

## THE HEMANS' MEMORIAL TABLET.

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THE Memorial Tablets Sub-Committee experienced considerable difficulty in accurately identifying the house in Duke Street in which Mrs. Felicia D. Hemans was born.

As Hon. Secretary of the Sub-Committee, I collected information which satisfied the members of the Society that the house now No. 118, Duke Street, was the birthplace of the poetess, and a tablet was placed thereon in January, 1899. The identification of this house was not challenged until November, 1902, when a letter appeared in the *Liverpool Daily Post*, in which the writer (Mr. John Hughes) tried to prove that Mrs. Hemans could not have been born in the house the Historic Society had placed a tablet on. The reply to that letter satisfied Mr. John Hughes that he was wrong, and that the birthplace of Mrs. Hemans had been correctly identified for the Historic Society.

The Sub-Committee have kindly authorized the reprinting of this correspondence, as it contains information (notably the extract from Mr. R. W. Bourne's letter) which did not appear in my pamphlet on the *Liverpool Homes of Mrs. Hemans*.

So many houses in Duke Street have been referred to as the birthplace of Mrs. Hemans, that it is desirable to place on record all evidence which will assist in the accurate identification of a house of such great local interest.

GEORGE T. SHAW,

*Hon. Secretary Memorial Tablets Sub-Committee of the  
Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.*

## THE BIRTHPLACE OF MRS. HEMANS.

The actual house in which Mrs. Hemans was born has been the source of much speculation among our local historians and antiquaries. Recently, however, the matter seemed to have been finally set at rest. Mr. Shaw, the able librarian of the Liverpool Athenæum, contributed a paper to the proceedings of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, wherein he demonstrated the identity of the present No. 118, Duke Street with the No. 72, at which George Browne, the father of Felicia Dorothea Hemans, undoubtedly lived in 1790 and onwards. Also the above Society has caused a tablet to be placed on the named house. But recent investigations in this period, on a totally different matter, brought into light certain facts, which have caused me to put the question thus: "George Browne undoubtedly lived at the present 118, Duke Street; but was Mrs. Hemans born there?" My answer is in the negative. Previously to Mr. Shaw's paper, Liverpool inquirers had their choice of two houses which local historians had given as the place of the birth of the poetess

Mr. James Stonehouse, writing, in 1863, in *Recollections of Old Liverpool*, gives the house as the "third house from Colquitt Street."

Mr. James A. Picton (afterwards Sir James), in *Memorials of Liverpool*, gives the place "a few doors below the Newsroom, "in a modest-looking dwelling, formerly numbered 32." The Newsroom was at the corner of Slater Street, and is now converted into the offices of Messrs. Walker.

Now, the difficulty of the case arises from the mercantile crash of 1793, which fell alike on every part of England. Liverpool suffered; and it will be in the recollection of all that this was the historic occasion on which Liverpool, in its corporate capacity, issued promissory notes against the security of the corporate estate for the benefit of its mercantile community. One effect of this crash was that the interval between the issuing of the local directories was longer than usual, none being issued between 1790 and 1796. Another effect was the bankruptcy of the bank of Charles Caldwell & Co., with the incidental (but for the purposes of this inquiry important) failure of one of their clients, Messrs. Browne & Brown, of whom the senior was the father of Mrs. Hemans. Caldwell's bankruptcy is gazetted on 8th April, and Browne & Brown's on 22nd April, 1793. The matter was immediately taken in hand by the assignees of the respective estates; and in a very short while the furniture, &c., of the private homes was offered for sale by public auction. In George Browne's

case there were two sales: one of the ordinary household goods, some of which were doubtless bought by friends to enable the dispossessed family to exist; the other, in July, of the "remaining furniture, &c., of Geo. Browne, plate, wine, paintings, and prints: the above collection will prove as "curious as it is valuable." I give the quotation as throwing a side-light on the possible source of Mrs. Heman's artistic temperament. Early in September, 1793, the dwelling-house in Duke Street, and two warehouses (six storeys high), in Henry Street, were sold; and George Browne was without home or furniture, save a possible remnant.

