

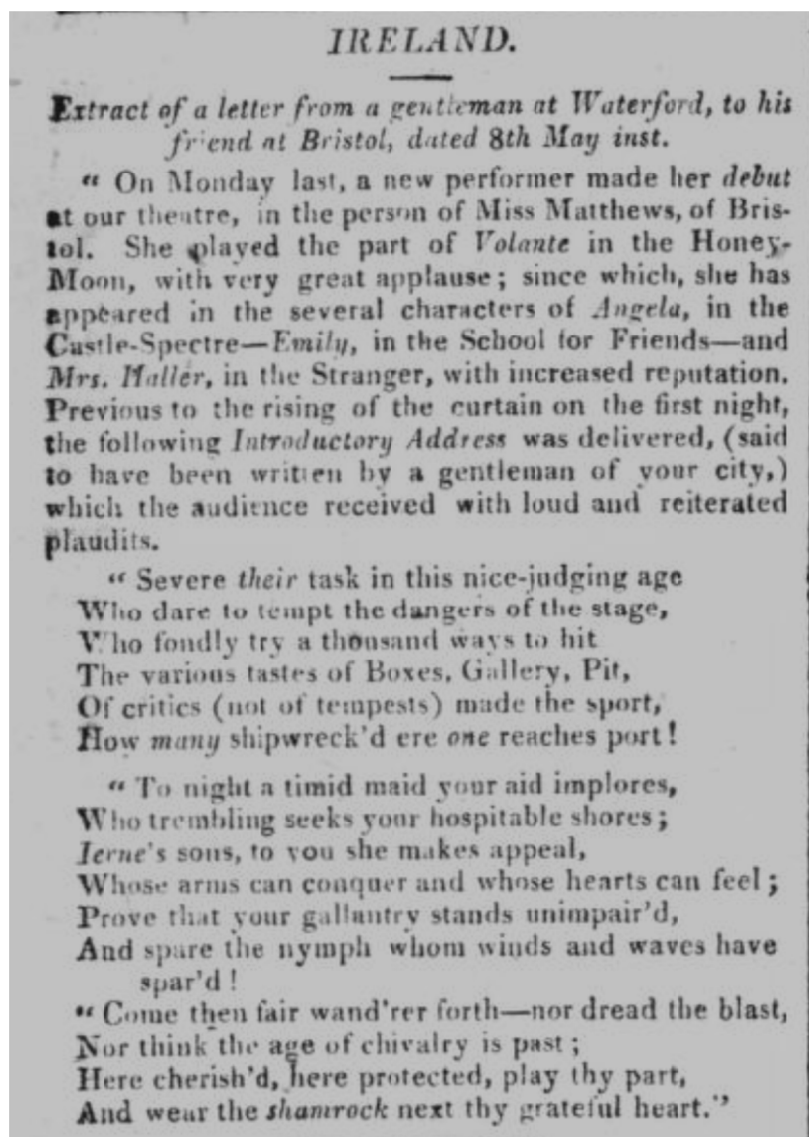
BRISTOL WOMEN, known and unknown:

Sarah Matthews: A Poke from the Psychic Facebook

Do other family historians receive pokes from the ether? This doesn't happen to me often, but now and again when I am looking through the records some unfamiliar long dead person makes an appearance, several times at random. It is comes like a dig in the ribs with shouts of "Me! Me! Me!" There is nothing for it eventually, but to take the hint. This blog is full of such meanderings off the beaten track.

The 'case' of Sarah Matthews is slightly different but I did indeed get a poke. It is the surprising tale of an unlikely couple, a union of Show Business and High Church.

The story begins with me looking for inspiration, surfing old newspapers for Bristol references, when an item in 1808 caught my eye. (This is the literal truth. I only have one functioning eye.) It was under the heading 'Ireland', an 'extract of a letter from a gentleman at Waterford to his friend at Bristol dated 8th May inst.' ¹



¹ Bristol Mirror, 28.5.1808

I believe 'the extract' is a thinly disguised 'squib' or advertisement. It certainly did its work in bringing the talents of the previously unknown 'Miss Matthews of Bristol' to my attention. Who was this mysterious starlet? I could find no immediate information about her which may suggest she was living out of a theatrical trunk, honing her talents at obscure Irish halls until

..... an advertisement of a forthcoming play at Bristol's Theatre Royal for January 1810 includes the first appearance of 'Miss S. Matthews' in the title role of 'Rosina' in a musical entertainment:

Theatre-Royal, Bristol,

ON MONDAY next, January 22, 1810, will be presented, (never performed here) a popular new Play, called

THE FOUNDLING OF THE FOREST.

Count de Valmont, Mr. Bengough—Baron Longueville, Mr. Sowerby—Florian, (the Foundling) Mr. Abbott—Bertrand, Mr. Cunningham—L'Eclair, Mr. Mallinson—Gespard, Mr. Charlton.—Geraldine, Mrs. Cummins—Rosabella, Miss Wheatly—Monica, Mrs. Grove—Unknown Female, Miss Marriott.

To which will be added, the Musical Entertainment of

ROSINA.

Mr. Belville, Mr. Webber.—Rosina, Miss S. Matthews, (being her first appearance).

Boxes 4s.—Pit 2s. 6d.—Gallery 1s. 6d.

‡‡‡ Tickets and Places to be taken of Mr. COZENS, Boxkeeper, at the Theatre; and at his shop, No. 36, King-street, every day from Ten till Three o'clock.

