

## Chapter 5

### Domestic Life

This fifth and final chapter considers the richness and diversity of women's domestic lives at eighteenth-century Bath and Tunbridge Wells. Family relationships are addressed first, with particular attention given to the ways in which leisured women performed their roles as daughters, wives and mothers during their spa visits and residences. The process of house-hunting forms the focus of section two, where it is argued that women often took on the responsibility of searching for lodging houses, exploring available properties and negotiating with proprietors. Section three explores domestic sociability and the semi-public role women played as hostesses of dinner parties, card parties and public days. Spa-visiting rituals, in which the domestic space of the home was opened up to a select visiting public and women found their welcome extended into one another's homes, are also considered. The concluding section addresses domestic activities pursued by women during their time at the resorts, including reading, writing and needlework; activities often deemed idle in the historiography of women and the family, but which allowed for creativity and self-expression.

#### **i. The Family at the Spa**

The poem *Advice to a Daughter Going to Bath* (1726) emphasises the precarious position of unmarried daughters visiting the spa without their parents. Written in the voice of a father to his daughter, the poem warns of all the dangers a young woman might encounter at the spa:

Beware ye men, but ah! Much more beware

Female seducers of ye young & fair.  
 One man may 20, women lead astray,  
 One woman traitress can ye sex betray  
 Secure with open ears ye hear her Tales  
 She knows ye point where most yr nature fails  
 Strikes at it once & e'r you dread ye Blow  
 You find you're conquerd by a secret Foe.<sup>1</sup>

This same message is echoed in novels such as *Camilla* and *Northanger Abbey*, in which the heroines venture to Tunbridge Wells and Bath without mother or father. Camillia Tyrold falls into debt at Tunbridge Wells when she realises, on leaving the resort, she cannot pay off her millinery costs, while Catherine Morland forms friendships with the manipulative and scheming John and Isabella Thorpe at Bath.<sup>2</sup>

Daughters who visited Bath and Tunbridge Wells without their parents had more freedom to act independently, yet parental relationships were maintained via written correspondence. Families at home expected a regular flow of letters, informing them of their daughter's welfare, activities and financial situation. From Bath, Bridget Ottley kept her father informed of her activities and the improvements in her health. Adam Ottley praised his daughter for her careful management of money: 'I think you an excellent manager that have made it do so long', illustrating that he offered guidance and support from afar.<sup>3</sup> A letter written during the early nineteenth century, from the Welsh Reverend Griffith to his daughter at Bath, offers another example of a father extending advice to the resort 'You are now entering upon a new scene of life' he began 'follow my advice...:

- 1) Contract no debts whatsoever
- 2) Buy nothing but what you have money in hand to pay for...

<sup>1</sup> NLW FF 37-38 Llanfair and Brynodynol (1) *Advice to a Daughter Going to Bath* (1726).

<sup>2</sup> Burney, *Camilla*; Austen, *Northanger Abbey*.

<sup>3</sup> NLW Ottley (Pitchford Hall) Correspondence (3) 3670 Adam Ottley, Pitchard, to Bridget Ottley, Mrs Bassett's near the Cross Bath (7 July 1741).

3) Buy nothing but what is absolutely necessary, not to indulge a fanciful imaginary want.<sup>4</sup>

The role of daughter was not the only familial relationship which elite and middling women carried with them to the resorts, there were also those of wife and mother. Whilst many historians have addressed the importance of the spa as a marriage market, few have considered how those who were already married experienced the resorts.

Many married women visited Bath and Tunbridge Wells while their husbands were occupied elsewhere: sitting in parliament, managing estates or running businesses. The physical separation by no means indicates that marital relationships played a less significant part in their lives during their spa visits, and spa correspondences between separated husbands and wives were often deeply affectionate. Lady Bristol felt that without her husband ‘no other pleasure can be tasted... at the Bath.’ On another visit to the spa, she felt wearied without his company and informed him she would have no rest until: ‘I am lodgd upon that faithful breast that has so often been my pillow.’<sup>5</sup> In May 1733, Mary Isham wrote to her husband Justinian, ‘I’m most exceedingly concern’d you are not inclin’d to come here’, and encouraged him to visit her at Bath as soon as possible.<sup>6</sup> In February 1733 she told him ‘I have yr lively image engraven sur men petit cour wch pleasant imagination makes some amends for ye real Dear object.’<sup>7</sup> The Duchess of Richmond’s letters to her husband from Tunbridge Wells have a comparable tone: she addressed him as ‘my angel’, wrote that she missed his company at night and added, ‘I am sorry you don’t come so soon as you had promised me’.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Montagu wrote to her husband asking, ‘when may I hope to see my best and dearest friend here?’<sup>9</sup> In 1765 Dorothy

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<sup>4</sup> NLW Llwyngwair 17004 Rev. D. Griffith, Berllan, to Miss Griffith, No. 8 South Parade, Bath (25 October 1827).

<sup>5</sup> Lady Bristol, Bath, to the Earl of Bristol (23 August 1721) in *Letter-Books of John Hervey*, ii, p. 166.

<sup>6</sup> NRO IC1995 Mary Isham, Bath, to Sir Justinian Isham (29 May 1731).

<sup>7</sup> NRO IC2020 Mary Isham, Bath, to Sir Justinian Isham (10 February 1733).

<sup>8</sup> WSRO GWD MS 102 Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duke of Richmond.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, Tunbridge Wells, to Edward Montagu Esquire (1749) in Montagu, *The Letters Elizabeth Montagu*, iii, p. 121.

Filmer confessed that she had found Tunbridge Wells ‘very dull’ since her husband had left her.<sup>10</sup> The letters of Lady Bristol, the Isham, the Duchess of Richmond, Montagu and Lady Filmer, show how far from rejoicing in their state of independence, they wished for and requested their husband’s company.

In addition to offering emotional support, Isham and Lady Bristol’s letters acquainted their spouses with details of their activities. Isham informed her husband that she intended to manage her purse ‘with the utmost Prudence I am mistress of’ and that she spent her time ‘chiefly in working, reading, & walking.’<sup>11</sup> The Duchess of Richmond’s letters acquainted her husband with the state of her health, the medical help she had received and the social engagements she enjoyed at the spa. In one letter she assured him; ‘I received my angels letter and obei your commands in string [stirring] against the spleen as much as is possible’,<sup>12</sup> illustrating how written correspondence enabled the husbands of spa-visiting women to offer advice from afar. She also performed her role as household manager while away from home, informing him; ‘I have calls upon me every day for debts... I think it my duty to tell you, you must either keep fewer servant & let them live better or keep these lower.’<sup>13</sup>

Other leisured women visited the resorts accompanied by their spouses, such as Caroline Powys on her yearly visits to Bath. Elizabeth Giffard’s diary offers a uniquely detailed illustration of a married couple’s spa visit. Giffard and her husband went to Bath one year after they married. The journal illustrates that Mr Giffard was openly affectionate to his wife: he sent a pot of tea and muffin home to her from the coffee-house, returned early from a ball to discuss his evening with her and ‘like a good husband’, refused ‘all invitations to an elegant supper, preferring his wife’s company at Home.’<sup>14</sup> On occasions when they stayed home together, Elizabeth expressed her enjoyment of his company, such as the morning they decided not to

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<sup>10</sup> CKS U120 C55/9 Lady Dorothy Filmer, Tunbridge Wells, to John Filmer.

<sup>11</sup> NRO IC1994 Lady Isham, Bath, to Sir Justinian (12 May 1731); NRO IC2016 Lady Isham, Bath, to Sir Justinian (17 January 1733).

<sup>12</sup> WSRO GWD MS 102 Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duke of Richmond (c. 1719-1740).

<sup>13</sup> WSRO GWD MS 102 Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duke of Richmond (c. 1719-1740).

