

## News, Notes and Queries

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### AN UNRECORDED WILLIAM ALLEN CARICATURE?

A CARICATURE relating to the marriage of William Allen, F.R.S., (1770–1843) to Grizell Birkbeck, widow of Wilson Birkbeck, has recently come to light. It bears the title ‘THE ATTRACTION OF GRAVITY !!!, the space being filled with a plough (Allen’s pharmacy was in Plough Court, Lombard Street, London) and the sub-heading: ‘Eye Natures walks shoot Folly as it flies’. This coloured engraving, by an artist yet unidentified but who may be Thomas Jones or possibly Robert Cruikshank, is not recorded in Mrs. D. M. George’s *Political and Personal Satires* for 1827 nor is it in the catalogue of the Print Room at the British Museum.

It must have been published in March 1827, the month in which the wedding took place, as were six other caricatures relating to the wedding. These are *Sweet William and Grizell or Newington Nunnery in an Uproar* (Robert Cruikshank, 5 March 1827, an uncoloured version of which was published by Henry Heath), *Racing Intelligence or Money Makes the Mare to Go* (Robert Cruikshank, 8 March 1827), *Humming All the Trade is or The Modern Alchemist* (T. Jones, 8 March 1827), *Willy the Lion—Insulted by Asses* (G. Williams, 1827) *The Loves of Willy and Grizy* (Henry Heath, 14 March 1827—a small coloured engraving with doggerel verses below) and *Yea, Verily the Spirit Moveth—The Wedding of Willy and Grizy* (? Henry Heath, 14 March 1827, a small print with doggerel verses).

The coloured engraving now described carries the wording: ‘Sweet Grizy, we have long *spoken the truth* together, verily now let us *lie* together—If the friends animadvert upon thee or me, they shall find I am a *Reciever* (*sic*) that can give them a *Retort*!!.’ The words ‘Reciever’ and ‘Retort’ had reference to Allen’s business as an apothecary. The drawing shows Grizell and Allen holding hands, both dressed in the Quaker style of the period.

The reason this marriage called from the caustic pens of the caricaturists of the time such severe lampooning of Allen was the consternation that it caused among the Friends, not only in London but throughout the country. Allen, a minister of the Friends, was a public figure, internationally known for his antislavery views, for his connections with the Royal House, for his visits to the Czar of Russia, and for the prominent position he held in London pharmacy. When the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain was formed in 1843 Allen was called upon to be its first president. In 1827 Allen was 57 years old and his bride, Grizell, 69. Allen had been married twice before: Grizell had been fifteen years a widow since the death of Wilson Birkbeck in 1812.

Lucy Bradshaw, in her three-volume *Life and Correspondence of William Allen*<sup>1</sup> notes that about March 1827 Allen mentions in a letter to a friend that a new epoch is opening in his eventful life, that for years he and Grizell Birkbeck had been upon terms of friendship and that he often sought her help and counsel. Not until he lost his beloved child, his last earthly prop, did a more intimate union than that of friendship appear. They, Allen and Grizell, purpose that the marriage should take place on the 14th instant (March). Allen added: ‘Should this step appear singular let it be remem-

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bered that the desperations through which I have had to pass have been singularly affective’.

To the Quaker community this intended marriage was more than singular: it caused the greatest consternation. Allen was highly respected for his labours among all classes yet here he was at the age of 57 marrying a *third* time and marrying a widow, also well known amongst the Friends, and who was now 69, Allen’s senior by twelve years. One Quaker, John Grubb, writing to his brother in Clonmel, Ireland, shortly after the intended marriage was announced, said it caused such a general sensation and such an *Explosion*, and he believed, general disapprobation. Another wrote: ‘If thou know the torrent of disapprobation that the William Allen and Grizell Birkbeck intended match has excited in this Country, probably thy astonishment might be greater than it is’. He concludes: ‘. . . We have seen a copy of verses written on the occasion, which has been printed in the new way called *Lithography* and circulated in many places. It is very severe entitled *Friendly Scandal*. Grizell Birkbeck has a great prospect: it is said about £3,000 a year’.<sup>2</sup>

Mary Watson, a close friend of Grizell was equally upset. She asks why her dear friends Grizell and William Allen could not continue to enjoy the benefits and comforts of religious and social intercourse and fellowship as has been the case for some years, independent, ‘especially at thy time of life’. Grizell took pains over her reply. . . . ‘I am not easy to pass it [Mary’s reprimand] in silence. . . . I may now add that after weighing the matter as well as we were able we concluded it best to deliver our intentions at our Monthly Meeting last fourth day’.<sup>3</sup> [4th February 1827]. As indicated, the wedding took place on 14th March 1827 after which the Allens moved to Paradise Row, Stoke Newington.

The caricaturists took full advantage of the fact that Grizell was known to be wealthy, for example, one set of verses ends: ‘To be sure the Beef is rather old, but then the Gristle’s made of gold’. Quite wrongly they attributed to Allen a desire to have access to Grizell’s funds. Allen himself was already a rich man, with a prosperous pharmacy and a flourishing manufacturing and wholesale drug business.

Grizell and William Allen lived happily together until her death in 1835, eight years after the marriage.

### REFERENCES

1. London, 1846, vol. 2, p. 437.
  2. *J. Friends Hist. Soc.* 1921, 18, 29–32.
  3. Original letters in the Friends Library, Euston Road, London, Port. 17. 38, 39.
- I have to thank the Librarian for allowing me access to these.

LESLIE G. MATTHEWS

*Sweet Grizzy we have long spoken the truth together. verily now let us  
lie together. If the friends animadvert upon thee or me, they shall find  
I am a Receiver that can give them a Retort !!!*



THE ATTRACTION <sup>OF</sup> GRAVITY !!!  
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