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A 'BLESSED ASYLUM' OR A UTOPIAN VISION:
THE VIABILITY OF A PROTESTANT NUNNERY IN
EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

JACQUELINE COLLIER

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ABSTRACT

In 1694, Mary Astell proposed the establishment of Protestant nunneries in England; in 1809, Helena Whitford reiterated the theme; yet, it was Lady Isabella King in 1816 who sought to put this radical idea into effect. A single, Irish, evangelically influenced gentlewoman, a younger daughter of the Earl of Kingston, she established the Ladies' Association, a 'conventual' home for eighteen distressed gentlewomen at Bailbrook House in Bath in 1816, securing support for it from such influential figures as Queen Charlotte, William Wilberforce and Robert Southey. When Bailbrook House was sold in 1821, she relocated the Ladies' Association to Clifton in Bristol, where its eventual failure in 1835 shattered her vision of establishing a national scheme of conventual homes that would benefit future generations of women.

Limited attention has yet been paid by historians to the role elite women played in creating and managing philanthropic institutions in the early nineteenth century, particularly those aimed at assisting other women in an urban setting. Some historians of philanthropy, such as Frank Prochaska, have identified an 'explosion' of early nineteenth-century female activity; however, *elite* women's charitable contributions have tended to be understood as rural, concentrating on family estates. Kim Reynolds, who has addressed Victorian elite women's philanthropy in an urban setting, maintains it functioned simply as a strand of elite women's work.

This dissertation draws upon a previously unstudied collection of papers compiled and annotated by Lady Isabella King, which span the existence of the Ladies' Association, in order to explore the nature of Lady Isabella's involvement in this philanthropic venture and her understanding of her role. Thus it not only seeks to recover Lady Isabella as an important historical figure in the development of early nineteenth-century philanthropic ventures, something for which she was recognised by her contemporaries, but also to

examine the structure of her unique experimental institution and cast some light on the sorts of women who became its residents. By doing so, it provides a case study in the development and practical application of a philanthropic ideal. It examines the ways that Lady Isabella, quite a conventional elite single woman, used her status, her location and her networks to create and maintain the institution for nearly twenty years. It provides a valuable opportunity to examine a number of the problems she faced in establishing and running the institution, given the social and gendered milieu in which she was operating, and the strategies she employed to achieve her ends.

I argue that Lady Isabella's elite status provided her with the wealth and access to influential social circles to make a difference, that her single status added independence to devote time to her cause and while she was initially beset with self-doubts about her competence to author and manage the project, she gradually gained confidence as she developed ways to implement and manage the institution. At the same time the groundbreaking nature of the Ladies' Association, the consequent public criticism and a growing discordant atmosphere among the residents of the institution lead to its closure in 1835.

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ABBREVIATIONS

APL	Diaries of Alexander Hamilton, Armagh Public Library, object number p0001594113
BC	<i>Bath Chronicle</i>
BNSRO	Bath and North Somerset Record Office
DRO	Doncaster Archives, Doncaster, S. Yks., Records of Davies-Cooke of Owston, Household Records, General Correspondence of Lady Isabella King
MSS	<i>Report of the Bath Society for the Suppression of Vagrants, Street Beggars and Impostors: Relief of Occasional Distress and Encouragement of Industry</i>
NA	National Archives
PRONI	Public Record Office, Northern Ireland, King-Harman Papers
PSLIRC	<i>Plan for Improving the Situation of Ladies of Respectable Character and Small Fortune</i> (Bath, 1817)



LADY ISABELLA KING,
Patroness of the Society,
1805—1808.

Plate 1: Miniature portrait of Lady Isabella Letitia King, date unknown

INTRODUCTION

In 1694 Mary Astell took the radical step of advocating in print, the establishment of Protestant colleges or ‘nunneries’ for unmarried gentlewomen; it was one of several proposals put forward for similar institutions since the dissolution of the monasteries between 1536 and 1541. While Astell’s plans were never realised they remained resonant throughout the following century, as eighteenth- century society continuously re-engaged with issues posed by the persistence of large numbers of single women in a society which, by default defined women through their paternal or marital association with men. During the eighteenth century, proposals — fictional and real — were put forward, including in 1762, Sarah Scott’s early feminist utopia *Millenium Hall*. In 1809 Helena Whitford again reiterated the still prevalent theme, yet it was Lady Isabella King (1772-1845), a single Irish, intellectually-minded, evangelical aristocrat, daughter of the 1st Earl of Kingston, who sought to put this radical idea into effect. While her scheme only survived for twenty years (1816-1836), the establishment of Anglican Sisterhoods in 1845 continued the theme into the twentieth century. This dissertation will examine the practical application of an idea which, although proposed and explored in depth intellectually over three centuries, had never been put into practice, at least not on any meaningful scale before the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This new research, which draws on several broad historical themes, including religion, gender and class, sits at the intersection of a number of more specific research areas — the history of Bath, its social space and social networks; that of female communities; and the rise of evangelicalism — is firmly anchored in the history of women, more specifically elite single women, and philanthropy. It primarily concentrates on Lady Isabella King and her role as founder of the Ladies’ Association, an evangelically influenced, Anglican charitable institution for distressed gentlewomen, established at Bailbrook House,

Batheaston, on the outskirts of Bath in 1816. In 1821 the Association moved to Cornwallis House in Clifton, Bristol, but was suspended in 1832 due to dwindling numbers and Lady Isabella's declining health. It finally closed in 1836. At its height, the institution housed eighteen distressed gentlewomen who were recommended through patronage networks.¹ As superintendent, Lady Isabella herself resided at the institution throughout its life. She also served as president and one of the institution's thirteen patronesses and four patrons. Together with four male trustees/guardians and a guardian committee of twelve local elite women, they managed the institution.²

Writing in *The Quarterly Review* in 1829, with the institution in decline, the poet Robert Southey remarked on the importance of the Ladies' Association. Had Lady Isabella's scheme succeeded, he was convinced that she would have been remembered as 'one of the greatest benefactors of her country, and the greatest to her sex that any country has ever produced.'³ Although both she and the institution were discussed by contemporary writers as far afield as New York and Calcutta, and she was a well-known figure in British elite society and philanthropic circles, historians have thus far paid little attention to her, or to the impact of her institution.⁴

In recovering Lady Isabella, examining the Ladies' Association which she founded and considering the charitable work she undertook, this dissertation not only provides valuable insight into the activities of an unmarried aristocratic woman in the field of early nineteenth-century philanthropy, but also makes an important contribution to our understanding of the scope and character of elite women's agency at the time. In this respect, it will argue that while it was unusual for aristocratic women to be actively involved in the growing urban philanthropic community on a management level, some did take on important, urban based roles which required them to act both as decision-makers and in a

¹ Doncaster Archives, Doncaster, S. Yks., Records of Davies-Cooke of Owston, Household Records, General Correspondence of Lady Isabella King, DD/DC [hereafter DRO], H7/7/1/2 'Hints for a working and reading association, 31st March, 1823.

² These numbers varied from time to time; see appendices 2, 4 & 6.

³ *Quarterly Review*, vol.22 (July, 1819), p.96.

⁴ Catherine Cappe, *Thoughts on Various Charitable and other Important Institutions* (London & York, 1814), p.105; *The Calcutta Magazine and Monthly Register*, vol.4 (October, 1830), p.241; *The Christian Disciple*, vol.6 (February, 1818), p.60; *The Ladies' Literary Cabinet*, vol.1 (May, 1820), p.6.

hands-on capacity and this was facilitated and encouraged by both single and elite status. At the same time, this study provides a valuable opportunity to examine the problems associated with setting up an institution such as the Ladies' Association in the early nineteenth century. It suggests that social concerns about Catholicism (particularly its re-emergence) and the perceived threat of female communities to the established social order — both of which had proved barriers to the formation of earlier institutions — continued to cause anxiety for early nineteenth-century society. The dissertation also explores the role of Bath, the location of the Ladies' Association during its formative years, in facilitating its creation. By examining how Lady Isabella constructed her network of support from her base in Bath it will propose that the importance of the city as a hub of elite sociability, its relative social openness, which encouraged the intermingling of classes and gender alike, and its more intimate disposition as a provincial town, were important factors. They enabled Lady Isabella to use her social position both locally and in the wider socio-economic milieu, her home in Bath and her social skills, together with her previous philanthropic experience and connexions in Dublin and Bath, to cultivate an interlocking set of social networks to manage and promote the institution. Finally, the dissertation will use a partial reconstruction of the institution's residential community to address the figure of the distressed gentlewoman. Contrary to the stereotype of the impoverished and single, orphaned daughter of the middling professional, whose indigence was the result of the prevailing socio-economic conditions, and tended to be portrayed by contemporaries as submissive, vulnerable and helpless, the residents of the Association were diverse.⁵ Although their common single, bereaved status and resulting financial hardship conformed to the image of distressed gentility, their circumstances were otherwise much more varied. They ranged in age from

⁵ Historically the middling sort have been regarded as particularly susceptible to distressed gentility; Kathryn Leviton suggests that the concerns surrounding single women was 'labelled a middle-class problem because of the specific challenges that middle-class women faced in attempting to support themselves': Kathryn Levitan, 'Redundancy, the 'Surplus Woman' Problem, and the British Census, 1851-1861', *Women's History Review*, vol.17, 3(July, 2008), p.364. See also contemporary writers who debated the problem in the 1790s with improved education as a solution in mind: Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with Reflection on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life* (London, 1787); Clara Reeve, *Plans of Education with Remarks on the System of other Writers. In a Series of Letters Between Mrs Darnford and her Friends* (London, 1792); Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education*, 2vols (London, 1798); Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflection on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, with Suggestions for its Improvement* (London, 1798); Mary Ann Radcliffe, *The Female Advocate: or an Attempt to Recover the Rights of Woman from Male Usurpation* (London, 1799).

eighteen to fifty-two and, socially, included women from aristocratic families through to those of the parochial clergy. Their geographical origins and connexions extended nationally from Scotland to Cornwall and, internationally, from Prussia to St Kitts. The extent of their impoverishment was equally diverse. Furthermore, while the ultimate goal for all residents was security, their life choices ranged from permanent residence in the Ladies' Association through to stays of varying lengths, terminating in marriage, a return to extended family, or independence.⁶ Arguably, their very diversity was detrimental to the long-term success of the institution.

Historiography and Context

This study of the Ladies' Association provides a lens through which to examine Lady Isabella's activity as an elite female philanthropist at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a period which, with the aftermath of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, and the rise of evangelicalism, saw a re-invigorated focus on women's domestic roles.⁷ As such, the dissertation will contribute to the broad historical debate which looks to understand more fully the nature and extent of female agency and, in so doing, adds to a growing body of literature which challenges and nuances a rigid interpretation of separate spheres. More specifically, the dissertation will contribute to recent research which has begun to uncover the possibilities for single women in general and elite single women in particular.⁸

While research on women's agency in recent publications by historians such as Christina de Bellaigue, Elizabeth Eger, Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor, have modified our understanding of the rigidity of separate spheres and expanded our knowledge of women's

⁶ See appendix 6.

⁷ Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-Class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987); Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres* (Harlow, 1998); Judith S. Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender Class and Politics in Late Georgian Britain* (New York, 2003).

⁸ For single women more generally see Amy Froide, *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005). For elite single women see Alison Duncan, "'Old Maids': Family and Social Relationships of Never-Married Scottish Gentlewomen, c.1740-1840", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012; 'Power of the Old Maid: The Never-Married Gentlewoman in her Family, 1740-1835', *Women's History Magazine*, 63(summer, 2010), pp.11-18; Ruth Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune: Elite Singlewomen's Experiences in Yorkshire 1730-1860', *Women's History Review*, vol.16, 3(July, 2007), p.391; Sandra Dunster, 'Useless and Insignificant Creatures? Spinsters in the Nottinghamshire Upper Class, 1720-1820', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 102 (1998), pp.103-112.

activities, limited attention has yet been given to the role that elite women played in creating and managing philanthropic institutions, especially during the pre- Victorian years of the early nineteenth century — the nascent years of associational urban philanthropy.⁹ There have been a number of studies carried out by historians such as Frank Prochaska, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Maria Luddy and Simon Morgan who have examined the increasing role played by middling women in the expanding urban philanthropic arena, particularly during the Victorian period, yet research into elite women's philanthropy has tended, perhaps unsurprisingly, to concentrate on the charity dispensed on family estates, more rural in focus and directed towards the estate's tenants; a relationship defined by its paternalistic nature.¹⁰ Kim Reynolds has briefly addressed aristocratic women's

⁹ Davidoff and Hall's 1987 seminal work, *Family Fortunes*, argues for the centrality of the ideological concept of separate spheres to the construction of a distinct middle-class identity. While they also argue that the realms of public and private were not exclusive, they assert that their period saw a marked narrowing of gender roles. Historians such as Amanda Vickery, Elaine Chalus, Kathryn Gleadle, Sarah Richardson and Kim Reynolds have questioned not only the timing and the narrow class focus of the claim but also how *far* it penetrated women's lives: Kathryn Gleadle, 'Revisiting Family Fortunes: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Publication of L. Davidoff & C. Hall (1987) *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson)', *Women's History Review*, vol.16, 5(December, 2007), pp.773-782; *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2001); Kathryn Gleadle & Sarah Richardson, (eds.), *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke, 2000); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, 1998); Hannah Barker & Elaine Chalus, (eds.), *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representation and Responsibility* (London, 1997); Kim Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Early -and Mid -Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1995); Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, vol.36, 2(June, 1993), pp.383-414; Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*; Catherine Hall, 'The Early Formation of Domestic Ideology', in Sandra Burman, (ed.), *Fit Work for Women* (London, 1979), pp.15-32. Current historical scholarship presents a much more sophisticated understanding of the way women actually lived their lives, recognising both the diversity of the category of women and the shifting nature of the private/public division: Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Abingdon, 2013); Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009); Christina de Bellaigue, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800-1867* (Oxford, 2007); Sarah Knott & Barbara Taylor, (eds.), *Women, Gender & Enlightenment* (Basingstoke, 2007); Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona Ó Gallchoir & Penny Warburton, (eds.), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge & New York, 2006).

¹⁰ Studies have argued that women participated in supportive and practical roles rather than as decision makers and organisers but also agree that there were a growing number of female- focused and female-led institutions which provided some more ambitious women with the opportunity to extend their sphere of activity and influence within the confines of the local. See Frank K. Prochaska's classic work on female philanthropy: 'Women in English Philanthropy, 1790-1830', *International Review of Social History*, vol.19, 3(December, 1974), p.437; *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1980); Mary P. Ryan, 'The Power of Women's Networks', in J.L. Newton et al. (eds.), *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London, 1985), pp.167-187; Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp.434-436; Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992), p.102; Donna Andrew, 'Female Charity in an Age of Sentiment' in J. Brewer & S. Staves, (eds.), *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London, 1995), pp.275-300; Martin Gorsky's case study of philanthropy in Bristol includes a chapter dedicated to women's involvement in the city: *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol* (Woodbridge, 1999); Mary Martin, 'Women and Philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740-1870', *London Journal*, vol.19, 2(November, 1994), pp.119-150; Maria Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995); Simon Morgan's more recent research focuses on the growing civic consciousness of the middle-classes as a motivator: *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London,

philanthropic involvement in an urban context as part of a broader study of Victorian aristocratic women, as has Prochaska, whose earlier research examined women's philanthropic activity more generally in an urban environment by using charitable records to ascertain the number of women involved and the types of activities they carried out. Both reached similar conclusions: that while elite women devoted energy towards fund raising – particularly hosting charity balls and supporting charity bazaars - until the 1880s 'few took an active part in the work of organised middle-class charities'.¹¹ Instead, they argue, women's involvement most often took the form of subscriber or patroness – roles which provided prestige through association and more often than not at a distance.¹² Reynolds, whose attention is particularly directed towards married women, has put this more remote involvement down to the peculiar circumstances of the aristocracy: philanthropy was simply one strand of many that constituted their busy lives.¹³ While she accepts that there are exceptions to the rule and cites Lady Byron and Angela Burdett-Coutts as examples, Andrea Geddes Poole has recently challenged her assertions in her new study of the urban charitable activity of Lucy, Lady Frederick Cavendish (1841-1925).¹⁴

2007); 'A Sort of Land Debatable': Female Influence, Civic Virtue and Middle-Class Identity, c.1830-c1860', *Women's History Review*, vol.13, 2(June, 2004), pp.183-209.

Charitable activity by elite women in this arena who are described by Reynolds as 'the natural patron[s] of the rural poor' was most often conducted through personal contact. It ranged from short-term support which entailed the distribution of food, clothing (second-hand and hand-made), bedding, medicine and advice through to longer-term projects including the establishment of schools and churches for the local population. Deborah Wilson, *Women, Marriage and Property in Wealthy Landed Families in Ireland, 1750-1850* (Manchester & New York, 2009), p.14; A.E. Hattersley, 'Philanthropy on Landed Estates in Northumberland during the Nineteenth Century', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Teeside, 2004; Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women*, pp.102-110, 112; Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689-1798* (Oxford, 1991), pp.572-573; Jessica Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Class and Rural Philanthropy', *Victorian Studies*, vol.30, 2(winter, 1987), pp.186-187.

¹¹ While elite women certainly supported the charity bazaar both historians warn from over emphasising their role; Reynolds argues that on 'only few occasions [did] aristocratic women undertake the complete organisation of a bazaar'. Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women*, pp.111-112, 115; Frank Prochaska, 'Charity Bazaars in Nineteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, vol.16 2(spring, 1977), pp.62-84, 79; 'Women in English Philanthropy', p.432.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women*, p.112; see also Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman*, pp.503, 570,572.

¹⁴ Lady Lucy Cavendish's charitable work in London began 'unremarkably' after her marriage in 1864 but, with no children, took off in earnest in 1882, after the murder of her husband (Lord Frederick Cavendish) in Ireland and continued until the early Edwardian period. Andrea Geddes Poole, *Philanthropy and the Construction of Victorian Women's Citizenship: Lady Frederick Cavendish and Miss Emma Cons* (London & Toronto, 2014), chapter 1. Although Poole's work concentrates on the later Victorian and early Edwardian period when women's philanthropic activity was expanding, it highlights the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced reading of elite women's urban involvement in the nineteenth century —particularly the first half. While unquestionably some women, as patronesses or subscribers, lent only their names or pocketbooks to a cause,

Although there is a new and growing body of research which is revising our understanding of the historical experience of single women, particularly lifelong unmarried women, few studies which specifically examine their philanthropic participation exist as yet.¹⁵ General studies have begun to challenge the contemporary conception of this category as socially redundant and argue convincingly for a more active and empowering role. Amy Froide's pioneering research, which stems from the urban experience of the middling single woman in Southampton between 1550 and 1750, is particularly important. She has proposed that the active engagement of 'never married' women, as she has termed the category, in useful occupations enabled them to carve a space for themselves in a society which, prescriptively at least, denied them one.¹⁶ While Froide's work situates their activity both within and outside of the family, Alison Duncan and Sandra Dunster's studies, which also argue for never-married women's agency and concentrate on the experience of never-married *elite* women from landed families in Scotland and Nottinghamshire respectively, c.1720-1835, place their interest firmly within the family domain.¹⁷ Duncan maintains that as, 'family mediator' and 'patronage facilitator', they performed an important role in the maintenance and promotion of the dynasty.¹⁸ Dunster agrees, but points out that while older elite spinster's activities remained focused on family concerns, they often lived independently.¹⁹ Ruth Larsen's research, which examines elite never-married women in Yorkshire between 1730 and 1860, confirms these views and also identifies them as rural philanthropists. Her findings propose that as independent women, with full financial control,

others did not. The extent of women's commitment to charitable fund-raising of this sort needs to be more carefully examined and appreciated in terms of its time and commitment in preparation and production.

¹⁵ The most obvious exception to this, as noted by Reynolds, is Angela Burdett-Coutts, although her work predominantly took place in the second half of the nineteenth century after inheriting at the age of twenty-three, in 1837. Susan S. Lewis, 'The Artistic and Architectural Patronage of Angela Burdett Coutts', unpublished PhD thesis, Royal Holloway University, 2012.

¹⁶ The term 'never married': was coined by Amy Froide to identify the spinster: *Never Married: Single Women*.

¹⁷ Duncan, 'Power of the Old Maid', pp.11-18; "'Old Maids:' Family and Social Relationships of Never-Married Scottish Gentlewomen'; Dunster, 'Useless and Insignificant Creatures?' pp.103-12.

¹⁸ Duncan, "Old Maids", pp.22, 97.

¹⁹ Dunster, 'Useless and Insignificant Creatures?' pp.107-8; Wilson, *Women, Marriage and Property*, p.121. Kimberly Schutte's research which examines elite women's marriage patterns from a wide chronological perspective, goes further; she identifies a number of life choices which aristocratic spinsters took between 1485 and 1920: a religious life, a career at court, a role within the family as 'nursemaid or housekeeper' or an itinerant existence comprising visits between relations and friends as life options. Kimberly Schutte, 'Marrying by the Numbers: Marriage Patterns of Aristocratic British Women, 1485-1920', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 2011, p.268.

they were able to shape their philanthropic activity to their own charitable agendas.²⁰ Bridget Hill's earlier work, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850*, which examines unmarried, mostly middling women, also briefly considers the agency of single women in a philanthropic setting. She too picks up the theme of independence as an important factor to female philanthropic effectiveness, asserting that: 'without the distraction of domestic ties, they had more time to devote to their cause'.²¹ Mary Clare Martin's research on female philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton pulls both Larsen's and Hill's arguments together. Her examination of the philanthropic activity of bourgeois elite women strongly suggests that the success of their individual charitable ventures depended not only on close personal institutional involvement but also on financial independence.²² Frank Prochaska also underlines the advantages of single status. His broad study of female philanthropy which identifies considerable numbers of unmarried women from both the upper and middling classes who subscribed to charitable organisations, argues they saw philanthropic activity as a means of offsetting the prejudice against their marital status.²³

Another group of single women whose historical experience has yet to receive significant academic attention are the distressed gentlewomen. For those women without financial security or familial support, life choices were limited and their life experiences often differed dramatically. Distressed gentility was a single woman's experience, whether unmarried or widowed and the nature of this condition has meant that archival invisibility creates problems in researching their lives. Kathryn Leviton has proposed that while the problem of the single woman had been written about by politicians, economists and novelists in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was only with the 1851 census, which detailed marital status for the first time, that the problem became truly visible to contemporary society.²⁴ Her circumstances, explained as a consequence of contemporary socio-economic conditions, are perhaps best summed up through the stereotypical figure of

²⁰ Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune', p.391.

²¹ Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850* (London, 2001), p.159.

²² Martin, 'Women and Philanthropy', pp.129, 132-133, 135.

²³ Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy', p.431.

²⁴ Levitan, 'Redundancy, the 'Surplus Woman' Problem and the British Census', p.364.

the governess, depicted in contemporary literature as vulnerable, dependent and marginalised. Kathryn Hughes' research, which uncovers the lived experience of nineteenth-century governesses, provides a more nuanced understanding, demonstrating the breadth of their work experiences and personal circumstances, while also pointing out the uneasy liminality of their positions.²⁵ Studies by James Hammerton and Olwen Hufton, which concentrate on the possibilities of agency for distressed women, examine various coping strategies these women adopted to survive and preserve at least some level independence and respectability. Hufton identified small groups of poor single women who pooled their resources by cohabiting, an activity which she termed 'spinster clustering,' while Hammerton's study of emigrant gentlewomen argues for their 'surprising adaptability' when faced with the unfamiliar.²⁶ Research, which considers distressed gentility from a financial perspective, often part of a broader study of female financial practices, extends the scope of opportunity for female self-government yet further.²⁷ David Green and Alastair Owens, whose research examines wealth ownership and investment behaviour among single middle-class women between 1800 and 1860 primarily through the lens of inheritance, agree that while women's choices were constrained, alternative strategies other than employment were available through investment and women were never totally denied access to money-making opportunities.²⁸ Indeed, far from being passive recipients of male wealth, he asserts that women took an active role in promoting their own welfare by managing their own finances.²⁹ The tendency to view distressed gentlewomen as an undifferentiated group remains, however. Consideration by class alone is insufficient; it precludes a more sophisticated understanding of the concept of distressed gentility. Broader questions need to be asked about the degree of financial impoverishment, the circumstances leading to

²⁵ Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (London, 1993).

²⁶ James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914* (London, 1979); Olwen Hufton, 'Women without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Family History*, vol.9, 4(December, 1984), p.361.

²⁷ David R. Green & Alastair Owens, 'Gentlewomanly Capitalism? Spinsters, Widows, and Wealth Holding in England and Wales, c.1800-1860', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol.56, 3(August, 2003), p.510; Penelope Lane, 'Women Property and Inheritance: Wealth Creation and Income Generation in Small English Towns, 1750-1835', in Jon Stobart & Alastair Owens, (eds.), *Urban Fortunes: Property and Inheritance in the Town, 1700-1900* (Aldershot, 2000), pp.172-194.

²⁸ Green & Owens, 'Gentlewomanly Capitalism', p. 511.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.512.

economic hardship and the women's family backgrounds.

Female communities — large, organised institutional establishments or informal companionate relationships, religious or secular, real and imagined — offered single women without family or financial support a range of possibilities but they also posed problems of organisation and governance. Hufton's spinster clusters were one solution but she does not take account of the question of power and hierarchy within the groups. Betty Rizzo's research on the other hand, examines the female companionate relationship through various real and fictitious situations, including the traditional mistress/companion, the business partnership and the *ménage à trois*.³⁰ Her overriding conclusion asserts that despite the variations in circumstances, they were similarly based on a relationship of unequal power and only occasionally on one of mutuality and in this respect, demonstrated a close resemblance to marriage.³¹ Nicole Pohl and Rebecca D'Monte's edited collection, *Female Communities, 1600-1800*, not only explores the concerns of and possibilities for contemporary women through fictional constructions of female communities but also looks to understand more clearly the gap between the abstract idea of community in fiction and the reality of the lived experience.³² Alessa Johns' study of female utopias foregrounds in particular, 'the establishment of a viable mode of group life [that] takes into account the full range of human needs'.³³ This is a problem which Lady Isabella's papers suggest was at the forefront of her mind. With no tangible forerunner on which to model the institution, the task of translating her idea into reality and formulating its governance was a fundamental and ongoing concern, something that the musings of co-conceiver, Elizabeth Smith, suggest troubled them both from its inception as an idea in 1795:

Imagination like the setting sun, casts a glowing lustre over the prospect, and lends to every object an enchanting brilliancy of colouring; but when reason takes the place of imagination, and the sun sinks behind the

³⁰ Betty Rizzo, *Companions without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Macon, 1994).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Nicole Pohl & Rebecca D'Monte, *Female Communities, 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities* (Basingstoke & New York, 2000); Nicole Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800* (Aldershot, 2006).

³³ Alessa Johns, *Women's Utopias of the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 2003), p.10.

mountain, all fade alike into the night of disappointment.³⁴

The Ladies' Association was a direct attempt to bring one particular form of female community into life — the Protestant nunnery. This model was most famously posited by Mary Astell in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, published in 1697, but while the subject has attracted the attention of scholars such as Ralph Washington Sockman, Bridget Hill and Susan Mumm, none of them give more than a passing reference to the Ladies' Association.³⁵ Writing in 1917, Sockman was interested in the resurgence of the idea through the Anglican Sisterhoods, first established in 1845.³⁶ While his concern lay with the influence of earlier ideas on the establishment of nineteenth-century institutions, Bridget Hill's concern in her important 1987 article was to understand the reasons for the prolonged and continued interest in such schemes, something she attributed to the growing numbers of single women in society and the need for female educational reform. Although Hill identified a continuous thread of ideas from the seventeenth through to the end of the eighteenth century, she then skipped to the establishment of Anglican sisterhoods in 1845, which she attributed in part to Southey, who was in fact a zealous supporter of Lady Isabella and contributor to her scheme.³⁷ Susan Mumm, who has since engaged with the theme of Anglican sisterhoods,

³⁴ Harriet Maria Bowdler, (ed.), *Fragments in Prose and Verse, by Miss Elizabeth Smith, Lately Deceased* (London, 1810), p.106.

³⁵ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Great Interest by a Lover of her Sex* (London, 1697).

³⁶ Ralph Washington Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life in the Church of England in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1917); Bridget Hill, 'A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery', *Past & Present*, vol.117, 1(1987), p.124.

³⁷ Bridget Hill argues that Robert Southey took up the theme in 1829, 'A Refuge from Men', p.127. There is little evidence to confirm the relationship between Southey and Lady Isabella conclusively; no letters written directly between them exist in the archive and there are only a handful which discuss Southey's participation. Further, research has so far failed to uncover any correspondence between them elsewhere. Nevertheless, in 1819 Southey agreed to write an article on Bailbrook House to 'recommend it to the world', which was discussed in a letter from Bishop Heber to Lady Isabella. Thomas Taylor, author of *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Right Reverend Reginald Heber DD Lord Bishop of Calcutta*, wrote that Lady Isabella wished to 'obtain the patronage of some distinguished literary character' to forward her cause, which suggests she was unacquainted with Southey before this time. Indeed, several letters from the Bishop of Salisbury which confirm Southey's approval and active support of her scheme, strongly suggest he was an intermediary between Lady Isabella and Southey, both through correspondence and in person. However, a letter written by Lady Isabella to the Bishop of Salisbury in 1833, which regrets Southey's absence from London while she was there, confirms that by that time Lady Isabella was directly in touch with him herself both by letter and in person: 'I greatly regretted that Mr Southey was not in town. I particularly wished to have some conversation with him ... it is my intention to write to him fully ... as soon as I find myself capable of doing so': DRO, H/7/7/18, letter from the Bishop of Salisbury, 12th June, 3rd July, 14th July, 4th August, 1829; DRO, H/7/7/19, 3rd July, 1829; DRO, H/7/7/1, letter to the Bishop of Salisbury, 27th June, 1833; letter from Bishop Heber to Lady Isabella, 17th March, 1819, *Life of Reginald Heber DD, Lord Bishop of Calcutta*, by his widow, 2vols, vol.1 (New York, 1830), pp. 474-475; Thomas Taylor, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Right Reverend Reginald Heber DD Lord Bishop of Calcutta* (London, 1835), p.78.

also linked Southey with their foundation.³⁸ Her broad study, which has contributed to the recovery of sisterhoods historically, argues for their importance as an empowering space for women, particularly for those of the middling and elite classes.³⁹ While the idea of Anglican sisterhoods centred predominantly on religiously inspired charitable work, rather than seventeenth and eighteenth-century proposals for similar institutions, the ethos of the sisterhoods was more consistent with the Ladies' Association, particularly in the later years of its life at Cornwallis House.⁴⁰

Although research has been undertaken into elite women, single women and philanthropy individually and from a number of perspectives, there has been no specific investigation into aristocratic never-married women and their philanthropic activity in the urban environment, particularly in setting up a scheme such as the Ladies' Association. By considering the previously unstudied papers of Lady Isabella and the institution which came to dominate her life, this dissertation provides an important case study. Not only does Lady Isabella's social religious and familial status place her firmly in early nineteenth-century elite society and provide her with a wide-ranging and diverse set of connections ranging from Queen Charlotte and William Wilberforce, through to otherwise unknown elite female supporters, thus allowing insights into the internal operation of and reactions to a female-led venture, but it also adds additional weight to the arguments for women's ability to create and function in an arena that was both public and private.

