

R.H.Cromek, Engraver, Editor, and Entrepreneur

DENNIS M. READ



R. H. CROMEK, ENGRAVER,
EDITOR, AND ENTREPRENEUR

To the memory of
my father and mother
Myron Read (1917–2006)
Alison B. Read (1919–2007)

*Soft voices had they, that with tender plea
Whisper'd of peace, and truth, and friendliness unquell'd*

—John Keats

R. H. Cromek, Engraver, Editor, and Entrepreneur

DENNIS M. READ
Denison University, USA

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2011 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © Dennis M. Read 2011

Dennis M. Read has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Read, Dennis M.

R.H. Cromek, engraver, editor, and entrepreneur.

1. Cromek, R. H. (Robert Hartley), 1770–1812. 2. Engravers – England – Biography.

3. Publishers and publishing – England – Biography. 4. Businessmen – England – Biography.

I. Title

769.9'2-dc22

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Read, Dennis M.

R.H. Cromek, engraver, editor, and entrepreneur / by Dennis M. Read.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7546-6399-7 (hardback: alk. paper)

1. Cromek, R. H. (Robert Hartley), 1770–1812. 2. Engravers—England—Biography. 3. Publishers and publishing—England—Biography. 4. Businessmen—England—Biography.

I. Title.

NE642.C88R43 2011

769.92—dc22

[B]

2010036573

ISBN 13: 978-0-7546-6399-7 (hbk)

Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| <i>List of Illustrations</i> | <i>vii</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | <i>ix</i> |
| <i>List of Abbreviations</i> | <i>xi</i> |
| 1 Father and Son | 1 |
| 2 Cromek the Engraver | 7 |
| 3 <i>The Grave</i> | 19 |
| 4 The Canterbury Pilgrims | 45 |
| 5 The Chalcographic Society | 87 |
| 6 Reliques of Burns | 107 |
| 7 <i>Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song</i> | 127 |
| 8 Last Days | 141 |
| Appendix 1: The <i>Grave</i> Portfolio Complete and In Pieces | 151 |
| Appendix 2: Coach Travel in Early Nineteenth-Century Great Britain | 155 |
| <i>Bibliography</i> | <i>161</i> |
| <i>Index</i> | <i>171</i> |



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

List of Illustrations

- 1 Engraving proof by William Blake of the frontispiece to *A Father's Memoirs of His Child* by Benjamin Heath Malkin (1806), by permission of British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings. 71
- 2 Pencil sketch of Robert Hartley Cromek by John Flaxman (1804), by permission of Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. 72
- 3 Rejected design by William Blake to *The Grave*, "Friendship" (1805), by permission, collection of Alan Parker. 73
- 4 Rejected design by William Blake to *The Grave*, "The Grave Personified" (1805), by permission, private collection. 74
- 5 Rejected design by William Blake to *The Grave*, "Heaven's Portals Wide Expand to Let Him In" (1805), by permission, collection of Robert N. Essick. 75
- 6 White-line etching of *Death's Door* by William Blake (1805), by permission, collection of Robert N. Essick. 76
- 7 Advertisement for *The Grave*, Aris's *Birmingham Gazette*, 28 July 1806. 77
- 8 Title page of *The Grave* (1808), designed by William Blake and engraved by Louis Schiavonetti, author's collection. 78
- 9 Portrait of William Blake (1808), painted by Thomas Phillips and engraved by Louis Schiavonetti, frontispiece to *The Grave*, author's collection. 79
- 10 Engraving of *Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims*, fifth state (c. 1820–23) by William Blake of his painting (1808), Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, by permission of Northwestern University Library. 80
- 11 Invoice for £75 from Louis Schiavonetti to R.H. Cromek, 23 November 1809, by permission of Princeton University Library. 81

- 12 Advertisement for the engraving of *The Procession of Chaucer's Pilgrims to Canterbury*, printed on end papers of *Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song* (1810). 82
- 13 Engraving of *The Procession of Chaucer's Pilgrims to Canterbury* (1817) by Louis Schiavonetti and James Heath, of the painting by Thomas Stothard (1806), by permission of Tate Gallery. 83
- 14 Proof of advertisement for the Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving, used as the first page of a letter from R.H. Cromek to James Montgomery, Sheffield, 9 August 1810, by permission of Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society. 84
- 15 Engraving by R.H. Cromek of Thomas Stothard's illustration to Robert Burns's poem, "The Cotter's Saturday Night," "wi' kindly welcome Jenny brings him ben" (1811), by permission of Library of Congress. 85

