

# A notable family of artists : the Caves of Winchester

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**A**T many stages of her history the ancient city of Winchester has been famous as a centre for artists and craftsmen. In the twelfth century unknown masters working in Winchester produced a series of illuminated manuscripts, enamels and ivories of unsurpassed quality and beauty. In later years this high tradition was carried on in different ways by the architectural craftsmen who worked in Winchester Cathedral and in Winchester College. Part of this tradition is to be found in the wall paintings which still adorn the Cathedral, the Chapel of St Cross, and the parish church of St John.

Yet the most famous painting on a wall in Winchester appears to be neither mediaeval nor ecclesiastical in origin. It is the Trusty Servant of Winchester College, an effigy constantly reproduced in a variety of forms and undoubtedly Winchester's best seller as a souvenir. On the top right-hand corner of the painting is the artist's signature, 'William Cave'. The Cave who painted the Servant was a member of the well-known Roman Catholic family of Winchester artists who worked in various media and made a considerable contribution to the artistic heritage of the city.

William Cave, senior, was born in 1737, the son of Richard and Mary Cave (*née* Meazy). His father's profession is not known, but the Meazys were stationers and booksellers, supplying the Town Clerk with paper, parchment and ink and the other necessary impedimenta of his office. In 1759 William Cave married Ann Broadway, whose father Thomas was painter-in-general to Winchester College. Henceforth there was no doubt as to the career which William was to follow. He became prosperous and the father of a large family, of whom three sons, William (referred to here as William Cave, junior), James and John were all artists. Nothing is known of John's work, but his brothers were notable local artists. The fact that the family were also devout Roman Catholics did not prevent them from taking a leading part in the civic affairs of Winchester; the city was well known for its tolerant attitude towards Roman Catholics, and in any case occasional conformity overcame the legal difficulties. William Cave became a freeman of the city in 1797, and a little later on held the offices of Bailiff of the Commonalty and Bailiff of the Twenty Four. In 1810 he was made an Alderman, and in the same year his son William became a freeman, next year a Justice of the Peace, and in 1813-14 Mayor. His father died on 27 November 1813 during his son's Mayoralty. Old Cave had been ill for some months before his death. His will, proved on 22 August 1815, shows that he was survived by his second wife Mrs Ann Cave (*née* Wheble), but she died in 1814, aged nearly ninety, before probate was granted. He left her his chattels and 'book debts', and his freehold in the High Street, with a proviso that his family should lease this property to his eldest son for £35 a year. Young William died

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intestate in 1817; he had no sons, but two daughters. His wife, Betty (*née* Mercer), died in 1824, leaving 'half-a-dozen best tea spoons and my pair of silver tea tongs' to her unmarried daughter Sarah (later Mrs Redman of New Alresford) who shared the rest of the estate with her sister Ann Ventham. Her sole executor was George Forder, Surveyor to the Dean and Chapter of Winchester Cathedral. The estate of William Cave, junior, was small, and was administered by his brother James and Robert Gudgeon, a Winchester upholsterer and founder of a well-known local firm of estate agents. James Cave died in 1834, John in 1840.

The working years of the Cave family thus cover a period of English history of indisputable artistic value contemporary with the beginning of the Gothic revival. It is a period which begins with the marriage of William Cave senior in 1759, to Ann, the daughter of the painter-in-general to Winchester College. Nothing is known of Cave's work till 1773; indeed until that date the College ordinarily employed other local painters. In 1773 there appeared a two-volume *History of Winchester* by an anonymous author who appears to have been the Rev. Richard Wavell of the well-known Wykehamist family, Rector of St Maurice Church and later Master of St Mary Magdalene Hospital. Wavell's *History* was a great success and judging from the numerous volumes extant today in good bindings a considerable number were printed and found appreciative readers. Thirteen out of a total of the fourteen illustrations were by William Cave. His reputation as an illustrator of architectural subjects was firmly established, and his supremacy at Winchester College. His drawings, where they can be compared with existing buildings, will be found to be reasonably accurate. Their value is much greater when Cave drew Winchester's lost architectural treasures. Thus his illustrations include the great mediaeval hospital of St Mary Magdalene on the east hill, which was pulled down in 1798. A glance at the surviving Winchester hospitals of St Cross and St John will show what a loss the demolition of St Mary Magdalene has been. His other illustrations of buildings now gone include Wren's palace on the western hill begun for Charles II in 1683, the original College of Matrons founded by Bishop Morley (now replaced by a nineteenth century building) and the County Hospital in Parchment Street. There are two illustrations which are not architectural. Cave's frontispiece to Volume II was a mythological representation of the spirit of Winchester, a female figure with sword drawn in defence of Justice, the Church and Learning. His illustrations for the section devoted to Winchester College include a representation of the Trusty Servant, and this, the known work of William Cave, senior, in 1773 makes an interesting comparison with the figure as it is today.