The place of Bath, as a location from which to launch the Ladies' Association, is also important. Much of what has been written on the city has tended to focus on the nature of its status as a spa and resort town, and the construction of its image, yet little specific

³⁸ Susan Mumm has argued that Southey resurrected the idea and 'it was as a tribute to Southey that the first sisterhood, the committee-established Park Village community, was founded in 1845'; *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain* (London & New York, 1999), p.3.

³⁹ For other work on sisterhoods see Joy Frith, 'Pseudonuns: Anglican Sisters and the Politics of Victorian Identity', unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University, Canada, 2004; Caroline Ann Lucas, 'Different Habits: Representations of Anglican Sisterhoods in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 2000. For studies on women religious in England during the nineteenth century see Carmen M. Mangion, *Contested Identities: Catholic Women Religious in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales* (Manchester, 2008); Sue Morgan & Jacqueline de Vries, (eds.), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (London, 2010); Susan O'Brien, 'French Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, vol.154, 1(1997), 142-80.

⁴⁰ See chapter 2.

attention has been paid by historians to women in Bath, even though they predominated demographically.⁴¹ Amanda Herbert and Elizabeth Child's recent publications pay particular attention to the place of the town in the creation of female networks in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Herbert's research recovers the female experience in Bath at the end of the seventeenth century which she argues has been absent from the historical discourse. She considers the 'homosocial activities' of women and proposes that 'spas served as crucial geographic sites for female identity creation'.⁴² Child examines Bath's female literary circles during the eighteenth century and concludes that the relative freedom which the city offered enabled women to play 'important roles in the evolution of local culture and civic identity'.⁴³ This argument has been picked up by historians studying philanthropic communities in other localities: Mary Clare Martin has noted the importance of the local to female philanthropic effectiveness in Walthamstow and Leyton between 1740 and 1870, while Mary Ryan's work on female philanthropy in Utica, New York, between 1830 and 1840, has led her to argue that a 'few active, organised and well-situated women were able to exert power in history.' These women, who she has described as 'sources of organisational strength at local level,' had, she argues, a direct effect upon the opinions of men.⁴⁴ More recently, Kathryn Gleadle, who has argued for female political engagement while also underlining its problematic nature, has extended the argument beyond a simplistic public – private duality by employing a third sphere of activity— the local or 'parochial'.⁴⁵ This arena is defined not only by the concrete space of the 'neighbourhood and workplace' but also by the abstract space of 'acquaintance networks' — 'characterized by daily, local interaction and personal communication' — which she has argued was a particularly

⁴¹ R.S. Neale, *Bath 1680-1850: A Social History, or, A Valley of Pleasure, Yet a Sink of Iniquity* (London, 1981); Graham Davis & Penny Bonsall, *Bath: A New History* (Keele, 1996).

⁴² Amanda Herbert, 'Gender and the Spa: Space, Sociability and Self at British Health Spas, 1640-1714', *Journal of Social History*, vol.43, 2(winter, 2009), p.362.

⁴³ Elizabeth Child, 'Virtuous Knowledge Woman's Truest Pride: Civic Ethos and Women's Literary Community in Eighteenth-Century Bath', in Rebecca D'Monte & Nicole Pohl, *Female Communities, 1600-1800* (Basingstoke & New York, 2000), p.223.

⁴⁴ Ryan, 'The Power of Women's Networks', p.181; Martin, 'Women and Philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton', p.134.

⁴⁵ Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, chapter 4.

empowering environment for women.⁴⁶ As a town which served as a microcosm of elite society and saw the ebb and flow of many of its most influential and powerful members, Bath was a crucial component in the success of the Ladies' Association. It provided Lady Isabella with the opportunity to gain practical experience of operating in the parochial sphere through her involvement from 1805 in Bath's leading charity, the Monmouth Street Society, of which she was the patroness; it gave her the social opportunities to forge connections with like-minded women and men, and create the networks that she would later exploit to form the Ladies' Association; and, as a social and cultural milieu, it proved attractive to the sort of distressed gentlewomen that she would seek to recruit.⁴⁷

Sources

The parameters of the dissertation are primarily defined by Lady Isabella's lifetime, 1772–1845, paying particular attention to the years of the Ladies' Association, 1816–35. The key primary source is a set of previously unstudied papers created and annotated by Lady Isabella herself, which relate directly to the foundation, management and eventual demise of the institution. This collection consists of some five hundred letters written by Lady Isabella and her supporters, together with upwards of twenty of her notebooks. It is a unique set of documents, especially as it was created by Lady Isabella with a specific purpose in mind:

The papers in this box all relate to The Ladies' Association formed under the sanction of Queen Charlotte in the year 1815. The Institution formed at Bailbrook in Bath in 1816 — which (when the place was sold by the proprietor Mr Walters in 1821) was continued at Cornwallis House Clifton until the year 1832 when it was suspended. In 1835 — The Ladies' Association was altogether at an end — and the house purchased for the institution advertised to be sold. Lady Isabella King — now puts these documents together — under an impression that at some *future time* a wish may arise to form a friendly association upon a similar plan — perhaps by some member of the King family in which case these papers might be found *useful* and interesting . *May 1836 Isabella L King*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Lyn H. Lofland, *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory* (New Brunswick, 2009), p. 10, also cited in Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens*, p.17.

⁴⁷ Percy Vere Turner, *Charity for a Hundred Years: The History of the Monmouth Street Society* (Bath, c.1914).

⁴⁸ DRO, H7/7/1/1, May, 1836.

There is no indication whether it was Lady Isabella's intention to compile this set of documents from the outset of her venture; indeed, although she had eagerly hoped that the Ladies' Association would continue in perpetuity, the state of the collection suggests that the idea came to her as the institution failed. This would explain the lack of papers relating to the early years of the institution, as compared with the larger number of papers relating to the institution once established at Cornwallis House by 1822. Furthermore, the fragmentary state of many of the documents — for example, incomplete sets of minutes for committee meetings, an unfinished notebook of rules and regulations, the absence of account books and unfinished notebooks listing admitted candidates — lend weight to the argument that Lady Isabella decided to create this archive in retrospect. Later annotations and insertions in pencil, retrospective thoughts and evaluations only underline this.

Correspondence which has been included in Lady Isabella's papers concentrates specifically on the institution. She edited the letters extensively, often removing names, which suggests that much of the information that has been concealed from public view was personal. As she was very aware of the potential public future of the documents, she appears to have wanted to protect both her personal privacy and that of her correspondents. Similarly, her own personal notes about the institution are also heavily edited. While this has caused difficulties in transcription in some instances, it has proved a valuable resource in others, providing a rare insight into her developing ideas, thought processes and emotional engagement with the project. They are a stark contrast to the few printed published documents for public consumption which exist.

Almost a third of the archive is written in a type of shorthand. Consultation with Dr Frances Henderson, an eighteenth-century shorthand expert, has confirmed that the style is a personal cipher.⁴⁹ As most of the coded papers are either notes written by Lady Isabella herself, or letters to and from her sisters, it is possible that the cipher is specific to the King family or even to the sisters themselves. While these documents are of potential importance, time limitations have precluded their inclusion in the dissertation. It is, however, my

⁴⁹ Dr Frances Henderson, Worcester College, Oxford.

intention to decipher and transcribe them as an independent project in the future. Wherever possible, Lady Isabella's sources have been augmented and cross-referenced through other contemporary sources, including some family papers and material from the archives of supporters. Fires at the King family home in Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries destroyed a substantial number of the King family papers, but those that survive serve to put Lady Isabella in context. Letters between her father and brother, Robert, reveal close family connections while her older sister Eleanor's diary, provides a brief snapshot of family life for the year 1774, when Lady Isabella was only two. The diary of her cousin, Alexander Hamilton, provides additional information about Lady Isabella's life in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century, whereas Lady Isabella's own correspondence with her friend, the scholar Elizabeth Smith, between 1796 and 1798, illuminates her character and concerns as a young woman.

Chapter 1 will introduce Lady Isabella King. As creator, orchestrator and resident of the Ladies' Association it will examine her background as a member of the Irish aristocracy, her status as a single woman, her evangelical values and her later participation in Dublin and Bath's charitable arenas as influences which contributed to both the character of the Ladies' Association itself and the shape of her involvement.

Chapter 2 will assess the viability of the Ladies' Association in the historical context of the Protestant nunnery. It will consider the discourse by evaluating the extent and character of proposals and ideas – both fictional and real - historically and the success of such institutions in relation to persisting criticism which consistently centred on fears of Catholicism re-establishing itself and concerns about women's natural role in society. It consequently situates the Ladies' Association in this context by identifying the principal historical models on which Lady Isabella based her scheme and examines the practicability of the institution in relation to previous ideas, particularly Sarah Scott's proposal brought to life in her utopian novel of 1762, *Millenium Hall*. Finally, the chapter will assess the impact of contemporary opinion on the institution and in this respect consider the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Chapter 3 considers Lady Isabella's own perception of her capabilities as a philanthropist. The unique challenge of creating and managing a new institution such as the Ladies' Association posed Lady Isabella with a number of problems— some real and some imagined. An examination of her actions and the thinking that underpinned them reveals a tension between the self-doubts exposed in her thoughts/words and her proficiency, demonstrated in her actions. The chapter will argue that in taking on a leading role in all aspects of the management of the Ladies Association her confidence grew as she proved herself a competent decision-maker, a capable organiser and innovative in her solution to problems.

Chapter 4 focuses on Lady Isabella's support networks. It establishes the scope of support available to her in the context of early the nineteenth-century elite; the sector of society which she chose to target as supporters and in doing so engages with the contemporary debates surrounding elite charitable giving and philanthropic sentiment. It will also consider the significance of the geographical, regional and social context of Bath in which she created her networks; examining the networks themselves in order to determine their social and gendered composition, their relation to Bath and their relationship with each other and establish the specific role each played in supporting both the institution and the institutress. The chapter will then think about the ways in which Lady Isabella used the resources available to her in Bath to construct her network of support. Finally, the chapter considers the impact of the move to Cornwallis House, Clifton, firstly on the power and structure of those networks and consequently on the institution itself.

Finally, through a case study of the residents, a group of distressed gentlewomen which has been carefully recovered, Chapter 5 assesses not only the character of such a group of women in the context of early nineteenth-century society, but also evaluates their influence on the success of the institution. It identifies a diverse and broad range of circumstances and experiences which produced not only the classic stereotype, perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the impoverished governess, but many other versions which saw women from the highest classes to the most modest ranks of the middling sort succumb to

this condition. It consequently argues that the heterogeneous character of this class of women in the context of early nineteenth-century society, both complicated Lady Isabella's rigorous selection procedure and played a significant role in effecting a discontented and discordant milieu which contributed to the decline and eventual closure of the society.

CHAPTER 1

LADY ISABELLA KING

Introduction

In June 1816, Lady Isabella King opened the doors of the Ladies' Association, an asylum for impoverished gentlewomen. Her philanthropic venture, which addressed the problems faced by gentlewomen of respectable status whose reduced financial circumstances had left them without the means to support themselves independently, was something quite new. An innovative philanthropist, her experiment in communal living required her to seek out suitable accommodation, obtain funding to support the scheme, create a workable system of government, recruit both supporters and residents and convince the public of its utility. Previous charitable projects, equally as ground-breaking, had in part prepared her for this undertaking, but, in a society where women were still limited in their scope for action, her task was challenging.

Raised in Ireland during the final quarter of the eighteenth century as a member of the aristocracy, Lady Isabella had a privileged upbringing. She lived predominantly at the family's country home in County Roscommon after the death of her mother in 1784. On the death of her father, thirteen years later she moved to Dublin and set up her own household. The period was a turbulent time of social and political change; the impact of first, the American Revolutionary War and then, beginning in 1789, the French Revolution, engendered fear and uncertainty, fuelling the already present murmurings of change within the social order; the rise of evangelicalism, whose doctrine of moral and spiritual regeneration specifically targeted the excesses of the elite; the increased pace of urban growth, rise of radicalism and dismal economic climate all contributed to the picture of a society in flux. In Ireland, social and political upheaval caused by the attempted French invasion in 1796, which passed close to the King's country home; the 1798 rebellion, which

took place while Lady Isabella was living in Dublin and the Act of Union in 1801, added to the experience.¹ Poverty in Dublin, a perennial problem, was, after the completion of a census of the city's inhabitants in 1796, documented for the first time and acknowledged as a real problem and charities began to address the needs of the destitute more vigorously than before. Lady Isabella began her philanthropic career in this climate. After living sometime in Dublin and taking part in its philanthropic arena, she relocated to Bath between 1799 and 1802 and took on a leading role in charitable work there. At the beginning of the nineteenth century philanthropy was not only an increasingly essential arena of activity but also a fashionable pursuit. Considered a morally and spiritually acceptable space for women to inhabit, it provided, in the eyes of contemporaries, a suitable outlet for female action — as long as that action conformed to female codes of behaviour — and increasing numbers of women chose to participate. Their activity has been identified by some historians as practical, hands-on and auxiliary; supporting men as the decision makers rather than working in partnership.² Recent research has identified a more complex picture, challenging the prescriptive 'norm' through the identification of female philanthropic activity which moved beyond this narrow sphere by women who were driven by a number of motivators such as ambition, religion, empathy, and as a means by which to claim civic status.³ This chapter will examine Lady Isabella's own motivation to found the Ladies' Association, arguing her emergence as an active and innovative philanthropist grew out of a variety of factors: her family background and social networks; her evangelical conviction to do good

¹ Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A History* (Cambridge, 2010), chapter 4; Ian McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Isle of Slaves* (Dublin, 2009), pt. III; S.J. Connolly, *Divided Kingdom: Ireland, 1630-1800* (Oxford, 2008), chapter 11; Joseph Robins, *Champagne and Silver Buckles: The Viceregal Court at Dublin Castle, 1700-1922* (Dublin, 2001).

² Martin Gorsky, *Patterns of Philanthropy: Charity and Society in Nineteenth-Century Bristol* (Woodbridge, 1999), chapter 7; Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge, 1992); Frank K. Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy', *International Review of Social History*, vol.19, 3(December, 1974), p.437; *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1980).

³ Andrea Geddes Poole, *Philanthropy and the Construction of Victorian Women's Citizenship: Lady Frederick Cavendish and Miss Emma Cons* (London & Toronto, 2014); Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867* (Oxford, 2009), chapter 4 in particular; Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 2007); 'A Sort of Land Debatable': Female Influence, Civic Virtue and Middle-Class Identity, c.1830-c1860', *Women's History Review*, vol.13, 2(June, 2004), pp. 183-209; Mary Martin, 'Women and Philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740-1870', *London Journal*, vol.19, 2(November, 1994), pp.119-150; Mary P. Ryan, 'The Power of Women's Networks', in J.L. Newton et al. (eds.), *Sex and Class in Women's History* (London, 1985), pp.167-183.

through practical assistance and instruction in moral improvement; her ability to take advantage of the opportunities available to her as a single woman; and her increasing experience and confidence as a philanthropist.

Family Background

Lady Isabella Letitia King was born on c.29th October 1772 in Dublin.⁴ Her father was Edward, 1st Earl of Kingston (1726-1797), and her mother was Jane Caulfield (1737-1784), the illegitimate daughter but heiress of Thomas Caulfield of Donamon Castle, County Roscommon.⁵ She was the sixth of seven children. Her eldest sibling, eighteen years her senior, was Robert, Viscount Kingsborough later 2nd Earl of Kingston; her two elder sisters, Lady Jane and Lady Eleanor, were seventeen and fourteen years older, respectively; while her younger sister, Lady Frances, was two years her junior.⁶ Two other elder brothers, Henry and William, had both died before reaching adulthood.⁷ The King family was a member of the small group of Anglo-Irish families who had acquired land in Ireland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as gifts for services to the crown, and claimed royal descent through Lady Isabella's paternal grandmother's family.⁸ Family member and

⁴ Reply from Lord Kingsborough to his father congratulating him on the news of Lady Isabella's birth: 'I am rejoiced to find my mother and sister Isabella Letitia are so well': Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, King-Harman papers (hereafter PRONI), D/4168/A/5/10, 1st November, 1772.

⁵ According to local writer Skeffington Gibbon: 'Thomas Caulfield died unmarried but a woman of the name Peggy Jordan who afterwards married James Black, a brogue maker by trade, fathered a daughter by him; I believe her name was Jane, whom he had properly educated and I understand he left her £10,000. Sir Edward King being in want of money married her': Skeffington Gibbon, *Recollections of Skeffington Gibbon from 1796 to the Present Year 1820* (Dublin, 1829), p.58; <http://www.thepeerage.com/p2583.htm#i25827> ; <http://www.thepeerage.com/p1280.htm#i12798> , 17th March, 2005.

⁶ Robert, Viscount Kingsborough, b. 1754, m. Caroline Fitzgerald 15th December, 1769, d. 17th April, 1798: <http://www.thepeerage.com/p11741.htm#i117402>, 17th March, 2005; Lady Jane King, b. 1755, m. Laurence Parsons, later 1st Earl Rosse, 11th June, 1772, d. 26th January, 1838: <http://www.thepeerage.com/p1280.htm#i12797> , 17th March, 2005; Lady Eleanor King, b. 1758, d. unmarried, 20th May, 1822: Lichfield Record Office, Lady Eleanor Elizabeth King, will: B/C/11, 1822; <http://www.thepeerage.com/p19036.htm#i190353>, 17th March, 2005; Lady Frances King, b. 1774, m. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Tenison 1803, d. May, 1812: Stirnet genealogy 'King01', <http://www.stirnet.com/html/genie/british/kk/king01.html>, 10th June, 2005; McManus YDNA Project, *The Fortunes of the Tenisons, King-Tenisons and Kingstons of Kilronan Parish, North*, <http://www.mywebtiscali.co.uk/heaven/tenisons.htm>, 10th June, 2005; see appendix 1 for family trees.

⁷ William died young in 1762; Henry died at Clifton in 1785, aged 17 and was buried in Bath: <http://www.thepeerage.com/p19036.htm#i190352> , 17th March, 2005; Bath and North East Somerset Record Office, (hereafter BNSRO) monumental inscription no. 479, Weston cemetery Bath.

⁸ Edward's father, Henry, married Isabella Wingfield, daughter of Viscount Powerscourt, a direct descendant of Edward III. 'From this female line [Isabella] the issue of Sir Henry King and their descendants claim legitimate lineal and unbroken descent from Victor Plantagenet of Poitiers and Cressy by links in the maternal line authenticated in history; acknowledged in the Royal Genealogies and books of peerage and each capable of

biographer, Anthony King-Harman, asserts that his ancestor, Sir John King, who arrived in Ireland in 1603, to claim his Elizabethan gift of land, ‘laid the foundations of the King family so firmly that for all of three hundred years they remained among the wealthiest, most extensively landed and influential of the Ascendancy families’.⁹

Family homes and landholding in County Roscommon, County Sligo and in Dublin substantiate this picture. On the death of his brother, Robert King, 1st and last Baron Kingsborough, in 1755, Lady Isabella’s father inherited a town house, 15 Henrietta Street in an exclusive area of Dublin and King House, in Boyle, County Roscommon.¹⁰



Plate 2: King House, Boyle, County Roscommon

Both were imposing houses, yet, in 1771, the year before Lady Isabella was born, he built a new mansion to replace King House, which, situated in the town of Boyle, he considered too public for an elite country residence.¹¹ Named Kingston Hall, the new

the best legal confirmation’: John D’Alton, *The History of Ireland from the Earliest Period to the Year 1845 when the Annals of Boyle which are Adopted and Embodied as the Running Text Authority Terminate* (Dublin, 1845), p.65.

⁹ Anthony L. King-Harman, *The Kings of King House* (Bedford, 1996), p.13. *The Peerage of Ireland* defines the family origins more clearly: ‘This noble family of King, which hath been thrice advanced to the peerage, were anciently seated at Featherstone Hall, Northallerton, in the county of York, and there possessed of large estates; the first of whom in this kingdom was Sir John King, who in the reign of Queen Elizabeth was very instrumental in reducing the Irish to due obedience’: John Lodge & Mervyn Archdall, *The Peerage of Ireland*, vol.3 (Dublin, 1789), p.218.

¹⁰ Number 15 was the final addition to an exclusive development by Luke Gardiner which was begun in 1723. It was a prime location and was the residence of the noble and the wealthy. (See Plate 7)

¹¹ Harman, *Kings of King House*, p.19.

mansion was located at Rockingham, the family's lakeside demesne, near Boyle. Little evidence remains to substantiate Kingston Hall's sumptuous nature or its fate, although later maps and photographs reveal the vastness of the site which remains today.¹²

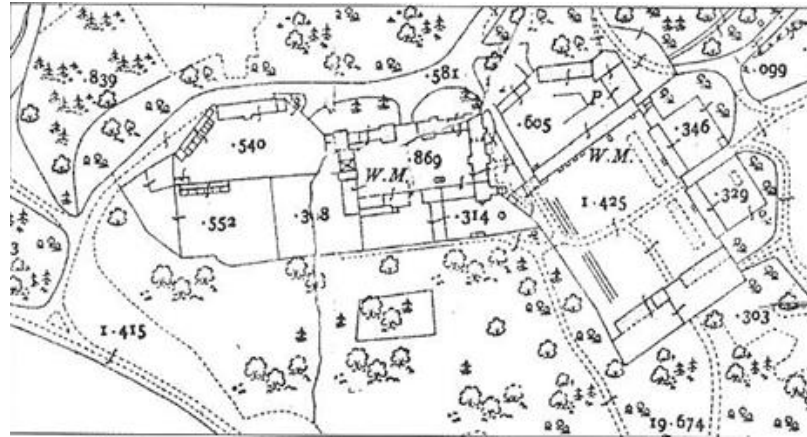


Plate 3: Map of Kingston Hall, 1912

Perhaps some sense of its grandeur can be gleaned from its successor, a magnificent neo-classical mansion, which was named Rockingham House. Designed by John Nash in 1809, for Lady Isabella's nephew, Viscount Lorton, to replace Kingston Hall, family biographers claim it resembled Kingston Hall in its opulence.¹³ Contemporary accounts of the demesne also concentrate on the lake and its islands, a unique and focal feature of the estate. On his tour through Ireland between 1776 and 1779, agriculturalist, Arthur Young noted its beauty; 'it is one of the most delicious scenes I ever beheld, the extent five miles by four, filling the bottom of a gentle valley almost of a circular form ... you look down on six islands ...

¹² *Tait's Magazine*, 1840, p.349; John Clapison & Triona Mullaney-Dignam, *Rockingham, Memories of a Vanished Mansion* (Boyle, 2007), p.11.

¹³ A description of Rockingham in *Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* confirms its luxuriousness and its neo-classical architecture: 'Rockingham House, the superb residence of Viscount Lorton is beautifully situated about two miles from the town [Boyle]. ...the building is of Grecian Ionic architecture, with a noble portico of six columns on each side of which the façade is decorated with as many of the same order; on the north is a colonnade of six ionic columns, and on the east is an entrance through an orangery: the grounds are tastefully laid out and there are four grand entrance lodges leading to the demesne which comprises about 2,000 acres, richly planted': Samuel Lewis, *Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (Dublin, 1837), www.from-ireland.net/lewis/r/boyle.htm, Dr Jane Lyons, Dublin, 3rd June, 2005.

nothing can be more pleasing than their uncommon variety'.¹⁴



Plate 4: Rockingham House

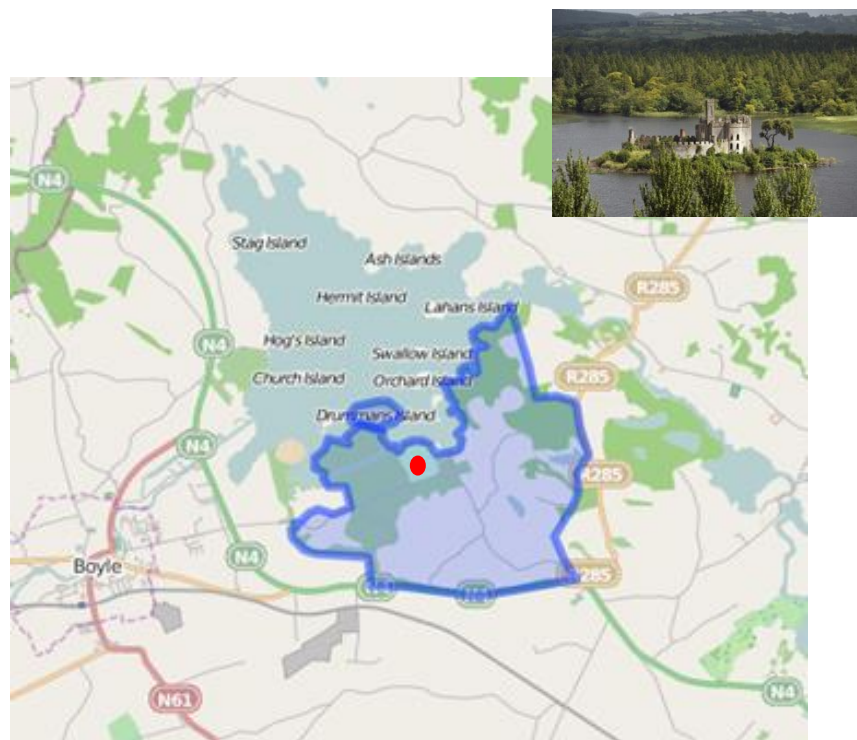


Plate 5: Lough Key & Castle Island (Rockingham House highlighted)

¹⁴ Arthur Young, *A Tour in Ireland with General Observations on the Present State of that Kingdom Made in the Years 1776, 1777, and 1778 and Brought Down to the End of 1779*, 2nd edn, 2 vols, vol.1 (London, 1780), p.264.

Edward played a significant role in managing and improving family status during the second half of the eighteenth century, primarily through the established routes of marriage and title. The arranged alliance between Viscount Kingsborough, and his cousin, Caroline Fitzgerald, sole heiress to the Mitchelstown estates in County Cork, in 1769 when they were both fifteen years old, saw the King family's landholding substantially increased by reuniting previously separated family estates; this helped in resolving financial problems inherited from earlier generations.¹⁵ Although the family enjoyed a prominent financial position, they were not among the pre-eminent of the Irish families, a position reflected in Edward's struggles to raise his family standing through title.¹⁶ The period saw increasing numbers of Irish clamouring for status through ennoblement and while Edward's exhaustive petitioning eventually managed to secure him titles, he was not selected as one of the inaugural sixteen members of the exclusive 'Order of the Knights of St Patrick', established in 1782, to confer exclusivity on the few.¹⁷

Yet, as Protestant landholders the Kings maintained a continuous presence in the Irish Parliament throughout the century by various successive members of the family until the Act of Union in 1801.¹⁸ Letters written between Edward and his son Robert demonstrate their use of patronage networks as the means of securing political posts. Writing from Dublin in 1775, while Robert was touring Europe, Edward raised the question as to whether

¹⁵ Caroline Fitzgerald inherited Mitchelstown estate comprising 100,000 acres in Cork, Limerick and Kerry from her Grandfather James 4th Baron Kingston, while Lord Kingsborough, on the death of his father, inherited the Boyle estate in Co. Roscommon amounting to c30, 000 acres and large parts of Sligo and Roscommon: King-Harman, *The Kings of King House*, p.19.

¹⁶ Edward was successful in raising his family status through title to 1st Baron Kingston of Rockingham, Co. Roscommon (15th July, 1764), Viscount Kingston of Kingsborough, Co. Sligo (15th November, 1766) and 1st Earl of Kingston (25th August, 1768): <http://www.thepeerage.com/p1280.htm#i12798>, 17th March, 2005; PRONI, D/4168/A/3/1-18, correspondence between Edward and Hugh Smithson Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1763-1765; Francis Seymour Conway, 1st Earl of Hertford, his successor, 1765-1767; John Ponsonby, Speaker of the Irish House of Commons and Lord Beauchamp and Lord Frederick Campbell, Chief Secretaries, written between 1764 and 1768.

¹⁷ Robins, *Champagne and Silver Buckles*, pp.89-92.

¹⁸ Edward was an MP until his ennoblement in 1764: for Boyle (1749-1760) and Co. Sligo (1761-1764). In 1795 *The City and Court Calendar or Irish Court Registry for the Year of 1795* records his position as Colonel of the Militia, Co. Roscommon, Governor of Roscommon and Co. Sligo, Recorder of Boyle and member of the Privy Council. He also enjoyed the patronage of Boyle and Sligo with an interest in the election of its MPs (his brother Rt. Hon. Henry King and future son-in-law Thomas Tenison). Lady Isabella's brother, Robert was MP and Governor for Co. Cork and her brother-in-law, Laurence Parsons was MP for King's County. *The City and Court Calendar or Irish Court Registry for the Year of 1795* (Dublin, 1795), pp. 46,114,128,233-4.

Robert would prefer to sit for the county of Sligo or the borough of Boyle on his return.¹⁹ Recommending Sligo as the better option, Edward instructed his son as a matter of urgency to act: ‘as soon as you get to London visit Sir Lawrence Dundas, Lord Palmerston and Mr Fitzmaurice,’ substantial landholders in County Sligo and Roscommon, who, he advised, would ‘give him their interest which is very considerable in that county’.²⁰

Lady Isabella thus grew up in a privileged elite family that was socially and politically active, and where patronage, socializing for political ends and the presence of networks of friends and family members would have been taken for granted. Entertaining at Kingston seems to have been a regular occurrence to establish new connexions and reinforce old ones. A range of visitors were welcomed to the estate during Lady Isabella’s childhood, from the Duke of Rutland, as Viceroy, in 1787, shortly before his death, to members of the extended King family. Entertaining important guests on the islands at Kingston to consolidate his networks, was a favourite pastime of Edward’s. On 2nd August 1774 he advised Robert; ‘Mr Fitzmaurice has been here and seems much pleased with the lake and the islands, particularly the House Island. We sail’d all over the lake in a new boat ... we din’d in the tent in the Castle Island’, while Lady Eleanor’s diary, confirms that the ‘Jentlemen din’d on the islands’.²¹ Extended family were also regular visitors and were frequently mentioned in letters: news of the birth of Robert and Caroline’s third child was greeted with joy in 1773 by Uncles and Aunts King and Knox and cousins Nell, Isabella and Bob and Tom Stewart, all of whom were all at Kingston at the time. Similarly, on her return from Dublin to Kingston in 1774, Lady Eleanor recorded the departure of her uncle, Captain Gore and her Aunt and Uncle King.²²

Women’s involvement in political life provided Lady Isabella with examples of

¹⁹ PRONI, D/4168/A/5/29, letter from Edward to Robert, 26th February, 1775.

