Chapter 3

Leisure and Consumption

i. Attitudes Towards Female Leisure

Peter Borsay has persuasively argued that English urban life underwent such change in the eighteenth century that it can justifiably be argued there was an ‘English Urban Renaissance’. This ‘Renaissance’ introduced assembly rooms, concert rooms, theatres and pleasure gardens to towns throughout the British Isles: arenas purposefully created for sociability and to host seasons of balls, concerts, plays and public breakfasts for a genteel clientele.\(^1\) Although Borsay does not focus on women and gender, his research demonstrates that women formed part of the pleasure-seeking crowd who attended the social entertainments blossoming in provincial towns across England.\(^2\) As illustrated in the introduction to this thesis, numerous historians, including Alice Clark, Peter Earle, Paul Langford, and Lawrence Stone, view the expanding world of eighteenth-century urban entertainment as one which offered elite and middling women little but idle and frivolous pursuit. For instance, Langford suggests that the card playing, dancing and conversations with which women entertained themselves, were ‘less important’ than the associational world of men and official club life. This chapter seeks to illustrate the significance of women’s leisure pursuits at the eighteenth-century spa.\(^3\)

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In contrast to the arguments of Clark, Earle, Stone and Langford, many women’s historians have specifically explored the world of female leisure and urban pursuits, illustrating its rich and diverse nature. Sarah Jordon’s research on attitudes towards idleness illustrates that genteel women were often regarded as a personification of leisure itself, being regarded in both class and sex, as unfit for little else. Amanda Vickery’s research highlights the development of urban entertainments in northern towns such as York and Beverly, utilising female authored letters and diaries to evidence female participation. Gillian Russell argues that in the later eighteenth century, ‘women made their presence felt as participants, sponsors, and sometimes subjects of a vibrant social scene, as theatre- and opera-goers, as masqueraders and promenaders’ and Katherine Glover identifies parallel patterns in urban entertainments in eighteenth-century Scotland. These works illustrate a growing awareness of the history of women’s leisure and offer a series of case studies demonstrating the richness of female-inclusive leisure pursuits in eighteenth-century British towns.

Nowhere was such emphasis placed on leisure and recreation as at the spa, where diversion was believed beneficial to the health of patients. Medical treatises urged spa patients to keep good company and remain busy in order to divert themselves from their poor health. Spa manuscripts suggest that this was regarded as good advice. For example, the Duchess of Richmond found she could fight off her ‘spleen’ by keeping ‘Company’ in the day at Tunbridge Wells, Adam Ottley advised his daughter to find young friends and attend public amusements to improve her health at Bath and Eliza Burges’s father almost forgot about his physical sufferings whilst about Bath amongst friends. In *The Expeditiions of Humphry Clinker*, Tobias Smollett notes that dancing in Spring Gardens at Bath was believed an ideal cure for rheumatism, due to the dampness of the air, further illustrating the link between leisure and health. In turn, this chapter explores female exercise and sporting opportunities, theatre and concert attendance, gambling, religion and finally

5 Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*.
7 Elwin (ed.), *The Noels and the Milbankes*, p. 38.
shopping, at eighteenth-century Bath and Tunbridge Wells. Through investigating the array of activities on offer to the leisured woman, the chapter illustrates that the privileged female visitor and resident was far from idle.

Reaction to female participation in public life was divided. On one hand, women were argued to be a ‘civilizing force’ promoting ‘civic and domestic virtue’ as argued by Joseph Addison, William Hogarth and David Hume. In his M.Sc thesis ‘The Geographies of Genteel Women and the Production of Space in Bath, 1702-1761’, Johnathan Williams emphasises this point, arguing that the inclusion of women within public leisure at the spa was ‘crucial to the maintenance and achievement of social credit among the wealthy’ at Bath. On the other hand, women appearing too frequently in public went against the modest, retiring feminine ideal. By confessing their temporary ‘idleness’ or the ‘dissipation’ of the resort, leisured women sought to reassure themselves that they were not idle individuals, but active and productive women placed in an indulgent society. Whilst at Tunbridge Wells in 1749, Elizabeth Montagu wrote: ‘I have been for a fortnight in a most flourishing state of health, which to acquire and maintain has cost me time and pains; drinking waters, riding on horseback, airing in a post chaise, continual dissipation, and uninterrupted idleness.’ From Bath, Priscilla Digby bemoaned that she lived ‘in a state of Idleness dreadful idleness.’ Similarly, despite her busy social life Anabella Carr felt that Bath was an ‘idle place … not like London.’ Margaret Graves wrote of Bath as a ‘dissipated City’, yet she too partook in the spa’s public sphere of leisure, visiting the theatre and viewing novelty exhibitions.

Another response was to attend public diversions whilst showing an air of displeasure. Elizabeth Montagu delighted in the witty condemnation of those around her. She satirised the ‘grotesque’ figures who filled Bath’s public arenas: ‘we have

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11 Elizabeth Montagu, Tunbridge Wells, to Mrs Donnellan (8 September 1749) in Montagu, _The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu_, iii, p. 85.
12 NUSC Mol.82 Pricilla Digby, Bath, to Mrs Molyneux (12 September 1745).
13 NA ZCE/f/1/1/3/12 Annabella Carr, Bath, to Ralph Carr (12 January 1799).
14 DRO 1038M/F1/169 Margaret Graves, Bath, to Eliza Simcoe, Wolford Lodge (23 October 1801)
some laughing hoydens, simpering dames, who are all good sort of women, and ugly ones, who are all good house-wives, and not at all coquet.'\textsuperscript{15} She also censured the music provided at the spa: ‘I have been at a concert where the cat’s gut has made a worse noise than puss’s concert in the gutter. It has diverted me much to hear some pretenders to taste pity those that had no ear.’\textsuperscript{16} Margaret Graves was similarly scornful of the entertainment and company she encountered on a visit to the phantasmagoria in Bath, where she found ‘the noise of the galleries very disagreeable; enveloped in darkness; they uttered abject fear, & vulgar impatience… the first appearance was an imitatin of the forked lightning; too dull to be terrifying.’\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, at Tunbridge Wells Lady Polwarth mocked the St Gilbert’s Ball celebrations:

We met first in Fry’s Rooms, & then at the word of command paraded away to pinchbeck’s, the Ladies in the front, & the gentlemen in the rear, & to say truth, we fell into so formal a processuin, that I could not help smiling at myself as we march’d along. To compleat the solemnity, as we return’d, the people were so kind to fire their shabby Battery Cannon, which indeed made me laugh outright.\textsuperscript{18}

Montagu, Graves and Lady Polwarth enjoyed the entertainments on offer enough to participate in them on multiple occasions; however, by adopting a tone of disdain, they reassured themselves that they were a cut above the rest of the company.

\textbf{ii. Exercise and Sport}

Before exploring female exercise at the spa, it is important to consider contemporary notions of female biology. Thomas Laqueur’s suggestion that the eighteenth century

\textsuperscript{15} Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (January 1740) in Montagu, \textit{The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu}, i, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{16} Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (January 1740) in Montagu, \textit{The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu}, i, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{17} DRO 1038M/F1/134 Margaret Graves, Bath, to Eliza Simcoe (date unknown).
\textsuperscript{18} BLA L30/13/12/30 Lady Polwarth, Tunbridge Wells, to Mary Robinson (24 August 1775).
saw the emergence of the ‘dual sex model’, has gained considerable popularity. Laqueur argues that before the eighteenth century it was believed men and women had a similar biological make up, with female reproductive organs being seen as an inverted version of the male form. He argues that this biological view shifted throughout the late Georgian period, as more complex differences started to be realised.\(^\text{19}\) The nineteenth century saw further emphasis being placed on the biological differences between men and women. Although the late nineteenth century saw the expansion of female sporting opportunities, women were increasingly advised ‘to treat themselves as invalids once a month, curtailing both psychical and mental activity’; a shift which it has been suggested created a cult of female invalidism.\(^\text{20}\) However, the long eighteenth century pre-dated such a cult; whilst women were believed to be generally weaker than men as they were of a ‘much finer Composition and tenderer Constitution than Men’, they were not viewed as permanent invalids.\(^\text{21}\) Therefore the eighteenth century illustrates a significant period in the history of women’s health, as wombs were not commonly viewed as a source of either hysteria as discussed in Chapter 1, or as a constant draining source on their health and energy levels.

Although the cult of female invalidism was not yet in existence, the physical implications of menstruation still made physical activity difficult to negotiate. Sanitary protection did exist in the form of handmade towels, but would have required frequent thought and consideration during physical pursuits. In some instances, menstruation may have prevented any exercise, as a letter from the Duchess of Richmond implies: ‘I did intende to ride this afternoon, but am hindered by you know what.’\(^\text{22}\) However, historians should be careful not to apply later


\(^{21}\) Oliver, A Practical Dissertation on Bath-Waters, p. 107.

\(^{22}\) WSRO GWD MS 102 Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duke of Richmond (c. 1719-1740).
nineteenth-century notions of female invalidism to the women of the long eighteenth century, whose sporting and exercise opportunities have received little attention.

In medieval and early modern England, elite women participated in a variety of sports including archery, hawking and hunting. Archery continued to be popular amongst women right through into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when female only archery clubs started to form. However, it is the nineteenth century which is frequently portrayed as the period in which women first started to engage in physically demanding sports. Jennifer Hargreaves, Kathleen McCrone, David Rubenstein and William Scheuerle highlight how the introduction of the bicycle, lawn tennis, croquet, physical education in girls schooling and a new physical feminine ideal provided women of the middle classes with a new wave of sporting and exercise opportunities. However, leisured women had access to a wide variety of physical recreations considerably before this, at the eighteenth-century resort, as the following section illustrates.

Walking was one of the most popular forms of exercise advised by spa physicians as it was believed to encourage the waters to work more quickly and effectively. Urban walks, within the specifically designed parading arenas, and rural expeditions, around surrounding countryside or semi-rural spaces such as pleasure gardens, were both popular. Walking around urban spaces was a popular form of exercise, but equally important were the opportunities it provided for display and sociability. Whilst urban strolls might not have always been physically demanding, they took women out of the home into the public arenas of the resorts. Figure 17, a map of Bath in 1780, encompasses all of the most popular walking spots of the spa.

**Fig 17:** Map of Bath (Unknown engraver and printer, 1780).
Fig 18: A Plan of the New Buildings at the South East Corner of the CITY of BATH, in Wood, A Description of Bath 1765.

Fig 19: (Bottom) North Parade (Thomas Malton, 1777).
Harrison’s Walks, situated along the banks of the Avon and laid out in 1709, were the first official arena designed for promenading at Bath. They were attached to Harrison’s assembly rooms and accessed only by those who purchased entrance tickets, or subscribed to the rooms. John Wood’s North and South Parades, created between 1739 and 1748, became the next fashionable walking spot. These walks differed from Harrisons in being residential streets, and therefore were less exclusive, yet they remained a fashionable walking spot throughout the 1750s and 1760s [Fig. 18, 19]. The Royal Crescent, designed by John Wood the younger and built between 1767 and 1775, and the Crescent Fields, which lay directly in front it, became a popular walking spot of the later decades of the eighteenth century. Of the Crescent Fields, Betsy Sheridan commented: ‘there is something whimsical yet pleasing in seeing a number of well dress’d people walking in the same fields where Cows and Horses are grazing as quietly as if no such intuders came among them’, illustrating the unusual combination of urban and rural pleasures offered by this particular walking spot.27

At Bath, the walks were usually visited in the morning, after taking of the waters and religious service. From his lodging house in the Abbey Green, the Reverend Penrose observed an ‘inconceivable’ number of ‘fine Ladies and Gentlemen (The Gentlemen far inferior in Numbers to the Ladies) pass before our Parlour Window, going to the Grand and South Parades, which are the most Public Walks’.28 Urban walks formed part of daily spa life for many female residents and visitors. On her Bath visits, Caroline Powys spent most of her mornings walking about the city; Elizabeth Giffard also spent much of her free time walking, particularly favouring the South Parade, as did an anonymous female visitor of 1789, finding it offered a sheltered spot when there was a strong northerly wind. On a visit to Bath in June 1786, Betsy Sheridan walked about the spa for so long, that she was forced to take to her bed

27 Betsy Sheridan, Bath, to Alicia LeFanu (1 June 1786) in LeFanu (ed.), Betsy Sheridan’s Journal, p. 85.
with exhaustion in the evening. 29 These instances illustrate that women did not feel bound within the home and domestic sphere, but saw the streets of the resorts open to them.