<sup>14</sup> FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard ‘A Bath Journal’ (18 November, 17 December 1766).

attend a public charity breakfast, ‘not being charitably inclined’; and instead took a ‘snug Breakfast at Home.’<sup>15</sup> Whilst Giffard’s journal is unique, in offering details of a married couple, observers commented on perceiving happy couples around them at the resorts: Elizabeth Montagu for example, found that her acquaintance, Mrs Friend, ‘loves her husband so much better than me that I cannot persuade her to come out’<sup>16</sup> whilst Betsy Sheridan noted seeing a ‘Lord John and his wife’ walking ‘arm in arm’, an apparently happy ‘domestic couple’<sup>17</sup>

Children were welcome in the public arenas of the resorts, making it easier for leisured women to negotiate their mothering role whilst also engaging in the round of amusements on offer, illustrating that domestic life was not restricted to the home. The Duchess of Richmond wrote from Tunbridge Wells to ‘beg’ that her husband would bring their daughters to her, adding ‘I hate being without them so long.’<sup>18</sup> As they grew older, the relationship between children and their parents changed, especially that between mothers and sons, altering how they behaved together at the resorts. The journals of Alfred Daniels, who lived with his family on the outskirts of Bath in the early nineteenth century, illustrates how he transformed from a child who needed escorting in public, into a young gentleman who could offer company and help to his mother. For example, in August 1825, he noted ‘Drove mama ...over to Warley and into Bath’ and the following day ‘Very wet. Drove mama ... to Sydney Gardens Bath.’<sup>19</sup> Daniel’s diary highlights how even when the relationship between a mother and her child altered with age, women still chose to sample public spa life with their children, enjoying their companionship.

Spa visits were sometimes made specifically for children. Amanda Herbert has highlighted how drinking the waters was recommended to mothers who were breast-feeding sickly infants.<sup>20</sup> Older children might also be taken to the spa for the waters,

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<sup>15</sup> FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard ‘Bath Journal’ (14 November 1766, 18 January 1767).

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (27 December 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i. p. 74.

<sup>17</sup> Betsy Sheridan, Bath, to Alicia LeFanu (1-2 December 1789) in LeFanu (ed.), *Betsy Sheridan’s Journal*, p. 188.

<sup>18</sup> WSRO GWD MS 102 Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells to the Duke of Richmond.

<sup>19</sup> BCL 29056 Pocket Journal of Alfred Daniels (5-6 August 1825).

<sup>20</sup> Herbert, ‘Gender and the Spa’, p. 368.

as Dr Pierce's memoirs suggest.<sup>21</sup> In 1791 Georgiana the Duchess of Devonshire regularly moved between Bristol Hotwell's, where her invalid sister was residing and Bath, where her ill young son was staying for his health. Fanny Burney observed the Duchess of Devonshire's actions with admiration, noting that her life was 'at present, wholly devoted to domestic duties.'<sup>22</sup> Children on the verge of adolescence may have been taken so that they could benefit from an introduction into polite society. As Bath was well known for its prestigious boys and girls schools, visits were often made by women who wished to view schools and make enquires about educational provisions at the resort. Mrs Penrose, for example, 'got a printed Bill of the Terms of the Bath Boarding-School' and visited the school to make enquires during her 1766 trip to the resort.<sup>23</sup> Even though the Penroses thought the cost of a Bath education a 'great expense', they sent Dolly to a Bath boarding school the following year.<sup>24</sup> Mary Nankivell Townsend wrote that she would never consider moving to Bath on her own account but thought of moving there for her son 'some sacrifice for educational advantages must be made, and Bath is so well supplied with masters of all kinds.'<sup>25</sup>

James Roseheim has argued that during the eighteenth century it was common for the nuclear family to take their leisure together and the material examined here suggests that spas were no exception.<sup>26</sup> It was not only mothers but fathers as well who ventured to the spas with their children; fathers also accompanied them to public places of the resort. The fact that it was acceptable for men to enjoy the company of their children in public suggests that resort life was firmly fixed as a family-friendly society which encouraged mixed-gender as well as mixed-age sociability. When Dennis Lyddell visited Bath with his family between 4 April and 9

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<sup>21</sup> Peirce, *Bath Memoirs* (London, 1697), pp. 222-226.

<sup>22</sup> Fanny Burney, Bath and Chelsea College, to Mrs Phillips and the Lockes of Norburn Park (September-October 1791) in Hughes (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Fanny Burney*, i. p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> Reverend Penrose, Bath, to his daughter 'Peggy' (26 May 1766) in Mitchell and Penrose (eds.), *Letters from Bath*, p. 144.

<sup>24</sup> Reverend Penrose, Bath, to his daughter Peggy (27 May 1766) in Mitchell and Penrose (eds.), *Letters from Bath*, p. 147.

<sup>25</sup> HRO 33A05/9/34 Mary Nankivell Townsend, Herbiere House, Penzance, to her cousin Mrs Sharp (4 February 1835).

<sup>26</sup> James Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order: English Landed Society 1650-1750* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 222.

May 1706, he spent much of his time them. He bathed at the Cross Bath once with his son Dick and twice with his son Charles. On 16 April he also went with his wife and children to an evening play.<sup>27</sup> Even on days when Lyddell did not spend time with his family, he often chose to record their activities, rather than his own. Lewis Weston Dilwyn's early nineteenth-century journal also highlights the involvement of a father with his children at Bath. When their son moved to Bitton school at Bristol, both Dilwyn and his wife stayed at Bath for a week so that they might 'better ascertain his likings' for the school. On 24 March the Dilwyns had their son brought to Bath where they had his sketch made by Mr Delamotte, as it was decided that he was to board at the school. Dilwyn and his wife showed their mutual affection for their children once again on a trip to Bath with their daughters in 1828, allowing them to choose their spa residence; 'Both Mary and I much preferred a House in Brock Street, but we gave up our likings to please the Youngsters.'<sup>28</sup> The family chose 36 Milsom Street instead. Tunbridge Wells was also a family-friendly resort, inclusive of children. In 1774 George Selwyn felt that 'for a little time in the summer, with a family' Tunbridge Wells was 'one of the prettiest places in the world.'<sup>29</sup>

The acceptance of children in public arenas of the resorts made spa-visitation a family-friendly activity, in which domestic familial cares were not only restricted to the home. This significantly impacted boundaries between public and domestic life, making them more permeable; women were not forced to choose between remaining at home with their children and enjoying public amusements. It has been argued by Philippe Aries that until the seventeenth century, men and women lived their lives in public, surrounded by friends and neighbours but without the notions of family and family ties that exist today. From the seventeenth century onwards, Aries suggests, individualism started to grow and eventually triumphed over social constraint, encouraging the family to withdraw into the privacy of their homes. He concludes

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<sup>27</sup> BL 74642 Autograph Journal of Dennis Lyddell (1706).

<sup>28</sup> NLW Lewis Weston Dillwyn (1), Lewis Weston Dillwyn Journal, (21, 24 March 1827, 24 October 1828).

<sup>29</sup> George Selwyn to Lord Carlisle (26 July 1774) in Melville, *Society at Tunbridge Wells*, p. 226.

that ‘sociability and the concept of the family were incompatible’.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, several historians have highlighted the presence of women and children in public life during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Jonathan Barry’s work on Bristol between 1640-1775 suggests that women and children were at the centre of public life in the town,<sup>31</sup> Angela Dain’s research on English assemblies 1660-1840 similarly argues that children were at the forefront of these public entertainments,<sup>32</sup> while James Rosenheim argues that the eighteenth-century ‘world of children’ was ‘a highly urbanized one’.<sup>33</sup> Peter Borsay’s work on children and the eighteenth-century town similarly contradicts the traditional argument for the domestication of childhood in the eighteenth century, suggesting instead that children were ‘drawn freely into this new world of [urban] leisure.’<sup>34</sup> He argues that the reason for this inclusion was educational, suggesting that the gap between childhood and adulthood actually narrowed during this period, as parents desired their children to learn the ways of fashionable urban society through experiencing inclusion in such society from a young age.<sup>35</sup>

There are numerous pictorial sources of children accompanying adults in fashionable spaces at Bath and Tunbridge Wells. These images alone cannot be read as evidence of inclusion of children in public life, but considered alongside the manuscript evidence explored above, such as the diaries of Daniels, Weston Dilwyn and Lyddell, they help to establish an image of inclusion. Most illustrations of the Pantiles at Tunbridge Wells include children, though these tend to be of the early nineteenth century. For example, Isaac Taylor’s engraving of the walks show a woman bending to talk to her child on the right hand side while on the left another lady holds a baby in her arms, accompanied by a boy playing with a hoop [Fig 32].

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<sup>30</sup> Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 405-407.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Barry, *The Cultural Life of Bristol, 1640–1775* (University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1985) referenced in Anja Muller (ed.), *Fashioning Childhood in the eighteenth Century: Age and Identity* ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Dain, ‘Assemblies and Politeness 1660-1840’.

