

Letters of J. B. Malchair, the Eighteenth-Century Oxford Artist

By H. MINN

THE originals of these Letters are in the Archives of All Souls College included in a small collection of letters addressed to Dr. Luttrell Wynne, formerly Fellow of All Souls.

Three are autograph letters, the fourth is a typescript copy. The donor of the letters to the College in a note states that he purchased the letters for the post marks on the covers; the last letter was written on a single sheet with the post mark, hence the typescript copy in which a number of omissions occur.

Thanks are due to All Souls' College for permission to publish the letters, for they add some new and valuable information as to Malchair and his work. So far they are the only known specimens of Malchair's correspondence.

Malchair's spelling has been retained as in the originals.

The letters of 12 December 1788 and 2 January 1789 give a very interesting account of the engraving and publishing of prints of Malchair's two drawings of the old 'Bocardo' or North Gate of the City of Oxford, one a view from the North, the other from the South. These prints were published in 1789, each being about 12 by 14 inches in size and bear the engraver's name, E. Howorth.¹ The letters prove the engraver to be Mrs. Howorth, and Malchair gives a few details as to the lady's condition and his appreciation of her work. The idea of engraving these prints was probably fostered by Malchair's brother-in-law, G. Jenner, who appears to have had some talent himself in that art, for in 1793 he etched a print of the 'Old Canterbury Gate of Christ Church' from a drawing by Malchair, and also several small etchings. It will be gathered from the letters that Malchair experienced a good deal of worry over the execution and printing of the plates; also that he consulted Mr. Jackson, printer of the *Oxford Journal*, about the impressions.

Oxford, Dec. 12, 1788.

Dear Dr. Wynne

I was unfortunate indeed to lose the pleasure of seeing you at Oxford, we missed one another by a few hours only for I returned to that place the Evening of the day on which you left it, to see you so seldom and miss you so nearely is most

¹ Copies of these prints are in the Bodleian Library. G.A. Oxon. a. 64. In the letters Malchair writes the name as 'Howarth'.

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provoaking. I had long wished for you as I had a thousand things to show you and as many to talke to you about. I never knew that it was a duty and marke of respect to solicit favours this I was instructed in last neight by the Bishop of Chester to whom you owe this letter, if it be worth anny thing as your favoures to me came always unsolicited. I thought it neadeless to informe you that I am uppon the eve of ushering into the world two Aquatinta Prints of old North Gate, the proposals for which I well knew you would meete with at Mr Paines shopp as he has kindly offred to take in subscriptions for me, al I can say is that your Name in that list will bee very propitious to my undertaking and procure mee some respect from Mr. Paine to whom I am an utter strainger, for it was my brother Jenner who procured me his favour. The Artist who engravd these prints Mrs Howarth she lives in Shappel Rowe Pimlico near Buckingham Gate where if you chance to pass she will think herself much honoured by a visit from you, as well as flatred by your approbation of the work which is infenitely more like Drawing than any aquatinta I ever did see. You perhaps already know something of this Lady, she is a daughter of a Dr. Laine formerly Cannon of Hereford Chatredal, her husband is Captain of a Man of Warr on half pay. The dissipation of an uncle who was receiver general for the County of Herefordshire swallowed up her patrimony and her numerous progeny forces her to employ those tallents, for bread, which formerly ware the amusement of her leasure houers only. She is deserving of your attention and friendship. I have no News to tell you, I am a total strainger at all Soules and know no body there, the gates of which ware formerly so familiar to me. I lately met my worthy old friend Dr. Beaver² in the streets of Oxford but forgot to tell him about my work, if you should chance to see him will you be so kinde as to show him my proposals. I had lost both person and correspondence of Mr. John Skipp³ but he appeared at Oxford sometime ago and is very well, perhaps you know more of him at present than I do. Pray does Mr. Peter Rashleigh⁴ ever comme within your view, the drift of this question you understand to well for me to explain.

I am Dear Dr. Wynne with the utmost respect
your most obliged Humble servt:

J. Malchair.

Oxford Jan 2, 1789

Dear Dr. Wynne

Your friendly exertion on behalf of My interest Comes like a Torrent, manny gentle Rills have hitherto gradually fill'd my list of subscribers but your sudden swell will endanger me of having More Suscribers than Coppys. By the Ladys account who has done the aquatinta the Plates will not rune much above one hundred impressions each, to which Mr. Jackson the Printer of Oxford says that she is not a proper Judge of this matter and the Plates are likely to runne five hundreds Coppys each, this may perhaps bee extravagant on the other side. I wish to God the Press

² Thomas Bever matriculated at Oriel College in 1748 ; Fellow of All Souls, 1753 ; D.C.L., 1753 ; d. 1791.

