

The Indianapolis Literary Club

“Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms” (Sherlock Holmes)

Essayist: Stephen J. Jay M.D.

Park Tudor School, Commons

January 20, 2009

Introduction

Last year, when I came early to arrange this room for our meetings I became intrigued with the black and white image behind the President’s chair and realized it was the only tangible link between our Club and the famous Literary Club of London. My interest was piqued in both the history of this picture and in the origins and nature of literary clubs, including our own. Why are we drawn to such clubs?

My aims this evening are twofold: first to reflect on this question and on the remarkable spread of literary clubs across America in the 19th and 20th centuries, and second to resolve the mysteries surrounding the image before us which is titled: “A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s”.

A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s

Let’s look closely at this picture. (1, 2) It is a print from steel or possibly a copper stipple and line engraving that features a dining room at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s, “with furniture and a chandelier of the taste of the second half of the (last) 18th century.” (3, 4) Three paintings, a man’s bust, and a four panel ornamental screen are seen behind the table. Dinner is finished and around the table are seated nine men. A dark-skinned man, perhaps a Creole servant, has entered the room “bearing on a tray a couple of high-shouldered decanters of wine..” (2) Perhaps this man is Samuel Johnson’s servant, Francis Barber, who is mentioned several times in Boswell’s biography of Johnson and to whom... Johnson left much of his property at his death. At the head of the table is Johnson, essayist and lexicographer, said to have been a scrofulous infant born in London at the home of a poor bookseller. (5) To his left Boswell, author of the “Life of Samuel Johnson”; then from left to right are: Reynolds, portrait painter; David Garrick, actor noted for Shakespearean roles; Edmund Burke, statesman and supporter of the American Revolution; General Pasquale de Paoli, the Corsican patriot and proponent of democracy—the only person here not a member of The Club, and, for Hoosiers, the person after whom our southern Indiana town is named; then, Dr. Charles Burney, musicologist, father

of Fanny Burney, a most popular 18th century English novelist and chronicler of society; on the right: Rev. Thomas Warton, literary critic, poet and essayist; and finally, Oliver Goldsmith, physician, the author of "The Vicar of Wakefield", and a playwright who once said of Samuel Johnson: "There's no arguing with Johnson, for if his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it." Johnson once described Goldsmith as "...a plant that flowered late." (6)

Johnson is speaking and the center of attention with the index and middle fingers of his right hand extended, suggesting he is making two points. His size is imposing and facial expression intense, no doubt making his points forcibly and with his irascible wit. With a gentleman's gentle face, Joshua Reynolds, who was near deaf, holds an ear trumpet close to Johnson. Boswell sits in the shadows, diminutive and with passive expression. Only the Reverend Warton and Oliver Goldsmith appear distracted, perhaps quibbling over the first point Johnson has made.

On this picture in the margin is the title "A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds's". Above this are the signatures of each man. At the left margin is printed "Painted by James E. Doyle", in the middle: "London. Published Oct 1, 1851, by Owen Bailey"; and at the right margin is printed: "Re Engraved by D. George Thompson."

This then was the image in artist James Doyle's mind as he reflected on the first gatherings of the London Literary Club in 1764.

"The Club" (Johnson's Literary Club; Literary Club)

The origins of literary clubs are unknown, but it seems unlikely that people from ancient civilizations did not gather together for wine, repast and repartee over things literary.

But, it is to 17th century England that we owe the word "Club" from the Anglo-Saxon word, *clifian*, to cleave, which defines a club as one whose costs are shared among its members. (1, 2). Samuel Johnson defined "Club" as "An assembly of good fellows meeting under certain conditions". He also posited that clubs were "For those who love to fold their legs and talk themselves out." (3) The whole concept of a club is one of the most English things in the world. (4, 5) It has been said that, if three Englishmen were stranded on a deserted isle, two of them would form a club to exclude the third. (4)

Among a myriad of English clubs of the 18th century, one, called simply: "The Club", founded in 1764, rose to prominence, and, as its famous motto and toast "Esto Perpetua (May it last forever) predicted, it has existed almost 250 years. The idea for The Club was Joshua Reynolds's, known by his friends as "the finest gentleman," and "the dear knight of Plympton. (3, 5-9)

The Club has had various names, confusing historians. (5, 10-13) The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography refers to The Club as “Johnson’s Literary Club” but lists Reynolds as its founder. James Boswell said: “Sir Joshua Reynolds had the merit of being the first proposer of it, to which Johnson acceded. There were nine original members. (14)

