

*Living ‘in the bosom of a numerous  
and worthy family’  
Women Printmakers Learning to Engrave in  
Late Eighteenth-Century London  
Hannah Lyons*

In eighteenth-century England, large numbers of women, of all ages, could be found working in a plethora of trades. Printmaking was one of them. In London, women undertook diverse forms of paid labour; some were members of the City’s Livery Companies, and a significant number of them ran businesses.<sup>1</sup> They worked as candlemakers, clockmakers, fan-makers, silversmiths, and milliners – to name just a few of their roles – and surviving trade cards and bill heads testify to their presence in a broad range of trades and professions, including those not typically considered ‘feminine’.<sup>2</sup> Historians of women’s work have considerably altered our understanding of the roles women played in eighteenth-century London, demonstrating that they were clearly an essential part of the fabric of economic life in the English capital.<sup>3</sup>

Countless women belonged to larger trade families and were expected to be part of the family enterprise, as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall outlined in their influential book, *Family Fortunes* (1987).<sup>4</sup> Within the printmaking trade, the majority of women who made impressions likewise did so within the structure of the family workshop. As it was typical for

<sup>1</sup> This research was based on a chapter of my unpublished PhD thesis: “*Exercising the ART as a TRADE*”: *Professional Women Printmakers in England, 1750–1830*; Birkbeck, University of London (2021). I would like to express my thanks to the following for their comments on my thesis: Kate Retford, Sarah Grant, Richard Taws, and Alison Yarrington.

<sup>2</sup> A. L. Erikson, ‘Eleanor Mosley and Other Milliners in the City of London Companies 1700–1750’, *History Workshop Journal*, 71 (2011): 147–172; N. Phillips, *Women in Business, 1700–1850* (Woodbridge and Rochester: Boydell Press, 2006), 145.

<sup>3</sup> See ‘City Women in the 18th Century: An Outdoor Exhibition of Women Traders in Cheapside, London’, <http://citywomen.hist.cam.ac.uk/> (accessed 1 February 2021); A. L. Erikson, ‘Esther Sleepe, Fan-Maker, and Her Family’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 42(2) (April 2018): 15–37; H. Barker, *Family and Business during the Industrial Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> L. Davidoff and C. Hall, eds., *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1987).

families ‘in trade’ to live and work in the same building, it was in the traditional setting of their own homes that several women printmakers were taught how to make prints. In statistical terms, there were approximately forty women who lived, worked, and made prints in these circumstances from c. 1750–c. 1850.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter is a broad account of the experiences of the printmaker’s family home-cum-workshop in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, focusing on the role and status of women within these families and spaces. Though the period in question was once thought to be one in which the spaces of ‘home’ and ‘work’ grew increasingly separate, historians such as Hannah Barker and Jane Hamlett have shown that in small family businesses, the domestic and commercial continued to coexist under one roof.<sup>6</sup> Weaving key examples throughout, this chapter will ask: What did women do, and not do, in the printmaker’s workshop? What forms of instruction were available to those women who were born into a printmaking family and were these opportunities comparable with the training offered to male relatives, such as their brothers? The case of Letitia Byrne (1779–1849), daughter of the engraver, William Byrne (1743–1805), will be considered alongside that of Ann (1782–1866) and Jane (1783–1824) Taylor, daughters of the engraver, Isaac Taylor (1759–1829). Isaac Taylor and William Byrne were two of those British printmakers who had witnessed and participated in London’s transition from a market of continental imports and artistic obscurity in the early half of the eighteenth century, to its dominance of the international print market in the latter half.<sup>7</sup> Crucially, both Isaac and William made the decision to train all their offspring – including their daughters – in their

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that not all of these women – who were members of artist families, and who were trained in the family workshop – went on to become professional printmakers. See ‘Appendix One: List of women who made prints in England between c1750–c1850, including new biographical research and details of locations where prints can be found’, in Lyons, “Exercising the ART as a TRADE”. See also D. Alexander, *A Biographical Dictionary of British and Irish Engravers, 1714–1820* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> H. Barker and J. Hamlett, ‘Living above the Shop: Home, Business, and Family in the English “Industrial Revolution”’, *Journal of Family History*, 35(4) (15 June 2010): 311–328, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0363199010373544>.

