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Sociability in the Early Royal Institution: Thomas Richard Underwood, Humphry Davy and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Abstract:

During its first decade the Royal Institution, founded 1799, has tended to be seen by historians as a place of chemical research (Davy) or of lecturing on various aspects of culture to socially elite, aristocratic, audiences (Davy, Coleridge and others) or as an institution endeavouring to apply scientific knowledge for practical purposes. But the hundreds of men and women, most of whom were not aristocrats, who attended lectures at the Royal Institution during its early years did not just turn up in its capacious theatre and go away having experienced a lecture, but while there they also interacted socially, forming small networks. Focussing on the interactions of the watercolourist and later geologist Thomas Richard Underwood, this essay will reconstruct, as far as the evidence allows, one of these loose groupings linked to the Royal Institution, which also included Davy, Coleridge, Thomas Webster, Benjamin Hooke and William Day. Not only will this exemplify the sort of sociability that occurred at the Royal Institution (something which must have been repeated many times over), but in this case casts new light on crucial events in its history, most notably Davy's appointment there in 1801, as well as illustrating the long-term legacies that such largely hidden coteries can have.

Keywords:

Thomas Richard Underwood; Humphry Davy; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Thomas Webster; geology; antiquarianism; watercolours; institutionalisation; sociability; biography

Introduction

During the long, almost continuous, war that Britain fought against France for more than twenty years from 1793 to 1815, there existed in London, and possibly Britain generally, a strong element of experimentation, or perhaps exploration would be a better word, about how best to organise the cultural creativity in art, literature and science as well as its consumption, that then existed. One solution was the deliberate formation of sociable groups which encouraged such creativity and consumption to flourish.[1] (Of course, the clearly perceived

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NOTES

I thank the following institutions for permission to work on their archives: The Royal Institution of Great Britain (RI), the Managers Minutes of which were published in facsimile as *Archives of the Royal Institution: Minutes of the Managers' Meetings, 1799-1903* (15 vols, bound in 7, London, 1971-6), cited hereafter as *RI MM* followed by date, volume and page number; The National Archives (TNA); Society of Antiquaries of London (SAL); Cambridge University Library (CUL); Wedgwood Museum (WM), now the V&A Wedgwood Collection; the Royal Society of London; the British Library; Vassar College; Natural History Museum; Morgan Library and Museum; Victoria and Albert Museum; National Library of Wales; Carlisle Central Library; Archives Nationales. Godwin's diary and Southey's letters are cited from http://godwindiary.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ and https://romantic-circles.org/editions/southey_letters respectively and are referenced by date. Genealogical information is drawn from the usual databases.

need for new organisations did not mean that already existing institutions, such as the Royal Society of London, the Society of Antiquaries or the Royal Academy, played no role in these experimental or exploratory processes.) The new institutions created during that period of global conflict ranged from large formal establishments with their own buildings to smaller, mostly transient, societies. The former included the Royal Institution (founded 1799), the Surrey Institution (1807) and the Russell Institution (1808), all of which supported the consumption of cultural products through sociability. Small societies, such as The Brothers or the British Mineralogical Society, which generally morphed into successor organisations, deliberately used their sociability to foster creativity. Such groupings, large and small, represented not only the desire for creative and cultural sociability, but also became major locations for such interactions – a symbiotic relationship. The smaller societies were effectively networks or coteries with significant overlapping memberships, but the larger institutions, such as the Royal Institution, also included small highly informal groupings (though even group might be too strong a word).

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[1] It should also be noted, though outside the scope of this paper, that a similar phenomenon occurred in print media with the publication of new journals including *A Journal of Natural Philosophy, Chemistry and the Arts* (founded 1797), *The Philosophical Magazine* (1798), *The Journals of the Royal Institution* (1800), *The Director* (1807), *Annals of Philosophy* (1813). See Anna Maria Gielas, 'Early Sole Editorship of Natural Philosophical and Scientific Periodicals in the Holy Roman Empire and Britain, 1770s-1830s', PhD thesis (University of St Andrews, 2019).

The early Royal Institution, founded through aristocratic patronage and run by a committee of Managers,[2] has tended to be seen by historians as the place where Humphry Davy (1778-1829) conducted his chemical research[3] or which provided lectures by Davy, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and others on various aspects of culture to socially elite, aristocratic, audiences[4] or as an institution that endeavoured to apply scientific knowledge for practical purposes.[5] But the hundreds of men and women, mostly non-aristocrats, who attended lectures at the Royal Institution during its first decade did not just turn up in its capacious theatre on Albemarle Street and go away having seen and heard (and occasionally smelt or felt) a lecture. They interacted with each other forming networks which must have been replicated many times over. The Royal Institution's sociable, clubbable, aspect has not received much historical attention.

Where such coteries comprised relatively obscure individuals, it is usually hard to uncover evidence about how they may have worked and their influence or legacy. This

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[2] Frank A. J. L. James, 'The Subversive Humphry Davy: Aristocracy and Establishing Chemical Research Laboratories in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century England', in Lissa Roberts and Simon Werrett (eds), *Compound Histories: Materials, Governance and Production, 1760-1840* (Leiden, 2017), 269-88.

[3] David Knight, *Humphry Davy: Science and Power* (Oxford, 1992), esp. chap. 5.

[4] Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1760-1820* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. chap. 7; Sarah Zimmerman, *The Romantic Literary Lecture in Britain* (Oxford, 2019); Harriet Olivia Lloyd, 'Rulers of Opinion: Women at the Royal Institution of Great Britain', PhD thesis (University College London, 2018).

[5] Frank A. J. L. James, '"Agricultural Chymistry is at present in it's infancy": The Board of Agriculture, The Royal Institution and Humphry Davy', *Ambix*, 62 (2015), 363-85.

particular study has emerged from my current research into Davy's career which focusses, in part, on his social interactions. His friendship with Coleridge has been well documented, but much more remains to be said, for instance, about his sometimes rather fraught relations with Robert Southey (1774-1843).[6] Then there are numerous, less well-known, figures significant for Davy in one way or another, some for his entire life. When studied, they provide clues about Davy's mobility in early nineteenth-century London society, and the place of science and culture within that society. Included, in a by no means exhaustive list, would be figures such as Tom Wedgwood (1771-1805) and Gregory Watt (1777-1804), sons of the prominent Midland potter and engineer respectively, the tanners Tom Poole (1766-1837) and Samuel Purkis (1755-1832), the calico printer James Thomson (1779-1850), the abolitionist James Webbe Tobin (1767-1814) and his brother the playwright John Tobin (1770-1804),[7] William Clayfield (1772-1837), son of a Bristol wine merchant, the physician Alexander Marcet (1770-1822) and his wife the science writer Jane Marcet (1769-1858), Davy's wealthy wife Jane Apreece (*née* Kerr, c.1780-1855) and Thomas Richard Underwood (1772-1835). The questions I have been asking include who were these people, how did they know Davy, how did they interact with him, with what consequences and so on. Even figures about whom it might be supposed we know a good deal, such as Lady Davy, we do not know as much we

[6] Frank A. J. L. James, 'Gas and Poetry: Humphry Davy in Bristol, 1798-1801', *Essays in Romanticism*, 26 (2019), 131-57.

