

John and Jane Cranch of Kingsbridge. The role of natural history in a Georgian domestic crisis

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Exeter-born John Cranch (1785–1816) is commemorated in the zoological literature for his ability as an assiduous biologist and to acknowledge his role as the ‘Collector of Objects of Natural History’ on an ill-fated expedition to the River Congo in Africa in 1816. His personal development from humble beginnings in Exeter and as a young shoemaker in Kingsbridge, to obsessive collector, systematist and Associate of the Linnean Society of London is charted. In 1809, he married Jane, his first cousin, who was an articulate and intelligent young woman. Her concerns about her husband’s behaviour were described in detail in the pages of a popular periodical and led to a dramatic interruption to John’s early ambitions.

JOHN CRANCH (1785–1816) – THE MAKING OF ‘A REMARKABLE EXONIAN’

John Cranch died at the age of 31, almost certainly of Yellow Fever, on September 4th 1816 and was buried in Embomma (now Boma), a city and port on the Congo River estuary and one of the main trading centres and slave markets in Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ His participation as the ‘Collector of Objects of Natural History’² on an ill-fated expedition funded by the British Government to chart the Congo River and discover its source and natural assets has been well documented (Anonymous, 1818; Baring-Gould, 1925, pp. 35–49;³ Monod, 1970) and his name is commemorated by taxonomic attachment to a zoological family (Cranchiidae), one subfamily (Cranchiinae), four genera and at least 23 species and sub-species (Table 1; Fig. 1). Although he died and

was buried many miles from Exeter, John's death was included on a headstone situated in the Exeter Dissenters' Graveyard in Magdalen Street, Exeter, along with his parents and a sibling who died in infancy (Fig. 2).

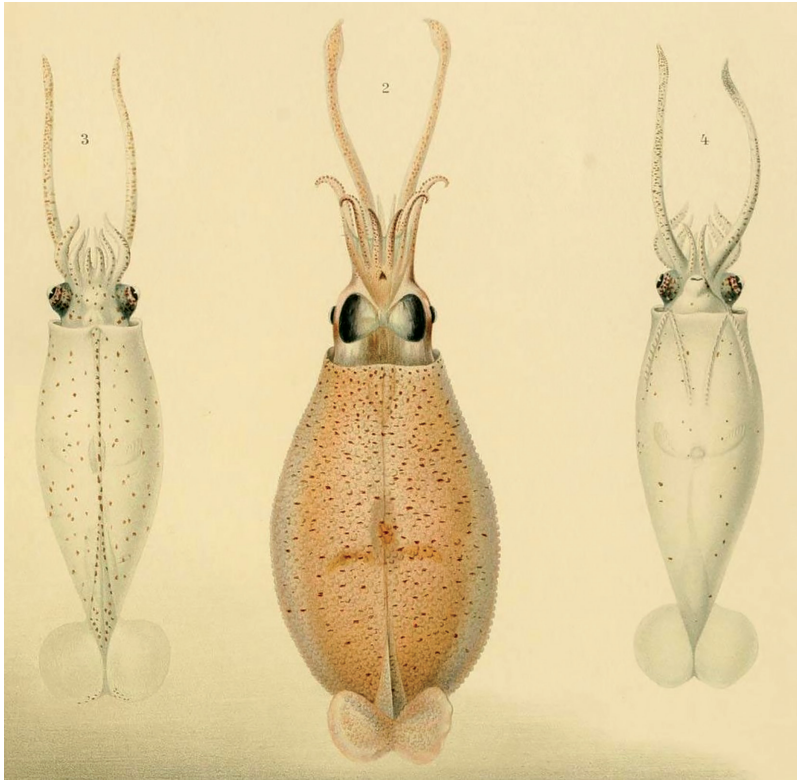


Figure 1. *Cranch's squids*. *Cranchia scabra* (2, centre) and *Liocranchia valdiviae* (3 & 4) from Chun (1910).

John Cranch was born in Exeter, on 16 March 1785 to Jane[I] (née Bowring), wife of Richard Cranch who was described as a journeyman Fuller (Bowring, 1872), but who was listed in 1791 as being a cheesemonger in Broad Gate⁴. Jane[I] was the eldest of four children born to Margaret (née Hutchings), wife of John Bowring (1736–1805), the grandfather of Sir John Bowring (1792–1872).

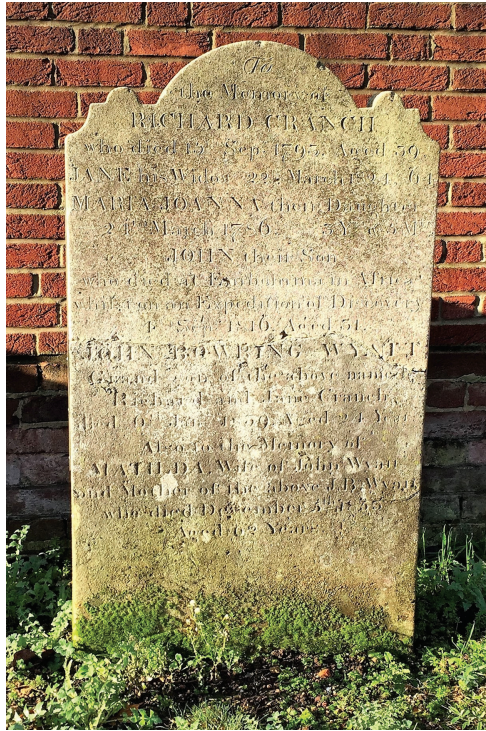


Figure 2. Headstone in the Exeter Dissenters' Graveyard commemorating the Cranch family. © Ian M. Varndell, 2018.

John Bowring's will, dated 30th September 1796, bequeathed two hundred pounds to each of his four children plus the fixtures from hosiery and cheese shops in Exeter to be split amongst his three daughters, named as Jane Cranch, Betty Drewe and Ann Bowring. Mr Bowring died in May 1805, but it appears that his will was not executed in the nineteen years after his death, '5 July 1824. Administration with Will annexed to Charles Bowring the son Margaret Bowring having survived the Testator but failed to take on the execution of the Will'.⁵ No explanation for the failure to carry out the instructions in Bowring's will has come to light as yet.