<sup>7</sup> For William Byrne, see T. Clayton and A. McConnell, *Byrne Family (per. 1765–1849), Engravers and Painters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/65026> (accessed 1 February 2021); J. M. Wheeler, ‘The Byrne Family and the Old Watercolour Society’, *The Old Watercolour Society’s Annual Volume* 48 (1973): 21–39. For Isaac Taylor II, see R. T. Gilbert, *Taylor, Isaac (1759–1829), Engraver and Educationist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27033> (accessed 1 February 2021); I. Taylor, *The Family Pen: Memorials, Biographical and Literary, of the Taylor Family of Ongar* (London: Jackson, Walford and Hodder, 1867).

profession. Finally, the example of Elizabeth Cristall (1771–1853), an aspiring printmaker who was not born into the trade, will reveal that training within the family workshop was almost the only way for a young woman to enter the profession.

William Byrne, who lived ‘in the bosom of a numerous and worthy family’ at 79 Titchfield Street in Marylebone, was a distinguished engraver and print publisher, particularly of topographical single-sheet prints and book illustrations.<sup>8</sup> Around 1774, he married his first wife, Ann of Taunton (dates unknown), and the couple had five children: Anne Frances (b. 1775), Mary (b. 1776), Letitia (b. 1779), Elizabeth (b. 1784), and John (b. 1786).<sup>9</sup> Less than two miles from Titchfield Street, at 54 Red Lyon Street in Holborn, the engraver, Isaac Taylor, and his wife, Ann Martin (1757–1830), lived with their two daughters, Ann (b. 1782) and Jane (b. 1783). In 1784, rising rental costs and ongoing health issues drove the Taylor family to Suffolk, sixty miles from London, where they welcomed three sons: Isaac (b. 1787), Martin (b. 1788), and Jefferys (b. 1792). In her *Autobiography*, the eldest daughter, Ann, describes the exact moment when she began to learn her father’s trade: ‘It had been on the 12th of July 1797, when I was in my sixteenth year, that the design always kept in view of educating Jane and me to engraving as a profession, was first put into practice.’<sup>10</sup>

It may seem unsurprising that many women printmakers were trained by a father or relative. Indeed, it has been taken as a given in art historical scholarship that early modern women artists ‘received their training in the arts as a result of being related to male artists’.<sup>11</sup> However, as Martin Myrone has recently argued, these observations ‘have been allowed to remain as generalities’.<sup>12</sup> Both print scholars and feminist art historians have been largely ignorant of the gendered mechanisms of the eighteenth-century family workshop environment and of the role of women within these overlapping commercial and domestic spaces.<sup>13</sup> This chapter will

<sup>8</sup> *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (London, 1805), 1071.

<sup>9</sup> Wheeler, ‘The Byrne Family’, 21–39. He later married Marianne Francotte as his second wife in 1792. It is likely that Ann died sometime between 1786 and 1792, perhaps after giving birth to John.

<sup>10</sup> This is an extremely rare account of the early life of a woman printmaker in this period. A. Taylor, *Autobiography and Other Memorials of Mrs Gilbert (Formerly Ann Taylor)*, ed., J. Gilbert (London: Henry S. King & Co, 1874), 83.

<sup>11</sup> D. Gaze, ed., *Concise Dictionary of Women Artists* (London; Chicago, IL: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 56.

<sup>12</sup> M. Myrone, *Making the Modern Artist: Culture, Class and Art-Educational Opportunity in Romantic Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 118.

<sup>13</sup> Lara Perry’s important research examines the households of London artists in the 1870s and 1880s. L. Perry, ‘The Artist’s Household: On Gender and the Division of Artistic and Domestic Labour in Nineteenth-Century London’, *Third Text* 31(1) (2017): 15–29.

therefore highlight the centrality of the family workshop in framing and encouraging women's printed productions, exploring the opportunities – and challenges – that being born into a trading family presented.

### Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship was the formal training system implemented by many professions and trades across Europe in the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> A premium was paid for an apprentice to be bound to a master, usually around the age of thirteen.<sup>15</sup> Typically, the student would board and work with that master and would be instructed in their specialist line of work.<sup>16</sup> In London, girls had been apprenticed since at least the fourteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Yet Amy Louise Erickson's recent research on eighteenth-century female apprentices in the London Livery Companies concluded that, on average, their numbers formed only one per cent of apprentices registered by guilds, and only five per cent of apprentices paying premiums.<sup>18</sup>

As most printmakers operated beyond the jurisdiction of the City of London, apprenticeship in the printmaking trade was not a necessity, but could be undertaken to bolster connections within the book trade.<sup>19</sup> Timothy Clayton states that the standard fee for an engraver's premium was around £50 in England in 1740, rising to around £100 by 1775, though this depended on the skill and reputation of the master.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, as Erikson has noted, there is no proper study of apprenticeship premiums in the eighteenth century, and so it is hard to make comparisons with other trades.<sup>21</sup>

Print scholar David Alexander, whose pioneering research on women printmakers has been central to my research, previously noted only two

<sup>14</sup> M. Prak and P. Wallis, eds., *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); T. Clayton, *The English Print, 1688–1802* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 13.

