

Condensed Summary of a Talk Given to Waltham Abbey Historical Society, Christmas 2018

Chinese before Takeaways by Les Tucker

Les is part of a group of six archivists at the Royal Gunpowder Mills, half of which also belong to Waltham Abbey Historical Society. The future of the Gunpowder Mills is currently unknown, but there is a plan to create it an Ancient Scheduled Monument, supported by Historic England.

Among the enquiries received at the Gunpowder Mills, there was one asking if someone from the mills was linked with a Chinese artist named Chitqua, who lived in London in the 18th century. At this time, the Chinese government forbade most travel, apart from within the Far East, but an East India Company ship arrived in London with a Chinese citizen on it, in 1771, maybe via Indonesia.

At this time, chinoiserie furnishing was very popular in Britain. It started from the reign of Queen Mary. Chitqua was a noted clay modeller in China and brought clay with him. He saw a business opportunity in London. For him to live in 18th century Georgian London he must have had support. A member of the Walton family, owners of the Gunpowder Mills, was a director of the East India Company. He visited Canton twice and was maybe a patron of Chitqua.

When the original enquirer, after receiving this information, looked at the wills of Chitqua and his wife, they looked the same as Mr Walton's and this proved the Waltham Abbey connection.

Les showed us a group image from the Royal Academy, which has Chitqua in it.

The Academicians of the Royal Academy 1771-72

JOHAN JOSEPH ZOFFANY (FRANKFURT 1733-LONDON 1810)

The Academicians of the Royal Academy 1771-72

Oil on canvas | 101.1 x 147.5 cm (support, canvas/panel/str external) | RCIN 400747

The two female founding members of the Royal Academy:

(1) Mary Moser (1744-1819)

(2) Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807)

(3) Mr Chitqua, the celebrated Chinese Artist:

Chinese artist Tan-che-qua (fifth from the left), happened to be in London during the period Zoffany was working on the painting. On the 7 May 1771 the Leeds Intelligencer reported that 'Mr Chitqua, the celebrated Chinese Artist... was conducted to the Royal Academy at Somerset House, where he not only met with a polite reception, but had the honour to have his portrait introduced by Mr Zoffanii, into a captial picture of the Members of the noble institution...'. In 1770 Tan-che-qua exhibited a portrait bust at the annual Royal Acadmey Summer Exhibition. His inclusion here may also be a reminder of the writer of the Royal Academy's Professor of Ancient History, Oliver Goldsmith (?1730-74), who published a series of letters, with the title 'The Citizen of the World', written by an imaginary Chinese man visiting England. Letter no. 104 (26 January 1761), discussing learned societies, seems relevant here, especially when we remember the conscious decision of the Royal Academy to restrict membership to practising artists, excluding gentleman connoisseurs:

"A philosophical beau is not so frequent in Europe [as in China], yet I am told that such characters are found here. I mean such as punctually support all the decorums of learning, without being really very profound or naturally possessed of a fine understanding . . . Such men are generally candidates for admittance into literary clubs, academies, and institutions, where they regularly meet to give and receive a little instruction and a great deal of praise. . . But where true knowledge is cultivated, these formalities begin to disappear; the ermin'd cowl, the solemn beard and sweeping train are laid aside; Philosophers dress, and talk, and think, like other men."



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Chitqua