

The First English Anarchist?

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If Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was the first anarchist and Josiah Warren the first American anarchist who was the first English anarchist? Albert Meltzer and Max Nettlau don't share many opinions yet both proposed the same candidate, a character who doesn't even appear in the anarchist histories of Marshall, Quail and Woodcock.

Ambrose Who?

Max Nettlau rescued Ambrose Caston Cuddon (ACC) from obscurity with a 1905 *Freedom* article whilst Meltzer learned of ACC from anarchist stalwart Ella Twynan. Albert and his comrades celebrated Ambrose's importance by naming their own journal, Cuddon's *Cosmopolitan Review* [1965-67] yet contributed nothing to Nettlau's clues to Cuddon's identity other than adding a dynastic error. So who was the real A C Cuddon?

A Catholic Publisher?

Heiner Becker's editing of Nettlau's bare description of Cuddon further muddied the waters in asserting ACC's anarchism developed, "After a career as a Catholic publisher and journalist" and inaccurately referred to him as Ambrose Custon Cuddon ("A Short History of Anarchism", Freedom Press 1996). Meltzer's mistake was to identify our hero as A C Cuddon junior.

In fact, marriage and census documents reveal that, Ambrose Caston Cuddon's (1790-1879) career began as "Cabinet Maker" and ended as "Retired Upholsterer" whilst AC Cuddon junior (1820-1887) was his non-anarchic son. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography identifies a prominent London Catholic publisher and journalist named Ambrose Cuddon who flourished in the years 1822-1828 whose "date of birth and parentage are unknown". What is known is that the Catholic literature invariably appeared under an "Ambrose Cuddon" imprint whereas the "anarchist" material bears the name of "Ambrose Caston Cuddon". The 1841 census shows our man, ACC, had shifted from his birthplace (and home until at least 1820) of Bungay in Suffolk to London's Pall Mall and his occupation was then "Secretary". We learn from newspaper sources that in 1841 Ambrose Caston Cuddon senior served as Secretary of Robert Owen's "Home Colonisation Society (HCS)".

Cuddon County

"Cuddon" may seem an unfamiliar surname but it was common around Bungay and denominated a prominent Catholic County family. The ODNB suggests that AC (the Catholic publisher) originated from Suffolk and it's quite possible that ACC was a relative (Nettlau suggests a son) who moved in the 1820's to London to perform some minor role in AC's Catholic publishing enterprise. AC was a political animal, active in campaign meetings at the *Freemasons' Tavern* but ACC's political development rapidly advanced far beyond Catholic Emancipation to embrace ideas of Chartism, Socialism and Anarchy.

Political Development

Nettlau claimed, "the first Anarchist propagandist pamphlet published in England" appeared in October 1853 and accurately identified its anonymous author as ACC. Produced under the auspices of the "London Confederation of Rational Reformers", founded two months earlier by ACC, and regarded by Nettlau as, "perhaps the first English Anarchist group".

By then ACC had spent over a decade agitating within and without various radical movements before arriving at an anarchist platform. Two prominent threads in his development through the 1830's and 1840's were Owenite Socialism and Chartism. Cuddon's involvement with the former peaked with his 1841 appointment to Secretaryship of the HCS whose programme he formally advocated in a leaflet published that year; "A sound education and permanent beneficial employment cannot be given under the present competitive

arrangements of society; and the best mode of securing these benefits to the population will be by the establishment of SELF-SUPPORTING HOME COLONIES". However throughout the forties the HCS grew more centralised, less democratic and ever more dominated by Owen himself. ACC correspondingly developed an increasingly radical perception of relations between legislators, capital, labour and freedom.

Keen to promote open discussion of social and radical issues, in 1846 Cuddon was amongst a mixed group of artisans and intellectuals that established London's Whittington Club. ACC escaped the State's repressive measures of 1848 but supported those less fortunate. In July 1851 Ambrose addressed a large protest meeting at the Dog & Duck Tavern, Soho called to establish a subscription fund to support and defend imprisoned and transported "victims of the spy system of the Whig government".

