1901, Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum.[[25]](#footnote-25) Colvin was a renowned literary scholar, and in 1887 had published an introductory biography of Keats, drawing on material that had not available to his predecessors.[[26]](#footnote-26) The recipient of his letters was Robert Offley Ashburton Crewe-Milnes, 1st Marquess of Crewe (1858-1945), aristocratic grandee of the Liberal party who served in governments from Gladstone to Lloyd George.[[27]](#footnote-27) Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, he was the son of Richard Monckton Milnes, 1st Baron Houghton (1809-1885), friend while a student at Trinity College in Cambridge of Tennyson, Arthur Hallam, and Thackeray, and the author of the first full biography of Keats, *The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats*, published in 1848.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In his first letter to Lord Crewe, dated 8 May 1901, Colvin alerted him to the Sotheby’s sale:

I [am] right to warn you ... that there are some very precious Keats MSS coming up for sale at Sotheby’s next Monday the 13th, namely the true original autographs of the Nightingale & Psyche Odes, which formerly belonged to J.H. Reynolds and are now sold upon the death of a nephew of his.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Crewe did not act at this point, and an annotated copy of the sale catalogue shows that the Nightingale manuscript was purchased by the London booksellers Pearson & Co. for £105, hoping, as is perfectly natural, to turn a profit by selling it on. But Colvin wrote again the day after the sale:

My dear Lord Crewe,

Referring again to my letter of last Thursday, I find that Pearson of Pall Mall Place has bought the autograph Ode to a Nightingale. It is a shabby enough little MS to look at, but of almost unequalled literary interest, being the true original first draft written under the tree at Hampstead as told by Brown, and containing a number of slips, corrections, & changed words: showing among other things that ‘magic casements’ was a second thought, not the first. I wonder whether there is any chance of your saving it from going to America.[[30]](#footnote-30)

On the back of the letter, in Lord Crewe’s hand, we find the following notes:

Thanked C. 6.5.01

MS bought later for £135.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Probably acting partly out of filial respect for his father’s exceptional role in scholarship on Keats and his poetry, Crewe had acted to save the manuscript for the nation.

It is clear from other correspondence in the Fitzwilliam archives that Lord Crewe kept the Keats manuscript at Crewe Hall in Cheshire (now a luxury hotel), not at Crewe House in Mayfair (now part of the Saudi Embassy). Moreover, a flurry of letters in 1904 reveals that he turned to Sidney Colvin and his British Museum colleagues to help him find the best way of displaying it. In a letter dated 30 November 1904, Colvin wrote to Crewe as follows:

[INSERT FIGURES 2.6 and 2.7]

My dear Crewe,

Two or three weeks ago I sent you off a box containing the Ode to a Nightingale MS. fixed on its turning stand and packed in sawdust. Did it reach you safely? and do you think it answers its purpose? If it is stood so that the glass frame comes at right angles with the long dimension of the foot, I think it cannot be overturned, whereas the other way it may be a little top heavy. The cost is £4.15.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Lord Crewe was in many ways an exemplary owner. He allowed the manuscript to return to the British Museum for scholars to have access and for it to be photographed for facsimiles, notably for the 1921 volume intended to mark the centenary of Keats’s death.[[33]](#footnote-33) Although Sidney Colvin continued to broker arrangements, one of the British Museum curators at this time was Laurence Binyon (1869-1943) – himself, of course, a poet, and the author of a sonnet on Keats for the memorial volume.[[34]](#footnote-34)

14 September 1920

My dear Colvin,

I cannot refuse to help in the Keats enterprise which you mention, provided that the delivery of the MS is not immediately urgent. It is enclosed in one of the heavy gun-metal cases made by Messrs Jeakes on the Museum model, and I cannot well send it up until somebody is actually going to London from here. This will not be until the end of the month, and it can then be handed over either to Dodgson or Binyon, who will no doubt get Messrs. Jeakes to open the airtight case if, as I suppose, it has to be taken out for reproduction.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Binyon replied a week later to acknowledge receipt, and Crewe then wrote immediately to Colvin to reassure him that all was well, and in so doing reveals that his butler was a forerunner of the present day art courier:

My dear Colvin,

My butler had to go to London, so that I was able to send the MS. of The Nightingale to the British Museum, and I hear from Binyon this morning of its safe arrival there ... So I am quite at ease about it.[[36]](#footnote-36)

This leaves us with a question. Given the close involvement of Sidney Colvin in Lord Crewe’s custodianship of the manuscript, why did Crewe not assign it during his life, or at his death, to the British Museum? Why was the Fitzwilliam Museum considered a better home?