Historians say Reynolds founded The Club so Samuel Johnson could hold sway with enlightened conversation and wit, partly to furnish “the great delight of (Samuel Johnson’s) life— conversation and mental intercourse.” (7, 15) That Johnson was a master of conversation and wit is incontestable. Johnson said of Oliver Goldsmith’s apology in the London Chronicle for beating Evans the bookseller (16) “He has indeed done it very well; but it is a foolish thing well done.” Johnson once quipped that “he did not care to speak ill of any man behind his back, but he believed the gentleman was an attorney.” (17) For twenty years, Johnson, called by Boswell the “Great Cham of literature,” dominated The Club. (18, 18 A)

The Club’s assembled talent, even genius, was incontestable: three of the world’s greatest books were written by members: Gibbon’s “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire”; Edmund Burke’s “Reflections on the Revolution in France”; and Boswell’s “Life of Samuel Johnson”. Johnson himself said that members of The Club could provide a complete and competent faculty for an imaginary college at St. Andrews. (7, 19)

The Club’s members increased to 35 by 1784, but a Club resolution limited membership to 40, and “The Club had the reputation of being more difficult to enter than the Kingdom of Heaven.” (13) The great historian Gibbon was “blackballed” once, as well as James Boswell. (7)

The Club first met at Turk’s Head Tavern in Gerrard Street, Soho, London, every Monday evening, then once in a fortnight during the meeting of parliament. (13, 13 A, 19). Meals were modest initially, but later became full-course dinners. Despite meeting at taverns, The Club owned its supply of potables; and it was the custom to measure, not how much liquor was consumed, but how much was left after each meeting. (20)

The Treasurer’s minutes of August 29, 1820, reflected the purchase of 37 dozen and 2 bottles of old East India Madeira. The cost was about L 123. (21) Liquor flowed freely at The Club, but Samuel Johnson preferred tea, not liquor; he included a definition of tea in his famous dictionary and is credited with promoting its use in England. (22) Johnson called himself “a hardened and shameless tea-drinker”

No records were kept of conversations of The Club members, but Boswell’s brilliant biography popularized Samuel Johnson, with accounts of his conversations with luminaries. (2, 14, 23) Samuel Johnson was not given to just “talk” and said on one occasion, “We had talk enough, but no conversation; there was nothing discussed.” Selection of new members was predicated on whether the nominee could converse, not just talk. (24) For the rare individual who was

voted into The Club, the action was presented in the formal and dignified announcement: “Sir, I have the pleasure to inform you that you had last night the honor to be elected a member of The Club.” (25, 26)

With the death of Johnson in 1784 and Reynolds in 1792 (27, 28), the Club had lost its founders but the essence and spirit of The Club lived on. The always mild and cheerful genius and attic elegance of expression of Joshua Reynolds and the wit and biting critiques of Samuel Johnson were missed. In the “Poets Corner” of The London Times (29): an Elegy on Samuel Johnson’s Death captured the immense stature of the man:

“The winds howl fierce, the thunder roils afar,
The forked lightning darts across the skies;
Contending elements now seem at war,
And by their blasts the oak uplifted lies.”

Joshua Reynolds’s Will provided 200 pounds for James Boswell, 2000 pounds to Edmund Burke, and, to seventeen of his particular friends, a picture each.” (30)

The Club’s restrictive membership often ruffled feathers of aspirants. In 1911, Winston Churchill and F. E. Smith founded a British political dining society to meet fortnightly while parliament was in session. (31) Neither Churchill nor Smith had been invited to join The Club and, in a pique, decided to establish their own club and call it “The Other Club”, whose rules posted today at the Churchill Centre in London state: The object of the “Other Club” is to dine (32); both The Other Club and The Club continue to meet today. (33, 34)

American Diaspora of Literary Clubs

Little is known about the spread of literary clubs from England to America. But, by the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783, there was growing interest in literary activities. (1-4) Spurred on by the Postal Act of 1794, magazines flourished in the “golden age of magazines”. (5) Colleges and universities formed literary societies. New copyright laws favored authors and publications soared. Public demand for information on religion and literature increased. Public libraries proliferated – 300 in the United States by the 1870s. (1, 6, 7) Libraries promoted community literary clubs—an early Library Primer said: “...it lies within the power of the librarian to create them.” (1) The World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 in Chicago was attended by one quarter of the American population and featured many literary activities which likely amplified interest in literary clubs in hometown America. (8, 9) Other factors played a role, including the remarkable women’s club movement, the “spirit of national unity,” and influx of immigrants who found clubs a vehicle for assimilation. (10)