The late Mr Herbert Chitty was able to show from Winchester College accounts that the present mural was painted in 1809 by a William Cave. It certainly replaced an older picture. The difficulty is that in 1809 there were two William Caves alive, the illustrator of 1773 and his son and namesake, born in c. 1760. One of them painted the Trusty Servant in 1809 just as one of them in 1796-7 was paid £29 2s. for 'painting, ornamenting and gilding the Tomb of the Founder', Wykeham's Chantry in Winchester Cathedral. Yet if the style of the illustrations in Wavell's *History* be compared with the fanciful and romantic background of the 1809 Servant it would seem unlikely that Cave senior produced them both. Assuming that the Servant is the work of William Cave junior, the same hand can also surely be seen in the fine series of three small paintings, signed 'William Cave', which until recently adorned the walls of No. 73 High Street, Winchester. Incidentally, this property was partly the Caves' own freehold, a private dwelling house, and partly shop and stable on leasehold from the Dean and Chapter of Winchester. It is mentioned in the will of William Cave, senior. Two of the three wall paintings will, it is hoped, soon be on view in the Winchester

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City Museum; the third proved impossible to move, and has therefore disappeared in a remodelling of the premises. They have been briefly described in H.F.C. *Proceedings*, Vol. XVII, Pt. 1, 1949, by Mr L. P. Jowitt.

When Mr Jowitt saw these paintings in 1949 it was clear to him that they were only part of an elaborate decorative scheme for the whole room. In the north-east corner of the room was a picture showing a ruined circular tower, with a seascape in front and a three-masted ship; it was of horizontal oval form. On the north side was a vertical oval, signed William Cave, a rustic scene with different birds, including a pea-cock on a wall; a second vertical oval on the west wall again showed birds and fowls, this time in front of a cottage. These ovals are not unlike the panels of a similar date recently found in some old houses in Bromley, Kent (*Country Life*, 27 November 1958). The Bromley paintings, however, were on wood, not direct on to plaster as in the Winchester examples.

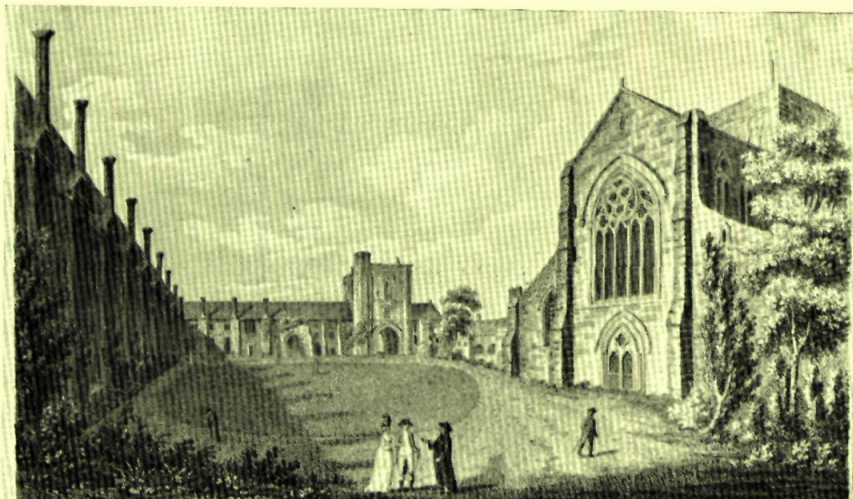
In much the same style is a large oil painting signed William Cave, and now in the Curtis Museum, Alton. This shows a coach travelling through a wild and romantic Italian-style landscape, with what appears to be a windmill in the right-hand background.