Now, as Picton notes, the date of Mrs. Hemans's birth is given in the memoir to her works as 25th September, 1793, but according to the *Memorials* of H. F. Chorley, the birth was in the succeeding year. And to this agrees the tablet to her memory in St. Asaph Cathedral—"Felicia Hemans, died "May 16, 1835, aged forty-one" For these reasons it is not probable that Mrs. Hemans was born at the present 118, Duke Street, and I consider the Historic Society should revise its decision. But which of the two remaining possibles is the house? Stonehouse's statement, "the third house from Colquhitt Street," is somewhat enigmatic, as it is quite possible to go in opposite directions to "the third house." He states that he had the pleasure of the acquaintance of Miss Browne, but obviously it was not, nor does he state it was, at this house. He also gives as an identification of the house the fact of one of the remaining trees of "The Lady's Walk" being in the garden of the house next door, and of its being apostrophised by Mrs. Hemans in one of her earlier poems. But this would apply equally to the house named by Picton, inasmuch as the "Lady's Walk" extended from opposite York Street to Berry Street.

Picton's reference (see *ante*) is somewhat vague, "formerly numbered 32." I will endeavour to make it intelligible. The numbering of the street at this time was very erratic. It grieved the careful soul of good John Gore, to whom we inquirers of a later day are so much indebted, and on the title-page of the directories of this period he liberated his soul thus:—"With the numbers as they are (or ought to be) affixed "to their houses." The method of numbering was this:—The numbers commenced on the left-hand side of the street, and continued consecutively to the top, and then turned down on the other side. Hence in a complete street the first number and the last faced each other. In the case of a complete street this was all right. But when the entire length of a street had not been built on, the gradual filling up of the vacant spaces seriously disturbed any previously attempted numbering of the

houses. Thus it rarely happens that the numbers of any street about this period are in agreement in consecutive directories. I take it, then, that Picton's phrase, "formerly numbered 32," refers to the period when the street had been built up.

This phrase also, "a few doors below the Newsroom," is anachronistic, for when the event took place which we are anxious to localise the Union Newsrooms had not been built. In Gore's map for 1796 (in the Binn's collection) there is a vacant spot where, later on (1800-1), the Newsrooms were built. But with this help we can fix on the house which Picton indicates.

After weary wading through the directories of 1790 and 1796 (unfortunately, the cross reference system to names under the respective streets did not come in till much later), I have managed to construct a list of the residents in the indicated part of Duke Street. I present here a few of them; also, for comparison, similar lists for the years 1803 and 1807. In the latter year the street had, so to speak, steadied itself in the way of numbering:—

1790.	
Street No.	Name.
25	Eliz. Wallbank.
26	Robt. Eccles.
27	Edw. Murray.
28	Rowland Blount.
	Vacant lot.

1803.	
Street No.	Name.
34	Eliz. Wallbank.
35	Isabella Lee.
36	Edward Murray.
37	Edward Blount.
38	Union Rooms.

1796.	
Street No.	Name.
27	Eliz. Wallbank.
28	—
29	Edward Murray.
30	Rowland Blount.
	Vacant lot.

1807.	
Street No.	Name.
31	Eliz. Wallbank.
32	Ann Lee.
33	Edward Murray.
34	Walter Blount.
35	Union Rooms.

Now these tables present a most striking corroboration of Picton's statement. The continuity of tenancy in several cases gives excellent testimony as to the exact locale of the required house.

Whatever the source of Picton's information may be, it is shown above that the house which he names was untenanted in 1796. Now we know from all sources that Geo. Browne continued to live in Duke Street after his dispossession from No. 72. The probabilities are that he had gone to reside in the smaller house indicated by Picton, and which he vacated before 1796, when he was resident in Bold Street.

