

Conclusion

i. Rescuing the Female Spa Patient

Whilst Penelope Corfield, John Cunningham, Phyllis Hembry and Roy Porter suggest that health diminished in importance, as a factor attracting visitors to spa resorts throughout the eighteenth century, the exploration of women's spa manuscripts and contemporary medical treatises creates a very different picture.¹ Between 1680 and 1830, elite and middling women resorted to Bath and Tunbridge Wells seeking cures for a number of health related problems including, but not limited to: biliousness, gall stones, gout, nervousness and 'stomach.' The spa life-writings of Isabella and Annabella Carr, Lady Jane Coke, Anne Duke, Elizabeth and Mary Isham, Lady Bristol, the Duchess of Richmond, Dennis Lyddell and Bridget Ottley evidence that poor health played a key role in many leisured women's spa visits and residences and that physical as well as emotional suffering impacted their spa experiences.² The correspondences of Eliza Courtenay, Pricilla Digby, Katherine Plymley and Anne Venables-Vernon further illustrate that even healthy women's spa visits were sometimes shaped by poor health, when they enacted the role of companion to an invalid.³

¹ Corfield, 'Georgian Bath', p. 27; Cunningham (ed.), *400 Years of the Wells*, p. 19; Hembry, *The English Spa*, p. 303; Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 245; Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 316-317.

² NA. ZCE/F/1/1/5/3 Isabella Carr, Bath, to Ralph Carr (29 November, 1761); WSRO GWD MS 102 (c.1719-1740); NA ZCE/ F/1/1/3/12 Anabella Carr, Bath, to Ralph Carr (21 January 1799); Rathbone (ed.), *Letters from Lady Jane Coke*; NLW Nassau Senior, E99 Mary Senior, Compton Beauchamp, Berkshire, to Mrs Duke, No.4 Marlborough Street, Bath (1792); NRO IC1995 Mary Isham, Bath, to Justinian Isham (29 May 1731); NRO IC2566 Elizabeth Isham, Bath, to Edmund Isham, Lamport (4 November 1738); WSRO The Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duke of Richmond; BL 74642 Autograph Journal of Dennis Lyddell (April 1706); CRO J 3/2/683 Frances Mitford, at a village near to Bath (the specific name is illegible), to John Hawkins (14 August 1828); NLW. 3647 Ottley Pitchford Hall Correspondence (3) Bridget Ottley, Bath, to Adam Ottley (2 April 1742).

³ NLW Glansevern 7979 Eliza Anna Courtenay, Camden Place, Bath, to Mrs Slougher, Grey Friars, Chester (17 June 1835); NUSC Mol 78 Priscilla Digby, Bath, to Anne Molyneux (21 March 1742); SRO 567/5/5/1/17 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1799' (24 February 1799); NUSC 107/6/1 Anne Venables-Vernon, Bath, to Dr Addenbrooke (c.1775-1776: un-dated).

The comic suggestions of John Macky, Thomas Rawlins and the Earl of Rochester that women found a ‘cure’ for barrenness at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, through adulterous relationships, have long detracted attention away from the fact that issues of fertility and gynaecological health were of great emotional strain.⁴ Medical treatises, including those by Lodowick Rowzee, Dr Pierce and William Oliver demonstrate that the waters of the resorts were advertised as a genuine tonic for a number of feminine ailments, ranging from the green sickness to frequent miscarriage, illustrating that woman of varied ages, from the adolescent to those in their mid to late forties, sought gynaecological aid at the resorts.⁵ The waters of both spas were believed to facilitate conception and the carrying of children to full term, through clearing obstructions and strengthening the womb, whilst those of Bath were also believed to heal through their natural heat. Royal women including Henrietta Maria, Catherine of Braganza, Mary of Modena and Queen Anne all utilised the spa waters to aid them in conception and recovery from pregnancy and were critical in promoting the spa’s reputation in this field.

Whilst manuscript evidence documenting female use of the waters for gynaecological purposes is hard to find, this is not surprising; as Rosemary Baird notes, women ‘stoically’ refrained from discussion of infertility in their correspondence during this period.⁶ Lady Polwarth, Elizabeth Giffard, Elizabeth and Mary Isham, the Duchess of Richmond, Elizabeth Montagu and Caroline Powys may also have sought gynaecological aid at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, as hinted by the fact that they visited the spas during periods of their lives in which they were married and of fertile age. The complete absence of children of Lady Polwarth and the Ishams, the time of Giffard’s visit after the birth of her first daughter and Montagu’s frequent spa visits after the death of her one and only child, all add further evidence to the suggestion that they sought aid in feminine health complaints. It is also possible that the Duchess of Richmond’s frequent pregnancies and her use of the waters at Tunbridge Wells were linked; she may, for example, have taken the waters during a pregnancy, or to quicken the healing process after giving birth.

⁴ Macky, *A Journey Through England*, ii, p. 123; Rawlins, *A Days Courtship*, p. 5; John Wilmot, ‘Tunbridge Wells’ in Vieth (ed.), *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot*, pp.73-80.

⁵ Pierce, *Bath Memoirs*, pp. 187-222; Rowzee, *The Queenes Welles*; Oliver, *A Practical Dissertation on Bath-Waters*, pp. 108-113.

⁶ Baird, *Mistress of the House*.

Pregnancy and child-birth were issues which dominated the lives of all married women; whether they were trying to conceive, pregnant, recovering from child-birth or from the death of an infant, such issues constantly effected women's emotional and physical health. Even for young unmarried women, such matters were distressing, as irregular menstruation, or cessation all together, might limit a woman's ability to attract a husband or produce a child. For women of any age or family circumstance, gynaecological problems could make them question their own purpose and femininity.

Whilst poor health affected many women at the resorts, it simultaneously opened up a range of unique social opportunities. Firstly, and in the most direct sense, health related issues were frequently the principal reason for leisured women attending the resorts. Secondly, the health treatments provided at the spas presented more specific social opportunities. At Bath, this included heterosexual bathing in five thermal baths and drinking mineral waters in the Pump Room; an ideal location to meet in the morning, as parties could then be formed for the rest of the day. The Pump Room was noted by contemporary authors of fiction, as well as real life visitors, as a space in which women enjoyed conversing with close friends, whilst observing others.⁷ At Tunbridge Wells, bathing was also an option, though much greater emphasis was placed on the communal drinking of the waters at the Well and upon the Walks. The taking of the waters, both internally and externally, offered a valid reason for even the most reserved or pious of individuals to socialise on a day to day basis and partake in public discussion. In the baths, an added level of excitement and pleasure was provided by the novelty of the activity. Bathing also provided an opportunity for flirtation with fellow bathers and perhaps with those who watched from the sides or over the walls. Yet it is unlikely that in spaces so crammed with other visitors and so carefully watched by bathing guides and on-lookers, that any sexual misdemeanours occurred in the baths, as R. S. Neale suggests.

⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 59; NUSC WTC14/8 Anne Marriott, Bath, to Mrs Elizabeth Marriott, Ashton Court, Somerset (28 November 1811).

ii. The Social Public Sphere

Taking the ‘water cure’ was not the only activity which provided leisured women with access to a public sphere of sociability at Bath and Tunbridge Wells. The English Urban Renaissance, argued by Peter Borsay to have occurred in provincial towns throughout all of England, impacted social life at the spa in a unique way.⁸ However, the emphasis placed on leisure and public diversion was of particular importance at the resorts, due to the popular belief that amusement and good company were beneficial for health.⁹ Therefore, rather than punctuating life with occasional balls or card assemblies, the assembly rooms, public walks, pleasure gardens and theatres of Bath and Tunbridge Wells provided a continual schedule of entertainments which ran from 7.00 am to 11.00 pm, Monday to Saturday, during the fashionable seasons. Even on Sundays, the assembly rooms of both resorts were open to male and female company, for card playing in the early eighteenth century and later for tea drinking.¹⁰ Significantly, the balls, card assemblies, public promenades and al fresco amusements provided, were available to anyone who could afford the subscription. Whilst they were exclusive establishments, those they excluded were prohibited entrance on grounds of social and financial status, not gender.