At Tunbridge Wells the company practiced ‘the necessary exercise of walking… for an hour or two’ as they took the waters on the Walks. 30 The Walks developed such a central role in life at the spa that on her visit to the spa in 1785, Sheridan was informed ‘no one walks but on the Pantiles.’ 31 The Duchess of Richmond had ‘run to the walks every hour’ when residing close by, and after moving further afield took possession of a ‘montgomery’ for the specific purpose of being able to ride to them, where presumably she dismounted to walk with the rest of the company. 32 In 1765 Lady Dorothy Filmer commented in surprise that ‘the Duchess of Grafton is come but don’t so much as come upon the walks’, suggesting that they formed a basic and expected part of a female visitor’s routine at Tunbridge Wells. 33 One of the particular benefits of the Pantiles was that: ‘from over the shops projects a roof supported with pillars, under which there is always a dry walk’ and thus it provided a space to walk in all weathers. 34

One significant difference between the resorts was that as an urban spa, Bath was provided with multiple pleasure gardens, whereas Tunbridge Wells, immediately surrounded by rural countryside, had none. At their most basic, pleasure gardens were ‘little more than small Gardens attached to Taverns’ and at their most grand, such as the London examples of Vauxhall and Raneleigh, they could have additional attractions including ‘Long-Rooms, Gardens planted with trees and shrubs, arbours’ and ‘commercial infrastructures’ offering ‘musical and dramatic performances, food,
drink, acrobats, tumblers’ and dancers. In 1742 Spring Gardens, Bath’s first official pleasure gardens, opened. They were established by William Pulteney who erected a garden house and bowling-green and taken over by William Purdie in 1759. The Bagatelle Gardens opened in 1770, half a mile outside of the City, in 1783, Bathwick Villa, a small estate with a gothick house and grounds was turned into a pleasure garden by Joseph Marrett and in the 1770s Grosvenor Gardens were established.

The highly successful Sydney Gardens opened in 1795, complete with a bowling green, grotto, maze, refreshment boxes and a winter opening programme. The gardens held public breakfasts and afternoon teas accompanied by instrumental music on French horns and clarinets throughout the summer season; entertainments enjoyed by many leisured female visitors and residents. When helping to select a residence at the spa in January 1801, Jane Austen wrote to her sister Cassandra that it ‘would be very pleasant to be near Sydney Gardens! We might go into the Labyrinth every day’ and in 1803 Katherine Plymley accompanied her eager nieces on a trip to the gardens, even though Jane was ill enough to require a chair to be carried home. Even the school girls of Belvedere, too young to attend such events, were enticed by the prospect of Sydney Gardens, and watched a firework display held there from their bedroom window. The fashionable status of the gardens drew visitors every day and evening and ensured that al fresco promenading remained a part of daily life at the resort.

Whilst lacking in pleasure gardens, the groves which surrounded Tunbridge Wells offered ideal spaces for exercise, sociability and display. These included Queens Grove on Mount Sion, named on the accession of Queen Anne, and Bishops Down Grove on Bishops Down Common. Betsy Sheridan particularly favoured the

37 *TBJ* (10 April 1775).
Grove, which she found a ‘sweet spot’, deserted of company.41 In the 1830s the Calverley Pleasure Ground also developed. Whilst Mount Sion and Mount Ephraim housed most visitors to the spa during the eighteenth century, in 1826 John Ward, Esq of Holwood, concluded transactions to develop the Calverley Estate on the relatively neglected site of Mount Pleasant. The twenty-four villas of the Calverley Estate surrounded a pleasure ground which ‘brought the Regent’s Park concept of a Residential Park on a smaller scale to Tunbridge Wells’, and therefore introduced a planned and landscaped walking space, similar to the pleasure gardens of Bath.42

Country walks around the environs of the resorts were popular at both spas, offering more physically challenging exercise than urban promenading. The girls of Belvedere school in Bath took a rural walk each day between 4.00 and 6.00 in the afternoon and particularly relished the moment when they passed ‘beyond the streets’ and ‘were not kept under so much restraint’.43 They were then allowed to walk in unchaperoned pairs, returning to the school at an appointed time.44 Austen also enjoyed such excursions at Bath, and was proud of her stamina, favouring female companions who demonstrated a similar passion for exercise. In 1801 she walked to Weston with her friend Mrs Chamberlayne who was ‘very capital’ in ‘climbing a hill.’ She marvelled at how Chamberlayne walked ‘without any parasol or any shade to her hat, stopping for nothing’, and concluded her letter to her sister by admitting, ‘after seeing what she is equal to, I cannot help feeling a regard for her.’45 In 1805 Austen recorded making the same walk to Weston from Bath: ‘yesterday was a busy day with me, or at least with my feet and my stockings; I was walking almost all day long; I went to Sydney Gardens soon after one, & did not return till four, & after dinner I walked to Weston.’46 The High Rocks and Harrisons Rocks were two favourite rural walking spots located near Tunbridge Wells. Despite not being officially invited, Betsy Sheridan accompanied a group of visitors on a

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41 Betsy Sheridan, Tunbridge Wells, to Alicia LeFanu (12-14 June 1785) in LeFanu (ed.), Betsy Sheridan’s Journal, p. 48.
44 Sibbald, Memoirs, p. 38.
45 Jane Austen, the Paragon, Bath, to Cassandra Austen (21-22 May 1801) in Le Faye (ed.), Jane Austen’s Letters, p. 91.
walk from Tunbridge Wells to ‘the Rocks’ in October 1783: ‘The morning was uncommonly fine and the country beautiful so that I really enjoy’d my walk very much.’

Sightseeing added to the pleasures of walking the city streets and women often experimented with travel writing techniques, recording architectural details of places they had seen on their walks about the spa as highlighted in the journal of Elizabeth Giffard:

**Sun 17 November:** We took a walk to recontre the principle parts of the Town of which, the north & south parades, communicating with each other, by the means of 2 streets, Duke & Pierpont compose a most magnificent pile of Building, with a Grand flag’d Terras … Milsom street is built on a regular ascent, the Cornish of each House, having three windows in Front rising near one foot about the adjoining one. At the top is a new range of Buildings call’d Edgars, with stabling & coach Houses behind each.

Giffard was not alone in paying note to such details on her walks. An anonymous female visitor of 1789 follows in similar vein:

**May 3:** From thence [South Parade] walked to Laura Place where they are building some charming house this part is the estate of Miss Pulteney … we sallied forth after Dinner to view the Crescent which I confess struck me with amazement the symmetry of the building the style of the architecture its situation all united to make it the most significant sight I ever beheld.

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47 Betsy Sheridan, Tunbridge Wells, to Alicia LeFanu (1-6 October, 1785) in LeFanu (ed.), *Betsy Sheridan’s Journal*, p. 74.

Fig 20: (Left) Women’s riding dress (C.1778/9, Victoria and Albert Museum).

Fig 21: ‘The Supremacy of the Skirt’: *Punch Magazine* lampoons rational dress. (December 12 1895).

*Gertrude:* ‘Mr dear Jessie, what on earth is that bicycle suit for?’
*Jessie:* Why, to wear of course.
*Gertrude:* But you haven’t got a bicycle!
*Jessie:* No, but I’ve got a sewing machine.
May 5: Went to the public breakfast at Spring Garden … there are boxes resembling those at Vauxhall for those who prefer being in the air […] there is an orchestra for the band [and] the gardens are laid out with taste … the view from them [is] delightful… after dinner we went to the Repository and walked on the north and south Parades which have broad pavements and a fine row of Houses.49

Mary Orlebar also records her delight at the architectural splendours of the spa: ‘I scarce know which to prefer; the prospects from the southern side of Brock Street and the Crescent, those seen from Bladud, & Paragon Buildings; or those, from the north & south Parades.’50 Giffard, the visitor of 1789 and Orlebar create informative and detailed accounts which could be read by or to an audience at home. Natural beauties were also recorded, as a letter from a Mary Ward at Tunbridge Wells highlights: ‘we went to see what are called the High rocks the other day. These are high masses of stone piled one above another come to a height of seventy feet… Today… we are going to see Harrisons Rocks’.51

Riding was another pursuit which took women out of the home into the fresh air and public arenas of the spa.52 Guide books advertised local beauty spots such as particular roads, villages and stately homes for spa the company to visit, either on horseback, or by carriage. *The Bath Guide*, for example, boasted that the roads around the spa were vastly improved due to local turnpikes, and advertised Lansdowne Road and Claverton Down as ideal riding spots, noting that the air was especially beneficial to invalids.53 Throughout her visit to Bath, Betty Hervey, daughter of Lady Bristol, rode frequently with other members of the company, and

49 CKS U1272 ‘A Diary Concerning a Stay in Bath 1789’ (3 May, 5 May 1789).
50 BL RP 9609 (ii) Box 266 Mary Orlebar ‘A Journey, from Ecton Through London to Bath and from thence, back again, through Cirencester, and Banbury, to Daventry and Northampton from august ye 3rd to October ye 12th 1785’ (August-October 1785).
51 CBS D-X 1388/10/57 Mary Ward, Tunbridge Wells, to her cousin Anne Ward Iver.
53 *The New Bath Guide* (1762), p. 36; *The New Bath Guide Necessary for All Persons Residing at, or Resorting to, This Antient and Opulent City. Giving an Account if its Antiquity, and First Discovery of its Medicinal Waters; The Reality and Eminence of King Blaudud, The First Founder of the Baths; Also a Description of the City and Its Buildings Down to The Present Time; With a Much More Correct Account Than Any Yet Published of The Going Out and Coming in of The Post, According to The Later Alterations Machines, Waggons, Carriers , &c, &c. &c (Bath, 1770), p. 41-42.
rarely missed an opportunity when she was asked to ride. Elizabeth Collett and her niece, Miss Thorpe were also keen riders. During their visit to Bath in 1793 they rode almost every day, their route usually taking them along the Upper or Lower Bristol Road, the Wells Road or to the Downs. Elizabeth Montagu also spent a great deal of time ‘riding on horseback’ during her visits to Tunbridge Wells. She had an appetite for excursions and during a visit in 1745 went on a ten mile ride from which she returned to the spa by moonlight. At Tunbridge Wells, the Duchess of Richmond found that ‘nothing … does me more good … than riding in the afternoons, & going to bed soon after’. She rode ‘a good deal’ and found it irritating when anything hindered her excursions, such as the weather or poor state of the roads.

Both resorts offered stables, where visitors and residents might hire horses and riding equipage or have their own horses stationed, such as Richard Maltby’s near Queen Square in Bath, which provided ‘Horses and Carriages… by the Week, Month, or Year’. The riding schools which started to emerge at the resorts in the later eighteenth century provided tuition to male and female pupils. There were a number of these establishments at Bath, such as that run by Samuel Ryles in Monmouth Street in the early nineteenth century, and those ‘in Montpellier-Row and Monmouth Street kept by Messrs Stevenson and Stokes’. Ryles advertised that he had ‘engaged a RIDING MASTER from London’ and had ‘good Horses, for those Ladies and Gentlemen who wish to ride for instruction.’ One of the particular benefits of the schools was that when the weather did ‘not permit ladies and gentlemen to take their rides upon the downs &c’, these institutions provided an ‘extensive and commodious space for equestrian exercise.’ Ryle’s school offered

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55 Elizabeth Montagu, Tunbridge Wells, to Mrs Donnellan (8 September 1745) in Montagu, The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu, iii, p. 85.
56 Elizabeth Montagu, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duchess of Portland in The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu, iii, p. 17.
57 WSRO GWD MS 102 Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duke of Richmond (c.1719-1740).
58 TBJ (6 March 1775).
60 TBJ (6 February 1804).
twice as many hours for men as for women, suggesting that demand was higher from male clients, yet the fact it still offered two hours a day for female pupils demonstrates that women could also benefit from the teaching of an experienced riding master.\(^{62}\)

Women’s rational dress of the 1890s, designed to enable women to cycle comfortably and safely, consisting of knickerbockers, fitted shirts and jackets, is widely known to have provoked moral outrage [Fig. 21].\(^{63}\) What is not so frequently recognised is that this mirrored an earlier upset caused by women’s riding dress of the eighteenth century [Fig. 20]. It was argued by Richard Steele, that the riding dress of fashionable ladies too much resembled that of gentlemen: fitting closely to the figure. In *The Spectator* Steele described one such ‘Amazon’ dressed in ‘a coat and waist-coat of blue carrick trimm’d and embraod’rd with silver, a Cravat of the finest Lace’ and her hair ‘wantonly ty’d in a scalet Ribon.’\(^{64}\) The popularity of riding amongst women at the resorts meant that they spent considerable time in riding-wear; clothes which gave them more physical freedom than their usual daywear.