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In the tradition of the time, courtesy demanded that an elder sister would be known as simply 'Miss Matthews' and the addition of an initial 'S' must mean there were two of them. The initial would assume an importance later when I looked for first names. Perhaps the elder sister was the 'Miss Matthews' of the Hibernian letter?

On 29th January, 'Miss S. Matthews' played 'Agnes', it 'being her second appearance' in 'Raymond & Agnes' — 'a grand serious ballet pantomime with songs, glees and choruses.'

² Bristol Mirror, 20.1.1810

By the 12th February her sister (if she existed) had departed, possibly married. My quarry, now appearing as 'Lady Eleanor' in 'The Haunted Tower', had inherited to become the 'Miss Matthews'. On 5th March, she played 'Phoebe' in 'The Three and the Deuce'; and on 11th June, 'Louisa' in 'No Song, No Supper.'

Theatre Royal, Bristol.

For the Benefit of Mrs. WINDSOR.

ON MONDAY next, June 11, 1810, will be presented, an Historical Play, (interspersed with Music, called **THE HERO OF THE NORTH.**

Gustavus Vasa, Mr. Stanley—Cassimer Rubenski, Mr. Charlton—Carlowitz, Mr. Bengough—Sigismund of Calmar, Mr. Bennett—Gabriel, Mr. Lovegrove—Marcoff, Mr. Mallinson.—Princess Gunilda, Miss Marriot—Santa Michelwina, Mrs. Sedley—Alexa, Miss Wheatly—Ulrica, Miss Chapman—Frederica Rubenski, Mrs. Windsor.

In the course of the Evening, the celebrated Song of "CRAZY JANE," will be sung in character, by Mrs. WINDSOR.

Between the Play and Farce, a favourite interlude, called **PERSONATION.**

Lord Henry, Mr. Cunningham—Lady Julia, Mrs. Loder. To which will be added, the favourite Musical Farce of **NO SONG, NO SUPPER.**

Robin, Mr. Lovegrove—Frederick, Mr. Webber—Endless, Mr. Evans—William, Mr. Cooke—Crop, Mr. Gattie—Louisa, Miss Matthews—Dorothy, Mrs. Loder—Nelly, Mrs. Cunningham—Margaretta, Mrs. Windsor.

☞ Tickets to be had at Mr. Hodges' Music Shop: at the Bush Tavern; and other usual places; at G. Routh's Printing-Office, and of Mr. Cozens, No. 36, King-street, of whom Places for the Boxes may be taken.

³ 8.6.1810

By 16th March 1811, Miss Matthews had graduated to a top of the bill show when she played 'Claribel' in 'The Maniac' 'a new operatic drama'. On June 21st, times must have been hard: she sang a duet with Mr Short 'O! Ever in my bosom live,' in a 'Benefit' for Mr Cozens, the Box book-keeper.....

FOR THE BENEFIT OF
MR. COZENS, Box-book-keeper.
ON FRIDAY next, June 21, will be presented, (not acted these three years,) the favourite Comedy of
LOVERS' VOWS.
In the course of the evening a variety of songs.
To which will be added, a Grand Serious Heroic
Pantomime, called
OSCAR and MALVINA: or, The HALL OF FINGAL.
With the original Overture and Music.
DUET—"O! Ever in my Bosom live," by Mr. Short and
Miss Matthews.
Tickets to be had of Mr. COZENS, at his Tea Warehouse,
No. 36, King Street.

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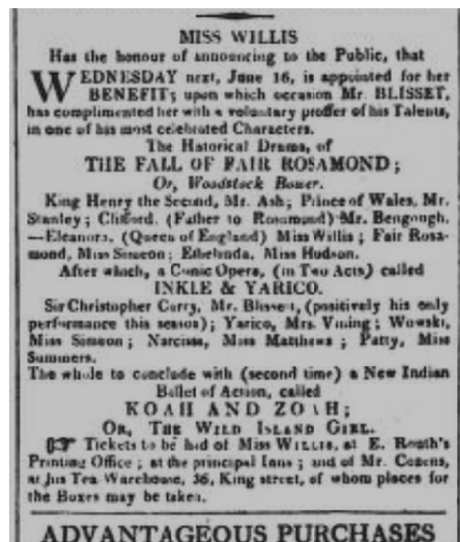
..... but November 1811 was busy. Miss Matthews reprised 'Phoebe' in 'The Three and the Deuce', played 'Clara' in 'Hit or Miss' and 'Floretta' in 'The Quaker', which was part of a triple bill in which she played 'Nancy' in a musical farce, 'No Killing, No Murder'. 'Mr Matthews', who I presumed was her father, was the star and rendered two 'favourite' comic songs, 'The Mail Coach' and 'Manager Strut was Four Feet High'. Miss Matthews' other roles during the month were 'Isabella' in 'The Doctor & the Apothecary' and 'Barbara' in 'The Iron Chest'. On 15th December she sang in a charity performance in aid of Bristol Infirmary:

BRISTOL INFIRMARY.
AT ST. THOMAS'S CHURCH, To-Morrow, SUNDAY,
the 15th of December, in the morning at Eleven,
and in the evening at Six o'clock, two Sermons will be
preached in favour of this Institution of Universal Charity,
and each Service will include a Selection of Vocal and
Instrumental Music, from the Works of Handel, Haydn,
Mozart, Kent, and Boyce; in which the benevolent ex-
ertions of the resident Amateurs and Professors, will be
gratuitously assisted by Miss Matthews, Mr. Winter, Mr.
Cummins, and Mr. G. Percevall, from Both. Leader of
the Band, Mr. Sturge; Organ, Mr. Bryan. The whole
under the direction of Mr. STANSBURY.