Whilst Alice Clarke, Peter Earle, and Lawrence Stone suggest that female leisure pursuits such as dancing and novel reading were frivolous, historians of genteel women, including Katherine Glover, Ingrid Tague, Gillian Russell and Amanda Vickery have highlighted their social importance, arguing that women of polite society were far less restricted in their actions and influences than has been traditionally assumed.¹¹ Contributing a new case study to this second historiographical school, this thesis illustrates the leisured woman’s inclusion within

⁸ Borsay, ‘The English Urban Renaissance: The Development of Provincial Urban Culture’; Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*.

⁹ George Cheyne, *An Essay on Health and Long Life* (London, 1725), p. 61.

¹⁰ *The New Bath Guide* (1786), pp. 22-25; Sprange, *The Tunbridge Wells Guide* (1780), p. 97.

¹¹ Glover, *Elite Women and Polite-Society*; Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre*; Tague, *Women of Quality*, pp. 49-71; Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, pp. 225-284.

public life at the eighteenth-century resort. Rather than perceiving the cards, dancing and conversation of polite women as ‘less important’ than the Habermasian public sphere of political discussion, or the official club life of eighteenth-century men, this study argues that entrance to a vast array of urban arenas and entertainments at the spa, provided leisured women with an entrée to a significant hetero-social public life in which they were physically and discursively involved.¹² These activities took women out of the home, broadening the sphere in which they moved and widening their range of social experience and knowledge. They also illustrate that whilst conduct books urged women to spend their time in; ‘devotions, child rearing... household supervision, and charity works’, women also enjoyed a variety of activities designed specifically for pleasure.¹³

The extent of involvement in public life has long been defined by political engagement, yet the expanding field of women’s history increasingly challenges such a notion. It is important to acknowledge, as does Elaine Chalus, that elite women were involved in the social sphere of politics in the eighteenth century, and therefore, even in the most strictly defined sense of the phrase, there was no such thing as an exclusively masculine public sphere.¹⁴ However, the term ‘public sphere’ needs broadening to include the many spaces in which women moved, comprising those public spheres completely detached from that of party politics. The letters and journals examined throughout this thesis clearly demonstrate that leisured women resorting to Bath and Tunbridge Wells were not confined to a limited domestic sphere, nor were their activities idle; instead their days were filled with social, physical and intellectual activity.

Surprisingly, despite the emphasis placed on sociability at the resorts, spas have rarely been discussed in historiographical works on eighteenth-century associational life.¹⁵ This may be because there were fewer clubs and institutions, due to the temporary nature of spa visitation. It is possible to trace a number, such as the

¹² Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

¹³ Jordon, *The Anxieties of Idleness*, p. 95.

¹⁴ Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life*; Chalus, ‘Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England’; Chalus, ‘That Epidemical Madness: Women and Electoral Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century’.

¹⁵ Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*; Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; Kelly and Powell (eds.), *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*.

Ladies' Catch Club and the Bath Harmonic Society, but these appear as exceptions. However, for elite and middling men and women, life at the resort was very much like belonging to an official club or society. Firstly, those of elite or middling status who partook in health and leisure activities on offer at the resorts were known as 'the company' and therefore, affiliated as a distinct social group.¹⁶ Secondly, as with many clubs and societies, spa visitors abided by sets of rules. These rules were laid out in print in guide books to the resorts, which also functioned like member's handbooks, informing readers of the full range of benefits members could receive. Importantly, the rules addressed female as well as male members of the company, noting that young girls and older women should be 'content with a second bench at the Ball, as being past, or not come to perfection'; advising young women to 'take Notice how many Eyes observe them' and requesting women to wear 'lappets' if they wished to dance the minuet.¹⁷ Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, the members of this 'association' met in specifically designated social arenas, such as the Pump Room, Well, walks, assembly rooms and pleasure gardens, to take part in social activity and conversation. To belong to the company, was in effect, to belong to a privileged social club; one which met to better the physical and emotional health of its members and to improve and perfect their moral, cultural and even intellectual character and tastes, through that most favoured of eighteenth-century pastimes, polite sociability. The most distinctive feature of this association was its inclusion of women.

The life-writings of leisured female spa visitors explored in Chapters 4 and 5 highlight how fully integrated women were within the public social life of the resort, evidencing the fact that they made full use of the facilities on offer. Isabella Wrightson, Elizabeth Giffard and Elizabeth Montagu all frequented the Ladies'

¹⁶ Use of the term 'Company' is extremely general. The following offer examples from a range of manuscript and printed sourced to illustrate this: WRO L6/1430 George Lucy, Bath, to Mrs Philippa Hayes (26 November 1753); Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, p. 134; Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 294.

¹⁷ *A New Bath Guide* (1762) pp. 24-25; Jasper Sprange, *A Description of Tunbridge Wells, in its Present State; And The Amusements of the Company, in The Time of the Season; And of the Ancient And Present State of The Most Remarkable Places, in The Environs: Comprehending a Circuit of About Sixteen Miles Round the Place* (Tunbridge Wells, 1780), pp. 20-23.

Coffee-House on their visits to Bath;¹⁸ Elizabeth Collett, Margaret Graves, Mary Isham, Lady Luxborough, Elizabeth Montagu, Bridget Ottley, Hester Thrale Piozzi and Katherine Plymley utilised the circulating libraries of the resorts;¹⁹ Jane Austen, Lady Polwarth, Sarah Knollis, Elizabeth Montagu, Caroline Powys, Betsy Sheridan and the ‘Lady Henley’s’ observed by Charles Pratt,²⁰ all attended balls at the assembly rooms and Fanny Burney, Elizabeth Giffard and Miss M. Pelham attended plays at the resorts, passing critical judgements on performances in their letters and journals. Even gambling, a past time believed to raise reckless passions in women, was publically indulged in by leisured female visitors, such as Mrs Martha Hutchins at Tunbridge Wells, and Lady Bristol at Bath.²¹ Peter Clark’s work on clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Britain states that women filtered into ‘every nook and cranny’ of social and cultural life, yet simultaneously concedes that very few societies were female inclusive.²² The spa however, was different and women were fully integrated into its associational life. They had access to the assembly rooms, pleasure gardens and a full array of public leisure facilities. Women were able to subscribe to a range of institutions in their own right, and could enter them not only as hostesses or side-lined companions, but as fully fledged members.

The hetero-sociability of public life at Bath and Tunbridge Wells is visible in both female and male authored manuscripts which highlight numerous instances of mixed company. For example, from male authored life-writings we find that Dennis Lyddell bathed with his sons and daughter at the Cross Bath in 1706;²³ George Lucy

¹⁸ Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (27 December 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i, p. 72; FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard ‘A Bath Journal’ (11 December 1766); DA DD/BW/A6-A7 Account Book of Isabella Wrightson.

¹⁹ BCL Elizabeth Collett, *Diary of a Visit to Bath* (1792); DRO 1038M/F1/151 Margaret Graves, to Eliza Simcoe (31 March 1799); NRO IC2019 Mary Isham, Bath, to Sir Justinian, London (29 January 1733); Lady Luxborough, Orange Grove, Bath, to William Shenstone in Williams, *Letters Written by the Late Right Honourable Lady Luxborough*, p. 296; Elizabeth Montagu to Lord Lyttleton in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, ix, p. 275; NLW Ottley Pichford Hall Correspondence (3) 3650: Adam Ottley, Pichford Hall, to Bridget Ottley, Mr Bevan’s, the Grand Parade, Bath (9 February 1741/2); SRO 567/5/5/1/27 Katherine Plymley ‘Journey to Bath 1807’ (22 January 1807); Clifford, *Hester Lynch Piozzi*, p. 398.