Little is known about Jane[II]'s life with Richard, except that they worshipped at the Bow Presbyterian Meeting House in Exeter, and that Richard died on 15th September 1793, aged 39, when

their son (John) was eight and daughters Charlotte (about 6)⁶ and Matilda was just two years old. In 1796, a Mrs Cranch was listed as a cheesemonger with an address in Butcher-row, Exeter⁷, and this is likely to have been Jane[I]. Butcher-row was a narrow street in the West Quarter of Exeter, running parallel to Fore Street and separated from it by the Corn Market, where:

‘... the knights of the steel reside in a kind of community among themselves, slaughter their cattle and expose their meat to sale ... The slaughtering of cattle, with the accumulation of dung, blood &c. thrown in heaps behind the houses, makes the Butchers-row a noisome place in the summer..’ (Jenkins, 1806).

Clearly, Butcher-row was not a pleasant place to carry out a trade and this might be the reason that an un-named author, but widely acknowledged to be Sir John Barrow⁸, wrote in 1818:

‘... his (John Cranch’s) parents were in an inferior rank of life ... his mother, being unable to provide for all her family, was obliged to resign her son to the care of an uncle, who lived at Kingsbridge’ (Anonymous, 1818; Fleming, 2001).

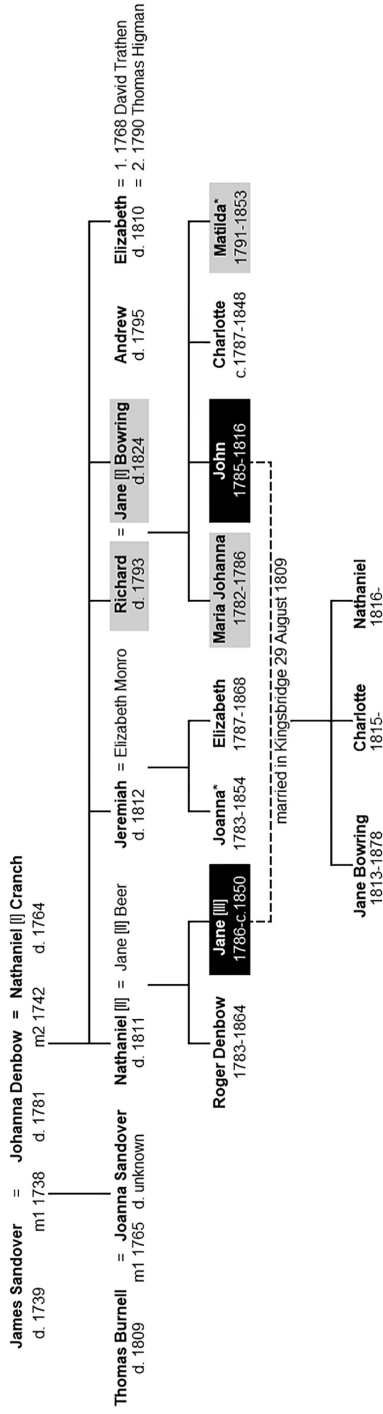
It seems that her eldest daughter, Charlotte, was also placed with another family member in Kingsbridge.⁶

Sir John Bowring gave a talk to the Devonshire Association a few months before his death in 1872 and commended John Cranch as being a ‘remarkable Exonian’, but did not indicate first-hand knowledge of him although they were first cousins. He wrote:

‘Being left an orphan⁹, he was bred by an uncle to the humble trade of a shoemaker ...’ (Bowring, 1872).

Richard Cranch had three brothers (Fig. 3), two of whom lived in Kingsbridge, one of whom, Andrew, was a shoemaker and it is recorded that John was apprenticed into that trade from about the age of fourteen¹⁰ although no indenture documents have been located. However, Andrew died in 1795, so it seems highly likely that John would have been apprenticed to Thomas Burnell, the husband of Richard’s half sister, Joanna (Fig. 3). Thomas was a shoemaker (cordwainer) living in Kingsbridge who was, ‘worth five thousand pounds’ according to Abigail Adams, wife of American

The Cranch family of Kingsbridge and Exeter



Key

John and Jane Cranch, the main subjects of this article, are depicted in black boxes.

Grey boxes indicate that the person was buried in the Exeter Dissenters' Graveyard.

Asterisks (*) indicate that the person was married and had children, but details have been omitted.

Figure 3. The Cranch family tree.

Congressman John Adams, who dined with the Burnells during their visit to Devon in 1787 (Taylor *et al.*, 2007).¹¹

John's eldest uncle was Nathaniel[II], a successful blacksmith¹², who with his wife Jane[II] (née Beer) had one son, Roger Denbow Cranch (born 1783), and a daughter, Jane[III] (born 1786). Cousins John and Jane[III] became lovers some time after 1804 (*vide infra*).

There are several references to John Cranch being an avid, and self-taught, collector of insects and other animals during his apprenticeship.

‘Notwithstanding the extreme disadvantages of his situation, ... his natural genius soon began to display itself; and in the little leisure which was allowed him, and by the imperfect aid of the few books to which he had access, he drew up correct and classical descriptions of all the insects which he could procure in the neighbourhood of his residence. By his own unaided exertions he even acquired a knowledge of the Latin and French languages, so that he was able to understand the descriptions of the zoological writers which were written in them, and to employ them himself in the description of the objects of natural history. Nor was his attention confined to this study; he seems to have grasped at every kind of knowledge, how much so ever it might appear, at first view, beyond his reach ...’ (Anonymous, 1818).