Acknowledgments

This study began several decades ago with my locating R.H. Cromek's heirs and learning that they possessed letters and other documents relating to him. They generously allowed me to examine this trove, to photocopy selected items among them, and to share them with other scholars. I am grateful for the hospitality and cordiality of Paul Warrington (Harrogate), Wilfred Warrington (Yattington, Buckinghamshire), and Michael Warrington (London).

I have conducted research for this study at the British Library, the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings, the Princeton University Library, the Victoria and Albert Museum Library, the Hornby Library (Liverpool), the Bodleian Library, the Fitzwilliam Museum Library, the Library of Congress, the Brotherton Library (University of Leeds), the National Library of Scotland, the University of Edinburgh Library, the Huntington Library, the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Newberry Library, the Free Library of Philadelphia, The Humanities Research Center (University of Texas), the Rush Rees Library (University of Rochester), the Ohio State University Library, the Stanford University Library, the Marquette University Library, the Golda Meir Library of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the public libraries of Wakefield, Bristol, Bath, Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham, and Westminster. I am indebted to the many kindnesses and courtesies given me by the staff of these institutions.

Earlier versions of chapters have been published in *Studies in Bibliography*, *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, *Philological Quarterly*, *Modern Philology*, and *Chaucer Illustrated: Five Hundred Years of the Canterbury Tales in Pictures*, ed. William K. Finley and Joseph Rosenblum (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press and London: The British Library, 2003). I am grateful to the editors of these publications for permission to draw from these essays.

I have benefited greatly from the generosity and encouragement of many scholars. I wish to thank particularly William F. Halloran, Morris Eaves, Morton D. Paley, John E. Grant, Robert N. Essick, W.J.T. Mitchell, Leslie Tannenbaum, and Joseph Viscomi. The person who has contributed the most to modern understanding of William Blake through his persistent collection of documents and data, his meticulous editing of Blake's works, and his landmark biography of Blake is also the person who has provided unstinting encouragement to me from my dissertation-writing days to the present moment, more than thirty years later. That person is G.E. Bentley, Jr. While he will never agree to be a member of the Cromek party, he has consistently supported my own interest in Cromek's career. His commitment to the highest standards of literary scholarship is my unending inspiration. I know that I am among legions of students and colleagues who have benefited personally from him. I value him as a mentor and friend, and I sincerely thank him for his manifold kindnesses over many years.

I am grateful for the many forms of support provided me over many years by Denison University. This includes grants from the Denison University Research Foundation, funds for travel and accommodation, and several sabbatical leaves. A research grant from the Huntington Library enabled me to burrow into the stacks of a wonderful institution one summer long ago.

My colleagues in the Department of English at Denison University have provided stimulation and encouragement for my scholarly work. They include Sylvia Brown, James P. Davis, Jack Shuler, Sandra Runzo, Margot Singer, Fred Porcheddu, and Linda Krumholz. I value my rich and enduring relationship with them and thank them for our years of engagement in literary pursuits. Ann Hayashi, Mogren Al-Dalilah, and Ayesha Venkatraman have been assiduous research assistants.

Finally, I am fortunate to have friends and family who have sustained me through the many drafts of this work. My assembling the career of Robert Hartley Cromek has been interrupted many times, causing a number of delays to its completion. The patience and fortitude of all of them has at times been greater than my own. Kay Haddox has stayed the course, in spite of everything. My children, Evan M. Read, Nathaniel P.T. Read, Austen T. Read-McFarland, and Andrew B. Read-McFarland, have kept me in good humor and forever young.

My one regret is that I did not finish this study while my parents were able to see it. They have made all things possible for me, and I wish they could know that this work has come out of their support and love.