⁴ BM 15.6.1811

Miss M. continued performing and reprising these roles in 1812, the most notable among them in January, as 'Lady Eleanor' in 'The Haunted Tower'; in March, 'Isabella' in a dramatised version of Sir Walter Scott's poem 'The Lady of the Lake' and in December, as 'Rosalie' in 'The Peasant Boy'.

It would seem that with the possible exception of the Scott, most of these plays were eminently forgettable. Then on 16th June 1813, as part of another triple bill, Miss Matthews took the part of 'Narcissa' in 'Inkle and Yarico' a play which is still occasionally performed as it satisfies the zeitgeist, both historically and nowadays, dealing as it does with slavery.



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The tragedy of 'Inkle and Yarico', set in 1647, allegedly a true story of love and betrayal, was first related in 'The Spectator' by Richard Steele in 1711.

Thomas Inkle, aged twenty, the son of an eminent London merchant, embarks on a voyage to the West Indies to seek his fortune. He had been well schooled by his father 'in a love of gain'. Young Inkle was easy on the eye with....

'a ruddy Vigour in his Countenance, Strength in his limbs, and ringlets of fair Hair loosely flowing on his Shoulders.'

At a point in the voyage his ship, the *Achilles* anchors in a creek to take on provisions. Inkle along with several of the crew members goes ashore to explore, adventuring too far inland, where they are set upon by natives. His companions are all slain, and Inkle only just escapes with his life. Exhausted, he is discovered, hiding in the forest by Yarico, 'an Indian Maid'.

'After the first Surprise, they appeared mutually agreeable to each other.'

⁵ (BM 12.6. 1813)

He is highly charmed by her wild grace and she in turn is fascinated by him, playing with his hair, delighting in his blond curls, and particularly amused by the numerous layers of clothing he wore. She is 'immediately enamoured of him' and over several months the pair enjoy a romantic idyll. Yarico provides for his every want and at night they sleep

'amidst the Falls of Waters, and Melody of Nightingales'.

She watches over him for fear of her countrymen, cradling him in her arms.

'In this manner did the Lovers pass away their Time.... till they had learn'd a Language of their own.'

Inkle tells her how happy they will be when he takes her back to his homeland. He promises she will be clothed in silks as rich and grand as the waistcoat he wears; that they will be carried 'in houses drawn by horses without being exposed to wind and weather'.

Then another English vessel lands on the coast. Yarico contacts the ship via smoke signals, and full of joy accompanies Inkle to be introduced to his countrymen.

At this point, Inkle has a change of heart. He becomes

'very pensive, and careful what Account he should be able to give his Friends of his Voyage.'

He regrets whiling away his time for so many months and tots up how much it has cost him in lost revenue. When he hears that there is to be a market where Indians and other slaves are to be sold, he immediately offers Yarico for sale,

'..... the poor Girl, to incline him to commiserate her Condition, told him that she was with Child by him, but he only made use of that Information, to rise in his Demands upon the Purchaser.'

The 'prudent and frugal young man' sells Yarico to a Barbadian merchant.

Over the course of the eighteenth century at least sixty versions of the story were published. It was made into a play, a poem and an opera. Over time the story was changed to deliver 'a happy ending.'

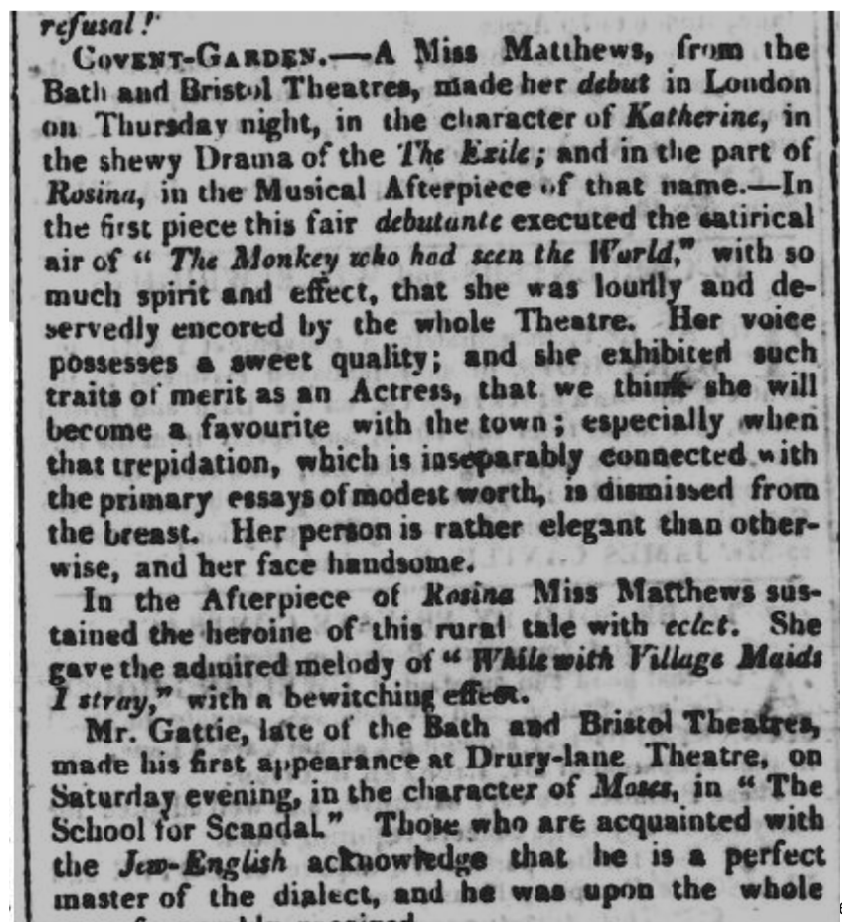
In the more palatable version, Inkle, an English trader is shipwrecked and rescued by Yarico. They fall in love. On his return to civilisation he plans to sell the girl to help defray his financial losses, at the same time arranging to marry another, Narcissa, a woman of superior social standing. Conveniently, Narcissa has second thoughts and marries someone else. Inkle, having seen the error of his ways, is re-united with Yarico.