<sup>33</sup> Rosenheim, *English Landed Society*, p. 221.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Borsay, ‘Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society in Eighteenth-Century England’ in Anja Muller (ed), *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century: Age and Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 58.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Borsay, ‘Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society’, p. 59.



A depiction of the London Road running by Tunbridge Wells in 1825 includes children walking and playing on the grass; one girl rides a donkey, another accompanies two women and two boys stand in a family group with a dog [Fig 33]. Interior images of the public arenas at Tunbridge Wells are distinctly absent; however these illustrations of the walks suggest that children at play were accepted on the fashionable parade.

Many images of the interior and exterior public arenas at Bath highlight the presence of children. Children are present in Speren's 1737 fan illustration of Mrs Lovelace's lower assembly rooms, which show groups of men and women playing cards, dancing and conversing, while a boy and girl walk in a family group [Fig 34]. Humphry Repton's illustration of the busy Pump Room shows a girl holding a doll, standing by her mother, and in the foreground, a kneeling boy plays with a small dog [Fig 35]. In Nattes's 1804 illustration of the Pump Room there are a total of six children; two with a group of adults, one with the couple of ladies in the centre, two more conversing with a man selling goods from a basket and one gazing out of the window [Fig 36].

The inclusion of children in polite urban society can be regarded as a symptom of the rise of the sentimental family. It is argued by Lawrence Stone that the eighteenth century saw a shift in family structure away from the Open Lineage form which dominated between 1450-1630, where family and the neighbouring community treated one another with little differentiation, and away from the closely bound Restricted Patriarchal Nuclear Family (1550-1700), towards the Closed Domesticated Nuclear Family (1640-1800), who respected individual identity, developed affectionate bonds and exhibited a desire to live more privately.<sup>36</sup> Within this nuclear, sentimental family Moller Okin argues women were increasingly cut off from the outside world and viewed as 'creatures of sentiment' naturally suited to attend to familial concerns, particularly relating to children, within the domestic

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<sup>36</sup> Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 85-150.

Fig 32: (Top) The Pantiles (Isaac Taylor, 1804, Tunbridge Wells Museum).

Fig 33: (Middle) The London Road (1825, Tunbridge Wells Museum)

Fig 34: (Bottom) Lovelace's Lower Assembly Rooms (George Spere, 1737, British Museum Collection).

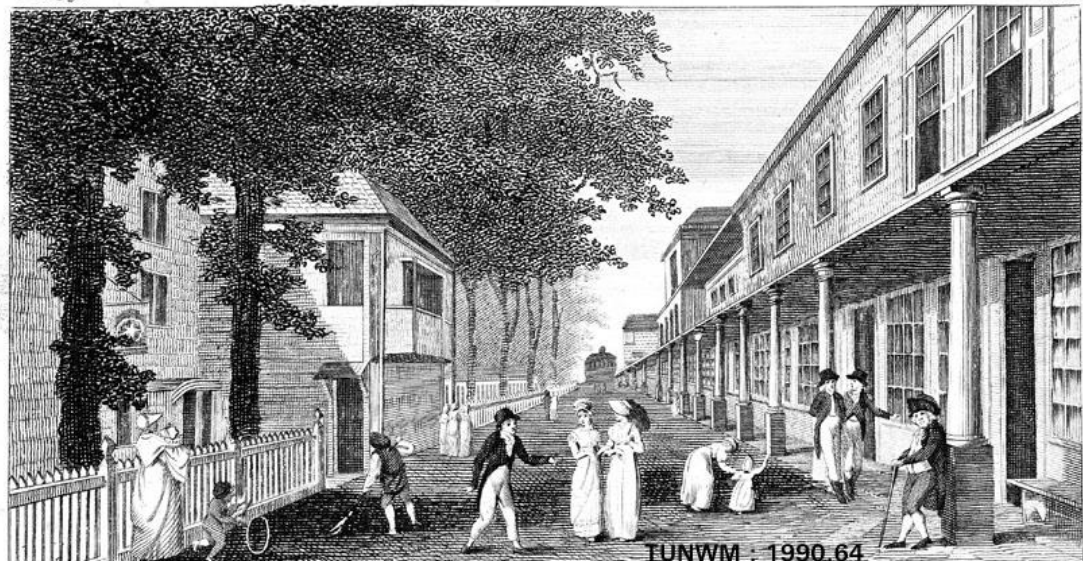




Fig 35: (Top) The Pump Room (Humphry Repton, unknown date).

Fig 36: (Bottom) The Pump Room (John Claude Nattes, 1804)



sphere.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to Moller Okin's view, the research presented in this chapter suggests that women and children played an important role in urban life throughout the century. The works of Barry, Dain, Rosehiem, Plumb and Borsay also support this line of argument. The sentimental family was not always confined to the domestic sphere; as this chapter illustrates, the public arenas of the resorts welcomed men, women and children who wished to spend their spa visits together exhibiting their affectionate relationships outside of the home.

## ii. Female House-Hunters

In contrast to the arguments of Alice Clark, Lawrence Stone and Peter Earle, who suggest that genteel women became 'idle drones' during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this chapter argues that elite and middling women continued to perform significant and skilled roles as home-makers throughout the long eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Numerous women's historians have highlighted the complexity and demanding nature of running an elite or middling eighteenth-century home. Rosemary Baird stresses that both the creation of a home and the running of a household were responsibilities which formed a life's work for many elite women,<sup>39</sup> whilst Ingrid Tague points out that women of quality 'made important contributions to the functioning of the household and to its role as an indicator of social status'.<sup>40</sup> The same can be argued of middling women. The decoration, furnishing and maintenance of a home as well as the employment and organisation of servants, the management of household accounts and the entertainment and care of guests were tasks familiar to the elite and middling women of eighteenth-century England. This chapter takes the discourse on domesticity in a new direction, exploring female domestic responsibility in an urban, spa-based context.

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<sup>37</sup> Susan Moller Okin, 'Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family' *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 11: 1 (1982), p. 74.

<sup>38</sup> Baird, *Mistress of the House*, pp. 3-6; Tague, *Women of Quality*, p. 99; Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?', p. 410.

<sup>39</sup> Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, p. 99.

It was not unusual for women of quality to arrange the purchase or rental of houses during the eighteenth century,<sup>41</sup> yet unlike decorating or furnishing, house-hunting was not commonly identified as a female duty; rather it had no strict gender identification. The letters and journals of women at Bath and Tunbridge Wells illustrate that house viewings, negotiating with proprietors and comparing the qualities and prices of different lodgings were a common part of the elite and middling woman's spa experience. While the association between women and the home was widely accepted, the process of house-hunting was in many ways opposed to all that was regarded as respectable and feminine. It involved physical exertion, communication with men and women unknown to them, and entering unfamiliar properties. The letters of Jane Austen and Fanny Burney and the diary of Margaret Wash illustrate the extent of female involvement in the process of house viewings at the spa.

In 1801, Jane Austen was engaged in house-hunting at Bath on behalf of her family who were relocating to the resort. For the period of the search she resided with her mother in the Paragon with her aunt and uncle, the Perrots. Austen viewed a house on Seymour Street, but disapproved of the smallness of its rooms. She also viewed a property on New King Street, but found once again that the rooms were too small. On 5 May she accompanied her uncle to view two houses in Green Parks Buildings. Although initially approving of the apartments, the family later heard of flooding and damp problems as well as 'putrid fevers' spreading through the area which altered their opinion.<sup>42</sup> It is difficult to ascertain how influential Jane Austen was in the final selection of 4 Sydney Place, however, she did express delight at the idea of being located close to Sydney Gardens.<sup>43</sup> It is evident that Austen was actively involved in the house-hunting the process. It is also clear that her opinion was valued by the family, as she was allowed to visit properties and offer her judgement. The detailed letters she sent to Cassandra also enabled her sister to participate in the process.

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<sup>41</sup> Tague, *Women of Quality*, pp. 97-103.

<sup>42</sup> Jane Austen, Paragon, Bath, to Cassandra Austen (5-6 May 1801) in Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, pp. 85-87.

<sup>43</sup> Jane Austen, Stevtenon, to Cassandra Austen (21-22 January 1801) in Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, p. 80.