List of Abbreviations

- Blake Records* G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)
- Erdman *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982)
- Farington Diary *Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre, 16 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978–98)
- Memorials Thomas Hartley Cromek, “Memorials of the Life of R.H. Cromek, Engraver, F.A.S. Edinburgh. Editor of the ‘Reliques of Burns’; ‘Remains of Nithsdale and Galloway Song.’ With the unpublished correspondence on those works and other papers relative to his professional and literary career. Collected and edited by his son” (Robert and Thomas Hartley Cromek Papers, 1792–1872, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library)
- ODNB* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Chapter 1

Father and Son

When Alexander Gilchrist's monumental biography of William Blake was first published in 1863, Thomas Hartley Cromek was confronted with startling accusations about his father. Gilchrist portrayed Robert Hartley Cromek as a second-rate engraver who turned to speculating on "the talents of others."¹ Gilchrist accused him specifically of stealing Blake's copyright to the *Grave* designs (p. 202) and of out-maneuvering Blake by commissioning a painting and engraving of the Canterbury Pilgrims after Blake had begun his own (p. 203). Cromek made much from the venture; Blake virtually nothing from his. Gilchrist also asserted that Cromek had deprived Robert Burns' widow of payment after collecting and publishing his manuscripts (p. 235), and he repeated Peter Cunningham's charge that Cromek stole from Sir Walter Scott a Ben Jonson letter to Drummond of Hawthornden (p. 238). His catalog of adjectives for Cromek includes "slippery," "unscrupulous," "wily," "treacherous," "shifty," and "predacious." In short, Gilchrist described Cromek as a rapacious exploiter whose only interest was personal gain at the cost of others, in particular, Blake.

Gilchrist's characterization of Cromek begins with what Blake had written privately about him in his Notebook. His scurrilous verses and aphorisms scattered in his Notebook form the story: after he had entered into an agreement with Cromek in good faith, Cromek had acted first dishonestly, then maliciously towards him. Gilchrist unquestioningly accepted this story, painting Cromek as the villain and Blake as the victim in their several disputes. In this stance Gilchrist was following the traditional path of biographer as hagiographer. Anything that made Blake seem more admirable or sympathetic was useful. Investing Blake's adversaries with the opposite qualities intensified Blake's saintliness. Gilchrist's interest in Cromek therefore was limited to advancing the portrayal of Blake as the misunderstood, exploited, ridiculed and neglected Romantic artist.

Thomas Hartley Cromek naturally took offence at Gilchrist's sully of his father's reputation. But he was not in a good position to dispute it. Since he was only three years old when his father died in 1812, he knew his father almost entirely through the recollections of his mother (who had died in 1848) and other family members. These recollections not surprisingly stood at odds with Gilchrist's version. Cromek had always understood that his father had been a hard-working engraver, a friend and respected associate among artists, writers, and publishers, and a successful editor and literary impresario. He had been given to believe that

¹ *Life of William Blake* (London: Macmillan, 1863), 2 vols. All the quotations are from vol. 1.

his father would have made a more lasting mark in British letters and the arts, had he not been struck down at the height of his career by consumption, dying at 42.

He had himself become an accomplished water-colorist partly to fulfill his father's artistic legacy. Early in his life at Wakefield, he had shown a talent for drawing. As a child he studied briefly in London with the engraver James Hopwood (1752?–1819), then returned to Wakefield, where he received instruction from the portrait painter James Hunter. In 1826 he moved to Leeds to study with James Rhodes. In 1830 he traveled to Florence and Rome, and in subsequent years he visited sites of ancient ruins in Italy and Greece which he rendered in drawings and paintings. While residing in Florence in 1837 he taught drawing to the young Edward Lear. He settled in Rome, but was forced to return to England in 1849 by the Garibaldian civil war. In 1850 he was elected an Associate of the New Society of Painters in Water-Colours. He moved to Wakefield in 1851, remaining there for the duration of his life, dying in 1873.²

Thomas Cromek was encouraged by others to answer Gilchrist's charges. Among them was the artist William Bewick, son of the celebrated wood-engraver, Thomas Bewick. He wrote Cromek on 12 February 1864:

I sincerely sympathise with you in your anxiety and vexation regarding the aspersions thrown out in the *Life of Blake*. Surely serious untruths, when published to the world, ought to be contradicted; the public ought to be set right if you are in a position to do so without much trouble to yourself.³

Six days later Bewick included in another letter to Cromek his recollection of an important informant in Gilchrist's biography, John Thomas (Nollekens) Smith:

I remember him well. He was a notorious gossip, and I knew ladies who used to go to the Print-room [in the British Museum, where he was employed] to be amused by his endless and amusing tattle. He was a great retailer of anecdote and scandal, dealt largely in innuendo, and had a keen relish for any story of doubtful propriety.⁴

Other contemporaries of Cromek's father disputed Gilchrist's characterization. In a published review of Gilchrist's biography, William M. Tarrt wrote that Gilchrist

² Biographical information drawn largely from *ODNB*. According to George Charles Williamson's *Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers* (New York: Macmillan, 1903–05, q.v.), "His drawings ... are much esteemed for the beauty of their colouring and their truthfulness to nature." A number of his works are in the Wakefield Art Museum; many others are in major museums and galleries. An exhibition of his watercolors and drawings was held at Colnaghi's in London, 29 February–30 March 1972; a more recent exhibition, "Thomas Hartley Cromek: A Classical Vision," was held at the Holburne Museum of Art, Bath, 1 March–2 May 2000.

³ *Life and Letters of William Bewick*, ed. Thomas Landseer (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1871), vol. 2, p. 221 [hereafter *Bewick*].

⁴ *Bewick*, vol. 2, p. 222.

“greatly wrongs” Cromek. “We met Cromek in 1808, as the guest of Mr. Roscoe at Allerton, and knew him afterwards; and we do not believe him to have been the mercenary in literature or art that he is here described. In his dealings both with Blake and Stothard he gave them what they required for the works he purchased; he faithfully fulfilled his engagements; and if he knew better than they did how to attract the attention of the public, he had a right to use such knowledge for his own advantage. It was only in this way that he made more by their works than they could have made themselves.”⁵

Cromek wrote to others from his home in Wakefield asking for recollections about his father, and he traveled to London to interview several of them. Bewick wrote to a Mr. Davison on 22 May 1864 that Cromek was currently enduring the “heat and turmoil” of London, “sweating in exhibitions or suffocated in omnibuses, fatigued by walking, and restored by Turkish baths!”⁶ His main mission, however, was searching for and meeting those who remembered his father. As a result, he was able to enlarge the manuscript “Memorials of the Life of R.H. Cromek ... with the unpublished correspondence ... and other papers relative to his professional and literary career,” which he had written about six months before Gilchrist’s biography had been published. Cromek described this volume in his letter of 18 January 1863 to W.H. Carpenter:

Since I last wrote to you, I have transcribed in a very fair hand, the whole of my Memorials of my father—to which I have made several valuable additions, in consequence of my frequent communications with Mr Pye, Miss Hopwood, & her sister in London (Mrs Eastwick)[.] Mr Pye has kindly revised two or three of his own letters, for insertion in the Appendix: these render my Memoir the more interesting, and they show what he thinks of my labours. I wish I could afford to publish it, even as a private book. The Publishers’ objection is, I think, a very foolish one—viz. it is not of sufficient interest to make it worth their while to speculate on it.⁷

While this copy of “Memorials” has not survived, two later versions have, one dated 23 December 1864 and the other dated 27 July 1865. Cromek also compiled a volume titled “Recollections of Conversations with Mr. John Pye ...” dated May 1863. In still another volume, dated December 1863, he reproduced extracts from Gilchrist’s biography on the left-hand page and responded to them on the facing page. These volumes express Cromek’s consternation over the abuse of his father’s

⁵ “Pictor Ignotus,” in William M Tarrt, *Essays on Some Modern Works, Chiefly Biographical* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1876), vol. 2, p. 200.

⁶ *Bewick*, vol. 2, p. 209.

⁷ Letter in the British Museum Department of Prints and Drawings. Carpenter was its librarian. The Memorials, as well as all of Cromek’s other manuscripts, actually was transcribed by his daughter, Mary Cromek, since paralysis in his arms made writing impossible for Cromek.

reputation, as well as the neglect or misuse of documents about his father he had provided to various people over the years.