In the east, the Calliopean Literary Society was formed in 1788 and the Century Club in 1847 in New York City. (2) In Boston, in 1855, the Saturday Club, frequented by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Emerson, Lowell and Longfellow. (11) The Literary Club of Cincinnati 1849 (12-15); Chicago Literary Club, 1874 (16, 17); and our Indianapolis Literary Club, 1877. (18-24) In the table we have distributed, I have summarized selected Literary and related clubs founded over the past 200 years in the U.S. (25)

The Indianapolis Literary Club (from 1877)

This history provides some context for understanding the motivation of our founding members who met on Jan 10, 1877, in Indianapolis to organize the Indianapolis Literary Club—three lawyers, a clerk of Federal District Court, a clergyman, and a librarian. (1-3) There has been controversy about who proposed the idea. Francis Insley, President of our club in 1970, said three members deserved consideration: Howland, Bartlett, and Evans. Mr. Howland was Clerk of the U.S. courts in Indianapolis, and the first organizing meeting was held in his house. A charter member, Mr. John H. Holliday, said the Rev. Bartlett was “probably” responsible for the idea, but Holliday was equivocal when he spoke 33 years after the Club was founded. Theodore L. Sewall, Secretary and President of our Club, suggested the “the man who brought about the first meeting was Charles Evans.” (3, 4)

I think Sewall was correct. Charles Evans’s biographer notes that Dr. William Frederick Poole, who helped establish the Cincinnati and Chicago Literary Clubs, stimulated Evans’s interest in establishing a club here. Three years prior to our Club’s founding, Evans wrote to Poole about promoting this matter. (5) It was over Charles Evans’s signature on Dec 13, 1876, that an invitation was sent out to meet for the purpose of “effecting an organization.” (3) In a paper entitled: “Looking Backward,” presented at our Club’s 50th Anniversary, Charles Evans suggests the idea for a Club was his, based on his early conversations with Dr. Poole in Cincinnati. (6)

Finally, in the mid 1870s, Evans was a budding star among American librarians, having been appointed Librarian for Indianapolis Public Library at 22. Libraries were promoting the literary club movement and Evans would have been motivated to create a club here. (5, 7)

Thus, the objective evidence points to Evans as the spark that lit our literary club flame, but, in the absence of a “smoking gun,” we may have to accept that the identity of our club founder will remain a mystery. In light of the interest among women at the time to form literary clubs, was it possible that the wives of these gentleman, suggested that a men’s literary club be organized? Perhaps to free the women for a night to pursue their interests—literary or otherwise. (7, 8)

Charles Evans was an odd sort, brilliant but irascible—a poor administrator, who lost his job in Indianapolis and suffered similar fates at other libraries. (9) His son, Chick Evans, became “the

first American to win both the National Open and Amateur Golf Championships in the same year.” (10, 11) But his father rarely saw him play. Charles Evans excelled in his professional niche as a bibliographer. From 1903 to 1934, he compiled everything printed in the U.S. from 1639 to 1820, published in 12 volumes over three decades, before illness stopped his work. (12) In 1935, Charles Evans died, and it was more than 20 years before volume 13 of his work was published. His American Bibliography is one of the great one-man bibliographical works in U.S. history and his biographer said of Evans: “Because of his temperament, Evans perhaps may be judged as a failure as a librarian, but because of his dedication and perseverance he is recognized as the “American Bibliographer.” (13, 14)

As a result of the vision of Evans and our other founders, our Indianapolis Literary Club today is one of the few Clubs in America that has maintained a literary focus and tradition for more than one hundred and thirty years, a club that finds in its “Roll of membership”: a President and two Vice Presidents of the United States, cabinet members, U.S. Congressmen, Ambassadors, Governors of Indiana; renowned authors and poets and men of distinction with national and local fame across the spectrum of human endeavor. (15, 16) But Charles Evans left us another legacy, the image before us.