Lady Bristol informed her husband that their daughter Betty had ‘eqipd her self for riding’ during a visit to Bath in 1723 and added that ‘all the lady’s do it here’.\(^{65}\) Many of Bath’s shops sold female riding wear. Sarah Clark of the Abbey Court Yard (and later of Wade’s Passage) and John Baker of Stall Street, sold women’s riding dresses, whilst E. Hallett, a hatter in the Orange Grove advertised, ‘Ladies riding Hats elegantly fitted up’.\(^{66}\) In addition to purchasing the necessary dress for riding, Betty Hervey was also sent ‘a very pretty pad and saddle’ by Dame Lindsey, the proprietor of the second set of assembly rooms, who opened opposite Harrisons in 1730. This gift suggests Lindsey wished to court the favour of the prestigious Hervey family, and the selection of stylish equestrian equipage suggests she saw

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\(^{62}\) *TBJ* (6 February 1804).


\(^{64}\) Richard Steele, ‘The Spectator’ (29 June 1711) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, i, p. 434.

\(^{65}\) Lady Bristol to the Earl of Bristol (22 May 1723) in *Letter-Books of John Hervey*, ii, p. 297.

\(^{66}\) *TBJ* (11 September 1775).
Fig 22: The Old Rooms at Bath
riding as a fashionable and popular pursuit, in which the young woman would inevitably want to partake at the spa.67

Dancing was perhaps the most popular physical recreation on offer at the eighteenth-century resort. The opportunity to dance arose on many occasions; in the pleasure gardens, the studios of dancing masters and most importantly, at balls. Balls were highly structured affairs, taking place up to four times a week during the fashionable seasons at Bath and twice a week at Tunbridge Wells. Before the opening of the Upper Rooms at Bath in 1770, balls were organised between the two Lower Rooms, each room holding one Dress Ball and one Fancy Ball a week throughout the season [Fig. 22].68 Harrison’s Assembly Rooms were the first to open. Situated opposite the Terrace Walk, Harrison’s Rooms opened in 1709, were expanded in 1720 by the addition of a ball room and further enlarged and remodelled between 1749 and 1750.69 They were of such success, that a second set of rooms were built opposite between 1728 and 1730. Once in existence, the rival establishments organised their balls on alternate nights so as not to clash.70 A third set of rooms, known as the Upper or as the New Rooms, opened in 1770, forcing the second set to close and resulting in the former organisation of ball nights being applied to the commonly termed Upper and the Lower Rooms.71 For example, in the 1780s visitors could

68 A ‘Dress Ball’ had two halves, the first half of which was dedicated to French dances and the second, to traditional country dances. At Bath, minuets were of particular importance. The most commonly performed of all French dances, the minuet, required great skill and precision, and a young woman’s first public minuet was regarded as a moment of great significance. Fancy Balls mainly consisted of country dances, interspersed with cotillion dances. The evening would conclude with a minuet: The New Bath Guide (1770), p. 35; Fawcett, Bath Entertain’d, p. 32; Georgians Revealed: Life, Style and the Making of Modern Britain (London: The British Library, 2013), pp. 130-134; TBC (29 November 1792); Burney, Camilla, pp. 444-445.
69 Proprietors of the first assembly rooms: Thomas Harrison (1708-1735); Lord Hawley and his mistress Elizabeth Hayes, sister of Dames Lindsey (1735-1745); William Simpson (1745-1755); Mrs Mary Webb, daughter of Thomas Harrison (1755-1772); Cam Gyde (1772) Hembry, The English Spa 1560-1815, pp. 177-118; The New Bath Guide; or, Useful Pocket Companion The New Bath Guide; or, Useful Pocket Companion for All Persons Residing at or Resorting to This Antient City. Giving an Account of the First Discovery of its Medicinal Waters by King Bladud; Nature and Efficacy of the Warms Bath and Sudatories, With Rules and Prices For Bathing and Pumping (Bath: 1786), p. 22.
70 The second set of assembly rooms were commissioned by Humphrey Thayer and leased by: Retired singer Dame Lindsey (1730-1736); Catherine Lovelace (1736-1737); Mrs Ann Wiltshire and her son Walter Wiltshire. The rooms were demolished in 1820 and replaced by York Street: Hembry, The English Spa 1560-1815, pp. 177-118.
71 Boddley, The Bath and Bristol Guide; The New Bath Guide (1790), pp. 21-22
attend Dress Balls on Monday at Mr Derham’s (the Upper Rooms) and Friday at Mr Gyde’s (the Lower Rooms), or they might decide to partake in a Cotillion in which case they could attend Mr Gyde’s on a Tuesday or Mr Derham’s on a Wednesday.\textsuperscript{72}

At Tunbridge Wells, the main assembly rooms were those on the walks of which there were two sets, known as at Bath, as the ‘Upper’ and ‘Lower’ rooms.\textsuperscript{73} Each room held one ball a week as Jasper Sprange advertised in his guide: ‘Twice a week there are public balls in the great assembly rooms- On \textit{Tuesdays} at the room on the walk, and \textit{Fridays} at the lower rooms.’\textsuperscript{74}

Women’s spa writings illustrate that balls were awaited and enjoyed with much excitement. Elizabeth Montagu ‘danced twice a week’ as a young unmarried woman at Tunbridge Wells in 1736 and in 1740 she was pleased with the end of the season at Bath, as she had been obliged to take the role of spectator throughout due to her health, although she longed to ‘foot it’.\textsuperscript{75} For some, balls were the most important ingredient of the spa social scene; ‘The Lady Henleys are here and are happy on Ball nights as you were 12 m[onth ago]’ wrote Charles Pratt to his daughters; ‘at other times I suspect their time passes heavily, for they are seen looking out of the window for hours together.’\textsuperscript{76} Even Margaret Graves, who was in her sixties when she moved to Bath, wished to dance at the resort, and wrote to her niece asking for ‘lessons of the art of jumping’, so she did not ‘forget the manner of it’; whether or not she would have danced in public due to her age is questionable, but the fact she wished to practice illustrates it was a skill and form of exercise enjoyed by women of all ages, not only the young and unmarried, seeking a husband.\textsuperscript{77} Women who feared they would not find a partner or believed they were too old, sometimes felt the need to withdraw from dancing. Sheridan wrote to her sister from Tunbridge Wells asking ‘can you blame me for chuzing rather to resign the very youthful pursuits rather before my time, in preference to the ridiculous jokes on Old maids’. However, it took little persuasion for her to accept the hand of Mr Rycroft at a ball, ‘I forgot my

\textsuperscript{72} Fawcett, \textit{Bath Entertain’d}, p. 34; \textit{The New Bath Guide} (1786), p. 23.
\textsuperscript{73} A set of rooms existed prior to this; they were brought from Rusthall and reconstructed on Mount Ephraim in 1670, but little is known of these rooms.
\textsuperscript{74} Sprange, \textit{The Tunbridge Wells Guide} (1780), p. 19.
\textsuperscript{75} Elisabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (January 1740) Montagu, \textit{The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu}, i, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{76} CRO U840 C2/1 Charles Pratt, Bath, to his daughters (6 October 1765).
\textsuperscript{77} DRO 1038M/F1/172 Margaret Graves, Bath, to Eliza Simcoe (23 September 1805).
former resolution and danced away ‘till I got well warm’d- my Partner was a very pretty young man, modest and unaffected. I was glad to find I could conquer the blue devils…”

Leisured female visitors often told their family and friends about balls they attended in their spa correspondence: ‘we do not feel ourselves the worse, for our Dance last Night, at Mr King’s Ball’ wrote Sarah Knollys from Bath in 1805: ‘it was a very good one, & the Rooms quite full, Dancing in all three of the Rooms, & our partners were Mr Pickering, [illegible], & our little Beau Edward Grindall, who I danced with the whole evening.’ Recipients were also eager to hear details of spa balls, as illustrated in a letter from Anne Sturges to her friend Marianne Dyson at Bath: ‘I insist on having a full account of the dress, & all about it, as well as about the rooms, & whether you danced there.’ Complaints that there were not enough male dancers to satisfy the demand for partners were common and illustrate the popularity of dancing amongst female visitors. Charles Pratt, for instance, commented on the lack of willing dancers at Tunbridge Wells in 1789, noting that: ‘8 couple is the highest number of dancers the company have seen this season & half of them without a male partner.’ In such situations, sometimes women partnered with other woman, or the Master of Ceremonies would step in to accompany partner-less women.

The assembly rooms were also open for dance rehearsals during the day, providing further opportunity for exercise. In 1767 Elizabeth Giffard recorded attending the assembly room in the morning ‘to see some of the company dance cotillons’, and enjoyed the same activity another afternoon, staying half an hour to watch the dancers. Katherine Plymley also went to watch this ‘singular scene, ladies & gentlemen in walking dresses, many of the gentlemen in boots, dancing by daylight, whilst numbers were looking on.’ At Tunbridge Wells, the figure for the cotillion to be performed at the next ball would be ‘put up in the Great Rooms’ prior to the

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78 Betsy Sheridan, Tunbridge Wells, to Alicia LeFanu (1 October 1785) in LeFanu (ed.), Betsy Sheridan’s Journal, p. 72.
79 HRO.21M69/6/2 Sarah Knollis, 44 Milsom Street, Bath, to Samuel Knollis (12 January 1805).
80 HRO 9M55/F5/3 from Anne Sturges Bourne, South Audley Street, London, to Marianne Dyson, to St James Square, Bath (16 February 1827).
81 CKS U840 C3/11 Charles Pratt, Tunbridge Wells, to Frances Pratt (16 August 1789).
82 FRO Elizabeth Giffard ‘A Bath Journal’ (2 February 1767).
83 SRO 567/5/5/1/27 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1807’ (29 January 1807).
event, so that the company ‘may be acquainted with it.’

It is possible that this provided another rehearsal space. Public daylight practices offered the same opportunities as a ball, except in a more relaxed atmosphere and without the strict dress regulations of the evening. The rehearsals also provided a form of spectator sport for women such as Giffard and Plymley who did not often stray from their houses in the evening.

Walking, riding and dancing were the most common forms of exercise in which women engaged at the spas, yet there were a range of other, more unusual, physical diversions on offer. Two of Bath’s pleasure gardens offered the novel entertainment of swinging. Waterloo Gardens boasted ‘some pleasing walks and the use of a swing’ and Sydney Gardens presented ‘swings, bowling greens and cold baths as well as a Merlin’s Swing in the centre of a labyrinth.’ At Sydney Gardens ‘several swings’ were ‘adapted for the ladies; and others for gentlemen’ illustrating that women were equally able to participate.

When Katherine Plymley visited the gardens with her nieces in 1803, she commented that ‘Swings are placed in different parts & we saw some very fearless swingers’, though she does not comment on their gender. There is little to suggest that swinging also took place at Tunbridge Wells, except for the series of fictional ‘swingers’ letters which appeared in *The Spectator* in 1712, explored in Chapter 2.