This is described by the Theatre Royal handbill as 'a comic opera.'

'Narcissa' is the role our Miss Matthews played on the local stage. Her next performance was as 'Selina', a Circassian prisoner in 'Timour the Captive Tartar,' a spectacular affair,

breathlessly announcing an 'Equestrian Troop which mounts a grand attack, infantry and cavalry, featuring *real horses*!'

This was her last appearance in Bristol, for Miss Matthews had been discovered. As usual the Bristol Mirror was on hand to record the triumph:



Up to then, I knew the actress only as Miss Matthews, with the probability that her initial was 'S.' I had suspected two of them, and so it proved. They were the two daughters of Mr Thomas Matthews, actor and impresario, and his wife Sarah. Both girls were Bristol born and bred:

They were baptised at St James' Church: Henrietta at the age of two and a half on 18th January 1791 and Sarah, aged five months on 18th December 1792.

Henrietta would also appear at Covent Garden in her married name, 'Mrs Payne', but from the somewhat muted review, of December 1819, it appears her sister was 'the star':

⁶ Bristol Mirror 18.9.1813

THEATRES.

Want of room prevents us from particularly entering into the merits of the performances last night. At Drury Lane, Mrs. PAYNE, of provincial celebrity (sister of Miss MATTHEWS), performed the part of *Lady Teazle* in a very effective style; and would have been still more happy in the representation had she thrown more rusticity of character into it. She was very much applauded throughout.—At Covent-Garden, Miss MACAULEY appeared as *Jane Shore*, and acquitted herself with so much ability as to call forth reiterated bursts of applause. Mrs. BUNN's *Alicia* was as spirited and effective as usual; and the whole of the performance went off with great eclat.

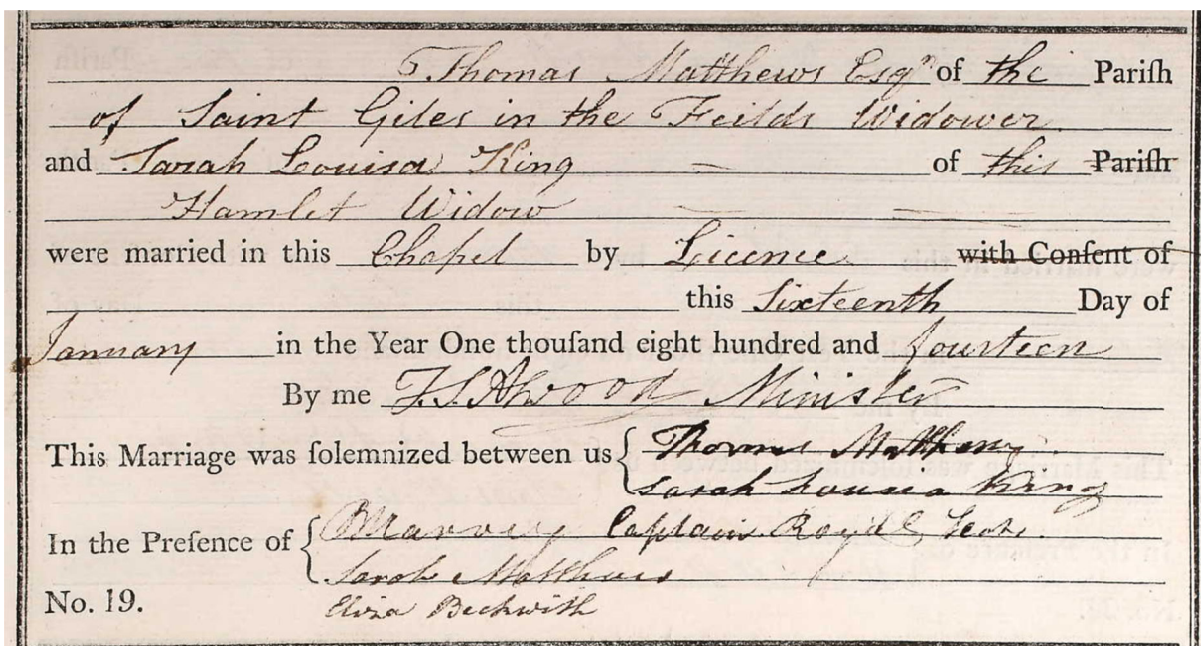
(The only marriage I can find for a Henrietta Matthews is to a Robert Payne, by licence at Hull in 1813. They may or may not be the correct people. 'Mrs & Mrs Payne' appear frequently at provincial theatres and in an ideal world Henrietta's husband would be Howard Payne, an American actor and prolific playwright, 1791-1843 who from the 1810s enjoyed a successful career on the English stage, including appearances at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. His chief claim to fame is as the writer of 'Home Sweet Home' which first appeared in his opera 'Clari, or the Maid of Milan'. I may return to 'the other Miss Matthews' in the future.)