Cuddon enthusiastically organised radical groups and meetings described by the press as an, "Attempted Revival of Chartism". Voted into the chair at an influential gathering at the *British Institution* in November 1851, to loud cheers Ambrose "attributed all poverty and wretchedness in this country to bad government". A few months later, at a March 1852 Soho meeting he was again voted into the chair and assured his audience that, "It was morally impossible they (Parliamentarians) would ever legislate for the benefit of the people. It was of far more importance that they should study the proper position and relative connexion of capital and labour than the speeches of ministers" (Northern Star, 6.3.1852).

The Prophet Josiah

By 1853 Ambrose Cuddon was convinced workers must dispense with all government to secure freedom, equity and justice. Between March 1852 and March 1853 Cuddon had corresponded with Josiah Warren who'd exorcised Cuddon's last vestiges of O'Brienite faith in land nationalisation with a letter explaining, "Of course with us there can be no such thing as a nation or state. There should only be the family of mankind – each individual managing his own affairs supremely and absolutely, but equitably, with his fellow man. The ownership of the soil for the sake of order and harmony, for the sake of disposing with legislation, must be absolute in the individual, guaranteed by a public sense of justice, the purchases and sales of it being conducted upon the cost principle, which remunerates only the labor in the transaction".

This "labor cost principle" was a fundamental building block of Warren's mutualist anarchism demonstrated in the practical success of his "Time Store" where goods were priced solely in terms of the amount of worker-time that went into producing them. Josiah was ideally placed to lead Ambrose from the failed dreams of Owenism, avoiding the rocks of O'Brienite nationalisation onto the sunlit uplands of practical, demonstrable anarchism. Warren was himself a former disciple of Robert Owen who'd learnt from his mistakes. As a member of Owen's 1825-7 New Harmony experiment in communalism Warren had realised the venture failed because of Owen's fixation on community at the cost of individual needs. He concluded that the suppression of the individual exacerbated rather than removed social conflict and he'd resolved to come up with a scheme that better balanced individual and communal needs.

From NRL to LCRR

Inspired and emboldened by Warren's ideas and practical demonstrations in August 1853 Ambrose Caston Cuddon led a small group of libertarian minded "private individuals of the middle and working classes" out of Bronterre O'Brien's *National Reform League* to form the *London Confederation of Rational Reformers* (LCRR). ACC and A M Dickey served as Joint Secretaries and the group's libertarian philosophy was contained in a four page "outline of principles" and explained in a detailed tract, "A Contribution Towards the Elucidation of the Science of Society", both published before the year end. It is the latter document that Nettlau identifies as, "the first Anarchist propaganda pamphlet published in England" and recognises as ACC's handiwork. Labelled "fundamentally

individualist” by Peter Ryley this LCRR statement evidences its Warrenite influence, “Liberty – *the sovereignty of the individual* – is the highest good of life, for which no artificial substitute, however ingeniously disguised, can ever be made an adequate compensation”.

Class Conscious Individualism

Cuddon’s essentially anarchist LCRR vision didn’t prompt him to embrace Utopianism but to support advanced alternatives alongside short term labour struggles. At a January 1854 “Trades Conference” organised to discuss “Strikes and Lockouts” and supposedly open to all, “Mr Cuddon of Camden Town, was of the opinion that combinations were objectionable, though necessary; and they were necessary because they were produced by a false and unjust system – the present competition system of trade” but the gathering refused to debate fundamental flaws in the existing system merely the “indiscipline” of labour for it was a “packed” gathering chaired by Lord Robert Grosvenor. As the meeting concluded, Cuddon’s joint LCRR Secretary, “Mr Dickey handed in a protest, amidst laughter and loud cries of NO from the meeting generally; which the Chairman declined to receive”.