As with so many Fitzwilliam Museum questions, the answer lies with Sydney Cockerell (1867-1962), the museum’s longest-serving Director from 1908-37.[[37]](#footnote-37) Cockerell was an expansionist. He oversaw not only major building campaigns, but instigated a highly targeted, even aggressive acquisitions policy that was driven by his conception of the museum as a home for art, for music, and for literature. Moreover, as personal assistant and librarian to William Morris, and secretary to the Kelmscott Press, Cockerell would have been exposed to the enormous influence Keats exercised on the pre-Raphaelites.[[38]](#footnote-38)

In 1911, Cockerell accepted for the Fitzwilliam the original portrait (that is, taken from life) of Keats painted in watercolour on ivory by Joseph Severn (1793-1879), which Keats gave to Fanny Brawne on his departure for Rome with Severn in 1821.[[39]](#footnote-39) It had been exhibited at the Royal Academy in May 1819, very much against the wishes of the sitter. ‘Even a large picture is lost in that canting place – what a drop of water in the ocean is a Miniature’ Keats wrote, fearing that viewers would ‘laugh at the puff of the one and the vanity of the other’.[[40]](#footnote-40) Brawne gave it some years later to Charles Dilke, part owner of Wentworth House where the *Ode to a Nightingale* had been composed, and it was given by the trustees of his grandson’s estate to the Fitzwilliam.

In 1920, the ivory miniature was followed by a gift from the American plutocratic collector J. Pierpont Morgan of the lock of hair cut on Keats’ deathbed by Severn himself.[[41]](#footnote-41) In 1921, Cockerell arranged for the lock to be enclosed within the miniature’s frame, and so created a kind of literary reliquary that brought together the image of the revered poet and a fragment of his bodily person. Both were, in a sense, the work of Joseph Severn, who had tended to Keats in his final desperate weeks in Rome.[[42]](#footnote-42)

[INSERT FIGURE 2.8]

A Keats manuscript must have been a high acquisition priority for Cockerell; it would make the perfect autograph companion to his acquisitions of William Blake, Charlotte Brontë and Thomas Hardy and others who already lived, through their handwritten remains, in the Fitzwilliam collections.[[43]](#footnote-43) His campaign seems to have begun as early as the summer 1926, when Lord Crewe wrote to Cockerell from Epsom:

My dear Cockerell,

Many thanks for your kind note of 14 June: the Nightingale is roosting silently in Paris, but when it returns to England I will see if I can lend it or some other Keats items to the Museum.[[44]](#footnote-44)

In the spring of 1932, Crewe responded to what must have been a gentle – or possibly not so gentle – reminder from Cockerell, this time writing from Crewe House in London:

My dear Cockerell,

I have not forgotten my promise to lend the Fitzwilliam my MS of Keats’s ‘Nightingale’ for the summer. I am going to stay with my brother-in-law Rosebery at Newmarket on Sunday next the 11th; and if it suits you I would bring it down to Cambridge and leave in your care on that day, taking the opportunity of seeing the extensions of the Museum, which I have not yet had the chance of doing. My idea would be to come down, by motor, in the morning, and I could bring the case to the Fitzwilliam any time after luncheon that suits you.[[45]](#footnote-45)

The manuscript duly arrived on Sunday 11 April 1932, when it was accepted into the Museum by Jack Goodison, Cockerell’s assistant curator.[[46]](#footnote-46)

It was now only a matter of time. In the summer of 1933, far from withdrawing his loan, Crewe converted it into a gift:

My dear Cockerell,

Since I deposited at the Fitzwilliam the original MS of the Ode to the Nightingale in April of last year, I have been thinking over the best course to take about it – whether to have it back for such time as I may be able to enjoy its company, or to leave it where I know it is appreciated, and where I have intended it should make its final home. My wife and I talked this over yesterday, and she concurs with my view that these things are better done promptly. So here is Goodison’s receipt for you to destroy. This means of course, that I hereby make the final gift to the Fitzwilliam Museum of the autograph MS of Keats’s Ode to the Nightingale.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Cockerell was jubilant, and the Annual Report for 1933 recorded the acquisition of ‘a priceless literary relic, of which it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance. This is the manuscript of Keats’s Ode to a Nightingale, written at Hampstead in 1819 and containing many corrections and alternations. This great treasure is exhibited in Gallery 5, and will be always be regarded by lovers of poetry as one of the principal attractions of the Museum’.[[48]](#footnote-48) It was then on more or less permanent display for decades.