[7] While there is clearly some room for confusing the brothers, generally James Webbe Tobin was much closer to Davy and his circle.

should or can.[8] In her case this is not helped by her receiving a generally bad press owing to her haughty treatment of Davy's assistant Michael Faraday (1791-1867) on the Davys' 1813-15 Continental tour.[9]

Underwood

This paper focuses on Underwood's social interactions within and outwith the Royal Institution to illustrate how at least some of its members connected it with society and culture in general. A competent watercolourist and later geologist, Underwood spent the second half of his life living mostly in Paris, keeping a detailed diary which, alas, has mostly disappeared. Having initially joined the Royal Institution as a Life Member costing 10 guineas, he quickly became a Proprietor in March 1800, for an additional 40 guineas. He knew well other Proprietors, such as the scientific instrument maker Benjamin Hooke (1771-1857) and the watercolourist William Day (1764-1807), both elected within a few days of Underwood following the same route.[10] Others closely associated with the Institution whom he knew included Davy, Coleridge, Benjamin Thompson, Reichsgraf von Rumford (1753-1814) and Thomas Webster (1772-1844). Underwood, a figure referred to in Davy's biographies without the connection ever becoming clear, seems to have first met him in Penzance in the

[8] But for a recent study of the source of her wealth see Frank A. J. L. James, 'Making Money from the Royal Navy in the Late Eighteenth Century: Charles Kerr on Antigua 'breathing the True Spirit of a West India agent'', *The Mariner's Mirror*, 107 (2021), 402-19.

[9] Frank A. J. L. James, *Michael Faraday: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2010), 35-7.

[10] Underwood, *RI MM*, 17 Mar. 1800, ii. 19; Hooke, 19 Mar. 1800, ii. 25; Day, 24 Mar. 1800, ii. 30.

late 1790s and knew him on and off until his death. Investigating Underwood casts new light on crucial events in both the Royal Institution's history and Davy's life, most notably his appointment there in 1801. Hence Underwood became a significant source for the first full scale biography of Davy by John Ayrton Paris (1785-1856) published in 1831.[11]

Little is known about Underwood's background. He would appear to be the only child of fairly wealthy parents and, while occasionally short of money, never seems to have needed to earn a living. Apprenticed in 1788 to the landscape engraver William Byrne (1743-1805) of Titchfield Street,[12] there is no evidence that he practiced that trade. Probably through this connection, however, Underwood became a topographical artist, exhibiting a least one watercolour of a medieval building almost annually at the Royal Academy between 1789 and 1801.[13] He mixed with London's thriving community of landscape and topographical artists, going on painting expeditions around England and Wales. Indicating his sociability, he became a member of a seven-strong group calling themselves 'The Brothers', dedicated to: 'establishing by practice a school of Historic Landscape, the subjects being designs from poetick passages'. They met weekly for at least four months until January 1800 and Underwood, following their cessation, belonged to various successor or continuity painting

[11] John Ayrton Paris, *The Life of Sir Humphry Davy, Bart.* (2 vols, London, 1831). See Frank A. J. L. James, 'Constructing Humphry Davy's Biographical Image', *Ambix*, 66 (2019), 214-38, which, curiously, in retrospect, did not discuss Underwood's role in constructing Davy's biography!

[12] Register of Apprentices, TNA IR/1/33, f.202.

[13] Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904* (8 vols, London, 1905-6), viii. 54.

clubs, from which emerged the still-existing Royal Watercolour Society.[14] Underwood also moved in the politically radical circle of William Godwin (1756-1836); his radicalism is suggested by the second name he chose for his daughter, Eleanor Darwin Underwood (c.1796-1881).

In 1792 the Council of the Society of Antiquaries of London appointed Underwood, aged twenty, to be 'Draughtsman in ordinary to the Society' with permission to attend meetings to allow him to draw objects displayed at them.[15] For the following nine years he produced a steady, though not enormous, flow of images of objects shown and discussed at the Society's meetings, many being engraved to grace their journal *Archaelogia*, for which he received modest payment.

Probably through his connection with the Antiquaries, Underwood came to know some prominent antiquarians including John Britton (1771-1857), Philip Rashleigh (1729-1811) and Henry Englefield (1752-1822). Britton received details of Cornish antiquities from Underwood[16] who depicted Roche Rock in Cornwall engraved (dated 1 February 1802) for publication in *Beauties of England and Wales* by Britton and Edward Wedlake Brayley

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[14] David Winter, 'Girtin's Sketching Club', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 37 (1974), 123-49. The founding principle of 'The Brothers' was recorded on 20 May 1799 on the back of François Louis Francia's drawing, 'Landscape Composition – Moonlight', V&A Museum object number 477-1883.

[15] SAL Council minutes, 30 Mar. 1792, 3: 156-7.

[16] T. E. Jones, *A Descriptive Account of the Literary Works of John Britton … (From 1800-1849) Being a Second Part of His Auto-Biography* (London, 1849), 35.

(1773-1854).[17] On 27 January 1796 Rashleigh, one of the largest land- and mine-owners in Cornwall and MP for Fowey from 1765 to 1802 (Father of the House when he left the Commons), described to the Society of Antiquaries an ancient brass hook found at a mine bottom close to the River Fowey near his seat, Menabilly. Rashleigh identified this object as 'a Druid's hook, for gathering mis[t]letoe'.[18] Underwood's illustration of it was published, with Rashleigh's description, in *Archaeologia*,[19] but the original watercolour drawing (Figure 1) is dated 1794, which may suggest an earlier acquaintance. It is likely that Rashleigh was in London in January 1796 for the Parliamentary session (on 29 February he delivered one of

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[17] The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Centre, Vassar College, Object 1863.2.2080. Reproduced in *Landscapes of Retrospection: The Magoon Collection of British Drawings and Prints 1739-1860* (Poughkeepsie, 1999), 14 and detail opposite 1. The engraving is in John Britton and Edward Wedlake Bradley, *The Beauties of England and Wales; or Delineations, Topographical, Historical, and Descriptive, of each County*, vol. 2 (London, 1801), opposite 517.