²⁰ Henry Temple, 2nd Viscount Palmerston, English MP, served as Lord of the Admiralty and the Treasury, owned estates in Co. Sligo: <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/archives/pdfs/BR137.pdf> [palmerston’s], 20th April, 2012; Sir Lawrence Dundas, Scottish businessman, landowner and politician, bought estates in Co. Sligo and Co. Roscommon from the King family: <http://www.landedestates.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/family-show.jsp?id=356>, 20th April, 2012; Hon. Mr. Fitzmaurice owned an extensive manufactory at Ballymoat, Co. Sligo. It was founded by Lord Shelburne, carried into effect by Lady Shelburne on his death and continued by the Hon. Mr. Fitzmaurice: Joseph Robinson, *A Traveller’s Guide Through Ireland* (Edinburgh, 1806), p333.

²¹ PRONI, D/4168/A/ 5/38, letter from Edward to Robert, 2nd August, 1774; Lady Eleanor’s diary, Saturday, 30th July 1774, King Harman, *The Kings, Earls of Kingston*, pp.40-41.

²² PRONI, D/4168/A/ 5/28, letter from Edward to Robert, 20th August 1773.

female activity that she could adapt and employ later (although in her case via seeking patronage/financial support) for her own ventures. Mary O'Dowd, whose research concentrates on women and politics in Ireland, argues that politics was a family-based affair, where women as well as men used their position and influence to canvas and lobby on



Plate 6: A View of Part of the Grounds and Lake Scenery of Rockingham, Seat of Lord Lorton

behalf of family members and where parliamentary seats were viewed as family possessions.²³ Writing to her mother-in-law, Countess Kingston in 1775, Caroline Viscountess Kingsborough intimated the Countess's specific interest in the political world: 'I am ashamed to send you such stupid letters as I always do, but really I never hear anything that is worth troubling you with, for I am sure you would find no amusement in reading a detail of all the Ladies dresses, and the quantity of feathers they wear etc, and as for politics

²³ Mary O'Dowd, (ed.), 'The Political Writings and Public Voices of Women, c.1500-1850', in Angela Bourke et al (eds.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, 2vols (4 & 5), vol.5 (New York & Cork, 2002), p.10.

I am too stupid to mind their meaning'.²⁴ Although this evidence only tentatively confirms the Countess's political involvement, it testifies to her interest in politics. The participation of other elite women locally was certainly visible: O'Dowd has noted the very active involvement of Elizabeth Hastings, Countess of Moira and her daughter Selina Rawdon, Lady Granard who both canvassed in the constituency of Granard in neighbouring County Longford. She records how 'one potential voter described how Lady Selina visited him and noted down in a pocket book his request for a favour in return for securing his vote'.²⁵

Evidence of socio-political networking in action at Kingston is significant as it is probable that Lady Isabella spent much of her early life in the country. After the deaths of her mother in 1784, when Lady Isabella was just twelve, and her brother, Henry just a year later, she was raised, along with her younger sister, Frances, by her elder sister Eleanor.²⁶ There is little to confirm her whereabouts during this period apart from correspondence written between Lady Isabella and her friend, the scholar Elizabeth Smith during the 1790s, which intimates that at this time Lady Isabella was predominantly at Kingston Hall. A visit from Elizabeth in the late summer of 1796 provides a brief glimpse of life there. Later letters between the two reminisce about country activities and more intellectual pursuits, suggesting that Lady Isabella had had a comfortable, not atypical upbringing — riding Brunette and Alicia, Lady Eleanor and Lady Isabella's horses; walking in the shrubbery; reading and intellectual discussions; and even late night mental meanderings, perched on either one or the other's bed.²⁷

Lady Isabella also grew up in a highly social extended elite family that took an active part in the elite sociability of Dublin that revolved around the Castle at the apogée of

²⁴ PRONI, D/4168/A/5/46, letter from Viscountess Kingsborough to Countess of Kingston, 21st December, 1775.

²⁵ Mary O'Dowd, 'Women and Patriotism in the Eighteenth Century', *History Ireland*, vol.14, 5(September/October, 2006), <http://www.historyireland.com/18th-19th-century-history/women-and-patriotism-in-eighteenth-century>, 25th April, 2014.

²⁶ Lady Eleanor's obituary states that she took over the 'entire charge of her younger sisters': *Christian Observer*, August, 1823, p.534.

²⁷ Harriet Maria Bowdler, (ed.), *Fragments in Prose and Verse, by Miss Elizabeth Smith, Lately Deceased* (London, 1810), pp.54, 59-66, 89.

the Dublin Season in the late eighteenth century.²⁸ Edward and Robert's families often operated as one unit moving regularly between town and country, often sharing children's visits between the families. This suggests that Lady Isabella was likely to have experienced the Season as she was growing up, even when she was too young to take part herself. Indeed, Michele Cohen's work on 'Familiar Conversations' argues that children in elite families were included in conversation and home-based sociability as an important part of their informal education.²⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, the radical thinker and campaigner for women's educational equality, who was employed as a governess to Lord and Lady Kingsborough's two youngest daughters, Margaret and Mary, from 1786-1787, described the lavish organisation which took place at Henrietta Street during the season.³⁰ In a series of letters to her sister, Evelina, when Lady Isabella was fifteen years old, Wollstonecraft, no admirer of the Irish nobility, reported: 'tomorrow the rest of the family is expected [from the country] and then the hurly burly will begin.'³¹ Her next letter describes how the preparations consumed the household:

We have nothing but hurry and confusion here and all about the mighty important business of preparing wreaths of roses for a birthday dress – well it was finished but next week the same work, or something similar will occur, for there is to be a ball at the Castle and a masquerade – and as it is impossible for a fine lady to fix, in time, on her dress, when the day arrives many necessities are wanted and the whole house from the kitchen maid to the governess are obliged to assist and the children forced to neglect their employment.³²

Lady Isabella's upbringing, which was a fairly typical pattern for girls of her class, would have familiarised her with both women's roles in the social arena and modelled for her the

²⁸ Mary O'Dowd, *A History of Women in Ireland, 1500-1800* (Harlow, 2005), chapter 2; 'The Women in the Gallery: Women and politics in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in *From United Irishmen to Twentieth-Century Unionism* festschrift for ATQ Stewart (Dublin, 2004), pp.35-47; Robins, *Champagne and Silver Buckles*, chapters 4 & 5.

²⁹ Michele Cohen, "'Familiar Conversation': The Role of the 'Familiar Format' in Education in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England", in Mary Hilton & Jill Shefrin, (eds.), *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain: Beliefs, Cultures, Practices* (Farnham & Burlington, 2009), pp.99-116.

³⁰ See Plate 7

³¹ Letter from Mary Wollstonecraft to her sister, Everina, 10th February, 1787, Janet Todd, (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London, 2004), p.101.

³² While there are no specific references to Lady Isabella in Wollstonecraft's correspondence, the closeness between the cousins in age and the closeness of the families, as well as their visiting practices, makes it likely that she would have known Lady Isabella as a child, and that Lady Isabella would have taken part in the same sorts of social activities as her charges: letter from Mary Wollstonecraft to her sister, Everina, 3rd March, 1787, Todd, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, p.108.

social skills she needed to move in that level of society as an adult.

In 1848 political and historical writer, Daniel Owen Madden, recorded that by the end of the eighteenth century ‘the house of King ... was very widely connected. Its members had at various periods made very fortunate marriages and the family occupied a very high place in English as well as Irish aristocratic society’.³³ While it has been argued that the Irish aristocracy tended to be held in low regard by its English counterpart, the King family moved in the premier circles, both politically and socially.³⁴ England was also a familiar venue for the King family. Eton was a popular choice of school for sons and the family made regular visits both to London and to Bath which some family members made their permanent home.³⁵ Other members of the King family also took up residence in England permanently. Correspondence written between Lady Isabella’s sister Jane, Countess Rosse and her husband, confirm their residence from the beginning of the nineteenth century, either in London or at their successive country houses, Stretton Hall, Near Burton- on-Trent, Hams Hall, Coleshill, and Elmdon Hall, near Birmingham Warwickshire where Lady Isabella would spend much of her time in her later life. Lady Isabella’s other elder sister, Lady Eleanor, also moved to England, living for some years at Wellington, Shropshire.³⁶

Senior members of the family were elected representative peers after the Act of Union in 1801 and this shift of political focus from Dublin to London, which created an exodus of

³³ Daniel Owen Madden, *Revelations of Ireland in Past Generations* (Dublin, 1848), p.83.

³⁴ Paul Langford has drawn attention to the relative impoverishment of the Irish elite by comparison to the English, particularly with their southern English counterparts, advocating their eagerness to share their opulence and imitate their lifestyle. As for the political arena, Boyd Hilton has described the Irish parliament preceding its amalgamation with Westminster in 1801 as ‘wholly subordinate ... its members being in effect nothing more than a colonial elite and Ireland a client state’: Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1998), p.325; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People: England, 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p.75.

³⁵ Thomas and Isabella, Earl and Countess Howth (Lady Isabella’s aunt and uncle) were regular visitors to Bath and by late eighteenth century they owned a house in Orange Grove where the Countess died on 23rd October, 1791. Their daughters, the Hon. Lady Elizabeth St. Lawrence and the Hon. Lady Frances St. Lawrence married Colonel Irving and the Venerable James Phillott, archdeacon of Bath, in the city, in 1786 and 1808, respectively: <http://www.chapters.Eiretek.org/books/ball1-6/Ball5/ball5.8htm>, 9th May, 2005; Francis Elrington Ball, *A History of the County of Dublin* (Dublin, 1902), chapter 8. Isabella, Countess of Howth was buried at Weston cemetery in Bath with her daughter, Isabella, Lady Sydney (d. 28th October, 1836): BNSRO, Weston cemetery, monumental inscriptions, No. 481. Robert and Caroline’s daughter, Caroline, married Lieutenant General Edward Morrison of Bath in 1800 and Lady Isabella’s grandmother, also named Isabella (d.23rd October, 1764) and brother, Henry, who died at Bristol Hotwells (6th July, 1785) were also buried at Weston cemetery: BNSRO, Weston cemetery monumental inscriptions, No. 479.

³⁶ Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, p.137; Birr Castle Archives, Parsons Family, Earls of Rosse family and estate papers, NRA 25548; King-Harman, *The Kings of King House*, p.65; Lichfield Record Office, will of Lady Eleanor King, B/C/11, 1822.

Irish aristocracy from Dublin, saw Viscount Lorton, Robert and Caroline's second son, swap the family townhouse in Dublin for one in Eaton Square.³⁷ Male and female family connections with the English court and with the upper strata of English elite society extended from the time of Lady Isabella's birth through to the period of the establishment of the Ladies' Association.³⁸ Her sister-in-law, the Dowager, Countess of Kingston's social standing and support were the most significant, given her active support for the Ladies' Association, but the fact that Lady Isabella's nephew was Groom of the Bedchamber to the king provided an excellent opportunity for patronage via direct access to the royal family.³⁹ While Lady Isabella would inevitably have benefitted from this association of close relatives with the apex of London society, Lady Isabella herself was also presented to the Queen at her 'coming out' at St James' Palace on the 6th March 1800 by the Countess.⁴⁰ Her later involvement in the London Season is noted by the *Oracle and Daily Advertiser*, which reported on 29th May that she had opened a masked ball hosted by Lady Kenmare, an Irish connexion, with Mr Fitzgerald.⁴¹

Lady Isabella's presence in London may indicate that she had moved permanently to England prior to 1800. However, we do know that she lived in Dublin for a period following her father's death in November 1797 and there is no authoritative confirmation of her

³⁷ Lawrence Parsons, Earl of Rosse (husband of Lady Isabella's eldest sister Jane) was elected as one of the original twenty-eight representative peers in Westminster in August 1800. He was replaced by nephew, George, 3rd Earl Kingston, on his death in 1807. George was subsequently joined by his brother Robert, Viscount Lorton, on 8th February, 1823: Jacqueline Hill, *From Patriots to Unionists: Dublin Civic Politics and Irish Protestant Patriotism, 1660-1840* (Oxford, 1997), p.292; King-Harman, *The Kings of King House*, p.24.

³⁸ Lady Isabella's brother and sister-in-law, the Viscounts Kingsborough, who rented a house in Hill Street, Berkeley Square in 1773, were frequently seen at court. In January, 1773, they were presented in advance of the Queen's birthday celebrations: 'I go to the Levée a Wednesday and Caroline goes with me a Thursday to the Drawing Room that we may be presented': PRONI, D/4168/A/5/15 &16, letters from Robert to his father Edward, January, 1773.

³⁹ In 1790, after her formal separation from Robert, Caroline rented Old Windsor Manor House and in 1802, then Dowager Countess of Kingston, she relocated to Portland Place in central London. Continuing her connection with court circles, newspapers reported regular dinners and 'elegant routs' hosted by her. This close connection with the court and London society was continued by her son and Lady Isabella's nephew, George, later 3rd Earl of Kingston. Born in London, he was a godson of George III and for much of his life was welcomed at court not only as godson of the monarch but also as a friend of the Prince of Wales and later, as George IV. This privileged position eventually afforded him a British peerage and an influential position at court. In 1815, the *Morning Post* congratulated George's brother, 'Hon. Col. King 2nd Battalion 5th Regt. upon being appointed one of the Grooms of the Bedchamber to his Majesty by the Earl of Kingston': *Morning Post* (27th March, 1802); Bill Power, *White Knights, Dark Earls: The Rise and Fall of an Anglo-Irish Dynasty* (Cork, 2001), p.59; *Morning Post* (24th February, 1815).

⁴⁰ *True Briton* (7th March 1800).

⁴¹ Mr Fitzgerald was probably the brother of Caroline, Dowager Countess of Kingston: *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* (29th May, 1800).

presence in England until her arrival in Bath between 1799 and 1803. As a single woman, her father's death, when she was twenty-five, inevitably altered Lady Isabella's position within the family. Her elder brother died less than five months after their father and while she deferred to her nephews, George, 3rd Earl of Kingston and his younger brother, Robert, Viscount Lorton, who were her contemporaries in age, her move to Dublin at this time suggests a shift of focus towards independence.⁴² Taking 'a house, no 41 in Great Georges Street', a short walk from Henrietta Street, Lady Isabella set up her own household.⁴³ Her income would probably have come from interest earned from a £10,000 legacy left to her by her father and a half share in a house just outside Dublin, left to her by her aunt, Mrs Walcot.⁴⁴ Although by the turbulent 1790s, Dublin was a very different city than it had been in the 1770s, accounts of Lady Isabella's participation in Dublin society are recorded by her cousin, Alexander Hamilton, in his diary between 1798 and 1800.⁴⁵

As a single woman of marriageable age, and an heiress, Lady Isabella could have attracted significant social attention in Dublin; however, her correspondence with her friend Elizabeth Smith suggests that she quickly tired of the frivolity and extravagance of the Season: 'What you say of dissipation is exactly what I expected from you. You have seen so little of it that it was very natural that you should enjoy it at first, but you are certainly not made for it'.⁴⁶ Elizabeth's letters, alive with intellectual discussion, point to Lady Isabella's real passion. Although none of her letters to Elizabeth survive, Elizabeth's replies overwhelmingly suggest that they were equally packed with intellectual and stimulating conversation. Literature was one of their favourite topics and Elizabeth's letters reveal a

⁴² George, 3rd Earl of Kingston, inherited Mitchelstown Castle and Robert, Viscount Lorton, inherited the Rockingham estate from their father Robert 2nd Earl Kingston.

⁴³ See Plate 7.

⁴⁴ Diaries of Alexander Hamilton, 1793-1801, Armagh Public Library, object number p001594113 (hereafter APL), vol.5, p.128, May, 1798; <http://www.chaptersofdublin.com/books/ball1-6/Ball2/ball2.3.html>, 23rd April, 2005; Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, p.204; King-Harman, *The Kings of King House*, p.45. For single women's patterns of inheritance in Ireland see Deborah Wilson, *Women, Marriage and Property in Wealthy Landed Families in Ireland, 1750-1850* (Manchester & New York, 2009), p.122.

⁴⁵ Alexander Hamilton records visits to and from Lady Isabella for tea and dinner and trips to the theatre: APL, vol.1, 25th February, 1798, p.117; 24th May, 1798, p.128; vol.2, 10th June 1798, p.3; 8th July, 1798, p.11; 1798, p.22; 25th December, 1798, p.45.

⁴⁶ Bowdler, *Fragments in Prose and Verse*, p.110.

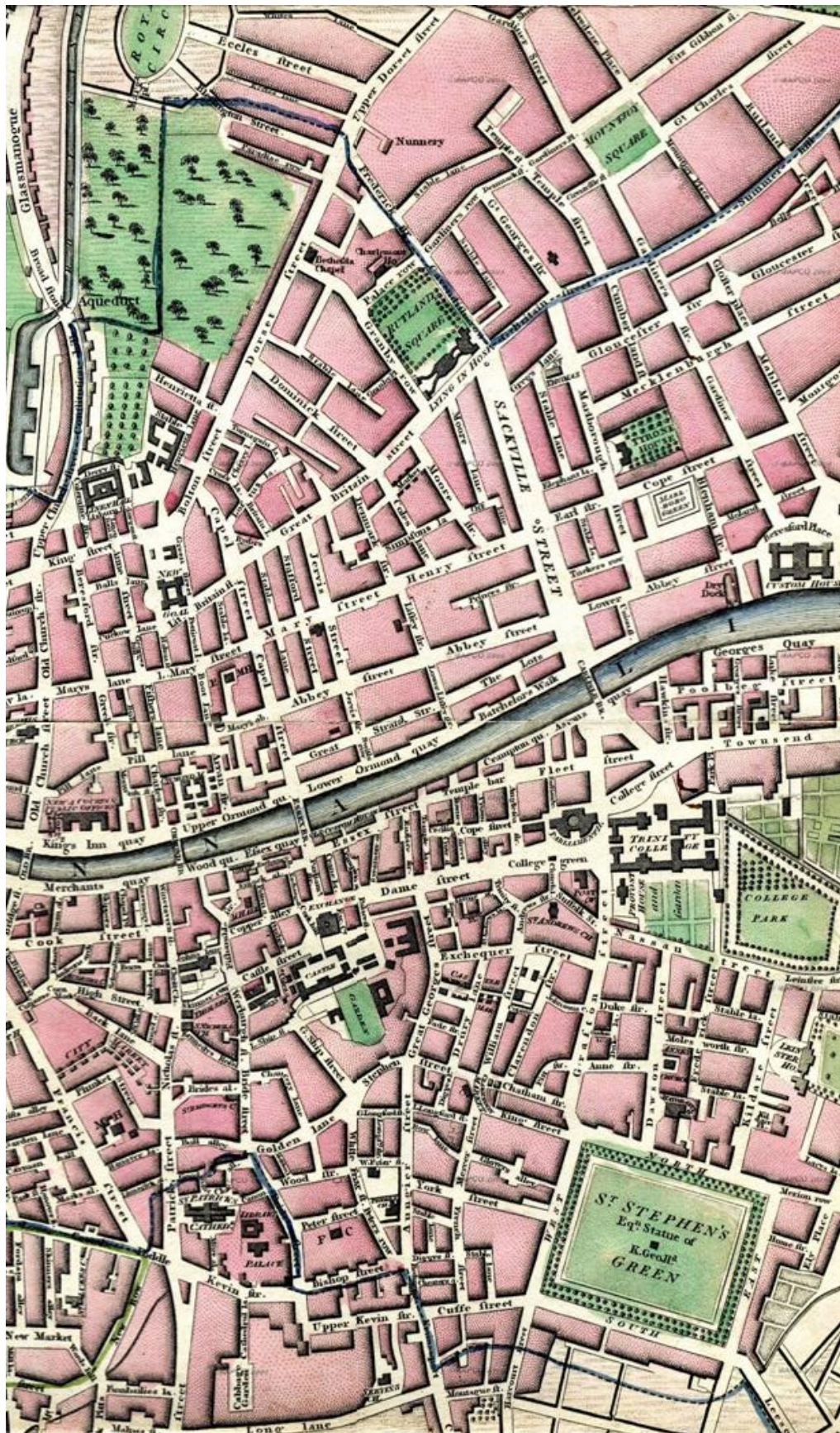


Plate 7: Map of Dublin, 1798, showing the location of Henrietta Street and Great Georges Street

relationship of ideas, upon which they both seem to have thrived. Lady Isabella's future was also a strong theme; her social experience in Dublin led Elizabeth to declare: 'one can allow those to spend their lives in folly, whose minds are incapable of anything better, but such as yours *should* not be thrown away, and I am persuaded *will* not'.¹ Lady Isabella's appetite for an intellectual challenge and her desire to put her life to some good purpose, coupled with Elizabeth's encouragement to 'seek for happiness in ... rational employments, for which you are well qualified',² are likely to have contributed to Lady Isabella's decision to direct her energies towards the philanthropic arena.

The Making of a Female Philanthropist

Rosemary Raughter has identified Irish women's motivations to take part in philanthropic activity as 'complex', but is clear that religion was the uniform driving force, regardless of belief; she considers this 'unsurprising given the centrality of charity in Christian teaching'.³ While Lady Isabella's motivations were likely to have emanated from her intellectual discussions with her friend Elizabeth, they are linked most clearly to two specific aspects of her life; her status as a single woman and her devotion to her evangelical faith.

With so little extant personal writing from Lady Isabella, it is difficult to determine the reason for her single status. It is possible that, as a woman of independent means, spinsterhood was a conscious choice. Her correspondence with Elizabeth Smith discloses conversations at Kingston Hall as early as 1796 which relate to future plans for an Association of Ladies. With a high level of commitment required to initiate and maintain such an undertaking, these conversations reveal a thought process which could indicate this choice. Writing to Lady Isabella from Bath in January 1797, Elizabeth frustratingly quipped: 'Our Millennium Hall scheme appears so distant, that I fear we shall be grown cross and

¹ Ibid.

² Although *Fragments* was published in 1808, before the foundation of the Ladies' Association, Harriet Bowdler's notes, which refer to Lady Isabella's reputation in Bath at the time, substantiate Elizabeth's observations: 'How far Miss Smith's ideas with regard to this lady have been realized, is well known to the grateful inhabitants of Bath': Ibid.

³ Rosemary Raughter, (ed.), 'Philanthropic Institutions of Eighteenth-Century Ireland', in Angela Bourke, et al. (eds.), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*, 2vols, (4 & 5), vol.5 (New York & Cork, 2002), p. 683.

disagreeable old maids before we can put it in execution.’⁴ For many elite women, with the benefit of wealth and its consequent independence, marriage was not imperative, despite its pre-eminent status, and aristocratic daughters, especially younger ones, often remained single. Kimberly Schutte, whose recent study examines marriage patterns of aristocratic women between 1485 and 1920, has estimated that approximately eleven per cent of British aristocratic women remained unmarried during the eighteenth century, rising to approximately fifteen and a half per cent by the nineteenth century.⁵ She concludes that for them endogamous marriage was the most desirable and the single state was preferable to marrying down.⁶ Amy Froide has suggested, based on the identification of a *pattern* of factors that predisposed women to remain single, that they rarely made a straightforward choice not to marry; rather they made a series of decisions and non-decisions.⁷ Although her research concentrates on single women more generally, the two most prevalent factors she has identified, sickness and deformity, and family responsibility, often linked to care-giving, could also potentially explain Lady Isabella’s single status. While there is no indication that she had a disability, she certainly suffered bouts of ill health. Letters written by her during the lifetime of the Ladies’ Association confirm that she suffered from asthma, a condition which impacted on her input into the institution from time to time. Writing to a resident, Mrs Halkett, in 1832, at a time when her health was extremely fragile, she confided: ‘I am going to indulge in the luxury of the sea breezes *for a week or two* with the hope of lessening the severity of my summer attacks of asthma.’⁸ As the older of the two younger daughters, it is also possible that the role of running the household fell onto Lady Isabella’s shoulders as soon as she was old enough, due to the early death of her mother and that she lived with her father until his death in 1797. Indeed, by May 1798, just six months after his death, Lady Isabella had moved to Dublin, and by 1802, relocated again to Bath.⁹

⁴ Bowdler, *Fragments in Prose and Verse*, p.65.

⁵ Kimberly F. Schutte, ‘Marrying by the Numbers: Marriage Patterns of Aristocratic British Women, 1485-2000’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 2011, Table 51, p.272.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁷ Froide, *Never Married*, p.183.

⁸ DRO, H7/7/19, letter to Mrs. Halkett, 9th June, 1832.

⁹ APL, vol.1, p.128, May, 1798.

As an elite single woman Lady Isabella experienced an independence which was not enjoyed by all single women, yet historically the never-married woman has not fared well. For women in general marriage was the norm and spinsterhood, regardless of class, was a disadvantage; their single and childless status not only cast them as redundant in a society which foregrounded marriage and the family, but also rendered them a threat to the normative family unit. Richard Steele's article on marriage, first printed in his June 1710 edition of *The Tatler* but still reiterated as relevant in 1823, leaves no doubt why it was considered so crucial. Depicting marriage as the key to social prosperity, he explained carefully: 'that great change of single life into marriage is the most important; as it is the source of all relations, and from whence all other friendships and commerce do principally arise'.¹⁰ With this understanding it is perhaps unsurprising that there was little conception that singleness could be a chosen state. In 1785, William Hayley, despite defending the 'Old Maid' against charges which rendered them 'absolute *non-entities*,' was bewildered why anyone should choose this condition. He reasoned: 'the total exemption from such innocent, or rather laudable desires, is hardly within the line of possibility'.¹¹ With no sanctioned role, never-married women were characterised at best as dependents, reliant on family good-will and, at worst, as ill-tempered, envious and gossiping creatures. Looked on with pity and regarded with contempt and ridicule, they were often the subject of vitriolic attacks by contemporary commentators. Even William Hayley emphasised their childless state by classifying them 'ancient virgins'.¹² Lucy Lyttelton Cameron, friend of Lady Isabella and sister-in-law of Mary-Anne Cameron, a resident of the Ladies' Association, further developed this unappealing depiction of the spinster. In 1841 and looking back to the recent past, her study of *Early Women in Past and Present Times*, proffered a view of their life as self-interested, purposeless and superfluous:

Time was, when a youth of folly, and an old age of cards described too

¹⁰ Richard Steele, 'On Marriage and the Customary Ceremonies- Impertinence of Ways,' *The Tatler*, 184 (June 1710) reprinted in, *The British Essayists with Prefaces*, vol.1 (London, 1823).

¹¹ William Hayley, *A Philosophical, Historical and Moral Essay on Old Maids*, 3vols, vol.1 (London, 1785), pp.4, 13.

¹² *Ibid*, p.4.

well the life of single females; disappointment of vain expectations was terminated by perpetual discontent; ill directed activity was wasted in the minute details of unprofitable things or in the acquisition of the meanest kind of information.¹³

While prescriptive literature inevitably had some foundation, such generalisations have undoubtedly limited our understanding of the space occupied by the never-married single woman. Lucy Cameron seemed to be aware of this, pointing out: 'that vain and trifling and often the peevish and discontented character of many individuals of this community have given cause to much just animadversion, is very true, and hence many innocent persons have shared a blame they never earned.'¹⁴ In recovering the image of the single woman from its stereotype, Cameron's observations demonstrate that not all contemporaries viewed the single woman in a negative light.

The peculiar circumstances of the spinster have led historians to argue for a more active and independent role for them. Amy Froide's more general focus advocates that, in a society which tried to deny them a place they had to create one for themselves and has consequently asked, was it possible for them to carve out neutral or even positive roles for themselves?¹⁵ Other historians have identified a pro-active attitude, anxious to be useful and purposeful members of the society in which they lived.¹⁶ Specific studies into elite single women's activities, particularly those by Alison Duncan and Ruth Larsen, whose research situates these women within the family context, argue similarly.¹⁷ Lady Isabella's own view

¹³ Lucy Lyttelton Cameron was the sister of authoress Mary Martha Sherwood: *Early Women in Past and Present Times* (London, 1841), chapter 3, p.31.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.30.

¹⁵ Froide, *Never Married*, p.184.

¹⁶ 'Lives of spinsters were not uniformly grim and unfulfilling...they considered their lives devoted to domestic pursuits and religious and charitable activities worthwhile/satisfying': Christine Adams, 'A Choice not to Wed? Unmarried Women in Eighteenth-Century France', *Journal of Social History*, vol.29, 4(summer, 1996), pp.883-889; 'what characterizes many single women in this period is not merely their endurance as victims in what for many was a dreary and monotonous life but the way they were constantly probing the limits of what was permitted to them as single women ... many managed to be far more than passive victims and by sheer persistence made a life for themselves that gave them at least degree of fulfilment and even a measure of independence': Hill, *Women Alone*, p.181.

¹⁷ 'Women claimed, negotiated or were expected to fulfil a variety of active and familial roles': Alison Duncan, 'Power of the Old Maid: The Never-Married Gentlewoman in her Family, 1740-1835', *Women's History Magazine*, vol.63, (summer, 2010), pp.11-18; 'many were not pathetic figures to be pitied or feared. Absence of a husband did not mean women had to lead secluded lives, for those who had the desire or the ability opportunities did exist': Ruth Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune: Elite Singlewomen's Experiences in Yorkshire, 1730-1860', *Women's History Review*, vol.16, 3(July, 2007), pp.389-401; Sandra Dunster, 'Useless and Insignificant Creatures? Spinsters in the Nottinghamshire Upper Class, 1720-1820', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, vol.102, (1998), pp103-112.

actively acknowledged the spinster in society. Engaging with the debate regarding their place, Lady Isabella, as a single woman herself, first and foremost recognised their role as separate from married women and the family in the social framework of early nineteenth-century England. Acknowledging their consequent redundant nature in a letter to her sister in 1813, regarding the recruitment of women similar to herself to support the Ladies' Association, she argued that they should have a more active, independent and useful social role:

Now if gentlewomen of independent fortune who have no business, no family cares, such as myself for example, would consider it their peculiar duty to society to assist in protecting and instructing those who though well born have neither friends or [fortune] home, it would be rightly employing that activity of mind which when not usefully directed is so apt to render its spinsters so meddling and so perniciously [?] in interfering with taking upon us the employments of duties which properly belong to others, and thus deranging the good order of society.¹⁸

Although Lady Isabella identifies the family as a woman's primary social focus, her proposal, which removes single women from the sphere of their own families, expands our current understanding of the scope of elite single women's activity at this time. While Lady Isabella's vision extends the sphere of activity for elite women, her language in her notes and correspondence suggests her thought process remained rooted in the model of the family unit. As the self-confessed 'parent' of the Ladies' Association, Lady Isabella personified the institution.¹⁹ Referring to it as this 'child of my own brain,' in a letter to Lady Wilton in 1813, she drew parallels between its creation and the natural process of procreation.²⁰ It is likely that she referred to the Ladies' Association in this way to friends and supporters on a regular basis, as correspondence addressed to her from general trustees of the institution contains similar language. Writing to her in April 1820, Earl Manvers concluded encouragingly: 'With every sincere wish that this child of your Ladyship's adoption may overcome all its difficulties and attain to full maturity'; whereas, Sir Benjamin Hobhouse

¹⁸ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Countess Rosse, 1813.