For the upper echelons of society, whose movements, mannerisms and behaviours were strictly codified, the temptation of swinging may have been particularly exciting. Like other forms of elite entertainment, it provided an opportunity for display; for the fabric of women’s dresses to splay out and for grace and ease of movement to be exhibited. Contemporary art made much of the connection between the swing and sexual immorality. The lack of physical control, the risk of dresses flying up and revealing a woman’s naked legs and the playful nature of the game

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85 *The New Bath Guide, or, Useful Pocket Companion For All Persons Residing at or Resorting to This Antient City. Giving an Account of the First Discovery of its Medicinal Waters by King Bladud; Nature and Efficacy of the Warm Baths and Sudatories, With Rules and Prices For Bathing and Pumping* (Bath, 1800), p. 45.

86 Merlin’s swing was designed by John Joseph Merlin, probably for the specific use of patients with consumptive disorders. The Bath Chronicle enticed visitors in 1795, stating that ‘Merlins swing is now open, and… it is thought most conductive to health.’
were all considered potentially dangerous for the young women involved. In Fragonard’s famous painting, *The Swing*, a woman is pushed on a swing by her husband, whilst her lover lies in the bushes before her, watching her dress rise to reveal her legs beneath. The painting visually represents fears reflected in *The Spectator’s* comments on the swingers at Tunbridge Wells; both link elite women’s pursuit of pleasure with sexual immorality, using the swing to represent female flirtatiousness and temptation, and depicting it as a facilitator of decadent, licentious behaviour.

One of the most unusual recreations on offer to polite women at Tunbridge Wells was competing in donkey races, as documented in an anonymous caricature entitled *Neddy Races at Tunbridge Wells* [Fig. 23]. The image depicts five well-to-do women astride donkeys as they compete to finish a race. None of the racers are flatteringly portrayed and all have grim expressions of determination on their faces. In the foreground, one woman falls from her horse exposing her large behind as she cries out; ‘oh what a nasty ass mine is’. The caricature comments on the perceived unnaturalness of polite women engaging in competitive entertainments, which were seen to raise unbecoming passions and ruin feminine delicacy. It highlights that the races were a particularly novel entertainment for women, and one which did not fit in with contemporary feminine ideals. A poster advertising ‘Diversions on Tunbridge Wells Common’ in 1797 notes that ‘An Ass Race for a Cheshire Cheese’ was to take place at 12.00 on Wednesday 16th August, illustrating that the races were not only a fictional creation. Unfortunately, no gendered distinction is made in the advert; the same poster, however, also states that a ‘grand match of Stool-Ball’ was to take place between ‘11 Ladies of Sussex, in Pink, against 11 of Kent, in Blue Ribbands’ highlighting that respectable women did involve themselves in competitive, sporting entertainments at the spa.87

Finally, there is also evidence to suggest that women engaged in at least one form of racket sport at the eighteenth-century spa. Baddledore and shuttlecock, an early form

87 TWM A poster advertising ‘Diversions on Tunbridge Wells Common’ (1797); ‘Stool Ball’ was an eighteenth-century game, in which a ‘gamester’ hit a ball with a bat, and then attempted to run around a set course, before arriving at his/her final destination and sitting on a stool. If he/she did not successfully complete their course, the stool would be taken away. *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (Worcester, Massachusetts, 1787), p. 41.
**Fig 23:** (Top) *Neddy Races at Tunbridge Wells Or a gallop down the Sand Hills for the Ladies Plate* (S.W. Fores, 1802, Tunbridge Wells Museum).

**Fig 24:** (Bottom) Fan illustration of shuttlecock in the assembly rooms (George Speren, c.1730s).
of badminton which required a racket (the battledore) and a shuttlecock, formed from feathers and a cork, was another sport in which women engaged throughout early modernity. Like archery, it continued to be played into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A fan illustration of c. 1730 depicts two fashionably dressed women playing at battledore in the assembly rooms at Bath, whilst several other women look on [Fig 24]. They are dressed in large hooped dresses, and except for the rackets they hold, do not appear to be attired for playing sports. In a journal entry of 1767, Elizabeth Giffard notes that she; ‘went to the rooms & play’d at battle-dore’ with two gentlemen.88 Dating from three decades after the fan illustration, this manuscript reference suggests that the sport continued to be played in the rooms for a length of time. William Scheuerle suggests that croquet was in fact the first sport in which men and women played together, yet here we have evidence of a mixed-gender game of battledore and shuttlecock at Bath. The way in which Giffard refers to the event is also understated, hinting that this was not an uncommon event.89

Battledore was regarded as a safe and fashionable game, particularly suited to women. Rousseau referred to it as ‘mere woman’s play’, unlike tennis, which he stated was unfit for the fair sex, ‘their white and delicate skins’ not being ‘adapted to bruises.’90 The lack of specific attire and the fact that men and women could play together implies that rather than being seen as a physically skilled or demanding activity, battledore was perceived as another easy and polite entertainment. Though it was regarded as a lesser sport, the significance of women being able to play a racket sport is worth noting. It was not until the late nineteenth century that games such as croquet, badminton and tennis became widely played amongst upper and middle class women, however as the fan illustration and Giffard’s reference indicate, they were able to partake in some forms of racket sports from considerably earlier and in the most respectable of public arenas.

In contrast to the notion that elite and middling women led quiet, inactive lives, confined to their settees and tea tables within the bounds of the domestic sphere, this investigation highlights that many of the pursuits in which women engaged at the

89 Scheuerle, Croquet and Its Influences.
90 Jean-Jacques, Emilius; or, a Treatise of Education (1768), p. 224.
eighteenth-century resort were physically demanding. Walking, riding and dancing, frequently formed part of the privileged woman’s spa routine; activities which took them into a variety of public arenas and required physical engagement. Many viewed women’s daily activities through a moral prism, and were quick to term their lifestyle or their environment ‘idle’; their use of the term not denoting inactivity; instead suggesting that they had not been engaged in productive household, familial or charitable responsibilities. Therefore, care should be taken not to read the term ‘idle’ literally; but to see it as an indication that women were pursuing interests and activities which lay outside traditional forms of feminine duty.

iii. Patrons of the Performing Arts

Performance was another urban pleasure open to female consumption at the resorts. When they attended concerts, puppet shows or plays at the spa, leisured women adopted the roles of patron, audience and critic. Musical entertainments became more frequent and professionalised throughout the long eighteenth century. An increase in printed music aided the formation of musical societies and concerts became a central part of fashionable life in London, the provinces and at the spas.91 For example, in the later eighteenth century, a winter season at Bath included eight musical concerts held weekly on a Wednesday.92 Women are highly visible in this musical scene. Female singers such as Elizabeth Linley and Madame Catelini captured public attention, and were admired for their musical ability and their physical presence which drew large crowds through their celebrity.

Whilst women are often highlighted as being absent from eighteenth-century associational culture, musical life was one area in which they were visible, such as the Ladies’ Catch Club at Bath.93 In January 1804 Caroline Powys wrote in her journal: ‘I was at the Ladies catch club. Mr Badderley was so obliging to get me a

93 *TBJ* (3 February 1794); *TBJ* (24 December 1804).
Ticket, a difficult thing to get one. About 372 mostly Ladies, no supper but cakes, ices, jellies & carried round between ye acts’, illustrating the dominant female presence. In 1807 Katharine Plymly’s niece was also offered a ticket; Plymley recorded that, ‘It was a ladies night’ and added ‘it is a favour to get a ticket for no Lady can subscribe’, highlighting that even though the event was designed for a female audience, it was men who purchased the tickets and selected who could attend.

The theatre, which forms the focus of the following investigation, also underwent considerable change throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After the restoration of the monarchy with Charles II, there was a renewed emphasis on the importance of the arts. On stage, female characters were played by women for the first time, instead of by men and boys who had traditionally taken on women’s roles. It was not necessarily an easy or safe career option for a woman; actresses often had to ‘fend off unwanted suitors who ignored the boundary between audience and stage in hot pursuit of them’. However, the legalisation of female actors opened up the profession to women, as well as adding a new level of naturalism to English theatre, making performances more enjoyable to watch and perhaps more appealing to female audiences as they saw themselves represented more naturalistically. Some actresses managed to achieve considerable respect and fame, removing themselves from the dangerous sphere which merged public performance and the sale of sex, Sarah Siddons being the most notable example. She had a long and respected career and was idolised by male and female audiences alike. However, such women sat in an awkward social position, whilst they achieved fame and respect, they were not part of the leisured echelons of society, as they had to work to earn their keep.

At Tunbridge Wells, women played an important role in the creation and survival of the theatre. Until the late eighteenth century, theatrical entertainment was limited at the resort, the spa being without a purpose-built playhouse or a successful group of

94 BL 42, 162 Powys Journal (27 January 1804).
95 SRO 567/5/5/1/27 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1807’ (23 January 1807).
97 Nussbaum, Rival Queens, pp. 8-9.
players until the 1780s. Lewis Melville refers to a band of strolling players performing at the resort in 1737 and the company of Canterbury Smith visiting in the 1750s, suggesting that that plays may have been an irregular occurrence. To aid the local players, Countess Tyrconnel commissioned ‘a play now and then to keep them from starving’ during the 1770s. Unfortunately, there is no indication of how frequently these performances were made or who attended them. It was another female figure who opened the first purpose-built playhouse at the spa. Mrs Baker established her ‘Temple of Muses’ on Mount Sion in 1786, which she pulled down in 1789 and rebuilt on the Lower Walks. Although the theatre was small, it was successful, with two or three shows a week in August and September during the 1790s. Mrs Baker’s success forced her rival, Glassington, to close his playhouse on Castle Street in 1789, leaving her institution as the sole theatre at the spa for the remainder of the eighteenth century. Whilst female theatre managers were not unheard of in this period, they were not common and where in existence, rarely had an official position. Therefore Mrs Baker was a rare exception to the rule, and one which ensured the provision of theatrical entertainment at Tunbridge Wells throughout the late eighteenth century.

The history of Bath’s theatre industry is better known than that of Tunbridge Wells; however, whilst women played an important role in patronising plays and visiting the theatre, there were no known female theatre managers at Bath in the eighteenth century. The first playhouse was erected in 1705 by George Trim along the North Borough Walls. This was shortly followed by the opening of a second theatre east of St James’s Church. In 1732 the Borough Walls playhouse was moved into the basement of Hayes’ Rooms (formerly Harrison’s), which could, with some discomfort, accommodate an audience of over 200. Simpson, proprietor of the other set of Assembly Rooms established a new theatre in 1747 beneath his ballroom. However, it was Orchard Street Theatre, headed by John Palmer and opened in the same year as Simpson’s theatre which gave Bath a name for the quality of its players.

98 Savidge, Royal Tunbridge Wells, pp. 84-85.
and productions, and was granted a Royal Patent in 1768. In 1805 the Theatre Royal moved to Beaufort Square where it remained.\(^{100}\)

Women of high social standing often commissioned plays, concerts and public readings at both resorts, illustrating their importance in the world of performing arts at the spa. A collection of posters and tickets printed and kept by Jasper Sprange, bookseller at Tunbridge Wells, demonstrates this point. These printed bills include a poster advertising a musical concert to be performed by the seven year old Miss Cobham and commissioned by the Duchess of York in September 1795; a musical concert performed by ‘Mess. Hummel and Son’ and requested by Lady Loughborough in September 1796; a benefit of *Pizarro or The Death of Rollo* ‘By Desire of Miss Ashburnham’ and readings of Voltaire and *La Sutitée du Barber de Seville*, requested by the Viscountess Boyne and the Countess of Errol.