Charles Evans and “A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s”

It was on a trip to London, Oct 1, 1877, for a Conference of Librarians, nine months after our club was founded, that Evans purchased this print of “A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s.” (1) We have no record of Evans’s motivation to buy it. But he was dedicated to the historical record, and he would have valued the literary connection between The Club of London, in 1764, and our fledgling Club. This print hung in Evans’s library for fifty years, and at our Clubs 50th anniversary, Jan 10, 1927, he gave it to our Club. (2, 3) Despite its historic value to us, our print has a fair market value of only \$500. (4) While this is not surprising in the world of art, I was surprised about the lack of factual information about this picture, particularly since it is thought to be the only visual representation of a meeting of perhaps the most famous club in the history of English speaking people.

To address the mystery surrounding the picture, I focused on two questions: First, what motivated or inspired Doyle to create “A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s”? Second, where is the original oil painting by James Doyle? But first a few words about James Doyle’s family.

The Family of James Doyle (b. 1755, Dublin) and Catherine Tyan

James William Edmund Doyle was born in London in 1822 into a family of Irish Catholics known for artistic and literary excellence and a “missionary zeal” to express themselves. (1, 2) Over

three generations, this remarkable family achieved the distinction of having five of its members included in the British Dictionary of National Biography. (1)

James's father, John, was the famous artist known as "HB." As a child with great skill in painting miniatures and in drawing horses, John Doyle became intrigued as a young man with politics, attending the House of Commons as a silent onlooker making notes. (3, 4) In 1827, he published political sketches with sarcastic but "gentle humor", under a pseudonym, "HB". (3, 5) For twenty years, John produced almost 1,000 sketches of which 900 are preserved in the British Museum. (3,6) To hide his identity, he continued to paint horses, regularly exhibiting and selling these, a perfect "cover" for his political artistry and commentary. John Doyle became the nucleus of a circle of prominent literary and artistic figures including: Sir Walter Scott, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Dickens, Thackeray, and Macaulay; but, remarkably, Doyle maintained his secret identity. (4)

John Doyle and his wife Marianne Conan had seven children. A young son and daughter died before they were fifteen, probably of consumption. (7) Another daughter became a nun. Four sons lived to adulthood and became successful artists. The children were raised as devout Catholics and were home-schooled- steeped in history, language art and music from an early age. (5, 6)

One son, Richard, or "Dicky" Doyle, became a preeminent artist, illustrator, and "the kindest of political satirists". (1, 5, 6, 6 A, 8-10) He illustrated popular manuscripts of "Beauty and the Beast" and "Jack the Giant Killer," and at eighteen, Dicky became a contributor to "Punch", the weekly British magazine of humor and satire. (8, 11) He created whimsical pieces and political cartoons and he designed the famous cover of Punch that was used for more than 100 years. (8,12,13) Richard provided illustrations for eighteen books and created more than one thousand drawings for illustrated books of prominent authors: Charles Dickens, Ruskin, and Thackeray. (8,13) But, Richard was best known for his marvelous paintings of fairies and his book "In Fairyland", is generally considered one of the greatest British books of the nineteenth century. (13, 14) Today, his paintings are in the finest British museums.

Richard's brother, Henry also became a prominent painter, illustrator and cartoonist but distinguished himself with paintings and frescos of religious themes that were recognized by Pope Pius IX. (6, 15, 15A, 16) In 1869, Henry was appointed director of the National Gallery of Ireland, where he served with distinction for twenty-three years, until his death. (6, 16)

Charles was the youngest and "weakest of character" of John and Marianne Doyle's sons, and despite his promise as an artist, he was unable to make a living from it. (6, 17-19) He worked for the Scottish government for 30 years, supplementing his income with illustrations for books, such as Daniel Defoe's: "The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe". (18, 20). His

themes were often whimsical, of elves and faerie folk, but, suffering from depression, alcoholism and seizures, Charles spent the last twelve years of his life in asylums; ironically, some of his best paintings came from this time, and he used them to demonstrate he was not insane and that he was wrongfully confined. (6, 20-22) His works today are held at Harvard; the National Library of Ireland, Royal Scottish Academy and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. (18) Ironically, Charles was the only son of John and Marianne Doyle to bear children, nine of them, one of whom would extend the Conan Doyle surname from its origins in 1856 to the end of its short span of 150 years, in 1997. (23).