[18] *Archaeologia*, 12 (1796), 414. This object has been lost, but in the late 1960s, from Underwood's drawing alone (surely a tribute to his artistic skill), it was identified as a pin associated with the Bronze Age culture of Western Slovakia. Michael Herity, 'Finds of Irish Antiquities: From the Minute-Books of the Society of Antiquaries of London', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 49 (1969), 1-21, 16-17. Unfortunately, no dimensions were provided by Rashleigh or indeed anyone else, but a comparison with the Slovak examples illustrated in Marija Gimbutas, *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe* (The Hague, 1965), 276, suggests a length of three to five inches. If this estimate is correct, then Underwood greatly enlarged the object in his drawing to illustrate its fine detail.

[19] *Archaeologia*, 12 (1796), opposite 408.

his rare speeches in the Commons) and may have met Underwood at an Antiquaries meeting around then.

As the owner of Cornish tin and copper mines during the latter part of the eighteenth century, Rashleigh formed a large mineral collection including many rare Cornish specimens. Almost uniquely for a British eighteenth-century mineral collection, it still exists, more or less intact, though divided between the Royal Cornwall Museum (Truro) and the Natural History Museum (London).[20] By 1791, Rashleigh had started looking for 'a good clever man to Draw & Colour some of my minerals' presumably with a view to publication.[21] The first volume of Rashleigh's *Specimens of British Minerals* (1797) contained thirty-three unsigned plates produced by the Cornish-born artist and prominent enamellist Henry Bone (1755-1834).[22]

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[20] John Davies Enys, 'The Rashleigh Collection of Minerals', *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, 15 (1903), 324-7; Arthur Russell, 'Philip Rashleigh of Menabilly, Cornwall, and his Mineral Collection', *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, n.s. 1 (1952), 96-118; Robert W. Jones, 'Philip Rashleigh and his Specimens of British Minerals (1797 and 1802)', *The Mineralogical Record*, 26 (1995), 77-84. For another surviving collection see Michael P. Cooper, 'The Devonshire Mineral Collection of Chatsworth House: An 18th Century Survivor and its Restoration', *The Mineralogical Record*, 36 (2005), 239-72.

[21] Philip Rashleigh to John Hawkins, Oct. 1791, R.J. Cleevely (ed.), *Collecting the New, Rare and Curious: Letters Selected from the Correspondence of the Cornish Mineralogists Philip Rashleigh, John Hawkins and William Gregor, 1755-1822* (Exeter, 2011), 84.

[22] Philip Rashleigh, *Specimens of British Minerals* (2 vols, London, 1797-1802). Bone was identified as the artist quite early on. See, for example, Richard Polwhele, *The Language,*

In July 1799 William Day, son of a wealthy linen draper with a Sussex estate, mineral collector and landscape watercolourist, wrote to Rashleigh offering to illustrate his minerals in exchange for duplicates for his (Day's) collection. He knew that Rashleigh had already paid for 'a good many drawings of your British minerals' so his proposal would be mutually beneficial though, he added modestly, his work was not as neat as Underwood's.[23] It would thus appear that by mid-1799 Rashleigh was already preparing the second volume of *British Minerals* with Underwood's involvement. In turn that would suggest Underwood visited Cornwall during 1798,the year after the publication of the first volume of *British Minerals*), and for which there is not much documentation about his movements. Though there were significantly fewer (twenty-one) plates illustrating the second volume, published 1802, they were higher quality than those in the first. Underwood signed fourteen of which Thomas Medland (c.1765-1833) engraved seven; Rashleigh's niece, Harriot Rashleigh (bp.1779, d.1855), executed one (unsigned) plate, engraved also by Medland;[24] the remaining six were unsigned. These two volumes, especially the second, continue to be highly regarded as exemplifying mineralogical illustration. (At the time of writing many of the specimens depicted are displayed in the Royal Cornwall Museum with facsimiles of their images from

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Literature, and Literary Characters of Cornwall: with Illustrations from Devonshire (London, 1806), 124.

[23] William Day to Philip Rashleigh, 3 July 1799, in Cleevely, *Collecting the New, Rare and Curious*, 136-7. On Day see J. E. Egerton, 'William Day 1764-1807', *The Connoisseur*, 174 (1970), 176-85.

[24] Rashleigh, *Specimens*, 2, plate 14. The original, signed by her, is in Natural History Museum Special Collection RAS along with all of Underwood's drawings.

the volumes mounted behind). Possibly the project turned Underwood's interests towards geology and hence his interest in the newly-founded Royal Institution.

Underwood, Davy and the Royal Institution

The supposition that Underwood visited Cornwall towards the end of the 1790s to illustrate Rashleigh's *Specimens of British Minerals* is supported by three paintings he made there. In addition to Roche Rock (about eleven miles north-west of Fowey, mentioned above), he also painted St Michael's Mount (just over forty miles south-west of Fowey near Penzance) and Launceston Castle (on the county boundary) exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1800 and 1801 respectively. In the short biographical account of Davy's life that Underwood wrote for Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) for his *éloge* of Davy for the Académie Royale des Sciences,[25] he claimed that he lodged in Penzance with Davy's mother at the same time as Gregory Watt, that is December 1797 to March 1798.[26] He seems here to have been conflating visits and

[25] This is published as [Thomas Richard Underwood], 'Appendix A: Biographical Account of Davy', in *The Collected Letters of Sir Humphry Davy*, ed. Tim Fulford and Sharon Ruston (4 vols, Oxford, 2020), iv. 339-43. Hereafter *CLHD*. The origin of this document is discussed below.

[26] On Watt's stay in Penzance see Frank A. J. L. James, 'The Watt Family, Thomas Beddoes, Davies Giddy, Humphry Davy, and the Medical Pneumatic Institution, Bristol', in Malcolm Dick and Caroline Archer-Parré (eds), *James Watt (1736-1819): Culture, Innovation, and Enlightenment* (Liverpool, 2020), 109-35, 115-17.

recollections since he was in London during that period.[27] Nevertheless, the description he provided of Davy's early chemical apparatus coheres well with Davy's own contemporary account: they consisted 'only of an old single bar[r]elled air pump, the lock of a pistol, a few fragments of glass tubes obtained from an itinerant Italian barometer maker; these and tobacco-paper fixed into corks were all he possessed'.[28] Furthermore, Underwood described Davy's method of composing poetry whilst walking in Cornwall's 'wild and romantic scenery', referring specifically to those poems on St Michael's Mount and Mount's Bay.[29] Aside from this, unfortunately no contemporary (or indeed any other) corroborating evidence for Underwood's visit more than thirty years previously has been found.

