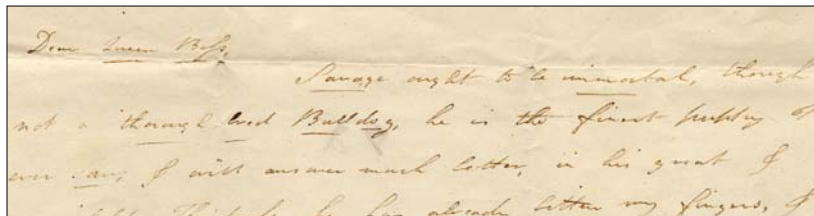


Elizabeth Bridget Pigot Byron's female friend



Byron's Letter to Elizabeth Pigot, June 11, 1807

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Byron met the Pigots in Southwell in April 1804 during the school holidays. The family lived across the lawn from Burgage Manor, where Mrs Byron resided at this time. Elizabeth,

the eldest of the children, hit it off with the young Byron, for they shared many interests. The two of them would talk about the theatre, literature and sing their favourite songs together. The friendship between the two was to last throughout Byron's youth and it had a deep impact on the development of the future poet. Five years his senior, the young woman was an avid reader and had inherited the artistic temperament of her mother, being also a competent watercolourist. These talents are most famously presented in '[The Wonderful History of Lord Byron and his Dog](#)', which she both illustrated and wrote. The tone of the work is one of mock-naivety, as she satirizes the book *The Wonderful Adventure of Old Mother Hubbard and her Dog*. In it, Elizabeth depicts Byron and his favourite dog, Boatswain, sharing some light-hearted frolics. She also wrote verses in her spare time and encouraged Byron to write poetry, as the two friends would engage in playful poetic competitions as they replied to each other's verses. In MacCarthy's words, the friendship was based on genuine honesty and it thrived 'because they [the Pigots] made no difficult demands on him [Byron], emotional or sexual' (MacCarthy, p. 46). The wiser Elizabeth saw only too well the defects of her adolescent, and at times difficult, friend, accepting them as might an older sister.

This stimulating friendship played a major role in the young Byron's literary development. His early compositions proved to be an outlet for the events surrounding his life at the time, i.e. the persons he was involved with, his school life at Harrow, and his subsequent days at Cambridge. Elizabeth was also to play the part of confidante with regards to the young peer's life, especially with regards to the quarrels he had with his mother, as is evident in letters such as that which he wrote on [August 10th 1806](#).

By 1806 Byron was preparing his first publication, *Fugitive Pieces*. Elizabeth and her brother John, apart from providing the society in which the young poet could vent his literary inclinations, also actively dealt with the publication process. Byron's printer at this time was John Ridge of Newark, a town near Southwell. The Pigot siblings received many a letter from Byron – who at this period travelled between Southwell, London and Cambridge – with instructions regarding the printings. The two of them would also supervise the publication of the succeeding two volumes, *Poems on Various Occasions* and *Hours of Idleness*, the latter coming out in 1807.

In the following years Byron was to lose touch with Elizabeth and the rest of Southwell society. The poet went to travel, become famous and eventually die in exile, whilst his mother died in 1811 when living at Newstead Abbey. The Irish poet Thomas Moore, the first of Byron's many biographers, visited the Pigots in 1828 in search of material for his book. He was most impressed by Elizabeth's intelligence and charm and she provided him with all the letters and manuscripts written by the poet that she held in her possession. She was to start a continuing correspondence with Byron's publisher, John Murray, regarding his early compositions and the manuscripts she provided.

Those years in the 1830s were possibly the most thrilling of Elizabeth's life. Whilst she dedicated her life to caring for her sick mother, she solicitously dealt with the many Byron enthusiasts that visited the region. She was to receive many literary gifts from John Murray and nurtured the hope of receiving a visit from Sir Walter Scott. When Byron's Italian mistress, the Countess Guiccioli, visited Nottinghamshire she went on to Newstead and made the

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acquaintance of her brother John, but did not call at Southwell, much to Elizabeth's annoyance and disappointment; Elizabeth was, however, to receive a lock of the Countess' hair six years later, which she put together with one of Byron's.

After the passing of her mother, Elizabeth Pigot continued her correspondences with those involved with Byron and his publisher. John Murray's son, John Murray III, paid her and her brother a visit in 1834 and presented them with, in her own words, 'magnificent [...] plates' (Boyes, p. 87). In that same year she saw Byron's daughter Ada on holiday in Harrogate. Despite only seeing her in the distance, she was satisfied at laying eyes upon her dear old friend's daughter.

She eventually moved to Easthorpe, where she dedicated the rest of her days to what she enjoyed most, preserving everything she could get that was once associated with Lord Byron. She was to die in 1866, aged 83, and much of what we now know of the poet's early years in Nottinghamshire is due to Elizabeth's enduring friendship with, and loyalty to, Byron.

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