<sup>15</sup> The sum could be paid by a parent, guardian or institution. This typically covered living costs and training; Prak and Wallis, *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> M. Keniston McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society, 1300–1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133.

<sup>18</sup> Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley', 150. She has based this number on an examination 'of nearly 60,000 apprentices in fifty-six London companies' from 1700 to 1750.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander has shown that some engravers were members of The Stationers' Company, though they could also belong to other companies. D. Alexander, 'The Evolution of the Print Market and Its Impact on the Art Market, 1780–1820', in S. Avery-Quash and C. Huemer, eds., *London and the Emergence of a European Art Market, 1780–1820* (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Research Institute, 2019), 118–30.

<sup>20</sup> Clayton, *The English Print*, 13. <sup>21</sup> Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley', 150.

cases where young women were formally apprenticed to an engraver in this period.<sup>22</sup> These were Caroline Kirkley (c. 1775–1823), the daughter of Sir Joshua Reynolds’s servant, Ralph Kirkley, and Ann Probin (c. 1773–c. 1819), daughter of the gunmaker, John Probin.<sup>23</sup> Both Kirkley and Probin were apprenticed to John Raphael Smith on 1 April 1789, for five years, for a £50 premium each.<sup>24</sup> By 1789, both young women were advanced in age for apprentices: Caroline was around nineteen years old, while Ann was around twenty-one. Though the typical printmaking apprenticeship was seven years, it was not uncommon for there to be exceptions to this rule and, as Erickson has revealed, female apprentices were more typically bound for a shorter period than their male counterparts. The £50 fee was hardly a substantial sum but it might be that Kirkley and Probin did not live with Smith, and that this was reflected in the cost of the indenture.<sup>25</sup>

It is very possible that Probin and Kirkley were apprenticed to Smith because his wife and daughters also lived in the family workshop.<sup>26</sup> (Smith’s daughters, Emma and Eliza, also made mezzotints. Emma, in particular, made a number of technically sophisticated mezzotints in the early nineteenth century, which were highly praised in the contemporary press.<sup>27</sup>) Having a group of women present in the household may well have appealed to Probin and Kirkley’s families, concerned, for the sake of propriety, about their daughters training in a male-dominated trade. It is likely to have been for this reason that, in September 1806, the bookseller, William Hayley (1745–1820), approached the engraver, Caroline Watson

<sup>22</sup> D. Alexander, *Caroline Watson & Female Printmaking in Late Georgian England* (Cambridge: Fitzwilliam Museum, 2014), 72.

<sup>23</sup> Caroline’s father, Ralph Kirkley, worked as Joshua Reynolds’s servant, and lived with the artist at 47 Leicester Square, where Caroline had been brought up. Recent research has revealed that Probin was born in Birmingham into a dynastic family of gunmakers. Though her father primarily worked in Birmingham, he also ran a gunshop on Agar Street, off the Strand in London.

<sup>24</sup> An indenture was typically a written agreement between a master and the family or guardian of an apprentice. A premium was the cost that the family or guardian or apprentice had to pay a master in order to take them on. Register of Duties Paid for Apprentices’ Indentures, 1710–1811, Series IR 1. National Archives of the UK, Kew, England. See also E. G. D’Oench, *Copper into Gold: Prints by John Raphael Smith (1751–1821)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 279, n.79.

<sup>25</sup> For comparison, Amy Erickson has demonstrated that some families were apprenticing their daughters to milliners with premiums costing £30 to £60 between 1718 and 1739. See Erickson, ‘Eleanor Mosley’, 149.

<sup>26</sup> D’Oench, *Copper into Gold*, 167. It is possible that Smith’s other daughter, Eliza (1785–1857), was also trained in the workshop. Jane Thompson (fl. 1800) may have also trained with Smith, as she produced at least five mezzotints after his work.

<sup>27</sup> Impressions by both women can be found in the British Museum.