In the account by John Paris, presumably given him by Underwood, the next time he and Davy met was in December 1799 when, joined by Coleridge, Davy visited London for the first time, staying for a couple of weeks. Coleridge and Underwood had met by 1796 when the latter wrote his address in the former's notebook[30] and by 1801 knew him well

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[27] Underwood attended meetings of the Royal Society of London on 7 Dec. 1797, 11 Jan., 8 and 22 Feb., 1, 8 and 22 Mar. 1798 (Royal Society of London MS JB/36, 352, 270, 395, 403, 408, 417, 429). Godwin, *Diary*, 20 Dec. 1797 and 22 Feb. 1798 noted seeing Underwood.

[28] [Underwood], 'Appendix A', 440. Frank A. J. L. James, 'Humphry Davy's Early Chemical Knowledge, Theory and Experiments: An Edition of his 1798 Manuscript, "An Essay on Heat and the Combinations of Light" from The Royal Institution of Cornwall, Courtney Library, MS DVY/2', *Ambix*, 66 (2019), 303-45, 309.

[29] [Underwood], 'Appendix A', 339-40. See James, 'Gas and Poetry'.

[30] *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (5 vols, London, 1957-2002), i. 109. Hereafter abbreviated *CN* and cited by volume and entry number.

enough to address him familiarly as 'Dear Coleridge'.[31] Their friendship came to an end after Underwood enquired about the reputation of a woman whom he may have suspected Coleridge had slept with.[32] Coleridge, not entertained, soon after referred to Underwood as 'unpleasant', translating his name into rather dismissive Latin as 'subligno'.[33] Coleridge and Davy became close friends after they first met in Bristol precisely a year after Davy's arrival there.[34] According to Paris, during his visit to London Davy 'associated' with Underwood, Coleridge, Southey, Watt, Thomson, Clayfield and the Tobin brothers.[35] In this list Underwood seems to have again conflated recollections. He was precise as to the date of Davy's arrival in London (1 December), but of those listed Southey was then in Ringwood from whence he returned to Bristol[36] and there is no supporting evidence for either Watt or Clayfield then being in London. Furthermore, this list does not record various other visits that Davy made. For example, he and Coleridge met Godwin three times, twice with Tobin;[37]

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[31] Thomas Richard Underwood to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 5 June 1801, Morgan Library and Museum MS MA 1857 No. 2.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Samuel Taylor Coleridge to William Godwin, 8 July 1801, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (6 vols, Oxford, 1956-71), ii. 742-4. Hereafter *CLSTC*.

[34] James, 'Gas and Poetry', 146.

[35] Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 62. It is probably not a coincidence that Underwood's address, 43 Lambs Conduit Street, is recorded (again) in Coleridge's notebook at exactly this time: *CN*, i. 593.

[36] Robert Southey to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 5 Dec. 1799, was written from Bristol.

[37] Godwin, *Diary*, 4, 7, 9 Dec. 1799.

Godwin thought Davy 'the most extraordinary human Being he had ever met'.[38] Davy also met the Scottish natural philosopher John Leslie (1766-1832) who was 'much pleased with his conversation'.[39] Leslie had tutored and become a close friend of Wedgwood whom Underwood by this time also knew, having met at Godwin's in April 1798.[40] Davy's London visit coincided with Underwood's involvement with The Brothers so perhaps he was too busy to accompany Davy on all his calls.

Shortly after Davy's visit Underwood joined the recently founded Royal Institution and presumably attended the first lecture course delivered by Thomas Garnett (1766-1802), commencing 11 March 1800.[41] Although Garnett proved a popular lecturer, he fell out with the Royal Institution's Managers and especially with Rumford, who oversaw much of the early Royal Institution's mundane work;[42] Underwood recollected that 'Rumford … at that time … possessed … almost dictatorial power' in the Royal Institution.[43] By January 1801, Rumford and the Managers had decided to replace Garnett and, as a first step, appoint someone to a more junior role with the clear intention of that person supplanting Garnett quickly.[44] By this point Davy had been Superintendent of the Medical Pneumatic Institution in Bristol since October 1798 working for Thomas Beddoes (1760-1808), a political

[38] Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Tom Wedgwood, 2 Jan. 1800, *CLSTC*, i. 558-60.

[39] John Leslie to Tom Wedgwood, 6 Dec. 1799, WM MS E1-275.

[40] Godwin, *Diary*, 3 Apr. 1798.

[41] *Gentleman's Magazine*, 70.1 (1800), 382.

[42] For a brief account see James, 'The Subversive Humphry Davy', 282-3.

[43] [Underwood], 'Appendix A', 441.

[44] They succeeded; Garnett's resignation is noted in *RI MM*, 15 June 1801, ii. 189-90.

(Jacobin) and medical radical. In his biographical note on Davy, Underwood claimed that Davy's

> young <Democratic> friends in the Metropolis were determined to get him from Bristol as it entered into their plans ~~of the Democratic party~~ with the professed view of imitating the Bavarian illuminati to fill every situation where tallents were indispensable with one of their own sect Davy was fixed upon by them to be professor of Chemistry at the Royal institution[45]

These metropolitan friends included probably at least some of those whom Davy had met while in London in late 1799. By autumn 1800 Davy had realised that his close connection with Beddoes, whose political views he knew attracted 'odium',[46] might damage his future prospects. This became especially acute following the publication in August 1800 of an attack on Beddoes, Davy and their work on nitrous oxide in the virulent pro-government *Anti-Jacobin Review*.[47] Davy thus began looking for alternative employment, though where is unclear.

In a letter to Paris, probably written in 1830, Underwood expanded his account, but without the politics. Telling him of the 'several conversations with Count Rumford', presumably in late 1800, 'on the subject of Davy's superior talents', he added that on 5 January 1801, following a Managers meeting, Rumford called on him with 'full powers to

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[45] [Underwood], 'Appendix A', 441.

[46] Humphry Davy to John Tonkin, 12 Jan. 1801, *CLHD*, i. 85-6, Letter 35.