¹⁹ DRO, H7/7/13, general government of the household, nd.

²⁰ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to Lady Wilton, 1813.

praised her institution, which, he was convinced ‘has thriven under your nursing’.²¹ While Lady Isabella’s language, both in her notes and in wider discussions, demonstrates her inclination to think about the Ladies’ Association in maternal terms, and her strong association with familial structures of authority is obvious, her words also indicate that she clearly recognised single women’s place as individuals in wider society. She was a strong advocate of single women carving out a ‘peculiar’ or distinctive role for themselves, not only to direct their mental and physical energy towards a useful cause in order to maintain the balance of society, but also to forge their own space and identity, and in doing so vindicate their place as useful and valid citizens.

One theme that runs through Lady Isabella’s correspondence is the peculiar nature of single women’s time. Ruth Larsen, in her study of elite single women in Yorkshire during this period, emphasises that it was their unique circumstances which gave them the space and the time to be active and powerful forces, both in their families and in the wider world.²² Amy Froide has similarly argued that single women with no immediate family to consider and sufficient wealth to support themselves possessed the liberty to follow vocations and the time to develop friendships and expand connections through their use of elite networks.²³ Lady Isabella, who emphasized the importance of using time wisely and productively, also drew attention to the amount of thinking or ‘mind’ time available to elite women ‘destitute of nearer ties and unfettered by primary obligations’.²⁴ In a letter to an anonymous bishop, c.1814, she reflected on the limits of her contribution to the Ladies’ Association, concluding that her single status gave her the ability ‘to devote my time and my thoughts with unmarried diligence to the well doing of the experiment is all that is in my power’.²⁵ As a single woman, she could focus absolutely on the task in hand, in contrast to the married

²¹ Earl Manvers’ comments could be interpreted simply as reference to Lady Isabella’s philanthropic activity as ‘female’, yet as general trustee of the institution, Hobhouse was both deferential to and respectful of Lady Isabella’s primary role in financial matters (see chapter 3 for an in depth discussion): DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Earl Manvers to Lady Isabella, 27th April, 1820; DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Sir Benjamin Hobhouse to Lady Isabella, 27th June, 1829.

²² Larsen, ‘For Want of a Good Fortune’, p.397.

²³ Froide, *Never Married*, p.184. Froide is not alone in stressing the importance of networks for single women. See also Duncan, ‘Power of the Old Maid’, p.11; Larsen, ‘For Want of a Good Fortune’, p.390.

²⁴ Jane West, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 3 vols, vol.3 (London, 1806), pp.90-91.

²⁵ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anonymous bishop, c.1814.

woman, whose familial commitments necessarily divided her attention. Indeed, in 1820, an article by Robert Southey in the *Gentleman's Magazine* drew attention to Lady Isabella's total commitment to her undertaking: 'In 1816 it was matured and methodized by the unwearied zeal of Lady Isabella who has in a peculiar manner devoted her time, her influence, and her fortune to its foundation and support'.²⁶

Lady Isabella's status as a single female also directed her sympathies towards the plight of other women, especially single gentlewomen whose adverse circumstances led them to experience hardship and impoverishment. Writing to the Hon. Miss Wodehouse in 1817, she revealed that her motives were not just for the good of society itself but 'from a wish to promote the improvement and happiness of my own sex'.²⁷ Although her inheritance precluded her from experiencing the financial hardship that many of these women encountered, her single status and the death of both her mother and father while she was still young may well have increased her empathy for these women.²⁸ Her desire to improve the circumstances of single women was lifelong: in her will, Lady Isabella bequeathed a large proportion of her estate to single female relatives, especially those who were less well provided for by their own immediate family.²⁹ She left £1,000 each to her grand nieces Eleanor and Mary Meares, daughters of her cousin Mary, who were spinsters, £1,000 to the unmarried daughters of her nephew Richard King, and £300 to her grand niece Eleanor Stewart, who was also a spinster.³⁰ The daughters of junior family members with numerous

²⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.90 (May, 1820), p.418.

²⁷ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to the Hon. Miss Wodehouse, 4th February, 1817.

²⁸ For a broader discussion on the subject of empathy and sympathy see chapter 4.

²⁹ In this respect Lady Isabella was not all that unusual. Amy Louise Erickson's research suggests that single women often made bequests to other women; she argues that nieces were a particular favourite. Deborah Wilson's study of elite Irish women agrees, but extends the argument to family members more generally: Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London & New York, 1995), chapter 12, see particularly p.217; Wilson, *Women, Marriage and Property*, p.116; National Archives (hereafter NA), will of Lady Isabella King, PROB 11/2018, image ref 53.

³⁰ Living for sometime in Richmond Place Clifton, Mary's two daughters did not reach the social level of their mother. Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, p.318. Richard Fitzgerald King (1779-1856), was the youngest of the seven sons and five daughters of Robert and Caroline, the Viscounts Kingsborough. Typically, as a younger son he entered the clergy and was vicar of Great Chesterford in Essex. He married Williamina Ross and had ten children; six sons and four daughters, three of whom were spinsters:

<http://www.cracroftspeerage.co.uk/online/content/index399.htm>, 7th May, 2011;

www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/index.jsp, 15th September, 2009. Eleanor Stewart, spinster, b. 1780, was one of the sixteen children, (eight sons and eight daughters) of Merchant, Edward Stewart of Hill House Winterbourne and formerly of Killymoon and London. He was the sixth of the eight sons and three daughters of William Stewart and Eleanor King (sister to Edward 1st Earl of Kingston). Eleanor participated in the

siblings, these women were potentially in a precarious financial position. She also bequeathed £150 to her maid, Eliza Hunting, who, after many years in her service had become her confidential servant, and £150 in stock to two unknown females, Elizabeth Crowe and Rebecca Bowles.³¹

A committed devotee of the established church, Lady Isabella also became increasingly inspired to action through the doctrine of evangelicalism. When her own religious views became evangelised is difficult to determine, but by the end of the eighteenth century an evangelical thread had increasingly begun to dominate those of her closest relatives, particularly her sisters Lady Eleanor and Jane, Countess Rosse, and Jane's daughter- and son-in-law, the Viscount Lortons. David Spring, whose research focuses on the religion of the aristocracy in this period, has argued that the Anglo-Irish evangelical revival, which he asserts, developed separately to Clapham and English Evangelicalism, 'bred an aggressive Protestantism in reaction to an aggressive Catholicism.'³² While the Kings shared this strand of anti-Catholicism, they also shared English evangelicals' commitment to moral reformation. Active from the mid-1780s and separate in this instance from the earlier evangelicalism of Wesley, Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon, late eighteenth-century Anglican evangelicalism has been primarily attributed to the Clapham Sect. Its most prominent member was William Wilberforce, who recorded his purpose in his journal in 1787: 'Almighty God has set before two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners.'³³ Herbert Schlossberg has noted that the political centre of the campaign was Clapham common, where influential members such as Henry Thornton, Zachary Macaulay and John Venn, who shared Wilberforce's views, congregated to promote the faith through their writing. The primary vent for their expression was through

establishment of the Ladies' Association through the distribution of pamphlets which explained its purpose: DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Mrs Iremonger, 26th November, 1813; Sir Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1836), p.1436.

³¹ NA, will of Lady Isabella King, PROB 11/2018, image ref 53.

³² David Spring, 'Aristocracy, Social Structure and Religion in the Early Victorian Period,' *Victorian Studies*, vol.6, 3(March, 1963), p.278.

³³ For the most recent work on William Wilberforce see Anne Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends* (Oxford, 2012), p.24; Robert Wilberforce & Samuel Wilberforce, *Life of William Wilberforce*, 5vols, vol.1 (London, 1838), p.149.

the establishment of philanthropic societies for moral and religious reform, missionary work and through high-profile political influence. At the same time the religious heart of the movement, which was headed by Charles Simeon, was located at Cambridge, while Hannah More's activity near Bristol was a third locus of importance.³⁴ By the beginning of the nineteenth century evangelical influence was spreading. Historians have argued that the rapid growth created a significant impact on British society in the years between 1780 and 1830, and 'established a moral hegemony over public life.'³⁵ Although generally understood as a middle-class phenomenon, evangelicalism also attracted a strong following among the elite. Indeed Peter Mandler reminds us that 'it began and in many respects continued as a movement for the reform of upper-class mores.'³⁶ Aristocratic women were particularly drawn to it; they saw it as their special mission to convert, not just the masses but also aristocratic men in their circles and carried out their mission with energy, often through philanthropic activity.³⁷ Good works were taken to be the only true sign of conversion. National philanthropic institutions such as the Anti-Slavery Society, the Proclamation Society and the Sunday School Society were established and well supported, as were local, more personal ventures. In tandem with increasing lay activity, the number of evangelical clergy also increased: the first evangelical bishop was consecrated in 1815 and by 1830 somewhere between a quarter and a half of the entire ministry were evangelical.³⁸

Lady Isabella's evangelical views are most clearly demonstrated through her inculcation of its values to those close to her, something which she saw as her spiritual and moral duty. Her influence is perhaps witnessed most demonstrably in Miss Brotherson. As a resident of the Ladies' Association, Lady Isabella's personal assistant to her evangelical protégée, Miss Brotherson ardently accredited her developing and devout evangelical ethos

³⁴ Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Ohio, 2000), p.62.

³⁵ Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, p.219; Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961), pp.6-10; Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England, 1734-1984* (Edinburgh, 1989), p.103.

³⁶ Peter Mandler, 'From Almack's to Willis's: Aristocratic Women and Politics, 1815-1867', in Amanda Vickery, (ed.), *Women Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750-The Present* (Stanford, 2001), p161.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 162-163.

³⁸ The first evangelical bishop was Henry Ryder, Bishop of Gloucester: Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England*, p.66.

to Lady Isabella's teaching. Writing to Lady Isabella in 1835, after the closure of the institution, she expressed her deep gratitude: 'Indeed dearest Lady Isabella it is a subject to which I can never be sufficiently gratified to you — for the effects of the kind and spiritual instruction I have received from you will follow me through eternity.'³⁹ Miss Brotherson's letter exposed the depth of her devotion:

I was powerfully reminded of that great day when we shall all awake from the sleep of death, and put on that glorious apparel prepared for us in the kingdom of our beloved Lord. — Oh! How trifling does the world and all its concerns appear to the mind in those moments of happy contemplation — and how much do we wonder at ourselves for suffering our hearts to be so absorbed in them! — What stronger proof can be given of the corruption of our nature — *surely none* — I like Jenks prayers better everyday — I can always find one to suit my frame of mind, let it be what it may — It is like always having a friend at hand — and I do thank you for giving me the book.⁴⁰

Although evangelicals ultimately believed, as Boyd Hilton points out, that 'justification comes through faith in the atonement alone,' Lady Isabella, like many of her contemporaries, was certain that good works and earthly duties were the route to salvation.⁴¹ Writing to an anonymous party in 1814 she proclaimed: 'We are all bound to endeavour to promote the glory of God and the happiness of our fellow creatures and our own happiness depends upon our own so doing'. Her beliefs led her to see the world as — in Catherine Hall's terms — 'immoral and distracting', and guided her to the role of 'moral missionary.'⁴²

Lady Isabella's early exposure to philanthropy in Ireland centred both on family activity and on Dublin as a developing centre for voluntary associative charity. Margaret Preston's research into the charitable arena in Ireland at this time has confirmed that, similar to England, the Protestant charitable network was well developed from the late eighteenth century onwards. The King family commitment, in line with her research, was encouraged

³⁹ DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Miss Brotherson, 1835/6.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Jenks, *Evangelical Meditations upon Various and Important Subjects*, originally published 1702, republished by Charles Simeon, 29th edn, (London, 1816). In his *Thoughts on Family Worship*, James Wadell Alexander commented; 'The work of Mr Jenks is by far superior to anything known to us of this sort, being warm, orthodox and scriptural, and imbued from beginning to end with evangelical sentiments': James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Philadelphia, 1847), p.199; DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Miss Brotherson, c.1835/6.

⁴¹ Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*, p.7.

⁴² DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anonymous, 1814; Catherine Hall, 'The Early Formation of Domestic Ideology', in Sandra Burman, (ed.), *Fit Work for Women* (London, 1979), pp.15-29.

and informed by two motivating factors: their strong religious beliefs and their paternalistic duty as landholders and members of the aristocracy.⁴³ There is little indication of charitable activity by Lady Isabella's immediate family during her formative years, but the participation of her sisters, the Dowager Countess Rosse and Lady Eleanor, both close influences, confirm their prolific benevolent activity once adults. While Countess Rosse's charitable contribution paid special attention to Ireland, her benevolence extended as far as the wilds of America, where she was involved in the establishment of Kenyon College, a theological seminary in the frontier regions of Ohio, part of a project initiated by Bishop Philander Chase, in 1824.⁴⁴ Lady Eleanor's charitable contribution, although no less profuse, was more parochial. While she contributed to missionary societies working abroad, most of her charity was focused on the environs of her English home in Wellington, Shropshire, where she contributed towards schools, made liberal subscriptions to religious charitable societies and was instrumental in organising the mass distribution of religious books and tracts.

The charitable activities of Lady Kingsborough, Lady Isabella's sister-in-law, perhaps demonstrate most clearly the range of influences Lady Isabella may have been exposed to in her early years. Janet Todd has argued that Lady Kingsborough, in patronising fashionable charities and teaching her daughters the paternalistic 'duties' of their station, including how to act benevolently to those below them, was motivated more by a need to promote her status than a genuine desire to do good.⁴⁵ Other accounts of her charitable endeavours however, promote her as a dynamic paternalistic philanthropist, both capable and admired as landlord of her estates.⁴⁶ Building upon her grandfather, James, 4th Baron Kingston's philanthropic achievements in Mitchelstown, she initiated a number of projects

⁴³ Margaret H. Preston, *Charitable Words: Women Philanthropy and the Language of Charity* (Westport, Connecticut & London, 2004), p.x.

⁴⁴ Bishop Chase was a pioneering missionary committed to the expansion of the Episcopal Church in Ohio and Illinois in the early years of Westward Expansion. Facing substantial opposition and with funding for his project unforthcoming in America, he looked to England to raise money to build Kenyon College, a seminary for the education of clergy which was established in Gambier Ohio in 1824:

<http://www2.kenyon.edu/khistory/chase/biography/biography.htm> , 22nd January, 2009.

⁴⁵ Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, pp.73-74.

⁴⁶ King-Harman, *The Kings of King House*, pp.26, 29.

to help both estate workers and townspeople.⁴⁷ She was responsible for building the Protestant church, establishing a grocery and clothes shop where goods were sold at wholesale prices, founding an orphan school and employing a doctor to visit the poor and provide them with medicine. An article written in *Belle Assemblée* in 1810, which referred to her as ‘The Good Countess’, backs up this more venerable charitable image.⁴⁸

Lady Kingsborough was also involved in Dublin’s burgeoning philanthropic arena along with Lady Isabella, whose first charitable involvement is recorded here. At this time Dublin was a wealthy city, and the extravagances of the elite were a stark contrast to the deplorable poverty experienced by the poor. Rev’d James Whitelaw, who conducted a survey of Dublin in the summer of 1796 to establish the size of its population, witnessed appalling conditions:

when I attempted ... to take the population of a ruinous house in Joseph’s –lane, near Castle market, I was interrupted in my progress by an inundation of putrid blood, alive with maggots, which had from an adjacent slaughter- yard burst the door, and filled up the door to the depth of several inches; by the help of a plank and some stepping-stones, which I provided for the purpose ... I reached the staircase; it had rained violently, and from the shattered state of the roof a torrent of water made its way through every floor, from the garret to the ground, the sallow looks, and filth and stench, of the poor wretches who crowded round me, indicated their situation.⁴⁹

His conclusion was not simply that the destitute required help but that the ‘money-grabbing wretch[es]’ of landlords should be held accountable and, as importantly, that the poor themselves should attempt to contribute to alleviating their own conditions.⁵⁰ To make matters worse, Ireland did not operate a welfare system to assist their impoverished poor as in England; the only means of assistance was from private charity. This made philanthropic support critical and, by the 1790s, Dublin society had begun to respond. John Shute Duncan noted the numbers and diversity of charitable societies which existed in the city at the beginning of the nineteenth century: ‘there are in Dublin at least fifty public charities

⁴⁷ James, 4th Baron Kingston, established Kingston College, a refuge for elderly Protestant gentlemen and women who had fallen on hard times in Mitchelstown: King-Harman, *The Kings of King House*, p.23.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.20; Peggy Quinlan, *Old Mitchelstown and the Kingston Family* ([S.I.]: [The author], 1980), p.11; *Belle Assemblée*, vol.1 (January, 1810), p.1.

⁴⁹ Rev’d James Whitelaw, *An Essay on the Population of Dublin, Seeing the Result of a Survey Taken in 1798* (Dublin, 1805), p.53.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

extending to every human want and infirmity, bodily or mental'.⁵¹ Raughter's research into female charity in Ireland has confirmed a similar pattern of female involvement to that in England: more women took part as the century progressed, leading her to assert that their 'participation diversified significantly as pioneering female philanthropists initiated action in previously disregarded areas of need in which they claimed women had a distinctive and valuable contribution to make.'⁵²

Lady Isabella, in Dublin by the late 1790s and with an agenda to make herself useful, would have been acutely aware of the situation. Dublin charity records highlight her particular concerns. Lady Kingsborough's charitable activity suggests her interests were synonymous with Lady Isabella's. Appointed Vice Patroness of the Dublin Magdalen Asylum for life in 1799, Lady Kingsborough was also a governess of the Orphan House for destitute Female Children, alongside Lady Isabella. Established in 1791 under the auspices of the Church of Ireland, the Orphan House was one of a number of institutions of this kind, but only one of a handful that were female-led.⁵³ Described as a dynamic organisation, its 'gigantic growth' was attributed, by a visitor to the city in 1797, to the 'God like stamina' demonstrated by the 'females of fashion in Dublin', who were its predominant supporters.⁵⁴ Limited information renders it impossible to assess either Lady Kingsborough or Lady Isabella's roles as governesses of the Orphan House. Accounts of the institution record that subscribers who donated twenty guineas or more annually were automatically bestowed with the title of governess for life; however, Lady Isabella's later charitable activity, particularly with a similar institution which she established in Bath in 1805, would suggest her pro-active involvement.⁵⁵ What is clear though is that Lady Isabella was one of only 171 (56 per cent) donors to the institution between 1791 and 1803 who were women, with involvement

⁵¹ John Shute Duncan, *Collections Relative to Systematic Relief of the Poor* (London, 1815), p.122.

⁵² Raughter, 'Philanthropic Institutions of Eighteenth-Century Ireland', p.683.

⁵³ *Gentlemen's Magazine and Citizens Almanack*, (1799), p.139; Joseph Archer, *Statistical Survey of the County of Dublin* (Dublin, 1801), pp.120-152; Raughter, 'Philanthropic Institutions of Eighteenth-Century Ireland', p.682.

⁵⁴ Anonymous, 'A Tour from London to Dublin and Some Other Parts of Ireland: Viz the Counties of Kildare and Wicklow, Made in the Summer of 1797', *Monthly Magazine*, vol.5 (May, 1798), pp.346-348.

⁵⁵ This information also confirms Lady Isabella as a substantial subscriber.

varying from subscriber to visitor, manager or fundraiser.⁵⁶ To what extent Lady Isabella's early involvement with the Orphan House, part of the ground-breaking philanthropic work taking place in Dublin at the time, influenced her later charitable involvement is impossible to ascertain; however, it provided her with a developing and valuable support network in Dublin and beyond, upon which she would later be able to draw.⁵⁷

Somewhere between 1799 and 1803, Lady Isabella made the decision to move to Bath, taking up permanent residence at 7 Great Bedford Street, a new and fashionable area just behind the Royal Crescent.⁵⁸



Plate 8: 7 Great Bedford Street, Bath (Highlighted)

At this time Bath was a growing residential city with a population of c.33, 000, somewhere that the genteel could live relatively cheaply while maintaining all the cultural benefits of a spa town. It had long been attractive to the Irish; furthermore, it was a meeting

⁵⁶ Raughter, 'Philanthropic Institutions of Eighteenth-Century Ireland,' p.683.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Alexander Hamilton's diary records Lady Isabella spending Christmas day 1798 in Dublin, while the Bath poor rate records Lady Isabella's first contribution in 1803; APL, vol.2, p.45; BNSRO, sixpenny poor rate 1803, Lady Isabella King 7, Great Bedford Street, £1.

place for an elite population of men and — especially — of women.⁵⁹ Coming from Dublin's forward-looking and energetic philanthropic arena, Lady Isabella threw herself into the city's vibrant and growing charitable network. As a subscriber, her early contributions define her philanthropic disposition and echo the sympathies she declared in Dublin. Donations to the House of Protection, the Monmouth Street Society and the Bath Penitentiary confirm her allegiance to women of all ages and situations who were in need, while donations to the Bath Auxiliary Bible Society and the Hibernian Society affirm her dedication to the promotion of religious causes.⁶⁰ Her commitment is not only evidenced in the number and category of charities to which she subscribed but also in the munificence of her contributions. The first subscription list printed for the Monmouth Street Society in the *Bath Chronicle* on 12th February 1805 indicates that she was one of its highest contributors, donating five guineas. Indeed, its annual report for 1807 to 1808, reveals her to be one of the three largest subscribers of a list of 365, made up almost exactly equally of men and women.⁶¹ Further donations of five guineas to the Bath Auxiliary Bible Society in 1812 and an annual subscription of two guineas to the Bath Penitentiary were also both significant sums compared to other donations.⁶² There is also some evidence to suggest that Lady Isabella fostered and encouraged a charitable ethos within her household. The Monmouth Street Society's subscription list for 1805 includes donations from Thomas Jones, S. Murray and Mary Ivy, all servants to Lady Isabella, who contributed between 1s.6d. and 2s.6d. each.⁶³ Frank Prochaska, who has identified occasional contributions from servants in his research, questions whether they gave spontaneously, or were invited to give by their

⁵⁹ Sylvia McIntyre, 'Bath: the Rise of a Resort Town, 1660-1800', in Peter Clark (ed.), *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England*, (Leicester, 1981), p.213; Davis & Bonsall, *Bath: A New History*, p.28; R.S. Neale, *Bath 1680-1850: A Social History, or, A Valley of Pleasure, Yet a Sink of Iniquity* (London, 1981).

⁶⁰ Initial donations of five guineas reduced to two guineas by 1819: *Report of the House of Protection*, (Bath, nd but before 1819); Society for the Suppression of Vagrants subscription list, *Bath Chronicle* (hereafter *BC*) 12th February, 1805; annual subscription of two guineas, *Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital, Report of the Committee for the Year 1816* (Bath, 1817); *BC* (19th March 1812); *Report of the Hibernian Sunday School Society for Ireland, 1810* (Dublin, 1810).

⁶¹ *Report of the Bath Society for the Suppression of Vagrants, Street Beggars and Impostors: Relief of Occasional Distress and Encouragement of Industry* (hereafter *MSS*) (Bath, 1808).

⁶² *BC* (19th March 1812); *Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital, Report of the Committee for the Year 1816* (Bath, 1817).

⁶³ *BC* (12th February 1805).

employers.⁶⁴ It is not clear whether these servants comprised the total number of Lady Isabella's staff; however, with only a handful of other servants in the city listed as contributors, the evidence suggests that it was uncharacteristic.

By 1805 Lady Isabella had immersed herself in a project in the city which would provide her with charitable experience and define her as an active and innovative philanthropist. The conception of The Bath Society for the Suppression of Vagrants, Street Beggars and Impostors: Relief of Occasional Distress and Encouragement of Industry, later renamed the Monmouth Street Society, and Lady Isabella's first philanthropic undertaking in Bath, can be attributed to an evening party held by her at her home on 6th January 1805, at which a discussion arose as to what could best be done for the benefit of Bath.⁶⁵ The guests included prominent members of the local elite, including John Shute Duncan, who suggested that one of the greatest nuisances was the swarm of street beggars who came down from London and other parts to impose on the charitable in Bath.⁶⁶ Resolved to do something, Lady Isabella and her guests were determined not only to rid the streets of beggars but also to provide assistance to those in real need. Their idea sought to replace the giving of money to those on the streets with a relief ticket system, whereby the claims of beggars could be investigated and instances of genuine distress identified and relieved. The principle underlying this scheme was a message which would be repeated by similar charitable organisations throughout the century: 'alms given in the street, without investigation are bounties on idleness and fraud ... every shilling so received is a robbery from real distress'.⁶⁷ At the beginning of the nineteenth century these were novel investigative techniques, untried anywhere else and the concern by those who devised them to re-educate both the seeker of alms and the potential charitable donor evokes overtones of paternalism. The Monmouth Street Society was a forerunner of similar institutions later founded in London, Edinburgh,

⁶⁴ Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy', p.431; Jackie Collier 'Philanthropy in Bath 1790-1820', unpublished MA thesis, Bath Spa University, 2006.

⁶⁵ Percy Vere Turner, *Charity for a Hundred Years. History of the Monmouth Street Society, 1805 to 1904* (Bath, c.1914), p.2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *MSS* (Bath, 1808), pp.3-5.

Oxford and Colchester.⁶⁸

Lady Isabella's part in the inception of the Monmouth Society went well beyond acting as hostess for the evening. Indeed, the obituary of the Rev'd (Mr) Richards, published in *The Christian Observer for 1827*, named her as one of the three founders: 'Lady Isabella, in conjunction with Mr Richards and Mr Duncan were principally involved in the formation of this institution'.⁶⁹ Moreover, Turner records a further two meetings hosted by Lady Isabella, at her house, on 15th January and 6th February in the same year, which were specifically organised to discuss and institute the society. At the first meeting it was 'arranged to call public attention to the matter by notice in the Bath papers and by the circulation of letters and tickets to respectable householders'.⁷⁰ It was also suggested that 'Lady Isabella King be requested to receive ... subscriptions and to act as patroness of the society'.⁷¹ Although the role of patroness was in essence passive, as hostess of these meetings, founder member and designated recipient of initial subscriptions, she is likely to have played a much more active role. At the second meeting, addresses were prepared 'for delivery to the Mayor and Corporation of the City and to the County Justices praying for their countenance and support'.⁷² Taking into consideration her later instrumental role in The Ladies' Association, together with the nature of her character, it would seem highly unlikely that she would not have been involved in drafting the addresses. However, in keeping with women's charitable involvement at the time, there is no evidence to demonstrate that she played a more formal role at general committee level once the Society was formed: indeed, the executive was male and subsequent meetings were held at their offices at 40, Walcot

⁶⁸ The Monmouth Street Society has been the focus of attention for historians studying voluntary philanthropy: Alan J. Kidd, *State Society and the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 1999), p.78; M.J.D. Roberts, 'Head Versus Heart? Voluntary Associations and Charitable Organisations in England, c.1700-1850', in Hugh Cunningham & Joanna Innes, (eds.), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp.66-85; 'Reshaping the Gift Relationship: The London Mendicity Society and the Suppression of Begging in England, 1818-1869', *International Review of Social History*, vol.36, 2(August, 1991), pp.201-231; R.J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and the Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *The Historical Journal*, vol.26, 1(March, 1983), pp.78, 95-118; Collier, 'Philanthropy in Bath', pp.75-77.

⁶⁹ *Christian Observer*, vol.26 (October, 1827), pp.635-637.

⁷⁰ Turner, *Charity for a Hundred Years*, p.2.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid*, p.4.

Street, a distinctly more publicly designated space.⁷³

Lady Isabella continued active, however; that she was instrumental in the formation of a ladies' committee connected with the charity confirms her participation in more conventional forms of charitable activity for women. *The Improved Bath Guide* for 1809 informs 'there is also a ladies' committee for the purpose of carrying the designs of the society into effect'.⁷⁴ This statement suggests participation on a more practical level in line with historians' arguments that women were helpers in charitable ventures, rather than decision-makers. Even so, at the general meeting of the society held on 23rd February 1805, it was resolved: 'that the sum of twenty guineas be immediately paid by the sub-treasurer to our patroness Lady Isabella King for carrying into effect the views of herself and other ladies, friends of the society, for the relief of female objects of distress, particularly during the time of childbirth'.⁷⁵ These minutes, although again indicating that the specific focus of the committee was for the provision of child-bed linen and blankets for women, present a more autonomous picture of female involvement. The value of contributions made from the general fund that was controlled by the main committee were set by the ladies themselves based on the number of cases assisted — twenty-one in 1805 and eighty in 1815.⁷⁶ These figures, calculated by the ladies' committee at their meetings, which were held at the society's offices on the first Wednesday of each month, demonstrate a level of female independent participation.⁷⁷

In 1805, Lady Isabella established, with 'a society of Ladies,' The House of Protection.⁷⁸ Also known as The Female Orphan Asylum 'for the maintenance and education of unprotected girls,' it echoed the sentiments of Dublin's Orphan House and was again under the umbrella of the Monmouth Street Society.⁷⁹ As patroness and governess, Lady Isabella held several positions within the charity, a multiple commitment which she would

⁷³ MSS (Bath, 1808); Collier, 'Philanthropy in Bath', pp.75-77.

⁷⁴ Turner, *Charity for a Hundred Years*, pp.5-6.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.66.

⁷⁶ Ibid, pp.66-67.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.67; Collier, 'Philanthropy in Bath', pp.77-78.