This must have been wonderful for visitors to the Fitzwilliam, but the manuscript paid a price. Paper and ink are immensely susceptible to damage by light, and after sustained exposure in the galleries, reaction with light (oxidation) had broken down the paper’s fibres, making it weak and brittle, and highly prone to further physical damage. Viewed in transmitted light, its fragility is only too apparent.

[INSERT FIGURES 2.9 and 2.10]

The edges of the pages have been badly torn, and there are losses along the creases and folds where the structure of the paper has weakened and then fallen away. Fortunately, its parlous condition was addressed in 1982, when desperately needed conservation treatment was undertaken by the Cockerell Bindery in Cambridge. Sandy Cockerell (1906-87), nephew of Sydney, assessed the situation in the following terms:

The manuscript was mounted between glass in a brass frame, two leaves joined by a wide paper guard with a very wide overlap onto the paper of the manuscript, the paper of the manuscript very fragile, soft and stained and dark in colour, badly creased in places, dirty and perforated where the manuscript has been folded up into a small size. The bottom edges damaged by tears and at the head a long tear in each leaf.

He neutralised the acidity of the paper, repaired the tears with Japanese tissue paper, and mounted each leaf within very wide margins of handmade paper with his characteristic cockerel watermark. Now, as the pages are turned, the original need never be touched.

This then is the story of a tightly defined, largely male network of friends, collectors, curators and conservators who over the last two centuries have preserved, treasured and conserved this remarkable document. It has rarely left the Fitzwilliam since its acquisition in 1933, but for one weekend in early May this year, it returned for the first time to its place of composition at Wentworth Place – now Keats House – in Hampstead, as part of the Keats200 programme. In the autumn of 2019, it will be displayed at the Fitzwilliam Museum alongside Joseph Severn’s miniature. A digital facsimile will also be uploaded to the Fitzwilliam’s website [<https://webapps.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explorer/>], making the manuscript freely available for the first time to everyone, anywhere, who loves the poetry of John Keats.

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1. This article is based on a public talk given at the Fitzwilliam Museum on 22 May 2019. I would like to thank my Fitzwilliam colleague Edward Cheese, Conservator of Manuscripts and Printed Books, for invaluable assistance and encouragement.