[47] *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, 6 (1800), 424-8. See James, 'The Watt Family', 131 for further discussion.

negotiate upon the subject'. Underwood recommended that Rumford discuss the matter with James Thomson on the grounds that he was not a Royal Institution Proprietor.[48] Whether Underwood or Thomson kept Davy informed about these manoeuvrings is uncertain, but around 10 January he received an invitation from Rumford about working at the Royal Institution.[49] This led to negotiations, presumably by post, lasting three weeks[50] and on 7 February he went to London for discussions with Rumford as well as with the leading Managers, the President of the Royal Society of London Joseph Banks (1743ns-1820) and the natural philosopher Henry Cavendish (1731-1810).[51] According to Underwood's biographical notes, the Managers' first impressions were unfavourable, referring specifically to Davy's 'infantine face natural awkwardness & Cornish accent of the protegée of the <London> Jacobins'.[52]

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[48] Thomas Richard Underwood to John Ayrton Paris, c.1830, Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 115. *RI MM*, 5 Jan. 1801, ii. 118-21 is silent on this. 'Memoirs of Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count of Rumford', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 64 (1814), 394-8, largely a translation of Rumford's obituary published in the *Bibliothèque Britannique*, 56 (1814), 398-401, but followed by 'some interesting memorials … by an intimate friend of the Count's' (396-8, quotation on 396). This included what seems to be the first publication of Underwood's claim about his role in Davy's appointment which, in turn, suggests that the author of this piece was Underwood.

[49] Mentioned in Humphry Davy to Davies Giddy, 8 Mar. 1801, *CLHD*, i. 91-4, Letter 39.

[50] Humphry Davy to Grace Davy, 31 Jan. 1801, *CLHD*, i. 88-90, Letter 37.

[51] Humphry Davy to Davies Giddy, 8 Mar. 1801, *CLHD*, i. 91-4, Letter 39.

[52] [Underwood], 'Appendix A', 441. A toned-down version of this was given in Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 120, doubtlessly derived again from Underwood.

Of these reasons, the one that would have counted most against Davy would have been his Jacobin associations, especially when seeking employment with an aristocratically dominated organisation. Banks loathed Beddoes and during the 1790s sought to sabotage the Medical Pneumatic Institution while Beddoes was raising funds for it.[53] Quite how Davy overcame this aspect of his background is not known, but clearly he convinced Banks, Rumford and Cavendish of his political trustworthiness for on 16 February 1801 the Managers appointed him 'Assistant Lecturer in Chemistry, Director of the Chemical Laboratory, and Assistant Editor of the Journals' which Rumford confirmed with an appointment letter.[54] The following day, doubtless to celebrate, Davy and Godwin dined with the radical Joseph Johnson (1738-1809),[55] publisher of Davy's first book.[56]

At first sight it might seem strange, to say the least, that the London Jacobins sought the appointment of someone with known Jacobin associations to an institution dominated by

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[53] Frank A. J. L. James, ''the first example … of an extensive scheme of pure scientific medical investigation': Thomas Beddoes and the Medical Pneumatic Institution in Bristol, 1794-1799', *Royal Society of Chemistry Historical Group Occasional Papers*, no. 8 (2016), 22.

[54] *RI MM*, 16 Feb. 1801, ii. 134; Rumford to Humphry Davy, 16 Feb. 1801, Henry Bence Jones, *The Royal Institution: Its Founders, and Its First Professors* (London, 1871), 317-19.

[55] Godwin, *Diary*, 17 Feb. 1801. For an account of this embarrassing occasion see Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 120-1, though this does not seem to have come from Underwood, who was not present.

[56] Humphry Davy, *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical; Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide, or Dephlogisticated Nitrous Air, and its Respiration* (London, 1800).

aristocrats and women,[57] the vast majority of whom would have had no truck with Jacobin politics.[58] But there existed a strand in the early Royal Institution where this strategy made perfect sense. The foundation documents for the Institution could be interpreted as suggesting that provision should be made for teaching workmen the scientific principles of their trades. This was certainly the interpretation proposed in an August 1799 letter to Rumford from Thomas Webster, an Orcadian architect and Clerk of Works to the Royal Institution.[59] This letter was read, without comment, to the Managers at the meeting where they also appointed Webster Clerk to the Royal Institution.[60] During the next two years Webster oversaw converting the Georgian townhouse, purchased by Royal Institution shortly after its founding, into a modern scientific institution.[61] The design incorporated a large lecture theatre, including, according to Webster's manuscript 'Autobiography', a separate staircase for workmen leading from the street to the gallery where they would sit.[62] When Davy's appointment was being considered early in 1801, this proposal for working men was still very much alive and so it would have made sense for the Jacobins to have what they perceived as one of their own working in the Royal Institution. However, according to Webster, he

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[57] Lloyd, 'Rulers of Opinion'.

[58] Knight, *Humphry Davy: Science and Power*, 45.

[59] Thomas Webster to Rumford, Aug. 1799, Nicholas Edwards, 'Some Correspondence of Thomas Webster (*circa* 1772-1844), Concerning the Royal Institution', *Annals of Science*, 28 (1972), 43-60, 45-8.

[60] *RI MM* 14 Sept. 1799, i. 57 (for the appointment) and 58-65 (for the letter).

[61] Frank A. J. L. James and Anthony Peers, 'Constructing Space for Science at the Royal Institution of Great Britain', *Physics in Perspective*, 9 (2007), 130-85.

[62] RI MS, Webster, 'Autobiography', 21. Zimmerman, *Romantic Literary Lecture*, 6.

received objections (though he does not say from whom) asking what he 'meant by interesting the *lower classes* in Science?' which was viewed as a 'dangerous political tendency'.[63] As a consequence, Webster was sent on sick leave in April 1802 (with a £50 salary advance).[64] Although thereafter he undertook some freelance work at the Royal Institution (including providing illustrations for Davy's geological lectures and lecturing himself on geology between 1829 and 1832[65]), he did not return. It is probably not coincidental that the following month Webster started attending an artists' club, a successor to The Brothers, to which Underwood also belonged.[66]

In London, Davy established himself as the pre-eminent lecturer on science, with spectacular attractive performances. After the end of his lecture on respiration delivered on 20 June 1801, Underwood and others inhaled nitrous oxide: 'He [Underwood] experienced so much pleasure from breathing it, that he lost all sense to everything else, and the breathing-bag could only be taken from him at last by force'.[67] Shortly afterwards he and Underwood went on a geological expedition to Cornwall, walking round the Land's End peninsular and at

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[63] RI MS, Webster, 'Autobiography', 22.

[64] *RI MM*, 26 Apr. 1802, iii. 8. On this episode, see Morris Berman, *Social Change and Scientific Organization: The Royal Institution, 1799-1844* (Ithaca, 1978), 25-8.

[65] Humphry Davy to Thomas Webster, 28 Feb. [1805], *CLHD*, i. 170-1, Letter 104. For Webster's lectures see *RI MM*, 6 July 1829, vii. 271; 6 June 1831, vii. 408; 2 Apr. 1832, vii. 451.

