

Abstract

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

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

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

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Peter Borsay for his unceasing support, encouragement and interest in my research. I am grateful for the very generous amount of time he has given to me throughout the PhD process from the earliest stages of my project proposal. Our supervision meetings have formed one of the most enjoyable aspects of the past four years and I feel very fortunate to have benefited from his knowledge of eighteenth-century urban history and from his advice. Thanks are also due to my second supervisor, Professor Martyn Powell, who first engaged my interest in Georgian England in 2005, when I was an undergraduate student. His module ‘Manners and Misdemeanours: Polite society in the eighteenth century’ sparked a curiosity in the lives of eighteenth-century women which has spanned the past nine years. Throughout my doctoral study I have valued our meetings, his careful readings of draft chapters, and the suggestions and comments he has made.

I am lucky to have had many inspirational history teachers and lecturers throughout my school, college and undergraduate years. In particular I would like to thank Paul Busby, Timothy Tinkler, Alys Griffiths and Rachel Brewin for their wonderful history lessons during my pre-university education and the lecturers of Aberystwyth History and Welsh History Department who taught me as an undergraduate.

To the many archivists, librarians and curators who have provided guidance and information about their collections, I would also like to offer my gratitude. This includes the staff of: Bath Central Library, Bedford and Luton Archive, the British Library, Buckingham Record Office, Cornwall Record Office, Devonshire Record Office, Doncaster Archive, Durham University Special Collections, East Sussex Record Office, Flintshire Record Office, Hampshire Record Office, the Centre for Kentish Studies, Northumberland Archives, Nottingham University Special Collections, Sheffield Archives, Shropshire Record Office, Staffordshire Record Office, Tunbridge Wells Museum, Tunbridge Wells Reference Library and the National Library of Wales.

In particular I would like to thank Anne Buchannan, Local Studies Librarian at Bath Central Library and Dr Ian Beavis, Research Curator and Collections Manager at Tunbridge Wells Museum, who discussed their collections with me and allowed me to photograph prints, posters and trade cards. To Susan Brown, former Local Studies Librarian at Tunbridge Wells Reference Library, I would also like to offer my thanks for kindly showing me around the library’s collection. I am also grateful to Julian Pooley at Surrey History Centre for providing information regarding the private Nichols correspondence Project. Trevor Fawcett’s wonderful studies of Bath have provided an essential reference point throughout my research. I am very grateful for the numerous detailed emails he has sent answering my enquiries regarding fan

illustrations, ladies' passing houses and battledore and shuttlecock in Georgian Bath. I would also like to thank him for the newspaper references he has provided.

Were it not for the generous funding I have received, this thesis would not have been possible. Therefore I would like to thank Aberystwyth University for awarding me a Postgraduate Research Studentship, which has enabled me to fully commit my time to research and writing.

For making the past four years such an enjoyable and rewarding experience, I would like to thank my friends. To Kimberly Cosgrove, Dr Harmony Dewez, Dr Jenny Bussell, Shea Esterling, Beth Head, Lowri Jones, Dr Katerina Hone and Dr Gillian McFadyen, I am thankful for the many cups of tea and the costume drama evenings which have become a regular feature of our time as Postgraduates in Aberystwyth. To my friends based outside of Aberystwyth, in particular, Rebecca Davies, Amanda Macmillan, Madeleine Norris, Zi Parker, Anna Popovich, Dr Lowri Rees and Gemma Williamson, I am thankful for your support and visits. I am especially grateful to Charlotte Dickerson, who has offered continual encouragement, as well as a place to stay on research trips to London.

Finally, for initiating and encouraging my interest in history from an early age, I would like to thank my parents, Judith and Ian McCormack. A childhood of visits to National Trust properties, castle ruins and museums has played a central role in developing my curiosity in the past. I dedicate this thesis to them for their unfailing love and support.

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Note on Text

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

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

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

Abbreviations

BCL- Bath Central Library

BL- British Library

BLA- Bedford and Luton Archives

BRO- Buckingham Record Office

CKS- Centre for Kentish Studies

CL- Clarke Letters, located in Somerset Record Office and edited by

CRO- Cornwall Record Office

DA- Doncaster Archive

DRO- Devonshire Record Office

DUSC- Durham University Special Collections

ESRO- East Sussex Record Office

FRO- Flintshire Record Office

HRO- Hampshire Record Office

NA- Northumberland Archives

NAP- Nichols Archives Project

NLI- National Library of Ireland research, collected by --- at Number One Royal Crescent, Bath

NLW- National Library of Wales

NUSC- Nottingham University Special Collections

SA- Sheffield Archives

SRO- Shropshire Record Office

StRO- Staffordshire Record Office

TBC- The Bath Chronicle

TBJ- The Bath Journal

TWM- Tunbridge Wells Museum

TWRL- Tunbridge Wells Reference Library