(1760/1–1814), to take on a young woman, ‘Little Fanny’, as an apprentice.<sup>28</sup> Watson, however, declined, stating:

Sixteen pounds per annum together with her support, and clothing, which at the least cannot be estimated at less than twenty-four pounds, considering the very high price of provisions, would increase my expenditure to more than I can afford. Happy would it be for me, if I could give £40 annually to so charitable an act as the support of an orphan.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, it appears that Hayley suggested that Little Fanny could undertake the duties of both apprentice *and* servant, which Watson firmly protested: ‘I think you will see that the two characters of pupil and servant cannot be united in the same person. The steady attention which drawing and engrave [sic] require must not be interrupted by domestick business.’<sup>30</sup> It is notable that Hayley had suggested to Watson that Little Fanny could undertake domestic responsibilities alongside her professional training; had the apprentice been a young man, it is highly unlikely that he would have made the same proposal.

This lack of female apprentices in the printmaking trade reinforces the conclusions drawn by Erikson, who summarised that ‘apprenticeship registers record tiny numbers of girls receiving training’.<sup>31</sup> Yet, even set against such figures, which show girls were apprenticed to the London trades in a significantly smaller number than men, there seems to have been a disproportionately tiny number of young women apprenticed in the English printmaking trade.

### The Family Workshop: ‘fitting us for self-support’

Rather than undertaking formal apprenticeships, many women printmakers who were born into printmaking families were expected to contribute to the family enterprise. As Priscilla Wakefield argued in her *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798): ‘The knowledge of a trade is a probable means which ought not to be neglected, of enabling them to give their assistance towards the support of their family.’<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> It is not clear what Hayley’s connection was to Little Fanny.

<sup>29</sup> Caroline Watson to William Hayley, 8 September 1806. Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, JRS 1992. Watson’s correspondence with Hayley, from 1805 to 1810, has been helpfully transcribed by Alexander. Alexander, *Caroline Watson & Female Printmaking*, 104–120.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> A. L. Erikson, ‘Married Women’s Occupations in Eighteenth-Century London’, *Continuity and Change*, 23(2) (2008): 267–307.

<sup>32</sup> P. Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex with Suggestions for Its Improvement* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, in St Paul’s Church-Yard; and Darton and Harvey, in Gracechurch Street, 1798), 150.

Printmakers, like many other trades and professional peoples, often trained their offspring so that they could support the family and the household's economy. In utilising the labour of their children, family funds were saved from being spent bringing in additional help.

Parents also taught their children so that, after their own retirement or death, their offspring had the skills to be self-supporting, or at least to be able to gain meaningful employment. These skills could be utilised in marriage to form an economic partnership, but they could also be used for independent means should the individual decide not to marry, or indeed, be unable to afford to marry. For engravers such as William Byrne, the assistance of his five children in the workshop was crucial, particularly after he needed more income to weather the collapse of the print market in the 1790s, caused by the revolutionary wars with France. Significantly, his training would also allow his daughters to earn an independent living after his death, if they remained unmarried. Indeed, he may well have feared being unable to find dowries for his four daughters. William likely shared the same sentiments as the painter, Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788), who wrote in a letter to a friend in 1764 that he would teach his daughters 'to paint Landscape; and that somewhat above the common Fan-Mount stile [sic] . . . that they may do something for their bread'.<sup>33</sup>

Most unusually, Ann and Jane Taylor were given an independent income for their labour in their father's workshop. This began in their teenage years, as Ann recalls:

I cannot please myself with the thought that we contributed much towards 'the family expenses' by our daily toil. Our dear father, always liberal to the extent of his ability, gave us not only board and lodging, but also wages, so that in keeping us at home I am sure he did not consult his own advantage. He thought he was fitting us for self-support in after life, not otherwise than feminine; and in keeping us around him at home he retained a domestic feeling, strong in every one of us.<sup>34</sup>

To be sure, Isaac Taylor clearly cherished his family, yet paying his daughters for their labour may also have been a subtle way of instilling in them the importance of maintaining an independent income should they not marry.

### **Instruction, Collaborations, and Networks**

The instruction offered to women in the family print workshop was likely to be enormously varied, changing according to shifting domestic

<sup>33</sup> J. Hayes, ed., *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 26.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Autobiography*, 76.

concerns, socioeconomic circumstances and the size of the family at any particular time. The art of making an intaglio print – the family of techniques in which an image is made by incising into a printing plate – was, of course, the most important skill that could be taught to a prospective engraver. In the workshop, from a young age, perhaps even as young as seven, both apprentices and offspring would receive face-to-face training, covering all aspects of intaglio printmaking. Typically, this would have encompassed verbal instruction and correction, but also hands-on tuition, providing crucial opportunities to observe and imitate the day-to-day work involved in making a print. Tasks were numerous and varied, and would develop in complexity over the course of the apprenticeship. The pupil would begin by performing jobs such as tidying the workshop and learning where all the necessary tools were housed. They would then progress to preparing the copper sheets – trimming, polishing, and arranging them – as well as ‘grinding the ink’ and preparing the resulting waxy, acid-resistant ground necessary for the etching method.<sup>35</sup>