[66] David Hill, *Cotman in the North: Watercolours of Durham and Yorkshire* (New Haven, 2005), 7.

[67] 'Royal Institution of Great Britain', *Philosophical Magazine*, 10 (1801), 86-7, on 86.

least half the Lizard.[68] Back at the Royal Institution Davy continued with his electrical researches commenced while still in Bristol[69] and prepared for his next lecture series in the new year.[70] This started with his famous 'Discourse' on 21 January 1802 attended by several hundred people including Coleridge, Poole and Underwood.[71] Davy, 'covered with glory,'[72] celebrated that evening at dinner followed by attending the masquerade at the Ranelagh Gardens.[73] The following day Henry Englefield invited Underwood to dine with him that evening with Davy. The familiar tone, 'Dear Underwood' does suggest he knew him well, if not through the Royal Institution where he was a Proprietor, then at the Society of Antiquaries where he was more active. However, the invitation's wording, 'If you could meet him [Davy], it would give me great pleasure' suggests that Englefield did not know their

[68] Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 125-6. Based on Underwood's diary.

[69] On his Bristol work see James, 'The Watt Family', 128-30 and for his electrical researches in 1801 and 1802 his notebook RI MS HD/13/C.

[70] Humphry Davy to Grace Davy, 23 Jan. 1802, *CLHD*, i. 107-8, Letter 49.

[71] Thomas Richard Underwood to William Owen, 7 Feb. 1802, National Library of Wales MS 13223C, p.859; Samuel Taylor Coleridge to William Godwin, 22 Jan. 1802, *CLSTC*, ii. 782-4.

[72] Henry Englefield to Thomas Richard Underwood, 22 Jan. 1802, Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 134.

[73] Samuel Taylor Coleridge to William Godwin, 22 Jan. 1802, *CLSTC*, ii. 782-4. For the masquerade see Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 134. His source for this is not clear; Underwood perhaps?

close connection,[74] although Underwood had already introduced them.[75] At that dinner Davy was requested in a written paper to publish his 'Discourse'. This was signed by all present except Underwood who took the view that the signature 'of so intimate a friend' might cast doubt on the idea's spontaneity;[76] the printed *Discourse* advertised in mid-May became available shortly thereafter.[77]

By this time Rumford, under some sort of cloud probably due to the first of the Royal Institution's recuring financial problems,[78] took advantage of the Peace of Amiens and went to Paris, never to return to Britain. Banks too withdrew from involvement in running the Institution[79] and it fell to the philanthropist Thomas Bernard (1750-1818), the chemist Charles Hatchett (1765-1847) and Davy to manage the lecture programme. They broadened it

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[74] Henry Englefield to Thomas Richard Underwood, 22 Jan. 1802, Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 134.

[75] Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 122, quoting a letter from Underwood.

[76] Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 134. Davy later described Underwood as 'an old and intimate friend', Humphry Davy to Francis Henry Egerton, 28 December 1813, British Library Egerton MS 61, f.108-9.

[77] Humphry Davy, *A Discourse Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry delivered in the Theatre of the Royal Institution, on the 21st January, 1802* (London, 1802). This was advertised in *The Courier*, 18 May 1802, p.1c. James Losh, *Diary*, 23 May 1802, Carlisle Central Library MS Losh papers, item 10, noted reading it with approval.

[78] Berman, *Social Change*, 29-30.

[79] James, '"Agricultural Chymistry is at present in it's infancy"', 373-4.

to include history, music, art and literature,[80] where Davy secured Coleridge's services in 1808.[81] Underwood did not hear these lectures as he had been detained in France.

Underwood in France

In September 1801, after nearly nine years of war, a preliminary peace treaty between France, now led by the military dictator Napoleon Buonaparte (1769-1821), First Consul from 12 December 1799 and Emperor from 18 May 1804, and Britain was signed. Confirmed the following year by the Peace of Amiens (25 March 1802), very quickly significant numbers of Britons began to visit France, something that had not really been possible, or legal, since the start of the war. Between June and December 1802 Underwood travelled on the Continent, visiting France, Switzerland and Italy.[82] In Paris he became acquainted with various prominent chemists including Antoine-François Fourcroy (1755-1809), Nicolas-Louis Vauquelin (1763-1829), Louis-Jacques Thénard (1777-1857) and Marie-Anne Lavoisier (1758-1836), who all inhaled nitrous oxide, seemingly at Underwood's suggestion.[83]

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[80] Lloyd, 'Rulers of Opinion', 123-5

[81] Zimmerman, *Romantic Literary Lecture*, 30-41.

[82] Kenneth Garlick, Angus Macintyre, Kathryn Cave and Evelyn Newby (eds), *The Diary of Joseph Farington* (17 vols, New Haven, 1978-1998), 29 Dec. 1802, v. 1954.

[83] Marc Auguste Pictet to Alexander Aubert, 12 July 1802 and Marc Auguste Pictet to Alexander Marcet, 12 July 1802, René Sigrist and David Bickerton (eds), *Marc-Auguste Pictet 1752-1825 Correspondance Sciences et Techniques* (4 vols, Geneva, 1996-2004), iii. 42 and 353-4. Edmond Pictet, 'Journal d'un Genevois à Paris sous le Consulat', *Mémoires et Documents publiés par la Société d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de Genève*, 5 (1893), 98-133,

After returning to London towards the end of 1802, Underwood was soon, probably unexpectedly, back in France. Wedgwood had decided on a Continental tour to improve his health and initially Coleridge would accompany him. Coleridge, perfectly well aware that the deteriorating political situation would mean a renewal of the war, arranged for Underwood to take his place. Precisely how is not clear, but Davy seems to have been involved.[84] Wedgwood and Underwood were in France when the Peace of Amiens ended and Buonaparte decreed (22 May 1803) that all British subjects in French territories should be detained.[85] Wedgwood escaped back to London, but Underwood, arrested in Calais, was detained for the next eleven years. Throughout, Wedgwood, and following his death his brother Josiah Wedgwood Jr (1769-1843), paid him £50 annually.[86] Initially held in Verdun (with other British détenus), from mid-1806 Underwood was allowed fairly comfortable parole in Paris. There he formed close connections with various French savants (especially those at the Jardin des Plantes and the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle), artists and officials, including the ex-Empress Joséphine (1763-1814) although how this came about is not known. He also

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entry for 14 Germinal an 11 (28 Mar. 1803), 117. For this episode see Marguerite Zimmer, *Histoire de l'anesthésie: Méthodes et techniques au XIXe siècle* **(**Courtabœuf, 2008), 49-52.

[84] Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Thomas Poole, 13 Mar. 1803, *CLSTC,* ii. 938-9.