³ John Skipp matriculated at Merton College in 1760. He was a pupil of Malchair and later became a well-known amateur artist. See D.N.B.

⁴ Peter Rashleigh matriculated at University College in 1765 and was later Fellow of All Souls College. Malchair records on several of his drawings in the Corpus Christi College collection that they were drawn on sketching expeditions in the company of Peter Rashleigh. See *Oxoniensia*, viii/ix, 159-168.

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was in your streeete I am shure you would procure me the true Medium account between the two. Jackson says I should not be too nice about impressions, which sounds to mee a little in the Marcante Stile tho at the bottom it is mere friendship. I am at a stand with regard to taking in subscribers, the Correspondence between the Lady and mee is somewhat tardy and indecisive, if therefore you would bee so kinde as to desire Mrs. Howarth by a Note to send you the last printed off Coppy and give your judgement uppon them wether they should be carryed ohn further or stopp, this Matter then I am shure will be properly settled. She speakes also of refreshing the Aquatinta after the Plates have gone as fare as they can in there first state and they will be as good as ever. Suppose this practicable what is to bee done then, this refreshing will take upp so much time as will carry the expectation of those who favour mee with their encoragement fare beyond my Promis according to the Proposals, all this quibeling perplexes me much and I am really ashamed to trouble you with this stoff, but wil naturally fly to those who are reddyest to give there asistance or (begging Lord Chesterfield's pardon for keeping upp the use of vulgar sayings) rieding a good Horse to death. I am sorry for the Lady's interest sake that she was not at home when you was so good as to call, I have lend her for her ohn use drawings of mine some of which she has done in Aqua tinta which I wished you to see, this by the by has made my work at times to stand still. She has sent me an impression of one incomparably imitated, it is a little drawing of the little Hovel and pigsty at Ferry Hingsley humble objects indeed but deare to your Memory and Mine as it recales to oure Meindes former happy days indeed. I have a Commical Drawing for you of the little Parsonage at Beselsleigh⁵ which I will enclose in my first parcel to Mrs. H. with orders to delivre it to you.

I am Deare Dr. Wynne with utmost Respect your Most
Obliged and Humble servant
Jo. Malchair.

The following is my Oxford List for Mr. Paine⁶

Dr. Bever.	Lord Sheffield.
Ld. Clive. 2 sets.	Sir John Hort.
Lady Clive. 2 sets.	Benjamin Way esq.
Peter Carew.	Lord Gage.
Sir J. StAubyn.	Sir S. Gideon.
Dr. Wynne. 2 sets.	Chris Hawkins esqr.
Rev. Mr. Gooche.	Rev. Peter Rashleigh. Hatton Garden.
Earl of Besborough. 2 sets.	Charles Rashleigh. Hatton Garden.
Lord Visct: Duncannon. 2 sets.	Philip Rashleigh. Hatton Garden.
Viscountess Duncannon. 2 sets.	

It was probably about this time that Malchair's eyesight began to fail and his infirmities so increase as to cause his friends and old pupils some anxiety as to his future welfare. It will be gathered from this letter that

⁵ This drawing may possibly have been one of several drawings of the Parsonage and ruins of the Manor House drawn by Malchair on 'Nov. 24, 1771', when 'Mr. and Mrs. M. went in a Chaise to take a Sundays Dinner with Dr. Wynne at Dr. Edward's Parsonage House at Besselsleigh'.

⁶ T. Payne, a bookseller in Castle Street, St. Martin's, London.

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Malchair's career as a teacher of Music and Drawing had been successful for he now possessed nine hundred pounds invested in the Stocks, and he tells Dr. Wynne how his friends propose to take part of this money and augment it with their own subscriptions to purchase an annuity for him. Before the discovery of this letter it was not known how much money Malchair was able to contribute towards the purchase of this annuity, it being thought that his old pupils contributed the whole sum.

Oxford. April 17. 1793.

Dear Dr. Wynne

I have before expressed my gratitude for your liberality to me and now thank you for your having promoted abroad my interest with an Activity that must at times have given you much trouble. Be so good as to pay the money in at Child's the Banker, Temple Bar, to the account of Dr. Blaynen and favour me with a line when so entered. I have enquired after Mrs. Hickman at Jesus College, she is alive, lodges some where near the chekers at Basels leigh. I will with pleasure execut anny Commission you shall be pleased to chearge me with. You above all my friends will rejoice at the state of my finances at present. I have Nine hundred Pounds nominal in the Stock, the scheeme of my friends is to sell out Seven hundred and join that summ to the Subscription Money, which will they say enable them to purchas for me an Annuity of one hundred and twenty pounds, leaving at the saime time a summ in reserve for me to dispose of among My relations at Cologne. Pray if you see Lord Aylesford and other friends thank them in my Name for there kindness to Me.