At the conclusion of his apprenticeship he went to London:

‘... with an idea, although probably vague and undefined, of renouncing his trade and devoting himself to a life of science’.¹³

Sir John Barrow, in his introduction to Tuckey’s Narrative added:

‘Every museum, auction room, and book stall, every object to which his attention was called, he visited with a rapid and unsatiable curiosity; gleaning information wherever it was to be had, and treasuring it with systematic care’.¹⁴

Barrow also remarked that, ‘The manners and morals of his fellow workmen were ill suited to his feelings and pursuits; and served only to encrease [sic] his dislike for the profession to which he had been doomed’. Notwithstanding, when John and Jane[III] were married, John was referred to as a cordwainer (shoemaker) both on an oath dated 8th April 1808 and in the Kingsbridge marriage register, on 29th August 1809.¹⁵

Although John was remembered fondly by several correspondents,

‘He was a man of much industry, quick discernment, and active mind: of strict integrity and obliging disposition, beloved and respected by all his neighbours’ (Hawkins, 1819), and ‘... if I may judge from external appearances, he was an affectionate husband and father, a sincere friend, a pious, honest, and good man’¹⁶

he clearly demonstrated a temperamental streak. In April 1810, a public apology was placed in the *Exeter Flying Post* by a ‘John Cranch of Kingsbridge’ for trespassing into the lodging of Philip Groves, a Serjeant in the South Devon Militia,

‘... with a malicious suspicion of his having stolen several Fowls from my father, Nathaniel Cranch, and in consequence thereof, a report has been circulated extremely prejudicial to the credit of the said Philip Groves’.¹⁷

His temperament was also alluded to by Professor Christian Smith, botanist to the ill-fated Congo expedition, who remarked, without elaboration, on or around April 3rd 1816:

‘Cranch, I fear, by his absurd conduct, will diminish the liberality of the Captain towards us. He is like a pointed arrow to the company’.¹⁸

Later in the same article, Smith wrote:

‘Poor Cranch is almost too much the object of jest’

and on the 3rd August 1816 Professor Smith recorded in his journal that he was,

‘... ordered on board the Congo, in consequence of some misunderstanding between Tudor and Cranch, relating to the ammunition belonging to the latter, and of some irregularity which had taken place with respect to the boats.’¹⁹

It seems that John Cranch had aspirations beyond life as a Westcountry shoemaker. He was clearly intelligent and inquisitive, despite having a poor formal education; and was clearly obsessive, possibly intense and even bumptious. His sojourn in London opened his eyes to science, to collecting and to systematics and to a lifestyle that was then beyond his means.

NATURAL HISTORY REPORTS IN *THE WEEKLY ENTERTAINER*

In 1811 John Cranch published five brief reports on topics of natural history in a periodical named *The Weekly Entertainer*.²⁰ The articles, each with the sign-off “J.C. Kingsbridge”, were entitled:

- Natural history of the large Pinna. No. 1. Pinna ingens. Published March 4, 1811.
- No. 2. Natural history of the Jessamine Moth. Published March 11, 1811.²¹
- No. 3. Natural history of the Pea Crab. Published April 29, 1811.²²
- No. 4. The natural history of the Hermit Crab. Published May 13, 1811.²²
- No. 5. Natural history of Solen. Siliqua. Published May 20, 1811.²²

It is odd that all five reports were published within a period of ten weeks, and that no others have come to light. Whether they represented several years work or were simply the result of a much shorter period of collecting and observation, is unknown. In *No. 2. Natural history of the Jessamine Moth*, he referred to having been given a caterpillar, ‘... in the month of September ...’ and then reported that the adult moth emerged in, ‘... the September following ...’, so he must have been known by others to have had an interest in natural history before September 1809. In the same report he comments that:

‘... we suspect from several years attention to this delightful branch of natural history ...’

rather than using “I” which he uses elsewhere in the text, the implication being that he was collaborating with other, perhaps more experienced, field naturalists.

Whilst the observations reported by “J.C.” are interesting and descriptive, they are very much the work of an amateur naturalist – written for the interest of a general reader in a weekly magazine; there is little evidence of detailed research or discovery. As will be seen in the next section, John was not the only member of the family to become a correspondent in the pages of the *Weekly Entertainer*.

DOMESTIC DISHARMONY IN THE WEEKLY ENTERTAINER

It appears that John's collecting habits did not have early support from his wife. The January 28th 1811 issue of *The Weekly Entertainer* contains an intriguing letter, signed by a "Jane Curios".

The History of a Virtuoso

I am the daughter of a respectable tradesman, and when about 18 years of age, formed a connection with a youth who bid fair to make a good figure in life. By the advice of friends, my lover went to London for improvement in his profession;²³ during his residence in the metropolis he became acquainted with a few characters, known as virtuoso's²⁴, and being of their turn of mind. He quickly fell into those men's unwarrantable extravagances, in making purchases of no real value, at exorbitant prices. The passion of becoming a collector having gotten possession, poverty followed, and the sum of one hundred pounds²⁵, which he carried with him, was easily transferred into a cabinet of ancient coins and medals.

Having expended all his money in a pursuit of this kind, he found himself under the painful necessity of retrenching from necessary expenditures, to keep alive that insatiable desire he had kindled within him of adding to his collection; and he has since assured me, the purchase of a Roman coin has more than once deprived him of his dinner at a cook's shop.²⁶

Having received from a friend some intimations of his proceedings, I wrote, and assured him of my indignation at his conduct, and refused further intercourse with him, unless he entirely gave up all pursuits of that kind. Acting as most men do in love, he readily acquiesced with my wishes, and returned me for answer, as soon as he had disposed of his cabinet (which, he doubted not, could be done to his advantage), he would immediately come down into the country. He accordingly made private application to those persons who had assured him of its great value, but found, to his disappointment, not a single purchaser. It determined him, however, to sell all at a public auction, the result of which was productive of other mortifications, as Mr. Hammer, the auctioneer, made but ten guineas of cabinet and all.

With a sum just sufficient to bring him home, he returned in a few days to his native place. An opportunity soon after offering, he commenced business for himself, and we were married.²⁷ We led a very

happy life the first matrimonial year; my husband was attentive to his trade, it increased, and we had the prospect before us of doing well in the world. While our sun of prosperity was thus arising, a friend one day called and requested we would go with him to see a collection of natural curiosities, brought to the town. Among a number of curious things was a cabinet of British insects²⁸; those struck my husband's fancy much, and I have since been inclined to think that Satan, aiming to destroy our happiness, entered that night into my partner's brain, in the form of a butterfly, or some other insect, for never was a man more changed since that time.

We all came home well pleased with what we had seen, but Mr. Curios (my husband) extolled the insects above all other things, and assured me he would endeavour to form a collection on a similar plan. Not then foreseeing the consequence, I dissented not from his wishes; he shortly after purchased a cabinet, and commenced fly catcher; the ill effects of this hobby soon began to appear, and portions of the day, which before used to be assiduously employed in business, were now devoted to butterfly-catching, caterpillar-hunting, or chrysalis digging, the result of which was a decline of trade ... and our shop, from the name of the most punctual, degenerated into the most negligent in the town.