   *Ode to Indolence* was not written down until May, but probably dates from March 1819: see Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 1-1933: see Stephen Hebron, *John Keats: A Poet and his Manuscripts* (London: British Library, 2009), 135-36, with facsimile; R. Gittings, *The Odes of Keats and their Earliest Known Manuscripts* (London: Heinemann, 1970), 65-67, with diplomatic transcription; *Index of English Literary Manuscripts, Volume 4, 1800-1900*, compiled by Barbara Rosenbaum, Pamela White and Richard Pearson (London and New York: Mansell, 1982) (henceforth *Index 4*), 375, KeJ282. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The importance of Brown to Keats’s life, work and reputation is clearly laid out in Nicholas Roe, ‘Charles Armitage Brown, John Keats, and Plymouth’, *The Keats-Shelley Review* 31.2 (2017), 120-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *The Letters of John Keats* (henceforth *KL*), edited by Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), no. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Charles Armitage Brown, *Life of John Keats*, edited with an introduction by D.H. Bodurtha and W.B. Pope (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 53-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The battle for control of Keats’s legacy is outlined in the Introduction to Brown, *Life of John Keats*, 3-23, and summarised in Andrew Motion, *Keats* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 572-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Barbara Rosenbaum, *Index 4*, 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For Keats, Taylor and Hessey see Tim Chilcott, *A Publisher and his Circle. The Life of John Taylor, Keats’s Publisher* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1972), 23-57; *KL* nos. 20, 27, 28, 49, 54, 57, 60, 65, 71, 78, 88, 133, 183, 188, 190, 211, 263, 269, 279, 282, 296. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Woodhouse’s transcripts are KeJ283 and KeJ 286 (*Index 4*, 375). The first is preserved in W2, Woodhouse’s notebook containing transcriptions of seventy-three Keats poems (now Harvard, Houghton Library, Keats Collection, MS 3.2); the second is W1, probably a duplicate of W2, a notebook containing thirty-four Keats transcriptions and other material (now Harvard, Houghton Library, Keats Collection, MS 3.1). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. KeJ 284, annotated by Charles Armitage Brown, and now at Keats House, Hampstead (*Index 4*, 375). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. KeJ 285: now British Library, Egerton MS 2780, fols. 53r-54v (*Index 4*, 375). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The manuscript consists of two half sheets of wove paper, the first 204 x 121.5 mm, the second 204.5 x 123 mm. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Robert Roth, ‘The Houghton-Crewe Draft of Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”’, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 48 (1954), 91-5 (p. 95) considers this not a false beginning but a jotted-down alternative to ‘light-winged dryad’ of stanza 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Sidney Colvin, ‘A Morning’s Work in a Hampstead Garden’, *Monthly Review* 10 (March 1903), 130-41. This was the first time Brown’s account of the poem’s creation was connected to the Fitzwilliam autograph, then in the collection of Lord Crewe (see below). Counter-arguments to Colvin’s conclusions are marshalled in Roth, ‘The Houghton-Crewe Draft’, who considers the manuscript to be a near contemporary revision rather than the very first draft. The arguments are carefully weighed in Gittings, *The Odes of Keats*, 65-6, who considers the value of Brown’s account to lie in what it tells us about Keats’s mode of composition rather than its help in identifying the putative first draft. Gittings concludes that Brown’s ‘scraps’ probably transmitted the *Ode to Indolence*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A thorough analysis of the process, with full diplomatic transcription, is found in Gittings, *The Odes of Keats*, 66-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For further information on these paper producers, see B.C. Barker-Benfield, ‘Shelleyan Writing Materials in the Bodleian Library: a Catalogue of Formats, Papers and Watermarks’, in *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, 23 (London and New York: Routledge. 2002), 79 (C24); Alfred H. Shorter, *Paper Mills and Paper Makers in England, 1495-1800* (Hilversum: Paper Publications Society, 1957), 191 (Kent, Mill No. 25). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *KL* no. 159; Harvard, Houghton Library, MS Keats 1-6, MS Keats 1, 1-53: description at

    <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/24/archival\_objects/285271> [accessed July 10, 2019]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *KL* no. 159, 88-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Annals of the Fine Arts*, July 1819, 354-56; the sketch is London, National Portrait Gallery, NPG 3251; Haydon’s painting is now at Mount St Mary’s Seminary, Cincinnati, US: <<https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/h/haydon/entryjer.html>> [accessed July 10, 2019]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Jeffrey Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); Duncan Wu, ‘Keats and the “Cockney School”’, *Cambridge Companion to Keats*, edited by Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 37-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and other Poems* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1820, repr. Oxford and New York: Woodstock Books, 1990), 107-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For an outline and further bibliography see Andrew Bennet, ‘Reynolds, John Hamilton’, *ODNB*, 2004, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/23426>> [accessed July 2, 2019]; see also Robert Gittings, ‘The poetry of John Hamilton Reynolds’, Ariel, 1 (1970), 7–17; Motion, *Keats*, 228-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *KL* no. 74; see Michael Levey, ‘“The Enchanted Castle” by Claude: Subject, Significance, Interpretation’, *The Burlington Magazine* 130 (no. 1028), 812-20 (820). Levey asserts that Keats could have seen the original painting on display at the British Institution in London in the summer of 1819 (it was then in a private collection in Kent), but I have been unable to trace any reference to this in British Institution catalogues for that year. It seems more likely that he saw a copy of the print by François Vivares (1709-1780) and William Woollett (1735-1785). Claude’s painting is now at the National Gallery, London: <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/claude-the-enchanted-castle>> [accessed July 10, 2019]. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. On the Gilded Age, see the collection of essays in the journal *Transatlantica* for 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. On Colvin at the Fitzwilliam Museum, see Lucilla Burn, *The Fitzwilliam Museum. A History* (London and New York: Philip Wilson, 2016), 90-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Sidney Colvin, *John Keats*, English Men of Letters (London: Heinemann, 1887). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. # John Davis, ‘Milnes, Robert Offley Ashburton Crewe, marquess of Crewe (1858-1945)’, *ODNB*, 2004,