[85] For the background see John Goldworth Alger, *Napoleon's British Visitors and Captives 1801-1815* (Westminster, 1904); Michael Lewis, *Napoleon and his British Captives* (London, 1962); Élodie Duché, 'A Passage to Imprisonment: The British Prisoners of War in Verdun under the First French Empire', PhD thesis (University of Warwick, 2014), 3-31.

[86] Thomas Richard Underwood to Josiah Wedgwood Jr, 24 April 1810, WM MS E1-34 recorded the sums paid until then.

experimented with Rumford in his laboratory at Auteuil where he had retired following his disastrous marriage to Marie-Anne Lavoisier.[87]

When Davy (with Lady Davy, her maid and Faraday), having somehow obtained permission to visit France and from thence go south into Italy, arrived in Paris in October 1813, he immediately sought out Underwood who provided introductions and guided them round Paris. Much of what we know about Davy's visit comes from John Paris's biography of him[88] derived almost entirely from Underwood drawing on his diary. Davy's position in Paris was difficult, since he had been criticised publicly and privately for accepting Buonaparte's permission to visit France.[89] There was therefore no question that he would attend an Emperor's levée, not that any evidence of an invitation exists. (Buonaparte had other matters on his mind following his recent defeat at the Battle of the Nations which opened the road to Paris for the Allied armies). But Davy was offered the opportunity to be presented to ex-Empress Joséphine (whom Buonaparte had divorced in 1810 and had then taken up residence at the Château de Malmaison, west of Paris). John Paris noted that Underwood 'had been frequently in the habit of paying his court to the Empress'[90] and so the invitation may possibly have come via him. After resolving some protocol issues, the ex-

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[87] 'Memoirs of Sir Benjamin Thompson, Count of Rumford', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 64 (1814), 394-8, 396; Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, ii.16; see also Sanborn C. Brown, *Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 297.

[88] Faraday's diary of the tour, published in Brian Bowers and Lenore Symons (eds), *'Curiosity Perfectly Satisfyed': Faraday's Travels in Europe 1813-15* (London, 1991), 14-34 shows that Faraday was left largely to his own devices while in Paris.

[89] *The Times*, 19 Oct. 1813, 3b; Robert Southey to Hugh Chudleigh Standert, 21 Dec. 1813.

[90] Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, ii. 25.

Empress received the Davys (and others) at Malmaison on 30 November 1813. According to Paris, presumably repeating what Underwood had told him, this was the first occasion that any English people had been so honoured. After the formal presentation, the ex-Empress invited the Davys and Underwood into her boudoir where Lady Davy expressed 'in very florid terms' her admiration for some porcelain displayed on the mantelpiece whereupon the ex-Empress presented her with an example. As it was a cold day, and she 'thinly clad', she borrowed 'a *mountain*' of furs allowing her to explore the famous conservatories of the ex-Empress, who had clearly taken a shine to her.[91]

The Go-between

The Davys left Paris at the end of December well before the Allied armies arrived and occupied Paris at the end of March 1814, events described vividly in Underwood's diary.[92] Following his release, Underwood spent some time in London, doubtless sorting out his affairs following the deaths while detained of both his parents. It would seem, however, that around August 1815 he returned to live permanently in Paris. His marriage had collapsed before he went to France[93] and while in Paris from 1806 he may have formed a long-term

[91] Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, ii. 26.

[92] [Thomas Richard Underwood], *A Narrative of Memorable Events in Paris, Preceding the Capitulation, and During the Occupancy of that City by the Allied Armies, in the Year 1814; Being Extracts from the Journal of a Détenu, who Continued a Prisoner, on Parole, in the French Capital, from the Year 1803 to 1814. Also Anecdotes of Buonaparte's Journey to Elba* (London, 1828).

[93] Thomas Richard Underwood to Tom Wedgwood, 8 July 1803, WM MS E1-25.

relationship with Marie Dassau, an unmarried woman, about whom little is known other than by the early 1830s both lived at 28 rue Neuve, St Augustin.[94]

From 1815 Underwood began a pattern of life that he followed until his death twenty years later. He spent the majority of his time in France, but most years, usually in the summer, visited Britain for a few months where he presumably looked after his affairs and renewed his acquaintances.[95] The usual places that Underwood visited in Britain, though not necessarily all in the same year, were London, Oxford, Cambridge, North Wales and, once, Scotland. On these visits he acted as an effective go-between, contributing significantly to rebuilding the personal and correspondence networks of savants, what in the eighteenth century had been referred to as the European republic of letters, destroyed by more than twenty years of war.[96] Mostly his interactions were in geology, but as a Royal Institution member when in London (where he stayed with Hooke, to whom he bequeathed £200 with

[94] His address given in *Bulletin de la Société Géologique de France*, 2 (1832), 107; 3 (1833), viii; her address is mentioned in a legal document of 1833, Archives Nationales MC/ET/VIII/728 5. He bequeathed her all his French property and half the residue of his English property, Will of Thomas Richard Underwood, 19 July 1834, TNA PROB/11/1850/84. There are references to a Mademoiselle D in his 1814 diary, [Underwood], *A Narrative of Memorable Events in Paris*, 151, 154, 162.

[95] For example, he met Godwin, *Diary*, 15 and 17 July 1816, 3 June 1817, 5 and 6 June 1818, 3 June 1819.

[96] Elise Lipkowitz, 'Corresponding in War and Peace: The Challenge of Rebooting Anglo-French Scientific Relations during the Peace of Amiens', in Paula Findlen (ed.), *Empires of Knowledge: Scientific Networks in the Early Modern World* (London, 2019), 205-22.

£100 each to his three daughters[97]), he usually visited Faraday carrying papers and other information between him and André-Marie Ampère (1775-1836) (whom he knew well since during his detention).[98]

In Wales he geologised and his observations were used by various grateful geologists including John Stevens Henslow (1796-1861), William Buckland (1784-1856) and Adam Sedgwick (1785-1873).[99] Underwood also kept up with his old acquaintance from artists' clubs and the Royal Institution, Thomas Webster, maintaining a long correspondence and bequeathing him £100.[100] After his time at the Royal Institution, Webster's painting career

[97] Thomas Richard Underwood to Adam Sedgwick, 27 Apr. 1827, CUL MS add 7652/I/G/36. Will of Thomas Richard Underwood, 19 July 1834, TNA PROB/11/1850/84.

[98] See the letters between Ampère and Faraday in vols 1 and 2 of Frank A. J. L. James (ed.), *The Correspondence of Michael Faraday* (6 vols, London, 1991-2012).