The same pattern of female patronage is also visible at Bath. Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire requested the tragedy of *Edward and Eleonora* followed by the farce *Barnaby Bristle* in May 1782. In June of the same year she commissioned a public breakfast and concert including a ‘band of horns and clarinets with vocals’ and in February 1784 Mr Diamond’s benefit performance was held by her ‘desire’ at which *Hamlet* and *Three Weeks After Marriage* were performed.\(^{101}\) Benefits could be commissioned to support particular performers, or in aid of a particular charity. For example, Hester Piozzi (then Hester Thrale), organised a breakfast concert at Bath ‘to aid James Harris a dwarf (who shall show himself)’ in June 1784.\(^{102}\) However, not all performances requested by women were for a particular cause, a public breakfast held at the lower rooms which was followed by a concert on ‘musical glasses’, at the desire of the Duchess of Atholl was for no other purpose than pleasure and some performances emerged more spontaneously.\(^{103}\) For example, in 1723, when bored with the ‘hurly burly’ of Harrison’s Rooms, Lady Bristol accompanied by three other women, Lady Gage, Mrs Berkley and Mrs Upton, went to Lindsey’s rooms where the singer Cuszony performed an unscheduled concert for

\(^{100}\) Fawcett, *Bath Entertain’d*, pp. 80-83.
\(^{101}\) *BC* (23 May 1782); *BC* (13 June 1782); *BC* (5 February 1784).
\(^{102}\) *TBC* (10 June 1784).
\(^{103}\) *TBC* (9 February 1786).
them. Sending for the lute player Wyburn, she proceeded to sing three English ballads and entertain the fashionable female company who had been unimpressed with other available entertainments.\(^{104}\)

Chris Roejek has argued that the eighteenth century was the first age of celebrity. He suggests that the modern culture of celebrity was produced by the ‘para-social relations, which boomed in the eighteenth century’ and encouraged by newspaper and magazine proprietors who held up newsworthy figures for public admiration and consumption. This world of mass media closed the gap between famous figures and their audiences, and created a space in which audiences could openly comment and reflect. Roejek proposes that the Shakespearean English actresses of the eighteenth-century, were in fact the first celebrities.\(^{105}\) Felicity Nussbaum echoes this, arguing that by the 1780s a ‘star system’ was firmly in place, in which particular actresses were idolised for their talent and beauty. This system, she argues, blossomed into a celebrity culture in the later decades of the eighteenth century, with the ‘masterful performances’ of Sarah Siddons.\(^{106}\) The celebrity culture highlighted by Roejek and Nussbaum existed at the resorts; a culture in which women eagerly participated.

At Bath Katherine Plymley recorded ‘I was at the play with Mrs Corbett & Miss Charlotte Isted. I saw a very celebrated young actor, Ellison, in Frederick Mowbray in First Love, & Vapour in Grandmother.’\(^{107}\) Fanny Burney was drawn to watch the celebrated Sarah Siddons but confessed, ‘instead of falling in love with her, we fell in love with Mr Lee, who played Pierre – and so well!’\(^{108}\) Cassandra Austen, mother of Jane Austen, wrote from Bath of her ill friend, Martha who had ‘ventured to the play on Thursday Evening, it was an exertion, but… an earnest desire to see & hear Cooke in the character of Macbeth encouraged her venture.’\(^{109}\) Women were therefore not passive consumers of the theatre; Plymley, Burney and Cassandra Austen’s letters and journals illustrate that they were active and aware audience

\(^{104}\) Lady Bristol, Bath, to the Earl of Bristol (16 September 1723) in Letter Books of John Hervey, ii, p. 331.
\(^{106}\) Nussbaum, Rival Queens, pp. 9, 11.
\(^{107}\) SRO 567/5/5/1/16 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1796 2\(^{nd}\)’ (26 November 1796).
\(^{108}\) Fanny Burney, Bath (1780) in Barrett (ed), Diary and Letters of Madame D’arblay, i, p. 351.
\(^{109}\) HRO 23M93/62/2/2 Mrs Cassandra Austen, Bath (10 April 1806).
members, conscious of the qualities they desired in their performers. Lady Polwarth placed particular emphasis on the importance of performers in drawing her to the theatre. From Tunbridge Wells in 1784 she bemoaned that: ‘the company is very much sunk since the Days of Mrs Siddons. Even Mrs Didier the lively soubrette actress is gone, Mr. Diamond only remains.’

Discussing the quality of plays and performers was a popular activity and by-product of attending the theatre. During Elizabeth Giffard’s residence at Bath between November 1766 and January 1767, she attended four plays and two concerts. One evening she wrote ‘after tea & coffee, we all went in a party to the play- which was the maid of the mill- miss adcock performed the part of fanny the gipsy to the admiration of all the spectators’ adding that when they returned to supper they ‘talked of nothing but the little girl & agreed that she was quite a miracle.’ Women especially enjoyed affecting a tone of disdain in discussing the plays and concerts they attended, to demonstrate their superior taste. Elizabeth Montagu, for example, attended a concert at Bath which she disliked, and was diverted ‘to hear some pretenders to taste pity those that had no ear.’ Nineteen year old Mary Pelham was similarly unimpressed with the plays at Tunbridge Wells, commenting that they ‘are not half bad enough, at least in comedy, but we have some hopes, they will entertain us better with acting a Tragedy; the Fair Penitent is to be perform’d this Evening.’

Didactic authors suggested that women should avoid the theatre there being ‘few English comedies a lady can see, without shock to delicacy’, arguing if they did attend, they should restrict themselves to tragedies which would ‘soften and enoble’ their hearts. However, it was common practice at the resorts and at most theatres of the period, to show a tragedy and a farce on the same evening. Spa letters and

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110 BLA L30/13/12/98 Lady Polwarth, Bath, to Mary Robinson (29 November 1784).
113 Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, (January 1740) in *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu* (1809-1813), i, p. 97.
114 NUSC NEC3067 Miss M. Pelham, Tunbridge Wells, to C. Clinton, Countess of Lincoln (23 July 1760).
journals leave no suggestion that women left before the farce, most frequently illustrating that they stayed for both performances on the nights they visited the theatre. Elizabeth Giffard, for example, saw ‘very well performed, the clandestine marriage, with the Farce of Thomas and Sally’\textsuperscript{116} and Anna Cradock was ‘very well entertained’ when she went with Lady Sussex to see ‘The Provoked Husband’ with the farce ‘No Song no Supper’.\textsuperscript{117}

Not only was the eighteenth century a period which started to welcome women into the acting profession, but it also ushered in a new era in the history of female leisure; theatre visitation became a weekly entertainment for many women at fashionable resorts and when the patronage of performing arts extended beyond the royal court, to elite women in English society. This is illustrated at the spas, where women also appear to have contributed to the creation of a new celebrity culture through favouring particular actors and actresses and writing from the spas, detailing the merits of tragic actresses, and handsome male leads.

iv. ‘Gamester Ladies’: Women and Gambling

Of all the leisure pursuits women participated in at the resorts, gambling was the most controversial. Ombre, quadrille and whist were regarded as innocent games which men and women might play together in public or private without concern for their reputation. Such ‘Play’ was not usually regarded as gambling, as the stakes were low and involved a certain amount of skill. On the other hand, hazard, faro, basset, quinze and lanterloo had high stakes and relied heavily on chance. They were therefore believed to be less suitable for female players, as were dicing games such as passage and roly-poly.\textsuperscript{118} Card games played against a bank were believed to be particularly dangerous when women took on the role of banker. In such cases, female gamblers posed a threat not only to respectability, but also to the socio-

\textsuperscript{116} FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard ‘A Bath Journal’ (24 November 1765).
\textsuperscript{117} DUSC Anne Francesca Cradock Journal (30 November 1790).
\textsuperscript{118} John Eglin, \textit{The Imaginary Autocrat: Beau Nash and the Invention of Bath} (London: Profile, 2005), pp. 69-72, 123-125.
economic structure; as ‘bankers’ women were effectively engaging in paid employment and it was for this reason faro caused such controversy in the 1790s.\textsuperscript{119}

Women were provided with many opportunities to gamble in the public arenas of the resorts. Guidebooks provide testimony to the fact that once Harrison’s and Lindsey’s Rooms were established at Bath, visitors had almost constant opportunity to play at cards. On ball nights, tables were provided for those who wished to game and on all non-ball nights, card assemblies were held providing further opportunity for gambling. In 1762, for example, there were assemblies at Simpsons on a Tuesday and Saturday, and at Mr Wiltshire’s on a Monday and Friday, with Sundays being swapped between the Rooms alternately. A guide of 1786 illustrates that changes in gambling laws forced the proprietors of the rooms to prohibit public gambling in the rooms on Sundays; every other night of the week they continued to offer gaming opportunities; the Rooms being ‘always open for the company to walk and play at cards.’\textsuperscript{120} Similarly, at Tunbridge Wells there were ‘card assemblies’ every night of the week… at each of the public rooms alternately’, except for Sundays as it too followed gambling legislation.\textsuperscript{121}

Observers suggested that high stakes games raised reckless passions in women which were ruinous to feminine modesty, virtue and beauty. In 1713 for example, Richard Steele published an article in The Guardian under the name of Nestor Ironside, declaring that the ‘Gamester ladies’ of Tunbridge Wells: ‘throw their Features into violent Distortions, and wear away their Lillies and Roses in tedious Watching, and restless Elucubrations.’ He further suggested that ‘their chief Passion is an Emulation of Manhood’, suggesting that gambling encouraged women to display unfeminine behaviour, implying that it was of such importance to some women, that it took the place of religion:


\textsuperscript{120} The New Bath Guide (1786), pp. 22-25.

\textsuperscript{121} Sprange, The Tunbridge Wells Guide (1780), p. 97.
Fig 25: Mrs Brittle the Beauty of Tunbridge Wells (1798, Tunbridge Wells Museum Collection).
It is no mean undoubted Argument of their Ease of Conscience that they
go directly from Church to the Gaming Table: and so highly reverence
Play, as to make it a great part of their Exercise on Sundays.\textsuperscript{122}

Similar sentiments are visible in \textit{Advice on a Daughter Going to Bath}, in which the
poet warns:

\begin{quote}
Ill luck will passions in some Bosoms raise
Too strong for female Reason to appease…
All her calm sweetness wth her money lost
Her tender soul in swelling Tempests Tost.\textsuperscript{123}
\end{quote}

Anxious to reassure their friends, family, and perhaps even themselves, that they
were not amongst the reckless ‘gamester ladies’ of the resorts, some women wrote
home to emphasise their abstinence from the gaming tables. Isabella Carr, for
instance wrote to her husband from Bath that she was going to the Rooms to play at
Cribbage, but felt need to add, ‘we don’t make an estate with gaming’.\textsuperscript{124} The printed
criticisms, mumbled complaints and disapproving looks of a few observers may
simply have had little real significance to those women who enjoyed gambling, and
saw it as one of the advantages of a spa visit.

Anna Cradock visited Bath in 1811; she too was keen to avoid the card playing
‘lists’ believing it was the ‘chief’ employment at Bath, and declaring that too many
old ladies dedicated their time to it at the spa.\textsuperscript{125} Whilst women had the opportunity
to play at cards at the spas, this did not mean all wished to. A combination of moral
opposition, cultural distaste and fear of public judgment may have dissuaded some
from play. The complaints against female gambling at Bath and Tunbridge Wells
encapsulated in the letter of ‘Nestor Ironside’ and \textit{Advice on a Daughter Going to Bath}, and those voices raised in opposition found in manuscript evidence illustrate
that despite opposition, many women continued to gamble as we know from public

\begin{footnotes}
\ref{122} The Second Part of the Tunbridge-Miscellany for the Year 1713 (1713).
\ref{123} NLW Llanfair and Brynodol (1) FF,37-8 ‘Advice to a Daughter Going to Bath’ (1726).
\ref{124} NA ZCE/F/1/1/5/9 Isabella Carr, Tunbridge Wells, to Ralph Carr (4 February 1762).
\ref{125} NAP PC1/25/F88 Anna Cradock, Bath, to Sarah Nichols (June 1811).
\end{footnotes}
criticism. Exactly how far women personally encountered criticism of female gambling whilst they were at the resorts is difficult to gauge. They were certainly encouraged to play by the masers of ceremonies and assembly room proprietors, as the rooms never excluded players on gender grounds.