²⁰ CRO U840 C2/1 Charles Pratt, Bath, to his daughters (6 October 1765).

²¹ BL 70348 Elizabeth Harley, Account Book, Tunbridge Wells (1687); Lady Bristol, Bath, to the Earl of Bristol (30 August 1721) *Letter-Books of John Hervey*, ii, p. 176; Lady Bristol, Bath, to the Earl of Bristol (13 September 1721) *Letter-Books of John Hervey*, ii, p. 194; Lady Bristol, Bath, to the Earl of Bristol (12 August 1721) *Letter-Books of John Hervey*, ii, p. 152.

²² Clark, *British Clubs and Societies: c.1580-1800*.

²³ BL 74642 Autograph Journal of Dennis Lyddell (April 1706).

accompanied two of his female acquaintances to a ‘musical academy’ (perhaps meaning a concert) and Alfred Daniels went to a waxwork exhibition in Bath with his mother in 1824.²⁴ From female-authored letters and journals we find that Elizabeth Montagu went riding with Dr Young at Tunbridge Wells;²⁵ Betsy Sheridan walked the environs of Tunbridge Wells in a mixed gender party and the young Elizabeth Montagu and Eliza Burges enjoyed dancing with handsome men in the assembly rooms, recording their partners in letters and journals.²⁶

Within the public and domestic spaces of the resorts several forms of relationship could be initiated, fostered and continued, including those of a romantic, familial or platonic nature. In so far as the spa provided women with an opportunity to meet with a greater choice of possible suitors and presented a host of public events in which conversational and even physical intimacy could be pursued through dancing, the resorts did function as a potential marriage market as Borsay, Corfield, Porter and Stone suggest.²⁷ However, the image of merchants’ daughters meeting the land rich but cash poor sons of the aristocracy in spa ball rooms and forming alliances, in which one would gain status and the other wealth, is somewhat exaggerated as Chapter 2 of this thesis argues. There were discouraging factors which made visitors think carefully about falling into marriage alliances with those they met at the spa, such as the emphasis placed on display and therefore the possibility of being deceived in issues relating to a suitor’s character, status or wealth. Even at the spa, visitors tended to socialise predominantly with those of a similar status and background, and therefore, the presence of a greater choice, does not mean this choice was fully accessible or commonly utilised. The fact that George Lucy, John Glynn Wynn and Caroline Walkey did not follow through on spa matches which they originally thought of with great hope, gives support to this argument.

²⁴ WRO L6/1472 George Lucy, Bath, to Mrs Philippa Hayes (11 March 1764); BCL 29056 Alfred Daniels (1824).

²⁵ Elizabeth Montagu, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duchess of Portland (1745) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, iii, p.17.

²⁶ Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (January 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i, p. 94; (February 1774) Eliza Burges Bath in Elwin 9ed.), *The Noels and the Milbanks*, p. 38

²⁷ Corfield, ‘Georgian Bath’; Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 28; Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance*, p. 246; Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 316-317.

Instead, the spa provided a range of romantic, courtship and even sexual opportunities to elite and middling women, in which the meeting of a possible marriage partner was only one outcome. Mrs Cassandra Austen, Elizabeth Linley, Catherine Macaulay, Elizabeth Neale and Barbara Ann Spooner all found husbands at Bath, as did the less well known Anne Barry, Eliza Burges, Margaret Graves, Christina Gurney and Helena Beecher Hayes. However, few of these alliances follow the neat recipe of a 'typical' spa match. Barry was an actress, Linley was a resident of Bath who earned an income through public performances, Catherine Macaulay a widow with a reputation damaged by staying in the home of a single male friend and Graves an aging spinster when she met her future husband. Due to the problematic nature of attempting to trace where marriage partners met, rather than where they eventually married or lived, it has proved more difficult to trace examples of couples whose courtships started at Tunbridge Wells, however, these Bath examples suggest that in fact the marriage market was more complex than is often depicted.

Despite mockery in contemporary satires, the spa marriage market appears to have been available to widows and spinsters and even working women, who technically lie outside the remit set for this study; it was not only wealthy merchants' daughters who might prosper by it. However, the single woman had much to gain by living a life of celibacy at the resort, in particular, if she was a wealthy widow like Margaret Graves of Lansdowne Crescent. The provision of shops selling all sorts of goods at a range of prices, the welcome women received in the public institutions of the resorts and the prominence of domestic sociability meant that single women such as Mrs Austen and her two daughters, the Mitford sisters of Somerset Place, Bridget Otley, Magdalen Price, Katherine Plymley and Margaret Graves, amongst many others, had much to benefit from. The commentary on the high visibility of widows and spinsters at Bath should therefore not be read as direct evidence of the marriage market and women seeking husbands, but perhaps of the comfort the spa provided for those who were single.

In addition to providing opportunities to meet with possible spouses in ball rooms and pleasure gardens, the spa also presented young women with an ideal environment in which to learn the art of courtship. Pupils of spa girls' schools were partially integrated into public life at the resorts and through visiting family friends, walking about the streets of the resorts and occasionally attending balls, could learn

the ropes of courtship by watching how it was conducted as they sat on the back benches at the balls, observing how women curtsyed and conversed with the gentlemen around them. Day and boarding schools presented further opportunities for girls to learn lessons in the art of courtship. As spa residents, they were partially integrated into public life at the resorts and therefore had further chances to watch how adult women conducted flirtations and courtships. Additionally, such schools provided an ideal training for both attracting a husband and being a wife.

Flirtation is perhaps one of the most neglected areas of female romantic life at the spas. This may be because of modern feminist scholarship, which might find it hard to place flirtation, amongst the empowering activities or options available to women in any time period. However, as Adam Phillips highlights, flirtation has an important role in courtship, by enabling the ‘flirt’ to entertain the possibility of a romantic relationship, whilst not committing themselves fully in any way. Both Bath and Tunbridge Wells provided many opportunities for flirtation, the public spaces were arenas designed specifically for parading, observing and engaging with potential partners. The dominance of light witty repartee, polite conversation and the trend for idolatry water-poetry, which was often written by men in admiration of a particular fair one or the female sex, are all evidence that flirtation was deeply embedded into the culture of the resorts. The dominance of coquettes in spa fiction, such as the female swingers of Tunbridge Wells,²⁸ further suggests that female flirtation at the resorts was a source of concern, perhaps because it illustrated women showing initiative and choice and not just the acceptance or denial of interest expressed by male admirers.

