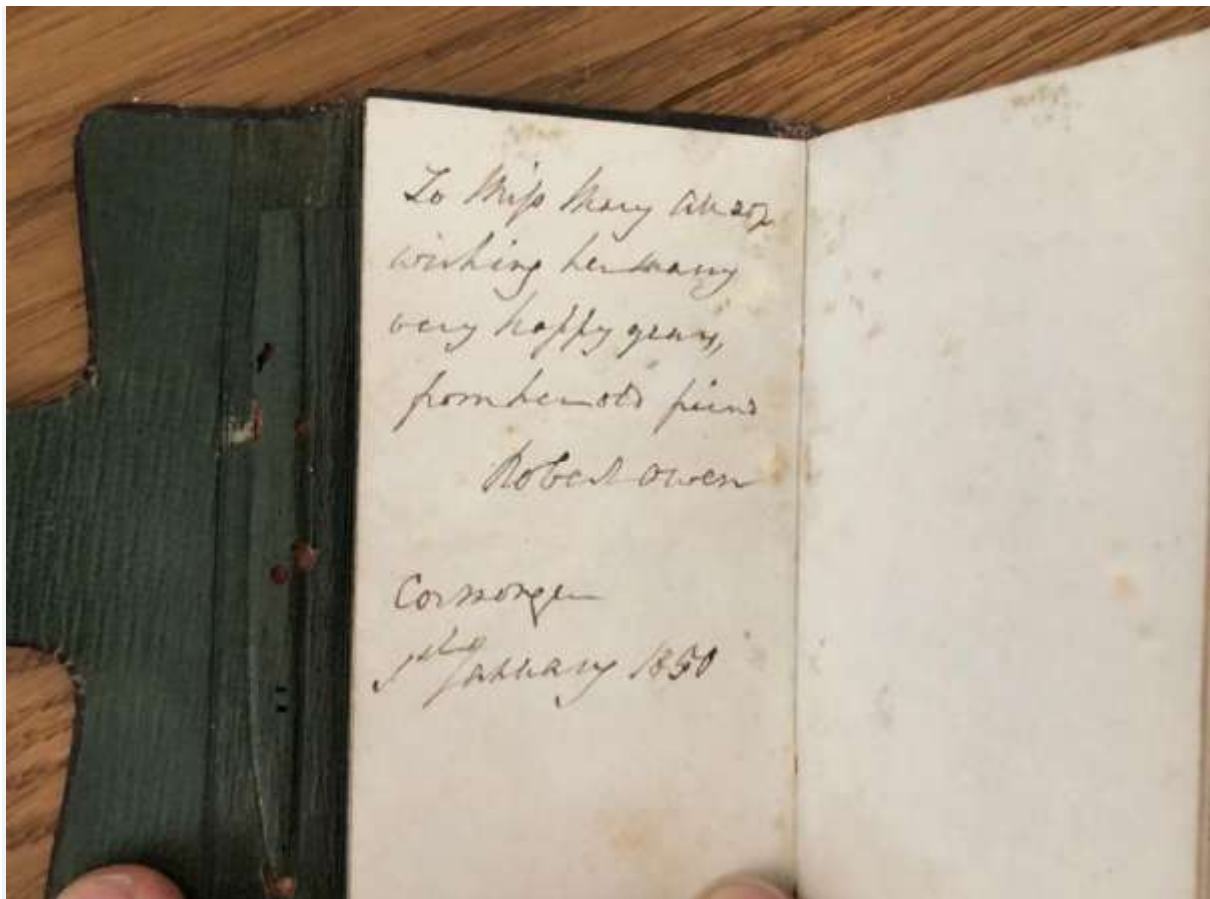


The Allsop Almanack

The Almanack which the Museum has recently acquired was a present by Robert Owen to Miss Mary Allsop, who was the daughter of his long-term friend and ally, Thomas Allsop. It is inscribed and dated, 1st January 1850.