Lady Bristol found little pleasure in visiting Bath but as an avid gambler she seized the opportunity during the three trips made for her health. The respectable game of ombre was her usual choice, but she also played at dice in the mornings, and wrote, in 1721, that her ombre partner had left so she had ‘taken to hazard… which is very low most of the ladies play silver’, hinting that she desired higher stakes. In another letter she boasted of her influence over other gamesters at the spa, detailing how the company ‘is always so complisant to play at Dames [Lindsay’s card room] when I please’. Hervey believed her influence was of such sway as to make it ‘very bad for Harrison’, as she drew the card players away from his establishment. It is most likely Hervey would have played at Harrison’s as well, had she not been dissuaded by her husband who disapproved of ‘Harrison’s stove’, believing it to be too hot and crowded for her health. Hervey was therefore aware of the disapproval her gaming might provoke, even from her husband, but she did not allow this to stop her playing altogether.

Betty Southwell was another spa visitor who enjoyed partaking in the gambling opportunities provided. On one occasion she returned ‘from Lindseys loaded with silver and abitt or two of gold she had nickd Syms out of at hazard.’ When at Bath in 1740, Elizabeth Montagu also enjoyed gaming in public, often playing at commerce on ball nights in a set of at least seven other women consisting of ‘Miss Bulkely, Miss Greville, Miss Cotton, the Miss Bathursts, Lady Widington, and Mrs. Howard.’ Whilst he enjoyed small intimate card assemblies in the homes of his female acquaintances at Bath, George Lucy frowned upon the public female

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gambler, such as a certain ‘Mrs C’ of Bath, whom he describes as a ‘compleat
gamester’ and adds ‘as I am not, we are not very intimate.’ He also noted that the
most popular games at the resort were quadrille and loo and that women were
rumoured to excel at them both; ‘at the former you hear of Ladies winning five or six
hundred fish and at the latter men loosing two or three hundred pounds.’

Raffling was another form of gambling popular amongst women at the spas. It was
enjoyed at both resorts, though appears to have continued longer at Tunbridge Wells
than at Bath. Defoe notes raffling was one of the prominent diversions at Bath, but it
is harder to find references to it later in the eighteenth century, whilst at Tunbridge
Wells, it is listed in numerous accounts. Raffles were organised by shop keepers
such as milliners, jewellers and booksellers who sold tickets to their customers. The
participants were then entered into a draw, or dice could be rolled to decide the
winner. A caricature of 1798 entitled Mrs Brittle the Beauty of Tunbridge Wells also
makes reference to the custom of raffling [Fig 25]. The print depicts an elderly and
unattractive female shop keeper holding list of entrants to a raffle she has organised.
She is smiling to herself, having deliberately selected as the winner a woman who
has already left the spa. Significantly, all the other names visible on the list appear to
be female, the titles ‘Lady’, ‘Miss’ and ‘Duchess of…’ all being visible. The account
book of Mrs Martha Hutchins, which details a trip to Tunbridge Wells in 1687,
reveals that raffling was her single greatest expense during her time at the resort.
The abbreviation ‘R- away’ indicating money that Hutchins had lost at raffling
appears frequently in her outgoing expenses; unfortunately there is no accompanying
list of incomings, yet it seems highly unlikely that her raffling was a financially
profitable pursuit. The account book suggests that some women may regularly
have partaken in the raffles, forming an addiction to these games of chance in the
same way some were drawn to gambling with cards and dice. Whilst in competition
with one another, these raffles also united the participants as they shared in the
‘ecstasy’ of ‘that moment just before the dice fell’, the moment which Jessica

130 WRO L6/1472 George Lucy, Bath to Mrs Philippa Hayes (11 March 1764).
131 Defoe, A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain, vi, p. 34.
132 BL Portland Papers: vol. CCCXLVIII, 30348: (1687) Account Book of Elizabeth Harley, 1687-
1688.
Richards argues was the main allure of gaming. Raffles were a popular form of competitive leisure, and one in which women were fully welcome to participate.

v. Religion and Charity

Life at the resorts was punctuated by religion. Morning and afternoon service or prayers were held at the various religious establishments of the spas daily and on Sundays, leisure pursuits deemed undevout, such as gambling and dancing, were relinquished in honour of the Sabbath day. Such a permanent feature of daily routine, many visitors did not see the necessity of recording their trips to the abbey, church or chapel in their journals or letters, only making such references in passing. The Duchess of Richmond, for instance, wrote to her husband: ‘I am just come from church my dear angel & the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk dine here’, Pricilla Digby comments that she would ride most days ‘after church in ye morning’ and Caroline Powys, recording her Bath routine of 1807, describes how she and her husband ‘emply’d our morning as is usual at Bath, in going to ye Pump [,] ye Abbey Church [and] ye Rooms.’ These comments illustrate that even if little space was given to it in their life-writings, religious service formed a constant feature of women’s spa routines. The scarcity of reference does however make it problematic to assess just how much time was usually spent at church or chapel. For instance, the Reverend Penrose noted that his wife and daughter ‘go out, to Church twice a day, a quarter after eleven, and a quarter after four’, illustrating that some women spent a great deal of their time at worship. However, this was certainly an area of variance; they were after all the wife and daughter of a clergyman.

The Chapel of King Charles the Martyr, opened in 1678 and financed by subscription, was the most popular place of worship at Tunbridge Wells. Situated

134 WSRO GWD MS 102 Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells (c.1719-1740) to the Duke of Richmond; NUSC. MOL 82 Pricilla Digby, Bath (12 September 1745) to Anne Molyneux; BL. Powys Journals 42, 164.
close to the Wells, the chapel attracted the patronage of many visitors. There were also a number of smaller religious establishments near the resort. In 1689 the Presbyterians obtained a licence to meet on Sundays, in a ballroom on Mount Ephraim, a dissenting chapel was opened on Mount Sion in 1720, and in 1768 Lady Huntingdon’s Chapel was opened by George Whitefield. Therefore, though it was a relatively small and rural resort, Tunbridge Wells and its environs provided visitors with a variety of religious establishments both conformist and non-conformist.

At Bath, the most prestigious and popular place of religious worship was the Abbey. Service was often performed by visiting clergymen. There were also a number of churches including, but not limited to, St Swithins which was rebuilt after a storm in 1742, and again in 1777 to cater for the expanding population of Bath; a Baptist Church which met in Southgate Street in the 1750s and moved to Gerrard Street in 1768, and Christ Church, the only Free Church in eighteenth-century Bath which was completed in 1798. The resort was particularly well known for its chapels which were built as a solution to the pressures placed on the city and its local parish churches, by the rising population of visitors who sought ‘exclusive religious spaces’. These included proprietary chapels such as St Mary’s at Queen Square (1734), the Octagon on Milsom Street (1767) and Kensington Chapel on London Road (1795). There were also many non-conformist chapels such as Lady Huntingdon’s Chapel (1765) and the Wesleyan Chapel in New King Street (1779). By 1800 Bath had a total of eleven Church of England chapels, and nine non-conformist ones. There was also a Roman Catholic chapel, which was ransacked and stripped bare during the anti-Catholic uprisings of 1779. The range of religious buildings at both resorts catered for the needs of visitors with different religious beliefs.

Religious service blurred the boundaries of leisure and duty. Attending church, chapel or the Abbey was an activity which visitors engaged in from their own free will; yet it may not have seemed like much of an option. Driven by religious

conviction, by prayers for their own health or for that of loved ones and perhaps by social pressure, religious service was seen as a necessary part of life. However, elements of religious practice at the resorts echoed patterns visible in the more commercial leisure pursuits. Except for the Free Church at Bath, visitors had to pay to enter all religious establishments. Katherine Plymley commented that Lady Huntingdon’s Chapel had the ‘air of a public place’, emphasised by the fact that ‘sixpence is paid on admittance; a ticket is given to you which you deliver again at the last door.’ Religious worship also presented another opportunity for self-display. Penrose was surprised to find it no uncommon occurrence for women to go to the Abbey in a sedan chair and ‘remain in it all Service Time.’ He was particularly astonished to see one woman ‘carried up to the Communion Table to be Churched’ remaining in her sedan chair.

Church touring was a highly popular past time in Georgian England and an aspect of tourist enjoyment is visible in the way women responded to the religious scene of the spas, in their life-writings. For instance, Katherine Plymley visited a number of religious establishments during her time at Bath; on Sunday 11 October 1794, she went to four; attending morning service at St James’s, a service for two charity schools held at the Abbey, service at Margaret’s and hymns at lady Huntingdon’s chapel in the evening. In 1799 she went to Queen Square chapel, being given the seat belonging to her friend Mrs Key, and in 1807, she visited the Free Church. The fact that Plymley recorded visiting these different establishments echoes the way visitors recorded details of their walks around the spas, further emphasising the element of tourism. When Charlotte Kenyon made a day trip to Bath in the nineteenth century, she gave a very brief description of her time at the resort, but paid close attention to architectural details of the abbey:

20 July: Nave plaster ceiling perpendicular window clustered columns & pointed arches 5 arches in Nave 3 in choir which has fan tracing in roof-

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138 SRO 567/5/1/4 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1794’ (11 October 1794).
139 Reverend Penrose, Bath, to ‘Peggy’ Penrose (29 April 1766) in Mitchell and Penrose (eds), *Letters from Bath 1766-1767*, p. 71.
141 SRO 567/5/1/4 Journey to Bath 1794 (11 October 1794).
142 SRO 567/5/1/27 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1807’ (25 January 1807).
high perpendicular window with fragments of painted glass very odd
glazing alter screen copied from the old in 1834.\textsuperscript{143}

In addition to interest in celebrity actors and musicians, women also appear to have
developed interest in particular speakers, extending the celebrity culture into the
religious sphere of the resorts. In 1794, Katherine Plymley noted that ‘Dr Randolph
of the Octagon’ had moved to Laura Chapel, which was ‘purchased for him by his
numerous admirers among the ladies, young & old. Some subscribed from 1 to 200£
& others less sums, even as low as £5.’ The irony of women being drawn to church
by their attraction to the minister did not escape Plymley’s friend Mrs Mary Isted
who commented: ‘It is a sad thing there should be but one soul saver in all this place
for fine ladies.’\textsuperscript{144} Randolf’s popularity appears not to have waned by 1796 when
Caroline Lybbe Powys noted, ‘Dr Randolf preach’d his charity sermon for ye Bath
Hospital and got a larger collection than any other church.’\textsuperscript{145}

Religion was an area of public life which had been open to women since antiquity,
and charitable works were regarded as a combination of religious duty and motherly
care which fell within a feminine domain: ‘legitimised by their role as moral
guardians within the home, philanthropy was seen as an accepted arena of activity
outside.’\textsuperscript{146} Elite women often enacted the role of lady bountiful in their local
community, donating financial aid and gifts to charities and the local poor, whilst
middling women offered smaller financial donations or practical aid in charity
schools or other similar institutions. At the resorts, though many were removed from
their usual communities, women continued to engage in charitable works in different
forms.

Charity could take the form of small and infrequent financial contributions. For
example, when staying at Bath between the end of April and the start of June 1794,
Mrs Hall only spent two shillings on charity, which went to the ‘charity schools’ of
the spa.\textsuperscript{147} Charity could also be shown in small yet frequent contributions, such as
those made by Elizabeth Harley during her visit to Tunbridge Wells. Harley spent a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{143} SRO Charlotte Kenyon’s Pocket Journals (20 July 1844).
  \item \textsuperscript{144} SRO 567/5/15 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1796 1\textsuperscript{st}’ (5 November 1796).
  \item \textsuperscript{145} BL 42161Powys Journals (February 25, 1796).
  \item \textsuperscript{146} Collier, ‘The Truly Benevolent Lady Isabella King’, p. 67.
  \item \textsuperscript{147} HRO 44M69/E18/1/136 Mrs Hall’s Personal Expenses at Bath (March-May 1794).
\end{itemize}
total of eight shillings and nine pence on charity, given out in five payments to ‘a poor woman’, a ‘poor man’ and ‘poor people’. She also provided a material gift of ‘flummery’ for a group of ‘poor men’.\textsuperscript{148} Between 2 June and 19 August 1703, she spent a total of three shillings and sixpence on charitable causes at Bath, paid out in seven instalments. These were to a ‘pore woman’, a ‘blind woman’, ‘a pore wido’ a ‘pore girle’ and ‘a pore woman and man’.\textsuperscript{149} One off, significant gifts of material or financial aid were another form charity might take, the most notable example being the financial contributions made by many elite women, to establish the Mineral Water Hospital at Bath.