It is known also that both the William Caves were interior decorators of much skill and architectural and artistic ability. Several of their original bills have survived and show them working as the firm of William Cave and Son. The redecoration of Wykeham's tomb has already been mentioned. In 1804 'Mr Cave' redecorated the neighbouring parish church of St Swithun upon Kingsgate; his bill included a sum of money for 're-writing the Sentences'. This appears to be the only Anglican parish church in which the firm worked. Other Winchester parish records show other craftsmen. The Caves probably owed this particular commission to the influence of their friend Richard Baigent. Baigent was also a Roman Catholic, but at one time he had a house in St Swithun Street, and was one of the Poor Law Officers for the civil parish. He was an influential man in Winchester, a freeman of the city, and apparently the first Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, with an office at No. 51 High Street. He taught drawing at Winchester College, and was the father of F. J. Baigent, the local historian who gave evidence for the claimant at the Tichborne trial. A near neighbour of Baigent's for some time was yet another member of the Cave family, the artist James, who rented a large house in Canon Street from the Dean and Chapter, a fine corner property now known as Hamilton House.

The two Williams did a great deal of work for the Corporation of Winchester. They had been employed on the redecoration of St John's House, though the fine plaster decorations and ornamental cornice there is the work of another Winchester family, the Lucases. It was 'Cave and Son' who wrote the names of the city officials in gilded lettering in the city 'Tables', a continuing record still to be seen in the Sessions Hall. In 1789 the Corporation decided to redecorate the High Cross. The masonry repairs were carried out by James Walldin, and the Caves did the painting—two coats—and the gilt-work. The firm also did much Corporation work in 1796 and 1797, but the details of what they did has not survived. They appear also to have worked on the Westgate and with the Lucases at St John's House.

The background of the Cave murals from No. 73 High Street suggest a fanciful trait which found easy and pleasant expression in William Cave's work for the theatre, whether it was the work of father or son or of both the Williams. Their masterpiece was undoubtedly the interior decoration of the new Winchester Theatre in Jewry Street, first opened in May 1785. Only one wing of the building survives today, but the *Hampshire Chronicle* account of the building reveals the extent of the Caves' success. 'The pillars that support the green