The conclusion of the whole matter, in my opinion, is that the present No. 118 has been shown to be impossible; the



statement of Stonehouse to be very debatable; and that the balance of probability lies in favour of the house named by Sir James Picton.

JOHN HUGHES.

[There is, we believe, in the possession of a Liverpool lady a collection of letters, from an aunt of Mrs. Heman's, written in the year of the poetess's birth, which, if studied by any competent person, would finally settle the question of the number and the date.—ED. D. P.]

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TO THE EDITOR OF THE "DAILY POST."

Sir,—The article which appeared in your issue of Monday last on "The Birthplace of Mrs. Hemans," by Mr. John Hughes, is interesting, but not convincing.

Before repeating the evidence which induced the Historic Society to place a tablet on the house now numbered 118, Duke Street, permit me to examine the statements made by your correspondent.

1. Mr. Hughes states that there were no local directories published between 1790 and 1796. There was a directory published in 1794, but not by J. Gore. A copy of it is in this library.

2. Mr. Hughes states that Mrs. Hemans's father was the senior partner in the firm of Browne & Brown. Has your correspondent any evidence to support that statement? There were two merchants in Liverpool at that time named George Browne. This matter does not affect the point at issue, but it rather illustrates the way Mr. Hughes appears to jump to conclusions.

3. Mr. Hughes states—"Now we know from all sources that George Browne continued to live in Duke Street after his dispossession from No. 72" (now No. 118). Do we? I have never seen the slightest evidence to justify such a statement. Different houses in Duke Street have been indicated as the birthplace of the poetess, but that does not imply that her father lived in them all.

4. The tit-bit of the article is the way the writer deals with Picton's statement that Mrs. Hemans was born "a few doors below the Newsroom [Slater Street], in a modest-looking dwelling, formerly numbered 32." It is here that Mr. Hughes is most interesting and least convincing. After describing the lack of system in the numbering of the houses, your correspondent states: "I take it, then, that 'Picton's phrase, 'formerly numbered 32,' refers to the period 'when the street had been built up' (say 1807). I contend that Mr. Hughes is not justified in so understanding Sir James Picton's statement. That statement does not bear the

slightest sign of personal investigation on the part of our local historian. If he had taken the trouble to find out the number of the house in 1807, he would have indicated more definitely its number in 1873 (the year the *Memorials of Liverpool* were published). When dealing with other residents in the same street (e.g., Richard Kent and John Sparling) Picton definitely indicated their houses.

If we grant that Mr Hughes's interpretation of Picton's statement is the correct one, we are supposed to arrive at the following extraordinary conclusion, viz., that the fact that a house which was numbered 32 in 1807 was unoccupied in 1796, is evidence that Mrs Hemans was born there in 1793-4.

There is not a scrap of evidence to show that George Browne ever occupied "a house a few doors below the Newsroom" (Slater Street). When Browne removed from the house now numbered 118, Duke Street, it was taken by Cornelius Bourne, and that gentleman's name appeared as the occupier in the directory for 1794. Browne's name did not appear in the directory for 1794, and if he had been a householder at that time, it is only reasonable to suppose that it would have been inserted.

Is Mr. Hughes quite sure that the house "formerly numbered 32" was unoccupied in 1796? It was not unusual for addresses to be given in the early directories as "Duke Street," without any numbers attached. It therefore follows that, unless Mr. Hughes has satisfactorily placed every householder so described, he cannot with certainty say that No. 28 was unoccupied in 1796. It is a rather curious coincidence that a house which was numbered 32, Duke Street, in 1796, and 28 in 1794, was occupied in those years by a James Brown. Is it not probable that Picton's informant made a mistake?

It is well to remember that this controversy is not a new one. It dates back to 1835, the year of the death of Mrs. Hemans. In considering the evidence which follows readers will do well to bear in mind that two sisters of Mrs. Hemans's mother resided in the neighbourhood of Duke Street down to the year 1852.