At the same time my house within underwent a strange metamorphosis, shelves and drawers were emptied of useful furniture, and adorned with boxes of living caterpillars, chrysalis's, or corked boards, filled with a thousand poor crucified captives, left there to perish in torture. A valuable green veil of my grandmother's was, during my absence a few days from home, transformed into a fly-net, and a large remnant of fine India muslin underwent the same fate.

For the first two years I could not keep a servant more than a month, and some hardly a day at a time; some blunder or other on my husband's insects was a sure presage of a discharge. An old servant, who had lived twenty years at a place, the first morning she came with us, broke in pieces a purple emperor, (pap. iris); she was openly insulted, and for such incivility made Mr. C_____ pay damages.

Besides daily evils which arose from pursuits of this nature, he was in the habit of making nocturnal peregrinations to increase his stock. It was usual of him in the summer months to go two or three miles in the dusk of evening, and remain 'till midnight in the woods, to catch moths.²⁹ Some of these adventures were likely to have given us serious

trouble; once in particular, being insect hunting near where a robbery was attempted, the thieves were pursued into the wood he was then in; the pursuers following, apprehended him as a suspicious person, took him into custody, and the next day brought him before a justice. The evidence against him was strongly suspicious, but on his producing to the magistrate his nets, traps, and a large pincushion, filled with pins (which he always carries with him), and relating fully the objects he was in pursuit of, he was judged by all parties *insane*, and was conducted home under a proper escort.

This had one desired effect of curing him of nightly rambles, but ultimately made way for a worse remedy than the disease, for being in some measure from this accident debarred catching insects at home, he wrote letters to his acquaintance in London, requesting them to purchase for him, at the shops which vend such articles, as many different species as they could procure. Those agents so well executed his commands, that in about six months after, a large box arrived, the contents of which cost fifty pounds.³⁰ With that pleasure which a miser looks over his useless golden hoard, so did Mr. Curios view and re-view this entymological [sic] treasure, and with the greatest composure assured me the bill of costs was moderate. I was thunderstruck with astonishment, and have as a curious truth, set down the prices of three of the insects inclosed.

1. A swallow-tail butterfly, (pap. machaon) one pound.
2. A scarce swallow-tail butterfly; (pap. pedalarisus) two guineas, marked very cheap.
3. A Cliefden nonpareil moth, (phal. fraxini) three pounds.

Besides various others, from twenty shillings to twenty pence each.

Knowing it was impossible for persons in moderate circumstances to hold long at this rate, I endeavoured to reclaim him by persuasion and entreaty, but found my arguments before and after marriage, produce very different effects; and as he still appears resolute to continue those pursuits, which I am fully persuaded will (if not soon prevented) totally ruin us, I am under this last necessity of stating my case publicly, and beg the advice of some of your ingenious correspondents, how to extricate, or at least to alleviate my present troubles; and, at the same time, through the channel of your weekly publication (which

my husband always reads), to assure him, that although I have hitherto borne all with Job-like patience, he shall find, if his practices continue after this public notice, the inventive genius of an enraged woman more than a match for all the butterflies and insects in the universe.

I remain,
Your obedient humble servant,
In distress,
JANE CURIOS

Understandably, it is highly likely that “Curios” was used by the writer as a *nom-de-plume* to protect her real identity, notably because in paragraph seven she refers to “Mr. C_____”, rather than using ‘Curios’ or even ‘Cranch’.³¹

Just two weeks later, a response to Jane’s plea appeared in *The Weekly Entertainer*.

Over my pipe this evening I have read the progress of Mr. Curios’s malady, and as you wish for advice upon the subject, I shall freely give it, as it may be the means of extricating you from the troubles you mention. In the first place burn, or otherwise destroy, (but without Mr. Curios’s immediate knowledge) all those butterflies, swallow-tail butterflies, insects, &c. &c. After this prudent step is taken, you will naturally experience a storm, for Mr. C. expressing his irreparable loss, and your negligence, &c. Take no notice of this ‘till a calm commences, though it be a sullen one, but then point out to him the impropriety of grieving over a few dead insects; ask him if the whole, even with their cases, would pay any of your bills, which you have received during his absence from different tradesmen. Then, ... point out the absurdity of such a pursuit to a person in his situation of life, and the ruin that must inevitably ensue. If the mode which I have pointed out should unfortunately be without effect, the best advice I can give is to advise Mrs. C. to get some person to procure for Mr. Curios a situation in St. Luke’s Hospital, London, where, probably, the discipline of the place may expel the mania with which Mr. C. seems particularly affected.³²

Your obedient servant,
NEMO³³

Surprisingly, Jane Curios now signing off as writing from *Kingsbridge*, continued the tale with a second letter submitted to the *Weekly Entertainer* on March 4th 1811, but not published until the 25th of that month.³⁴

Continuation of the History of a Virtuosi

As I found admission in your work for my letter on the misery attendant on those who follow improper pursuits, I flatter myself you will admit this as a conclusion to that story.

When Mr Curios had read my paper, inserted January 28, addressing himself to me, he said he disapproved communicating such subjects publicly, and wondered at the presumption of a woman who only understood how to keep a shop, or to make a pudding; he wondered at her presumption in thus boldly attacking a man of science and understanding, and that if my intellectual powers were not less than the generality of womankind, he would undertake to make a convert of me in a month, alledging [sic] the wisest man had followed pursuits similar to his; that old Father Adam, and Solomon, and others recorded in the Bible, not to mention numerous heathen philosophers, had been inspectors and lovers of natural history; that men gathered knowledge from the ant, cloathing [sic] from the silk-worm, the art of making ships from the nautilus³⁵; that for many of the richest dyes we were indebted to the researches of the entomologist, and for useful substances in the materia medica we were particularly beholding to the insect, the despised insect creation.

I endeavoured to vindicate my letter by insisting on the impossibility of our deriving any real good from his pursuits, and declared the probability of those bad consequences which would result from it, if he still persisted; adding it would be difficult for him to prove any had obtained riches by such pursuits. To this he briefly answered, happiness is the only true riches, and the road to it was nature; that as his circumstances were not very extensive, he had chosen that part of nature which abounded with the greatest variety, and was attainable at the least expence [sic]; and positively assured me, as long as there was a British insect known which he had not in his collection, he would use his utmost endeavours to procure it, and said he set me, and my designs to destroy his enjoyments, at defiance.