PLATE III



*The SOUTH WEST VIEW of the CHURCH and HOSPITAL of ST CROSS.*



*Interiors of various sections  
Nave of the church.*



*Choir of the church, pointed  
arch in South aisle.*



*East end of the church  
South aisle.*

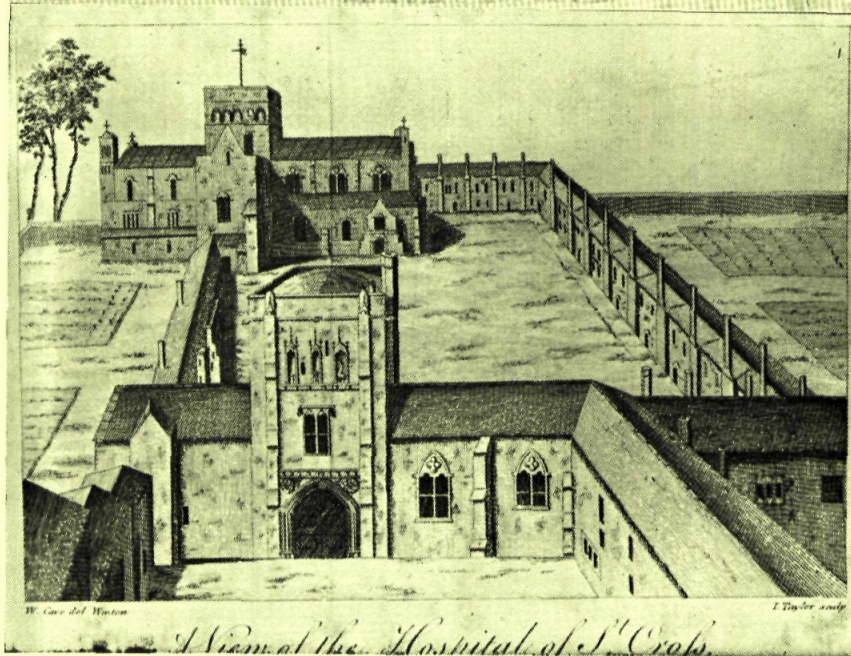


*East end of the church  
North aisle.*



*East end of the church  
South aisle.*

*Curious Specimens of ARCHITECTURE in the CHURCH of ST CROSS.*



*W. Cave del. Winton*

*J. Taylor sculp.*

*A View of the Hospital of St. Cross.*

James Cave's view of St Cross from Milner's *History of Winchester*



PLATE IVA



One of a series of wall paintings from 73 High Street, Winchester, once the home of William Cave, senior

PLATE IVB



Jane Cave, the poetess, 1755-1813

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boxes and gallery are superbly painted after the manner of the Pantheon; the ceiling is painted in imitation of the blue sky, with some well fancied clouds, in the centre of the ceiling is a ventilator, and at the four corners Thalia and Melpomene, as the Comic and Tragic Muses, Apollo as the emblem of the opera or music, and Pero as the representative of pantomime; the panel next to the ceiling is decorated with festoons of flowers and the whole house is finished in a style of elegance which does great credit to the taste and judgment of Mr Cave, by whom the whole of the ornaments are designed and executed.' This was work done for the theatre's owner-manager, Collins; in 1797 'Mr Cave' did the scenery for a new theatre at Gosport, opened by Thornton.

'Mr Cave's' interest in theatrical affairs did not end with his success at the Winchester Theatre, and the firm later took on the task of preparing 'transparencies', illuminated indoors on festive occasions. Thus 'Mr Cave' prepared the transparencies displayed in St John's Rooms on 30 October 1809 on the occasion of the Jubilee of George III.

In the eighteenth century the Caves of Bristol were a notable family of merchant bankers. It has not yet proved possible to discover any relationship between the two families, but in 1779 Miss Jane Cave, probably a member of the Bristol branch, came to Winchester from Bath; she was a poetess of some distinction, publishing work in a series of successful volumes with many subscribers including 'Mr Cave of Winchester'. There were about one hundred and thirty Winchester subscribers, including the Duke and Duchess of Chandos, who each took ten copies. It would be interesting to know if Jane's portrait, used as a frontispiece for her poems, was drawn by one of the Winchester artists. Jane married a Winchester miller, Thomas Winscombe of the Abbey Mill. He later entered the Excise service, and, with his wife, went to live in Bristol. Jane had an eventful life. Her poems suggest that she was not a Roman Catholic, but an Anglican influenced by the Wesleyan movement. Her work on Hampshire subjects include a poem 'On hearing Morning Service in St Thomas' Church, Winchester', and another on an excursion to the Chandos mansion of Avington House.

