

Anna Seward

1742 - 1809

Anna was the eldest daughter of Rev. Thomas Seward, a canon of Lichfield Cathedral. Anna spent most of her life in and around Lichfield. With her father, they were part of a literary circle including Erasmus Darwin (grandfather of Charles Darwin,) Samuel Johnson, and Johnson's biographer, James Boswell. Anna was encouraged to participate in this circle and was involved in the meetings and corresponded with members of the Lunar Society that would sometimes meet at her father's home.

After her death, the writer, Sir Walter Scott edited Anna's *Poetical Works* into three volumes. Anna's letters, were published in six volumes and show her wide knowledge of English literature, casting light on the literary culture of the Midlands of her day.

She is seen as a valuable observer of relationships in late eighteenth century society from a woman's perspective. Seward was critical of marriage as an institution and never married. Although not strictly from the Black Country, she is included here for her perspective on the developing industrial activity across the Staffordshire area. Anna was among the first to



Fig. 23 Anna Seward, engraving 1799, from "The Lady's Monthly Museum"

reflect critically at the impact of industry on the local landscape.

Known as *The Swan of Lichfield*, she offered something of an early "green" interpretation of the processes of industrialisation. In her c.1785 poem entitled *To Colebrook Dale* she equated industrial development of the ironworks there as being like a sexual violation of the landscape.

TO COLEBROOK DALE

*Thy Genius, Colebrook , faithless to his charge
Amid thy woods and vales, thy rocks and streams,
Form'd for the train that haunt poetic dreams
Naiads and Nymphs, - now hears the toiling barge
And the swart Cyclops ever-clanging forge
Din in thy dells; - permits the dark red gleams
From umber'd fires on all thy hills, the beams,
Solar and pure, to shroud with columns large
Of black sulphureous smoke, that spread their veils
Like funeral crape upon the sylvan robe
Of thy romantic rocks, pollute thy gales,
And stain thy glassy floods; - while o'er the globe
To spread thy stores metallic, this rude yell
Drowns the wild woodland song, and breaks the poet's spell.*