The manner in which he finished this discourse gave me no reason to expect reformation from what I had advanced, and I had now only to wait

for advice from your correspondents on the subject, to put some scheme or other in practice to ameliorate my situation; but in order to prevent his suspicions, I determined on examining your publication before it came under his notice, with a view to secrete any useful information, until I had put the same in practice. The paper written by friend Nemo, and inserted February 11, on deliberate consideration (although the most hazardous), yet at the same time offered the most effectual means of eradicating my husband's folly. I accordingly mislaid that number, and a few days after Mr Curios had a particular affair to settle at Exeter, which we expected would detain him some days from home. This was a favourable opportunity, and I determined on the destruction of the whole cabinet. I communicated my intentions to a female servant, whose fidelity and support I assured myself of, and who often said she wished such foolish nonsense did not trouble her master's brain. The maid was startled at my proposition, but at length yielded to my wishes, and declared she would stand by me, and assist, be the consequences what they might.

Having thus an auxiliary in my determined engagement, we found no difficulty in procuring the key of the entomological garrison, and having lighted a good fire, we prepared to proceed to a genuine demolition; and here it is but justice to our fame to assert, that whatever noise heroes or heroines have made in the world – the honours that were attained by him who, subduing the world, wept for others to conquer – or the bloody laurels of a Caesar, obtained by the destruction of a million of the human species – yet not one of these heroes destroyed in many years more royal personages than we did that night; for in less than two hours, twelve emperors and empresses, twenty kings and queens, numerous dukes and duchesses, and 3000 personages of lesser rank, with a number of great and little tigers, and other beasts of fiercer names, were committed to the flames. With sacrilegious hands we seized on six seraphims, whose heavenly titles could not preserve them in their fiery trial; out of pity to the present Spanish royalists, we reserved a king and queen of Spain, which if wanted are hereafter at the service of the Dons. There was also rescued at the same time a Duke of Bourbon in chrysalis, and which is expected to come forth in May, and is at the service of another part of the continent.

Having completed our affair without any loss on our side, we replaced all the drawers in their proper places, locked the cabinet, and confined ourselves to the protection of providence. As a thief who has

committed a robbery feels at times a repugnance of conscience, or a murderer whose guilt makes him dread the consequence of the law, so with us, after we had destroyed what was impossible for us again to replace, did our minds agitate with fear on the consequences.

The insects now destroyed, a thought arose in the mind of Susanna, (my maid) which she instantly communicated, of destroying the cabinet also, affirming it was as well to “be hung for a sheep as a lamb,” and unless the nest was totally demolished, there was much danger that my husband would again, after some time, attempt to re-establish a new collection. This counsel I agreed to, and we began the work of destruction afresh, with as much expedition as possible. We soon consigned many of the drawers to the flames, and the whole cabinet, in a short time, by piecemeal, was removed to the fire-side for conflagration. A rattle at the door, however, startled us, and the well-known voice of an unwelcome, unexpected visitor, (Mr Curios) saluted our ears. In this dilemma what was to be done? to make good our ground was impossible, to retreat was next to it. Could a Hogarth or a Flaxman have then seen us, what inimitable figures of surprise and fear should we have presented! Silence was the only resource we could have, and we submitted ourselves (like the old Roman senators when surprised by the barbarians) to dumb, passive subjection, and the will of fate.

After repeated calls, to which we returned no answer, Mr. Curios ascended the staircase, came to the door, and found it fastened. Seeing a light in the room, and receiving no answer, various suspicions arose in his mind, and with a loud voice he said, if the door was not immediately opened, he would force it. A dead silence ensued, and the next minute informed us he was carrying his threats into execution. “Lord deliver us!” exclaimed my servant as he burst the door. A dreadful frown on his countenance expressed his displeasure at the manner in which we had treated him, in not obeying his summons to let him in; but as he was going to demand explanation, a glance from his eye discovered his cabinet, his beloved cabinet, in flames. Like a madman in one of his maddest fits, he sighed, he roared, jumped, cursed, and swore alternately, and sometimes all together, and grasping a horsewhip he held in his hand, flew with vengeance in his eyes to attack me and my servant, and inflicted such a severe punishment on us both as we shall (I fear) have reason to remember as long as we live.

Having satiated himself with revenge on us in a corporeal way as far (and by the bye farther) so as not to endanger our lives, he left us both panting for life on the floor; he then flew round and round the room, breaking and destroying every thing that came in his way; and seizing the key of my china closet, demolished in an instant all my own and all the family china that had descended to me from my mother's side for generations, swearing that not a cup or a dish, a plate or a looking-glass should ever more be brought into his house; that as out of malice and ignorance I had destroyed what was to him irreparable, his vengeance should pursue all *my* fancied treasures. It was useless, and in fact the state of debility in which he had left us, rendered it impossible to say or do any thing in the present crisis. He then ran roaring all over the house, "Oh my cabinet, my cabinet!" d-----g me and the maid at intervals, swearing he was the most unfortunate, the most unhappy of all mankind.

Having by these means exercised his passion for near an hour, he rushed from the house in a furious fit of anger, denouncing vengeance on us at his departure. We remained some time in fearful suspence [sic], dreading his return, but on hearing no one in the house but ourselves, I began to endeavour to recover, and tried to rouse my fellow-sufferer from that state of lethargy in which she lay, and by means of a little reviving cordial at hand, to my unspeakable joy, succeeded. The poor girl had equally felt with myself the strength of her master's arm, but having each of us taken some spirits for refreshment after the battle, we revived. The maid declared she so much dreaded his return, that even death could not frighten her more. I supported her with all the consolation I was master of, and assured her, the brunt of the action being over, we must wait for time and patience to establish the rest; that every good I could hereafter do her, to compensate for present suffering, I would gladly fulfil.