Similarly, Fanny Burney took on the role as house-hunter for herself and her husband when they decided to move from 25 Rivers Street, to a more affordable Bath property. A later letter, from Burney to her sister Esther who was also looking for a house at Bath, illustrates her knowledge of the process. Burney dissuaded Esther from ‘House hunting at this cold or Rainy Season’ and suggested that by waiting for warmer weather, she might find the ‘rambling’ useful to her health complaint, ‘instead of dangerous.’<sup>44</sup>

In 1827, Margaret Walsh was similarly involved in house viewings at Tunbridge Wells. Residing at a hotel at the spa in May 1827, Walsh spent four days looking at houses with the intention of taking a short term lease of a property. On 15 May she went alone ‘in a fly to see different lodging houses’ and notes having viewed one on Mount Pleasant ‘in a pretty situation & with a little shade & pleasure ground.’ On 17 May, she records having communication with the ‘principal house agent’ regarding properties on Mount Ephraim and lists the comparative costs and benefits of different houses. She made her viewings alone on the morning of the 15, and remained at Tunbridge ‘3 or 4 hours later intending to see more houses’ after the departure of ‘John and Liz’ on the 17th.<sup>45</sup> Burney, Austen and Walsh’s accounts evidence that women could act with authority when house hunting at the resorts; they walked the streets of Bath and Tunbridge Wells searching for accommodation, were trusted by their family and friends to have the necessary skills to judge the properties they saw and were even, in the cases of Burney and Walsh, confident enough to enter unfamiliar houses without a companion.

Women also appear to have played a role in making the final decision to accept or reject lodgings. Writing from Bath, Isabella Carr informed her husband that she had moved from her noisy and small lodgings on the Parades to ‘very good Lodgings near the Cross bath’.<sup>46</sup> In a following letter she added that she feared he would find fault with her move but defended her choice stating ‘I assure you we are not amongst plebians, for the Ladies northumberland; nofolk, & wentworths... are our

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<sup>44</sup> Fanny Burney, 23 Great Stanhope Street, Bath, to Esther Burney (22-23 February 1817) in Hughes (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Fanny Burney*, ix, p. 330.

<sup>45</sup> NLW Ormathwaite papers FE 4/17 Diary of Margaret Walsh (15-17 May 1827).

<sup>46</sup> NA ZCE/F/1/1/3/5 Isabella Carr, Bath, to Ralph Carr (18 November 1761).

neighbours.<sup>47</sup> The fact that Carr feared her husband's disapproval, but still made the decision without his permission, suggests it was a choice she felt she had a right to make independently. Her defence of the decision is also significant, as she attempts to prove that the Cross Bath was a respectable situation by listing the aristocratic women residing there. This note was designed to reassure her husband that she had not made an error of judgement regarding the respectability of her location, but revealingly suggests she may have moved for reasons of female companionship as well as practicality.

In February 1803 Caroline Powys also took lodgings in Bath without first confirming the decision with her husband. Powys and her husband had spent three days unsuccessfully searching for accommodation at Bath, while staying temporarily at the White Hart Inn. When shopping, Caroline enquired in Coward's Lace shop if the proprietor knew of any available accommodation at the resort and was offered rooms directly above the shop. She noted in her journal, 'I knew it was not time to be difficult' and accepted the apartments, moving in with her husband the following evening.<sup>48</sup> Although evidence relating to decision making on properties is scarce, the fact that both Carr and Powys felt able to make a final decision regarding their lodgings, suggests that the role of selecting a house at the resorts was at least open to women.

It was not unusual for women to help their friends and relations find lodgings at the resorts, extending their domestic influence beyond their own doorsteps and into the homes of others. Sarah Anne Knollis helped her friend General Mercer and his family find a house at Bath: 'I went to look for lodgings with them, & at that got a very good one No.2. Queens Square'<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Charlotte Isted helped Katherine Plymley to find accommodation at Bath: 'Miss C Isted had the goodness to accompany us in search of lodgings, & by her assistance we are settled in very handsome apartments No.5 Oxford Row.'<sup>50</sup> In 1815, the widowed Maria Bourdois,

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<sup>47</sup> NA ZCE/F/1/1/5/3 Isabella Carr, The Cross Bath, Bath, to Ralph Carr (29 November 1761).

<sup>48</sup> BL 42, 162 Powys Journals (18 February 1803).

<sup>49</sup> HRO 21M69/6/2 Sarah Anne Knollis, 44 Milsom Street, Bath, to her father Samuel Knollis (12 January 1805).

<sup>50</sup> SRO 567/5/5/1/4 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1794' (8 October 1794).

took 25 Rivers Street for her aunt, Fanny Burney and her husband.<sup>51</sup> When a Mrs Yorke and Lady Beauchamp left Tunbridge Wells in 1775, unhappy with their accommodation on the Pantiles, Lady Polwarth commented: ‘perhaps they had better have emply’d us to take Lodgings for them elsewhere’, further illustrating that women saw house-hunting as a role they could perform well.<sup>52</sup> House-hunting at the resorts was open to women and the prominent place it takes in the letters and diaries of female visitors suggests that female involvement was commonplace. The proximity of a property to the centre of the resort, views, neighbours, quietness and comfort were all factors to be taken into consideration.

### iii. Domestic Sociability

It was a woman’s ‘on going task’ to create ‘an atmosphere of warmth and hospitality’ in her home, to organise social gatherings, welcome guests, provide refreshments and facilitate easy conversation and an air of relaxed sociability.<sup>53</sup> Both elite and middling women were familiar with the role of hostess, although the form of their domestic gatherings varied. For example, elite families often held public days at their country and town houses, where visitors came to marvel at their home and furnishings; on such occasions it was a wife’s duty to speak to visitors of note and impress them with her affability. Women of middling rank did not have the status to hold public days, yet they shared with elite women the custom of making and receiving visits and an array of other social gatherings. The sociability of public life at the eighteenth-century spa is well acknowledged, yet the sociability of its domestic life has received little attention.

Dinner parties, card parties, musical entertainments, routs, tea parties and public days were all part of the domestic social life of Bath. These gatherings, like those in the public arenas, often included men and women, although they were most

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<sup>51</sup> Lane, *A City of Palaces*.

<sup>52</sup> BLA Lady Polwarth, Tunbridge Wells, to Mary Jemimma Robinson (24 August 1775).

<sup>53</sup> Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 4.



frequently hosted by women. Towards the end of the eighteenth century there was a perceivable shift as the most fashionable circles started to prefer private over public entertainment. This caused concern for many reasons, it was feared that socialising in the small apartments of Bath town houses had dangerous health effects. James Adair went so far as to suggest that private routs provided Bath physicians with their income, as crowds crammed themselves into small apartments which were poorly ventilated, ignoring the early hours advocated for spa patients.<sup>54</sup> It was also seen as an end of the old forms of public politeness which had reigned in the time of Beau Nash. Hosting required time, effort and skill, but offered welcome rewards, such as the development of friendship networks. However, there is little evidence to suggest a similar shift in entertainment at Tunbridge Wells. The spa was poorly equipped to foster a domestic social scene, with visitors lodgings widely dispersed between Mount Sion, Mount Ephraim Mount Pleasant and the Pantiles, and much planning and assistance required to move between these different spaces, in contrast the ease of Bath's streets, sedan chairs and plentiful lodgings.

At Bath, hosting was an effective way to establish one's importance amongst the company. The Public days held by Mrs Falconer in the 1790s in the Circus illustrate how the home was not necessarily a private space. Katherine Plymley's description of Falconer's public days, demonstrate how domestic gatherings sometimes mirrored the regular nature of public entertainments; 'Mrs Falconer receives company every Monday evening... Form is excluded & the meeting is pleasant; no one is particularly invited, but it is understood that she is glad to receive any of their acquaintance.'<sup>55</sup> The public days attracted large numbers, Plymley attending one occasion where there were forty five guests.<sup>56</sup> With one drawing room 'appropriated to cards, the other to conversation & work'<sup>57</sup> Falconer's public days blended the public with the domestic, offering a comfortable and attractive alternative to the fashionable public entertainments of the resort.

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<sup>54</sup> James Adair, *Essays on Fashionable Diseases. The Dangerous Effects of Hot and Crouded Rooms. The Clothing of Invalids. Lady and Gentlemen Doctors. And on Quacks and Quackery* (London: 1790), pp. 31-42.

<sup>55</sup> 567/5/5/1/5 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1794 2<sup>nd</sup>' (21 October 1794).

<sup>56</sup> 567/5/5/1/16 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1796 2<sup>nd</sup>.' (26 November 1796).