Mary Lamb Allsop, to give her full name, was born in Middlesex in 1836, so would have been 14 in 1850 at the time of the gift, and was the third child of Thomas Allsop (1795-1880) and his wife Anna (1795-1876), following his eldest son Robert (born 1825) and Charles (born 1831). Both Charles and Mary had been named after the brother and sister literary figures Charles and Mary Lamb, who were close friends of Thomas. It appears that Mary was, in 1850, living with her parents in Middlesex, though by 1861 she was recorded in the Census as living in Melcombe Regis (now part of Weymouth in Dorset) and her death certificate shows that she died a spinster in Dorset in 1867.

Thomas Allsop had been a friend and supporter not only of Charles and Mary Lamb but also of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He was attracted to lectures by Coleridge, which he heard in 1818 and asked to meet the writer. They developed a lasting friendship and on the poet's death Allsop published in two volumes his major work, *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1836). Allsop had a wide range of acquaintances in literature and politics such as William Hazlitt, William Cobbett, the Radical MP Thomas Noon Talfourd and the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini.

Allsop had been born on 10th April 1795 at Stainsborough Hall, near Wirksworth in Derbyshire, educated at Wirksworth Grammar School, and was destined to follow his ancestors as a landowner and 'gentleman farmer'. However he developed 'an irresistible desire to see more of the world than was possible in a secluded Derbyshire village [which] led him to abandon farming for the experience of London, whither he went at the age of seventeen'.ⁱ He was employed by Anthony Harding (also originally born in Derbyshire and his mother's brother) in what can be claimed to be the first department store, Harding, Howell & Co.'s Grand Fashionable Magazine, which was located in Schomberg House on Pall Mall in London, and had been opened in 1789. Allsop worked there for at least fifteen years before becoming a successful stockbroker around 1827.



Harding & Howell's on Pall Mall

The National Co-operative Archive in Manchester has a collection of correspondence between Robert Owen and Allsop (and his wife Anna) that covers the period 1830 to 1855 as evidence of their long friendship and Allsop's support for and involvement in Owen's activities, which the Almanack could be said to reciprocate. Allsop wrote to Owen in 1855 of his support:

*The principles you have established are those which must be adopted or the world will never have peace or internal harmony. It is thus that time winnows out the chaff from the grain, and it would seem that only by time and thro' time can the People slowly, very slowly emerge from the sloughs of ignorance & absurd irrational habits and practices.*ⁱⁱ

Another key aspect that it appears appealed to Allsop about Owen was his rationalism, or as it would have been called at the time, his atheism. Thomas Allsop was a professed atheist, to the extent that, for example, in advertising for a country house he said that preference would be given to one which had no church or clergyman within five miles! Owen, however, despite his reputation, was not an atheist; he was opposed to organised religion (as he had made clear publicly in 1817) but retained spiritual beliefs in the existence of some creator and 'higher power' which probably amounted to a sort of deism (which is made clear in his correspondence about spiritualism with Frederick Hockley in the 1850sⁱⁱⁱ). This became (shockingly) clear to Allsop when he attended Owen's funeral in

November 1858 in the churchyard of St Mary's Church in Newtown, as George Holyoake recalls in his book *Life and Last Days of Robert Owen*^{iv}:

Mr. Allsop, who would have walked from Devonshire, had it been necessary, to be present at the grave, would not enter the church. He preferred the solitude of nature, where the reverence of the heart was undisturbed by hollow formularies. On arriving in the town he addressed to me the letter I shall here quote:

— Newtown, Montgomeryshire, Nov. 22, 1858.

Mr DEAR Friend,

—The grave has closed on Robert Owen (if great aims and a blameless life constitute greatness and goodness)—a great and pre-eminently good man—and what a worker! For seventy years, since the year 1788, when my informant saw him rolling up a piece of silk very neatly, and with his mind ever absorbed upon the great problem of humanity, he has never passed one hour in idleness, one hour not devoted to the deliverance of his fellow-man from the degradation of superstition, and the tyranny of class and capital.

It pained me deeply that such a man, after life had departed, should pass into, or rather under, the mummery of an outworn creed, which it had been the great labour of his life to expose and destroy. What hope can we rationally entertain of the future, when the followers of Robert Owen endure Christian burial for their master, whose chief merit was his exposure of the system of priestcraft and superstition? Why, the very Indians throughout Central America and Mexico, have recently rejected their mystery men, having detected them in their frauds, whilst our mystery men are accepted 'by a most thinking people,' to use Cobbett's expression, as of divine appointment, and their existing revelation as the perfection of reason. It is not by this weak conformity to the absurd practices enjoined by our superstition that any progress is to be hoped for.