We passed the remainder of the night in fearful suspence [sic], nor could obtain any news of Mr Curios until the afternoon of the following day, when information was brought us that he was at Will Squander's, the sign of the Prodigal, that he had been drunk all night, and was now incapable of coming home without help. In the evening, however, of the day, he staggered home in sullen silence, casting many a wicked look at us; not a syllable has been spoken to him since his return, nor has he asked a question; we have lived near a week in this manner, and a stranger might well suppose our's a dumb society, as all

domestic concerns are carried on by signs and motions. However, Mr. Editor, if I am afraid to address him personally, I will venture, through your Entertainer, (having stated to you the result of our proceedings hitherto) to communicate my mind to him in the following letter:-

“Mr. Curios,

“Necessity compelled me to have recourse to a desperate, yet the only effectual remedy that remained to prevent impending ruin from you, myself, and family, in the destruction of your insects and cabinet. I am still emboldened to inform you (notwithstanding the severe chastisement you inflicted on us) it is my determination to resist any attempts to re-establish a collection of that or any other kind; at the same time, with due submission to every reasonable pursuit, and with a most ardent desire to increase your domestic happiness, and to assist jointly with yourself, to establish our characters as respectable persons, which I am convinced is yet in our power to attain.

“I subscribe myself.

“Your affectionate wife,

“JANE CURIOS.”

Kingsbridge, March 4, 1811.

“P.S. The sacrifice of all my china I consider as nothing, provided you return to the path of duty, of our’s, and your own real interest.

JOHN CRANCH – THE COLLECTOR OF OBJECTS OF NATURAL HISTORY

Jane’s letters are a remarkable record of domestic disharmony in early nineteenth-century Devon brought about by her husband’s obsessive and profligate collecting. However, in spite of Jane’s warnings (and actions), it seems that John continued his passion for natural history and yet their marriage persisted. Indeed, it might have been as a direct result of Jane’s involvement that John was stimulated to publish his work. Jane’s second letter, reporting the conflagration and its violent aftermath, was dated 4th March 1811, and appears to have been written at least a few days after the event. John’s first report, on *Pinna ingens*, was published on that same day. Perhaps John felt that by publishing reports of his observations it would establish him as the ‘man of science and understanding’ he clearly wanted his wife and others to acknowledge.

Jane’s father died early in 1811 and left her £200 together with

income from properties and other investments.³⁶ In the previous year Jane and John each inherited £50 from their aunt, Elizabeth Higman, so within a few months their financial situation had improved significantly.³⁷ Later reports show that John returned to accumulating and classifying a whole range of land and marine animals and Jane must have resigned herself to his extramural activities because in September 1813, their first child, Jane Bowring Cranch, was born.

Sir John Barrow recorded that he had received a letter from Dr William Elford Leach (Harrison and Smith, 2008) which, ‘..bears ample and honourable testimony..’ to the qualities of John Cranch as a natural historian. Leach continued:

‘In 1814, Mr Montagu and myself, together with Mr C. Prideaux, visited Mr. Cranch, for the purpose of seeing his museum. We were all astonished at the magnitude of his collection of shells, crustacea, insects, birds &c. collected entirely by himself, and still more so with the accuracy of their classification ... Soon after this meeting I was appointed to the British Museum where Mr. Cranch applied to me to endeavour to obtain for him some situation in that institution ...’³⁸

As no vacancy existed, Leach proposed that Cranch should be employed by him to,

‘... investigate the coasts of Devon and Cornwall, for marine productions ...’

and promised to recommend him,

‘... to the first situation that might occur, to enable (Cranch) to attain the object of his ambition’.

At the beginning of 1814, at the age of 28, John became an Associate of the Linnean Society.³⁹ Four other Kingsbridge-based naturalists held Fellowships of the Linnean Society (FLS) at that time. These were George Montagu (FLS, 1795), Rev’d. Benjamin Kerr-Vaughan (FLS, 1807), W. E. Leach (FLS, 1809) and Charles Prideaux (FLS, 1813), so this area of South Devon was well endowed with talented biologists. John Cranch’s Certificate of Recommendation for membership lists Leach, John Harris from Exeter⁴⁰ and William Bullock⁴¹, as supporters of his application, and the document, seemingly in Leach’s handwriting, was dated 25th

October 1813.⁴² Leach and Prideaux had known George Montagu⁴³ for some years.

Much has been written about Montagu's contributions to natural history (Cleevely, 1978; Pratt, 2016; Waterhouse, 2013) and that his home, Knowle House in Kingsbridge, had:

‘... the air of a menagerie as well as a museum ...’ (Harrison and Smith, 2008, p. 87).

As Montagu occasionally suffered from gout his servant, Mr Gibbs, is known to have assisted with foraging, general collecting and taxidermy:⁴⁴

‘... I sent Gibbs on the last change of the moon, to the bed (of *Pinna ingens*) which is only bare at the lowest spring tides ...’ (Cleevely, 1978, p. 461).

As previously mentioned, Cranch's first article in *The Weekly Entertainer* described *Pinna ingens*, so John Cranch might have benefitted from Montagu's (or Gibbs') experience and expertise in locating and collecting these bivalve molluscs. Cranch's proposal for membership to the Linnean Society described him as, ‘... (being) well versed in the Testacea and Crustacea of Britain, and having a general knowledge of the Molusca [sic] and Birds of this country ...’ – the principal interests of Montagu and Leach. Fox (1874, p. 65) wrote that Col. Montagu particularly patronised John Cranch, and it is likely that Montagu brought him to Leach's attention.

In April 1815 a steamship capable of exploring the Congo River was ordered to be built by Lord Melville. It was laid down in October 1815 and launched as H.M.S. *Congo* in January 1816, although the engine had to be removed and the ship schooner-rigged with sail before it was considered seaworthy.¹

Jane and John's second child, Charlotte, was born on 11th June 1815 in Kingsbridge, and Jane was expecting their third child, Nathaniel, when John was approached by Leach to join the expedition to Africa. Leach must have convinced the authorities, including the eminent naturalist Sir Joseph Banks, to invite Cranch to join the expedition. It was reported that Cranch accepted:

‘... not without some painful struggles to his feelings, ...in consequence of a presentiment that he should never return’ (Anonymous, 1818).



Figure 4. Red-necked Spurfowl (*Pternistis afer cranchii*).⁴⁵
© Alamy Stock photo.

H.M.S. *Congo* finally left England on 19th March 1816 and the journey was documented by the Captain and Mr Smith the botanist.¹ John died just two months after the birth of the son he never saw, who was named Nathaniel after John's uncle and father-in-law by his young widow.