Women who were already married and those who went with their children could spend time with their families in the public arenas of the spas, as discussed in Chapter 6. The assembly rooms, pleasure gardens and public walks were welcoming to children as highlighted by the depiction of young boys and girls in many illustrations of the spas, the sale of children’s clothes in many millinery shops and reference to children in the rules of the resorts. Therefore women did not have to choose between spending time within their children at home, or enjoying the public amenities on offer; they could enjoy both activities at the same time. The letters and

²⁸ Richard Steele, *The Spectator* (24 September 1712) in Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, iv, pp. 244-247; (29 September 1712), pp. 260-261.

diaries of Alfred Daniels, Charles Pratt and Lewis Weston Dilwyn evidence that men spent time with their family at the eighteenth-century spa, supporting the arguments of Stone and Moller Okin, that there was a rise in the sentimental family during this period.²⁹ However, in contrast to their arguments, these manuscripts evidence that men and women did not confine themselves within the home, but spent time as a family in public, and therefore support the suggestions of Jonathan Barry and Peter Borsay, that the sentimental nuclear family was not confined to the home.³⁰

In addition to having full access to public arenas such as assembly rooms, pleasure gardens, theatres and concert rooms at the resorts, leisured women were able to move about these spaces and the environs of the spas, with far more physical freedom than previously recognised. Walking, riding and dancing formed daily pursuits for leisured women at the resorts. Dance is coming to be acknowledged as an area of history in which women have long issued power and patronage;³¹ however the importance of nonprofessional dancing is less frequently discussed. Chapter 3 illustrates it was a form of exercise and sociability which many women enjoyed, and one which allowed them an uncommon level of physical intimacy with male partners. The girls of Belvedere school, Jane Austen and Betsy Sheridan were all keen walkers;³² their letters and journals illustrating that urban strolls and rural walks took up much of their time at the resorts whilst Elizabeth Collett, Betsy Hervey, the Duchess of Richmond and Elizabeth Montagu were all keen horse women, enjoying regular riding sessions whilst at Bath and Tunbridge Wells.³³ A world of more novel exercise and sporting opportunities was also made available to the leisured woman at the eighteenth-century spa. She might ice skate or play at battledore and shuttlecock

²⁹ Okin, 'Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family', p. 74; Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*.

³⁰ Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society', p. 58; Dain, 'Assemblies and Politeness'; Rosenheim, *The Emergence of a Ruling Order*, p. 222;

³¹ Brooks, *Women's Work: Making Dance*, p. 4.

³² Sibbald, *Memoirs*, pp. 38-39; Jane Austen, the Paragon, Bath, to Cassandra Austen (21-22 May 1801) in LeFaye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, p. 91; Jane Austen, Gay St Bath, to Cassandra Austen (21-23 April 1805) in LeFaye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, p. 108; Betsy Sheridan, Tunbridge Wells, to Alicia LeFanu (1-6 October 1785) in LeFanu (ed.), *Betsy Sheridan's Journal*, p. 74

³³ Lady Bristol, Bath, to John Hervey (12 August 1721) in *Letter-Books of John Hervey*, ii, p. 152; Elizabeth Montagu, Tunbridge Wells, to Mrs Donnellan (8 September 1745) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, iii, p. 85; Elizabeth Montagu, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duchess of Portland in *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, iii, p. 17; WSRO, GWD MS 102 Duchess of Richmond, Tunbridge Wells, to the Duke of Richmond (c. 1719-1740).

as did Elizabeth Giffard at Bath between 1766 and 1767;³⁴ she could engage in races such as the race for a Cheshire cheese in which ‘ladies’ could compete at Tunbridge Wells in 1797,³⁵ or she might play upon the swings especially adapted for women, such as those in Sydney Gardens at Bath.

These sporting and exercise opportunities reveal that long before late Victorian women were travelling about the town and country astride their bicycles and playing at croquet and lawn tennis, elite and middling women found sporting and exercise opportunities available to them at the eighteenth-century spa. This argument sits in direct contrast to those of Kathleen McCrone, David Rubenstein, William Schuerle and Patricia Vertinski, who argue that the nineteenth century was the major turning moment in the history of women’s sport.³⁶ Of course, such opportunities are unlikely to have been limited to the resort. However, the spa provided a particular emphasis on such pursuits, as part of a healthy life-style. Currently women’s sporting and exercise opportunities of the eighteenth century are under-researched, but the evidence brought to light in this thesis highlights it as a significant area for further research.

The arguments of Elaine Ableson and Erika Rappaport, that it was not until the nineteenth century that shopping started to emerge as a distinct leisure pursuit available to women, also place too great an emphasis on the change between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁷ They neglect to pay due attention to the work of Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, J. H. Plumb, Amanda Vickery and Lorna Weatherill, who all evidence various ways in which women partook in the consumption of a variety of consumer goods during the eighteenth century, and the pleasure which women took in shopping in the period. The suggestion that it was not until the department store opened its doors to them that polite women could shop in safety, fails to acknowledge that there were many polite and respectable streets in both London and the provinces long before this, where women could also shop for pleasure. Among the milliners, jewellers and stay-makers of the resorts, leisured women shopped for fabrics, accessories and cosmetics; creatively selecting pieces

³⁴ FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard ‘A Bath Journal’ (1766-1767).

³⁵ TWM Poster for ‘Diversions on Tunbridge Wells Common’ (1797).

³⁶ McCrone, ‘Play up! Play Up! And Play the Game!’; Rubenstein, ‘Cycling in the 1890s’; Scheuerle, *Croquet and its Influence*; Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman*, p. 39.

³⁷ Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, p. 15; Ableson, *When Ladies go a Thieving*, p. 6.

which they put together based on their individual income, personal millinery skills and observation of fashionable models which they wished to imitate or avoid copying.

This study illuminates the unique social experiences offered to elite and middling women at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, whilst also highlighting the watering-place as an area of urban history requiring further investigation; one which can contribute significant findings to a vast array of topics including women's history, men's history, gender history, leisure history and the social history of medicine, to name but a few. In the manuscript collections of record offices, archives and libraries across Britain are many more life-writings detailing the watering place visits of the long eighteenth century, a rich and until now, relatively untapped source. Contemporary printed literature highlights that other resorts also offered women significant leisure opportunities. It was commented of Buxton that women were busily employed 'spreading out their nets' for capturing men.³⁸ Epsom offered 'two Bowling-Greens, with Raffling shops and Musick for the Ladies' Diversion' as well as fostering a visiting culture similar to Bath, women being permitted visitors at their lodgings, unlike at Tunbridge Wells.³⁹ At Harrogate, a unique beverage exchange culture existed in the Assembly Rooms, where gentlemen presented 'ladies with wine' which the women returned 'in tea' and George Saville Carey noted of Margate that there was no watering place 'where the ladies have been so considered, or so accommodated.'⁴⁰ Sea-bathing started to compete with spas during the later eighteenth century, following the publication of *A Dissertation on the Use of Sea Water* in 1760.⁴¹ Seaside resorts offered similar opportunities for external and internal consumption of the waters, as well as an array of leisure opportunities; a comparison of women's social and leisure opportunities at the two forms of watering-place forms another potential area for further research.

³⁸ *A Companion to the Watering and Bathing Places of England* (London, 1800), p. 37

³⁹ Macky, *A Journey Through England*, i, p. 111.

⁴⁰ George Saville Carey, *The Balena: or, an Impartial Description of all the Popular Watering Places in England* (London, 1799), p. 5.

⁴¹ Dr Richard Russell, *A Dissertation on the Use of Sea Water in the Diseases of the Glands* (London, 1760).

iii. The Intellectual Public Sphere

Whilst this study argues that dancing, gambling and consumption of fashionable dress should all be recognised as significant activities which broadened women's sphere of activity, it does not neglect or dismiss the more widely recognised Habermasian public sphere of the coffee-house, or Peter Clark's public sphere of associational life. In addition to their physical welcome in the public arenas of the resorts and their social and physical freedom within these spaces, elite and middling women also found access to an intellectual, discursive and literary public sphere in coffee establishments and circulating libraries of Bath and Tunbridge Wells; as well as in their written and oral communications.

Though argued by Edward Bramah, Jürgen Habermas and Moyra Haslett to have been a predominantly male establishment,⁴² female engagement in coffee-house life has more recently been demonstrated in the works of Brian Cowan and Emma Clery.⁴³ This thesis contributes to the burgeoning history of women and public coffee consumption, by highlighting female patronage of the Ladies' Coffee-House at Bath, and female access to coffee-rooms at both resorts.⁴⁴ Whilst the coffee-room has largely been neglected in mainstream histories of the coffee-house, it appears to have offered a similar social experience and the same opportunities for public engagement.⁴⁵ The minutes for the coffee room of Bath's Upper assembly rooms illustrate that coffee-rooms also provided newspapers for their clientele, as well as a

⁴² Bramah, *Tea and Coffee*, p. 46; Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 33; Haslett, *Pope to Burney 1714-1779*, pp. 139-144.