It was not thus that George Fox obtained for the Quakers full recognition of their independence, it was not by such means that Cromwell, Ludlow, and Ireton succeeded. Oh, for one hour of that true man, fanatic though he was, and his Ironsides, to show the men of this age of what stuff the men were made who withstood tyranny and priestcraft in the olden time. In this time of cant and profession, where every man is liberal — God save the mark! in profession; where are the men who bear witness to the truths which are known — "familiar as Household Words?" Where are the men who, despising the opinion of others, or what is said to be opinion, who bear witness to their conviction? What men, out of the myriads who laugh at the superstitions rampant throughout the world, show their sense and appreciation of truth by refusing to serve or invoke a Deity, of whose existence they have no evidence? For if a Being, such as he is described, did exist, he should be superseded. Where the men that refuse any longer to perpetuate that horrid system of punishing men for crimes which that system has rendered inevitable, and from which they cannot escape?

After Savonarola, Giordano Bruno, who follows to bear testimony to the truth as it is in him? Alas for an age and a people who seem determined that custom shall be fruitful and reason barren. Who can hope for a purer inner life, or any real devotion?—

Ever yours,

T. Allsop.

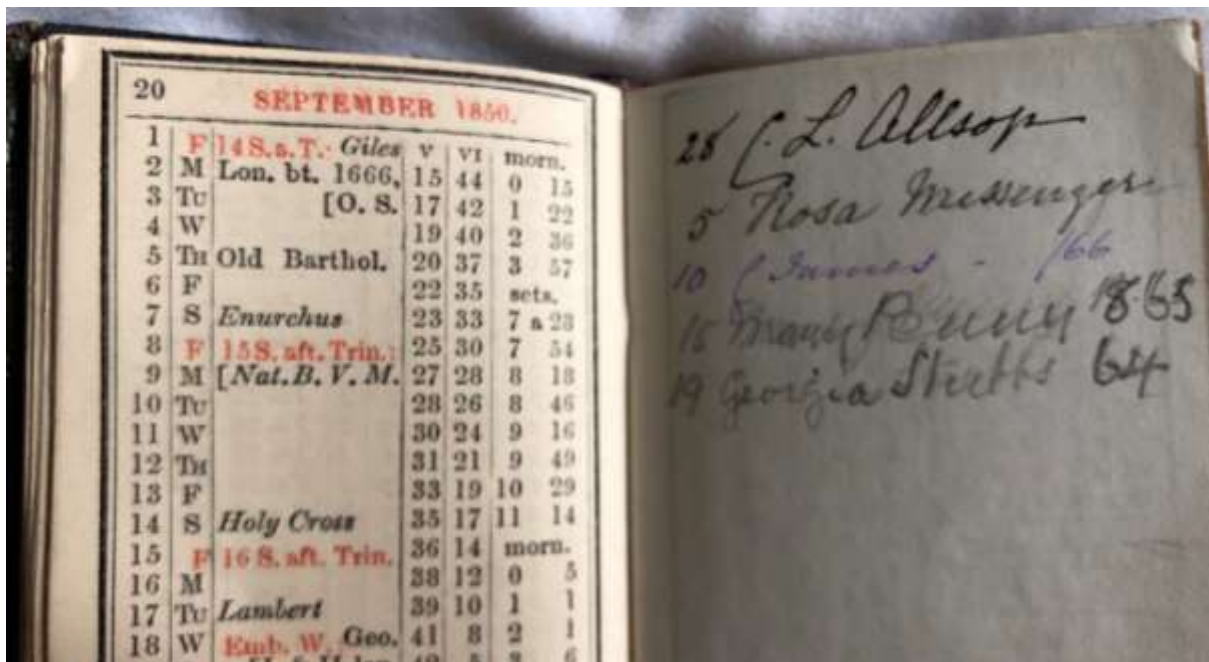


Thomas Allsop

When Allsop himself died in 1880 he left his papers to the Co-operative historian (and fellow rationalist) George Holyoake. Holyoake also set up the Thomas Allsop Prize Essay Competition in 1886 on the following topic:

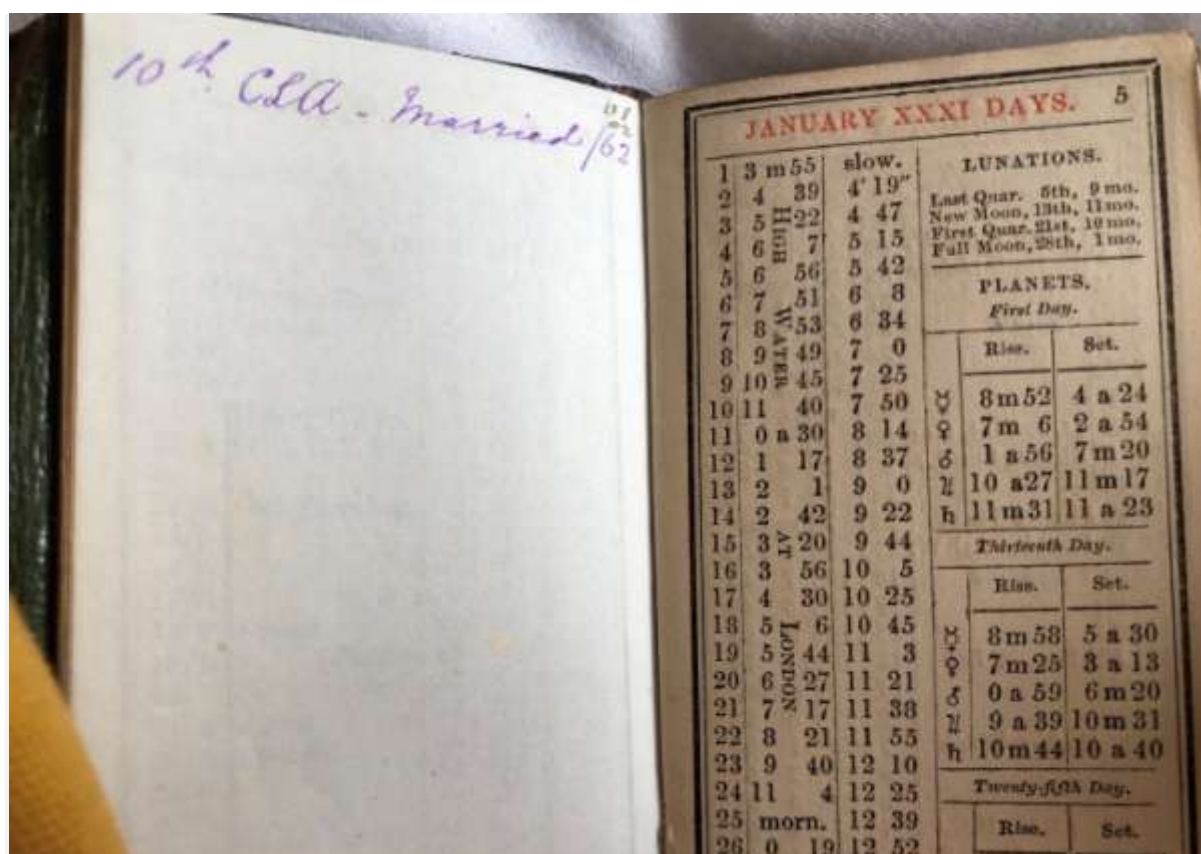
“Assuming the tenets of Christianity to be disproved, what would be the social and moral effects of the discontinuance of its teachings and its institutions?”

Thomas Allsop also had some important connections with Chartism - that topic is covered in a separate article on *Thomas Allsop, Robert Owen, Chartism and Montgomeryshire*.



The entry above in the Almanack (presumably by Mary), showing the birthday of C.L. Allsop is for her older brother Charles Lamb Allsop, who had been born in Middlesex in 1831. At some stage Charles Lamb migrated to New Zealand, as he is recorded as marrying Catherine Bunker of Philipstown at Trinity Church in Lyttelton in 1862:

ALLSOP - BUNKER - on 10 Jan. at Trinity Church, Lyttelton, Charles Lamb Allsop to Catherine, dau. of Richard Bunker, Lyttelton. 1862



The marriage is also noted in Mary's Almanack, which suggests that Mary was using the Almanack for a considerable time after 1850, indeed past the time that she moved to Dorset, and possibly up to her death in the later 1860s (this could be supported by the other entries for September, in the previous image, which seem to relate to dates in 1864, 1865 and 1866 respectively – possibly the birthdates of children?).