[99] John Stevens Henslow, 'Geological Description of Anglesea', *Transactions of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, 1 (1822), 359-452, 359; William Buckland, *Reliquiæ diluvianæ; or Observations on the Organic Remains Contained in Caves, Fissures, and Diluvial Gravel, and on Other Geological Phenomena, Attesting the Action of an Universal Deluge* (London, 1823), 28-9, 206; Adam Sedgwick, 'On the Phænomena Connected with some Trap Dykes in Yorkshire and Durham', *Philosophical Magazine*, 67 (1826), 211-19, 249-59, 258.

[100] John Challinor, 'Some Correspondence of Thomas Webster, Geologist (1773-1844)', parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, *Annals of Science*, 17 (1961), 175-95; 18 (1962), 147-75; 19 (1963), 49-79; 285-97; 20 (1964), 59-80, 143-64. Will of Thomas Richard Underwood, 19 July 1834, TNA PROB/11/1850/84.

had not been a success.[101] Like Underwood he moved into geology becoming the first paid employee of the Geological Society, another society emerging from the sociability (for example the British Mineralogical Society[102]) of the war years and lasting to the present. He worked with Englefield on their magnificent *A Description of the Principal Picturesque Beauties, Antiquities, and Geological Phœnomena of the Isle of Wight* (1816), for which he executed most of the illustrations. As he appreciated and Heringman has analysed, Webster adjusted the genre of watercolour landscapes to geological formations, complete with people to provide scale.[103]

Throughout the 1820s and indeed early 1830s, in his go-between role Underwood also provided (as he did for Davy in 1813) introductions to visiting English (and other) savants arriving in Paris. Meeting Underwood seems to have become almost obligatory as is apparent

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[101] Which doubtless explains the very brief reference he accorded to it in RI MS Webster 'Autobiography', 22-3.

[102] Paul Weindling, 'The British Mineralogical Society: A Case Study in Science and Social Improvement', in Ian Inkster and Jack Morrell (eds), *Metropolis and Province: Science in British Culture, 1780-1850* (London, 1983), 120-50.

[103] Thomas Webster to Thomas Richard Underwood, 18 Mar. 1822, Challinor, 'Some Correspondence of Thomas Webster', part 2, 153-5; Noah Heringman, 'Picturesque Ruin and Geological Antiquity: Thomas Webster and Sir Henry Englefield on the Isle of Wight', in C. L. E. Lewis and S. J. Knell (eds), *The Making of the Geological Society of London* (London, 2009), 299-318 and Noah Heringman, *Sciences of Antiquity: Romantic Antiquarianism, Natural History, and Knowledge Work* (Oxford, 2013), 281-307.

from the advice that Buckland gave Sedgwick when he was about to visit Paris: 'The best method of beginning operations is to find out Mr Underwood'.[104]

Biography and Conclusion

In early 1829 Underwood visited Italy, for the second time, and witnessed a minor eruption of Vesuvius.[105] During the second half of March or sometime in April while in Rome, he called on Davy who, very ill, declined to see him. Davy's brother, the army physician John Davy (1790-1868), who was present, construed this meant that Davy 'had ceased to esteem Mr. Underwood'.[106] However, this may have just been John Davy's way of casting doubt on the veracity of the information that Underwood gave John Paris for his biography of Davy which so outraged him.[107]

Quite how in 1829 or 1830 Paris knew about Underwood's existence and that he possessed material relevant for Davy's biography is not clear. In the Institut de France archives there is an undated, untitled, unsigned, biographical account of Davy running to about 2000 words. Almost certainly in Underwood's hand, it includes several references to

[104] William Buckland to Adam Sedgwick, 3 Dec. 1826, CUL MS add 7652/I/G/27.

[105] Thomas Richard Underwood to Adam Sedgwick, 9 Oct. 1829, CUL MS add 7652/I/F/2.

[106] John Davy, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Humphry Davy, Bart.* (2 vols, London, 1836), i. 150.

[107] James, 'Constructing Humphry Davy's Biographical Image', 226-7, 232.

him and a transcription of a letter from Davy to him, published by Paris.[108] Presumably Underwood wrote and gave this account to Cuvier who began collecting information about Davy shortly after his death, for his *éloge* delivered to the Institut on 26 July 1830, though not published until 1833.[109] Cuvier used Underwood's account extensively in his *éloge*, mentioning, for example, Davy's poem on St Michael's Mount and the basic, domestic, scientific apparatus to which Davy had access in Cornwall. As one might expect from someone who throughout his career supported whatever government held power in France, distancing himself from the previous regime, Cuvier played down the political context that Underwood gave of Davy's appointment to the Royal Institution, referring obliquely only to democracy in Bristol. Nor, for the same reason, did he mention Davy's visit to Paris in 1813 which Underwood briefly mentioned. On the other hand, Cuvier paraphrased, but without diminishing its force, Underwood's account of the first impression that Davy made at the Royal Institution, but blamed Rumford (whom Cuvier clearly detested) for its effect.

It is highly likely that Underwood sent Paris a similar biographical account to that he provided Cuvier. Paris, like Cuvier, discussed Davy's preliminary encounter with the Royal Institution. But, as already discussed, Underwood also sent Paris other material, including about Davy's first visit to London, his radicalism, the diary of their 1801 visit to Cornwall,

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[108] [Underwood], 'Appendix A'. The letter is Humphry Davy to Thomas Richard Underwood, 12 July 1801, *CLHD*, i. 98-100, Letter 44; Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 124.

[109] Georges Cuvier, 'Éloge de Sir Humphry Davy', *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences*, 12 (1833), i-xxxvii. For other documentation sent to Cuvier, see James, 'Constructing Humphry Davy's Biographical Image', 217-18.

details of the Davys' 1813 visit to Paris as well as a letter from Genoa.[110] Much of this was still politically embarrassing in post-1815 Europe. Indeed, John Davy spent four pages in his own biography of his brother criticising the evidence that Underwood (now safely dead) had provided Paris and his interpretations thereof.[111] It is little wonder that John Davy, in the hope of rescuing at least to some extent, his brother's reputation challenged Underwood's veracity by suggesting that Davy at the end no longer esteemed him. But Underwood's very role in constructing Davy's biography illustrates the long-term legacy that the largely hidden sociable networks, groups or coteries of the early Royal Institution have had in making available such evidence that, whatever its shortcomings, would not otherwise have existed.

[110] Humphry Davy to Thomas Richard Underwood, 4 Mar. 1814, Paris, *Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, 2: 33-4; *CLHD*, ii. 286-7, Letter 413.

[111] John Davy, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Humphry Davy*, i. 147-50.