⁴³ Clery, 'Women, Publicity and the Coffee-House Myth', p. 177; Pincus, 'Coffee Politicians Does Create', p. 815; Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee*, p. 228.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (27 December 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i. p. 72; Wood, *A Description of Bath 1765*, p. 438; *TBJ* (6 October 1755); Goldsmith, *The Life of Richard Nash*, pp. 41-42, 44; *TBJ* (5 May 1755); *TBJ* (6 Oct 1755); *TBC* (14 March 1765); *TBC* (9 April 1772); *TBJ* (24 August 1772); *TBC* (19 November 1772); *TBC* (7 October 1773); *TBC* (14 October 1773); *TBJ* (6 October 1755); Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (January 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i, p. 92; DA DD/BW/A6-A7 Isabella Wrightson, 'Household Account Books'; FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard 'A Bath Journal' (11 December 1766).

⁴⁵ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

public space in which to consume hot beverages and engage in discussion.⁴⁶ This highlights the necessity for further research into the coffee-room as a parallel institution to the coffee-house; a field of research which may alter the perception of female exclusion from a coffee-drinking public sphere.

It is possible that female access to coffee drinking institutions was more acceptable at the resort, where traditional social rules were partially suspended due to the temporary nature of spa-visitation, and by the necessity of sociability for good health. It is significant that on a visit to Turkey in 1717, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu visited a bath house, a 'Bagnio', in Adrianople, in which she identified a form of sociability much like that of the coffee-house, thus making the link between the water-cure and the coffee-house even more evident. She noted that within the house there were:

Women naked in different postures, some in conversation, some working, others drinking Coffee or sherbet, and many negligently lying on their Cushions while their slaves (generally pretty girls of 16 or 18) were employ'd in braiding their hair... in short tis the Women's coffee house, where all the news of the town is told, Scandal invented etc....⁴⁷

Whilst direct access to the coffee-house and coffee-rooms as a welcome clientele, may have been more likely at the resort, it is an area which requires further research. It is possible that there were other coffee-houses where women were included, as hinted by the fact a lecture was held to discuss a 'Scheme for a Lady's Coffee house, with Laws of Talking' in Lincolns Inns Fields in November 1732.⁴⁸

Clery and Haslett remind us that the Habermasian public sphere could also be highly effeminate and dominated by genteel behaviour and society gossip.⁴⁹ This message is emphasised by Daniel Defoe who confessed in his travel writing:

It is really among them [men] that the ladies characters first, and oftenest receive unjust wounds: and I must confess the malice, the reflections, the

⁴⁶ BCL B914.238: Proceedings of the Committee for Managing the New Assembly Rooms in Bath'.

⁴⁷ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Adrianople (1 April 1717) in *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Selected Letters* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 49.

⁴⁸ *The Daily Journal* (14 November 1732).

⁴⁹ Haslett, *Pope to Burney 1714-1779*, p. 159.

busy meddling, the censuring, the tattling from place to place.... Is found among the men gossips more than among their own sex, and at the coffee-houses more than the tea-table.⁵⁰

It is therefore important to remember that hetero-social, exclusively male and exclusively female groups were all as capable of ‘gossip’, it was not only restricted to female sociability. However, it is a central argument of this thesis that society gossip should, by no means, be dismissed by the historian and that female discussion of romance, fashion and novels provides little proof of women’s relegation to an idle domestic sphere. The coffee-room, circulating library and other public meeting spaces of the spa provided women with continual opportunity for sociability. By sharing their thoughts and opinions within these spaces, leisured women had just as much opportunity of regulating the powers which governed their lives, as Habermas suggests men found in the coffee-house.

Circulating libraries and bookseller’s shops presented their male and female patrons with access to a wide array of novels, plays, poetry, pamphlets and newspapers, as well as a public meeting space with a ‘club-like’ atmosphere and sociability. A large body of material illustrates that the libraries were busy, mixed-gender, discursive spaces; this is illustrated by Lydia Melford’s description of Bath’s circulating libraries as hetero-social meetings spaces in which societal news was shared and Fanny Burney’s depiction of the bookseller’s shop in *Camilla*, as a space in which male and female company met to peruse pamphlets, subscription books and gossip. These establishments offered informative works for the accomplished or learned reader, such as Hester Thrale Piozzi who frequented Bull’s on the Terrace Walk at Bath, as well as the lady who preferred novels and biographies, and edited volumes of other women’s letters, such as Betsy Sheridan during her visits to both spas. In providing choice, the circulating library and bookshop provoked contemporary concern that the genteel lady’s education and knowledge could progress unchecked; and it is this concern that we see reflected and satirised in the poem, *The POETICAL PETITION of the BOOKS of a Circulating Library in Bath* and in Richard Sheridan’s *The Rivals*.

⁵⁰ Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, i, p. 126.

Whilst Bath and Tunbridge Wells encouraged hetero-sociability, it was also possible for women to create female communities around themselves at the eighteenth-century spa. Moyra Haslett questions the extent of official and purely female communities, but this thesis shows that if they wished to, genteel women could live predominantly amongst other women at the resorts. There were purely female households, such those of the Mitford sisters, Sarah Scott and Lady Barbara Montagu, and Hester Piozzi when she resided with her daughters at Bath. There were also girls' schools, such as the Belvedere run by the Lee sisters at Bath and others run by Mrs Halliey, Miss Sydall and Mrs Way listed in the Tunbridge Wells Guide for 1817. Women might also attend social occasions in the public arenas, but retain their female communities around themselves.

As argued earlier in this chapter and throughout this thesis, to belong to the company was like belonging to a club; a significant fact which is frequently overlooked is that the minutes of this spa 'club' were kept by the pens of a multitude of elite and middling women in their letters and diaries. As they detailed the state of their health, the public events they had attended, prevalent fashions, who had danced with whom, how crowded or empty the walks and ball rooms were, how tasteful or poor public entertainments were and how many visits they had made that day, the leisured female spa visitor contributed to a republic of letters, though one of a very different nature to that of Revolutionary France. Through writing letters on uses of health treatments, domestic life, fashion and public leisure, women too engaged in a public sphere of information. These were the issues central to their lives, and by sending news on these matters, to their friends and relations throughout the country or further afield, they created public networks of information that were of direct relevance and importance to themselves.

Though written within the privacy of the home, the journal was far from a private product. In opposition to the arguments of Philippe Aries and Roger Chartier explored in Chapter 5, this thesis argues that journals offered their authors an opportunity for self-expression and the chance to represent their thoughts, memories and emotions in a form which could be read and consumed by a public audience, however small it might have been. The abundance of female life-writings explored throughout this thesis illustrates that writing letters and journals formed an important activity for leisured women during their time at the resorts. It must also be

remembered that the writings looked at only represent a fraction of those that were written; post travelled six days a week to and from Bath and Tunbridge Wells, meaning that the resorts will have produced a substantial literary public sphere, of which women were equally, if not the predominant, producers.