<sup>57</sup> 567/5/5/1/5 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1794 2<sup>nd</sup>.' (21 October 1794).

Falconer was not the only woman in Bath to hold regular gatherings for a large number of guests; it appears to have been quite common amongst women of substantial means. Caroline Powys recorded a Mrs Lutwych being 'at home' to her friends every Tuesday. Lutwych's 'at homes' were large gatherings and Powys was surprised to find the seven tables of guests she encountered on her first visit supposed 'very few... I really was ignorant for I did not know it, and rather thought it a squeeze.'<sup>58</sup> The importance of women's roles on such occasions is illustrated in another example from Powys' journal. Following a sermon given at Bath by Oberne the Bishop of Meath, against the holding of card parties and musical concerts on Sundays, Mrs Oberne visited an elderly woman who confessed being disappointed to have received twenty eight cards of refusal for her Sunday party. Mrs Oberne declared her delight, affronting the elderly lady who replied 'it shall not hinder my parties'.<sup>59</sup> The ability to host a social event at the time of her own choosing was clearly important to the elderly lady who believed she had a right to continue with her social arrangements and was frustrated by the interference of Oberne. The scale of domestic entertainments varied, from small intimate gatherings to surprisingly large events, such as the party Plymley attended hosted by Mrs Haygarth in January 1807, 'Dr Haygarth's is an elegant house in the Crescent...I was told above four hundred cards were sent out & it was supposed that in the course of the evening not many fewer persons were there.'<sup>60</sup> These examples illustrate how women with means turned their homes into semi-public spaces at the resort, organising regular parties which they orchestrated from their position as hostess.

George Lucy's letters offer further evidence of women hosting at the resort and demonstrate that they held mixed gender gatherings. Lucy was a keen card player and wrote of gaming in the homes of his female acquaintance at the spa. On the 29 December he 'played at cards with Mrs Wright in gay Street', noting that 'the company we met there were twelve in number.'<sup>61</sup> Similarly, on another occasion he

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<sup>58</sup> BL 42161 Powys Journals (3 April 1798).

<sup>59</sup> BL 42, 162 Powys Journals (Notes for December 1803).

<sup>60</sup> SRO 567/5/5/1/27 Katherine Plymley Journey to Bath (27 January 1807).

<sup>61</sup> WRO L6/1452 George Lucy, Bath, to Mrs Philippa Hayes (29 December 1758/9).

recorded having ‘been at cards with Mrs Wrighte twice, with Mrs Isted once.’<sup>62</sup> Lucy’s enjoyment of female company and hospitality is also apparent in his description of a dinner party he attended, hosted by Mrs Charleston, where he approved of the ‘fine Turbot’ and ‘good soles’ as well as the wine, claret and port which were ‘all good in their kind.’<sup>63</sup> Lucy’s praise of the food and drink also proves that a hostess’s role was open to the observation and the comments of her guests, further emphasising its importance. Through the organisation of a successful dinner party, a hostess could impress her guests with her range of domestic skills. The arrangement of card parties for twelve guests or dinner parties where ‘seven and nine dishes’ were served, required time and careful organisation, demonstrating that hosting was a productive and not purely ornamental role.

Visitors as well as residents hosted social occasions at the resort. During her stay at Bath, Anabella Carr boasted; ‘I have a great many acquaintance- who come and drink tea with me & the other Even- collected together fourteen north country people.’ Her pride becomes more apparent when she describes the demeanour she adopted for hosting her tea parties, ‘upon these occasions- I put on a face of ease & chearfulness- that is very foreign to my feelings.’<sup>64</sup> Her letter highlights that in addition to the organisation of events, a hostess also had to appear happy and at ease. Carr spent more time at home than in public due to poor health, hosting gatherings at home enabled her to orchestrate a social life that she otherwise would have missed out on. The parties organised by Melesina Trench, during her Bath visit of 1814, offer further evidence that visiting women hosted private entertainments at the resort. Trench ‘gave one large party’ as well as ‘three small concerts’ during her stay. Like Carr she was proud of her entertaining skills, adding that the parties were ‘extremely approved.’

In addition to hosting social events for large numbers of guests, elite and middling women played a central role in the visiting culture of Bath. A close look at this visiting culture reveals the prominent place it held in domestic life at the resort and

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<sup>62</sup> WRO L6/1451 George Lucy, Bath, to Mrs Philippa Hayes (10 January 1759).

<sup>63</sup> WRO L6/1453 George Lucy, Bath, to Mrs Philippa Hayes (29 February 1760).

<sup>64</sup> NA ZCE/F/1/1/3/12 Anabella Carr, Bath, to Ralph Carr (21 January 1799).

the benefits it offered those women who participated in it. Visiting was a popular custom practiced in both urban and rural communities throughout England. Men and women of the upper and middling orders would call on their neighbours and friends to share tea, coffee and polite conversation. Such visits were usually brief and formal between those not closely acquainted, although they could last for hours between closer acquaintances. The letters and journals of spa women illustrate that visiting was as much part of the daily routine of resort life for them, as were trips to the pleasure gardens or assembly rooms.

Tea drinking played a central role in private visiting at Bath as well as in the public life of the resort. The East India Company had been importing tea into Britain since 1678, where its popularity is believed to have been influenced by Catherine of Braganza's liking for the drink.<sup>65</sup> It was sold in the coffee-houses in both liquid and dried forms and rapidly became a status symbol as it was an expensive commodity in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, requiring the purchase of appropriate tea equipage to be drunk fashionably at home. However, by the mid eighteenth century, cheaper varieties of tea were available and rising wealth meant that customers of lower social backgrounds were able to participate in tea drinking.<sup>66</sup> The delicate utensils required to make and drink the beverage, combined with its reputation as a social lubricant which encouraged gossip and scandalmongering meant that it was regarded as a particularly feminine drink and often criticised for encouraging women to fritter away their days enjoying the luxurious commodity and the leisured social life it promoted. Eliza Haywood, for instance, was critical of the way it encouraged ladies to entertain one visitor after another until their entire day had gone by without anything productive being achieved: 'when the Tea-drinking Company have almost finished their Regale, and the Table is going to be removed, a fresh visitor arrives, who must have fresh Tea made for her; after her another... a third... Perhaps a fourth, or more, till the Room is quite full, and the Entertainment prolonged a considerable Time after the Candles are lighted.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Robin Emmerson, *British Teapots and Tea Drinking 1700-1830* (London: HMSO, 1992), pp. 1-2.

<sup>66</sup> Emmerson, *British Teapots*, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Eliza Heywood 'John Careful', 'The Female Spectator Book viii' in Patricia Meyer Spacks (ed), *Selections from The Female Spectator / by Eliza Haywood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 85.

Tea was drunk in the assembly rooms during the day and at evening entertainments such as balls and card parties. Charles Baldwyn wrote to his cousin Adam Ottley in 1736, amazed at the size of the company who 'are got into a way of spending a Sunday evening in the publick rooms about 14 at a Table round tea & there are near 20 Tables'. Katherine Plymley found tea drinking with her friend, Mrs Arundel, the most pleasurable aspect of a Bath ball she attended in November 1796; 'we drank a comfortable dish of tea together & talk'd of old times I thought myself quite in luck.' Tea could also be drunk in inns, pastry shops and even at the Ladies Coffee-House. In the poem *Bath a simile* (1779) the resort is compared to a tea set;

Since monstrous Similes alone,  
Can please this wond'ring Age,  
I'll call Bath with its Environs  
-A huge Tea-Equipage.<sup>68</sup>

Using, amongst others, the analogies of the baths as slop basins, the Circus as a Wedgewood plate and the Avon's yellow waters as a pot of cream, the poem develops the comparison which works on two levels: not only do each of the aspects mentioned compare well with components of a tea equipage, but tea drinking was also crucial to the identity of the resort.<sup>69</sup> Tea and coffee drinking 'enhanced and formed the focus of the social classes' in eighteenth-century England, yet it appears to have been tea which played the most prominent role at the resorts, as coffee was never drunk in the public rooms, and tea appears to have been most commonly served to friends during private visits.<sup>70</sup> The fact that the feminised beverage became synonymous with the resort highlights that women were central to the spa's social life; tea drinking gave a purpose to many of the public and private entertainments of the resort and the prominence of tea over coffee or alcoholic beverages indicated a female presence.