On 19th January 1814 a marriage announcement in Bristol Times and Mirror confirms again that it was Sarah who was the celebrity. Evidently her mother, also called Sarah, had died some years before, possibly the Sarah Matthews buried at St Augustine the Less in Bristol, on 15th July 1807. The notice concerns the widowed Thomas Matthews:

"Married. On Sunday se'nnight at Hammersmith Church, Mr Thomas Matthews of this City, [i.e. Bristol] father of Miss Matthews of Covent Garden Theatre, to Miss King, of Hammersmith Terrace."

The wedding had taken place on the 16th January:

⁷ Morning Post, 17.12.1819



Sarah Matthews was one of the witnesses to her father's marriage.

She was a hit at Covent Garden. She was so popular her sudden failure to appear due to illness in January 1814 caused a near riot, leaving her understudy in tears. Her recovery a few weeks later was also widely reported and by 6th March 1814, a London paper, 'The News' records her and another actress as 'The Wandering Boys', wearing very daring costumes:

'No straggling hisses now greet the author's offence against good taste. If the delicacy of Miss Matthews and Miss Booth has no objection to tight pantaloons we should indeed be fastidious to quarrel with such a graceful exhibition of pretty legs and ancles [sic].'

Sarah was versatile. As well as sundry song and dance productions during the year, she played 'Ophelia' opposite one of the most celebrated actors of the age 'Mr Kemble', John Philip Kemble, the brother of Sarah Siddons.

In January 1815 she was 'Ariel' in 'The Tempest', singing 'Where the Bee Sucks' with 'great spirit and was rapturously encored by a packed house' according to the Anglo-Gallican Monitor. In the same month she was in a comic opera, 'Love in the Village' and in a musical evening of songs by Handel she rendered 'As like the Dove'. That month she again fell ill – at the time an infection had cut down most of the Covent Garden cast - but she had recovered sufficiently by the end of the month to deputise for Mr Sinclair, who was still on the sick list. She was lauded by the critic as 'A very useful and deserving young lady'. Once again she took a 'breeches role', singing counter-tenor - 'she executed the songs in a superior style' - in Handel's 'Artaxerxes'. In February she was in a new opera, 'The Farmer's Wife' and still appeared frail, but after a drink of water rendered 'a pretty song.' A section of the audience cried out 'Mercy! Do not force it!' but she seemed 'so eager to continue that the merciful were silenced.' What a trouper!

In March she was in the opera 'John of Paris' and with Mr Matthews, her father, the farce, 'Love Laughs at Locksmiths.' On 1st May, the Morning Herald announced the annual exhibition of portraits at the Royal Academy. Miss Matthews featured at no. 524 in a trio with fellow actresses Miss

Stephens [misspelt as Stevens) and Miss Booth. That month Sarah was the 'Second Bacchante' in the 'Masque of Comus' with music by Handel. In June she went on tour, one of a 'company of comedians' from West End theatres who would be appearing in Oxford at the Racket Court, Blue Boar Lane. On 25th June, Bell's Weekly Messenger announced her forthcoming Benefit along with a performer still famous today, Mr Joseph Grimaldi, otherwise 'Joey the Clown' from whom all clowns derive their name. The performance on 4th July 1815 would include 'the serious opera, Valentine and Orson' then the pantomime, 'Harlequinade Whittington'.

THEATRE ROYAL, COVENT GARDEN.
Miss MATTHEWS and Mr. GRIMALDI have the honour of announcing to their Friends and the Public, their **BENEFIT** will take place on Tuesday, July 4, when will be presented a Favourite **OPERA**; after which a Grand Scene from the serious Pantomime called **VALENTINE and ORSON**. To conclude with **HARLEQUIN WHITTINGTON**; in which Mr. **GARNERIN** will present the audience with a grand display of Fire Works, and the ascent of an illuminated and Detonating Balloon, and an exhibition of Burning Glasses, never before seen in this Country.—Tickets and Places to be had of Miss Matthews, 13, Leicester-street, Leicester Square; of Mr. Grimaldi, Prospect Cottage, Spa Fields; and of Mr. Brandon, at the Box Office.

In July 1815, Miss M. reprised 'Ariel' in 'The Tempest, played 'Annette' in 'Lord of the Manor' and according to The Globe was 'a lively and engaging Agnes' in 'The Mountaineer'. In August she was 'much commended' as 'Barbara' in 'The Iron Chest'. In 'A Chip off the Old Block' at the Haymarket Theatre, though the farce was generally 'languid', her father, Mr Matthews was loudly encored for his mimicry, and Miss Matthews, though ill, had left her room at great risk and stoically appeared so as not to disappoint the public. This was followed by 'Annette' in 'Secrets worth knowing'. On 12th September, back at Covent Garden, in another Shakespearean role, her 'Ophelia' was 'simple and unaffected. She rendered the distracted warblings with much sweetness.'

