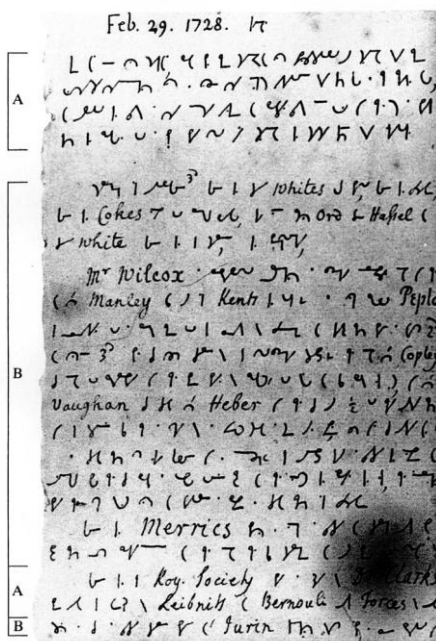


Byrom Projects

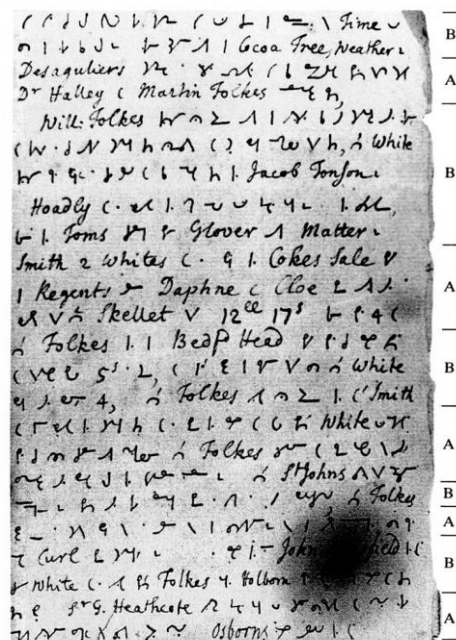
Joy Hancox is an Associate of the Royal College of Music, London, and a member of R.I.L.K.O. (Research into Lost Knowledge Organisation). She is also an Associate Member of the Association of School and College Leaders. She gave up a successful career in Music, the Performing Arts and Schools Administration to concentrate on her research.

Joy is the originator of the Byrom Projects research programme. This programme began when she acquired a unique original ms. in Byrom's shorthand. Her training as a musician and familiarity with musical notation enabled her to approach the transcription of the shorthand with a persistent curiosity. She was aided by a rare copy of Byrom's shorthand manual. It soon became clear that this manuscript material had never been in the public domain and, with her curiosity aroused, she hunted down other original mss in family papers, record offices, libraries and museums in the UK. Some material she was able to purchase, some she was given privileged access to over the years by people closely associated with the Byrom family and the descendants of staff who had worked for them. Much of it has never been used before and it has placed Joy in a unique position to re-appraise the historical significance of this once prominent Lancashire family, in particular John Byrom (1691 – 1763).

A member of The Royal Society and the inventor of a phonetic shorthand from which the later Pitman system was developed, Byrom did not publish his method during his lifetime, despite being granted a monopoly to publish and teach it for twenty-one years by George II in 1742. A pirated version compelled him to petition Parliament to bring in a Bill to protect his system. The monopoly lasted for twenty-one years and with its protection Byrom continued to teach privately to leading politicians and figures of the day. Thus his shorthand gained currency for a confidentiality and secrecy akin to a form of coding.



2 The published portion of the first page begins with the announcement that this is Byrom's birthday, and continues with his pious determination to live a better life. However, the editors have omitted the passage where Byrom, writing about the election of a new Fellow to the Collegiate Church in Manchester, talks of bribery and criticises Bishop Peplow of Chester. The published version resumes with less contentious material: a visit to the Royal



Society. The editors then omit a suggestion from one of Byrom's friends that he publish his verses on the robbery at Epping Forest to make some money before a pirated version appeared. The last part of the entry, full of exemplary Christian thoughts ('it seems to be necessary to live so as to preserve our innocence'), has been included in full. A = published section; B = unpublished.

Byrom lived through the unsuccessful Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745 and was known to have been a secret Jacobite, yet he escaped the punishment meted out to many for their treason. The degree of his immunity can be gauged from the fact that in November 1748 he was asked to transcribe and read to aristocratic friends in London a letter from Paris written in his own shorthand describing the arrest of Prince Charles Edward Stuart by the French and his treatment. The letter ends “it is treason now to say that he was tied or ill-used.” Byrom was careful not to record in his own journal the name of his correspondent, but it is an indication of his standing with the great and the good. This incident alone belies the commonly accepted view that Byrom was simply a “minor” eighteenth century figure.