    <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/32628>> [accessed July 2, 2019]. Crewe was also the first Chairman of the British Committee of the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association, set up to purchase (in 1906) and preserve Keats-Shelley House in Rome: see Catherine Payling, 'An Echo and a Light Unto Eternity: The Founding of the Keats-Shelley Memorial House', *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 19.1 (2005), 50-63 (60-61) An exchange of letters from 1933 between Crewe and Robert Underwood Johnson, prime mover in the campaign to preserve the House, is preserved in Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/70/11/3/KEATS/10 and 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of John Keats*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1848): on the role of this biography in constructing a de-historicised and de-politicised Keats, see Motion, *Keats*, 573-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/70/11/3/KEATS/1. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/70/11/3/KEATS/2. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/70/11/3/KEATS/3. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/70/11/3/KEATS/4, referring to ‘the editorship of an extremely energetic (though not to all tastes palatable) gentleman whom perhaps you know, Dr G.C. Williamson’. Williamson planned to reprint Colvin’s 1903 essay on the manuscript with a reproduction of one of the sheets of the manuscript: see *The John Keats Memorial Volume, issued by the Keats House Committee* (London and New York: The Bodley Head, 1921), with a revised version of Colvin’s ‘A Morning’s Work’ at 65-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Binyon, ‘A Sonnet’, in *The John Keats Memorial Volume*, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/70/11/3/KEATS/5. The letter also refers to Campbell Dodgson, then Curator of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. The building firm of Clement Jeakes were located adjacent to the Museum on Great Russell St in Bloomsbury. Besides the BM, they numbered among their clients members of the aristocracy, Charles Dickens and Florence Nightingale: see Emma Kay, *Dining with the Victorians: A delicious history* (Stroud: Amberley, 2015), 119-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/70/11/3/KEATS/9. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. For an overview, see Burn, *The Fitzwilliam Museum*, 116-44; Stella Panayotova, *I turned it into a palace: Sydney Cockerell and the Fitzwilliam Museum* (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 2008); idem, ‘Sydney Cockerell: a Bibliophile Director-Collector’, in *Collecting the Past: British Collectors and their Collections from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Toby Burrows and Cynthia Johnson (London: Routledge, 2018), chapter 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. For a summary see Julie F. Cordell, ‘Painting Keats: Pre-Raphaelite Artists between Social Transgressions and Painterly Conventions’, *Victorian Poetry*, 33 (1995), 341-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Fitzwilliam Museum, 713: see <<http://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/18211>> [accessed July 10, 2019]. A copy is in London, National Portrait Gallery, NPG 1605: <<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portraitExtended/mw03554/John-Keats?LinkID=mp02480&role=sit&rNo=5>> [accessed July 10, 2019]. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *KL* no. 153, Keats to Severn, 29 March 1819. Andrew Motion summarizes brilliantly the reasons for Keats’s unease: ‘It a picture of unrealised ambition – of wide eyes which look ardently to the future, of a sensual mouth which is hungry for success, of a little body crouched inside a too-large coat’ (Motion, *Keats*, 356). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Fitzwilliam Museum, Annual Review, 1920: ‘Dr J Pierpont Morgan, of Christ’s College, has presented part of a lock of hair of John Keats, cut off on his deathbed by Joseph Severn’. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Motion, *Keats,* 550-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Panayotova, *I turned it into a palace*, 165-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/5/6/3/CREWE/1, letter dated 20 June 1926. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, FM/5/6/3/CREWE/2, letter dated 7 April 1932. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Burn, *The Fitzwilliam Museum*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Cambridge, University Library, University Archives, CUR.30.4, item 631, letter dated 26 June 1933, Crewe House, Curzon St, London W1, quoted in Burn, *The Fitzwilliam Museum*, 131. Note that in 1939, Crewe sold his father’s Keats collection to Harvard University, where it forms the nucleus of the most important collection of Keats manuscript material in the world: see <<https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/24/resources/1309>> [accessed July 10, 2019]. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Fitzwilliam Museum, Annual Report for 1933, partly quoted in Panayotova, *I turned it into a palace*, 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)