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<sup>68</sup> *Bath, - a Simile. Bath, - A Conversation-Piece* (1779), p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> *Bath, - A Simile*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>70</sup> Sarah Richards, *Eighteenth-Century Ceramics: Products for a Civilized Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 132.

Tea drinking also played an important role in visiting. Giffard, for whom entertaining visitors to tea was a crucial part of a Bath visit, made a shopping trip soon after her arrival, specifically to equip herself with ‘Tea, coffee, sugar, & all other requisits Relative to House keeping.’<sup>71</sup> Powys made frequent tea visits and entertained her friends with the drink and her Bath journals are scattered with entries such as ‘Miss S Nicholls to Tea’ and ‘The Pages to Tea & Cards.’<sup>72</sup> While Plymley did not host visits, she made many visits to her female acquaintances at the resort, with tea playing an important role. In October 1794 she noted; ‘We drank tea this evening with Ms James an unmarried lady of singular character, always busy, talkative, cheerful, the heroine of all her own anecdotes, the dearest friend of all her acquaintance’.<sup>73</sup> Burney also participated in the visiting culture of the resort, and was particularly affected when she paid a visit of leave to her friend Madame de Somerey ‘who had her two Jolies daughters, Stehpanie & Pulcherie, at work by her side, the Tea Table spread a l’angliase ... in this private, comfortable style, they were all ten times more easy, engaging, & lively, than I had ever yet seen them.’<sup>74</sup>

Failure to participate in the making and receiving of visits could easily cause offence and compromise a woman’s reputation as a polite member of the company. The making and receiving of visits enabled women to influence how they were perceived at the resort and was a role many women felt duty-bound to perform. Jane Austen was often critical of intimate visits at Bath and wrote to her sister; ‘Another stupid party last night; perhaps if larger they might be less intolerable’ adding that the evening had consisted of six people sitting around talking ‘nonsense to one another’.<sup>75</sup> Yet her letters reveal that she, like many women, felt visiting was a duty to be upheld ‘My Uncle and Aunt drank tea with us last night, & in spite of my resolution to the contrary, I could not help putting forward to invite them again this Evening’.<sup>76</sup> At Bath, visiting took up a large portion of women’s daily routines. ‘The

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<sup>71</sup> FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard ‘A Bath Journal’ (24 November 1766).

<sup>72</sup> BL 42161 Powys Journals (9 April 1800); BL 42, 162 Powys Journals (3 March 1802).

<sup>73</sup> SRO 567/5/5/1/5 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1794 2<sup>nd</sup>’ (October 1794).

<sup>74</sup> Fanny Burney to M. D’arblay in Hughes (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Fanny Burney*, x, p. 513.

<sup>75</sup> Jane Austen, Paragon, Bath, to Cassandra Austen (12-13 May 1801) in Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen’s Letters*, p. 89

<sup>76</sup> Jane Austen, Gay Street, Bath, to Cassandra Austen (21 April 1805) in Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen’s Letters*, p. 108.

waters employ the morning, visits the afternoon and we saunter away the evening in great stupidity' noted Elizabeth Montagu of her life at Bath in 1740. While men also participated in visiting, it was not a fundamental part of their spa lives in the same way it was for women. There is little evidence of men making frequent domestic social calls at the spas without women present, while women often visited each other without the presence of men. Penrose, for example, made and received visits at Bath, but his wife or daughter were usually present.

Visits could be made at any point in the day at Bath. The afternoon was the most popular time, but morning visits were also acceptable; Caroline Powys, recording, in 1805, that the majority of her mornings at Bath were spent either walking or visiting.<sup>77</sup> If a visitor called while someone was out, a calling card was usually left and the recipient of the card would be expected to return the visit within the next couple of days. A host was also expected to return a visit one or two days after they had received one and in doing so, created a regular pattern of making and returning visits which became part of their spa routine. It was also customary to make 'visits of leave' before quitting the spa, women often spending their final day at a resort in saying goodbye to their friends. Typically this was a female responsibility and women made their leave-taking visits on behalf of their whole party.

Visiting or receiving visits from those who were out of favour could be as damaging to a woman's popularity, as socialising with popular individuals could be beneficial. In one letter, Melesina Trench admitted that she had decided to withdraw her attentions from a female acquaintance at the spa, 'not from inclination for I find her very entertaining, but for fear of sharing in her unpopularity, which I think is as great as the favour I at present enjoy.' In discarding one acquaintance, Trench hoped to secure her wider popularity, 'I now literally know everybody, & am asked everywhere.'<sup>78</sup> Betsy Sheridan treated her friend Mrs Foster in a comparable way. She wrote to her sister that Foster was 'lost to her' because of her odd habit of having 'vulgar people' as friends, her companions at the time being 'her own Maid Charlotte under the name of Miss Carey and a Mrs Pritchard who formerly kept one

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<sup>77</sup> BL 42, 162 Powys Journals (21 January 1805).

<sup>78</sup> HRO 23M93/42/33/24 Melesina Trench, Bath, to Sarah Tuite (1798)

of the Taverns in this Town but who fail'd.' Sheridan's decision to distance herself from Foster was based on the same principals as Trench's decision to distance herself from her friend; Sheridan argued that while Foster's companions 'may be very good sort of people they are certainly not company one would wish to appear with in such a Town as this'<sup>79</sup>, and therefore, by extension, Foster was not the sort of woman she wished to be seen with herself.

Visiting gave structure to women's daily life at the resort and provided them with an entertainment which could be enjoyed when poor weather kept them inside. Residing in Stall Street in 1740, Mrs. M. Brampton remarked that she had 'not yet been anywhere but the pump room the weather being so cold and the snow Deep' but noted that she had received visitors at home. Visiting enabled Brampton to see her friends Lady Peterborough, Miss Kitty Windsor and Mrs Sophia Duncomb and allowed her to experience the sociable nature of spa society even though the weather prohibited her from enjoying the public amusements of the resort.<sup>80</sup>

Elizabeth Giffard's Bath journal offers a detailed picture of one woman's visiting rituals over a four month period. She made visits and received visitors almost every day of her stay at the resort, sometimes with and sometimes without her husband. There were days when, excepting her husband, she socialised only with women. For example, on 10 December she recorded having met with seven women during the course of the day, acting as both hostess and visitor. The journal entry highlights how social calls shaped her day: 'visited miss Pennants & miss Dottins, returned Home & received a visit from Mrs Browne, dined at half an hour pas'd two o'clock- in the Evening returned visits to Lady Edwards Lady Malpas, Mrs nagle & Mrs Saintleger.' However, Giffard did not restrict herself to female company and had several male acquaintances at the resort. On 26 November she received Lady Arundel and Miss Porter in the morning and in the evening 'Drank tea & play'd at Quadrille with Dr Hays & Mr Cumberbach by invitation at Their Lodgings.'<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Betsy Sheridan, Bath, to Alicia Le Fanu (9-17 December 1789) in LeFanu (ed.), *Betsy Sheridan's Journal*, p. 189

<sup>80</sup> HRO 63M84/378/2 Mrs. M. Brampton, Stall Street Bath (15 December 1740).

<sup>81</sup> FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard 'A Bath Journal' (10 December, 26 November 1766).



Some women chose to leave details of their visits out of their letters and journals, as visiting was such a constant part of their daily lives that they thought description would only appear repetitious. Elizabeth Montagu rarely mentioned who she visited, but acknowledged that visiting was a fixed part of her daily spa routine.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Caroline Powys decided she would not ‘each day set down ye visits reciev’d & paid’, due to the frequency and repetition of her social calls.<sup>83</sup> For example, on the 18 January 1804, she was visited by Mr and Mrs Powys of Shropshire, Mr and Mrs Badderly, Mr, Mrs and Miss Austin, Mr and Miss Masons, Mr and Mrs Scott and Mrs Eyre. The following day she simply noted, ‘Return’d the above visits.’<sup>84</sup> Although many women’s spa letters and journals detail visiting routines, it is possible that they do not show it to its full extent, as other women may also have decided to minimise visiting references for the same reasons as Powys.