Whilst Harriett Blodgett argues that women's early modern life-writings show little personal expression, this thesis illustrates otherwise.⁵¹ The satirical wit of Jane Austen, Frances Cradock, Elizabeth Montagu, Melesina Trench and Lady Polwarth; the affectionate sentimentality of Lady Bristol, Mary Isham and the Duchess of Richmond and the detailed accounts of architectural and rural surroundings found in the writings of Elizabeth Giffard, Katherine Plymley, Mary Orlebar and Mary Ward all evidence that women's narrative voices varied greatly. These documents provide a valuable tool for the historian in several senses. Of course, no source provides an 'authentic' history in any direct sense. However, when used collectively, the descriptions of spa customs contained within these female letters and journals provide a detailed and reliable picture of female social life at the eighteenth-century resort. They also evidence female engagement in a literary public sphere. The fact that this literary genre was in manuscript rather than print format did not alter the public nature of female life writing, which was usually written for an audience. However select this audience might have been, restricted to a single friend or relation, or accessible to a wider audience of neighbours, friends and kin, the spa letter and journal was designed so that the leisured woman's experience of the resort was recorded and its details made public.

Contemporary fiction highlighted the high visibility of women in public life at the spa and the multiple opportunities for courtship, flirtation, sexual misdemeanour and leisure, which the resorts provided. Novels, plays, poetry and prints commented with humour and concern that women might thrive in this environment, successfully securing fortune, health and pleasure, whilst simultaneously suggesting that they could become consumed by it, and end the victim of fortune hunters, rakes, madams or gossip. Significantly, fictional works also illustrate the importance of female life-writing at the resorts. In Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*, Tabitha Bramble and Lydia Melford communicate with their friends during their time in Bath via letter, as

⁵¹ Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days*, p. 4.

does Jenny Warder in Anstey's *A New Bath Guide*. In *Northanger Abbey* Mr Tilney teases the heroine stating; 'I shall make but a poor figure in your journal to-morrow', commenting on the predictability of women recoding their spa visits and entertainments in a personal record.⁵² Letters and journals formed an important mode of spa communication, offering the private individual voice a public outlet. This was partly the result of the prominence of spa visitation and its temporary nature, therefore resulting in many spa-frequenters being separated from their closest friends and relations. The letter was the quickest form of immediate communication. In turn, the prominence of letter writing became an ingrained part of spa culture and part of the spa-routine involved reflecting on it in letter or journal form.

Fictional depictions of spa-visiting women have long been read as proof that women were only active in a sphere of frivolous concerns. However, Henry Bunbury's buxom women energetically partaking in a Bath minuet [Fig 2]; James Gillray's fashionably adorned belle being carried to the spa's assembly rooms by amused and disgruntled chairmen [Fig 3]; and Richard Steele's female swingers of Tunbridge Wells, cattily commenting on one another's impropriety as they 'kicked up their heels' and revealed their garters to their male companions,⁵³ offer no firm proof that there was a growth of idle women in the eighteenth century.

Contemporary print culture commented, with both humour and concern, on the social, physical and leisure opportunities presented to elite and middling women at eighteenth-century Bath and Tunbridge Wells. Through re-investigating spa-visiting women through their life-writings, this thesis presents a more multifaceted picture. Many elite and middling women went to Bath and Tunbridge Wells because of poor health, where their experiences were shaped and coloured by physical and emotional discomfort. However, they were simultaneously presented with access to two publicly significant spheres; one of leisured sociability and another of a literary, discursive and associational nature. Every woman's experience of the eighteenth-century spa varied, yet when viewed together, the personal life-writings of visitors and residents evidence that the eighteenth-century resort presented leisured women

⁵² Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, p. 26.

⁵³ Richard Steele, 'The Spectator' (24 September 1712), in Daniel Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, iv, pp. 244-247; Richard Steele, 'The Spectator' (29 September 1712) in Daniel Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, iv, pp. 260-261.

with rich opportunities for social, physical and intellectual activity and agency within their public and domestic lives.

.....

Bath and Tunbridge Wells were spas with distinctly different identities, both of which altered considerably over the one hundred and fifty years covered in this study. Bath was a large city, with a population of approximately 1000 in 1660 and just short of 35,000 by 1801. Tunbridge Wells, on the other hand, was a small, disjointed, rural spa, with a population of only 400 to 500 in 1700, rising to around 5000 by 1801. These figures demonstrate the substantial difference in residential population between the two case-study resorts.⁵⁴ It was not only the population size of the spas which differed, but also their natural geography and their physical expansion. Bath offered plentiful, well-built accommodation, much of which was in close proximity to shops and public amenities, whilst at Tunbridge Wells, the Pantiles provided only a handful of hotels and lodging houses. Instead of residing on the Pantiles themselves, visitors often had to lodge at one of the spa's 'satellite' vicinities: Mount Ephraim, Mount Sion, Mount Pleasant and from the 1830s, the Calverley Estate.

In the later eighteenth century, Bath expanded northwards, firstly, with the creation of the Circus and the Crescent and later, with the development of Lansdowne Road. As the city sprawled over new ground, accommodation and public facilities, such as the Upper Assembly Rooms, developed in tandem, meaning that both upper and lower Bath were well-catered for. Good roads, the provision of sedan chairs and the arrangement of public balls on alternate nights, at the Upper and Lower Rooms, helped to maintain strong connections between the old and new parts of the city. Similarly, Tunbridge Wells expanded in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Phyllis Hembry's research indicates that by 1780, there were at least 73 lodging houses and stabling for 504 horses.⁵⁵ In the 1830s, there was also the development of the Calverley Estate, with new houses and a pleasure garden.

⁵⁴ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1992), pp. 20-21; Alan Armstrong, *The Economy of Kent 1640-1914* (Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 1995), p. 280.

⁵⁵Hembry, *The English Spa*, p. 237.

However, the roads about the spa were notoriously dusty and uncomfortable to walk and ride, resulting in a less communal atmosphere than that at Bath. Additionally, the development of housing at each of its environs diminished the central focus of the Well and the Walks, thus drawing attention away from the features which rendered it a spa. This was not such an issue at Bath, where the city's very name, in addition to the existence of multiple baths and a Pump Room, prevented the spa suffering damage to its watering place identity.

A further contrast between the resorts was that from the mid eighteenth century, Bath became increasingly well-lit and well-policed, creating an atmosphere of polite safety, a fact which leisured women observed with relief.⁵⁶ This is not to say that the resort and its environs were free from the threat of violence; as Barbara White's research indicates, the attacks of highwaymen happened frequently around and even within the city's walls.⁵⁷ However, Bath maintained a reputation for politeness and safety. In contrast, the rural isolation of Tunbridge Wells made it feel more exposed to crime and disturbance. The smallness of the spa also meant that when crimes occurred, they were known to a significant proportion of those at the spa. The disappearance of lamps from the walks; the creation of a cage for the imprisonment of 'drunken fellows'; a break-in at Miss Sprange's Rooms, followed by the destruction of a sedan chair on the common and the attacks of local highwaymen, were evidence of unrest that unsettled the tranquillity of the spa and its residents.⁵⁸

The behaviour of the visiting company developed in different ways at the two case-study spas, particularly towards the end of the eighteenth century. From the 1790s, Bath's leisure scene shifted towards a pattern of domestic sociability, offering women the opportunity to play a key role in the social life of the spa, as hostesses of

⁵⁶ *The New Bath Guide* (1792), p.45; SRO 567/5/5/1/5 Katherine Plymley 'Journey to Bath 1794 2nd' (27 October 1794); Fanny Burney, Bath, to Princess Elizabeth (6-7 January 1817) in Hughes (ed.), *The Letters and Journals of Fanny Burney*, ix, p. 303.

⁵⁷ Barbara White, 'Stand and Deliver: Bath and the Eighteenth-Century Highwayman', *Bath History*, xiii (2013).