Two instances of his providing information to others about his father stand out. Cromek reports that in 1833, during a brief stay in London, he lent to Allan Cunningham his copy of R.H. Cromek's vituperative letter of May 1807 to Blake in which he refuses to buy from Blake his dedicatory design to *The Grave* for 20 guineas. Cunningham, Cromek states, never returned this unique document, instead passing it on to his son, Peter, who published it in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of February 1852 with no acknowledgement of its source.⁸ Gilchrist included the letter in its entirety in his biography, again without indicating its source. Cromek ruefully writes, "The last person, in whose hands I placed that letter, was—Allan Cunningham; and I have never seen it since."⁹

The second instance occurred after the publication of the biography of Thomas Stothard in 1852 by Stothard's daughter-in-law, Anne Eliza Bray. Cromek states that on 8 October 1854 he wrote to Bray correcting misinformation about Stothard's painting of *The Canterbury Pilgrims*. He previously had provided her with information that she had included in "Reminiscences of Stothard" (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 39 [May, June 1836], pp. 669–88 and 753–68) with the acknowledgment, "the account [of *The Canterbury Pilgrims*] given to me by Mr. Cromek." Bray forwarded Cromek's corrections to Gilchrist, who included them in his biography of Blake but neglected to identify their original source. Cromek expostulates:

These facts were not communicated to any one but Mrs. Bray; nor could they be known to any one else, inasmuch as my father[']s Memorandum book has never been out of my possession. The "other sources," or rather, source to which Gilchrist alludes is myself and no one else, for Mrs. Bray, who must have given him the information, directly, or indirectly had most assuredly received it from me. Why, therefore[,] should all acknowledgement of valuable information be denied to me, and my name never once mentioned?¹⁰

Cromek's effort to answer Gilchrist's assertions, however, came to little effect. His "Memorials," along with the papers and prints his father had left, remained with his heirs after his death in 1873. Over the years, occasional mention in print would be made of this cache. In his edition of *Burns's Works*, W. Scott Douglas cites the owner of the original manuscript of "Elegy on Willie Nichol's Mare" as Mrs. [Mary] Warrington, "the granddaughter of R.H. Cromek."¹¹ This is the daughter

⁸ John Linnell had a similar experience, writing to Gilchrist on 28 November 1860, "I have been terrified at lending anything of Blake[']s through having lost one of his letters which I lent to Allan Cunningham" (Ivimy MSS., British Library).

⁹ "Gilchrist's 'Life of William Blake,'" Princeton University Library.

¹⁰ "Gilchrist's 'Life of William Blake,'" Princeton University Library.

¹¹ W[illiam] Scott Douglas, *Works of Robert Burns*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Paterson, 1877–79), 2: 292.

of Thomas Cromek who had handwritten his “Memorials” and other volumes; she had married John Warrington in 1875. In the 4 November 1882 *Spectator* John Bell reports that “there are papers in existence—now before me—belonging to the representatives of the late T.H. Cromek which throw much light upon his father’s transactions ... and I need hardly point out that they give a most emphatic contradiction to the statements advanced in such a vindictive spirit by Blake’s biographers” (p. 1411). The “representatives” are not identified by Bell, but they probably are Thomas Cromek’s daughters, Mary, Clarinda, and Anastasia, as well as the husbands of Mary and Clarinda. In 1886, Samuel Richardson stated in his note to a plate engraved by Cromek, “Blake’s accusations, however, were refuted by Cromek’s son,” indicating that Thomas Cromek’s rebuttal had registered to some degree.¹² And in the September 1917 *Bookman* of London, Davidson Cook reports on stumbling over Douglas’s reference and subsequently visiting Austin Warrington, son of Mary Warrington (who died in 1907), who “very kindly favoured me with the loan” of “Memorials.”¹³