⁷⁸ *Bath Guide*, 1824, addenda.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

repeat later as patroness, president, superintendent and resident of the Ladies' Association. A female-led charity, the day-to-day responsibilities rested with its eight governesses, each of whom took her turn 'to visit the house daily, to hear the girls read, examine their work and give any directions that may be necessary to the matron'.⁸⁰ While these duties were essentially domestic in nature, there is also evidence which indicates that the women were involved in more formal activity. The *Bath Guide* discloses that the society's committee met on the first Thursday of each month to settle the accounts, and although four male guardians were acknowledged appointments to the charity, the only evidence of their active participation, on a financial and advisory level, is revealed in the annual report for 1840 which states that 'every half year the accounts will be laid before the guardians'.⁸¹ It is apparent then that domestic duties were combined with more formal decision-making.

Moreover, although locally focused, female-orientated and low-key, characteristics which have been designated typical of female-led charities at this time, the institution exhibited a drive to succeed similar to that of the Dublin Orphan House. Indeed, the society's achievements are demonstrated by the results offered in the *Improved Bath Guide* of 1812. Of the '114 girls received into the institution, 71[have been] placed at service, 8 returned to their friends, 13 dismissed, 4 died [and] 18 remain in the house'.⁸² Furthermore, the *Bath Guide* for 1820 includes an addendum after the entry for the society which announces that 'it is in contemplation speedily to enlarge the means of this society so as to render it more benevolent by admitting a far greater number of young females'.⁸³ The society also demonstrated its verve in its contemporary attitude towards methods of election, identified by the *Bath Guide* as the mode 'now ... prevailing in all charities, particularly in London'.⁸⁴ As with the Society for the Suppression of Vagrants, this confirms Lady Isabella's eagerness to employ innovative methods and approaches.

Her participation in Bath's charitable arena with The Bath Society for the

⁸⁰ *Improved Bath Guide*, 1824.

⁸¹ *Improved Bath Guide*, 1812, p.56; *Report of the House of Protection, Beacon Hill, Bath* (Bath, 1840), p.1.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Improved Bath Guide*, (1820), p.120.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*; Collier, 'Philanthropy in Bath', pp.77-78.

Suppression of Vagrants, its ladies' committee and The House of Protection indicates that her early participation was varied, ranging from subscriber to pro-active patroness, president of the ladies' committee, and governess of the House of Protection. Her involvement extended from acting on a domestic level, in active partnership with men, and more independently. By 1815 she had established herself in Bath and her reputation as 'the truly benevolent Lady Isabella King' had placed her firmly at the centre of its charitable arena as one of its leading players.⁸⁵ In her *Thoughts on Various Charitable and Other Important Institutions* in 1814, Catherine Cappe confirmed her already wider reputation: '[she is] a character too well-known and too long distinguished in the annals of Christian benevolence, to need any eulogium of mine'.⁸⁶

Conclusion

As a member of the aristocratic King family Lady Isabella occupied a position which was notably beneficial to the advancement of the Ladies' Association. Family influence, power, wealth and close association with the most powerful and influential social networks, both in Ireland and England, afforded her a prestigious platform from which she could operate. Being a single woman of independent means brought with it the advantages of an independence of thought, time and choice, which allowed her to her address her sympathies towards the impoverished single woman in a focused and single-minded way; it also motivated her to fashion a space in which she could create a legitimate and purposeful identity. Her intellectual predisposition and evangelical principles guided and gave added impetus both to her charitable actions and her commitment. Her early association with predominantly middle-class female-orientated charities in Bath and Dublin not only equipped her with valuable skills and experience, but established her as a leading player in Bath's charitable hierarchy by 1815. Her innovative approach affirmed her willingness to

⁸⁵ This is corroborated by Mrs Iremonger. Speaking of Lady Spencer in 1813, she reported: 'On her visits to Bath she must of known of Lady Isabella's devotion of herself to purposes of utility of the most important kind': *New Bath Guides*, (1813-1820); DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Mrs Iremonger, 1813.

⁸⁶ Catharine Cappe, *Thoughts on Various Charitable and Other Important Institutions* (London, 1814), p.105.

address contemporary social problems in new ways and proved her emergence an astute and capable philanthropist.

CHAPTER 2

THE VIABILITY OF THE LADIES' ASSOCIATION IN THE CONTEXT OF PROTESTANT NUNNERIES

Introduction

In 1814, while pondering the problem of single gentlewomen Lady Isabella asked of Britain: 'Is there amongst the multitude of benevolent institutions in these Kingdoms any in which Gentlewomen reduced to indigence by the loss of a parent or husband, could find a suitable asylum?' Answering her own question, she admitted ruefully: 'No there are almshouses where they may perhaps gain admittance and associate with the vulgar the coarse and illiterate but amongst her own class she will find no associate ready to receive her'.¹

Having acknowledged the lack of space afforded to this class of women by society, Lady Isabella applied herself to finding a remedy. Her idea, which proposed the establishment of conventual institutions or 'Protestant nunneries', first in Bath, and later in all the major towns in England and Ireland, drew on a long line of ideas, both fictional and real, proposed but never realised, which had also engaged with the problem of a space for single women since the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century.

While monasticism as part of the Catholic Church had been accepted as a solution to the problem of elite single women in England before the Reformation, the notion of a Protestant nunnery in Britain afterwards was incongruous and not well received. Some writers, who regretted the loss of a separate space for single women, supported their re-establishment but deemed the ascetic practices of the Catholic monastic institutions incompatible with Protestantism.² Proposals for a suitable Protestant model, which were put forward from the sixteenth century onwards and drew on existing Protestant conventual institutions in Germany and Belgium, encompassed more conservative ideas which

¹ DRO, H7/7/3, notes, c.1814-15.

² For example, see John Bramhall, Bishop of Armagh, *A Just Vindication of the Church of England, from the Unjust Aspersion of Criminal Schisme* (London, 1654), pp.39-40.

advocated the elimination of binding vows and austere practices, while recommending a more useful and benevolent purpose. Even so, many writers remained sceptical, even hostile, to the introduction of an institution that had popish connotations and, by offering the potential for an autonomous female space, also threatened the contemporary patriarchal social order. It was a viewpoint which would remain constant into the nineteenth century. Consequently the few attempts that were made to create such institutions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were small-scale, private, local and short lived; more extensive proposals requiring public support were quashed by lack of funding and by public opposition.³

Regardless, ideas for monastic-style institutions continued to echo throughout the eighteenth century. Perhaps most influential to the growing discourse was Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* which, published in 1694, on the cusp of the period, advocated the creation of a separate space for women, a place of religious retirement where they could receive a more fitting education. Continuing the theme, Sarah Scott wrote *Millenium Hall* (1762), a novel similar to Astell's work, but more overtly polemic, it challenged contemporary social values by offering women a separate, autonomous space in which they could live more fulfilled lives.⁴ A female utopia, *Millenium Hall* sheltered its community from social criticism by the isolated and providentially achieved, financially autonomous status, which rendered it successful and harmonious.

Reliant on public financial support, Lady Isabella's scheme was subject to scrutiny by a society whose anti-Catholic views had been re-energised by the establishment of monasteries on British soil by French *émigrés*, and whose patriarchal principles, also invigorated both in the wake of the French Revolution and by a growing evangelical

³ Small private institutions were tailored to the needs of their residents such as a community identified by George Crabbe near Beccles which consisted of four or five spinsters who chose to live together for a period of time (see p.74). Larger schemes, which tended to focus on the broader picture of single women such as Mary Astell's plan, which she put forward in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest by a Lover of her Sex* (London, 1694), often required public support for their success and as such, were more controversial.

⁴ Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall* (ed.), Gary Kelly (Ontario, New York & Hadleigh, 1999).

influence, preferred not to recognise female autonomy.⁵ Lady Isabella, therefore, was faced with instituting her plan under less than favourable conditions in a society where the notion of a convent still raised a cry of popery. Her strategy included a consideration of public feeling, balanced with a loyalty to her own aims and a concern to maintain the genteel status of all involved. Carving the shape of the institution by a series of negotiations with public opinion, she attempted to follow a moderate course which, she hoped, would project the character of the institution in a publicly acceptable manner.

While the concept of a Protestant nunnery has been examined by a number of scholars from both literary and historical perspectives, a detailed consideration of previous attempts to found such institutions in this chapter reflects their importance to the development of the Ladies' Association. Indeed, Lady Isabella looked back to these earlier models, both fictional and real, for guidance; in particular she drew on Scott's utopian novel, *Millenium Hall*, the Protestant Chapitres in Germany and the Moravian communities which were established in England during the eighteenth century. With this in mind the chapter will consider the extent and character of proposals historically, the motivation behind their creation and their reception and success in a fiercely Protestant and patriarchal society. It will examine the key ideas and models which Lady Isabella drew on as inspiration for her scheme and, taking contemporary views on conventual institutions into consideration, it will assess their influence on her actions and the consequent value of their contribution to the shape of the Ladies' Association.

The Intellectual Context

Lady Isabella's scheme to assist the distressed gentlewoman drew on a much larger intellectual framework which had been engaged with the problem of single women from the

⁵ For first British convents established by French nuns see; Susan O'Brien, 'French Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, vol.154, (February,1997), pp.142-180; 'A Survey of Research and Writing about Roman Catholic Women's Congregations in Great Britain and Ireland, (1800-1950)', in Jan de Maeyer, Sophie Leplae & Joachim Schmiedl, (eds.), *Religious Institutes in Western Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leuven, 2004), pp.91-115.

sixteenth century onwards.⁶ Amy Froide has calculated from figures compiled by Peter Laslett that in the period 1574-1821 single women comprised 30.2 per cent of the adult female population.⁷ Although the latter part of the sixteenth century, according to the American Protestant preacher and scholar, Ralph Washington Sockman, was a period of quiet in relation to debate relating to nunneries, the seventeenth century saw increased engagement with the idea which demonstrated both a positive and critical response.

While some writers held favourable opinions, others were sceptical and, with anti-Catholicism fierce, many were even openly hostile. Antiquarian and prelate, Thomas Tanner, updating Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* in 1695, acknowledged that an inflexible contemporary perception would be difficult to shift and far from everyone would be supportive of such schemes:

I am not ignorant that the generality of people ever since the dissolution have thro' a mistaken zeal and false prejudices, thought that the very memory of those Great Men, who erected these places, ought to be buried in the rubbish of those structures that they designed ... thus they have always been censured as well wishers to the introducing of popery, who ever endeavoured to give any account of Monasticism.⁸

While it is impossible to gauge the extent of support for such institutions, Tanner's account suggests it was minimal, yet a positive thread can be identified which supported the development of a modified form of conventual institution which distanced itself from the confined austere practices of the Catholic Church. John Bramhall, who, as Archbishop of Armagh, was head of the Anglican Church in Ireland and steadfastly defended it against Catholic denunciation, was potentially in favour of such a move. Bramhall believed that to make such establishments more palatable to society in general rules and regulations should be reformed to remove the superstitious and ascetic doctrines and practices of Catholic

⁶ See particularly Bridget Hill, 'A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery', *Past and Present*, vol.117, 1(1987), pp.107-30; Nicole Pohl, 'In this Sacred Space': The Secular Convent in Late Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Expository Literature', in Rebecca D'Monte & Nicole Pohl, (eds.), *Female Communities, 1600-1800* (New York & Basingstoke, 2000), pp.14-65; Ralph Washington Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life in the Church of England in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1917).

⁷ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), p.2; Peter Laslett, 'Mean Household Size in England Since the Sixteenth Century', in Peter Laslett & Richard Wall, (eds.), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1972), p.145.

⁸ Thomas Tanner, *Notitia Monastica, or, A Short History of the Religious Houses in England and Wales* (Oxford, 1695), preface, p.2.

monasticism. He advocated, first, that there should be no binding vows, leaving residents free to marry should they wish, and secondly, in order to proffer a more purposeful and useful way of life, that they should incorporate more active benevolent public participation:

the abler sort, who are not taken up with higher studies or weightier employments were inured to bestow their spare hours from their devotions in profitable labour for the publick good, that idleness might be stripped of the cloak of contemplative devotion. So as the vows of perpetual celibate were reduced to the forme of our English Universities ... or of the Canonesses and Biggins [Beguines] on the other side of the seas, which are no longer restrained from wedlock then they retain their places or habits; so as their blind obedience were more enlightened and secured by some certain rules and bounds. So as their mock poverty were changed into a competent maintenance and lasting, so as all opinion of satisfaction and supererogation were removed, I do not see why monasteries might not agree with reformed devotion.⁹

By aligning his idea for a restructured institution both with the European Beguinages, which Robert Southey would promote in the nineteenth century as a model for Protestant conventual institutions to follow, and the English universities to which Lady Isabella would later direct her attention as an example of an established (albeit male) alternative after the dissolution of the monasteries, Bramhall engaged with a nascent but developing network of ideas and alternatives around the perceived problem posed by single women which emerged after the Reformation and continued to serve as paradigms into the nineteenth century.¹⁰

Subsequent proposals put forward for Protestant institutions for women engaged with Bramhall's ideas for reform. Amy Froide asserts that Edward Chamberlayne's plan for such a scheme, which he published in 1671, was the first institutional and vocational scheme of its kind.¹¹ The title page reveals his idea:

an academy or colledge, wherein young ladies and gentlewomen may at a very moderate expence be duly instructed in the true *Protestant* religion, and in all vertuous qualities that may adorn that sex also be carefully preserved and secured till the day of their marriage, under the tuition of a governess, and grave Society of Widdows and Virgins, who have resolved to lead the rest of their lives in a single retir'd Religious way,

⁹ Bramhall, *A Just Vindication of the Church of England*, pp.39-40.

¹⁰ Writing to John Rickman from Brussels in 1816 after visiting a Beguinage, Southey described their pious and charitable character: 'The Beguinage is a remarkable place ... supported by public opinion: and being of evident utility to all ranks ... they receive the sick ... they are bound by no vow.' Charles Southey, (ed.), *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, 6vols, vol.4 (New York, 1855), letter from Robert Southey to John Rickman, 2nd October, 1816, p.319.

¹¹ Amy Froide, *Never Married*, p.170.

according to the Pattern of some Protestant Colledges in *Germany*.¹²

In designating the plan an ‘academy or colledge,’ Chamberlayne distanced it from monastic ideals. Engaging with the more moderate ideas of Bramhall, he confirmed the absence of irrevocable vows and was unquestioning in his acceptance that the women would marry. In addition, by employing as a model the Protestant ‘colledges’ in Germany, conventual institutions which had re-established themselves in a Protestant form as Chapitres after the Reformation, he further confirmed his proposal’s moderate status.

A plan proposed by Clement Barksdale four years later, in *A Letter Touching a Colledge of Maids, or, A Virgin-Society* (1675), while intricate in its description, also demonstrates a more conservative approach. Although designed for daughters of the wealthy, Barksdale’s seminary accepted ‘maids of meaner birth.’¹³ While he did not specify the status of the ‘maids’, his reference is potentially an early acknowledgement of the fortuneless gentlewoman, to whom Lady Isabella’s scheme was specifically directed. The intended physical surroundings demonstrate the more moderate approach. They included, ‘A fair garden ... where they have pleasant walks and Arbors, and variety, not only of beautiful Flowers, but of Wholesome Herbs and Physical Plants,’ chambers and a library, which comprised ‘Authors of *History*, Poetry and especially of *Practical Divinity*.’ Regulations permitted ‘Liberty of going abroad, and visiting of friends,’ while ‘their *Apparel* is modest, suitable to their minds ... the Gentlewomen wear silk of some sad colour, their Maids fine serge.’¹⁴ The institution’s ethos required that they were employed in ‘Divine and Honourable’ occupations, which suggests both religious and benevolent activity, while ‘on *Holy Dayes* they use to go orderly to the Parish Church near their House, where they have a private Gallery fitted for them.’ Numbers at ‘The *Abby House*’ amounted to ‘twenty Gentlewomen and their ten Maids.’¹⁵

Although there is no evidence to suggest that either Barksdale’s or Chamberlayne’s

¹² Edward Chamberlayne, *An Academy or Colledge, wherein Young Ladies and Gentlewomen may at a very Moderate Expence be Duly Instructed in the True Protestant Religion* (London, 1671), title page.

¹³ Clement Barksdale, *A Letter Touching a Colledge of Maids, or, A Virgin-Society* (London, 1675).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

schemes were ever implemented, evidence perhaps of the hostility towards them, both tracts, in their intricate detail, are serious in their proposals. Indeed, Chamberlayne, providing details of its 'pious design' presents a detailed description of the intended location and physical shape for his institution to anyone who wished to support the scheme:

These are therefore to give notice, to whom it may anyway concern, that near *London* ... there is a ... proposed large House, with a Chappel, fair Hall, many commodious Lodgings, and rooms for all sorts of necessary Offices, together with pleasant Gardens, Orchards and Courts, all encompassed and well secured with strong High Walls.¹⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, few actual attempts to establish a female Protestant institution during the seventeenth century have been documented. One of the most scrutinized, however, is an establishment which was set up by Nicholas Ferrar for his family at Little Gidding in Huntingdonshire in 1625. Although a small, family, and ostensibly private, local concern, it attracted national support, controversy and even hostility and while it has been disqualified by some for accommodating both men and women, it is relevant to this study both as an independent community and for the argument which surrounds its religious character. Retiring from public life in 1624 Ferrar bought, with his mother's dower, the manor house at Little Gidding. He invited his mother, brother John, and his sister Susannah and their families to live there with him making a household which, including servants, totalled forty. They established a school for the extended family, a small almshouse in one wing of the house which accommodated a few elderly women and a dispensary. However, the main focus of the retreat was religion. Nicholas Cranfield's biographical account of Ferrar records that in 1626 he was ordained deacon by Bishop Laud in Westminster Abbey. His actions both confirm his commitment to a devout existence and his religion as Protestant.

Yet Little Gidding was criticised for its popish similarities. The rising puritan ethos, its location in Cambridgeshire, a Parliamentary stronghold, coupled with the high-profile patronage of King Charles I, who was rumoured to have visited the institution in the spring

¹⁶ Ibid, p.6.

of 1642, compounded suspicions.¹⁷ Wishing to move the church away from austere puritan practices and married to a Catholic, the King's religious affiliation was also in question and a volatile subject for a country on the brink of civil war. Opponents' views towards the scheme are encapsulated in an anonymous tract, published in 1641 which, identifying Little Gidding as an '*Arminian Nunnery*,' asked questions of its character.¹⁸ The author's choice of the word Arminian to describe the institution was a specific attack not only on the character of Ferrar's community, but potentially also on the king's religious views. Convinced of Little Gidding's popish sympathies, the tract asked rhetorically; 'how neere it complieth with the *superstitious* Nunneries in Popish places beyond the Seas, I and others that have travelled and seene them may plainely perceive and notifie,' and, pointing out the severity of the enquiry, reminded the Ferrars of their exposed position: 'doubtless such a monastic innovation in settled Church-government is of dangerous consequence in many respects.'¹⁹ There is no doubt from its description, if it can be relied on, that the institution oozed sufficient monastic flavour to raise suspicions. Its purpose was undeniably devout and was reflected in its daily routine, which followed a strictly pious regime, while its dress code reflected the austere monastic habit and its physical shape was overtly of a monastic hue with '*Crosses* on the outside and the inside of the *Chappell*' and '*an altar richly decked with Tapestry, Plate and Tapers*.'²⁰ However there were no formal religious vows or practices and Ferrar, in response to accusations of popery, irrefutably denied it was a nunnery, instead acknowledging it simply as a 'religious house for the service of God.'²¹

Local, independent and focused on personal requirements, while atypical in its raised profile, Little Gidding was otherwise characteristic of the few early attempts which were made to form conventual institutions. Historians' accounts of its fate vary; Sockman has recorded its destruction at the hands of the Parliamentarians, while Cranfield's account

¹⁷ Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life*, p.20; Nicholas W.S Cranfield, 'Ferrar, Nicholas (1593-1637)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, online edn, October, 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9356>, 10th December, 2011.

¹⁸ Anonymous, *The Arminian Nunnery or, a Briefe Description and Relation of the Late Erected Monasticall Place called the Arminian Nunnery at Little Gidding in Huntingdon-shire* (London, 1641).

¹⁹ Ibid, p.4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, p.4, 9.

suggests a gradual demise by ‘death and marriage.’²² There is no evidence to suggest it was more than a one generational affair, yet the published attack was made sixteen years after its inception, which must say something about its enduring success at the height of animosity towards the king, as well as the increased fear of Catholicism. As with Elizabethan engagement with the idea of a Protestant nunnery, Ferrar’s scheme stands as an example of the degree to which context is critical to response.

There is a notable absence of women from these accounts. Hill, however, in her research on Protestant female communities, has identified several, including Lady Lettice, Viscountess Falkland, who, in the 1630s, following the death of her husband, proposed a scheme which, although intended as ‘places for the education of young Gentlewomen and for the retirement of Widows (as Colleges and the Inns of Court and Chancery are for Men)’ was never realised due to the outbreak of the Civil War.²³ Fictional proposals put forward during the seventeenth century included *The Convent of Pleasure*, a play written in 1668 by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, which advocated the establishment of a convent as an alternative to marriage. Her leading character, Lady Happy, voiced the Duchess’s proposal: ‘I will take so many noble persons of my own sex, as my establishment will plentiful maintain, such whose Births are greater than their Fortunes, and are resolv’d to live a single life ... my Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint but a place for freedom.’²⁴ Her idea, which offered gentlewomen of limited fortune an asylum in an unregulated religious retirement, while echoing earlier conservative ideas, as a fiction, was less reserved in its proposal.

Ideas for monastic-style institutions for single women, both real and fictional, continued to reverberate throughout the eighteenth century. Proposals emanated from intellectuals and literary figures, many of whom were women, and focused on improving

²² Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life*, p.20; Cranfield, ‘Ferrar, Nicholas (1593-1637)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9356>, 10th December, 2011.

²³ Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life*, p.112; John Duncon, *Lady Lettice Viscountess Falkland*, M.F. Howard (ed.) (London, 1908), p.27.

²⁴ Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*, Jennifer Roswell (ed.) (Oxford, 1995), p.11.

other women's lives through reform.²⁵ Scholars have argued that the discourse was dominated by Mary Astell's idea for a conventual retreat as published in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Great Interest by a Lover of her Sex* in two parts (1694 and 1697).²⁶ Part I is a persuasive and specific appeal directed exclusively at the female section of the population, while Part II, longer and written after critical public engagement with Part I, is a more formal, instructive piece, aimed at a general audience.

Astell advocated the establishment of colleges as a refuge from the world, where women could devote themselves to serious contemplation and education. Sensitive to public opinion regarding popish connotations, she was careful to select a name which distanced her plan from any associations, explaining frankly, 'now as to the proposal, it is to erect a *Monastery*, or if you will (to avoid giving offence to the scrupulous and injudicious, by names which tho' innocent by themselves, have been abus'd by superstitious practices,) we will call it a *Religious Retirement*.'²⁷ Unlike Ferrar's seventeenth-century institution, the success of Astell's plan was reliant on public support, and Part I, ending with an appeal for support, not only acknowledged the leap between idea and reality but also — imploring the public to contribute to save the women's souls — recognised the importance of public charitable contributions to the success of the venture: 'What now remains, but to reduce to Practice that which tends so very much to our advantage ... Is Charity so dead in the world that none will contribute to the saving their own and their neighbours Souls?'²⁸

With this in mind and recognising the importance of securing public approval, Astell was not only cautious in her choice of name but also steered away from the unpalatable ascetic practices of monasticism; instead, she recommended voluntary admission and

²⁵ Figures included Mary Astell, Lady Masham, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Sarah Scott, Sarah Fielding and men such as Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson.

²⁶ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of their True and Great Interest by a Lover of her Sex* (London, 1694); Hill, 'A Refuge from Men'; Allegra Johns, 'Mary Astell's 'Excited Needles': Theorizing Feminist Utopia in Seventeenth-Century England', *Utopian Studies*, vol.7, 1(1996), p.60; Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago & New York, 1986), p.112; Rebecca D' Monte & Nicole Pohl, 'Introduction', in Rebecca D'Monte & Nicole Pohl, (eds.), *Female Communities, 1600-1800* (New York & Basingstoke, 2000), p.14.

²⁷ Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, p.61.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.164.

discharge for her scheme, with ‘no vows or irrevocable obligations.’²⁹ She also, by incorporating benevolent activity which centred on doing ‘good to our own Souls by doing Offices of Charity and Beneficence to others,’ shaped a plan which appeared more palatable to contemporary society.³⁰ As in the Duchess of Newcastle’s fictional convent, which offered asylum to ‘such whose Births are greater than their Fortunes,’³¹ Astell also engaged directly with the problem of the distressed gentlewoman. Her institution, she made clear: ‘will include the less well off ... and when by the increase of their Revenue, the Religious are enabled to do such a work of Charity, the Education they design to bestow on the Daughters of Gentlemen who are fallen into decay, will be no inconsiderable advantage to the Nation.’³²

Historians have proposed that although a female sponsor, reputed to have been either Queen Anne or Lady Mary Hastings, stepped forward as benefactor and offered the sum of £10,000 to fund the scheme, she was persuaded to withdraw her donation by the Whig, Bishop of Salisbury, Gilbert Burnett, who denounced the scheme as too reminiscent of Catholic nunneries.³³ Astell’s early biographer, George Ballard, reported: ‘he immediately went to that Lady and so powerfully remonstrated against it, telling her it would look like preparing a way for popish orders, that it would be reputed a nunnery.’³⁴ Not everyone was critical, though. John Evelyn, regretting the dissolution of the nunneries and, lauding Astell for her proposal, was representative of those who supported her scheme. Speaking of the ‘Learned, Virtuous and Fair Sex,’ he expressly drew attention to ‘Madam Astalls’ plan:

Besides, what lately she has proposed to the Virtuous of her Sex, to shew by her own Example, what great Things, and Excellencies it is Capable of, and which calls to mind, the Lady of that *Protestant Monastery*, Mrs. Farrer, not long since at *Geding* in *Huntington-shire* ... Not without my hearty Wishes, that at the first *Reformation* in this Kingdom, some of those demolished Religious Foundations had been spared both for Men and Women; where single Persons devoutly

²⁹ Ibid, p.105.

³⁰ Ibid, p.72.

³¹ Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*, p.11.

³² Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, p.149.

³³ Although Burnett condemned Astell’s proposal, he later promoted the idea himself: Hill, ‘A Refuge from Men’, p.118; Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life*, p.21; William Kolbrener & Michal Michelson, (eds.), *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith* (Aldershot & Burlington 2007), pp.45-46.

³⁴ George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (London, 1753), p.446.

inclined, might have retired and lived without Reproach or insnaring Vows; tho' under such Restraint and Religious Rules, as could not but have been approved by the most averse to *Popery* or Superstition, and as I have heard, is at this Day practised amongst the *Evangelical Churches* in *Germany*. And what should still forbid us to promote the same Example, and begin such Foundations, I am to learn more solid Reasons for, than any I confess, as yet I have.³⁵

While his support embraced an emphatically and exclusively religious based plan, Evelyn added a codicil to his praise, re-emphasising the need for sensitive attention to the shape of such institutions in order to quell any fears relating to the potential re-emergence of Catholicism. In linking Astell's idea with both the earlier seventeenth century attempt by Ferrar at Little Gidding, which he specifically identified as a Protestant institution, and with the reformed and moderated '*Evangelical*' Protestant institutions in Germany, as Chamberlayne had done over thirty years earlier, he confirmed her institution as respectable; furthermore, in integrating Astell's plan into a much wider framework, he demonstrated continued contemporary engagement with the developing historical network of ideas and activity.

William Kolbrener and Michal Michelson's research has led them to ask: 'why did Astell's proposal receive the suspicion and ridicule that it did, given that it was in a sense highly respectable and in keeping with orthodox Anglican thinking?'³⁶ In proposing that Astell's idea was the most intricate in the history of schemes for secular convents, Nicole Pohl, perhaps partially answers their question.³⁷ Detailed plans often present a more credible scheme, and an idea which has the potential to translate itself into reality is more likely to be seen as threatening. Astell's detailed proposal posed a threat, not just of popery, but also, by creating a separate, independent or, as Pohl has argued, 'emancipatory' space solely for women, out of the jurisdiction of any religious or legislative hegemonic body, it challenged the established patriarchal social order.³⁸ Astell's proposition encompassed ideas which were not only religious, but also social, addressing women's subordinate social role by arguing for

³⁵ John Evelyn, *Numismata, a Discourse of Medals, Ancient and Modern Together with some Account of Heads and Effigies of Illustrious, and Famous Persons* (London, 1697), p. 265.

³⁶ Kolbrener & Michelson, *Mary Astell: Reason, Gender, Faith*, pp.45-46.

³⁷ Nicole Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800* (Aldershot, 2006), p.110.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.11.

female empowerment through education. Christine Mason Sutherland maintains that Astell believed women's subservient social position was a result of 'the lack of education not women's inherent inferiority,' and, as such, well-educated women were the key to an improved social role.³⁹ Astell's own words are insightful: 'The soil is rich and would, if well cultivated, produce a noble Harvest'.⁴⁰

Astell made her proposal directly to women, which Sutherland asserts was in itself a threat to the male half of the population: 'by addressing the women rather than the men', she argues, Astell 'is encouraging a revolt against the status quo.'⁴¹ Indeed, Astell's idea for an independent, empowering space for women was responded to most publicly by Jonathan Swift in *The Tatler*, in 1709. His sardonic attack, in the form of an anecdote, involved the uninvited visit of a group of men to a retired and remote community of women. His designation of 'Rake' as lead male intruder, was a purposeful casting which hit at the heart of the female form. 'Rake's' invasion of the retreat enabled Swift to comprehensively undermine the virtuous and empowering feminine space created by Astell. By reclaiming male domination, through the intruders' insulting and lewd behaviour, the female residents are left with nowhere to retreat and Swift achieves the symbolic destruction of Astell's plan by restoring patriarchal order to the space.⁴² Ironically, Astell's proposal had specifically offered women a safe haven from the rakes of the world: 'here she may remain in safety till a convenient Match be offered by her Friends and be freed from the danger of a dishonourable one.'⁴³ The contradiction between, as Nicole Pohl has argued, the redefinition of the convent as an emancipatory space for women, which Astell proposed, and Swift's attack which reclaimed the space as male-controlled and confining for women, clearly demonstrates the tensions relating to the establishment of female communities at this time. It is not surprising that some literary critics have labelled Astell's scheme as a utopian vision

³⁹ Christine M. Sutherland, *The Eloquence of Mary Astell* (Calgary, 2002), p.56.

⁴⁰ Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, p.25.