The last Cave to achieve artistic distinction was James. His original work in Winchester today is represented by two charming water colours, one of St Cross, one of the Cathedral, and both once the property of Sir William Portal. A painting of Richard Fox's Crozier is recorded as once having been in the possession of the Stopher family, but it seems to have disappeared. James is also thought to have been drawing master at Twyford School. At one time he lived in Hamilton House in Canon Street, and later in No. 8 St Peter Street, of which he was the first tenant from 1826, the property belonging to the Catholic Church. Just as old William Cave's reputation was established by his illustrations for the Wavell *History* of 1773, his son James became famous for his work in the Rev. J. Milner's *History of Winchester*, a best seller first published in 1798, and compiled in less than twelve months. It is still a best seller, but it has been a pitfall for the unwary local historian ever since. Yet like all venerable local histories 'Milner' has great charm, and a considerable part of the charm is to be found in the illustrations. It is interesting to compare James' treatment of subjects also drawn by his father. James was less concerned with the claims of architecture; he contrived to produce a picturesque illustration. He loved ivy-clad ruins, beautiful trees, and even human beings where they added to the scene. James and his brother John both became freemen of Winchester in 1833, but James died the year after, unmarried and poor, leaving John as his executor. James appears in Bryar's *Dictionary of Painters and Engravers* (edition of 1918, Vol. I, edited by R. E. Graves), in a brief note which records that 'he occasionally exhibited drawings at the Royal Academy', and making his chief claim to fame his drawings for the second edition of Milner in 1809.

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Not much is known of John Cave except that he also is described as an artist. He married Ann Vinn in 1798, and from 1811 lived in Southgate Street in a house belonging to St John's Hospital. He died in 1840; his widow lived on in Southgate Street till her death in 1858.\* Descendants of this branch of the family are alive today.

It is only now in Milner that the *chef d'oeuvre* of the Cave family can be studied today, in James' illustrations of William Cave's interior decoration of the Church of St Peter built in 1792 to serve the Roman Catholic community. This church survives but only as a shell, for it has become a parish hall. St Peter's was designed by an architect protégé of Dr Milner's 'Mr. Carter'. The accounts of its building and decoration have been published in 1945 by the Catholic Record Society. It is the only important building in Winchester of late eighteenth century 'Gothic' character with a documented history. Tower House, in the same part of Winchester, is obviously of great architectural importance. There would appear to be little doubt that internally the Chapel was old William Cave's masterpiece, and other members of his family probably helped him. Only a small proportion of the work had to be paid for; the rest was given to the church, and included a fine altar-piece in the form of a copy of Raphael's 'Transfiguration'. The walls were adorned with a series of paintings by Cave, and he also painted the vaulting of the roof, and the carved and coloured bosses of which only two survive in the Winchester City Museum. No one who reads Milner's account of this church can doubt that it is indeed one of Winchester's lost treasures.

Thus for over sixty years the Cave family played their artistic parts in Winchester; decorating its theatre; helping to preserve the city's Anglican churches and its civic monuments, beautifying its new Roman Catholic Church, illustrating its most popular Histories; living, working and dying in some of its most attractive houses; serving the ancient faith, yet also upholding the dignities of office within the Anglican Corporation. If many people today know of the Caves only as the artists responsible for repainting the Trusty Servant, it is perhaps an appropriate remembrance of a family faithful to their city's many needs and interests.

Acknowledgment must be made to the late Mr H. Chitty's notes on the Caves' work for Winchester College published in the *Wykehamist*, Vol. XII, No. 583, 1919; Vol. XIV, No. 652, 1924; and to the Catholic Record Society, volumes of *Hampshire Registers* (1945). The Caves' theatrical work is recorded, though not in detail, in *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex* (Phoenix, 1958) by Arnold Hare. John Carter, the architect of Milner's Chapel, is the subject of a note in the Dictionary of National Biography; for a brilliant account of his and Milner's part in the Gothic revival see Sir Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival* (Constable, 1949). For Milner's part in the history of English Catholicism see the chapter on him in David Matthew's *Catholicism in England* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 3rd edition, 1955).

\* In Cheyney Court Books of the mid-nineteenth century a John Cave is described as a merchant: he was almost certainly the painter's son and namesake.



PLATE VA



Interior of St Peter's Chapel, Winchester  
Decorated by William Cave, senior

PLATE VB



Oil Painting by William Cave, now in the Curtis Museum, Alton

*Copyright, The Curtis Museum, Alton, Hants*



PLATE VIa



Base of Cross in Froyle Churchyard

PLATE VIb



Stone Stile at Froyle

[Photo by Miss. P. Wilcocks