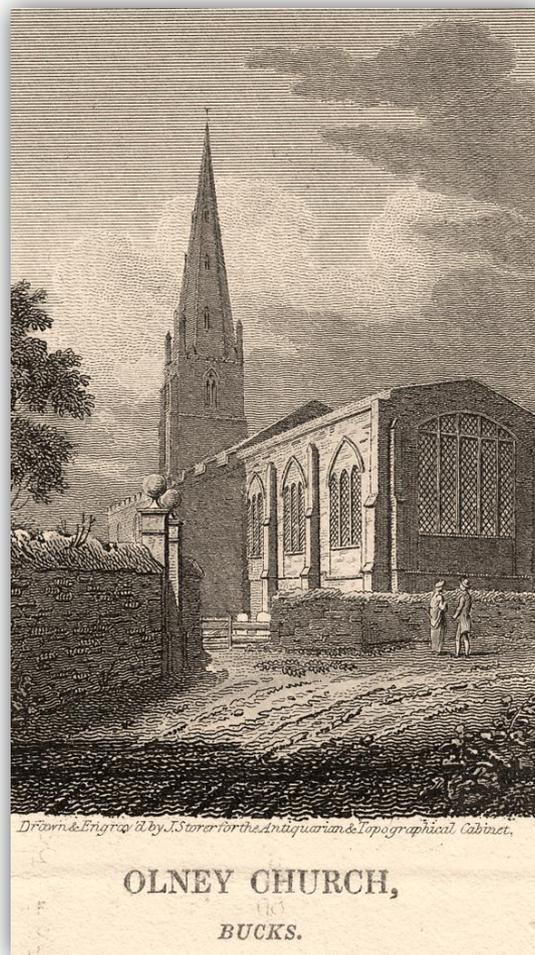


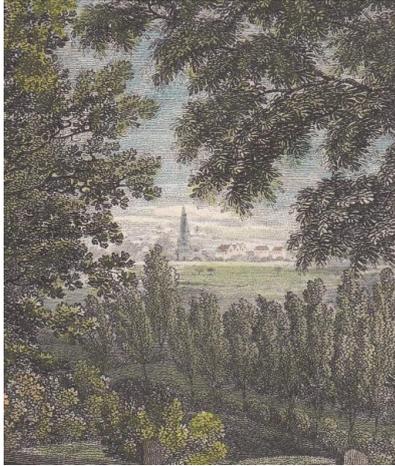
A Buckinghamshire Poet



William Cowper, the “Stricken Deer”, three times attempted suicide, then languished in an asylum, engulfed in depression and despair, gloomily convinced he was damned and on the road to Hell. Then he came to Buckinghamshire to live with a compassionate family and here found salvation in a commitment to a gentle evangelical Christianity. From his now tranquil mind poured forth a cascade of hymns – “God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform” – and poems of contemplation inspired by the nature and wildlife of the pastoral landscape of meads and woodland around Olney. He wrote comic verse (“John Gilpin”), and happy celebrations of everyday life. Often regarded as a forerunner of the romantics, he won praise from Coleridge and Wordsworth. At Olney, he had befriended the curate John Newton, former sea captain and reformed slaver, himself a hymnodist (“Amazing Grace”), and involved in the campaign to abolish slavery. Cowper wrote poetic critiques of that iniquitous trade in human flesh, and penned admiring verse in praise of William Wilberforce. Cowper was born in Hertfordshire and is buried in Norfolk, but it was in Bucks that he found salvation and produced so much of his work, and where surely his gentle spirit must linger.

Michael Ghirelli

A Distant View of Olney



How oft upon yon eminence, our pace
Has slackened to a pause, and we have borne
The ruffling wind scarce conscious that it blew,
While admiration feeding at the eye,
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene!

While far beyond and overthwart the stream
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,
The sloping land recedes into the clouds;
Displaying on its varied side the grace
Of hedgerow beauties numberless, square tower,
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
Just undulates upon the listening ear;
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote.
Scenes must be beautiful which daily viewed
Please daily, and whose novelty survives
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years:
Praise justly due to those that I describe.

The Negro's Complaint

Forc'd from home and all its pleasures,
Afric's coast I left forlorn;
To increase a stranger's treasures,
O'er the raging billows borne;
Men from England bought and sold me,
Paid my price in paltry gold;
But though theirs they have enroll'd me
Minds are never to be sold.
Still in thought as free as ever,
What are England's rights, I ask,
Me from my delights to sever,
Me to torture, me to task?

Fleecy locks and black complexion
Cannot forfeit nature's claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
Dwells in white and black the same.
Why did all-creating Nature
Make the plant for which we toil?
Sighs must fan it, tears must water,
Sweat of ours must dress the soil.
Think, ye masters iron-hearted,
Lolling at your jovial boards;
Think, how many backs have smarted
For the sweets your cane affords.