The LCRR responded with an open letter published in the press alongside the original 3-part protest. It’s essential reading as it evidences the class conscious dimension of Cuddon’s anarchism. The LCRR protest -

1. Because the working classes seem not to be really represented at this meeting, whilst it is composed of the representatives of the master and capitalist classes, several of the speakers being members of Parliament, barristers and others, who to my own knowledge do not possess the confidence of the people who are directly inimical to their rights and interests.
2. Because the questions are cunningly deprived of all point – are a delusion; and whether carried one way or the other are equally useless or adverse to the cause of the suffering people.
3. Because it seems to me to be a suicidal act for any honest delegate to allow himself to be entrapped into a decision that hereafter may be used to prejudice the rights and interests of the working classes.

Cuddon’s “sovereignty of the individual” should be read as a primary, essential ingredient of an equitable, egalitarian anarchist society NOT a macho assertion of rampant capitalist individualism with the Devil left to take the hindmost. He aimed to revolutionise society not simply stimulate individual or communal experiments and proposed revolutionary ideas in every available forum. In July 1855 Cuddon assured a gathering at London’s Freemasons’ Tavern, “it was an absurdity to talk of ever remedying the existing evils by mere administrative reform...he had no confidence in the mercantile and monied (sic) classes, who were a new aristocracy more tyrannical than the older one”.

Modern Times

Josiah Warren recognised Cuddon as a fellow spirit and invited him to America. In 1857 Ambrose visited Warren at “Modern Times” and was much impressed by the whole enterprise. From Long Island ACC wrote, “They (the principles) are comprehensive and of universal application. They cover the whole ground of social economy, extending into all the ramifications of life...they introduce real science with all its requirements into a branch of knowledge generally abandoned to speculative reasoning or unsuspecting credulity.”

The Inherent Evils of Government

In the autumn of 1858 Cuddon composed an “Appendix” for Edmund Burke’s, “A Vindication of Natural Society” (1750) which was then republished as “The Inherent Evils of All State Governments Demonstrated”. The cover carried Burke’s bold proclamation, “In vain you

tell me that artificial Government is good, but that I fall out only with its abuse: the thing itself is the abuse!" Cuddon's appendix opens, "Although Burke, in the preceding Essay has proved that he was fully convinced of the evil consequences of political institutions (or state-craft) upon the happiness of a people, he has not suggested any mode by which such institutions could be abrogated, and *Natural Society* established. We will endeavour to show how this deficiency could be supplied..." and over the next 18-pages, Ambrose proceeded to do just that.

A Workers' International

Aged 71, in February 1861 ACC launched a new monthly journal, *The Cosmopolitan Review – a Political, Social, Philosophical and Literary Magazine* which a century later inspired the title of Albert Meltzer's magazine. Cuddon's paper was a forum for discussion of the most advanced ideas of the age. Although generally positively received it didn't gain universal acclamation with the *South London Chronicle* complaining, "The worst article in our opinion is *Radical Reform – What is It?* by Henry H Wiltshire, whom we should suppose to be an ambitious youth, who just thinks he can write. The article reads like a speech and is diffuse enough to suit the most childish intellect..."

Nevertheless, as James Martin observes, "Cuddon continued to head up the literary front in the London area, publishing articles with a strong anarchist flavour in the *Cosmopolitan Review* and the *Working Man* throughout most of 1861-2." In January 1862 Ambrose chaired a committee welcoming Michael Bakunin to London, following his escape from Siberia, at a reception organised by Alexander Herzen.

In October Cuddon led a welcoming committee of English workers in hosting a reception at Freemasons Hall for a group of about seventy French workers who'd come to London to attend the World's Fair. A prominent member of the French delegation who'd taken part in the 1848 revolution was Alain Tolain who although not actually an anarchist was much influenced by the ideas of Proudhon and actively involved in a variety of working-class mutual aid societies. Cuddon addressed the gathering which, for the first time, proposed the idea of forming an International Workingmen's Association.

The following year, Josiah Warren published, *True Civilization – Being the result and conclusions of thirty-nine years laboring in the study and experiments in civilization as it is and in different enterprises for reconstruction*. In the concluding section Warren invited reader's opinions on his findings, directing correspondents to either himself or, "A C Cuddon, No. 7 Arthur's Grove, Kentish Town, London, England".