Though much of what can be said is speculative, contemporary advice literature aimed at the parents of prospective apprentices does provide us with some key information about the skills required of the printmaker’s apprentice. ‘A Genius for Drawing’, as Robert Campbell notes in *The London Tradesman* (1747), was crucial, as was an acquaintance ‘with Painting . . . a nice Judgement in the Works of the most famous Artists, and perfectly Masters of the Doctrines of Light and Shade, in which their art consists’.<sup>36</sup> According to Campbell, the education offered to the apprentice ‘ought to be pretty liberal’, though the hopeful student should already be possessed of a few informal qualifications and skills:

They ought to have a fertile invention, and a kind of poetic fancy: They must have a delicate and steady hand, and a clear strong sight for their work is very trying to the eyes. There is little strength requir’d for this branch of business; but, like all other sedentary occupations, it requires a sound constitution. All business, however trifling, that require application, poring and sitting, are bad for persons inclined to consumptions.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> A. Griffiths, *The Print Before Photography: An Introduction to European Printmaking, 1550–1820* (London: British Museum Press, 2016), 234; A. Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching, 1400–2000: A History of the Development of Manual Intaglio Printmaking Processes* (London: Archetype Publications, 2012), 84.

<sup>36</sup> R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman, Being an Historical Account of All the Trades, Professions, Arts, Both Liberal and Mechanic, Now Practiced in the Cities of London and Westminster, Calculated for the Instruction of Youth in His Choice of Business* (London: Printed by T. Gardner, 1747), 111.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



Campbell's account would have made attractive reading for any parent who wished to enrol their *son* into the printmaker's trade: his account refers only to 'man' or 'men'; likewise he frequently uses the pronoun 'he'.<sup>38</sup> He does include a discussion of female traders and apprentices elsewhere in his guide, in his chapters 'the Milliner', 'the Comb-Maker', 'Cap-Maker', 'Stay-Maker', and the 'Mantua-Maker'. This indicates that it was those trades that were primarily open to female apprentices. Indeed, Erickson's work on milliner apprentices confirms that this was the case; 'Clothing trades accounted for sixty per cent of all the masters and mistresses taking female apprentices.'<sup>39</sup>

Surviving impressions, such as Letitia Byrne's *Animals Etched by Letitia Byrne from the Most Esteem'd Masters*, also give us visual clues as to the training undertaken by some printmakers. In 1795, aged only fourteen or fifteen years old, Letitia made a set of thirteen etchings after prints by a variety of seventeenth-century Dutch artists, revealing that her father had given her access to significant, imported continental prints by some of Europe's most accomplished and celebrated landscape and animal painters. Published by Darling and Thompson on 1 January 1795, the frontispiece of this series (Figure 5.1) is a confident interpretation of a work by the pioneering animal painter Paulus Potter (1625–1654), etched after his death by his fellow countryman, Marcus de Bye, in 1664.<sup>40</sup> Like de Bye, Letitia purposely and clearly asserted her authorship – and her link to her family trade – by etching her name onto the rock in the foreground of the print. Her careful translation reveals how, at a young age, she had managed successfully to acquaint herself with the tonality and marks of de Bye's etching. She made some subtle changes to the composition, for example adding horizontal shading on the stone and removing it in the sky, but the etching corresponds very closely, even in size, to the Dutch print.

Letitia was the only one of the Byrne children who created impressions for the London market at such a young age, indicating that her skill with the etching needle was notable within her large, artistic family. Detailed in their execution, these prints indicate her solid technical grounding and the

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Erickson, 'Eleanor Mosley' 147–172. See also P. Wallis, 'Apprenticeship in England', in M. Prak and P. Wallis, eds., *Apprenticeship in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 247–281.

<sup>40</sup> There are impressions of Letitia Byrne's frontispiece in the V&A and British Museum; however, both prints are without publication lines. The impression in the University of California, Berkeley, does have the following formula: 'London, Pub<sup>d</sup> Jan 1. 1795 by Darling and Thompson G.<sup>t</sup> Newport Str<sup>t</sup>.'



Figure 5.1 Letitia Byrne, after Paulus Potter and Marcus de Bye, Frontispiece to *Animals Etched by Letitia Byrne From the Most Esteem'd Masters*, Published by Darling and Thompson, London, 1795.