⁴¹ Sutherland, *The Eloquence of Mary Astell*, p.61.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.146.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

and her retreat a 'female paradise.'⁴⁴

Although Astell's plan attracted criticism, the eighteenth century is peppered with proposals, both real and increasingly fictional, which sought to challenge or ameliorate the female status in contemporary society through the creation of a female community, either as an emancipatory space, separate from the values and principles of the existing patriarchal society, or as an educational space which, some envisioned, would equip women with the tools to engage with contemporary society in a more liberated way. While proposals, particularly literary, tended to emanate from women, men also contributed to the discourse. Pohl, however, has argued that 'male writers who ... [were] advancing the establishment of secular convents carefully ... [sought] to prevent the independence and possible autarchy of the female community.'⁴⁵

Samuel Richardson stands as an example. Strenuously advocating Protestant nunneries as a '*national good*' in his novel *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, which was published in 1753, he proposed plans for an institution, 'in which single women of small or no fortunes, might live with all manner of freedom,' existing independently by 'joining their small fortunes.'⁴⁶ His plan further advocated the engagement of a superintendent, which he asserted should be 'a worthy divine at the appointment of the Bishop of the Diocese ... to guard it from that superstition and enthusiasm which soars to wild lengths in almost all nunneries.'⁴⁷ While his idea has direct and obvious links with earlier proposals, his stipulation that the regulation and supervision of the institution should be assigned to a member of the clergy, places the community under the (male) jurisdiction the church. Richardson pays little attention to the thorny subject of funding, assuming that 'small fortunes' constituted ample financial support. This was an assumption which the Ladies' Association would later prove to be inaccurate.

While Richardson's plan has a close association with earlier proposals, literary

⁴⁴ Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia*, p.110; Johns, 'Mary Astell's 'Excited Needles'', pp.60-74.

⁴⁵ Pohl, 'In this Sacred Space', p.149.

⁴⁶ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, 7vols, vol.4 (London, nd), p.161.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

scholar Jocelyn Harris has argued that it is likely his idea originated specifically from Astell's idea.⁴⁸ Scholars are also unanimous in agreeing that Sarah Scott, whose novel *Millenium Hall* also engaged with the discourse, was also influenced by Mary Astell's earlier writings.⁴⁹ Allessa Johns asserts that Scott's is 'the fullest fictional realisation of Astell's dream.'⁵⁰ Moreover, Richardson's close connections with the London and Bath literary circles, particularly through his friendship with Sarah Fielding, another literary figure who supported the idea in her writing and who was also a close friend of Scott's, exposes an intellectual stream of thought, which took in Bath as a centre of meeting, at the heart of which was a dialogue addressing the problem of single women.⁵¹ A later proposal made in *The Spiritual Quixote* by Richard Graves in 1773 may have extended the discursive network in Bath yet further. Rector of Claverton and friend of Ralph Allen, Graves was also an acquaintance of Richardson.⁵² The thread of thought was not just confined to Bath. Helena Whitford, who designated her proposed educational institution a 'Protestant nunnery,' a title which was sensitively altered to read 'institution' rather than nunnery, also engaged in the dialogue.⁵³ A letter in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1820, in defence of such institutions, added an extra dimension: 'she has quoted Bishop Burnett's favourable arguments and the Rev'd William Tooke that a similar institution, founded by the Empress Catherine exists in Russia.'⁵⁴

Actual attempts to establish conventual institutions in the eighteenth century, as in the seventeenth century, tended to be small-scale and private. Sockman has identified several, local, private institutions which were set up during the eighteenth century and to

⁴⁸ Jocelyn Harris, *Samuel Richardson* (Cambridge, 1987), chapter 8.

⁴⁹ Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850* (New Haven & London, 2001), p.134; Allessa Johns, *Women's Utopias in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 2003); Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison*, (ed.), Betty Rizzo (Lexington, 1996), p.xxxix; Qian Ma, *Feminist Utopian Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Chinese and English Fiction: A Cross Cultural Comparison* (Aldershot & Burlington, 2004), p.109.

⁵⁰ Johns, 'Mary Astell's 'Excited Needles'', p.60.

⁵¹ Sarah Fielding, *The Countess of Dellwyn* (London, 1759).

⁵² Richard Graves was rector of Claverton from 1749-1804: Austin Dobson, *English Men of Letters: Samuel Richardson* (London, 1902), p.168.

⁵³ An advertisement for the work in the *Belfast Monthly Magazine* in 1810 listed Whitford's proposal as *Thoughts and Remarks on Establishing an Institution for the Support and Education of Impoverished and Respectable Females*, but added, in brackets afterwards 'Protestant nunnery': vol.4 (January, 1810), p.47.

⁵⁴ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.40 (January, 1820), p.30.

which, he asserts, little attention was paid.⁵⁵ Tending to be personal and idiosyncratic, they can be illustrated by a small community of women which was identified by the poet George Crabbe when visiting at 'a sweet little villa near Beccles,' in 1785:

Here four or five spinsters of independent fortune had formed a sort of Protestant nunnery, the abbess being Miss Blacknell, who afterwards deserted it to become the wife of the late Admiral Sir Thomas Graves, a lady of distinguished elegance in her tastes. Another of the sisterhood was Miss Waldron ... dear, good-humoured, hearty, masculine Miss Waldron, who could sing a jovial song like a fox-hunter, and, like him, I had almost said, toss a glass; and yet there was such an air of high *ton*, and such intellect mingled with these manners, that the perfect lady was not veiled for a moment.⁵⁶

Crabbe's account of the institution, while designating it a Protestant nunnery, seems to have been monastic only in his choice of words to describe the institution itself and the status of its residents. A private, local concern, its residents numbered only four or five and his account of them suggests the establishment was more inclined to a cluster of spinsters than to a monastic order. His application of the term Protestant nunnery, in this case, seems to have been loosely applied and is synonymous of the labelling of other small scale institutions existing at the time.⁵⁷

Substantial plans which required public financial support seem, like Mary Astell's, to have been quashed. A proposal put forward by Sir William Cunninghame, which was presented to Thomas Sharp, Archdeacon of Durham in 1737, received little encouragement. In fact, Cunninghame's idea would likely have remained unknown until the correspondence was published in 1825. His plan, again based on the revised model required no vows to be taken and asked that the ladies should demonstrate 'exemplar gravity, agreeable temper ... [be] well descended, piously disposed and frugally inclined.'⁵⁸ Limited to ageing, but wealthy, single gentlewomen and widows without children, the institution was proposed as a 'pious and comfortable retirement,' a retreat from a world, which Cunninghame argued 'exposed [them in their old age] to scorn, to say no worse for their being of little use to the

⁵⁵ Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life*, pp.22-24.

⁵⁶ George Crabbe, *The Poetical Works of the Reverend George G. Crabbe: with his Letters and his Life*, by his Son, 8vols, vol.4 (London, 1834), p.99.

⁵⁷ See Hill, 'A Refuge from Men', pp.120-125; Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life*, pp.21-24.

⁵⁸ Thomas Newcome, (ed.), *The Life of John Sharp DD, Lord Archbishop of York*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1825), p.281.

world'.⁵⁹ His plan further stipulated the requirement of the clergy's support through their approval of the scheme and, as with Richardson, advocated their supervisory role once the institution was established. As with Astell's scheme, the plan, which envisaged admitting up to thirty single women, required public funding, which Cunninghame addressed comprehensively, suggesting applications to 'The Duchess Dowager of Marlborough,' followed by 'one or more of the pious rich and beneficent Ladies of England,' should the Duchess decline the invitation.⁶⁰

Archdeacon Sharp, aware of previous ideas, including Astell's, while accepting the proposal as 'serious and sober,'⁶¹ considered the scheme was not creditable to the Church of England. His assessment reasoned firstly that while there were no objections to such an institution in general, its insular nature was unacceptable to the Protestant Church; 'we ought not to live to ourselves only, the public have some right to or service.'⁶² He further believed that to remove oneself from society due to social disapproval, which he reasoned was imagined anyway, would encourage an adverse public perception of the institution. Further clarifying his thoughts, he explained; 'to be thought a company of discontented and desponding creatures that are tired of the world because they think the world is tired of them,' would not only be damaging to their own community but would also be damaging to the church.⁶³ While Sharp's objections seem superficial or even misconceived, indeed Hill's research has led her to argue that opposition *was* often related 'to the increasing malice and scorn with which single women were regarded,' the more fundamental issues of popery and the rejection of contemporary social values by women are clearly factors which informed his decision.⁶⁴ These are not only obvious in his opposition to a monastic-like, isolated community, whose intentions were to remove themselves from a world which was unpalatable, but are also reinforced by his further distaste for 'the words convent, prioress, nunnery and whatever conveys an idea of servitude between your society and the Popish

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.284.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.287.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.289.

⁶² Ibid, p.291.

⁶³ Ibid, p.296.

⁶⁴ Hill, 'A Refuge from Men', p.119.

religious houses.⁶⁵ With ecclesiastical approval and support paramount to Cunninghame, the scheme was abandoned.

Ideas for female conventual institutions were resonant almost immediately from the time of the dissolution of the nunneries through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and into the nineteenth, when Lady Isabella established the Ladies' Association, and beyond. They consistently advocated a more conservative model which avoided the austere practices of monasticism to pacify anxieties surrounding Catholicism re-establishing itself. The historical discourse was consistent and interactive, yet how far Lady Isabella's knowledge of the network of thought extended is uncertain.

The Development of an Idea

Lady Isabella's own thought process can be dated back to 1796 when she was twenty-four years old and still living at her family home, Kingston Lodge in Ireland. Her close friend Elizabeth Smith wrote to her in January of the following year of 'our Millenium Hall scheme,' an idea designed to improve the situation of gentlewomen left destitute by the death of their parents and which they had conceived during previous visits by Elizabeth to Kingston Lodge.⁶⁶ Their inspiration was *Millenium Hall*, a novel written by Sarah Scott and first published in 1762, nine years after Richardson had published *Sir Charles Grandison*.⁶⁷ Designated a powerful social vision by Gary Kelly, its most recent editor, *Millenium Hall* challenged contemporary social patriarchal values through the story of a group of single women whose socio-economic circumstances led them to create an alternative way of life beyond the boundaries of contemporary society and outside the prescribed female domestic sphere and was based on the more feminine principles of benevolence, piety and inclusion.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Newcome, *The Life of John Sharp DD*, p.292.

⁶⁶ Harriet Maria Bowdler, (ed.), *Fragments in Prose and Verse by Miss Elizabeth Smith, Lately Deceased* (London, 1810), p.65.

⁶⁷ Sarah Scott was sister of the Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu. After a short and unhappy marriage, in 1754 she moved to Batheaston with her friend Lady Barbara Montagu where she established a small community of women who supported each other and tried to live a charitable and independent life.

⁶⁸ Gary Kelly, 'Women's Provi(de)nce: Religion and Bluestocking Feminism in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*, (1762)', in Rebecca D'Monte & Nicole Pohl, (eds.), *Female Communities, 1600-1800* (New York & Basingstoke, 2000), p.179.

Disfigured by smallpox and separated from a malevolent husband, who rendered her neither wife nor widow, Scott was motivated to write, like other female contemporary writers, by her economic circumstances. Determined to devote her life to useful and philanthropic purposes, she used *Millenium Hall* as a vehicle to espouse her well-formed views which embraced social reform in favour of the disadvantaged, particularly women, from a perspective of charitable Anglican piety.⁶⁹ Closely aligned with both Lady Isabella's views and motivation, and others, particularly Astell, her particular focus was on the promotion of female communities as an alternative way of life to the limited possibilities offered to single women by eighteenth-century patriarchal society which demanded marriage as its primary model. The fact that her book extended to four editions by 1778, suggests that it was well received or at least received with interest.⁷⁰ Further probing the possibilities for female communities, Scott's activity was not limited to the written word. Attempts to establish real communities, first at Batheaston in 1754, with her close friend Lady Barbara Montagu, and later, at Hitcham in Buckinghamshire with a group of women who included friends from her literary circle in Bath and her sister, Bluestocking, Elizabeth Montagu, although ultimately unsuccessful, were partially responsible for and indebted to the *Millenium Hall* model.⁷¹

Scott was uncompromising in her views and Betty Rizzo, editor of the sequel to *Millenium Hall*, *Sir George Ellison*, proposes that Scott used *Millenium Hall* to probe the question 'how might a woman fare if absolutely free of all patriarchal oppression?'⁷² In order to answer this question, Scott's novel chronicled, through the words of a narrator, the story of six elite women who chose to remain single as a result of previous traumatic experiences in the outside world, the consequence of patriarchal control and manipulation.

⁶⁹ Gary Kelly, 'Scott, Sarah (1720–1795)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23292>, 10th August, 2007.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ The Batheaston community was established close to the Bailbrook estate where Lady Isabella would found the Ladies' Association some sixty years later and scholars believe *Millenium Hall* was partially based on Scott's life there: Dorice W. Elliott, 'Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* and Female Philanthropy', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol.35, 3(summer, 1995), p. 537; Linda Dunne, 'Mothers and Monsters in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*', in Jane L. Donawerth & Carol A. Kolmerton, *Utopia and Sci-Fi by Women: Worlds of Difference* (Syracuse, 1994), p.54.

⁷² Sarah Scott, *The History of George Ellison*, p.xiv.

Preferring to live a retired genteel life among others of their own sex, these women pooled their providentially acquired fortunes to form an all female community at Millenium Hall, an isolated country estate in Cornwall and invited other wealthy gentlewomen, whose fortunes also contributed to the upkeep of the society, to join them. Dedicated to a female focused domestic, religious, [educationally] improving and philanthropic lifestyle, they also offered refuge and a chance to live useful and fulfilling lives to gentlewomen in less fortunate financial circumstances than themselves. Analogous with Lady Isabella, Scott furnished the founders of the institution with an empathetic perspective towards this disadvantaged section of society, which not only contributed to an understanding of the impoverished gentlewoman's potential fate but also motivated them to act; 'these Ladies,' reported the narrator:

long beheld with compassion the wretched fate of those women, who from scantiness of fortune and pride of family, are reduced to become dependent, and to bear all the insolence of wealth, from such as will receive them into their families; these though in some measure voluntary slaves, yet suffer all the evils of the severest servitude, and are I believe the most unhappy part of the creation ... for the relief of that race they bought that large mansion.⁷³

Through the combined philanthropic endeavours of all its residents, Millenium Hall further provided homes, in the form of cottages, and work for the old and poor, the disabled and the badly deformed, all similarly marginalised and oppressed social groups in eighteenth-century society. The juxtaposition which Scott established between female subjugation in the outside or real world, which is illustrated through the experiences of its founders, and the alternative, female orientated social model offered by Millenium Hall, whose norms, contra to the prevailing social values, are illustrated through the inclusion of other socially stigmatised and marginalised groups who are not only given refuge but a valued status, served not only to emphasise but also to condemn contemporary patriarchal social values. Indeed, Zoe Kinsley, whose exploration of the novel focuses on perceptions of the institution by travellers, has characterised Millenium Hall as an inclusive society 'where

⁷³ Ibid, p.115.

disability did not equate to marginalisation.⁷⁴

Scott took care to separate Millenium Hall from the outside world sufficiently for it to operate independently. 'Several miles from a town, 'it was geographically and physically a separate entity, with the park itself described as three miles round and the house said to be situated at the end of a mile and a half long track.⁷⁵ Gary Kelly has argued convincingly that the landed estate is a metaphor for the larger estate of the nation and in this respect he has identified the community at Millenium Hall as an independent nation state whose 'national' boundaries were defined by the brick walls which surrounded it.⁷⁶ Independence was further strengthened by the structure of its economy. While funds to support the institution were predominantly derived from the contributions of its founding members, the institution also had a well organised, home based, financial system which Betty Rizzo has described as a 'sensible ecologically balanced economy'.⁷⁷ Based on collective participation, each member of the community, from its founders to the poor and the deformed, took on their own role in contributing to the estate's economic independence, constituting a committed, content and productive working community. Scott further stressed the self-sufficient nature of Millenium Hall's economy through the wealth of home-bred game and livestock nurtured on the land. Her vivid description of the estate through the words of Mrs Morgan, one of the institution's founders, bears witness to a plethora of nutritious food, plenty for the entire estate and extra to give to local residents. She described a 'very large pidgeon house' in the guise of a temple folly 'that affords a sufficient supply to our family, and many of our neighbours,' a hill in the distance 'prodigiously stocked with rabbits,' a lake and river which were stocked with 'a great profusion of fish' and an abundance of deer, hares and all sorts of game that roamed the estate, 'so that with the help of a good dairy, perhaps no situation ever more amply afforded all the necessaries of life.'⁷⁸ The occupants' personal preference for social seclusion or independence was both identified and explained by another co-founder, Mrs Mancel, in

⁷⁴ Zoe Kinsley, *Women's Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* (Aldershot & Burlington, 2008), p.124.

⁷⁵ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, pp.56, 57,109.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.28.

⁷⁷ Scott, *The History of George Ellison*, p.xxiv.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the rejection of the superficiality of eighteenth-century society for a more sincere, authentic and intellectual discourse which cannot be found outside the institution and which centres on trust, honesty and compassion.

You will pity us perhaps because we have no cards, no assemblies, no plays, no masquerades in this solitary place. The first we might have if we chose it, nor are they totally disclaimed by us; but ... we wish not for large assemblies because we do not desire to drown conversation in noise ... and as we are not afraid of shewing our hearts, we have no occasion to conceal our persons, in order to obtain either liberty of speech or action ... what I understand by society is a state of mutual confidence, reciprocal services and correspondent affections.⁷⁹

The strength of conviction in their social principles which Mrs Mancel demonstrated on behalf of the whole society rendered internal activity more tailored to their preference for intellectual and purposeful sociability, while any external interaction was on their terms alone.

Practically and emotionally the institution was also independent. A harmonious atmosphere was established, primarily through conformity and industry. There was no sense of conflict; strict adherence to rules and regulations ensured social harmony and any deviation was dealt with through expulsion. Mrs Maynard, the third co-founder explained; 'if anyone of the ladies behaves with impudence, she shall be dismissed and her fortune returned; likewise if any should by turbulence or pettishness of temper, disturb the society, it shall be in the power of the rest of them to expel her'.⁸⁰ With only one resident on record being asked to leave, the precept by which this exacted itself was through the 'fear of being dismissed' and the consequent removal to the perceived evils of the outside world.⁸¹ With the rules unquestionably established, residents were eager to not only conform but also to actively contribute to the ethos of the institution which declared it the 'duty of every person to be of service to others.'⁸² The harmonious atmosphere was also manifested in the physical appearance of the estate's inhabitants, from the agricultural workers in the field to the genteel women at their easels, journals or tapestry frames. Scott particularly singled out 'the

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp.111-112.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.117.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.120.

⁸² Ibid, p.118.

cleanliness and neatness of the young women [haymakers]' in who she imbued 'a rural simplicity without any of those marks of poverty and boorish rusticity, which would have spoiled the pastoral air of the scene around us.'⁸³ This description not only contributed to the harmonious atmosphere but also conjured up, as Scott says, a rural idyll, perhaps representative of the novel as a whole. Her description of the residents, employed in the educational pursuits of reading, writing, painting, drawing, sewing and playing musical instruments, rising in unison on the entrance of visitors and universally absorbed in their separate occupations, further projected the social harmony.

This ultra organisation was mirrored in Scott's own community at Batheaston, which led her sister to describe their institution when writing to the religious philosopher and Christian poet Gilbert West, as: 'their convent for by its regularity it resembles one.'⁸⁴ It is likely, however, that this comment would not have pleased Scott, who was openly critical of such institutions. As such, although *Millenium Hall's* active benevolence and educational and religious ethos aligned it with the notion of a Protestant nunnery, Scott's distaste for such establishments rendered her careful to affiliate the institution more with the idea a genteel female residence in the form of a country estate rather than a conventual institution. Indeed, its opulence and grandness was not only reflected in the magnificent, ancient structure of the house itself but also in the grounds in which the house was situated and Scott's narrator remarked on the beauties and riches of 'the park ornamented by woods and fine pieces of water.'⁸⁵ Residents themselves were described variously as 'exquisitely genteel ... elegant ... sensitive ... [and] ... graceful,' and directions for admission required that only 'gentlemen's daughters whose character was unblemished ... might be received into that society.'⁸⁶

Economically, practically, emotionally and geographically independent, the society at Millenium Hall was completely self-sufficient and consequently had no requirements or

⁸³ Ibid, pp.57-58.

⁸⁴ Emily J. Climentson, *Elizabeth Montagu, Queen of the Bluestockings: Her Correspondence from 1720-1761*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1906), p.79.

⁸⁵ Ibid, pp.58, 109.

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp.59-60, 116.

need for approval from the oppressive and exploitative society from which it had escaped. Internally its model of management was efficient, seemingly easy and self-supportive and the constructed space, both physically and emotionally, was comfortable, tranquil and welcoming. This 'female arcadia,' created by Scott was further heightened by the conversation between the narrator and the housekeeper whose reply to his question 'in what heaven do you live?' is naturally: 'happiness flows ... in an uninterrupted current.'⁸⁷ While the novel lends itself specifically to asserting the peaceful, harmonious and ultimately successful nature of the institution, its language: 'earthly paradise,' 'this heavenly society,' 'this fairy land,' evokes the ethereal and by definition the unattainable.⁸⁸ Allegra Johns's study of *Millenium Hall*, which analyses women's utopia's agrees, arguing that the women 'withdraw to engage in nostalgic feudalism,' while Judith Broome, whose study of the novel has particularly focused on the concept of nostalgia, has further argued that *Millenium Hall* is an 'illusory harmonious space that does not engage in its surrounding world'.⁸⁹

Although successful in fiction, *Millenium Hall* is ultimately an imagined community. Created by women for women, its idyllic, isolated location, flawless organisation and harmonious form, together with the lack of criticism and consequent removal of any form of masculine authority from the society, distances it from any serious proposals and has led the novel to be identified as an early example of a 'feminist utopia.'⁹⁰ While *Millenium Hall* is an ideal social vision, Scott was persuasive in her attempts to convince the reader of the viability of her scheme. In presenting a real community with a practical and social purpose situated outside the social constraints imposed by eighteenth-century society, circumstances which are made all the more convincing by her intricately detailed descriptions of the place, the inhabitants and its management, she offered Lady Isabella a credible and potentially technically achievable model on which to base the Ladies'

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp.120, 223.

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp.58, 200.

⁸⁹ Johns, *Women's Utopias*, p.91; Judith Broome, *Fictive Domains: Body, Landscape and Nostalgia, 1717-1770* (Cranbury NJ, 2007), p.152.

⁹⁰ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p.35; Johns, *Women's Utopias*, p.14.

Association.⁹¹ A pastoral retirement which looked, as Gary Kelly has proposed, to a golden age for solutions to the problem, may well have appealed to Lady Isabella's nostalgic sensibility based on her paternalistic perspective.⁹² Scholars have further pointed to the conservative nature of the novel in its portrayal of women in a conventional 'unamazonian' way and, with the only demand of the residents being a 'wish to regulate ourselves,' this also contributes to the credibility of the scheme.⁹³ If we add to this the absolute success of the project which is conveyed in the expansion of the plan to include another mansion nearby, due to huge demand, the potential for the wide scale application of such a scheme is not only highly captivating but also convincing to the reader.⁹⁴

In a letter written in 1813, requesting advice from a gentleman whom she wished to remain anonymous, Lady Isabella admitted that the idea for an asylum for gentlewomen in reduced circumstances was a subject which had persistently pervaded her thoughts.⁹⁵ She confessed, it has 'occupied my mind from time to time these many years and as often as I dismiss it from my thoughts it will return'.⁹⁶ Her determination and devout belief in providence encouraged the belief that she had 'no right to chase away my [her] reveries' believing 'they may be sent for some good purpose'.⁹⁷ She also identified a number of signs which she was convinced had been sent to her for a purpose: 'this year so many books have chanced to fall in my way, so many conversations to meet my ear, all tending to give importance to the subject of my thoughts and I am determined to endeavour to make it something more than a dream'.⁹⁸ As previously noted, Gary Kelly has described *Millenium Hall* as 'a powerful social vision' which he believed was also 'informed by ideas of divine providence'.⁹⁹ Citing providential events which combine to create the plot of the novel, he draws attention firstly and most importantly to the providential nature of the text itself as the

⁹¹ Qian Ma, *Feminist Utopian Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Chinese and English Fiction*, p.107.

⁹² Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p.36; see chapter 3.

⁹³ Jody Greene, Review of Lisa L. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies: Towards A Sapphic History of the British Novel*, (Durham NC, 1997), *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, vol.53, 3(December, 1998), p.392; Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p.166.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.121.

⁹⁵ Name edited out.

⁹⁶ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to dear sir, nd.

⁹⁷ DRO, H7/7/13, notes nd.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹⁹ Kelly, 'Women's Provi(de)nce: Religion and Bluestocking Feminism', p.179.

narrator and his travelling companion stumble upon Millenium Hall purely by chance after an accident while en route to Cornwall.¹⁰⁰ Equally important perhaps are the providential or fortuitous means by which the lady founders of the institution acquire their legacies or fortunes which enable them to establish a community at Millenium Hall.¹⁰¹ With a utopian character established for *Millenium Hall*, a model which Lady Isabella leant heavily on, how realistic a project was the Ladies' Association?

A close examination of notes written by Lady Isabella, headed 'plan' and entitled: 'A perusal of Mrs Scott's interesting story of *Millenium Hall* gave rise to the following thoughts respecting an association of Ladies,' confirm the formative significance of Sarah Scott's narrative to Elizabeth and Lady Isabella's idea. Although it is possible these notes may date to earlier conversations with Elizabeth Smith it is more likely that they were written independently by Lady Isabella at the time her thoughts were developing in Bath in 1813. Elizabeth Smith died prematurely in 1806, at the age of twenty-nine, and, although Lady Isabella later bequeathed her letters from Elizabeth to Harriet Bowdler who published them in *Fragments of Prose and Verse* as a tribute to Elizabeth, there is no further mention by Lady Isabella in her archive of any collaboration between them after 1796. Indeed, her reference to the institution in 1813, as 'this child of my own brain,' confirms her perception of the project as her own.¹⁰²

A detailed breakdown of Lady Isabella's initial thoughts, which are laid out in the notes, confirm that her plan imitated the structure of Scott's novel both in form and management. The plan itself involved the establishment of a community of genteel women who differed in financial circumstances only. By combining the financial resources of the better off it would be possible, she believed, to rent 'a handsome mansion in the country' where all could live respectably and independently, supporting each other as 'one family' on an equal footing.¹⁰³ This scheme, she was convinced, would benefit all involved. She also

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² DRO, H7/7/15, letter to Lady Wilton, 1813.

¹⁰³ DRO, H7/7/3.

proposed the provision of a separate trust fund in which the wealthier residents of the institution would deposit a lump sum, which Lady Isabella suggested might be somewhere in the region of £1,000 each, as security for the richer ladies upon whom the financial responsibility of the undertaking would fall. This scheme, she was convinced, would maintain the respectability of the institution and its residents. The women in less favourable financial circumstances, Lady Isabella calculated, should be asked to contribute £50 each per year towards the household expenses. The total income would consequently be derived from the interest of the security fund, contributions from the three foundresses or Renters, as they would be known, the other Lady Renters and from the annual payments of a proposed nine ladies in less affluent circumstances who would be named Lady Associates. Single, wealthy women and women with small but independent fortunes, who otherwise could only afford a modest home, would be able to live more comfortably in conducive company and, in doing so, serve other gentlewomen in more limited circumstances, by offering them a respectable and creditable home, 'on terms suitable to their narrower fortunes'.¹⁰⁴ Once the community was established and its income proven to support the community, it was further planned to admit a number of destitute but genteel women who could then be accommodated free of charge. The bond uniting their community, Lady Isabella was adamant, should be a common agreement in plans of usefulness and benevolence, and members, she stipulated, should be chosen accordingly. At this early stage no further detail is included except an acknowledgement that the ultimate object of the community ought to be 'to encourage mental improvement, active exertion, benevolent occupations and above all, religious principles and religious practice'.¹⁰⁵

Once committed and in progress, the reality of the task, in the midst of a society which was increasingly individual, still anti- Catholic in its outlook, highly suspicious of female communities and, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic war, unforthcoming in its financial support, almost immediately proved less straightforward than *Millenium Hall* had

¹⁰⁴ Defined by Lady Isabella as not possessing more than £100 a year: DRO, H7/7/4, nd.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

suggested. As a new and, with Lady Isabella wishing to extend the scheme nationally to ‘each of the principle towns in England,’¹⁰⁶ extensive plan, early attempts to summon support, were, as others had been historically, received with enthusiasm by the few and scepticism by the many. This lacklustre response forced Lady Isabella to follow a course which can be best understood as an evolutionary process in which the shape of the institution, although establishing and adhering to a basic framework from the outset, was carved through a series of negotiations and renegotiations which interacted with, responded to and was compromised by public opinion. Initial requests to support the institution, although successful in recruiting women who were prepared to pay high rents as Lady Renters, were less successful in their attempts to attract those who would or could further contribute a lump sum to a proposed separate trust fund to ensure the stability of the institution and the security of its members. A letter from Lady Isabella to an anonymous supporter setting out her position prior to the commencement of the institution, disclosed the extent and character of support which had been mustered, although it provides no evidence who she specifically approached or her methods of communication:

The number of Ladies who have agreed to give their assistance in forming and regulating a Female College on the Plan proposed amounts to about 10 or twelve. They have declared their readiness to rent apartments there, and to devote much of their time and thoughts to the well being of the Institution.¹⁰⁷

This number included both Lady Renters and Lady Associates and the absolute commitment of these early supporters to the scheme is undoubtedly demonstrated in the personal contribution of time and thoughts which they were prepared to make. This being the case, it seems likely that the restricted character of the financial contributions made by Lady Renters, was due to the limitations of fortune or income rather than to choice. An addendum to Lady Isabella’s notes relating to *Millenium Hall*, which she added in 1819 once the institution was established, reflected on the lack of support from wealthier single women:

many attempts were made to give currency to the thoughts which have been here stated and more than once sanguine hopes arose of the

¹⁰⁶ DRO, H7/7/15, notes, 1815.