Leach admitted that he had lost, '... a true and sincere friend and a faithful servant' (Leach, 1852). Professor Sir Eric Smith in his Presidential Address to the Devonshire Association in 1980 stated:

'(Leach) was evidently a man of extreme sensitivity and kindness. When he felt deeply about some event, as on the death of his friend John Cranch, he brooded on it to the extent of naming 27 of the new species that Cranch had collected during his ill-fated voyage on the Zaire (Congo) river after him' (Smith, E., 1980; Fig. 4).

The fact that John Cranch's name lives on in the zoological literature is a fitting tribute to a 'remarkable Exonian' whose exploits as a natural historian might easily have ended in flames!

Table 1. List of species commemorating John Cranch

Genus, species, (Authority, year)	Type
<i>Achaeus cranchii</i> (Leach, 1817)	Cranch's Spider Crab
<i>Chromalizus fragrans cranchii</i> (White, 1853)	Beetle
<i>Chrysichthys cranchii</i> (Leach, 1818)	Fish (Kokuni)
<i>Cirolana cranchi</i> (Leach, 1818)	Isopod
<i>Cranchia scabra</i> (Leach, 1817)	Cephalopod
<i>Ebalia cranchii</i> (Leach, 1817)	Cranch's Nut Crab
<i>Enigmocranchia nipponica</i> (Kubodera & Okutani, 2014)	Cephalopod
<i>Eualus cranchii</i> (Leach, 1817)	Crab
<i>Helicocranchia joubini</i> (Voss, 1962)	Cephalopod
<i>Helicocranchia papillata</i> (Voss, 1960)	Cephalopod
<i>Helicocranchia pfefferi</i> (Massy, 1907)	Cephalopod
<i>Hemiarthrus cranchii</i> (Giard & Bonnier, 1890) §	Isopod
<i>Liocranchia gardineri</i> (Robson, 1921) †	Cephalopod
<i>Liocranchia globula</i> (Berry, 1909)	Cephalopod
<i>Liocranchia reinhardtii</i> (Steenstrup, 1856)	Cephalopod
<i>Liocranchia valdiviae</i> (Chun, 1910)	Cephalopod
<i>Lupa cranchiana</i> (White, 1847) §	Crab
<i>Megalocranchia abyssicola</i> (Goodrich, 1896) †	Cephalopod
<i>Megalocranchia corona</i> (Berry, 1920) †	Cephalopod
<i>Megalocranchia fisheri</i> (Berry, 1909)	Cephalopod
<i>Megalocranchia maxima</i> (Pfeffer, 1884)	Cephalopod
<i>Megalocranchia oceanica</i> (Voss, 1960)	Cephalopod
<i>Pandarus cranchii</i> (Leach, 1819)	Copepod
<i>Prionorhynchus cranchianus</i> (Leach, 1830) ‡	Shrimp
<i>Pternistis afer cranchii</i> (Leach, 1818)	Red-necked Spurfowl
<i>Zygocranchia</i> (Hoyle, 1909) ‡	Cephalopod

§ *Nomen nudum*. † *Taxon inquirendum*. ‡ *Nomen dubium*.

Sources: World Register of Marine Species (www.marinespecies.org) and Global Biodiversity Information Facility (www.gbif.org). Species in **bold** are illustrated in Figs. 2 and 3.

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NOTES

- ¹ *Narrative of an Expedition to explore the River Zaire, usually called the Congo, in South Africa, in 1816, under the direction of Captain J.K. Tuckey*, R.N. Rediscovery Books, 2006. Cited below as "Tuckey's Narrative".
- ² Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and honorary member of the Linnean Society in 1815/16, wrote a 4-page document entitled, "Instructions for the Collector of Objects of Natural History on board His Majesty's Ships" (SAFE/Banks Papers/Series 88.07/FL3184387 accessed at <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/banks/>) for the holder of that role on the Congo expedition.
- ³ Lt John Hawkey was a colleague of John Cranch on the Congo expedition and his diary included later entries than in Tuckey's Narrative (*op. cit.*). Twenty-one of the fifty-six officers and men who embarked on the expedition lost their lives to fever, exhaustion and other causes.
- ⁴ *Exeter Pocket Journal*, 1791.
- ⁵ Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury PROB 11/1687/396.
- ⁶ There is only circumstantial evidence that Charlotte was the daughter of Richard and Jane Cranch. No baptism record has been found for her, whereas they have for the three other children. Thomas Burnell's will (1809) mentions, "John and Charlotte children of Richard Cranch" and Elizabeth Higman's will (1810) leaves bequests to John and Matilda, but Charlotte, "my most affectionate niece" is named as sole Executrix.
- ⁷ *Exeter Pocket Journal*, 1796.
- ⁸ Sir John Barrow was Second Secretary to the Admiralty who commissioned the Congo expedition.
- ⁹ It is clear that John was not an orphan in the modern definition of the word, but Johnson's Dictionary (1792) defined an orphan as "*a child who has lost a father or mother, or both*".
- ¹⁰ Tuckey's Narrative (*op. cit.*), page lxxii.
- ¹¹ John Adams was the first United States Minister to the United Kingdom

