**John** 1785-1865 **& Thomazine** 1796-1883 **Carslake**

John was born in Colyton, the son of a surgeon. At 14 he joined the Royal Navy and was Midshipman on Nelson’s HMS Victory in 1803. He served at Trafalgar and was promoted to Lieutenant becoming First Lieutenant on HMS Prosperine in 1807. His good fortune and career came to an end after being taken prisoner whilst blockading Toulon. He served almost six years as POW in Verdun. Although not mistreated these were wasted years.

After release he met Thomazine Leigh, of Slade House, Weston. Her enlightened parents had encouraged a good education and love of the theatre and literature. She was attracted to John but there had been other admirers including Oxford students, friends of John Keats. Her commonplace book is in the archives of the Keats Museum in London. She and John married in Salcombe Regis Church.

In 1816, after a short period back at sea, he was paid off, aged only 31. His 1809 capture had been deemed ‘honourable’ and he should have received automatic promotion. He spent future years campaigning to seek redress.

They had inherited several properties and leasing them was their main income but their constant maintenance meant they were never financially secure. Houses in which they lived or leased included Hills, Cotlands, Asherton, Violet Bank (Littlecourt) and Cotmaton Old Hall. They also lived in Exeter or in Somerset and the impression is that they were never settled.

John became a magistrate and also the first chair of the Sidmouth Improvement Committee (forerunner of the SVA) but it unlikely that either role gave him the fulfilment he sought. Thomazine was a most supportive and loving wife but no doubt missed the cultural pleasures of her younger days.

Their grandchildren **Annie (Leigh Browne)** and **Mary (Lockyer)** stayed with them for enjoyable holidays.

As John reached his 60s his health declined but expert opinions could not find a physical cause and he resorted to mesmerism. His spinal pain may have resulted from an old injury when he fell from a mast and he had other falls while riding.

He was finally assigned ‘retired Commander’ rank when 65 but it was too little, too late. The absence of written memories of Trafalgar and Nelson may reflect his bitterness towards the Royal Navy.

The Museum has John’s old sea chest. In addition is a wooden half-moon table with hinged lid. It had been bought by the Carslakes from Woolbrook Cottage in 1853 and probably was an item of furniture during the royal visit of 1819. The surface has a roundel of two young women studying music scores and the interior of the lid shows a portrait of, we believe, Thomazine, in her early 40s.

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