Joy became fascinated by the intrigues that seemed to gather around Byrom, politically, socially and intellectually. Barred from any public office because he had refused to swear allegiance to the Hannoverian succession, he never bought a property, nor had any inclination to do so. He led a nomadic life in London moving between various coffee houses and inns during the season and then returning to Manchester. Despite having a wife and children there of whom he was fond, he cultivated a deliberate independence. At the same time the Byrom family of Manchester was rising in prosperity as the town rose with the growth of the cotton industry.

As the years went by and Joy’s resource of original material expanded, she became convinced that Byrom’s role in history had been diminished both intentionally and by the hazards of time. As a Freemason he was restricted by the rules of membership, which during his lifetime had afforded a protection for some of his activities. Even so his life demonstrates that things are not always as they seem. His Jacobite activities brought him into contact with a previous tenant of her own home, Thomas Siddal. He did suffer the ultimate punishment for his Jacobite loyalties and in the process provided cover for some of Byrom’s own treasonable behaviour.

It was during these years of study that a collection of 516 geometric drawings previously owned by John Byrom came to be part of her on-going research. It soon became clear that their significance was intended solely for “those with an understanding”. In other words they were part of another system of encoding. But, whereas Byrom’s shorthand was based on letters and sounds, the drawings were based on numerology. So Joy was faced with a different kind of challenge.

At some point the drawings had been placed in two brown paper bags which in themselves acted as a protection to the contents. But, although they were carefully preserved, their meaning had become obscure with the passage of time. The question was had they any significance for the present day? It is all too easy to spend time on trivialities. However, the quality and precision of the work, some in colour, seemed to deny this.

Eventually, Joy learned that they were connected with a prestigious European family of printers, the de Bry dynasty. The family had been particularly prominent in the seventeenth century, publishing writers such as Robert Fludd and Richard Hakluyt and carrying out commissions for the royal family of Stuarts.

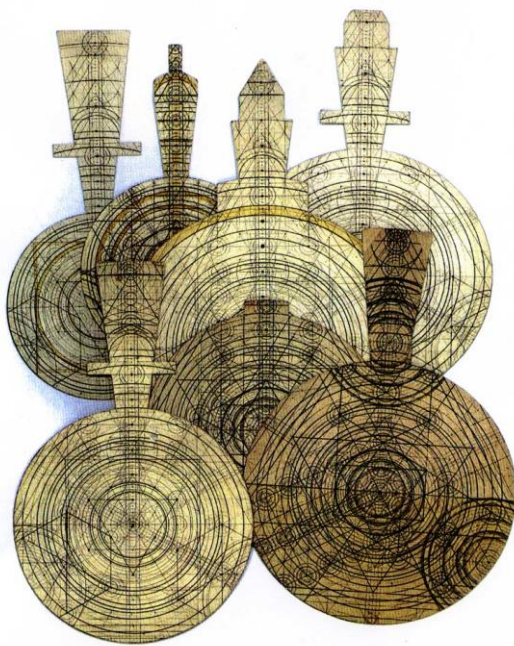


Figure 14: The rich variety of the parametric drawings.

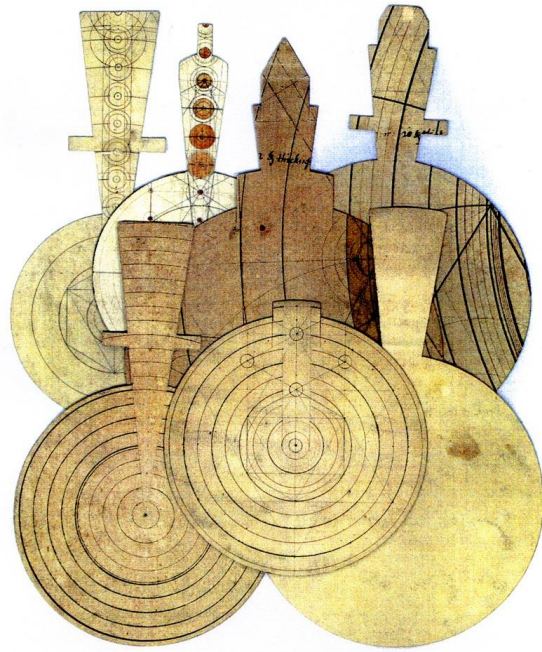


Figure 15: The parametric group in reverse.

