A Hopkins Chronology

1844–62

H is born at 4.15 a.m. on Sunday 28 July 1844 at Chestnut House, 87 The Grove, Stratford, Essex, the first of seven surviving children of Manley and Kate Hopkins, and baptised at the church of St John the Evangelist, Stratford; on Christmas Eve his father makes him the subject of a poem ('Hail! little worshipper of Light!'). Manley, who ran a successful marine insurance business in the City of London, was himself a writer of sorts, publishing some collections of verse, reviewing poetry for The Times and writing a book about mathematics and an unpublished novel; his Manual of Marine Insurance and The Port of Refuge, or advice and instructions to the Master-Mariner in situations of doubt, difficulty and danger established themselves as standard works. From February 1856 he was for forty years Consul-General for Hawaii in London, in which capacity he found a butler for King Kamehameha IV, wrote Hawaii: an Historical Account of the Sandwich Islands, and contributed a series of London newsletters to the Polynesian over the pseudonym 'Fleet Street'; he reported a sighting of the dodo in Samoa a century after it was thought to be extinct, and when Queen Emma of Hawaii visited England she called on the Hopkineses.¹

Manley and H, though certainly fond of each other, were not for the most part on good terms. Whilst Manley could claim artistic kin with Beddoes and (via his sister-in-law) with the portrait painter William Beechey, Kate (born Smith) was connected more or less distantly with Sydney Smith and Gainsborough, and her grandfather was a medical student with Keats at Guy's. Fond, like her sisters, of music, she was unusual in her time for being a female speaker of German. She took a consistent interest in her son's writings (The Starlight Night, one of the two sonnets H sent her on 3 March 1877, was a particular favourite, which she had illuminated in parchment and hung in her house). After H's death, she engaged in a long correspondence with RB about publication of the poems, and, living for two years beyond the appearance of the First Edition of 1918, she was within six months of her hundredth birthday when she died. Nearly all the Hopkineses were long-lived, except Gerard. A last most influential relative was Aunt Annie (1815–87), an

J. McDermott, A Hopkins Chronology
© John McDermott 1997
accomplished musician, painter and amateur student of archaeology; H was close to her, and a keen pupil in the first two of these accomplishments. The water colour of the 15-year-old Gerard in the National Portrait Gallery is by Annie.

So parented and surrounded, it is hardly surprising that H should have developed artistic tendencies (he drew and composed in addition to writing poetry), as did his brothers Arthur (born 30 December 1847 – died 1930) and Everard (1860–1928); brother Lionel (1854–1952) became a noted sinologist, interpreting archaic scripts; brother Cyril (born 18 March 1846 – died 1932) was the only son to go into insurance; Grace 1857–1945) had some musical talent, and another of the three daughters, Milicent (born 17 October 1849 – died 1946) became an Anglican nun. The other children of this generally very long-lived family were Felix Edward (1852–3) and Kate (1856–1933). The 1851 census return shows a Stratford household of twelve: Kate and Manley, Manley’s mother and spinster sister Ann (in effect H’s governess), plus four children and cook, nurse, housemaid and nurserymaid.

John Henry (later Cardinal) Newman, who later would receive H into the Church was received into the Catholic Church in 1845.

H’s first extant letter, to his mother, dates from possibly 1847 or 1848, but one biographer places it as ‘probably dating from February 1852’ (even though the letter is clearly written in an adult hand and H would surely have been able to write, however childishly, for himself by 1852). In 1850 Alexander Liholiho (king of Hawaii from 1856) and his brother Lot visit Manley. The growing family (four children by now, plus servants) moves to 9 Oak Hill Park, Frognal, Hampstead in 1852, and in September 1854, having attended a small Hampstead private school in the interim, H starts to attend Highgate School, boarding for all but the last few weeks of his time in Elgin House at 2 High Street (where he is ‘cock of the walk’). The standard curriculum included ‘the study of Latin and Greek . . . the primary object of our creation’ (view attributed to Dr Dyne), history, arithmetic and the principles of religion; German and French (for additional fees), both taken by H, though he never became particularly well read or fluent in either. English literature tended to feature only in so far as passages from, say, Milton, Addison, Johnson, Gibbon and Burke were set for translation from living into dead languages. Drawing was available too. It is per-