The obituary notice of the poetess which appeared in the *Athenæum*, contained the following statement:—"Felicia Dorothea Browne was born in Liverpool, in a small, quaint-looking house in St. Anne Street" In the *Liverpool Mercury*, of June 5th, 1835 (probably the week following the notice in the *Athenæum*), appeared the following correction, unsigned, but preceded by an interesting editorial paragraph, which I quote: "[It appears from the following communication, from a very respectable and well-known gentleman in this town, that the statement in the *Athenæum*, relative to Mrs. Hemans, is in some respects erroneous—ED.]: Mrs. Hemans was the

“grand-daughter of Benedict P. Wagner, to whom I served  
“my apprenticeship, under the firm of Fahrer & Wagner. . .  
“Mr. Fahrer retired from business, and I became subsequently  
“the partner of Mr. Wagner. . . Mr. Wagner had four  
“sons and three daughters, all born at his house in Wolsten-  
“holme Square (with the garden at the back fronting Duke  
“Street), and where his two surviving daughters, Miss Eliza  
“and Miss Anne, still reside. Miss Wagner (Felicia Dorothea)  
“married Mr. George Browne, of Cork, . . and resided in  
“a house in the upper end of Duke Street, where, I believe,  
“Mrs. Hemans and his other children were born.” I may  
here remark that a house below Slater Street cannot be  
described as being at “the upper end of Duke Street.”

This correction appears to have had an effect on the writer  
of the obituary notice of Mrs. Hemans which appeared in the  
*Gentleman's Magazine* for July, 1835, as it is there stated that  
“Felicia Dorothea Browne was born at Liverpool, in the  
“house now occupied by Mr. Molineux, in Duke Street.”  
The house Mr. Molineux resided in, in July, 1835, is the one  
that now bears the Historic Society's tablet, and is numbered  
118, Duke Street.

As I have stated above, the gentleman who took the house  
in Duke Street when Mr. George Browne vacated it was  
named Cornelius Bourne. That Mr. Bourne's grandson  
(Mr. Robert W. Bourne) is now residing in Sussex, and is  
a member of the Lancashire and Cheshire Historic Society.  
When he received the volume of the Society's *Transactions*  
containing my paper on “The Liverpool Homes of Mrs.  
“Hemans,” he wrote a letter, from which I quote the following  
paragraph: “Mr. Shaw is quite correct as to the house in  
“Duke Street, which has often been pointed out to me by my  
“father. Mrs. Hemans was born at the time when her father  
“changed his house, which was taken by Mr. C. Bourne.  
“Most of the furniture had been removed, but her mother was  
“so ill that she could not be moved, and a bed was made up  
“for her in the dining-room for a considerable time, to the  
“very great inconvenience of my grandfather. This story  
“was often told to me years ago, and I have no doubt that it  
“is reliable.” Mr. R. W. Bourne's statement is the link that  
completes the chain of evidence in support of the house now  
numbered 118. To identify the house in which Mr. Browne  
resided in Duke Street was difficult enough, but to prove that  
he was residing in it when the poetess was born was rendered  
more difficult by the dispute about the date of her birth. The  
circumstances disclosed in Mr. Bourne's letter were hardly  
likely to occur to anyone trying to identify the house, nor  
would they have been accepted if put forward as a matter of  
speculation.

I am sorry to trouble you at such length, but, in the interest of the Historic Society, it is necessary to show that in placing tablets on houses they are guided by reliable information. I only hope that I have satisfied Mr. Hughes that he has made a mistake in concluding "that the present No. 118 has been "shown to be impossible."—Yours, &c.,

GEO. T. SHAW,

*Hon. Sec. of the Memorial Tablets Sub-Committee of the  
Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire.*

ATHENÆUM,

LIVERPOOL, Nov. 12, 1902.

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TO THE EDITOR OF THE "DAILY POST."