Stone argues that the rise of the nuclear family led to the erosion of outside support and the ‘reduction of sociability’ with persons outside of the nuclear family. Ironically he makes this argument, while simultaneously suggesting that the ‘formal visits’ of elite and middling women were nothing more than the actions of ‘idle drones’.<sup>85</sup> However, the manuscript material explored in this chapter demonstrates that women developed their own friendship and support networks through visiting at Bath. ‘I’m glad... you visit your friends, pray remember to see the Lady of my old friend col: wolf, who was so kind to offer being a nurse to you’<sup>86</sup> wrote Adam Ottley to his daughter Bath. He encouraged her sociability as a means of distraction from her illness and to create a network of supporters who could offer care for her if she became worse. Bridget Ottley frequently made social calls, visiting her friends Mrs Cressett and Mrs Jenkinson in their Bath houses. Unlike the archetypal visit, centred on tea and conversation, Ottley’s visits were less formal. Her female friends appear to have adopted a mothering role with her, both Cressett and Jenkinson inviting Ottley to dine with them on numerous occasions, for example in February 1742 she

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<sup>82</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (27 December 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu with some of the Letters of her Correspondents*, i, p. 72.

<sup>83</sup> BL 42, 162 Powys Journals (21 January 1805).

<sup>84</sup> BL 42, 162 Powys Journals (18, 19 January 1804).

<sup>85</sup> Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 396-397.

<sup>86</sup> NLW Ottley Pitchford Hall Correspondence (3) 3657 Adam Ottley, Lutwyche, to Bridget Ottley, the Parade, Bath (8 January 1741).

wrote to her father; 'I dined yesterday at Lady Jenkinsons on Wednesday & yesterday at Mrs Cressetts in ye Abbey Green'.<sup>87</sup> On one occasion she also writes of having eaten with other women in her lodging house.<sup>88</sup>

Fostered by the visiting culture of the spa, resort friendships provided women with various forms of support. During her trips to Bath, Plymley was supported by her friends the Isted. Her visits to Mrs, Charlotte and Rose Isted were not a daily occurrence, but were a constant feature of her trips to the spa, the visits being continued in 1794, 1795, 1799 and 1807. The visits sometimes focused on tea and conversation, and at other times would take the form of a lunch or evening meal. In 1794, after her first social visit to the Isted's home, Plymley noted 'Miss Charlotte Isted almost devotes herself to our amusement, her health & spirits enable her to be an excellent chaperon'.<sup>89</sup> In addition to helping Plymley find lodgings at the resort, Charlotte accompanied Plymley when she ventured into the public arenas, for example when she went to a play or attended a concert. The friendship benefitted both women as it provided each with a companion, offered Isted the opportunity to enjoy the role of hostess and spa guide and provided Plymley with a chaperone with local knowledge.

Proof that Bath's intensive visiting culture was particular to the resort can be found in the letters of Melesina Trench which were written during her visits to the spa between 1797 and 1814. When encouraging her friend 'Sal' to move from Ireland to stay with her first in London and then in Bath, Trench stated that London was poor for establishing friendships, telling Sal that her friends 'will probably not find out you are with me, till you are gone' and arguing that 'in Bath the case is otherwise ... all my acquaintances wold become yours, & the intercourse would go on in London'.<sup>90</sup> She had a critical view of London's visiting culture, observing that there people visited their friends for years 'with out knowing any more of them- there they

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<sup>87</sup> NLW Ottley Pitchford Hall Correspondence (3) 3649b Bridget Ottley, Bath, to Adam Ottley (7 February 1741 ½).

<sup>88</sup> NLW 3648b Bridget Ottley, Bath, to Adam Ottley (27 March 1742).

<sup>89</sup> SRO 567/5/5/1/4 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1794' (9 October 1794).

<sup>90</sup> HRO 23M93/42/33/19 Melesina Trench Bath, to Sarah Tuite (1797).

are less occupied, & have time to seek private society.<sup>91</sup> Trench suggests that the temporary nature of spa residence encouraged visitors to be warmer towards one another, adopting an active and sociable holiday routine, rather than settling into the solitary life which a town, with a more stable and settled population, might encourage.

Trench's letters, sent from Bath on her numerous visits to the spa, illustrate why she had such a positive opinion of the resort. Although she rarely mentions visiting the public areas, her letters create a picture of a busy and active social life. She enjoyed several spa friendships, hosted parties and participated in the visiting culture of the resort. In one of her undated letters Trench records Mrs Cradock sending 'a dinner ready dressed... the moment we arrived, with every minutie, as if it had come from the best hotel' accompanied by a bill for Catelini's benefit concert.<sup>92</sup> These were useful and thoughtful gifts for those arriving at the spa, the meal easing Trench's party into their domestic spa life and the bill providing information on public life before Trench had the opportunity to open a paper or hear of the amusement through gossip.

In addition to being a popular and important entertainment in its own right, visiting often formed a prelude to public entertainments at the resorts. For example, Penrose recorded a Dr Stackhouse visiting him one evening, accompanied by a Miss Kitty, Miss Coryton and Miss Tremayne; 'We drank Tea immediately, and immediately after away they went again, in four chairs, to the Ball.'<sup>93</sup> Penrose's description emphasises the shortness of the social call, it's rushed, rather than leisurely pace. Social visits, made prior to public entertainments extended the hours of sociability and pleasure seeking, and gave an air of importance to an occasion, and to the women who appeared to be busily moving from one entertainment to another, such as the young ladies accompanying Dr Stackhouse. In calling on one another, women formed plans of how to spend the rest of their day, and formed parties for the

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<sup>91</sup> HRO 23M93/42/33/25 Melesina Trench, Bath, to Sarah Tuite (1798).

<sup>92</sup> HRO 23M93/30/1/21 Melesina Trench to Charles St George.

<sup>93</sup> Reverend Penrose, Bath, to Peggy Penrose (6 May 1766) in Mitchell and Penrose (eds.), *Letters from Bath 1766-1767*, p. 88.

evening. This further enhanced the importance of domestic entertaining, and linked public and private leisure even more closely.

#### **iv. Domestic Pursuits**

While the chapter has focused on aspects of domestic life that were particular to the spa, there were components of domestic life at the resorts which remained similar to women's lives in urban and rural situations all over eighteenth-century England. Needlework, artwork, letter and journal writing played an important role in the domestic lives of privileged women during their spa visits. Such activities were regarded as suitably feminine and were seen as useful employments which prevented women from become idle, slovenly or too accustomed to luxury and sociability. It is possible to view these employments as repressive activities which gave women ornamental skills but failed to instil any particularly practical qualities, or as passive employments women engaged in simply to fill their empty hours. However, it is argued here that these activities were creative and fulfilling pursuits in which many women took great pleasure.

While women pursued needlework, art work, letter and journal writing in urban and rural homes all over eighteenth-century England, the high number of women in fashionable society at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, and the emphasis on female education at the resorts increased the status and importance of these activities at the spa. Many women took their needlework with them on visits, and enjoyed knitting or embroidering while conversing with their friends. For example, on a visit to Bath in 1787, Anna Cradock spent an afternoon with two friends, knitting and drinking tea: 'In the afternoon Lady Midleton and Mrs Wetham came by appointment to tea; brought their knitting and sat the afternoon with us quite in a friendly way.'<sup>94</sup> This also gave women an opportunity to view each other's work, to complement and learn from one another. The fact that Mrs Falconer had a room specifically dedicated to needlework at her public days emphasises the importance of the craft at the spa and

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<sup>94</sup> DUSC 1433 Anna Francesca Cradock 'Journal of a Tour in England' (30 May 1787).

illustrates how needle and thread, just like the tea table and tea, provided an opportunity for leisure and sociability.<sup>95</sup> Needlework also provided a sense of purpose for single or widowed women who had more solitary time. Plymley commented with approbation on the liveliness and productiveness of Mrs Isted, who was 81 when she visited her in Bath in 1796, noting ‘Carpet work, & muslin work by turns engage her, knitting fills up her odd minutes, a book amuses her & after supper she writes her letters.’<sup>96</sup> These examples illustrate how needlework was enjoyed by women at the resort as a leisure activity. Parker argues that embroidery has always provided women with a ‘source of pleasure and power... while being indissolubly linked to their powerlessness.’<sup>97</sup> Although some historians might take issue with viewing needlework as a positive, pleasurable and even powerful aspect in the lives of eighteenth-century women, this chapter supports the argument of Parker and suggests that many privileged spa visiting women found pleasure in working both alone and in company and that they valued the ease it gave to social occasions.