In September 1815, a concert in Kent at Egham Assembly Rooms was advertised, to be followed by a Grand Ball at the venue. Various performers from Covent Garden had been engaged to appear. Miss Matthews would sing the ballads, 'Robin Adair' and 'With lovely suit and plaintive ditty' from her favourite role in 'Rosina'. The proceedings turned farcical, as described in The Globe, 20th October:

A most extraordinary circumstance took place on Tuesday evening at Egham, where a Concert and Ball was announced to take place in the Assembly Rooms, for the benefit of a professional gentleman of St. George's Chapel, who has a family of infant children, and who has been many years deprived of the use of his limbs. With this humane attraction, together with that of Miss MATTHEWS, of London, and a number of highly approved vocal and instrumental performers, yet, strange to tell, not a single person attended as an audience. The performers, after waiting above an hour after the time announced for beginning, had the candles put out, and departed.

If she was embarrassed by the debacle, the show had to go on, as 'Kathleen' in the opera, 'The Poor Soldier', followed by 'Daphne' in the romance, 'Cymon' and in November by 'What's a Man of fashion?' In December she was 'Amanda' in 'Hobinet the Bandit', a musical entertainment.

In January 1816, she was 'Second Fairy' in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. In a poor review, the Theatrical Examiner was scathing about 'the full grown, substantial and well-fed fairies.....we shall remember you but we do not believe in your fantastic tribe.' In February, Miss M. was 'handsome' in 'Love in a Village', an adjective which again may imply sturdiness. In March, she was 'Julia' in 'Guy Mannering' a part she would play many times. In April, 'Rosanthe' in 'Brother and Sister'.

In January 1817, in 'a dull piece', an opera, 'Three Miles from Paris', Miss M. as 'Louisa' and Mrs Davenport as her aunt 'did all they could with two very insipid characters'.

In May 1817, Mr & Miss Matthews were among 'the principal corps' for the opening of the Haymarket Theatre Season. In August she was cast as 'Molly Mizum' in a new comedy, 'Teasing Made Easy'. Miss M. 'flirted and sighed as the enamoured waiting maid and gave herself the airs of a fine lady to great effect,' and as 'Rosina' – again - in a very long review, the critic implied with a yawn, 'we've heard it all before'. She still continued to play in productions at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden and in December was 'Julia' again in a revival of 'Guy Mannering'. In September 1817, 'Miss Matthews 'is respectable as Ophelia. Greater praise we cannot bestow' said The Public Ledger.

This was followed in September by more revivals, the 'Castle of Andalusia' and 'The Poor Soldier'. Her name was used to advertise sheet music: 'Light of my Life'. as sung by Miss Matthews at the Haymarket.

In September and October, she was 'Celia' in 'As You Like It', followed by 'Stella Clifton' in 'The Slave'. In 'Siege of Belgrade' the same month, 'Miss M. looked charming but had 'too much singing and too little acting to be admired as she deserves.' In November, she was 'Victoria' in the comic opera, 'The Castle of Andalusia' followed by 'Constantia' in 'The Cabinet'

In the perennial favourite, 'Guy Mannering', Miss M. was in her usual role, 'Julia', over Christmas 1817 and in January 1818.



Advert: Morning Chronicle 23.12.1817

This was followed in February by 'Inisilla' in 'Zuma', or 'The Tree of Health' a comic opera. In April, in the 'The Devil's Bridge', the critic was mean: Miss Matthews was 'a poor substitute for Miss Kelly', who was indisposed.

In May 1818, 'The Slave' was reprised. In June, an innovation. Miss M. played 'Lady Frances Touchwood' in 'The Belles' Stratagem', a feminine skit on Farquhar's 'The Beaux' Stratagem' (first performed in 1707 and still in the repertory.) The 'Belles' was a brave effort, but it does not seem to have been repeated. In June, Miss M. was 'Fatima' in 'Bluebeard or Female Curiosity', described as 'a domestic romance' followed by 'Katherine' in 'The Exile' which included 'Miss Matthews with a Polacca' (a polonaise, a Polish dance). On 18th July she was 'Jessica' in 'The Merchant of Venice' and on the same bill the eponymous 'Rosina'.

In July, in 'Nine Points of the Law' at the Haymarket, Miss M. 'sang a pretty song,' though the ensemble, damned by faint praise, 'exerted themselves to the utmost of their abilities'. This was followed by 'The Rival Soldiers' and in August, 'Teasing' again, and as 'Eliza' in 'The Flitch of Bacon'. In September, the farce, 'Who's my Father?' and the 'Rival Soldiers' again.

In January 1819, she was absent from 'Guy Mannering', due to illness, probably dying of boredom. Then she reprised 'Fatima' in February, 'Nine Points', again, as well as singing in various 'Benefit' concerts. In July, on the Last night of the Company's performances for the season she reprised 'Ophelia'.

In August she had a well-earned rest, but in September she was back with 'Guy Mannering' and 'Fatima' in the Devil's Bridge

On 20th October 1819 deputising for Mrs Dickins who was sick, she rendered 'Lucinda' in 'Lord of the Manor', with 'animation and sprightliness'. In November, a new play, she was 'Lauretta' in 'Richard Coeur de Lion' and in November, 'Venus' in a masque 'Arthur and Emmeline'. The Christmas production was 'Guy Mannering' for the umpteenth time.

In January 1820, Miss M. was 'Maria McIntyre' in 'The Antiquary', a musical drama, which was on again in February and April. .

THEATRE-ROYAL, COVENT-GARDEN.

THIS EVENING, TUESDAY, April 18,
will be acted a new Musical Drama, called

THE ANTIQUARY.