Some female residents were more actively involved in charity at, and around the environs of the resorts. Sarah Scott, sister of Elizabeth Montagu, set up a poor school on the outskirts of Bath, where she personally cared for and tutored twelve girls. Hannah More wrote and published her ‘Cheap Repository Tracts’ during her residence at Bath, making her moral tales available for those on a very low income and Isabella King was amongst a committee who established the Monmouth Street Society, a relief ticket system which investigated the claims and needs of beggars in Bath to identify and help the ‘deserving poor’\textsuperscript{150} These examples illustrate that whilst the spa opened up many novel and exciting areas of public life to leisured female visitors and residents, it did not prevent them from engaging in the more traditional public spheres of religion and charity, which had been open to them for considerably longer.

\textbf{vi. Consumption of Clothes and Cosmetics}

The subject of consumption, John Stobart argues, has ‘replaced the grand-narrative of the industrial revolution’, becoming an ‘important meta-narrative’.\textsuperscript{151} Much of the

\textsuperscript{148} BL Portland Papers: vol. CCCXLVIII, 30348: (1687) Account Book of Elizabeth Harley, 1687-1688.
\textsuperscript{149} BL Portland Papers, vol. CCCXLIX, 70349: (1691-1717) Account Book of Martha Hutchins (nee Harley, half-sister of Robert, 1st Earl of Oxford).
\textsuperscript{150} Collier, ‘The Truly Benevolent Lady Isabella King’, p. 69.
literature on eighteenth-century consumerism revolves around the issue of whether the period witnessed a consumer revolution, as Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and George Plumb famously argued in their 1982 seminal work. However, this chapter shifts away from this focus; it is evident that elite and middling women did engage in a variety of consumer experiences at the eighteenth-century resort, and rather than explore the notion of revolutionised consumption, our focus shall be on the meaning of feminine consumption at the spas. In part, this is due to the nature of primary material examined. There is not adequate statistical evidence to examine female participation in a consumer revolution at the eighteenth-century resorts, as the account books utilised are fragmentary. However, an examination of feminine consumption using letters, journals and account books for their qualitative information, negates this issue. As Lorna Weatherill highlights, journals can shed considerable light on consumption patterns, providing ‘a depth of detail not attainable from inventories’. It was not only ‘within the home’ that women ‘endowed belongings with…meanings’, but within a public context as well, as the final section of this chapter explores. As Thorstein Veblen argues, amongst the leisured class the possession of property ‘becomes the basis of popular esteem’: through exploring the wearable and cosmetic items which women purchased at the spa, this section considers the value which was placed on items which are frequently dismissed as frivolous.

It is often argued, that it was not until the nineteenth century and the rise of the department store that shopping emerged as the quintessential leisure pursuit of middling and upper class women. William Leach argues that department stores had a ‘transformative’ effect on women’s lives; looking specifically at American stores he suggests that shopping began to overtake church going as a leisure pursuit towards the end of the nineteenth century and that by 1900 women were ‘encouraged to


Fig 26: *Bath Stays or the Lady’s Steel Shapes* (Matthew Darly, 1771, The British Museum Collection).

Fig 27: *The Ladies’ Contrivance* (The British Museum Collection).
**Fig 28: The Lulliputian Satirists** (Isaac Cruickshank, 1797, The British Museum Collection).
indulge their desires… to buy without much thought or reflection.'\textsuperscript{156} Erika Rappaport suggests that department stores completely altered the way in which women shopped; they presented themselves as safe, secure and comfortable spaces in which respectable women could shop for pleasure, transforming the West End into ‘the locus of middle-and upper-class women’s amusement, social life and politics.'\textsuperscript{157} Elaine Abelson also states that it was not until the 1800s that women started to shop for entertainment, suggesting that that ‘the association of leisured, urban women with shopping as a discreet activity dates from the early decades of nineteenth century.'\textsuperscript{158} Whilst the department store ushered in many changes, women were shopping for pleasure long before its emergence. As Judith Flanders highlights, ‘there is a long history of browsing’, of men and women shopping for pleasure, before the rise of the store. She draws attention to Defoe’s Complete Tradesman of 1726 which states that ‘ladies… divert themselves in going from one mercer’s shop to another, to look upon their fine silks, and to rattle and banter the journeymen and shopkeepers.'\textsuperscript{159}

At Tunbridge Wells those of a lower social status such as servants and agricultural workers carried out their shopping on the lower walk of the Pantiles, where local traders came to sell their goods at market, whilst leisured visitors browsed the ‘milliners, the jewellers, toy-shops, &c’ along the upper walk.\textsuperscript{160} This remained much the same throughout the late 1600s and the 1700s, until the development of the Calverly Estate in the early nineteenth century, which saw the introduction of a new shopping district. At smaller eighteenth-century spas, visitors sometimes sent requests for food and other provisions to be sent to them from home if they could not find what they required, as Katherine Glover’s work on the Scottish spa of Moffat illustrates; yet this was not the case at either of our case study resorts.\textsuperscript{161} At Bath, most streets housed some shops, even predominantly residential areas such as the

\textsuperscript{159} Flanders, Consuming Passions, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{160} Barton, Tunbridge Wells, p. 117.
Parades and the Circus. The Orange Grove and later Milsom Street were two of the most popular shopping districts at the spa. The Upper Walk at Tunbridge Wells and the fashionable shopping streets of Bath were safe and respectable environments which offered a variety of stores, and visitors often allotted part of their day to perusing these establishments, in much the same way that later nineteenth-century shoppers browsed different departments of the same store.

Johnathan Barry suggests that some studies of eighteenth-century consumption are too ambitious in their approach, taking on too many topics.\(^\text{162}\) The array of decencies and luxury goods on offer to women at both resorts was vast; furniture, china, mirrors, clothing and beauty products, as well as fashionable gastronomic goods such as tea, coffee and sugar were all available. Fashion is one of the most visible areas of female consumption at the spa; highlighted in contemporary fictional works, satirical prints, newspaper advertisements and women’s personal life-writings. Fashion is particularly significant to the focus of this study, as through their choice of dress and cosmetics, women made personal and public statements about their character and the array of consumer choices they had in this area at the resorts, provided them with a significant opportunity to explore, experiment and express how they saw themselves and how they wished to be seen.\(^\text{163}\)

A number of visual caricatures mocked female obsession with dress at the spa. Matthew Darly’s 1771 *Bath Stays* [Fig.26] for example, shows two blacksmiths hammering at a pair of stays, making the waist small enough to please a smiling fashionably attired woman who stands wearing a monstrous head dress. *The Ladies Contrivance* [Fig.27] shows another scene in which female attention to dress has reached an absurd extent; it depicts two sedan chairs, one carrying a male passenger and the other with its top raised to accommodate the large wig and feathers adorning the head its female occupant. Sedan tops were hinged and could be propped open; therefore it is possible that the caricature is not as exaggerated as it might at first appear. *The Lulliputian Satirists* [Fig.28] adopts a different take on the subject,


highlighting how female attention to dress was a way of seeking male admiration. The title refers to Liliput Alley, a street in Bath which was home to several dress-related stores. It depicts two fashionably attired women, whose clinging dresses emphasise their shapely legs and calves, visible to the soberly dressed man walking by. The accompanying statement suggests that such women were keen to gain male approval either through cruel attempts at writing witty satires, or, by showing their ‘symmetry through shades of gauze’. All three of these prints suggest female consumption of dress reached disproportionate levels; the first two however imply this only had a comical outcome, whilst the third image implies it was a more calculated female evil.

Bath shop keepers advertised goods, to both male and female clients, in local newspapers. For example, Pettingal’s Silk-Mercery and Bath-Lace Ware-house advertised ‘A Large Assortment of the most fashionable SILKS… in Flower, Figure, and Stripe’ for ‘ladies and gentleman’. The advert also added that ‘Ladies may have Patterns of their own made.’ Similarly, James Head, a Bath shoemaker promoted footwear for a mixed clientele; ‘Gentlemens stich’d Shoes, Pumps and Boots; Ladies Buff and Silk Shoes and Pumps of all sorts’ amongst his wares. Some adverts specifically targeted women. Sarah Clark, for instance, advertised a wide variety of items for women and children, including ‘ALL Sorts of Quilted and Fly petticoat [a] great Choice of Hoops… Ladies’ Riding Dresses… Ladies Bed Cloaks, Children’s Flannel Petticoats, and Packthread Stays…Bath Bowels, and Bathing Linnen’, but noted nothing aimed at male customers. Similarly, James and Peter Ferry, silk weavers in Galloway’s Buildings, informed ‘those Ladies that will please to honour them with their Commands, that their Large and Fashionable Assortment of WINTER SILKS Made for this present Season, is now Completed.’ These adverts illustrate that even before the emergence of the department store, shops targeted female customers in a variety of ways, often emphasising the aspect of choice which customers would find in the promoted stores, and some shops, such as Pettingal and

164 TBJ (18 March 1754).
165 TBJ (14 January 1765).
166 TBJ (8 April 18 1754).
167 TBJ (1 October 1764).
Ferry, highlighting the up-to-the-moment fashionable status of the goods they were selling.

Certain stores catered specifically for female needs, the most obvious example being the stay or corset shop. Bath had a considerable number of stay makers including Jadoul, who had been ‘Foreman for the Stay-Maker to the QUEEN of FRANCE.’ Jadoul opened a shop specialising ‘in every article’ of stay making, opposite the Pump Room in the 1780s. Troei, sold long French stays and Italian corsets from number 7 Union Passage and Mrs Embely, of New Bond Street, prided herself on her anatomical stays, which, she claimed: ‘give an easy elegance to the figure, without pressure’ in the 1820s.\(^{168}\) As the stay was essential to creating a fashionable silhouette, something which changed rapidly throughout the eighteenth century, the presence of numerous stay shops enabled the fashion conscious to ensure they were wearing the correct styles. It is significant that the first millinery items Mrs Hall purchased at Bath were materials for a pair of stays. Perhaps she had required a new pair and waited until arrival at the spa to purchase a particularly exemplary set, or it may have been that she was taken by the desire to appear a la mode amongst the fashionable company.\(^{169}\)

If she wished to partake in the full range of leisure opportunities which awaited her at the spa, the leisured woman would require several specific items in her wardrobe: a brown linen dress for bathing, a suitable morning dress for attending the Pump Room or walks, a coat or pelisse, a riding dress, a fully trimmed dress with a large hoop (compulsory for those who wished to dance minuets at public balls), a hat or bonnet and a range of footwear including dancing shoes, walking boots and pumps or alternative day shoes. She may also desire a pair of wooden pattens. These however, were only the basic elements. Having a range of each item was desirable, and for the more fashion conscious, the clothing would need to match current fashion trends, or at least be adapted so that they did not look too out-moded.

For women interested in fashion, dressing for public entertainments was one of the great pleasures of the resort. Reverend Penrose’s letters make frequent reference to

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\(^{168}\) *TBJ* (1 December 1783); *TBJ* (14 February 1814); *TBJ* (26 January 1824).

\(^{169}\) HRO 44M69/E18/1/136 Mrs Hall’s Personal Expenses at Bath (March-May 1794).
the elaborate dress of the women he saw in the spa’s public areas. He also notes his own daughter’s participation in dress consumption at the spa, writing home to another of his daughters that she had purchased lace to make a ‘Tippit and Tucker’ for next ball and that Betty herself would write soon with Bath’s fashion news.\textsuperscript{170}

The account book of Isabella Wrightson, who stayed at Bath between October and January 1770, details the purchase of five dress related items. All of these appear to be luxurious and non-essential, bought for display rather than comfort or convenience. The expenses listed are: the cost of fitting a hoop ring (probably for a public ball), a pair of worked ruffles, a waistcoat, a tupee and towards the end of her stay, a gown as a gift for a ‘Webster’ as well as a final payment of £1.3.6 to Mrs Boot the Milliner.\textsuperscript{171}

The account book of Mrs Hall of Hampshire, detailing a Bath visit between March and the end of May 1794, is scattered with millinery references. Three days after her arrival she purchased tapes, pins and silk and the following day 3 ounces of worsted as well as a ‘galoon of silk’ for a pair of stays.\textsuperscript{172} In April she bought five yards of fringe, lining and thread and more worsted. Then in May: grey ribbon, silk, worsted gauze stockings, gloves and hat pins, a brown beaver hat, a black ferret, brown silk to trim hat, 300 black pins, 6 pocket handkerchiefs, two pairs of cotton stockings, seven yards of calico, muslin for two shawls and a ‘gown for self’; a particular luxury which cost her £1.12.s.\textsuperscript{173} For Hall, shopping formed a leisure activity, illustrated by the consistent listing of dress items in her account book. Rather than going on specific, occasional trips to the milliners, she was in the habit of popping in several times a week to purchase thread, ribbon and various other millinery goods.