This may also give some context to the New Zealand stamp that was found within the Almanack. It is not clear when Charles Lamb emigrated, as the marriage appears to be the first sign of him 'down under', but his presence is noted in the tragic deaths of four of their young children, which are recorded in the Barbadoes Street Cemetery in Christchurch between December 1864 and April 1868^v. So too is Charles' bankruptcy in June 1868, as the following extract from the New Zealand paper *The Press* from Thursday July 16 1868 shows^{vi}:

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF NEW
ZEALAND,
CANTERBURY DISTRICT.

THE BANKRUPTCY ACT, 1867.

In the matter of Charles Lamb Allsop, of
Purarikanui, in the Province of
Canterbury, schoolmaster, a bank-
rupt.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the
said Charles Lamb Allsop having by
an order bearing date the sixteenth day of
June instant been adjudged bankrupt under
a petition for adjudication of bank-
ruptcy filed in this Honourable Court on
the thirteenth day of June 1868 and that
at a meeting of creditors held at the office
of the Registrar on the twenty-fourth day of
June instant James Edwin Graham of Christ-
church accountant was chosen trustee of the
estate and effects of the said Charles Lamb
Allsop and that the Court has by order
bearing date the thirtieth day of
June 1868 confirmed such choice and
notice is hereby further given that a public
sitting for the said bankrupt to pass his last
examination and to make application for his
discharge will be held before his Honor Mr
Justice Gresson on Thursday the thirteenth
day of August 1868, at the Court house
Christchurch at eleven o'clock in the fore-
noon.

Dated this thirtieth day of June 1868.

EDWARD S. WILLCOCKS,

7-16

Registrar.

It is unclear what happened to Charles (described in 1868 as a schoolteacher living in Purarikanui in the Province of Canterbury) subsequently, but an entry in the death register at Brompton in Middlesex in 1885 may be his, which may suggest that the double blows of the death of his children and bankruptcy led him to return to England and the familiar surroundings of Marylebone.

Thomas Allsop's eldest son Robert (1825-1893) outlived both of his younger siblings and his father, but carried on the link with Robert Owen, naming his first son, born in 1865, Robert Owen Allsop. This, along with the suggestion that Mary carried the 1850 gift with her for the rest of her life (or that someone else in the family continued its use), shows the continuing impact of Robert Owen on the Allsop family.



Here is the Almanack in its leather cover.

REFERENCES

ⁱ *Dictionary of National Biography 1885-1900 Volume 1* entry by George Holyoake

ⁱⁱ Allsop to Owen, 23 December 1855, Manchester Collection

ⁱⁱⁱ 41 letters from Robert Owen to Frederick Hockley about spiritualism are in the Museum's collection. We are currently transcribing them, with a view to future publication.

^{iv} G Holyoake *Life and Last Days of R. Owen*, p. 17

^v **Allsop, Ada Isabel** - aged 4 months

August 1864 - 24 December 1864

Dec 24, at Ferry Road, Christchurch, Ada Isabel, infant daughter of Mr Charles Allsop

- daughter of Charles Lamb Allsop & Catherine Bunker & twin with Leonard

Allsop, Charles Reginald - age not recorded

- 13 April 1868

Allsop, Laura Gertrude - age not recorded

1864 - 9 January 1865

- daughter of Charles Lamb Allsop & Catherine Bunker who married at Trinity Church, Lyttelton 10 January 1862. Charles Lamb Allsop was a Schoolmaster and in 1868 was living in Purarikanui, Canterbury

Allsop, Leonard Coleridge - aged 5 months

Aug 1865 - 25 January 1866

- son of Charles Lamb Allsop & Catherine Bunker & twin with Ada Isabel

[BARBADOES Cemetery Christchurch - A :: FamilyTreeCircles.com Genealogy](#) last accessed 13.10.2022

^{vi} Vol. XIII No. 1,710