¹⁰⁷ DRO, H7/7/16, nd.

possibility of carrying into effect some scheme of the sort- but it became obvious that ... no general fund [was forthcoming] to which recourse might be had should the richer members withdraw from the society.¹⁰⁸

The poor response, reflecting both Astell and Cunninghame's experience, was a huge disappointment to Lady Isabella. Convinced that the undertaking would be more likely to prosper under independent management, as both *Millenium Hall* and independent attempts had demonstrated, she explained the benefits a single founder would bring to the success of the scheme: 'Had any Individual stepped forward, able and willing to form the Establishment, no Committee would have been necessary, as the rules and regulations and every necessary arrangement would have depended on wishes of the Founder and of the Lady Renters.'¹⁰⁹ A further afternote to her thoughts relating to *Millenium Hall* confirmed the course of action which she would be forced to take under these circumstances: 'no one to be found disposed to join in contributing [sic] any portion of money it became necessary therefore to use as a security fund some thousand pounds by subscription.'¹¹⁰ The implications of this are twofold, one following on from the other. First, with no overall financial control or responsibility, it would clearly be unethical for the founders of the Ladies' Association to design and implement the physical and organisational shape of the institution independently. Ergo, under these circumstances its design would necessarily require approval from all subscribers who contributed towards the financial welfare of the institution and as requests for contributions were made to the public in general, it was consequently early nineteenth-century society at large that would need to be satisfied. Lady Isabella's addendum elucidated further;

These difficulties taken into consideration led step by step to the arrangements upon which the Bailbrook Institution formed. A subscription was set on foot to supply the want of a joint fund for security, — this rendered necessary the appointment of Patrons, Patronesses and Trustees. A Guardian Committee was then chosen to whom was committed the protection and assistance of the first experimental Establishment.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ DRO, H7/7/4, notes, 1813.

¹⁰⁹ DRO, H/7716, nd.

¹¹⁰ DRO, H7/7/4, nd.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

By revealing the appointment of a significant number and variety of official positions on both local and national levels, Lady Isabella's notes defined the institution as a public entity, reliant on public support for its success and as a consequence, crucially open to criticism and disapproval. As such, the Ladies' Association, unlike *Millenium Hall*, functioned *within* the boundaries of contemporary society and under the scrutiny of patriarchal authority.

While the Ladies' Association, as a real attempt to establish a female community had numerous difficulties to deal with as a result of its dependence on wider society, *Millenium Hall* succeeded precisely because, as a fictional utopia, it was able to define itself as completely independent of the outside world. This is primarily reflected in the absence of any critical comment of the place. Although the narrator and his travelling companion were outsiders and a mouthpiece for the patriarchal society from which they retreated, Scott did not enter into a dialogue relating to contemporary opinions regarding female communities or religious institutions. Instead, the visitors were overawed by the environment around them, to the extent that the narrator, Sir George Ellison, so affected by his experience, established a similar community in Scott's next novel and sequel to *Millenium Hall*, named after him. Although unrealistic, the absence of critical comment is an obvious necessity, as condemnation in any form would undermine the successful model which Scott presents.

Mary Peace, whose work on Scott has focused on its independent economy, has argued that in order for *Millenium Hall* 'to lead the good life' it was imperative 'to be materially self-sufficient, and therefore independent of the corruptions of the commercial and political world'.¹¹² *Millenium Hall* was not simply financially viable but thrived to the extent that co-founder Mrs Maynard admitted 'the society now subsists with the utmost plenty and convenience.'¹¹³ This is demonstrated in the choice of residents. Continuing with her account of the institution's successes, Mrs Maynard further confirmed that 'most [women] admitted had a trifle, some not more than one hundred pounds ... in general the

¹¹² Mary Peace, 'Epicures in Rural Pleasures: Economy in Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*', *Women's Writing*, vol.19, 2(2002), p.308.

¹¹³ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p.117.

institution chose to admit those who had the least'.¹¹⁴ Indeed Millenium Hall prospered financially to the extent that potential wealthy residents were rejected over the less well off, even refusing admission to 'young women of near two thousand pounds in fortune'.¹¹⁵ That admission was refused to many seems to have been due to lack of space. With seemingly inexhaustible funds to expand, further development was considered and embarked upon for this reason and the purchase of an even larger property is absolute testimony to the institutions well-being. Mrs Maynard explained:

as the expenses of the first community fall so far short of their expectations, and the sums appropriated for that purpose, they determined to hazard another of the same kind, and have just concluded a treaty for a still larger mansion, at about three miles distance and by the persons now waiting for it, they have reason to believe it will not be less successful than the other.¹¹⁶

While Scott's six main protagonists were easily able to fund their venture independently, exactly in the manner envisioned by Lady Isabella, Kelly, as previously noted, points to the fortuitous nature of their resources, gaining their 'utopia by providential means — an unexpected inheritance, a lucky discovery, a female friendship'.¹¹⁷ That each member's wealth came about in the same chance circumstances is hard to believe and as such indicates the potential difficulties in funding such a venture in reality. Scott offered no realistic explanation for the apparently limitless funds the founders brought to finance their scheme and in this respect Kelly notes that the institution 'is created as much by good fortune or divine gift as by human agency'.¹¹⁸ Literary critics have proposed that this is a *deus ex machina* solution to the important question of funding, whereby the potential or even likely lack of support for such an institution is seemingly magically solved by an unanticipated force or intervention.¹¹⁹

Scott's own personal attempt to translate her idea into reality demonstrated the difficulties involved. After the death of her companion, Lady Barbara Montagu in 1765, she

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.121.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.32.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Kelly, 'Women's Provi(de)nace: Religion and Bluestocking Feminism', p.182.

crafted plans to set up a small scale Millenium Hall at Hitcham House in Buckinghamshire, near to Maidenhead and close to her sister, Elizabeth, who lived at Sandleford Priory near Newbury.¹²⁰ We know this project was linked to the novel, at least in the minds of Scott and her sister Elizabeth, through references to the new community as a Millenium Hall. Writing to her sister following a visit to Hitcham House in April 1768 shortly after the community had been set up, Elizabeth spoke of ‘the happy spirits of Millenium Hall,’ while in a later letter, thanking her sister for ‘ye pleasing hours you gave me in your Millenium, as it resembles your Millenium in quality I wish it did so in quantity,’ she makes an unfavourable comparison with the novel.¹²¹ The practical arrangements and financial circumstances which are also discussed in the sister’s correspondence, throw further light on these comments. They reveal a benevolent and purposeful routine and ethos at Hitcham House which is closely aligned to that of Millenium Hall, yet accounts of financial circumstances strongly suggest a lack of funding was largely responsible for its short life.¹²² Although founded as an independent entity, the scheme encountered considerable problems almost immediately. Proving far more expensive than had been originally anticipated and, in financial dispute with one of its members, Scott acknowledged defeat only seven months after its foundation, writing: ‘I wish I could cherish any chance of continuing in this place could it be done, but even could the expense be brought within proper bounds, I see not how it could be’.¹²³ Literary critic Nicole Pohl suggests that if ‘Scott’s fiction worked, the real life Hitcham experiment arguably failed because of the inability to turn theory into practice.’¹²⁴

The Ladies’ Association as a real endeavour encountered its share of problems which were largely centred on public censure, which, as established, was facilitated by the

¹²⁰ Scott wrote *The History of George Ellison* in 1766 to fund the project. Kelly, ‘Scott, Sarah (1720–1795)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹²¹ Scott, *The History of George Ellison*, pp.xvii-xviii.

¹²² Members were ‘to practice first the domestic economy then the charitable activity of Millenium Hall’ which included the establishment of a school and a Sunday school and various schemes for employing the poor. A well stocked garden and livestock were to render the community as independent as possible, while the institution should be run on a democratic model with rules which would be implemented by good-will. Ibid, p. xxvii.

¹²³ Ibid, p.xviii.

¹²⁴ D’ Monte & Pohl, ‘Introduction’, *Female Communities*, p.16.

need for financial support.¹²⁵ Lady Isabella acknowledged this and attempted to overcome disapproval by making a concerted effort to connect with public opinion, while remaining loyal to her own religious principles and vision and to the genteel status of all involved. Criticism predominantly focused on the character of the institution in the shape of two threads of thought which settled at opposite ends of the spectrum and which reflected the historical criticism of conventual institutions. The first criticized the institution for its overly religious character, as in earlier periods, associating it with the reviled insular and ascetic regime of the Catholic nunnery, while at the other extreme, critics condemned the institution for its lack of religious focus, classifying it as nothing more than a country boarding house where gentlewomen could live in comfort and indolence, an argument which not only relates to fears surrounding independent female communities but was also sensitive to the growing evangelical ethos which saw the upper classes as moral role models to their lower class contemporaries. More specifically, at one end of the spectrum Thomas Dew asserted, in *A Digest of the Laws, Customs, Manners and Institutions of the Ancient and Modern Nations*, written after the closure of the Ladies' Association in 1853, that 'generally these schemes have failed because of an aversion to popery,' while at the other extreme, criticism in the *Monthly Review* for the lack of religious character of the institution, called the scheme 'absurd.'¹²⁶ Justifying its acerbic attack, the article, reviewing the *Life of Dr Heber, D.D. Lord Bishop of Calcutta*, explained that 'because there was to be no vow required, no rule to be observed, no religious bond to keep the community together,' the institution, in its opinion, was 'nothing better than a mere country boarding house.'¹²⁷ The High Church magazine, the *Christian Remembrancer*, exploring the revival of conventual institutions, added its opinion to the debate from its own biased perspective: 'owing in part no doubt to

¹²⁵ Robert Southey's *Colloquies* confirmed 'it was hoped that between ten to fifteen thousand pounds might have been raised, which would have sufficed for putting upon a permanent establishment; but though the Queen and the late Princess Charlotte and other Princesses contributed to the subscription, not five thousand were collected.' Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1831), p.307.

¹²⁶ Thomas R. Dew, *A Digest of the Laws, Customs, Manners and Institutions of the Ancient and Modern Nations* (New York, 1876), p.388; Review of *The Life of Dr Heber, D.D. Lord Bishop of Calcutta*, *Monthly Review*, vol.14 (August, 1830), p.527.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

the total want of a religious character they [female communities] have never become respectable in public opinion ... It seems to have been owing in part to this defect that it [The Ladies' Association] owed its failure.'¹²⁸ Robert Southey however, convinced of the requirement for such institutions, was certain such an institution should be 'an edifice which, while intended for pious purposes, should be at the same time a monument to high civilization.'¹²⁹

With this in mind, Lady Isabella's first challenge was to present the institution in a form which would distance it from the strict religious character which monastic institutions had reminded many for centuries, while at the same time remaining loyal to her own religious requirements. In this respect, Lady Isabella not only took direction from the blueprint of *Millenium Hall*, but was also fundamentally influenced by the nunneries of pre-reformation England. Her notes, evidence of her contribution to the continuing debate and understanding of its scope, confirm her conviction of their value as refuges for single women and harbour an underlying resentment that their removal was not compensated for. Condemning the injustice of providing an alternative for men while ignoring the needs of single women, she protested angrily:

The revenues of Religious houses dissolved in the 15th and 16th centuries were settled on the different colleges of Oxford and Cambridge... But for the nunneries abolished what recompense was made? What asylums were thought of to supply their place to women requiring the protection of a creditable home or the advantage of cheap education, or the comfort of a religious retirement? - None.¹³⁰

The notion of a nunnery has already been identified as an unwelcome concept in the eighteenth century and before and although by the mid-eighteenth century fears surrounding Catholicism had diminished substantially, confirmed in the passing of the Papists Act in 1778 and the Catholic relief Act in 1791 which saw the partial repeal of the stringent laws surrounding Catholics in Britain, suspicion and opposition still simmered amongst some, evidenced in the shape of the Gordon Riots, a response to the first bill, in 1780.

¹²⁸ *Christian Remembrancer*, vol.7 (February, 1844), p.258.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p.309.

¹³⁰ DRO, H7/7/15, notes, 1813.

The welcoming of French *émigrés* clergy and monastic orders to Britain by the 1790s, offering a refuge from the atrocities of the French Revolution, although seen by some as commendable, had by 1800 sparked new fears and renewed debate around the Catholic question. Concerns centred on the opportunities for proselytising which the ‘spirit of toleration to the free exercise of their religious duties,’ namely the establishment of monasteries in different part of the England, offered and which, it was feared could culminate in the re- establishment of the Catholic faith or worse.¹³¹ These concerns manifested themselves in the Monastic Institutions Bill introduced in 1800, which aimed to tighten the existing laws relating to monastic institutions which had stated; ‘be it further exacted that nothing in this act contained shall make it lawful to found, endow or establish any religious order or society of persons bound by monastic or religious vows’.¹³² Proponents' opinions ranged from the more balanced and objective view which simply argued that the establishment of monasteries were practices which ‘ought to be checked in the bud,’ to more alarmist attitudes which warned; ‘the age of popery has commenced.’¹³³ The general tenor from this camp, however, settled on the precept that they ‘did not expect to hear monastic life defended ... [being] contrary to our religion, hostile to our laws and destructive of our prosperity.’¹³⁴ Opponents, however, considering the existing laws sufficient protection, saw the introduction of the Bill as unnecessary. Labelling proponents as alarmists, they argued there was no adequate cause for concern. Fears that ‘five thousand priests subsist here at public expense,’ was, they argued, when numbers and activity were factually presented, nonsense and scaremongering was simply based on a lack of knowledge.¹³⁵ Benjamin Hobhouse, who would later play a key role in the management of the Ladies’ Association, thought the resolutions, if passed, would ‘trench on the spirit of toleration which particularly distinguished the country,’ further arguing that it wasn’t ‘*our*’

¹³¹ *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, 35vols, vol.35, 21st March, 1800-29th October, 1801 (London, 1819), p.341.

¹³² *Ibid*, p.378; Act 31 GIII c32 paragraph 17.

¹³³ *Ibid*, pp.342, 355.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p.342.

Catholics that were causing the problem but the émigrés.¹³⁶ It was the establishment of erstwhile almost non-existent monasteries that was the perceived threat rather than the practice of the faith by its followers.

Although the Bill was rejected, the argument rumbled on. Five years later, Robert Southey made his views on the subject clear in a letter to CW Wynne, MP for Montgomeryshire, warning ‘there is more need to check popery in England ... It was highly proper to let the immigrant monastics associate together here and live in their old customs but it is not proper to let them continue their establishments, nor proper that the children of Protestant parents be inveigled into Nunneries.’¹³⁷ The attitudes surrounding the production of the Bill and the protracted concerns emphasise the continued anxiety towards monastic establishments, most of which were female-occupied nunneries. Hostility it seems, still originated not simply in their association with Catholicism but also because of their ascetic practices. Writer and critic, Anna Jameson, whose active benevolence concentrated particularly on the condition of women took a more pragmatic approach, admitting ‘I am no friend to a nunnery,’ and argued that such institutions were ‘suited to a popish but not Protestant state where freedom of individual action in its full development is the very soul of religion.’¹³⁸

While public concern continued, some, including Southey, engaging historically with the problem of single women and other minority groups, argued for the more conservative model of religious institution which had been proposed two centuries earlier as a solution and which he reiterated in *Colloquies*. Addressing the problem forthrightly, he argued that if you ‘take from such communities their irrevocable vows, their onerous laws, their ascetic practices, cast away their mythology and with it the frauds and follies connected therewith and how beneficial would they be found! What opportunities would they afford to

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.345.

¹³⁷ Southey, *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, vol.2, p.323, letter to CW Wynne, 6th April, 1805.

¹³⁸ Anna Jameson, ‘Woman’s Work’, *Irish Quarterly Review*, vol.6, 24(December, 1856), pp.727-766.

literature, what aid to devotion, what refuge to affliction, what consolidation to humanity.’¹³⁹

Nineteenth-century historian Sharon Turner, whose work on the Anglo Saxons had a profound influence on contemporary historical thought, agreed. Assessing the importance of monasticism in England from the Anglo Saxon period, he championed such institutions in contemporary society as ‘temporary asylums of unprovided youth’ on the proviso that their rules and habits should be updated to engage with current thought and proposed that monastic institutions should be ‘formed on such moral plans and religious formulae as should be found worthy of an intellectual age.’¹⁴⁰ Periodicals also engaged in the debate. *La Belle Assemblée* espoused such a scheme, acknowledging its historical context; ‘the idea of a Protestant establishment upon a conventual plan, exclusive of vows, has been a favourite one with many tender hearted persons, who have thought that such a species of asylum would be serviceable to females of fallen expectations and circumscribed fortunes,’ while *The Ladies Literary Cabinet* published an article focused on the problem of single women in England which reported: ‘we have been led from our observations of society, to believe that Protestant institutions might be formed without any of the evils attached to them which heretofore been inherent in monastic establishments.’¹⁴¹ Tory publication *The Quarterly Review*, published several pieces on monasticism, one of which was written by Southey, anxious, according to Sockman, to bring the subject before the better classes.¹⁴² Its general message to the educated and elite was that under no circumstances should the old model of monasticism be reinstated but instead, a reformed, more moderate and less restrictive model, which focused more on active benevolence and less on the ascetic and self-absorbing aspects

¹³⁹ Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies*, p.338.

¹⁴⁰ Sharon Turner (1768-1847), historian and London attorney, was a contemporary of Lady Isabella. His most important work, *The History of the Anglo Saxons: Comprising the History of England from the Earliest Period to the Norman Conquest*, first published in 1799, brought him an ‘immediate and substantial scholarly reputation’ and was informed by his patriotic, conservative and progressive views. According to his biographer, H.R. Loyn, ‘his outstanding attributes were a formidable intellectual curiosity and a practical desire to bring to general notice historical evidence that had long been neglected or ignored.’ Friend, Robert Southey, paid tribute to his work while others noted a tendency for romance, a perceived characteristic which Southey himself had been charged with. H. R. Loyn: ‘Turner, Sharon (1768–1847)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27866>, 20th April, 2012; Sharon Turner, *The History of the Anglo Saxons: Comprising the History of England from the Earliest Period to the Norman Conquest*, 2vols, vol.2 (Philadelphia, 1841), p.464.

¹⁴¹ *Belle Assemblée*, (September, 1823), p.108; *Ladies’ Literary Cabinet*, vol.2 (May, 1820), p.6.

¹⁴² Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life*, pp.55-56.

of the traditional monastic institution, should take its place.

While these ideas were not new, Southey's article also called for more support for the establishment of such institutions, not just to ameliorate the situation of impoverished genteel women but also in order to counteract the establishment of Catholic institutions in England. He was scaremongering perhaps, but it was a fear precipitated by the peculiar context of the time. His article warned:

if Bailbrook House, for want of due support should cease to be an association for English Ladies, educated in the pure principles of the gospel, and employed in training up others in the same principles which are the foundation of our public prosperity and our private happiness, it will immediately pass into the hands of the papists and be converted into a regular nunnery. There is no want of money among the Catholics for any object connected with the propagation of their corrupt and mischievous doctrine. They can erect colleges and purchase estates for their support. Means are never wanting where there is zeal.¹⁴³

Southey was criticised for his ill informed, prejudiced and outdated attitude towards monasticism and the Catholic faith by an anonymous correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. The unknown, perhaps Catholic, writer attacked Southey for exaggerating the 'religious excesses,' and advised that his 'habits of reasoning and opacities of understanding, would receive much benefit from a little more knowledge and a little less enthusiasm'.¹⁴⁴ Although also attacked by Macaulay for his over enthusiasm, Southey was mentally well travelled in this area and his views, as already demonstrated, were held by many others of his standing.¹⁴⁵ Southey's concern must have been widespread as in 1815, the Catholic Father Charles Premord, felt compelled to write a book 'to try to remove the fears of some well-meaning people and to show that there is nothing in these religious establishments, which can give the least umbrage to a liberal and enlightened nation.'¹⁴⁶ Lady Isabella was of a similar mind. Relating the visit to Bailbrook House by Catholic nun, Mme. Mirefoix to Lady Manvers, she considered it 'a mortifying thought that a Protestant Institution which Her Majesty had visited and which she had been heard to call 'A blessed asylum' should

¹⁴³ *Quarterly Review*, vol.22 (July, 1819), p.102.

¹⁴⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.127 (January, 1820), p.31.

¹⁴⁵ See chapter 2 fn.175.

¹⁴⁶ Father Charles Leonard Premord, *A Friend of Religious and Civic Liberty. Reflections on Communities of Women and Monastic Institutes* (London, 1815), preface.

now pass away from us into the possession of a Catholic Community'.¹⁴⁷

Carefully taking into consideration the prevailing ethos of feeling surrounding religious institutions in England at the time, Lady Isabella attempted to take the middle ground, believing emphatically that if an asylum *along* the lines of a nunnery but without its extreme religious practices could be established it would be eagerly supported by many and the idea would gradually be 'followed in every part of England and Ireland.'¹⁴⁸ Her optimism that support would be forthcoming suggests that contemporary public opinion was more receptive to such an idea than it had been historically. Her plan consequently involved the establishment of a community 'so regulated as to possess the advantage of a convent without its vows or unnecessary restrictions, something short of a female college where not so much the sciences as the Christian virtues should be studied'.¹⁴⁹ Southey estimated 'it will not be difficult to hold a safe and even course between the too little and too much' but believed their ethos would 'partake rather of the character of colleges than of convents. The fewer regulations the better; none beyond what are indispensable for the well-being of the community.'¹⁵⁰

Lady Isabella's use of the word convent in her description of the plan, as past experience had demonstrated, was problematic. There is no doubt that she saw the institution as a type of conventual establishment, classifying it as such in a letter to Lady Manvers in 1819.¹⁵¹ Yet to consider calling the institution anything which would so obviously align it with Catholicism and monasticism would, she was advised, be suicidal. Southey, pondering the dynamics of such female communities in 1797, reiterated the negative impact any association with a Catholic conventual institution would have on public opinion. To call such a scheme a Protestant nunnery was, he believed, 'deservedly obnoxious, for nunneries,

¹⁴⁷ Madame Mirefoix was, an aristocratic French lady, previously from Montargis in France, who had lost relatives in the French Revolution and who had, since 1806, been the prioress of a community of Benedictine nuns at Heath Hall, near Wakefield. She was introduced to Lady Isabella by Peter Baines, an Ampleforth monk, who had recently taken up the post of priest at the Catholic chapel in Bath: DRO, H7/7/16, letter to Lady Manvers, January, 1819.

¹⁴⁸ DRO, H7/7/13, 1813.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies*, p.313.

¹⁵¹ DRO, H7/7/16, letter to Lady Manvers, January, 1819.

such as they exist in Roman Catholic countries, and as at this time are being re-established in this, are connected with the worst corruptions of popery, being only nurseries of superstition and misery,' and warned that nothing could 'be more injurious to the success of the experiment than to have it supposed that it partook in any of the same character'.¹⁵² Re-considering the name of the Ladies' Association once established at Cornwallis House, the High Church, yet ecumenically minded bishop of Salisbury, Thomas Burgess also advised Lady Isabella to veer away from any connection with the notion of a convent; 'perhaps the institution [could be] called *The Protestant Sisters Of Charity* which is not [as] liable to the objections [that] Protestant *Nunneries* and Protestant House Association are ... perhaps also *Queen Charlotte's Association of Protestant Sisters of Charity*'.¹⁵³ These discussions regarding the name of the institution provide an example of the negotiating processes which took place to court public approval. With a name at the forefront of any scheme, a 'brand,' providing a primary image of the character, focused consideration was crucial to a successful outcome.

In terms of its spiritual shape, Lady Isabella not only looked back to the pre-Reformation nunneries but also actively took direction from other religious establishments which existed in Britain and Europe. She was particularly interested in the principles and structure of the Moravian Church which had settled in England from 1743, an evangelical branch of Protestantism with a strict moral code, and those of the Chapitres in Germany, which had been referred to as a model as early as 1671:

Let us look to existing societies of females and see under what sort of authority they are regulated. In the church of England I believe there are no such societies except alms house and colleges for old persons ... in the Moravian sisters houses the bond of union and principle of submission to their head, seems to be of a religious nature.¹⁵⁴

Correspondence in the main archive, written to and from the Moravian, Ignatius Latrobe and from John Hawkesworth, whose distant relative was a member of a Protestant Chapitre in Germany, provide information which points to the viability of similar schemes and Lady

¹⁵² Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies*, p.338; Ibid, p.311.

¹⁵³ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from the Bishop of Salisbury, nd.

¹⁵⁴ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to B. Hobhouse, 10th December, 1829.

Isabella's interest in both their character and their structure again confirm her relentless efforts to establish both a workable and socially acceptable model through negotiation and enquiry. Both well established in Europe as Protestant institutions by the eighteenth century, (although Moravian settlements were still establishing themselves in England at this time), they were, as Lady Isabella supposed, principally devoted to religious practices. In response to her enquiry to know more about the Moravian institution, Ignatius Latrobe, secretary to the Moravian Brethren's Society from 1787 until 1834 and well known in evangelical circles, informed her of their retired and devotional, but not binding, ethos which appealed to many:

The origin of these Institutions with us was religious. Without any vows or compulsion of any kind, first a few and afterwards many more, agreed to live together, so far separated from the world, so to be less exposed to its snares, and more undisturbed in attending to the concerns of their souls, edifying, encouraging, and comforting each other.¹⁵⁵

Latrobe's description, which related to the female sector of the Moravian settlement in England, fits with historians' assessments of these institutions as self-contained communal establishments where residents lived in sex and age organized 'choirs', rather than family units but worked and worshipped together in one community.¹⁵⁶ Latrobe further suggested that an initial opposition to their project was based on ignorance of the proposed scheme and a persisting fear of Catholicism re-establishing itself in England. 'When they were first introduced in England,' he informed Lady Isabella, 'they created much surprise, to some disturbance, the populace about Fulneck near Leeds, where the first was built, fearing that Popery was making a lodgement in the country.'¹⁵⁷ Latrobe summed up his informative communication by advising Lady Isabella that the most constructive response to criticism was to proceed quietly but confidently towards her goal. He confirmed with conviction that in conducting themselves with 'simplicity and fearlessness, in spite of all noise and

¹⁵⁵ John C. S. Mason, 'La Trobe, Christian Ignatius (1758–1836)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16107>, 31st October, 2011; DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Ignatius Latrobe, nd, but after 1821.

¹⁵⁶ Joseph E. Hutton, *The History of the Moravian Church* (London, 1909), p.221; Colin Podmore, *Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* (Oxford & New York, 1998).

¹⁵⁷ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Ignatius Latrobe, nd, but after 1821.

opposition ... the institution has answered the aim proposed.¹⁵⁸ Although there is no indication of Lady Isabella's response to this information, Latrobe's description of the Moravian settlement, which clearly embraced a similar structure to the Ladies' Association, would have confirmed to her the viability of such schemes, even in the face of initial opposition.

A later letter from John Hawkesworth, which enclosed information regarding enquiries made on Lady Isabella's behalf, related to the German Chapitres, another model of Protestant conventualism which had been used to understand the concept of the Ladies' Association when it first opened. Pierce Egan's *Walks Through Bath*, described the Ladies' Association as 'rather of a *nouvelle* description in this country, resembling the German Chapitres.'¹⁵⁹ His words not only confirm the familiarity of the Chapitres to the British public but also show that the Ladies' Association, as a British equivalent, was a new concept to most, creating confusion and difficulties in assimilating its shape and intention. Indeed the original prospectus which advertised the Ladies' Association also employed the model of the Chapitres to explain the nature of the institution: 'the establishment of Bailbrook House resembles in some respects, those Protestant institutions, called *Chapitres*, which have long existed on the continent. Like them it offers a desirable residence to ladies of respectability, who by birth and education, are placed in the rank of gentlewomen.'¹⁶⁰ Hawkesworth's letter, which confirms Lady Isabella's enquiries, advised her:

I received from Hanover from my little sister-in-law Baroness Reigenstein an account of 'The Kloster Walsrode' in the kingdom of Hanover of which her sister-in-law was the superintendent – I now have the honour to enclose it and hope it may afford you some information upon a subject you felt so much interest.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Pierce Egan, *Walks Through Bath* (Bath, 1819), p.208.

¹⁶⁰ *Plan for Improving the Situation of Ladies of Respectable Character and Small Fortune* (hereafter *PSLIRC*), (Bath, 1817).

¹⁶¹ DRO, H7/7/19, letter from John Hawkesworth, 24th December, 1823. Kloster Walsrode is still a Protestant nunnery today, inhabited by benevolent and aristocratic women. The prerequisite for inclusion is the active membership in an evangelical church, the status of 'alone' in the sense of widowhood or divorced, their own supply [funds], the willingness to fit into a community and an interest in the monastery and its art treasures. <http://www.klosterwalsrode.de/>, 15th July, 2010.

Although Hawkesworth's letter does not provide any further information relating to the Chapitres, Fanny Burney's diary, which details Queen Charlotte's personal recollections of her own experience of conventual life in Germany prior to her marriage to George III, includes detailed information to establish their character and purpose. This is supported by an account of Protestant conventual institutions by the Reverend Dr. William Render, who visited several while travelling through Germany in 1803.

Render's opening comments: 'they are very numerous,' confirm their popularity, while both accounts establish the exclusive nature of such institutions.¹⁶² Describing her own Chapitre, Queen Charlotte advised: 'there is one for royal families — one for nobles; the candidates' coats of arms are put up several weeks to be examined, and if any flaw is found, they are not elected. These nunneries are intended for young ladies of little fortunes and high birth.'¹⁶³ Render's account is almost identical:

Every Lady who is introduced and admitted into such convent, must produce a lineal genealogy of nobility ... they are generally the daughters of nobles and warriors; as dukes, counts, marquises, generals etc who at their death have not been able to leave them a fortune sufficient for the proper support of their rank in life.¹⁶⁴

While confirming the stringent regulations regarding lineal status and the benevolent purpose in providing an asylum to the less wealthy of their class, neither account suggests any enquiries were made with reference to character. Living conditions reflected status. Queen Charlotte, for whom, as a member of the nobility, luxurious living was customary, simply stated: 'They have balls,' while, for Render, the opulent surroundings were conspicuous and his description of living conditions clearly mirrors the status of the inhabitants: 'These edifices are the most magnificent that can be imagined, and their apartments are furnished in the most elegant style ... their luxurious mode of living exceeds that of the first nobility in Germany.'¹⁶⁵ Rules and regulations further established these

¹⁶² Reverend Dr. William Render, *A Tour Through Germany; Particularly along the Banks of the Rhine, Mayne etc and that Part of the Palatinate, Rhigaw etc usually termed the Garden of Germany*, 2vols, vol.1 (London, 1801), p.55.

¹⁶³ Fanny Burney, *Diary and Letters of Fanny Burney*, 7vols, vol.2, 1781-1786, (ed.), her niece (Charlotte Barrett) (London, 1854), pp.341-342.

¹⁶⁴ Render, *A Tour Through Germany*, p56.