James William Edmund Doyle (1822-92)

James was the eldest son, and as a child showed promise as an artist. (1-4) His most successful painting was, "A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds's," was engraved in 1848 and sold for 6 pounds a copy, selling out in two years. (1,5) James created designs and frescos after Sir Walter Scott subjects for the walls of the Royal Summer House at Buckingham Palace—his work selected by the Queen and Prince Albert. (6,7, 7 A) But, while in his 20s, James became interested in history, heraldry, and genealogy and turned to writing. He published two major works for which he received widespread recognition in England: In 1864, "A Chronicle of England from B.C. 55 to 1485". (1,5,8,9) Adorning this opus of principle events of English history, were 81 images, watercolor scenes of medieval history and pageantry, prepared as wood engravings by Edmund Evans, one of the best engravers of the Victorian era. (10) In 1886, James published: "The Official Baronage of England: showing the Succession, Dignities, and Offices of every peer from 1066 to 1885". Doyle created 1600 illustrations for this work. (5, 11-13)

James was a quiet and private person, a deeply devout Catholic, and because of his ascetic and scholarly ways and "prolonged bachelorhood, he carried the nickname, "The Priest." He was a tall, imposing and stern man, bearded to the cheek-bones. (14, 15) He married Jane Henrietta Hawkins Feb 12, 1874 in London. He was 52, she 39. (16) They lived, childless, for 16 years with a live-in cook and parlor maid in London; in the 1891 census he described himself as an "Author" and "Landowner". On Dec 3, 1892 James died at age 70. (17-19) His obituaries said he had extraordinary knowledge of history, heraldry and antiquities but his extreme modesty of character and retiring nature prevented him making a remarkable figure in the world. (20-22) One obituary said James's death deprived historical art of a gifted and conscientious student and the Holy Church of a loyal and devout son—a simple and gentle "man wholly without guile."

James was recognized primarily as an illustrator and antiquary, not a painter, this despite the considerable early success of James's "A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds's." (23)

Let's return now to the two questions: What motivated James to create "A Literary Party"? Where is the original oil?

James Doyle's oil painting: "A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds"

Unfortunately, we have no specific primary source information as to James's reasons for painting this image. Doyle's biographers and art historians are silent on this point. (1, 2)

Of the many possible motives, I think it likely Doyle painted "A Literary Party" on a commission. James had done such work before and, struggling for income at age 26—he needed the money. In 1848, The Literary Club of London was well-known as a bastion for some of the best minds in English history, and it is plausible there was interest in capturing on canvas the founding fathers at a dinner meeting. Is it possible that The Club of London approached James Doyle and commissioned "The Literary Party"? I will return to this point shortly.

A commissioned work would help explain why the "Literary Party" image is so different from James's other works. His biographer, Rosemary Mitchell, astutely noted, they (his paintings) were "elegantly composed, with statuesque figures, but essentially lifeless." (1) Doyle's engaging figures in "The Literary Party" are strikingly different from the stiff and "lifeless" figures in his "Chronicle of England". A painting on commission, with specific expectations of the artist, might explain this disparity. I have assembled a selection of James's work so you can convince yourself whether or not this point has merit.

Our second question concerned the whereabouts of Doyle's original painting. As with the first question, I found more mystery and confusion than enlightenment, after considerable research that includes about two linear feet of material which I'll summarize in a merciful couple of minutes.

The IN Historical Society archives of our club had no information regarding Doyle's original oil.

Among the many museums and libraries I contacted in the U.S., the U.K and Ireland, my primary sources of information were the National Portrait Gallery in London and the Yale University Center for British Art. They had no information on the original oil. (3)

I spoke with university experts at Leeds; Lancaster; Aberdeen; Edinburgh; University of Essex; University of Glasgow; Universities of London and St. Andrews; again, no information on the whereabouts of the original painting.

The auction houses, Christies and Sotheby's had never handled this painting. (4)

Dr. Rosemary Mitchell, biographer of James E. Doyle for the Dictionary of National Biography, thought only one of his oil paintings existed: “The Black Prince on the Eve of the Battle of Poitiers”; she had no information on the whereabouts of Doyle’s “Literary Party” painting. (5)

I requested Wills and probate information from London Probate Department but found no evidence for the original oil.

I also explored other possible niches into which the “Literary Party” painting might have fallen: Doyle moved among Catholic hierarchy, and I wondered if he had given the painting to the Church. The Archivist at Westminster Diocese had no knowledge of the painting. (6)

James and his wife were invited by the Duke of Norfolk to spend their honeymoon at Arundel Castle, and I wondered if James had given the painting to them; Arundel Castle did not have the painting or any record of it. (7).