The True Order and Science of Society

At the end of the decade Cuddon supported the revived Republican movement, contributing both correspondence and money to *The Republican* newspaper, despite his own increasingly straightened circumstances. ACC had by then worked up his political programme into a series of twelve lectures which in 1871 he advertised as, *Ready for Publication – A Familiar Treatise on the True Order and Science of Society* but sadly, as he subsequently confided to Josiah Warren, "I could not afford to publish" but Ambrose assured Josiah that although he was then 82 he was enjoying life as much as ever. The following year (1874) Cuddon met and impressed Warren's young protégé, Benjamin Tucker, during his visit to Europe.

Cuddon never did manage to get his comprehensive lecture series published although an undated (c1875?) six page section entitled, *What is Education?* was by some curious circumstance published and printed in Dunedin, New Zealand by "Mills, Dick & Co". This pamphlet reveals an anarchism couched, in part, in uncomfortably Catholic language that nonetheless combines a searingly Godwinian indictment of conventional "education" with Marxist materialist analysis; "this dictatorial teaching is not Education; at best, it is but instruction, putting into the mind erroneous notions or crochets which interested men or parties of men in assumed and unjust authority may wish to prevail for their own party purposes and views, that they may live in ease and

affluence out of the labor of the industrious millions without themselves labouring at all." Cuddon's alternative implicitly looked back to Rousseau and Godwin and forward to Kropotkin and Tolstoy. Ambrose claims real education supports the natural intellectual development of every human being for, "The kingdom of God is within you". The learner is the subject not the object of real education, not a cistern to be filled, instead, "opening up its own fountain, to draw out from its own resources the immortal spirit that is there – to develop our consciousness and bring into action the intellectual conceptions, the instincts and intuitions of our inward selves, the pure and unperverted tastes, inclinations, propensities and powers of human nature".

The Roots of English Anarchy

Having outlived two wives, Ambrose Caston Cuddon died at home, 5 Leigh Terrace, Chaucer Road, Acton, West London on 15th April 1879, aged 89. His estate, valued at "less than £200", was administered by his married daughter Jemima Remington who'd cared for him at home in his final years. Of Ambrose's other three children, Anna Maria Dugdale had emigrated to America where ACC visited her during his trip to meet Josiah Warren. Anna's son was the pioneering American sociologist, Richard Louis Dugdale (1837-83).

One of Ambrose's two sons, John (1821-1875) was a devout Catholic who lived in a Belgian monastery, whilst the other, Ambrose junior, died in 1887 in Islington Workhouse. When Henry Seymour boosted England's embryonic movement in 1885 with publication of *The Anarchist* he didn't acknowledge his debt to Cuddon but if you examine the back page of issue two, alongside adverts for Proudhon's "What is Property?" and Bakunin's "God and the State" is another for "The Inherent Evils of All State Governments Demonstrated" which is Burke's "A Vindication of Natural Society" supplemented by Cuddon's anonymous 18-page appendix. This booklet was advertised and distributed as part of Seymour's "The Revolutionary Library" for years. On the paper's demise, further reprints, sales and distribution were taken over and continued by *FREEDOM* until well into the twentieth century.

English anarchism has too often been treated as a virgin birth precipitated by the arrival of European anarchists in the 1880's. Ambrose Caston Cuddon didn't have the revolutionary dynamism of Johann Most or the charisma and scholarship of Kropotkin but his many decades of political activism conveyed elements of Owenism, Socialism, Chartism, Republicanism along with Warrenite anarchism into an emergent English movement. Nettlau's identification of Ambrose Caston Cuddon as the First English Anarchist, seems fairly established but there's far more to be done to unearth and untangle other personal, practical and ideological roots of English anarchism. Nettlau's pioneering 1905 paper kicked off the process and I trust this modest article might prompt more comrades to get the shovel out of the shed and dig down into early English anarchist history.

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KSL note

See the author's pieces on the Walsall anarchists at the Radical History Network Blog
<http://radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.co.uk/2017/11/is-this-walsall-bomb.html>
<http://radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.co.uk/2017/11/lives-of-walsall-bombers.html>
<http://radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.co.uk/2017/12/auguste-coulon-special-branch-anarchist.html>