‘I had not expected such a long stay... I had not laid out sufficient Employment of Drawings’ wrote Lady Polwarth from Bath in November 1784.<sup>98</sup> Like needlework, drawing and painting provided women with a pursuit that they could enjoy independently and gave an outlet for creativity. The fact that the length of Lady Polwarth’s stay affected the number of drawing provisions she took with her, suggests that drawing played a prominent role in her life at the spa. If it was only an occasional entertainment, then it is unlikely she would comment on running low on her drawing equipment as an alternative employment could be sought. Giffard also spent time drawing during her stay at Bath in the 1760s. On the 13 January 1768 she recorded that ‘the Gentlemen amused themselves about the Town,- Mrs Giffard spent the morning at home in writing & Drawing’ and on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February she noted that the men went to the rooms while ‘Mrs Giffard spent the evening at home in Drawing.’<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> 567/5/5/1/5 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1794 2<sup>nd</sup>’ (21 October 1794).

<sup>96</sup> SRO 567/5/5/ Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1796 1<sup>st</sup> 15 (22 October 1796).

<sup>97</sup> Rozika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1984), p. 11.

<sup>98</sup> BLA L30/13/12/98 Lady Polwarth, Bath, to Mary Robinson (29 November 1784).

<sup>99</sup> FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard ‘A Bath Journal’ (13 January: 7 February 1768).

The local scenery, both natural and architectural sometimes formed the focus of women's paintbrushes and pencils. For example, Lady Gordon's sketches of Tunbridge Wells made in pencil, pen and ink depict rural landscapes and contain few man-made buildings or even people illustrating the Regency taste for the picturesque. The journal of Louisa Charlotte Kenyon, written in 1844 also contains sketches, however rather than the romantic and careful illustrations one might expect a lady to make to improve her artistic ability, these sketches are rough depictions of Bath Abbey, made to record architectural details such as columns and archways.<sup>100</sup> This illustrates how the content, style and purpose of drawing and painting varied between female visitors. However, the emphasis on education at the spa, encouraged women to want to perfect their artistic abilities. When Plymley took her nieces to Bath in 1807, she enquired after the best masters, visited their studios and then engaged 'barker to attend Josepha for landscips & Hewlett Jane for Flowers, at 4s a week.'<sup>101</sup> That each niece had her own drawing master, rather than both being taught at the same time, indicates that the teaching of the girls was taken as a serious matter and suggests that the tastes and preferences of each were taken into consideration.

While letter and journal writing are widely acknowledged to have played an important part in spa women's domestic routine, the value of their writings have been significantly underplayed. Early feminist analyses of the manuscript material produced by women throughout medieval and early modern history were sceptical, as Kathryn King argues; female manuscript culture 'was less a phenomenon to be investigated than an example of female powerlessness' and was regarded as evidence of 'patriarchal repression'.<sup>102</sup> However, literary opinion has changed and female manuscript culture, or women's 'life-writings', are now valued as an independent genre with numerous sub-genres, rich in historical detail and told in interesting and sophisticated narrative voices.

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<sup>100</sup> SRO SA 549/288 Diary of Louisa Charlotte Kenyon, A Trip to Malvern (1844).

<sup>101</sup> SRO 567/5/5/1/27 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1807' (23 January 1807).

<sup>102</sup> Kathryn. R. King, 'Elizabeth Singer Rowe's Tactical Use of Print and Manuscript' in George. L. Justice and Nathaniel Tinker (eds.), *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England 1550-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 158.

The writing of letters during a spa visit was by no means a passive act which filled vacant hours for bored women. Instead, letter and journal writing was an activity which many women relished. Aries and Chartier view the development of the personal diary as one of the most significant shifts in early modern culture which contributed towards the privatization of society.<sup>103</sup> In their diaries, men and women had personal space in which to record and review their experiences and thoughts and the power to develop self-identity through what they wrote about themselves and how they wrote it. The journals kept by Giffard, Plymley, Cradock and Powys were not the products of patriarchal society, but the produce of independently thinking women with individual voices who chose to write because they enjoyed it. Letter writing was a vital means of communication with loved ones, it enabled relationships to continue from afar and the detailed discussion of social and cultural life indicates that women were writing of the issues that were of importance to them, allowing readers today to get as close as possible to hearing the spoken voice of their authors. Without the detailed descriptions of issues such as health, balls, assemblies and house hunting at the resorts, all contained in the personal writings of elite and middling women, this thesis would not be possible. The importance of letter writing is indicated further by the fact that such a volume of letters were produced by women at the resorts, and that they frequently describe how they put time aside for the specific task of letter writing.

As Kinsley states in her study of eighteenth-century women writing the home tours, it cannot be argued that all women were good at the same things, and therefore it is important not to make sweeping generalisations about the nature of their letters and journals.<sup>104</sup> Increasingly, literary scholars and historians are discovering the complexity of women's life-writings in early modern England. In contradiction to Harriet Blodgett's suggestion that 'remarkably few English women of the past used their diaries for active self-creation or transformation'<sup>105</sup> more recent studies have suggested that women expressed and created identities for themselves in a variety of

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<sup>103</sup> Roger Chartier, 'Forms of Privatization' in Roger Chartier (ed), *A History of Private Life III: Passions of the Renaissance* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 5, 165.

<sup>104</sup> Zoe Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 8

<sup>105</sup> Harriet Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: English Women's Private Diaries* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1989), p. 4.

forms of life-writing such as the diary, letter and even recipe book. The essays compiled in Michelle Dowd and Julie Eckerle's *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England* illustrate that many women were familiar with various aspects of 'an increasing textual world' and suggest that they creatively sought forms of expression and of 'unique selves'.<sup>106</sup> The women whose letters and journals are explored throughout this thesis have very individual writing styles and shaped identities both through their narrative voices and through the incidents and activities they recorded. Their differing styles suggest that women enjoyed writing as it was a domestic activity which allowed them to express their own style. Several of the authors including Cradock, Montagu, Trench, Lady Polwarth and of course Austen have a sharp and witty style. They mocked the company, the customs of the spa and their own behaviour. Their style also mirrors the satirical form of the lampoons which were so popular at the resorts and captures the taste for caricature in their mockery of particular individuals.

Giffard, Plymley and Powys have an informative tone, their journals record precise details about their activities and observations and are less prone to satirical comment, perhaps because unlike the former women, they were writing more for themselves than to impress an audience away from the resort. Their writings are clear and comment on spa society as if they are making an anthropological and architectural study. This is not to say that they lack style or are not as pleasurable to read, their authors simply adopt a more direct and less satirical approach. Ottley, Richmond, Burney and Sheridan wrote in a more emotive style, although each writer differed considerably in her written form. Ottley and Richmond's letters are emotive and dutiful, Burney's compositions combine emotive language and a heightened sensibility while Sheridan's writings form a combination of emotion, wit and cynicism, yet all four women emphasised their affection for those they were with or those that they missed. The women mentioned here are only a sample of those whose writings form the basis of this thesis, yet they illustrate how the written style of each letter and journal writer varied. As Aries argues, the writing of journals reveals 'the determination of some people to set themselves apart' and therefore the creation of

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<sup>106</sup> Michelle Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle, *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 1.



an individual voice may have been a priority of those who kept journals. Letter and journal writing blended the divide between public and private at the resorts, enabling women to send their thoughts and voices from the privacy of their homes out into the literary public sphere.

Elite and middling women visiting Bath and Tunbridge Wells in the long eighteenth century did not necessarily exchange quiet domestic lives for busy, public ones. While they had entrance into the public arenas of the resort and could wield considerable influence there, they also had to fulfil the familial and domestic responsibilities expected of them. This by no means lessens the importance of female public life at the eighteenth-century spa; instead it reveals the multifaceted nature of the privileged woman's spa existence. At the resorts, childhood and motherhood were freed from the confines of the home, as children were welcome in the public areas of the spas. Elite and middling women operated within a public context as they viewed and took possession of spa properties and as they fostered domestic sociability within these semi-public spaces. When the number of visitors partaking in public leisure activities started to decline at Bath during the late eighteenth century, the spa's lively domestic social life increased, thus securing the status of the resort for a little longer and increasing its appeal for women who enjoyed hosting and attending private social events. However, the domestic social life of Tunbridge Wells could bear no comparison. The fact that Tunbridge Wells did not offer privileged women similar opportunities for domestic sociability could be one of the central factors which led Bath to surpass it in terms of popularity and fashionable status from mid to late eighteenth-century.