Etching, 14.5 × 18 cm. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

quality of the material available to her. William Byrne's use of prints by the Dutch masters in his training process was not uncommon. In the studio of the reproductive engraver, copying the prints of previous masters was an important exercise, and had been since the sixteenth century. Yet, along with teaching them to etch by copying the prints of older, famed Masters, William also took his children's training beyond the studio, so that they could practise their draughtsmanship. In his famous diary, the artist Joseph Farington (1747–1821), a close friend of the family, detailed: 'Byrne goes to Windsor tomorrow for a few days with his family to afford them an opportunity of drawing from trees in the Park.'<sup>41</sup> Sketching *en plein air* does not appear to have been standard practice in Britain for those training to be engravers, and probably highlights William's particular determination to give his children a thorough artistic education. It also

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Farington, *Diary*, Sunday 5 July 1801. All Farington references are taken from K. Cave, ed., *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, 16 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978–1984).

demonstrates the benefits of being born into a printmaking family: it is highly unlikely that William Byrne's apprentices also benefited from this development opportunity.

Another one of Letitia's early forays into etching plates for the European print market was for large, topographical publications, collaborating on impressions with her father. *Donnington Castle*, made for the ambitious publication, *Britannia Depicta*, and also published in January 1805 as a single sheet print, is co-signed by Letitia and her father: 'Engraved by W. & L. Byrne'. Made after a drawing by J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851) who provided William with watercolours to translate into engravings, the image depicts the gatehouse to the ruined fourteenth-century castle, overlooking the Lambourne Valley.<sup>42</sup> Letitia and her father have faithfully interpreted Turner's charming early watercolour in the more complex and laborious processes of etching and engraving; most of the plate was etched, but engraving was added to strengthen parts of the composition. It is difficult to ascertain which parts of the print Letitia put her hand to, and which parts William created. Yet, given William's experience with the burin, it is possible that Letitia made the initial etching of the castle, the landscape, and the human figures, with William finishing the plate by engraving the sky. Letitia had already demonstrated her skill in making prints of animals in their natural habitats, so it is possible that she etched these as well as some of the finer details in the foreground of the image. As we can see in the publication line, William published the jointly signed print from their home-cum-workshop at 79 Titchfield Street. In doing so, Letitia's name and her familial association with the trade was advertised to the market for high quality, topographical prints and illustrated books.

Though familial relationships were crucial, wider associations of friendship and patronage were also of paramount importance within the printmaking trade, and the artistic network that a printmaker built during years training in the workshop would prove essential over their career. Letitia and her siblings benefited from the convivial environment provided by her father in their home-cum-workshop, where it is certain they would have been introduced to a host of the key players in British art. In his diary, Farington details the numerous dinners that took place at the Byrne home. Often, he draws the layout of the seating plan, which makes it clear that all William's artistic children were present at these events, partaking in the networking that was so crucial to commercial success. Joseph Farington became a very important supporter and promoter of the work of Letitia

<sup>42</sup> The watercolour by Turner was sold at Bonhams, London, on 3 December 2014.

and Elizabeth Byrne, in particular, loaning them his landscape drawings to copy, and offering them his advice on the quality of their productions, particularly those pieces that they hoped to submit to London's public exhibitions. 'Byrne I drank tea at', Farington wrote in August, 1801, 'I went to make some remarks to his youngest daughter on her drawings.'<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Ann Taylor records her father taking her to London, when she was eighteen years old, with the specific intent of introducing her 'to several artists of note'. She recalls meeting William Byrne and his daughters:

A visit to London with my father, with which he indulged me in May of this year (1800), greatly stimulated my zeal as an artist . . . He made it his business to show me all he could, and introduced me to several artists of note, by whom my ambition was not a little excited. To Mr Byrne, an eminent engraver of landscape, and his three daughters, all of whom he had educated for the profession, I was particularly indebted. One of them etched landscape, another painted flowers exquisitely, and the third, miniatures in oil. All were admirable artists in their different lines. They kindly lent me works in different styles to copy; the head of a Madonna slightly tinted, landscapes in Indian ink, and studies of trees, chiefly with the pen, are amongst the copies taken at this time, and still remaining to me.<sup>44</sup>

That Isaac Taylor sought out William Byrne suggests that he was specifically keen for his daughter to meet other young women who were likewise being trained in the profession. This points to the gendered networking that clearly took place between such women, creating friendships that could be vital in male-dominated artistic communities.