⁵⁸ CKS P371/8/3 Minute Book of the Committee of King Charles the Martyr, Minutes detailing the commission of a cage for 'drunken fellows'; TWM, Poster offering a 'Five Guinea Reward' for the discovery of the 'Person or Persons' who broke into the Card-Room belonging to Miss Sprange, and 'with evident and Malicious Intent', destroyed a sedan chair, leaving the remaining pieces on the Common, (March 1797); *Daily Advertiser* (28 September 1774), detailing an incident in which Lady Harcourt was accosted by a Highwayman, on her way to a ball at Tunbridge Wells.

dinner, card and music parties.⁵⁹ As a resort with plentiful, well-built accommodation, Bath was equipped to accommodate this shift. Its public arenas continued to be frequented, but more visitors started to host domestic entertainments at their spa lodgings. Those who had grown up in the heyday of the Georgian spa, commented with disapproval on this change. On visiting a dress ball at the Upper Rooms in 1805, Caroline Powys noted that the scene was:

Immensely crowded at Tea but the number of Card parties, quite spoil the Balls as [it is] fashionable to attend 5 or 6 before you go to the Rooms, it was endeavored to alter The hours, but fortunately for ye old people and those who drink ye waters it was not permitted, and at eleven if in the middle of a Dance, ye music stops, but as I suppose tis reckon'd vulgar to come early we see nothing of Dancing or Company for ye round: in short The Rooms are not kept so agreeable as they were some years ago, when ye late London hours were not thought of.⁶⁰

However, Powys also readily embraced the domestic social scene, as illustrated in Chapter 5, partaking in visiting rituals and attending private dinners and card games. Bath's private sociability placed a new emphasis on the importance of women's roles as domestic hostesses, expanding rather than diminishing the opportunities presented to leisured female visitors to the spa.

Bath's pattern of domestic sociability was not replicated at Tunbridge Wells. Partly this was due to the dispersed accommodation, which made it more difficult for women to move independently between one another's residences than at Bath. The quality of housing, which some felt was poor and uncomfortable (therefore less than ideal for entertaining), may have also played a role.⁶¹ Edward Budgen, a resident of Frant during the 1760s, noted that visitors to Tunbridge Wells appeared to be spending more time exploring the surrounding countryside in small, private groups, rather than gathering for public activities on the Pantiles. This suggests that the

⁵⁹ Adair, *Fashionable Diseases*, pp. 30-31; BL 42, 162 Caroline Powys Journal (28 January 1805).

⁶⁰ BL 42, 162 Powys Journal (28 January 1805).

⁶¹ CKS U908C94/3 Lady Wilton, Heath House, to Miss Starie (10 December 1813); Hembry, *The English Spa*, p. 238.

desire for more exclusive forms of entertainment was present, whilst the necessary requirements for domestic entertainment were not.⁶²

As a result of these differences, it is unsurprising that women, in particular single women, were more likely to choose Bath than Tunbridge Wells as a home or holiday destination, especially in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Bath offered comfort, freedom of movement and an exciting public and domestic social scene. Women could therefore easily access leisure, friends and medical aid at the spa. Tunbridge Wells, in contrast, was isolated, had fewer choices of shops and amenities and it was more difficult to move about due to its physical geography. A single woman, or even a party of women, might easily have felt lonely at Tunbridge Wells, as a consequence of this physical isolation and the lack of a lively, domestic social scene.

Despite its slow development, Tunbridge Wells continued to be a popular summer resort into the 1830s.⁶³ This thesis demonstrates that it sustained a visiting culture well after 1720; the point at which, it has been argued, Bath became the more fashionable resort.⁶⁴ This can be seen in the visits of Lady Jane Coke, Marianne Dyson, Dorothy Filmer, Lady Polwarth and Betsy Sheridan. The natural beauties of the resort and its environs, appealed to the early nineteenth-century taste for the picturesque, therefore securing continuing popularity. Peter Borsay identifies interest in picturesque views, such as those of ‘rocks, cliffs, caverns, trees and of course the sea’, as a major factor contributing to the popularity of seaside visiting in the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Whilst it had no coast line, the natural beauties of Tunbridge Wells and its environs, for example, sights such as Harrisons Rocks, appealed to early nineteenth-century aesthetic ideals.

However, the medicinal quality of the waters of Tunbridge Wells became questioned and therefore, the spa’s identity changed. It is especially significant to this study that by the 1830s, belief that the waters of Tunbridge Wells could aid women seeking fertility were openly questioned and denied in print. Britton went so far as to state

⁶² NLW DTM Jones (3) Edward Budgen, Frant (16-27 July 1769).

⁶³ Granville, *The Spas of England*, ii, pp. 618-634.

⁶⁴ Girouard, *The English Town*, p. 9. 77-78.

⁶⁵ Peter Borsay, ‘“A Room with a View”: Visualising the Seaside c. 1750-1914’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 23 (2013), p. 186.

that the waters of the resort could cause ‘additional mischief.’⁶⁶ Tunbridge Wells increasingly became sought as a place of permanent residence, rather than as a resort for invalids. This was particularly evident at Mount Ephraim, once the most popular location for visitors, which became ‘occupied by private houses for permanent residents’ by the 1830s.⁶⁷ Whilst the spa continued to be frequented, it was no longer a rival to Bath. Instead, Cheltenham took its place as Bath’s fashionable competitor.⁶⁸

Some of Bath’s splendour had also worn off by the close of the eighteenth century, but it did not rapidly go out of fashion in the late eighteenth century. Similarly to Tunbridge Wells, Bath increasingly became a place of permanent residency towards the close of the eighteenth century, for women such as Henrietta Bowdler, Margaret Graves, the Lee and the Mitford sisters and Hester Piozzi. As at Tunbridge Wells, Bath continued to have a visiting population for much longer than is traditionally recognised. Long after the ‘golden age’ of Nash, polite female visitors, including Elizabeth Collett, Sarah Knollis, Lady Polwarth, Caroline Powys and Queen Charlotte, made visits to Bath, illustrating that it continued to attract Royal, aristocratic, genteel and middling clientele.

Though the world of women explored in this thesis varies in shades (from the aristocracy to the middling sorts), the opportunities women discovered at the resorts were very similar, regardless of whether a visitor was a Duchess or the daughter of an apothecary. Elite and middling women visited both spas in pursuit of health, including aristocrats such as Lady Jane Coke and the Duchess of Richmond, women of the mercantile middling sorts, such as Isabella and Annabella Carr and those of clergy families, including Bridget Ottley and when at the spa, these women found access to the same health treatments and public world of leisure. However, the emphasis placed on sociability did not result in distinctions of rank vanishing. Women discussed the presence and behaviour of those of differing status with a mixture of interest, humour and boredom. Isabella Carr for instance, attempted to reassure her husband by informing him that she resided in the same neighbourhood as numerous aristocratic women at Bath. Genteel Pricilla Digby, in contrast, showed

⁶⁶ Britton, *Descriptive Sketches of Tunbridge Wells*, pp. 73-74.

⁶⁷ Britton, *Descriptive Sketches of Tunbridge Wells*, pp. 58, 65.

⁶⁸ Hembry, *The English Spa*, p. 241.

little interest in those above her in status, noting that there was a large company of titled visitors at Bath in 1742, but describing them as ‘too tedious’ to list. Elizabeth Montagu satirised almost everyone she met at the spa. This included the ‘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’ as well as the ‘tall Dowager Duchess’ who commanded the bath to be filled so that ‘all those below her stature, as well as her rank, were forced to come out’.⁶⁹

Inevitably the breadth of this study means that is unable to consider all connected subjects in equal depth. As a result, there are a number of areas touched on which provide potential areas for further research, including the specific differences between elite and middling women’s spa experiences, the male spa experience and comparative work exploring the leisure experiences on offer at the spa in relation to those on offer in other urban environments. However, whilst these areas require further attention, this thesis offers the first large-scale prosopographical study of the leisured woman and the eighteenth-century resort. It identifies and draws from a wide range of printed and manuscript female-authored letters and journals, exploring these through numerous historiographical lenses, including the social history of medicine, marriage, leisure, domestic life and the public sphere. It is therefore useful to scholars researching many areas of eighteenth-century social history, not just those working directly on women and the spa.