Creativity was required as most dress items were bought in parts, and then either made up by a milliner, or made up at home. For example, if a gown was being purchased, the fabric and a pattern for a dress would be selected, and the customer

\textsuperscript{170} Reverend Penrose, Bath, to ‘Peggy’ Penrose (13 April 1766) in Mitchell and Penrose (eds.), \textit{Letters From Bath 1766-1767}, p. 31.
\textsuperscript{171} DA DD/BW/A6-A7 Isabella Wrightson ‘Expenditure in Bath’ (29 October 1768 to 22 January 1770).
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Galoon}: A narrow trimming, from the French, \textit{galon}, meaning a braid or stripe.
\textsuperscript{173} HRO 44M69/E18/1/136 Mrs Hall’s Personal expenses at Bath; the ‘ferret’, might refer to a black ferret hat, or possibly to a piece of ferret fur used for another fashion accessory (March-May 1794).
would have it made up by a milliner as she wished. This was the same for many items of clothing, for example, a customer might choose a simple hat and have it trimmed to their specific design, as Hall did with her brown beaver hat, and its brown silk trim. In 1782, a Miss Dalton of Staffordshire purchased from Philip Tully of North Parade Bath, ‘A fine Living Hat Trim’d wh Ribbon Gold & Silver, Cord Band, Tasel, Trims, Mays & a Feather’ which along with a hat box cost her a total of two pounds. It is likely that, she too, chose the different parts of this hat as separate pieces, and then had it put together to her requirements. \(^{174}\) This creative element made shopping an interactive experience between the milliner and his or her customer. Many eighteenth-century stores provided comfortable seating and refreshments for their clients, to make this a more enjoyable experience, and to encourage custom.

Even those women with a smaller income could enjoy the pleasure of fashion consumption. Despite having little money at her disposal, Betsy Sheridan still took an interest in fashion when at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, attempting to make the best she could of her own appearance; ‘I find my millenary and hair dressing Talents of great use of these occasions, as literally since I came here I have not spent a shilling on either article’ she told her sister, ‘as some remains of last Winter’s finery varied by my own hand have supplied me with caps and tuckers, and as to la frizure I was provident enough never to suffer the Maid I kept to dress me so constantly as to lose the power of arranging my own locks.’\(^ {175}\) However, dress could also be a cause for concern. Elite women often commented scornfully on one another’s appearances, whilst middling women condemned the expense and extravagance of elite women’s dress. Elizabeth Montagu with her usual satirical bite noted that ‘Lady Parker and her two daughters’ had arrived at Tunbridge Wells in 1749: ‘they make a very remarkable figure, and will ruin the poor mad-woman on Tunbridge, by outdoing her in dress; such hats, capuchins, and short-sacks, as were never seen! One of the ladies looks like a state bed running upon castors.’\(^ {176}\) There were also many generalised derogatory comments on the lack of beauty at the spas, such as the declaration made

\(^{174}\) STRO 0641/4/3/18/1 ‘Bills for items supplied to Miss Dalton, later Mrs Sulyard’.

\(^{175}\) Betsy Sheridan, Bath, to Alicia LeFanu (5-10 January 1790) in LanFanu (ed.)., Betsy Sheridan’s Journal, p. 193.

\(^{176}\) Elizabeth Montagu, Tunbridge Wells, to Mrs Donellan (1749) in Montagu, The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu, iii, p. 92.
by George Lucy that there was not ‘Beauty enough to inspire Love’ at Bath in 1754. These comments are likely to have arisen due to the simple fact that there were high numbers of women appearing in public in one place, rather than signalling anything specific about the women commented upon. However, knowledge that they were being observed created an atmosphere of pressure, and looking fashionable, stylish or even merely acceptable could be the cause of considerable anxiety.

It was not only female consumption of dress which interested satirists; it was also their consumption of cosmetics. Many shops, including milliners, sold cosmetics; they were sometimes listed under ‘haberdashery wares.’ Mary Sellen, a Bath milliner of North Parade sold; ‘Scented and Plain Powders; Right French Hungary Water, and best Double-distill’d Lavender Water, &c, as cheap as in London.’ They could also purchase cosmetic items from perfumers, including ‘Green’s Hair Dresser and Perfumer’ which stood opposite York House in Broad Street, in Bath in 1775. A Bath Lampoon of 1694 for example, highlighted the dangers of make up:

Did you ne’r seen Drawn by some painters Art
A Dame that wou’d all passion strait impart?
Tuck’t up so nicely, One wou’d almost swear,
The water’d Colour’d thing an Angel were;
Yet when the Limner, to your great surprise
Spunges the tempting Curtain from your Eyes
A fury, or some Moster do’s appear.

A Speedy and Effectual Preparation for the Next World [Fig 29] also remarks on the way women altered their physical appearance through cosmetics at Bath. It depicts the female historian and Bath resident, Catherine Macaulay, with paint pots and brushes applying make up to her aging face, while Death mimics her actions behind. In addition to commenting on Macaulay’s well-known penchant for facial cosmetics, the print makes the more sinister point that attempting to look youthful will not slow

177 WRO L6/1432 George Lucy, Bath, to Mrs Phillippa Hayes (6 January 1754).
178 TBJ (1 October 1744).
179 NUSC PWV 47/99 Bath Lampoon (1694).
**Fig 29:** A *Speedy and Effectual preparation for the Next World* (1777, The British Museum Collection).

**Fig 30:** *The Bath Beauties* (1793, The British Museum Collection).
the passage of time.\textsuperscript{180} The Gubbins sisters were two more real-life spa residents, whose consumption of cosmetics was mocked in print. A caricature of the two sisters is accompanied by a verse highlighting the artificiality of their appearance, which depends on trickery through use of makeup, such as Parisian rouge [Fig 30].

Purchasing goods for friends and relations was popular amongst leisured female spa visitors, enabling them to enjoy the pleasure of perusing shop windows, the comfort of aiding their friends and relations and the pleasure of feeling their importance rise as a result of their inhabiting the spa. Pricilla Digby sent millinery items from Bath to her friend Mrs Molyneux; she wrote that she was pleased Molyneux had liked the lace she had posted and added that she had done her 'best' in finding it. In another letter, Digby describes how she had looked for a black hat for her friend but was unable to find one; instead she sent valuable fashion advice; ‘there were none except the Friperist Ala mode ones I ever see. The man told me they were left off, all ye Ladies wore white such as yors.’\textsuperscript{181} Similarly, Jane Austen wrote to her sister from the spa in 1799, to inform her of current trends, her most recent millinery purchases and to promise to send a present:

My Cloak is come home, & here follows the pattern of its lace.- If you do not think it wide enough I can give 3d a yard more for yours… I saw some Gauzes in a shop in Bath Street yesterday at only 4s a yard, but they were not so good or so pretty as mine. Flowers are very much worn & Fruit is still more the thing… I have seen Grapes, Cherries, Plumbs & Apricots…. My Aunt has told me of a very cheap one [shop] near Wolcot Church, to which I shall go in quest of something for you.\textsuperscript{182}

Present buying was particularly popular on leaving a resort. On leaving Tunbridge Wells, Betsy Sheridan bought a range of presents including a needle work box for her sister, a pin cushion and writing box for other women in her family and a shaving

\textsuperscript{180} McCreery, \textit{The Satirical Gaze}, pp. 232-233.
\textsuperscript{181} NUSC Mol 79 Pricilla Digby, Bristol, to Anne Molyneux at Oxton, Nottinghamshire (30 June 1742).
\textsuperscript{182} Jane Austen, 13 Queen Square Bath, to Casandra Austen (2 June 1799) in Le Faye (ed.), \textit{Jane Austen’s Letters}, pp. 43-45.
box for her brother in law. Amanda Herbert notes that it is often difficult to gauge why women exchanged gifts in the eighteenth century, their journals and account books rarely giving much information. The custom of taking gifts back from the spa may have been favoured by the present-giver as it demonstrated that they had been part of the fashionable spa-visiting crowd, whilst also appealing to the receiver, reminding them that they had had been thought of even amongst the busy and distracting environment of the resort.

In addition to present buying, women also carried out shopping requests for their absent friends and relations. One of the most illuminating correspondences which throws light on this practice is that of Ann Duke, who resided in Queen’s Place in Bath in the 1790s and her daughter Mary Senior who lived at Crompton. Senior’s letters to her mother are scattered with requests for items to either be sent or brought to her including, ‘a few gown laces & three or four ounces of 6d, 2d, 10d & 1d thread from the Linen Drapers in Margot Court’, ‘two garden rollers for the children’ and ‘two boxes of the asthmatic pills & a box of the lozenges Mrs Martyn recommended.’ Senior did not hesitate in making use of her mother’s residence at the spa and asking her to carry out ‘troublesome’ commissions.

Privileged women were presented with a vast array choice regarding their consumer experiences at the eighteenth-century spa, specifically in relation to dress and cosmetics. Display formed an important element of spa life and women appear to have enjoyed the opportunity to style and present themselves in spa society. This is highlighted in the account books of Isabella Wrightson and Mrs Hall who purchased numerous millinery goods on their short visits to Bath; the journal-style letters of Betsy Sheridan from both resorts which show that despite her lack of income, she took interest in what women wore at the spas and took pride in her hair and millinery talents and in the letter Jane Austen wrote to Cassandra, detailing her toilette for a recent Bath ball. The voice of disdain, audible in satirical poems such as A Bath

183 Betsy Sheridan, Tunbridge Wells to Alicia LeFanu (20 June 1785) in LeFanu (ed), Betsy Sheridan’s Journal, p. 58.
184 Herbert, Female Alliances, pp. 52-53.
185 NLW E103 Nassau Senior (2) Mary Senior, Crompton, to Mrs Duke, Bath (c. 1793).
Lampoon and visible in images such as *A Speedy and Effectual Preparation For The Next World*, criticised the opportunities the spas presented for both purchase of millinery goods and cosmetics and the entertainments which gave women a public stage on which to present themselves.

Understanding the leisure activities in which women engaged at the spas illuminates the values, concerns and interests which women held as important and helps to develop a more three dimensional view of eighteenth-century womanhood, expanding our knowledge of how women operated outside of the home. Women formed a crucial sector of the visiting and resident company of the resorts, helping to finance the entertainments on offer and forming a substantial proportion of the population; exploring their amusements also sheds light on why the resorts were so popular, and on day to day life in these particular urban environments. This chapter illustrates that privileged female visitors moved within numerous, overlapping public arenas of leisure. Women could walk, ride and dance on a daily basis at the spas and thus had access to sport and exercise. They attended plays and concerts, commissioned acts, followed the careers of particular actors and actresses and engaged in discussions about the entertainments, airing their critical voices. Whether they were playing at hazard, loo or partaking in a raffle, elite and middling women also had access to public gambling in which they could compete with men on equal grounds. Whilst they found access to these exciting and expanding public spheres, which grew as the Urban Renaissance progressed, women still partook in the more traditional public spheres of religion and charity. All of these leisure pursuits inter-linked with that of consumption, another public arena in which the leisured female spa visitor could move; this is most significantly illustrated in her ability to stroll the streets of Bath and Tunbridge Wells, perusing shop windows and purchasing an array of millinery and cosmetic goods, through which she could create her own public image.