### ‘Supra’ and ‘Infra’

Though boys and girls had much the same training in the printmaking workshop, there were some key differences in their experiences. Women's labour within the home was of course not limited to 'work' that generated an income; the chief female duty in all classes in the period was believed to be those of a responsible family member, fulfilling duties bestowed by God. A woman should, it was averred, be respectful of the family hierarchy and dependent on the men within it. As the Reverend James Fordyce, in

<sup>43</sup> It is not clear which daughter Farington refers to here, because he sometimes refers to Letitia as the youngest daughter, even though Elizabeth had been born in 1784. However, it is clear throughout the diary that he knew and advised all of William Byrne's children in turn. Joseph Farington, *Diary*, Sunday November 16, 1794.

<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *Autobiography*, 97.

his hugely popular *Sermons for Young Women* (1766), reminded his readers, it was ‘those family duties for which the sex are chiefly intended’.<sup>45</sup> Fordyce’s view is representative of the pervasive, normative ideals that were firmly established in eighteenth-century Britain concerning women, femininity, and the associated domestic, familial responsibilities. These ideals were circulated in contemporary literature, from sermons like Fordyce’s (continuously reissued throughout the eighteenth century) to monthly periodicals.

Furthermore, as the home and workplace of the printmaker so often coexisted throughout this period, these familial responsibilities often took place within the same spaces as professional ones. The work done by women for the business could therefore be undertaken flexibly alongside their domestic roles. Though, as seen, Caroline Watson argued that learning the art of engraving ‘must not be interrupted by domestick business’,<sup>46</sup> Ann Taylor recollects that she and Jane were engaged in a carousel of labour, whereby one daughter would assist the mother with her household chores whilst the other assisted the father with his printmaking:

In order that my mother might enjoy the assistance she needed, as well as that we might become sufficiently domestic in our acquirements, we took our places at the work-table only in alternate weeks; the one employed in the workroom being known as ‘Supra’ and the other as ‘Infra’ . . . To ‘Infra’ – below stairs – belonged *pro tem* numerous domestic duties, from essays in cookery, to washing and getting up the fine linens; so that the assistance we could render in needlework was really very small, and a heavy burden was still left on my dear industrious mother.<sup>47</sup>

Ann’s account indicates that only she and Jane undertook these household duties; their brothers were not required to contribute in this regard. The training of women printmakers within the family home, then, may not have always been as systematic as that of their male siblings. Yet, Ann also notes that she and Jane could both be ‘withdrawn’ from family duties if her father gained more work that would require their assistance:

Jane and I had, as has been said, spent only alternate weeks in the workroom; but an engagement made by my father to supply monthly portraits to the *Theological Magazine* induced him to withdraw us both from the family, and now to the end of our residence we continued fully employed in engraving, with exception of one day each, in a fortnight,

<sup>45</sup> Reverend J. Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for A. Millar and T. Cadell, J. Dodsley, and J. Payne, 1766), vol. 1, 220.

<sup>46</sup> Alexander, *Caroline Watson*, 110. <sup>47</sup> Taylor, *Autobiography*, 84.

for our own needlework, which was certainly most sedulously worked to that purpose.<sup>48</sup>

Women who worked alongside their male relatives in the family workshop were not challenging idealised domestic codes, nor were they acting beyond the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour. They were still concerned with feminine respectability, and their labour – both domestic *and* in the workshop – conformed to the ideal of a good wife or daughter, alleviating some of the pressures placed on the paterfamilias, and thus performing her necessary duties for the family.

### Struggling ‘with want and means of connection’

The example of Elizabeth Cristall, a young woman who was not born into a printmaking family, demonstrates the importance of that unit for providing training and creating artistic and economic opportunities for young women. Around 1792, Elizabeth moved into shared lodgings with her older brother, Joshua Cristall (c. 1767–1847), at 28 Surrey Street, Blackfriars Road.<sup>49</sup> Joshua and Elizabeth were two of four children of the mariner, Captain Alexander Cristall, and his second wife, Elizabeth Batten, and the family had settled at Rotherhithe, where Alexander had set up his own yard ‘making masts, blocks and sails’.<sup>50</sup> Though the elder brother was trained in this family trade, his siblings had artistic aspirations.<sup>51</sup> The art historian, John Lewis Roget, writing in the late nineteenth century, informs us that they ‘had to struggle, not only with want and means of connection, but against the opposition of parents and friends’.<sup>52</sup> After serving an apprenticeship with William Hewson, who sold china and glass, Joshua intended to set up a printmaking partnership with his sister, Elizabeth, but they were firmly discouraged by the engraver, Thomas Holloway (1748–1827):

It was proposed between them that he should draw and Miss Cristall engrave. But this scheme was abandoned on the representation of

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>49</sup> J. L. Roget, *A History of the ‘Old Water-Colour’ Society* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1891), 189.