The Public Catalog Foundation in the U.K. is a registered charity in London set up to photograph and record and place online all oil, acrylic and tempera paintings in publicly owned collections in U.K., about 200,000 paintings, of which only 20% are now available for public viewing. The Director of this Foundation did not find Doyle’s painting. (8)

Finally, I found an interesting potential relationship between Charles Burney, one of the nine men featured in Doyle’s painting. Burney’s daughter, the famous author, Fanny Burney, lived in Dorking at her home, Camilla Lacey. (9,-11) After her death in 1840, the house, which was filled with her manuscripts and antiques, ended up in the hands of a wealthy industrialist F. Leverton Harris, a prominent Member of Parliament and renowned art collector. (11-18) I wondered if Doyle’s painting might be among Fanny Burney’s collections. In a tragic fire, in 1919, the house burned to the ground and there was no mention that oil paintings were lost. (9) At F. Leverton Harris’s death in 1926, his extensive art collections were dispersed to museums. A print of “A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s” was among the items he bequeathed to the National Portrait Gallery in 1927. But no original oil. We can only speculate whether the fire at Camilla Lacey consumed Doyle’s original painting. (11-19)

Provenance: Indianapolis Literary Club’s print: “A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s”, by D. George Thompson, after James E. Doyle, 1851.

Having failed to find the original oil, I searched for information regarding the origins and history of our Club’s “Literary Party” print.

After research and counsel with experts at the Yale Center and the National Portrait Gallery, I have some suggestions about the origins of our print: Doyle’s original oil was painted in the 1840s circa, 1848, and was engraved in London by the well-known engraver, William Walker.

(1) It was published by Owen Bailey, sold well, and after the initial 325 impressions were reported to the Printseller's Association, the work was probably "re-engraved" or "re-worked" to sharpen detail. (2, 4) In 1851, the print was re-issued by Owen Bailey but with a different engraver, D. George Thompson. It was a print from this engraving that Charles Evans purchased in 1877. The National Portrait Gallery in London has the 1851 print and Yale Center for British Art has both the 1851 and 1848 prints; neither has detailed provenances for their prints. There is consensus that the original plates from 1848 and 1851, are lost, a common occurrence with engravings.

This research has answered some questions but raised others: First, why doesn't William Walker's name, appear with D. George Thompson on our 1851 print? Did Walker have a "falling out" with the publisher, Owen Bailey, over a dispute over ownership of the image? This was apparently not an uncommon occurrence. (3, 4) For this we have no answer.

Second, what is the relationship between the two engravings? Were they one in the same? Or is the 1851 engraving a new work by D. George Thompson? The likely answer to this question is found in the fine printing at the lower right hand corner of our 1851 print: "Re-Engraved by D. George Thompson". A detailed "side-by-side" "forensic" comparison of the two prints would help resolve this mystery.

Third, is it possible the Literary Club of London commissioned the 1848 work with artist James Doyle and engraver, William Walker? I believe it is. A mysterious dedication line on the 1848 print suggests this is plausible. It reads: "Dedicated by unanimous permission to "The Club" by their most obedient and Humble Servant William Walker". (5) Unfortunately, I found no information about this dedication statement or any relationship between Walker and The Club. On the other hand, if The Club commissioned the painting or engraving there would likely be a record of their ownership of it—I found none. Another possibility is that William Walker proposed the idea of a painting and engraving to James Doyle. Walker's wife, Elizabeth, was an accomplished engraver, having been appointed miniature painter to King William IV. (6) Her father was also a prominent engraver who collaborated with Sir Joshua Reynolds, the subject of Doyle's "Literary Party" painting. The Walkers may have had both pecuniary and sentimental reasons for urging Doyle to paint the picture.

A fourth question relates to the significance of another statement on the 1848 engraving: "Engraved by William Walker from a picture by James E. Doyle in possession of James Prior, Esqre. F.A.S." (7) Who was James Prior? (8, 9) Had Doyle sold or given the painting to him? James Prior was a naval physician and prominent author who completed his great biography of Oliver Goldsmith in 1848; perhaps Prior was motivated to obtain Doyle's painting because of his intimate knowledge of Oliver Goldsmith, who was featured in the "Literary Party" painting. I

found no corroborating evidence, even after examining Wills from the London Probate Department for James Prior and his wife Dame Caroline. (10-13)

