Abstract

This thesis argues that throughout the long eighteenth century, a unique emphasis was placed on leisure and sociability at the English watering-place, due to a belief in their medicinal benefits. In turn, this emphasis provided the privileged woman with opportunity to participate in public life at the resort; both in terms of a public sphere of leisure and sociability and a literary and discursive public sphere. In contrast to the suggestions of Alice Clark, Peter Earle and Lawrence Stone, who argue that elite and middling women were increasingly restricted to a sphere of idle domesticity, this study demonstrates that the urban, intellectual and associational developments of the eighteenth century offered genteel women access to socially, physically and intellectually active lives; and nowhere more so than at the resort.

Adopting a dual case study approach, the thesis explores the leisured woman’s experience of visiting and residing at Bath and Tunbridge Wells throughout the long eighteenth century (c.1680-1830). The study offers the first extensive prosopographical study of the eighteenth-century spa. It utilises the letters and journals of over sixty male and female visitors and residents, sourced from nineteen repositories, as well those published in edited volumes, to form an original collective history of the female spa experience.

Contributing previously neglected manuscript evidence to the field, this thesis peels away the caricature of the spa-visiting woman, promoted in eighteenth-century print and argues that health was not a pretence (as suggested by Penelope Corfield, Phyllis Hembry and Roy Porter), but a genuine reason for female spa-visitation, colouring and shaping a woman’s time at the resort. Whilst emphasising the presence of the female spa invalid, the study explores the range of romantic, leisure and intellectual opportunities presented to the leisured female visitor in the public and domestic arenas of the resorts.
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Note on Text

Dates before the introduction of the Gregorian Calendar in 1752 are given in the old style, except the year is taken to begin on 1 January. In the footnotes, dates are given as they appear in original sources, with the New Year provided in brackets for sources produced between 1 January and the 24 March before 1752.

As far as possible, original spelling has been maintained. Due to the extensive use of manuscript documents, non-standardised spelling is not indicated with the term ‘sic’, as this would appear too frequently and distort the appearance of the text. Instead, where the original spelling or formatting is difficult to decipher, additional letters, punctuation or words have been inserted in square brackets.

Aristocratic women are given their titles throughout the thesis, whilst all other women are referred to by their Christian and surnames (the surname being their final married surname). There are however a number of exceptions. These are generally in instances of famous women, better known by their maiden names such as Elizabeth Linley (later Mrs Elizabeth Sheridan) and Betsy Sheridan (later Mrs Elizabeth LeFanu). The biographical table in the appendix provides maiden names, and interim surnames from any further marriages.
Abbreviations

BCL- Bath Central Library
BL- British Library
BLA- Bedford and Luton Archives
BRO- Buckingham Record Office
CKS- Centre for Kentish Studies
CL- Clarke Letters, located in Somerset Record Office and edited by
CRO- Cornwall Record Office
DA- Doncaster Archive
DRO- Devonshire Record Office
DUSC- Durham University Special Collections
ESRO- East Sussex Record Office
FRO- Flintshire Record Office
HRO- Hampshire Record Office
NA- Northumberland Archives
NAP- Nichols Archives Project
NLI- National Library of Ireland research, collected by --- at Number One Royal Crescent, Bath
NLW- National Library of Wales
NUSC- Nottingham University Special Collections
SA- Sheffield Archives
SRO- Shropshire Record Office
StRO- Staffordshire Record Office
TBC- The Bath Chronicle
TBJ- The Bath Journal
TWM- Tunbridge Wells Museum
TWRL- Tunbridge Wells Reference Library