

The following extracts are from a collection of "family poems" in a MS book written in a hand which is probably that of Anne Steele (later Tomkins). Most of the poems were written by her aunt, Anne Steele the hymn-writer, some by Mary Steele (later Wakeford); her other aunt, and some by her father William Steele. A number of them, of which these are some, seem to have been written when William was still at Grandfathers and before Mary Steele married, so are likely to have been written in the 1730s or 1740s. They are reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Hugh Steele-Smith who is a descendant of the Steeles. One of these describes the occupation of the girls which help to "shorten the dull wintry nights". Here are some lines:

A Candle is lighted and chearful we sit  
Close round a good fire of odiferous Peat  
Its fragrance inhaling delightful perfume  
Which sweetens our garments and fills all the Room

.....

And sometimes a Neighbour may chance to come in  
A Farmer or so to enliven the Scene  
Then making of Matches improving of Farms  
And different Opinions the Conference warms

Another poem is a delightful mock elegy for an Old Apple Tree which has been knocked down by one of Mr. Steele's waggoners, whose name was Sander Tobin who probably worked for the Steeles in the timber business.

On the Death of an Old Apple Tree

Thee I invoke O Goddess fam'd  
Pomona by the Poets named  
But oft a humble form dost wear  
And like an ancient Dame appear  
By the delighted School Boy seen  
With basket full and apron clean  
O come, assist while I complain  
And tune like thine my lofty strain.

An Apple Tree I mourn whose fate  
From cruel outrage met his fate  
Long had this tree with care been nourish'd  
And near the owner's dwelling flourish'd  
An ancient Tree well known to fame  
And Uppinstock its noble Name  
So called perhaps from Stock of wood  
Which near the place of old had stood  
From which our Ancestors ascended  
The Steed when they a ride intended  
Poor Uppingstock which yearly bore  
Delicious fruit a plenteous store  
Thy plenteous store of tempting hue  
No more alas shall charm our view  
No more shall please thy Master's taste  
Or daily finish his repast  
No more in delf or china placed  
Shall entertain the welcome guest  
The grievous loss let all bemoan  
Poor Uppingstock is dead and gone  
Thy fruit no more the ventrous Boy  
Shall pocket up with conscious joy  
No more thy useful trunk shall hold  
The Miller's Horse till lone and cold  
His Master's long important chatt  
The impatient steed is forc'd to wait  
How shall he now contrive to stay

/And chatt with Sue

And chatt with Sue the hours away  
 Millers and Boys your loss bemoan  
 Poor Uppingstock is dead and gone  
 Ah fatal Day! Ah fatal Deed!  
 When Sander drove with erring speed  
 The loaded Waggon's dreadful stroke  
 Against the Tree and down it broke  
 Let all who know his worth bemoan  
 Poor Uppingstock forever gone.

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A third poem describes how tragic it is for the race of spiders when Mary leaves and a more conscientious maid (?) takes her place:

How will the wretched race of Spiders moan  
 When Mary their protecting friend is gone  
 When her successor arm'd with dreadful broom  
 And cruel eye and murdering hand shall come

.....

How happy we in gentle Mary's time  
 Who never thought our buildings were a crime  
 But unmolested suffered us to dwell  
 Each Spider then in peace possessed his Cell

.....

She ne'er attacked nor viewed with threatening eye  
 Bed, Cornice, Ceiling, they were all our own  
 We built and prosper'd ev'n where Sunbeams shone  
 But now, alas, the gentle Mary's gone.

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And finally a little poem, quoted in full:

Written on a Chamber Door

In this abode if neatness keeps  
 Her residence how sound she sleeps  
 A deathlike sleep, good Betty wake her  
 She'll sleep her last unless you shake her