<sup>50</sup> J. Tisdall, ‘Cristall, Joshua (Bap. 1768, d. 1847), Watercolour Painter’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6710>.

<sup>51</sup> R. Greene and L. Landau, ‘Cristall, Ann Batten (Bap. 1769, d. 1848), Poet’, *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37323>

<sup>52</sup> Roget, *A History*, 178.

Holloway, the leading engraver of the day, that a lady could not be regularly taught unless she lived with a father or relative who could instruct her. She could not be taken as an apprentice, and no separate lessons could be given. Women had not then the facilities for education which they now enjoy. So this idea with the others had to be given up; and some years after [Joshua] Crisall had attained his majority, he became a student of the Royal Academy.<sup>53</sup>

When Thomas Holloway informed Elizabeth that ‘she could not be taken as an apprentice’, he was speaking from his experience as a highly successful engraver, working at the heart of the London trade. Despite this, however, Elizabeth did try her hand at printmaking. One aquatint print by her survives, though it is not clear how she learnt this technique.<sup>54</sup> Brother and sister worked together on the impression: Joshua provided his sister with a drawn portrait of their friend, George Dyer (1755–1841), and it is probable that this was an attempt by the siblings to break onto the London market. Dyer, an author and advocate of political reform, must have agreed to Joshua drawing his portrait, Elizabeth etching it, and the brother publishing it on 1 May 1795.

Elizabeth Crisall’s print of George Dyer is the only work known by her. The resulting impression demonstrates a capable and promising talent for such a young and inexperienced hand. Yet the lack of training opportunities open to her, because of her sex and lack of family connection to the trade, appear to have effectively ended her printmaking career. It has been recently suggested that she went on to live with her elder sister, Ann Crisall, and became a tutor, possibly at Lewisham Grammar School.<sup>55</sup> Joshua, on the other hand, went on to train as a student engraver at the Royal Academy and became a founding Member of the Old Watercolour Society, going on to become its President.<sup>56</sup> It is only through records of his distinguished artistic career that we gain any insight into the aspirations of his sister.

### **Conclusions: Print and Prejudice?**

The printmaking family was critical to the life and subsequent output of the professional woman printmaker. Indeed, having a close (usually male)

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>54</sup> There are surviving impressions in the National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG D2293 and another in the New York Public Library, Duyckinck Collection, 1025. They are essentially aquatints, with added stipple on parts of the figure, and engraving in the hair. I thank Dr Madeleine C. Viljoen for discussing this with me.

<sup>55</sup> Greene and Landau, ‘Crisall, Ann Batten’, *ODNB*. Elizabeth died in 1853, aged 81 years old, and is buried with her sister Ann at St Mary the Virgin Churchyard, Lewisham.

<sup>56</sup> Tisdall, ‘Crisall, Joshua’, *ODNB*.

relative in the trade was really *the only* way that a woman in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England could learn this specialist art and earn a living from it. Such was the importance of the family workshop that Elizabeth Cristall, as we have seen, was discouraged from working as an engraver because she could not be taken on as an apprentice, nor did she live 'with a father or relative who could instruct her'.<sup>57</sup> Aside from the notable exceptions of Caroline Kirkley and Ann Probin, girls were not taken on as official apprentices within the English printmaking trade.

The printmaker's home-cum-workshop was a highly gendered space, though scholars have largely failed to recognise it as such. As Ann Taylor recollected, girls were likely to have to manage their time training in the workshop alongside their domestic responsibilities. In the Taylor's home-cum-workshop, these household labours – which included cooking, washing, and needlework – were entirely female duties. Ann and Jane's three brothers, meanwhile, would have benefited from their father's continuous systematic and rigorous tutelage. Nevertheless, as exemplified by the Byrne family workshop, the instruction offered to sons *and* daughters on the whole could be comparable. Boys and girls were both highly trained in printmaking, giving them the core skills and vital artistic networks through which they could assist the family unit and earn a living in the future. If born into a supportive family workshop, female printmakers like Letitia Byrne were able to capitalise on their familial connection to the trade. They could take the opportunity to collaborate with more established relatives and go on to achieve significant artistic and commercial success in a challenging urban print market.

<sup>57</sup> Roget, *A History of the 'Old Water-Colour' Society*, 188.