- (1785–1788) and served as the second President of the United States (1797–1801). The Cranch and Adams families were related by marriage.
- ¹² Nathaniel Cranch's will of 1810; DHC 818A/PO/3/b/67.
 - ¹³ Anonymous, 1818 (see References), page 326; Tuckey's Narrative (*op. cit.*), pp. lxxiii.
 - ¹⁴ Tuckey's Narrative (*op. cit.*), page lxxiii.
 - ¹⁵ Oath taken by a surrogate, 8th April 1808 (DHC DEX/7/b/1/1809/142) and extract from marriage register (South West Heritage Trust, Devon Marriages for the Year 1809, p. 20). It is possible that the oath should have been dated 1809.
 - ¹⁶ Mr Fitzmaurice, Master and Surveyor to the Congo expedition in Tuckey's Narrative (*op. cit.*), pp. lxxvii.
 - ¹⁷ *Exeter Flying Post*, 19th April 1810. By this date Nathaniel [III] was John's father-in-law.
 - ¹⁸ Tuckey's Narrative (*op. cit.*), p. 235.
 - ¹⁹ Tuckey's Narrative (*op. cit.*), p. 307.
 - ²⁰ *The Weekly Entertainer; or, agreeable and instructive repository. Containing a collection of select pieces, both in prose and verse; curious anecdotes, instructive tales, and ingenious essays on different subjects.* (J. Langdon, Sherborne), Vol. LI, 1811.
 - ²¹ The Jessamine Moth (sphinx atropos; now *Acherontia atropos* L. 1758) is the Greater Death-Head Hawk Moth. It was known as the Jessamine Moth because it feeds on jasmine nightshade (*Solanum jasminoides* – jessamine is a synonym) and other members of the Solanaceae.
 - ²² The communications were dated April 15th, 17th and 18th, respectively.
 - ²³ Jane Cranch's father was a respectable tradesman. She was 18 in 1804; John was 19 and it is known that he went to London (he commented that a stocking made from the byssal threads of the *Pinna* may be seen in the British Museum) once he had completed his apprenticeship, which would have been some time after 1806.
 - ²⁴ Wood (2010) quoted Samuel Johnson's (1751) definition of a virtuoso as, "... an amateur devoted to subjects of study remotely allied to useful knowledge" and went on to comment that, "*The consummation of the virtuoso's career, according to the Earl of Shaftesbury, was no more than a useless 'cabinet of curiosities'*". Gillen D'Arcy Wood. 2010. Introduction: virtuosophobia, p.3. In. *Romanticism and music culture in Britain 1770–1840. Virtue and virtuosity*, (Cambridge University Press). Later, in the tenth edition of Johnson's Dictionary (1792) he referred to a virtuoso as, "*A man skilled in antique or natural curiosities, studious of painting, statuary or architecture*".
 - ²⁵ This equates to around £6,900 when converted to current year values using RPI (www.measuringworth.com).

- ²⁶ This suggests that John was operating on a limited budget whilst in London, which is consistent with him being a young shop-keeper with a fledgling trade.
- ²⁷ John and Jane Cranch married on 29th August 1809. England Marriages 1538–1973 accessed at www.findmypast.co.uk, 20th July 2016.
- ²⁸ The term ‘insects’ was much broader in the early part of the nineteenth century, including members of the sub-phyla Crustacea and Hexapoda, not just the Class Insecta. Indeed, John Cranch in the *Weekly Entertainer* articles (*op. cit.*) erroneously refers to the Pea Crab (*Cancer pisum*; now *Pinnotheres pisum* L. 1767) and Hermit Crab (*Cancer Bernardus*; now *Pagurus bernhardus* L. 1758) as ‘insects’.
- ²⁹ Several authors have alluded to John Cranch’s collecting exploits, similar to those reported by Jane Curios, Jane describes the purchase of some moths, and it is established that John Cranch wrote about at least one moth (the Jessamine Hawk Moth) in *The Weekly Entertainer*, which was a magazine he clearly read.
- ³⁰ This equates to around £3,450 when converted to current year values using RPI (www.measuringworth.com).
- ³¹ The first name and initials of the writer – Jane Curios are the same as for Jane Cranch. The surname Curios was not recorded in England in 1811 (using various public domain search platforms), so it is likely to have been contrived for the purpose of publication.
- ³² St Luke’s Hospital for Lunatics was founded in London in 1751 for the treatment of incurable pauper lunatics by a group of philanthropic apothecaries and others.
- ³³ Nemo. Latin – “nobody” or “no-one”. Jules Verne gave this name to the Captain of the *Nautilus* in his book: “Vingt mille lieues sous les mers: Tour du monde sous-marin“, published in 1870, almost sixty years after the letters appeared in the *Weekly Entertainer*.
- ³⁴ *The Weekly Entertainer*, pp. 227–231.
- ³⁵ This is a prescient comment as Cranch went on to discover and describe several species of cephalopod molluscs, including glass squids and an Argonaut *Ocythoe cranchii* Leach 1817 (now classified as *Argonauta hians*, Lightfoot 1786) also known as the Brown Paper Nautilus, during his ill-fated trip to Africa.
- ³⁶ Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Collingwood Quire Numbers: 159 – 213. PROB 11, Piece 1521.
- ³⁷ Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, Collingwood Quire Numbers: 401 – 448. PROB 11, Piece 1514.
- ³⁸ Tuckey’s Narrative (*op. cit.*), page lxxiv-lxxv. Barrow states that the letter from Leach stated, “In 1814”, and yet it must have been some time the previous year as Leach was appointed to the British Museum in

1813. See Harrison, K. and Smith, E. 2008. Rifle-Green by Nature. For Cranch's collection to be described as a "museum" is indeed astonishing if it had been assembled from scratch after 1811.
- ³⁹ List of Fellows of the Linnean Society, 1805–1851 accessed at <https://archive.org/details/listoflinneansoc00linn>.
- ⁴⁰ <https://livesonline.rcseng.ac.uk/biogs/E002126b.htm>. Harris (1782–1855) was a surgeon at the Devon & Exeter Hospital, twice Sheriff of the City and County of the City of Exeter (1820 & 1827) and mayor of Exeter (1822).
- ⁴¹ Bullock's address was given as "Museum, Piccadilly". In 1812 Bullock commissioned the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly where he displayed his vast collection of objects which included items from Captain Cook's voyages. He was an astute businessman, collector and would have been an influential member of the Linnean Society at the time of Cranch's application.
- ⁴² Linnean Society of London; certificate of recommendation for Cranch, J. 1814.
- ⁴³ George Montagu (1753–1815) entered the military at the age of seventeen and ended his career as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Wiltshire Militia. Shortly before he was dismissed by court martial from the Regiment in 1799, he went to live at Knowle House in Kingsbridge with his married mistress, Elizabeth Dorville. See Waterhouse (2013).
- ⁴⁴ In Montagu's *Testacea Britannica* (1803, p. 506) he referred to Gibbs – "... whose industrious exertions for collecting, and excellent discrimination, especially of the more minute species, have tended to enrich these sheets."
- ⁴⁵ Tuckey's Narrative (*op. cit.*), Appendix IV, p. 408. The entry states, '*Perdix Cranchii*, (new species.) Cinereous-brown beneath, whitish, freckled with dark-brown; the spots on the belly elongate and inclining to ferruginous; throat naked.'

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