

**AUSTRALIAN JOINT COPYING PROJECT**

**CHARLES MERYON**

**Papers, 1818-92**

**Reel M595**

**The British Library  
Great Russell Street  
London WC1B 3DG**

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**Filmed: 1965**

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Charles Meryon (1821-1868) was born in Paris, the illegitimate son of Charles Lewis Meryon (1783-1877), an English doctor, traveller and author, and Pierre-Narcisse Chapoux (1793-1838), a dancer at the Paris Opera. His half-sister was Fanny Lowther (1818-1890), who eventually married Henry Broadwood and lived in England. Meryon was brought up by his mother and educated at Paris and Marseilles.

Narcisse Chapoux died in 1838, by which time Meryon had entered the Naval School at Brest. He subsequently served in the Mediterranean on the ships *Alger*, *Montebello* and *Inflexible*. In 1842 he joined the corvette *Le Rhin* on its voyage round the world. In January 1843 the ship reached Akarao, the small French settlement in New Zealand, where it spent lengthy periods during the next two years. Visits were also made to Auckland, Wellington, the Bay of Islands, Valparaiso, the Marquesas, Tahiti, Wallis Island, the Gilbert Islands and New Caledonia. In New Zealand Meryon made a number of drawings of coastal scenery, landscapes, natural history, canoes and Maori profiles. *Le Rhin* also called at Hobart on its way to New Zealand and twice visited Sydney, where Meryon made a drawing of a pet dingo, a portrait of an Aborigine, and a view of Sydney Harbour. Some of the drawings were later to be the subject of etchings.

In 1846, following his return to France, Meryon resigned from the Navy and announced his intention of becoming a professional artist. He took painting lessons, but within a few years colour blindness forced him to abandon oil painting. One of his teachers, Renier Zeeman, transformed him into an etcher and he soon showed an extraordinary ability. His famous series of 22 etchings of Paris appeared between 1851 and 1854. While little known in his lifetime, they placed him among the greatest original etchers.

Meryon was a man of brooding temperament and strange visions and in the 1850s he became increasingly unsociable and mentally unbalanced. In 1858 he was removed to an asylum at Charenton Saint Maurice. He was released after fifteen months, but was never well again. Although assisted financially by his sister and supported by several loyal friends, he lived in wretched conditions. In 1866 he was re-admitted to Charenton, where he died in 1868.

## CHARLES MERYON

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### British Library, Add. MS37015-16

#### Add. MS 37015

Letters of Pierre-Narcisse Chaspoux and her son Charles Meryon to Charles Lewis Chapoux, 1821-39 (folios 1-196, letters 1-100).

The letters from Chaspoux (also known as Mme. Gentil) date from 1821 to 1836, two years before her death, and were written from Paris. Charles Lewis Meryon travelled extensively and the letters were addressed to Florence, Marseilles, the Levant, Broadstairs, as well as London. The earliest letter that he received from his son was written in 1828 and there are regular letters from onwards.

The letters from Chapoux refer to Charles Meryon's childhood activities, including his baptism, visits to the theatre, presents from his father, his relations with his half-sister Fanny Lowther, visits to the theatre, house moves, his education, his stay in Marseilles in 1834-35, his study of the English language, a visit to Italy, his moods and interests, and his interest in a career in the French Navy. There are also references to Chapoux's relations with Lord Lowther (the father of Fanny) and meetings with Charles Lewis Meryon. The letters are all in French.

The letters from Charles Meryon deal inter alia with presents, his schooling, English lessons, reading, his interest in a naval career, and the death of his mother (1838). A few of his letters are in English, but most are in French.

Apart from six original letters, the letters are all manuscript copies, which are numbered. Occasionally, sentences or passages were omitted and there are a few annotations in English, probably made by Lewis Meryon, who donated the collection to the British Museum.

Letters of Charles Meryon to his father Charles Lewis Meryon and some letters from other correspondents regarding Charles Meryon, 1839-68. (ff. 197-568, letters 101-219)

The letters from Meryon, which are the originals, date from 1839 to 1863, five years before his death. They were mostly written in Paris, but some of the earlier letters, which document his naval service, were written in Toulon, Smyrna, Tunis, Valparaiso, Tahiti and Akaroa. They were addressed to his father in London. All the Meryon letters are in French.

The letters refer to Meryon's attendance at the Naval School at Brest, friends, his life at Toulon, cruises on the *Alger* in the Mediterranean, financial difficulties, his impressions of Algiers, Tunis,

Athens and Smyrna, shipboard life, painting lessons at Toulon, his appointment to the corvette *Le Rhin* (1842), the ship's visit to the French settlement at Akaroa in New Zealand, life in Valparaiso (1844-45), the Marquesas Islands, his return to France (1846), a visit to England and meetings with Fanny and Henry Broadwood (1847), the 1848 revolution in Paris, his decision to study painting with Eugène Bléry, the transformation of Paris, exhibitions, his series of Parisian views, commissions, his illnesses and internment at the asylum at Charenton St Maurice (1858-59), his relations with his father and friends, and his thoughts of emigrating to New Zealand (1862).

Within the chronological sequence of letters are a few from relatives and friends of Meryon: Antoine-Edouard Foley, Mme Blouin, Fanny Broadwood, Gustave Salicis and Charles Lewis Meryon's principal Parisian correspondent, M. Miranda. The letters of Broadwood and Miranda are in English. The letters from 1863-68 describe visits to Meryon, his health, living conditions and companions, his financial difficulties, his re-admission to Charenton (1866) and his death. There are also copies of a few letters of Charles Lewis Meryon. The 1867-68 letters are not numbered.

#### **Add. MS 37016**

Typescript copies of two letters (1892) from Lewis Meryon to Frederick Wedmore, the author of *Meryon and Meryon's Paris* (1879). (ff. 1-4)

English translations of letters (nos. 195-216) from Charles Meryon and other correspondents to Charles Lewis Meryon, 1863-66. Meryon contemplated using the letters as a basis for a novel and he assigned fictitious names to the writers, such as Clarence D'Anvers (Charles Meryon) and Mrs Dashwood (Fanny Broadwood). There is also an index to the letters. (ff. 5-68)

Fragments of a diary kept by Charles Lewis Meryon in England and France, June-Oct. 1818. One entry refers to the birth of Fanny Lowther, Charles Meryon's half-sister. (ff. 69-72)

Official papers, including certificates of the birth, baptism and naval service of Meryon, passports, and a letter from the Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies, 1821-62. (ff. 73-84)

'Annotations de la carte', comprising brief hydrographical notes in New Zealand waters, 1846. (ff. 85-87)

Notes and sketches of skies and birds in the South Seas and also Wallis Island word lists, c. 1842-46. (ff. 88-100)

Sketches of vessels in the South Seas and notes, c. 1842-46. (ff. 101-25)

'Agenda' notes written by Meryon in his last years. (ff. 126-81)

The papers include a cutting from the *St James Gazette* (17 July 1891) and two Christies' catalogues of sales of engravings and etchings by Meryon (26 Nov. 1890, 17 July 1891). (ff. 182-203)