I am dear Dr. Wynne with the warmest gratitude
Your Most obliged and
Humble servant
J. Malchair.

P.S. on a loose leaf.

Subscriptions [to his Annuity]	
J. Wilmot	2·2·0
— Batt not paid	2·2·0
Jos. Windham	5·5·0
Lord Bessborough	1·1·0
Sir. Jos. Banks	5·5·0
Lord Aylesford	20·0·0
L.W.	10·0·0
Ld. Werlor	1·1·0

Malchair at the request of Dr. Wynne has taken a walk to Besselsleigh to find old Mrs. Hickman, who seems to have been at one time servant to the Doctor, and give the old lady some gratuity from him. He gives Dr. Wynne an account of his finding Mrs. Hickman, of her circumstances and her gratitude for his gift. The journey back to Oxford in the evening over Cumnor Hill with the view and atmosphere gives him opportunity to express that artistic

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feeling and love of nature, which must have been very attractive to his pupils when out sketching in his company.

Oxford, May 5, 1793.

Dear Doctor Wynne,

Not having seen Mrs. Hickman for many years I was a little struck with the havoc of old age, she lives in a lane behind the Chequers, a pleasant part of the town I was never in before. Her family consists of a kinswoman who married a shoemaker, who was hard at work while I transacted the business, and his wife a young woman who was dandeling her little boy, she is a Niece of the old woman ; by a few farthing candles, balls of woosted and other small matters I perceived that the old Dame keeps a shop. My son, said she, built the house we live in, In a few months she lost three of her children, the elder daughter has been well married and lives at Apleton. She expressed her gratitude to you for your bounty in full to me which she wished to do to you in a letter, but seeing the time she took in signing I thought fit to save her the trouble telling her I was going to write to you and would enclose her thanks and duty. I never pass Baselsleigh without a warm remembrance of your civilities to me and family. The Ancient Venerable Mansion House, the solemn Veteran Pines are no more, the owl and the cat are annoyed by the noisy horn and rattling wheel. Silence and Solitude are fled, you have known Baselsleigh in its best days and made me partake of the pleasure it afforded you. You must pardon me this strain of nonsense, I cannot desist, it is the consequence of yesterdays ramble. As I passed the side of Comner I smiled at poor Dr. Bukler's whitewashed barn by way of object to his terrace of the parsonage, the present incumbent as he cannot see a yard before his nose totally neglects the whitewash and the object has become very dingy. The Clumps on the hill is very ragged and poor. However the Hills, Sunn, and Skey remain the same, the blackbird and cuckoo sing as usual, the golden blossom of Broome has not lost his luster, the distant waters glisten at set of sun as brilliant as ever, there are two grand views on that side of Cumner one looking West as you reach the top of the hill from Oxford, the other South by West towards Farringdon which does not come in view until you have passed Comner Town, at my return the sun being nearly a setting and a — the — were in their best particularly to the West towards — the waters of Brokins Wier appeared to be on fire, the Burford horizon was — Violet, Purple, and Azure, these complexions were opposed by the indigo colour of Witham Hill and the rusty brown of Cumnor. I was so struck with all that I retained somewhat of the effect which I committed to paper at home from recollection with some success.

I am dear Dr. Wynne

Your most affectionate and obliged Servant

J. Malchair.

Pray favour me with a line whenever you can afford a few minutes.

APPENDIX

A full account of Malchair's life and work will be found in an article by Paul Oppé published in the *Burlington Magazine* for August 1943. Some account of his Oxford activities may be gathered from an article on his drawings in *Oxoniensia*, viii/ix, 159-168.

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Two recent additions to the examples of Malchair's work in the Bodleian Library are of great interest. The first is a collection of 28 drawings of parts of the City and University all drawn in 1776-1777. These drawings may have been given by Malchair to his pupil, the Rev. Dr. Cooke, who matriculated at Oriel College in 1777, and in whose family they remained until presented to the Bodleian Library in 1951. (The shelf mark is now MS. Top. Oxon. b. 222.)

The second is a series of 12 etchings, mostly 'Views of the Environs of Oxford, 1763'. This is a complete set of etchings as sold by Malchair, held loosely together by a piece of string. It is the only complete set I have seen in this form. Malchair's etchings are not uncommon as sold separately, having holes showing that they once formed part of a set sewn together as this complete set is. This is now in the Bodleian as Malchair Etchings, Vet. A 5 c. 62.