**Jonathan Oldbuck, Mr. Liston; Caxton, Mr. Blanchard;
Lovel, Mr. Duruset; Sir Arthur Wardour, Mr. Chapman;
Edie Ochiltre, Mr. Emery; Lord Glenallan, Mr. Connor; Hec-
tor M'Intyre, Mr. Abbott. Miss Isabella Wardour, Miss
Stephens; Miss Maria M'Intyre, Miss Matthews; Miss
Griselda Oldbuck, Mrs. Davenport; Elspeth of the Craig-
burnfoot, Mrs. Faucit.**

On 18th April 1820 she made her final appearance. Prior to this there had been several missed performances due to her 'sudden indisposition', and it seems probable that her star was on the

wane. At the age of twenty eight, having endured eleven years of gruelling appearances in farces, musical dramas and Shakespeare, she was probably tired out and possibly considered too old for the ingénue roles in which she specialised. Her life was about to change totally.

It was during my continued trawl through the records to see what had happened to her, (there was no farewell performance) I came across the astonishing information which makes me think this saga was in fact a “Me! Me! Me!” after all.

On 21st December 1820, I was taken by surprise. Sarah Matthews had got married! The fact itself surprised me, but it was the venue which made me catch my breath. The ceremony was performed by none other than the Rev Mr Coneybeare (of fossil-hunting fame) at my own parish, St Luke's Brislington!

Sarah's bridegroom was John Gordon, son of the Dean of Lincoln – did his bride, an actress raise a few eyebrows? The Bristol Mercury's notice contained the additional information that he was an MP “in the last Parliaments for Wootton Bassett and Athlone”. Which must have required a fair amount of travelling unless Athlone was one of the infamous ‘rotten boroughs’.

On Thursday, at Brislington church, by the Rev. Wm. Coneybeare, John Gordon, Esq. eldest son of the Very Rev. the Dean of Lincoln, to Miss Matthews, late of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, and second daughter of Mr. Thomas Matthews, formerly of this city.

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MARRIAGES solemnized in the Parish of Brislington
in the County of Somerset in the Year 1820

John Gordon of the Parish
of St James Westminster Bachelor
and Sarah Matthews of this Parish
Spinster
were married in this Church by License with Consent of
this twenty first Day of
December in the Year One thousand eight hundred and twenty
By me Wm Coneybeare
This Marriage was solemnized between us { John Gordon
Sarah Matthews
In the Presence of { John Hill
Robert Hill
No. 58.

The Marriage Licence was endorsed by John Hill, Brislington, the bondsman, who with Robert Hill was also a witness to the wedding.

⁸ Bristol Mirror 23.12.1820. He was the second son, not the eldest.

John Gordon was born on 20th October 1794, the 2nd son of the Very Rev. George Gordon, DD, Dean of Lincoln. He was educated at Rugby School, 1807 and at St John's, Cambridge, 1811. His grandfather was precenter and his father Dean of Lincoln. Both were active in local politics. Gordon was returned for Athlone by his patron, William Handcock, Lord Castlemaine, who usually 'sold the seat to the Treasury'. He was classed by Peel as a supporter of government and voted against Tierney's motion for a committee on the state of the nation, 1819. His only contribution to debate was on 25th February 1819, and barely reported as 'Gordon spoke in a voice so low that the reporters could only catch fragments of sentences.' He voted against Catholic Relief on 3rd May and was in the minority against the extension of the franchise at Penryn, 22nd June. He supported Ministers on the Seditious Libel Bill 23rd December 1819. He was replaced at Athlone in 1820 and subsequently took Holy Orders.⁹

Somehow one did not see this High Church Tory (and apparent stuffed shirt: against Catholic Relief and extension of the franchise indeed!) to be a stage-door Johnny, but somehow this unlikely pair got together.

A child, George Tomline, was born in 8th August 1823. His baptismal entry, at Acton, 3rd September is strange 'the 'son of John & [blank] Gordon, gentleman'. Surely he could not be the son of another mother? Probably the vicar simply forgot the mother's name when he came to write up the register, but it's an oddity, nevertheless. John Gordon's mother was a Tomlinson, but this is coincidental: the boy was named after the Bishop of Winchester, George Pretyman Tomline.

Sept 3	George Tomline	John &	Gordon	Acton	Gentleman	Mr. Andrew Aug.
No. 506.						

A daughter, Isabella Emma Elizabeth was born 19th August 1825 and baptised at St Andrew Undershaf, London on 7th May with both parents' names shown. Gordon was by then a 'clergyman'. He had been vicar of Bierton with Buckland, in Buckinghamshire since 1825, a post he held until 1834.