By the time Cook inquired about the original Burns manuscripts, the Cromek heirs no longer had them. Cook surmises that they must have been the “Collection of Burns Manuscripts and Other Documents Relating to the Poet, made by Thomas H. Cromek (Son of the Author of the Reliques) in one volume folio” sold on 28 March 1877 at Dowell’s Auction Rooms in Edinburgh. Ten years earlier, in 1867, Cromek had given 119 engravings executed by his father, along with a drawing by Howard, another by Stothard, and a unique print by Blake, to the British Museum Print Room. A collection of 167 letters addressed to Thomas Cromek is now in the University of Edinburgh Library. Other documents and pieces of information relating to father and son are in various public and private collections in the United Kingdom and the United States. These, along with the scattered published references to Cromek and the projects he participated in, have always been available to the assiduous researcher. But the most important documents relating to Cromek’s career now are in the Princeton University Library. The collection, comprising nine bound volumes of papers relating to the careers of the two Cromeks, was sold at Sotheby’s (London) on 17 July 2008 by the heirs of the Warrington family to the antiquarian booksellers John Hart and Chris Johnson. Princeton purchased the lot in March 2009.¹⁴ Among the volumes are “Memorials,” “Recollections of Conversations with Mr John Pye,” and the critical commentary on Gilchrist’s biography of Blake.

The task that Thomas Cromek undertook still needs to be completed. His father still is regarded as the unscrupulous exploiter of Blake and others. In his having irreconcilable differences with Blake, Cromek had much company; Blake quarreled with nearly everyone, from Raphael to Reynolds. Certainly Cromek was

¹² Samuel Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison* (London: Field & Tuer, 1886), p. 14.

¹³ “Burns and Stothard,” *The Bookman* (September 1917), p. 167.

¹⁴ Robert and Thomas Hartley Cromek Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

no exemplar of altruism. But he hardly lived in an age of altruism. He was an ambitious and determined individual who recognized entrepreneurial opportunities in a developing capitalistic marketplace. In this endeavor he was following pioneer businessmen of the eighteenth century who, in J.H. Plumb's words, realizing "that there was a market in culture, ... began quite deliberately to exploit it, and to pursue innovation and sophistication in order to reap the profits that were there."¹⁵ Examining Cromek's career with an open mind enables us to redress the wrongs and balance the scales. More significantly, it provides a look at the workings of cultural projects in early nineteenth-century Britain and how one innovative and persistent man forged his way by advancing several significant ones.

¹⁵ *Georgian Delights* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), p. 10.

Chapter 2

Cromek the Engraver

Although Gilchrist and subsequent biographers have been loath to consider it, Cromek and Blake had much in common. For one thing, they both had quick, explosive tempers. They would erupt over any real or imagined slight, and long afterwards they would seethe with anger towards the perpetrator, who sometimes was not even aware that he was the one who had caused the eruption.

This shared trait would ultimately—and inevitably—drive Cromek and Blake apart, each of them certain that he was the wronged party. Before that happened, however, they were circumstantially close, brothers in their chosen profession of engraving. London engravers formed a small and tight fraternity of several hundred during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Blake was among the most prominent in the profession. Its conditions suited him well. Because engraving requires acute concentration and attention to detail, it is best practiced in quiet solitude. The work he produced is unquestionably inspired, a product of a ceaselessly creative spirit and of the new techniques and methods he developed.

The same cannot be said of Cromek. He was basically a commercial engraver, methodically copying the designs of others and very rarely originating his own. Nor did he attempt new techniques or methods of engraving. But what most limited his capacity as an engraver was his chafing at its regimen. Cromek preferred crowds to solitude, conversation to silence, activity to serenity. While art dominated his life, his practice of it did not conform to the practices of an engraver.

During the more than ten years that he was an engraver, however, Cromek was able to establish friendships and associations with people who advanced his fortunes in the engraving, publishing, and bookselling circles of London. Because his artistic talent was limited, Cromek had to cultivate alliances through good will. While Blake was temperamentally an outsider, Cromek was geographically and culturally an outsider. He was a Yorkshireman, and his north country vocabulary, accent, and habits stigmatized him among Londoners. He had been born in Kingston-upon-Hull, Yorkshire, in 1770 to Thomas Cromek, a stone-mason, and Martha Hartley, the daughter of Robert Hartley, a corn merchant of Outwood, Wakefield. They had married in the Parish Church, Wakefield, on 23 January 1769. Thomas was the oldest of three children; his two sisters, Ann and Maria, were born in 1772 and 1775. He was christened on 18 June 1771 in Holy Trinity church in Hull.

Cromek's ancestors derived from the Cromacks of Kidwick in the sixteenth century. His later interest in Scottish literature has something to do with his Gaelic ancestry. From at least the seventeenth century, however, the Cromek clans lived in Yorkshire. His father was the third oldest among nine siblings.