A final mystery involves James Doyle's other oil paintings. One expert questioned why only one of his oils was known to survive: "The Black Prince on the Eve of the Battle of Poitiers." Yet most of James's other drawings and watercolors exist in museums. I tracked down the owner of "The Black Prince" hoping that he would lead me to the "Literary Party" painting. Professor Stephen Wildman, Director, Ruskin Library and Research Centre, Lancaster University told me he indeed owned the "Black Prince", but he had never seen the "Literary Party" or heard of it at auction. (14) Dr. Wildman had purchased the "Black Prince" 25 years ago at a small auction house in Birmingham, England, but without provenance he could trace. He said the "Literary Party" oil "could either be hanging quietly forgotten somewhere, or has been destroyed without record through fire, flood or war." (14) An assistant Curator at the National Portrait Gallery in London said that James Doyle's pictures would not necessarily be considered of museum quality and that Victorian pictures such as Doyle's were completely unfashionable for a large part of the 20th century; this might explain why his oils have vanished. (15)

"Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms." (Sherlock Holmes)

My odyssey has met dead ends; confusion; and more mystery than I thought could exist at the outset of my research. But this shouldn't surprise us, considering the family history of James Doyle. As you may have surmised, James E. Doyle, the mysterious, "Priest," was indeed Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's eldest uncle. (1, 2) Conan Doyle was the second of nine children of James's youngest sibling, Charles Altamont Doyle who suffered in asylums. It was Arthur Conan Doyle's uncle, James, the stern and devout Catholic, who stimulated Conan Doyle's interest in genealogy but was critical of his nephew's "disturbingly alien and Bohemian" ways. (1, 3-5) But, despite family discord over Conan Doyle's beliefs in spiritualism, he respected his uncles and family history; Conan Doyle was a prominent mourner at his Uncle James's funeral.

I was fortunate to communicate with Georgina Doyle, whose biography of Conan Doyle's first family: "Out of the Shadows" is a treasure of this history. She is the widow of the nephew of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and told me she thought "the original picture...probably sold at one time" and added "I fear only luck may help here." (6) She was happy, however, that someone was interested in James. Mrs. Doyle's note to me also included the wonderful image of a Long Tailed Tit from an original water color by her step-daughter and James Doyle's great great niece. Art, indeed, runs in the blood! And "Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms." (7)

Reflections on Clubs and Clubbing: Esto Perpetua

I want to conclude by returning to the question posed at the outset: Why did men meet as a literary club in London in 1764? Why did our Club's founders meet in Indianapolis in 1877? Why do we meet today?

Perhaps we should answer the question: What does the pronoun, "it", mean in the Club's ancient motto: *Esto Perpetua*: May it last forever? May what last forever? What did our founding fathers have in mind? What do we have in mind today?

A review of the aims of many of the literary clubs in the handout we provided earlier includes similar ideas that: A club is a place for fellowship; healthy and free exchange of ideas; a social and intellectual democracy, where ideas and independent achievement, not just position, have value; a place that celebrates man but also the ecumenical view of men; as one author put it: "the Club is...a brilliant manifestation of the triumph of the aristocracy of the mind," a place where we might learn and contribute to the improvement of the human condition. Some view the club as a society of interested and interesting men with merit- a culture of accomplishment, rewarded. (1, 2)

Other clubs have been less philosophical and touted the club as a place for clever repartee and humor: for example, the Boswell Club in Chicago met not for yearnings of literary fame but for the Triple B's: "to gather monthly around the table and Bite, Burp and Bibble." (3)

Perhaps "it" was in the "18th century a repast: soup, salad, a venison pie, or stewed rabbits, and ice or fruit for dessert," washed down with claret and port in profusion. (4) Perhaps "it" was the conversation that, often, shaped by the likes of Samuel Johnson, was a "head-long steeplechase, with every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost." (5) Was "it" the community of quality minds of an "intellectual aristocracy." Perhaps the nostalgia for a dream of a universal mind and language of cultivated men, the striving for and confidence in improving the lot of humankind. The search for higher principles and "nobler things of the human spirit."

I was struck by how relevant these age old ideas are to the present and how each of us most assuredly will have our own unique reasons for "clubbing". Perhaps the reason why our literary club and those like ours have lasted for more than a century is that our vision and mission are universal, with principles that transcend the generations, that appeal to us today as they appealed to our Club founders and to Sir Joshua Reynolds's and Samuel Johnson some 245 years ago.

I'm sure some of us would agree this evening that the "it" in the motto "May it last forever" is all these things and more.

End: "Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms" (Sherlock Holmes)

Stephen J. Jay

January 20, 2009