Parametric geometric drawings - The Byrom Collection

Identified by Joy Hancox as being connected with the design concept of Elizabethan Theatres

Jacques Christophe le Blon was a member of this publishing dynasty and came to work in England in 1718. He had invented a new system of printing in colour and was awarded a patent for the process by King George I. It was intended for the colour reproduction of original paintings. In 1727 le Blon also produced a colour printing process for tapestries. But, although partially successful, this enterprise failed and he left London for Paris in 1735 where his patrons included Cardinal Fleury and the French court.

It is absolutely clear that part of Byrom's collection of 516 drawings contains some which were part of the de Brys' involvement in the London scene. How he came by them remains unclear, but we have from his own diary evidence that in 1735 he bought drawings from Jonathan Falkner in Bartholomew Close, and Falkner was also a member of the de Bry dynasty.

Joy has become convinced that part of the collection of drawings was devoted to the concept behind the building of the Elizabethan playhouses. Mathaeus Merian, yet another member of the de Bry family, was responsible for one of the most important engravings of the panoramic view of the river Thames. It shows several of the Elizabethan playhouses in situ. The designs of the playhouses in which Shakespeare's plays were first performed have provided scholars with an additional mystery for some years, for little evidence in the form of plans and contracts was said to have survived. Joy thinks some drawings in the Collection provide evidence to the contrary. Indeed Byrom may have been aware of that concept when he visited the theatre in London to see "Julius Caesar" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor" to celebrate one of his leap year birthdays in 1724.

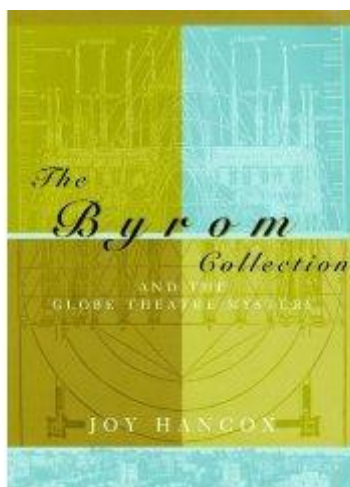
He lived in semi-retirement after the 1745 Uprising, returning to Manchester, chastened by the tragedies that had befallen friends and colleagues. The paperwork, books, knowledge, skills and confidences acquired at Cambridge and in London remained hidden in the quiet domesticity of his final years. He still engaged in intellectual debate on religious and philosophical topics in letters to friends. But this secret Jacobite must have been haunted by a sense of guilt at the price paid for his own safety. He kept the cloth in which Thomas Siddal's head had been wrapped and returned to Manchester in 1746 where it was exhibited as a warning to others. That cloth still exists.

On the last page of the very first manuscript Joy had transcribed from Byrom's shorthand were written the following lines:

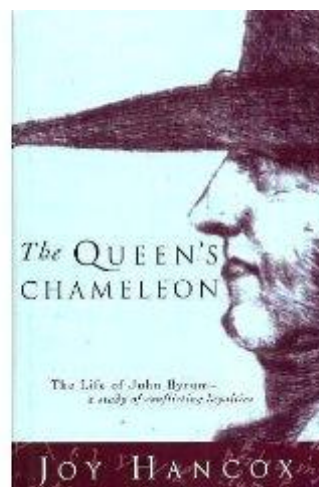
Our townsmen, now that they are dead and gone
Leave Heaven to pass the honouring sentence on.
Martyrs are not still. He who keeps the keys
Of its blest gates may open if he please,
Strive to get in thyself, ne'er mock I wrote
On the wrong side, to keep thy neighbour out.

Described as "The Grandmaster of Shorthand" in his lifetime, John Byrom died a few weeks after the monopoly granted by George II for twenty-one years came to an end. So did the confidentiality of the system, and he could no longer insist on any exclusive rights. The publication of his shorthand manual was overseen by his brother-in-law, John Houghton, four years later.

Joy spent ten years researching her latest book "The Hidden Chapter". The nature of the material related to the geometric drawings demanded no less. She feels privileged to have had access to knowledge that has been stored over a long time until now. Her earlier books have paved the way for "The Hidden Chapter", and it reaffirms the richness of the legacy pursued by "Byrom Projects".



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