Sir,—Mr. George T. Shaw's comments of the 12th inst. on my article call for a reply and some admissions. I cheerfully admit that I did not know of the existence of a directory for 1794, though it is mentioned in Mr. Shaw's paper read before the Historic Society. A copy of it is not in the William Brown Street Library, nor in the Lyceum; nor have I ever been offered one by the local booksellers for my own little collection. I regret I have not access to the Athenæum Library. Mr. Shaw's next criticism is an unintentional compliment. By careful research and collation of facts I have indubitably established the identity of the father of Mrs. Hemans with the senior of the firm of Browne & Brown. Hence my method of "jumping to conclusions" is one to be commended. May I refer Mr. Shaw to *Wosencroft's Directory* for 1790? The first entry of the Brown family is George Browne, the next Henry Brown, the third Browne & Brown's warehouse. These are the entries for the two partners and for the firm. The *Gazette* for the 22nd April, 1793, gives these two names as partners in Browne & Brown. *Gore's Advertiser* for the 8th January, 1789, and *Williamson's Advertiser* for the 10th June and the 22nd July, 1793, give particulars which also confirm this. Mr. Shaw will also recollect that the only George Browne under discussion is the one who lived at the present 118, Duke Street.

Now, with reference to the "formerly numbered 32," Duke Street, Picton's phrase must have some meaning. I have endeavoured to assign one to it. Mr. Shaw does not agree with this, but suggests no alternative. That the 32 of 1790 or 1796 was not in Picton's mind is obvious, since my little tables show that the then 32 was above, and not below, Slater Street. Hence Mr. Shaw's "curious" reference to Mr. James Brown is quite out of place. But I do not now press the point.

With reference to the letter to the *Liverpool Mercury* of the 5th June, 1835, little need be said. It contains little but a confirmation of what Mr. Shaw and I are quite agreed upon



—viz., that George Browne lived at the present 118. As to Mrs. Hemans's birthplace, the writer merely expresses a belief, and this over forty years after the event. This surely is not evidence.

On quite a different footing is the communication of Mr. Robert W. Bourne. Had I not taken Mr. Shaw's conclusions as to the date of Mrs. Hemans's birth—viz., the year 1794, and had I known of Mr. Bourne's comment on Mr. Shaw's paper, my article in your issue of the 10th instant would not have been written. Mr. Shaw gave many good reasons why the date should be 1794, and not 1793. But here comes in the specific value of *Wosencroft's Directory* of 1794. This directory would be issued in the early months of the year, if it followed the usual course. But Mr. Shaw can refer to this point. My copy of *Wosencroft* for 1790 is dated 28th January, and *Gore's Directory* for the same year was issued in the early months. Further, to anyone accustomed, as I have been, to compare the papers of these times with the current directory, there is no lack of internal evidence of this. In *Wosencroft's Directory* for 1794, as Mr. Shaw states, Mr. Cornelius Bourne is given as the occupier of the present No. 118, and as he, according to Mr. R. W. Bourne's letter, commenced his occupancy about the time of Mrs. Hemans's birth, this must have been in September, 1793. The very awkward circumstances attending her birth, impressed the matter on the minds of the Bourne family. Now, herein is a confirmation of my statements with reference to George Browne's misfortunes. As I stated, the house was sold early in September, 1793; and Mr. Bourne also states "that most of the furniture had been removed." It had, indeed—by the two public auctions mentioned by me. Mr. Bourne's letter causes me to withdraw from my former position. It was on account of the year of her birth being given as 1794 that I characterised the occurrence to have been impossible, and for that year I still maintain it. But change the year to 1793, and, with the help of Mr. Bourne's letter, all becomes clear. I see that both the *D.N.B.* and the Historic Society's tablet give the date as 1793.

I have been asked why reference to the parish registers has not been made. It is only due to Mr. Shaw to state, to a wider public than the *Transactions* of the Historic Society reach, that he has done the community the service of searching all the books, but, alas! in vain.—Yours, &c.,

JOHN HUGHES.