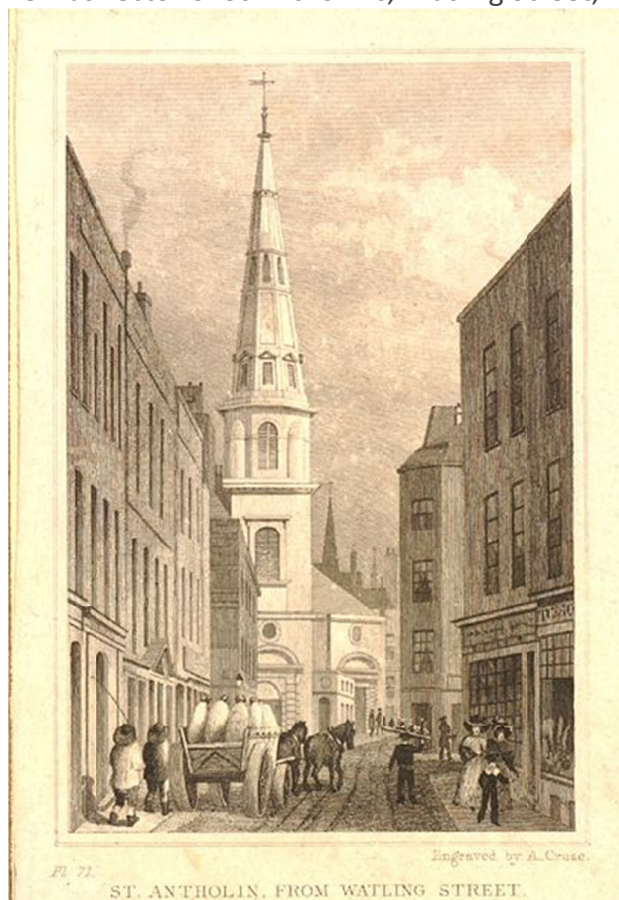
Born August 19 1825	1827. May 7 th	Isabella Emma Elizabeth Daughter of	John & Sarah	Gordon	Kennington	Clergyman	John Gordon Rector
No. 313.							

⁹ History of Parliament.



Church House, Bierton with Buckland.

He was rector of St Antholin's, Watling Street, 1827-35



There were two younger children, John, born in London, according to the census and Henry, date unknown.

Gordon was prebendary (honorary canon, Bath & Wells) at Easton-in-Gordano, Somerset from 1834 and from 1835 he was vicar of Edwinstowe, Nottinghamshire, where according to legend, Robin Hood married Maid Marian. He held both these posts until his death.

Rev Gordon preached at the Oddfellows' dinner in June 1835 'A new commandment I give to you that ye love one another'. The following year he preached to the organisation again, 'Give me neither poverty nor riches'. 'Glees' and other songs were sung, but no mention

was made of Mrs Gordon's previous occupation and it is unlikely she attended. It would not have been seemly. The health of the couple was drunk thrice, 'May the benevolent exertions Mr & Mrs Gordon meet their reward in the gratitude of their parishioners'. (Nottingham Review)

In 1841, John and Sarah were recorded at the Vicarage in Edwinstowe with 2 male servants, 3 females and a couple of visitors, William and Anne Kirke. (It seems that Sarah was sensitive that she was two years older than her husband. She is described aged '40' and John, '45'.) Their children were all away at school. Isabella was at a girls' establishment 'Westgate Sycamory' at Louth, Lincolnshire and George at Westminster School. (Possibly the two younger boys were also at Westminster.) George was admitted to Clare College, Cambridge in December 1841, and matriculated in the Michaelmas term of 1842.

On 7th May 1843, Rev John Gordon died aged 49. In his will, made in London at no. 22 Craven Street, Strand, two weeks before his death, he left all his household goods, plus carriages and horses to his 'dear wife Sarah' with £300 immediately after his death, with all other holdings in trust between her and his elder brother, Rev Henry Gordon, to buy government bonds for the upkeep of Sarah and their children, an exception being an estate at Middle Rasen in Lincolnshire entailed to his eldest son, George Tomline, over which he had no control. The will was proved by Sarah in July.

The marriage seems to have been a happy one, for which the only evidence is John's will. Their lives, like his Parliamentary career, were so unobtrusive as to be almost non-existent. I wonder if she savoured the rest after her years of hectic activity? Did the parishioners know of her previous life? She would have had to leave the vicarage shortly after she was widowed to allow for the instalment of the new incumbent, but nothing is known of her in the next years until she made her will on 12th January 1850. She was then resident at Cuckney, near Worksop. Cuckney Hall was the seat of George Tomline, who married Harriet Harrison, the daughter of the Rev T. Harrison of Firby Hall, Yorkshire in 1847, the year before he obtained his B.A. degree. Sarah's will is very short. She leaves 'all my plate, furniture, books, linen to be equally divided between my children, Isabella, John and Henry' with Isabella separately to have her jewellery. George is not mentioned, though he was a witness, and after swearing an oath, acted as executor. I assume the omission is because she knew he was already well off because of the estate at Middle Rasen. Sarah died on 1st February 1850. The obituary notice in the Notts. Guardian reads 'Sarah, widow of the late Rev John Gordon, vicar of Edwinstowe, in the 59th year of her age.' She was buried at Edwinstowe next to John on 8th February 1850. On the 18th February Harriet Gordon was delivered of twins, born prematurely. Sadly, the girl twin, named Sarah after her grandmother, died shortly after birth.

The remaining family, recorded at Cuckney Hall in 1851, shows that George Tomline and Harriett had three sons in quick succession, George D., 2, born at his mother's home, Firby, John C.F. aged 1 (the surviving twin) and an unnamed male infant aged one month. Also with them were George's mother-in-law, Anna Harrison, as well as his brother and sister, Isabella aged 25, and John, aged 23, an ensign in the Honourable East India Company. There is no sign of the elusive Henry, the younger brother. They lived in some style, looked after by two manservants, five female servants and a monthly nurse.

Sarah's family had one more surprise for me. George Tomline Gordon migrated to America (presumably with his family). A stint as a Captain in the Notts. Militia had given him a taste for military life. He joined the Confederate Army, becoming a Colonel in the 11th Tennessee Infantry, serving 1862-5, 'with distinction in some of the most important battles of the Civil War.'

I have to say I would have preferred him to have been a Union Officer, but you can't win 'em all.