Although there were significant differences between the case-study resorts and variations between the leisured women who frequented them, female authored life-writings disclose many areas of similarity in the character of the spas and the leisured woman’s experiences of them. Women went to both spas in the genuine pursuit of health. Letters and journals, documenting pain, inability to participate in public entertainments and emotional distress occasioned by caring for loved ones, encourage an unfamiliar image of the female spa-visitor. Though she may have been surrounded by rich opportunity for sociability, leisure and public engagement, her ability to participate was frequently limited and shaped by illness. Furthermore,

⁶⁹ NRO ZCE/F/1/1/3/5 Isbaella Carr, Bath, to Ralph Carr (18 November 1761); NUSC Mol 79 Priscilla Digby, Bath, to Anne Molyneux (30 June 1742); Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (January 1740) in *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i, p. 95; Elizabeth Montagu, Bath, to the Duchess of Portland (7 January 1740) in Montagu, *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, i, p. 79.

printed works such as the memoirs of Dr Pierce and the medical treatises of Oliver and Rowzee strongly suggest that gynaecological concerns played a particularly important role in drawing women to both spas.⁷⁰

Depending on the nature of her particular complaint, a female patient could take on roles other than that of ‘invalid’ at Bath and Tunbridge Wells. She could be a voracious reader of books, journals and newspapers; a conspicuous consumer of fashionable goods or even an accomplished walker, dancer and horsewoman. Bath and Tunbridge Wells provided plentiful opportunity for the female patient and for women in the full bloom of health, to engage in a variety of such pursuits. They had access to a multitude of hetero-social public spaces, including the walks, assembly-rooms and theatres. Their daily routines were filled with physical activity such as walking, riding and dancing or more novel pursuits including swinging and games of battledore and shuttlecock. Lampooned as unfeminine and immodest, polite women also gambled and enjoyed private play at the spas, forever finding new forms of gaming, including variations of cards, dice and raffling. Leisured women also took advantage of the consumer experiences open to them at the resorts, observing popular fashions and imitating, adapting and purchasing items to create the level of acceptable or impressive toilette they desired. Finally, coffee-houses, coffee-rooms and circulating libraries also enabled the female spa-visitor to access a female-inclusive associational world, one in which she could read and engage in discussion and debate, thus participating in a public sphere of ideas and information, frequently argued to have been exclusively male.

Elite and middling women could, of course, attend balls, plays and card assemblies in London and provincial towns without spa pretensions. However, at the resort, the search for health gave the pursuit of leisure a more wholesome identity. Leisure was promoted as a tonic for poor health, for example, Rowzee advised patients at Tunbridge Wells, they would do well to resign themselves to ‘mirth with the rest of the companie; for those that look to reap benefit by *Tunbridge*, must turn away all cares and melancholy.’⁷¹ Therefore, at the resorts, leisure was more than a mode of whiling away free time; the carefully timetabled daily routine of amusements was

⁷⁰ Pierce, *Bath Memoirs*, pp. 187-222; Rowzee, *The Queenes Welles*; Oliver, *A Practical Dissertation on Bath-Waters*, pp. 108-113.

⁷¹ Macky, *A Journey Through England*, ii, pp. 119-120; Rowzee, *The Queenes Welles*, p. 56.

regarded as medicinal. The central place leisure held in spa life therefore increased the level of hereto-sociability, as men and women, in pursuit of health, pleasure and sociability, partook in the available entertainments.

Female access to public leisure pursuits fluctuated at the resorts, over the one hundred and fifty years covered by this thesis. These fluctuations do not present a neat picture of a gradual expansion or reduction; they resulted from the rise and fall of specific proprietors, establishments and customs, and therefore, were consistently changing. For example, female access to a public sphere of debate and discussion expanded at Bath after the opening of the Ladies' Coffee-House during the 1740s; however, there is no record of its existence after 1773.⁷² If the establishment closed around this date, then it is likely that female participation in a traditional coffee-house culture became significantly limited at the spa, as no institution was created to take its place. However, the proliferation of circulating libraries at both resorts provided women with access to a wider literary public sphere during the latter half of the eighteenth century. For instance, prior to 1750, female visitors to Bath or Tunbridge Wells had only a couple of institutions from which to select their reading material. However, by 1830, the female visitor to Tunbridge Wells had at least four circulating libraries at her disposal (a significant number for a small spa), whilst the female Bath visitor of 1790, had seven libraries from which to choose.

Female exercise and sporting opportunities also varied over the period. However, the evidence explored in this study does not provide a sufficient basis to effectively evaluate the changing levels of female physical activity at the spa. For example, the 1730s fan illustration, depicting women playing battledore and shuttlecock at Bath, and Elizabeth Giffard's diary entry recording her game of battledore at Bath in 1769, does not prove that the game was new to the resort, or that women continued to play the sport for the remainder of the century.⁷³ Similarly, evidence of female racing at Tunbridge Wells during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, does not imply that racing was an activity newly available to women at the spa, or that it continued to be popular after this point.⁷⁴ However, whilst the rise and fall of particular establishments and practises led to fluctuating patterns in female leisure,

⁷² *TBC* (7 October 1773); *TBC* (14 October 1773).

⁷³ FRO D/NH/1074 Elizabeth Giffard 'A Bath Journal' (30 January 1766).

⁷⁴ TWM A poster advertising 'Diversions on Tunbridge Wells Common' (1797).

one clear conclusion is apparent: between 1680 and 1830 Bath and Tunbridge Wells provided consistent opportunities for female engagement in a wide and varied public sphere of leisure. It would therefore follow, that the rise in the number of spas in England during this period, as well as the emergence of seaside visiting, led to an increase in the number of urbanised spaces in which elite and middling women could engage in a physical, intellectual and discursive public sphere of leisure.

Just as the importance of health, intellectual and physical activity have been underplayed, this study demonstrates that the role of the marriage market has been overplayed, in spa historiography. Husband-hunting was only one of a variety of options presented to the female spa visitor, regarding her intimate life. If looking for a husband, then the public areas of the resort, and later on, private entertainments, offered plentiful opportunity for her to meet possible suitors. However, not all visitors would have been in search of a spouse: many were already married, others too old or too young and there were those who were disinclined. The spas did much more than allow couples to meet: they provided adolescent girls with lessons in courtship, enabled women of all ages to enjoy the excitement of flirtation and gave single women the option of establishing lives of independence.

This thesis weaves a further square into the expanding quilt of eighteenth-century women's historiography. It evidences, as Glover has for Scotland, Vickery has for northern England and Russell has for London, that elite and middling women were far more active than Stone suggested, when he labelled them 'idle drones'.⁷⁵ The study demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the female spa experience, illustrating that activities such as dancing, card-playing, novel-reading and tea visits were not the empty actions of frivolous women, but, instead, pursuits which engaged the bodies, minds and voices of a multitude of women, widening the world that they inhabited at the eighteenth-century resort. Leisure was the constant *raison d'être* at Bath and Tunbridge Wells, sought by women and men alike, as a tonic for the sick and as amusement for those in good health. The emphasis placed on heterosociability increased female involvement in public life at the resorts and therefore,

⁷⁵ Glover, *Elite Women and Polite-Society*; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*; Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre*; Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 349-353, 396-397.

the leisured woman's inclusion and agency in a public sphere that was simultaneously socially, intellectually and physically active.