¹⁶⁵ Burney, *Diary and Letters of Fanny Burney*, pp.341-342; Render, *A Tour Through Germany*, p.55.

institutions as a more moderate form of conventualism. Render noted, ‘they enjoy every happiness and are not in the least confined to any irksome regulations,’ while Queen Charlotte confirmed their more relaxed convention: ‘there is no restriction but to go to prayers at 8 and 9, at night, that is very little you know, and wear black or white.’¹⁶⁶ Although Fanny Burney admitted that she ‘could not help saying how glad we all were that she was no nun!’¹⁶⁷ Clarissa Campbell-Orr’s work on Queen Charlotte suggests that she remained attached to such institutions, regarding ‘her Frogmore retreat, which she shared with her five unmarried daughters, as a kind of nunnery,’ an attachment which was reiterated in her extensive patronage of the Ladies’ Association.¹⁶⁸ While luxurious in its surroundings and elite in its residents, the rules and regulations of the Chapitre situate it as a conventual institution but, unsurprisingly, more moderate in its approach than its Catholic counterpart.

In the same way, the physical space which Lady Isabella created reflected a major requirement to demonstrate not only the institution’s commitment to establishing a religious retirement but also reinforced the genteel social position of all concerned, a thread which is also evident in *Millenium Hall* and to a lesser extent in earlier proposals. Southey’s edict for such an institution was conservative in its opulence, centring predominantly on a functional space, with decoration just sufficient for the maintenance of respectability:

for sake of effect, the domicile ought to have an appearance in character with its purpose ... a local habitation is therefore all that should be desired, when a secular nunnery, or rather a college for women, is to be established; with just ground enough for use, for recreation and for becoming ornament ... enough to preserve the respectability of its appearance and to prevent intrusion.¹⁶⁹

Southey’s words were written after the establishment of Cornwallis House at Clifton, in which case it is possible that he took direction from Lady Isabella’s own creation. In addressing the space geographically, architecturally and decoratively she created a secluded,

¹⁶⁶ Ibid; Burney, *Diary and Letters of Fanny Burney*, pp.341-342.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Clarissa Campbell-Orr, ‘Introduction: Court Studies, Gender and Women’s History, 1660-1837’, in Clarissa Campbell Orr, (ed.), *Queenship in Britain, 1660-1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics* (New York & Manchester, 2002), p.40.

¹⁶⁹ Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies*, pp.314-315.

yet elegant and polite space suited to both its religious character and to the requirements of genteel society.

Bailbrook House, an imposing mansion at Batheaston on the outskirts of Bath, was chosen as the first home of the institution and was rented from June 1816. Following its sale in 1821, the institution relocated to Cornwallis House in Clifton. Although this residence was less grand in size and less isolated in its position, it was purchased rather than rented and improved and enlarged before the residents took up residence. 'Mansion' was the usual term applied to both, and this label, together with their self-contained status, allies them with Sarah Scott's ideal vision of a rural retreat for single gentlewomen. Southey tells us that 'Bailbrook House and the garden and Shrubberies,' was let to 'The Right Honourable Lord Gwydir and the Right Honourable Lady Willoughby his wife and the Right Honourable Lady Isabella King for an initial term of three years on an annual rent of £400 free of taxes and rates.'¹⁷⁰ This lease was then renewed up until 1821.

Although Lady Isabella's papers provide very little evidence to explain the choice of Bailbrook House as the initial residence for the institution, its vicinity to the genteel city of Bath maintained connexions with elite society, while its distance from the centre endowed it with a respectable independence and self-sufficiency and gave it the capacity to render itself remote from the potential pitfalls which Bath also threatened. Previously owned by Thomas Walters, head of a leading Batheaston family who purchased it in 1814 for £6,818, a price which included mahogany library bookcases, Rumford stoves and various heating plant and cooking apparatus, the grandeur of Bailbrook House is evident in the advertisement for sale placed in the Bath Chronicle in September that year, which considered it 'a truly desirable and distinguished mansion with ... every accommodation that can be desired for a family of the first respectability.'¹⁷¹ A later advertisement relating to its offer of sale, in 1819, proclaimed it a:

Noble mansion [which] comprises principal apartments of handsome

¹⁷⁰ The Ladies' Association did not rent the parkland attached to this house; this was let independently to local farmers. Southey, 'British Monachism', p.97.

¹⁷¹ Bryan Little, *Bailbrook* (Southall, 1979), p.13; *BC* (22nd September, 1814).

dimensions with seven principal bedchambers: cold bath and water closets: ample offices in the basement, secondary apartments comprised in the adjoining pavilion, coach houses and stabling attached ... contains in all about 20 acres.¹⁷²



Plate 9: Bailbrook House c.1830

Although the wording of these advertisements was specifically aimed to entice a buyer, their content, confirmed Bailbrook House as a residence synonymous with the status of members of the Ladies' Association. It was consistent with Lady Isabella's vision of a genteel sisterhood that the interior decoration of the house was of a high standard. Details of expenditure by the committee at Bailbrook House state that the 'value of furniture purchased in 1816' amounted to 'about £1,000', a figure which although Robert Southey recorded as slightly higher at £1,350, was still a significant sum.¹⁷³ While the figure is high and it is likely, as with the previous owner, that Lady Isabella inherited fixtures and fittings, the unique use of the house as a group residence demanded the acquisition of a number of specific furnishings. Southey further confirmed the employment of funds, which he recorded were 'laid out by the committee in fitting up and furnishing apartments for ten Lady

¹⁷² *The Times* (25th March, 1819): the advertisement was also included in issues on 30th March, 15th, 20th, 22nd, & 27th April and the 4th & 13th of May of the same year.

¹⁷³ DRO, H7/7/7, sums expended, July, 1823.

Associates and for the servants of the institution.’¹⁷⁴

Bills and accounts in the archive for repairs, renovations and extensions to Cornwallis House carried out before the move there in 1822, perhaps present a clearer picture of Lady Isabella’s determination to maintain genteel status through her surroundings. The Surveyor, Edward Sampson, who was appointed to assess the potential of Cornwallis House in 1821, deemed the House and Premises ‘in most fearful repair; the sum of £800 supposedly having been expended thereon by Mr. Gore, who now offers to sell this Property with two Pews or Seats in the New Church, for £3,600.’¹⁷⁵ The Ladies’ Association paid £3,250 for Cornwallis House, a sum which included some fixtures, while extensive renovations and extensions to the house are recorded as costing a total of £4,162. 10s, again a significant sum.¹⁷⁶ While practicalities were addressed in terms of the size of the space through an extension to the house to increase the number of bedrooms, together with necessary repairs to a property requiring structural attention, internal decoration also indicated comfort, luxury and fashion, either in terms of cost or look.¹⁷⁷ Mason, J. Philips, billed Lady Isabella for erecting marble chimney pieces in her bedroom and sitting room, while Charles Hoskins’ account for furniture confirmed the purchase of a ‘large sized reeded dressing table on reeded legs, a large size reed pole for the window cornice, japan’d black and burnish gold and handsomely finished foliage ends for the cornice finished in Burnish Gold.’¹⁷⁸ The most expensive pieces of furniture that were purchased included ‘a very handsome mahogany Library Range with large Brass Wise Doors and green hooked silk curtains,’ which cost £40 and another ‘very handsome Spanish mahogany library range,’ made to correspond with the former one which cost £38. The total for this particular bill from Hoskins of Bristol came to £91.¹⁷⁹

However, perhaps the most impressive alterations were the extensive work carried out to create an outdoor space, transforming an adjoining field, previously grazing land for

¹⁷⁴ *Quarterly Review*, vol.22 (July, 1819), p.97.

¹⁷⁵ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Edward Sampson, Henbury, to Isaac Cooke, 10th April, 1821.

¹⁷⁶ DRO, H7/7/7, sums expended, July, 1823.

¹⁷⁷ The cost of repairs and alterations totalled £2,050.

¹⁷⁸ DRO, H7/7/14, 1822; DRO, H7/7/14, bill from Chas Hoskins, 1822.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

cows, into a pleasure ground, a genteel space common to all country estates and particularly prevalent in several proposals for conventual institutions in the seventeenth century.

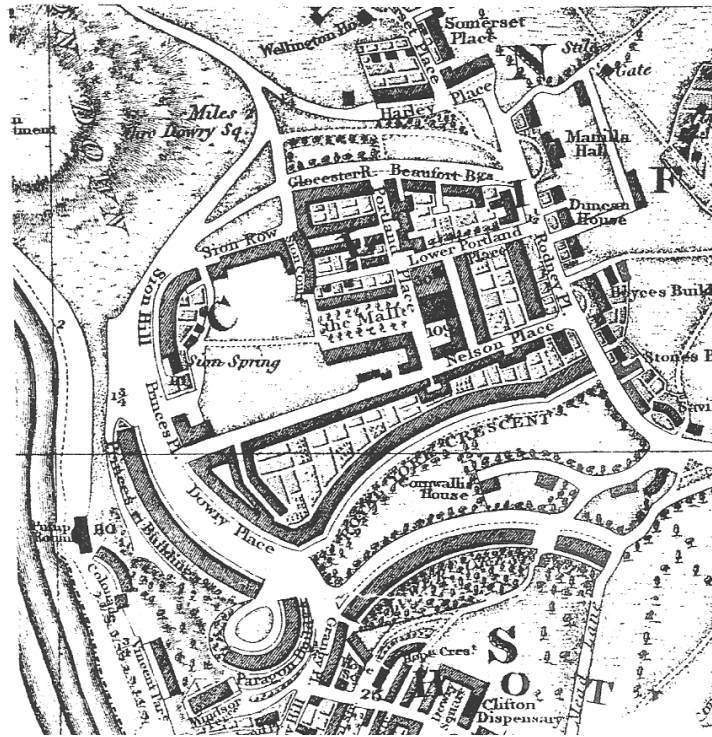


Plate 10: Clifton c. 1850 with a plan of Cornwallis House and its grounds

Accounts confirm that the cost for ‘altering garden’ amounted to £1,000 plus 450 guineas for the purchase of the land itself.¹⁸⁰ The workforce engaged to renovate and plant the shrubbery consisted of between four and seven men, employed daily, between October 1821 and February 1823, which cost a total £421.12s. Work which characterised the space included building ornamental, circular shaped walls, paths and importantly a greenhouse, or hot-house.¹⁸¹ Bills from nurserymen, seedsmen and florists, Sweets and Miller, for the provision of shrubs and trees totalled £280 and the quantity and variety of species ordered not only indicates the size of the project but also confirms luxury in the exotic.¹⁸² Numerous orders included 130 laurels, 100 evergreen privets, 20 limes, 50 elms, 20 sycamores, 20 spruce firs,

¹⁸⁰ The land was paid for by contributions from ‘a few of its friends’ [Lady Willoughby, the Dowager Countess Rosse, Lady Eleanor King and Lord Lorton]: DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Mr Brooke to Isaac Cooke, 15th June, 1822; DRO, H7/7/7, sums expended, July, 1823.

¹⁸¹ DRO, H7/7/14, bills, 1822/3.

¹⁸² DRO, H7/7/14, bills to Sweets & Miller, 7th May, 1822, 18th June, 1823.

6 large horsechestnut, oaks, birch, beech, mountain ash, honeysuckle, broom, white mulberry, and 100 roses, as well as many more including specimens which had to be imported, such as peach and almond trees, sweet bays, 26 American maples, white jasmine and yellow broom. Specificity in choice is illustrated in the numerous varieties of particular species ordered. For example Lady Isabella requested Virginian, creeping rose and giant

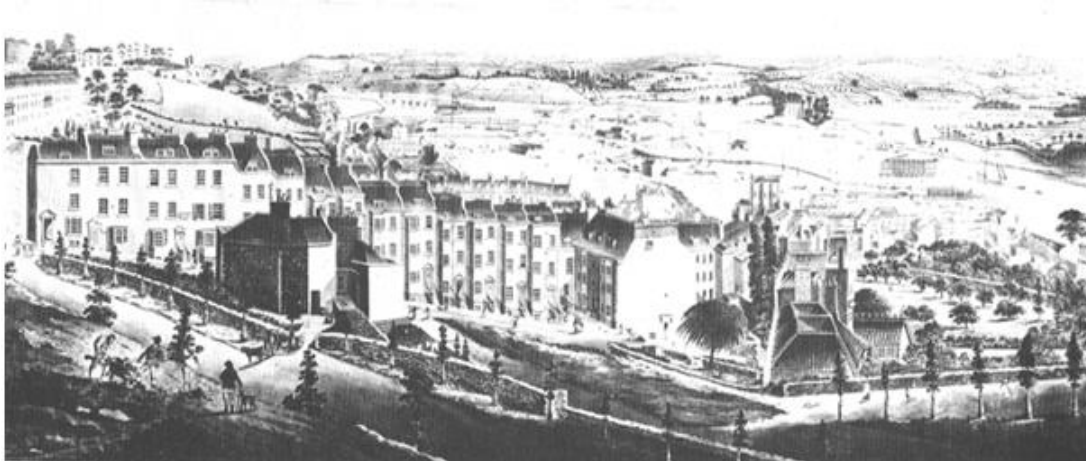


Plate 11: View of Cornwallis House from Windsor Terrace, Clifton, 1822, showing the construction of the shrubbery to the right of the house

acacias.¹⁸³ A bill from architect James Foster for the ‘drawing [of] a plan and Elevation for a veranda proposed to be erected at the west end of Cornwallis House,’ overlooking the shrubbery, not only specifies its aspect but also provides details of its fashionable character: ‘a veranda with copper top, one extra pillar and arch’.¹⁸⁴ There is no indication that the land was used for practical purposes, apart from the presence of fruit trees which were planted in the shrubbery. The advertisement for the sale of Cornwallis House in 1837, confirmed its raised profile and its imposing size:

Cornwallis House and Pleasure Ground to be sold by auction early in the month of May ... this capitol MANSION, commanding views of the Vale of Ashton, Dundry [sic] in the county between Bristol and Bath and the Floating Harbour and River Avon; with a beautiful planted SHRUBBERY and PLEASURE GROUNDS of full an acre. The premises are adapted for any public institution or other purpose requiring great accommodation. The house may be easily and at small expense

¹⁸³ DRO, H7/7/14, orders, 7th May, 1822, 18th June, 1823.

¹⁸⁴ DRO, H7/7/17, October, 1823; DRO, H7/7/14, bill from James Foster & sons, architects, nd.

converted into two capitol residences.¹⁸⁵



Plate 12: Cornwallis Crescent, with St. Andrew's church c. 1825
(Cornwallis House, centre)

Another indication of the balance Lady Isabella attempted to achieve can be discerned in the dress of the residents. Ignatius Latrobe does not mention a code of dress at the Moravian settlements but Queen Charlotte recalled the 'black and white' uniform of the Chapitres which Render presented as more elegant and representative of the residents' high status through the adornment of 'armorial ornaments about their necks, shewing the distinction and antiquity of their ancestors.'¹⁸⁶ Millenium Hall ladies dressed with 'the same neatness, the same simplicity and cleanliness', yet neither was their attire wholly reflective of conventual habits as there was nothing 'unfashionable in their appearance except that they were free from any trumpery ornaments.'¹⁸⁷ The resident ladies of the Ladies' Association were also not required to wear a uniform, but dressed elegantly and respectably. However, in

¹⁸⁵ *BC* (13th April, 1837), p.1.

¹⁸⁶ Render, 'A Tour through Germany', p.144.

¹⁸⁷ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p.61.

1826 residents requested approval from Lady Isabella to introduce a uniform for all residents to wear (Lady Isabella excepted.) Her response ‘to the wish expressed by some of the members to dress alike,’ was in agreement. She advised: ‘no objection can possibly be felt,’ provided the choice was demure and appropriate.¹⁸⁸ Lady Isabella considered it not only a ‘pledge of sisterly union’ but also a symbol of commitment to the institution’s benevolent and pious purpose.¹⁸⁹ She did however make it clear that uniform should be a personal choice and ‘no one should be required to adopt it.’¹⁹⁰ Southey agreed with her views: ‘uniformity of dress,’ he considered, ‘would be proper, for preventing expense and vanity, and for a visible sign, which might attract notice, and if the habit were at once grave, convenient and graceful, would ensure respect’.¹⁹¹ Time and thought had obviously been put into the adoption of conventual attire. The description of the agreed uniform renders it elegant, fashionable and luxurious in its fabric and extent, while at the same time attempting to remain simple in its appearance, again straddling the divide between gentility and religious sobriety. The apparel was described as:

gowns of purple silk, poplin, or stuff [sic] with long sleeves and high bodies untrimmed except with the same material white handkerchiefs or collar to be worn without frill or other trimming. A Bonnet of black silk or white silk, or cambric of the same shape- black silk stockings or foots [sic] - dark or white gloves - Cloaks, shanks [sic], Pelisses etc of the same colour, (purple) - black or white - Ladies wearing caps to put on them no flowers or any ribbon but white or purple. Ornaments to be confined to one Pair of Bracelets, a [?], or Broach, rings to be worn *in moderation* being generally pledges of affection. Black purple or white veils to be worn but not of lace.¹⁹²

Although the adoption of a uniform suggests a move towards a more intense commitment by residents, the extensive and expensive choice of attire suggests one eye is still on genteel society and this suggestion is supported by a final clause in the document which confirmed the permission to revise the uniform if ‘the change of fashion shall render it conspicuous or inelegant.’¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ DRO, H7/7/10, rules and regulations of Cornwallis House, 1826.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies*, p.313.

¹⁹² DRO, H7/7/13, recommendations, 1826.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

The more moderate approach also required a contemporary conventual establishment to be active in its purpose. Southey's son, Charles, engaging with his father's earlier thoughts in a publication of his life and his correspondence in 1850, several years after his death, revealed one strand of contemporary thought:

institutions of this kind, so long as their object is limited to the benefit of their own inmates, have not in the [?] a sufficient largeness of purpose and general utility to command the interest and admiration of mankind to any wide extent ... it seems ... an absolute essential that they should have their definite work; an object which may fill their thoughts and occupy their energy, and this my father suggests ... ought to be devoted to purposes of Christian charity.¹⁹⁴

Mrs. Jameson, speaking later and more virulent in her views, exposed another perspective. Focusing on the negative aspects of such communities who chose to remain insular, she spelt out unequivocally, the harmful effects on residents:

women shut up together in one locality with no occupation connecting them actively and benevolently and with the world of humanity outside, with all their interests centred within their walls ... such an atmosphere could not be perfectly healthy, spiritually, morally or physically – frivolity, idleness and sick disordered fancies in lighter characters and in superior minds, aesthetic pride, gloom and impatience,

she believed, would permeate the minds of all involved.¹⁹⁵ Frances Power Cobbe, also deliberating on the severe practices of nunneries and fearing that the usefulness which separated Protestant Nunneries from their Catholic opposites would be overshadowed by 'that asceticism which was the origin of the system, and which at any moment may crop out again,' questioned 'whether this original principle can ever be eliminated from the system.'¹⁹⁶

From the outset, Lady Isabella directed that the institution should 'encourage ... active exertion' and 'benevolent occupations' based on religious principles, yet early documentation provides no specifics which further elucidate her initial directive.¹⁹⁷ While the primary purpose of the institution was to take care of 'unprovided females' of the genteel class, a lack of financial support required Lady Isabella to amend her plans to focus solely

¹⁹⁴ Southey, *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, vol.5, pp.29-30.

¹⁹⁵ Jameson, 'Woman's Work', pp.727-766.

¹⁹⁶ Frances Power Cobbe, *Essays on the Pursuits of Women* (London, 1863), pp.114, 127.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

on the accommodation of ladies of small fortune until 1819, when funds permitted the admittance of several destitute gentlewomen.¹⁹⁸ Her notes not only confirm the paucity of resources to fund such a plan but also its costliness in real terms:

many ladies of good family, and peculiarly respectable from their own merits, but wholly destitute of fortune have sought admittance into the Bailbrook society. That society, although able to maintain its independence while it continues on the present footing is not rich enough to engage in so expensive a line of benevolence.¹⁹⁹

As a real venture this modification was not only disappointing for Lady Isabella who was committed to assisting those in real need but also roused critical comment which, as she explained, claimed: ‘that the unprotected and the indigent ceased to be the first object and that two thirds of the expense to be incurred was in fact for the accommodation of ladies of independence though respectable fortune.’²⁰⁰ In this respect the Ladies’ Association stands in contrast to the utopian spirit of Millenium Hall, with its seemingly unlimited and free-flowing cache of funds, able to focus on the accommodation of those ‘who have least,’ and which was not subject to any criticism or derision.²⁰¹

While initial documentation is unforthcoming regarding plans of usefulness, notes written after the establishment of the Ladies’ Association confirm that by 1817 Lady Isabella had established a Sunday school at Bailbrook House. A printed account of the institution at the end of its first year advised:

The character of the association being avowedly benevolent it is hoped that the members of each establishment will participate in the general intention, and join heartily in the desire of rendering their abode, not merely a source of advantage to themselves, but also a benefit to the deserving poor in their neighbourhood. In order to encourage and facilitate such benevolent exertion a Sunday school has been established in the present institution.²⁰²

The establishment of a school not only provides a link with earlier eighteenth-century ideas which foregrounded education as an important feature of Protestant conventual institutions, but perhaps more importantly at this time, it indicates a decisive outward focus through

¹⁹⁸ DRO, H/7/7/15, notes, 1815.

¹⁹⁹ DRO, H/7/7/17, notes, 1819.

²⁰⁰ DRO, H/7/7/3, notes, nd.

²⁰¹ Scott, *Millenium Hall*, p.121.

²⁰² DRO, H/7/1/2, hints for a working and reading association, 1823.

benevolent interaction with the wider community at a time when the Sunday school movement was growing rapidly — it was one of the most fashionable forms of philanthropy. Writing to Thomas Burgess, then Bishop of St David's, in 1817, Lady Isabella confirmed both the local connection and the benefits this would afford residents of the institution: 'this forms a tie between us and the industrious poor in our immediate neighbourhood, and is an interesting and very improving occupation to the younger members of our society.'²⁰³ In 1819 an account was printed in which a wish was expressed that 'the original view of benevolent and useful occupation may become a more leading object.'²⁰⁴ In this respect and in addition to the Sunday school, Lady Isabella vigorously promoted the establishment of a school for the female orphans of gentlemen. A series of letters written between general trustee of the Ladies' Association, Lord Manvers and Lady Isabella demonstrate her determination to install such a scheme and are an indication of her commitment to further benevolent contribution and her consequent engagement with public opinion. Lord Manvers, reticent to support such an undertaking, advised Lady Isabella that insufficient donations thus far and a fresh appeal to the public would be 'much too precarious in its effect, to justify the hope entertained by the Lady President and the Guardian Committee, of being able by such an appeal to engraft upon the original plan a "School for Orphans."'²⁰⁵ Lady Isabella's response was feisty in its resolve. Replying immediately she confirmed not only her understanding that an active community was conducive to the mental health of its residents but that it would also contribute to the encouragement of public support. 'The Ladies of the Guardian Committee,' she advised Lord Manvers:

have in the course of their present visits to our Establishment formed an opinion in which I am more than ever confirmed by my residence there, Namely- That it is essential to the happiness and respectability of such institutions to have some system of rational employment inseparably interwoven with the Plan. Every person with whom we conversed agreed in the same sentiment ... It was obvious that the comprehending of such interesting objects as the Orphans of the description in view would render the whole Institution more popular and [most] probably obtain for it a

²⁰³ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to the Bishop of St David's, 18th February, 1817.

²⁰⁴ DRO, H7/7/1/2, hints for a working and reading association, 1823.

²⁰⁵ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Lord Manvers, 15th March 1819.

more general support.²⁰⁶

Although Lord Manvers agreed that Lady Isabella's reasons for the establishment of such a school were incontrovertible, he reiterated his original message: 'it is in vain to talk of "the School" being created and supported "out of surplus" before any such surplus exists, and it is evident, that altho' it might set out with every prospect of success, yet upon any diminution of support from the Public, it would endanger the original plan, with which it would be completely identified.'²⁰⁷ Regardless of his concern for the welfare of the parent association, Lady Isabella proceeded with her plan and at a meeting of the Guardian Committee on 30th March 1820, it was 'resolved that the prospectuses of the Orphans school, read to the Committee by the Lady President, be forthwith printed and circulated.'²⁰⁸ The prospectus, which requested donations towards the school, offered a 'plain useful and religious education at as moderate an expense as can be made practicable,' with the 'totally destitute [to be] received gratuitously.'²⁰⁹

The education which was offered, Lady Isabella was adamant, would be appropriate to their status as gentlewomen but would also fit them for a more practical lifestyle should their circumstances require it. There would be 'no instruction in Drawing, Music or, or whatever else is generally understood by the term accomplishments. The business of the school will include English, (grammatically and carefully taught), Geography, History, Writing, Arithmetic, and every kind of useful Needle-Work.'²¹⁰ In line with contemporary proponents' ideas for educational reform, it was designed to provide young ladies with a useful education both in the context of the early nineteenth century and in the context of their own compromised circumstances. Despite Lady Isabella's enthusiasm and determination, as Lord Manvers had argued, funds were insufficient to support the scheme, although Lady Isabella's papers confirm she never relinquished hope of realising her objective. Notes written in both 1823 and in 1824 are reminders that the addition of such a

²⁰⁶ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Lord Manvers, nd, but as a response to the above, 1819.

²⁰⁷ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Lord Manvers, 2nd April, 1819.

²⁰⁸ DRO, H7/7/2, minutes of guardian committee meeting, 30th March, 1820.

²⁰⁹ DRO, H7/7/5, prospectus for the Orphan School.

²¹⁰ DRO, H7/7/5, printed prospectus for the Orphan School.

scheme would take place when ‘funds should suffice for such extensions.’²¹¹

Other charitable endeavours are suggested in detail in 1826, although as recommendations it is impossible to determine if they were ever put into practice. They included the addition of a Repository where ‘the ladies were invited to produce goods to sell for the benefit of both private and public charities,’ the provision of ‘instruction in reading and writing’ to the household servants and ‘the respectable poor’ and visiting the sick poor as nurses.²¹² These activities, although potentially never carried out, can be identified as historically progressive in philanthropic terms and typical of the activities of later female Victorian philanthropic endeavour.

While Lady Isabella’s exertions towards establishing a model which was acceptable to society at large were directed and comprehensive, one of her most important priorities, as a member of the established church, was also to obtain approval for her scheme from the bishop of the Diocese. This was the Bishop of Bath and Wells who, at that time, was Richard Beadon. Although no correspondence has been uncovered from him which relates directly to his views, Lady Isabella’s response to him clearly indicates his disapproval:

should his Lordship [have time to] bestow a little further consideration on the subject she trusts his objections may vanish ... to her it appears that Colleges or Establishments calculated to afford a respectable home to women of small fortune do not seem to savour more of the monastic plan than the Colleges of Oxford and Cambridge and it seems to have been almost an act of injustice to have transferred to these Colleges the revenues of [the] many abolished monasteries whilst the wealth which supported the (missing) was given to the crown.²¹³

It seems clear from Lady Isabella’s response to his reply that it is likely his disapproval was based on a view which concurred with the consistent strand of thought that denounced the establishment of such institutions from concerns that they were redolent of Catholic originated monastic institutions. The tone of Lady Isabella’s letter, which includes revisions, indicates her frustration at his negative response but her modification of the letter which

²¹¹ DRO, H7/7/1/2, hints for a working and reading association, 1823; DRO, H7/7/7, an account of the institution, 1824.

²¹² Writing is interesting as it was still controversial in some circumstances to teach the poor to write, especially poor women. DRO, H7/7/13, rules and regulations, nd.; DRO, H7/7/1/2, hints for a working and reading association, 1823.

²¹³ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to the Bishop of the Diocese, nd.

removes the phrase 'have time to' points to a more considered final response which, although is accepting, clearly demonstrates her disappointment.

Female Communities After 1835

The Ladies' Association effectively came to an end after the sale of Cornwallis House in 1835, but that was not the end of attempts to create female communities in Britain. In fact ideas around female communities bifurcated and two different types of female communities were established. Both had identifiable links with the Ladies' Association while demonstrating differing aspects of its character.

The first of the Anglican Sisterhoods, whose eventual success is demonstrated in the number of institutions that were established, was founded in 1845, the year in which Lady Isabella died. Their connection to the Ladies' Association has its roots in Robert Southey, an ardent supporter of the Ladies' Association, to whose views historians have unquestionably attributed the foundation of the Sisterhoods.²¹⁴ Sockman has identified him as the 'father of the monastic revival in the English church.'²¹⁵ More overtly a Protestant nunnery than the Ladies' Association, their intention was primarily religious and, Susan Mumm, whose research has focused specifically on the development of Anglican Sisterhoods, maintains that vows *were* professed but they were unsanctioned by the church. Further imbued with a distinctly benevolent purpose, their inhabitants have been identified by Carmen Mangion as 'like-minded' women who 'sought a spiritual way of life that combined philanthropy and prayer.'²¹⁶ As with the Ladies' Association, Sisterhoods were not under the jurisdiction of the church and were consequently autonomous in government. Largely funded independently, they were also financially autonomous. In terms of character, Mumm points to their familial nature, a contrast to their Catholic counterpart which she describes as 'closely resemble[ing] regiments in an army,' and yet the space created as home to the

²¹⁴ Sockman, *The Revival of the Conventual Life*, pp.58-59; Susan Mumm, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers; Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain* (London & New York, 1999), p.3.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.58.

²¹⁶ Carmen M. Mangion, 'Women, Religious Ministry and Female Institution Building', in Sue Morgan & Jacqueline de Vries, (eds.), *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800-1940* (Abingdon & New York, 2010), p.75.

Anglican Sisterhoods was more simple and austere than that which Lady Isabella fashioned for the residents of the Ladies' Association.²¹⁷ The uniform, also simple, usually black or purple and 'not subject to the vagaries of fashion,' followed suit.²¹⁸

During the early years of their existence the Sisterhoods were criticised vehemently both by the public and church alike. As with the Ladies' Association, condemnation centred on issues relating to popery which continued as a presence after the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829 and, as female communities, were perceived as a threat to the Victorian domestic ideology. Christina de Bellaigue's research on women's education in England and France in the first half of the nineteenth century agrees. She has argued that criticism of female monastic institutions at this time, when the number of convents in England was increasing, not only focused on their 'dangerously foreign and Catholic' nature, but was also a response to their unnatural independent female character.²¹⁹ Mumm has drawn attention to clerical concerns regarding the control of these female communities as autonomous bodies of women and has argued that while the Catholic orders were subordinated to their church, Protestant institutions were 'private enterprises within Anglicanism and as such were not answerable to any ecclesiastical authority.'²²⁰ Consequently, she argues, the church saw them as 'potential forces for undermining the church establishment.'²²¹ This argument when superimposed on the Bishop of Bath and Wells' earlier attitude towards the Ladies' Association clearly provides further clarification of his disapproval. Feeling was so high at the time of the establishment of the first Sisterhoods that Mumm asserts: 'conflict was played out in pulpit, press, courts, and Parliament and in the streets through acts of public disorder'.²²²

A second model of female institution, which attempted to establish itself after the Ladies' Association closed its doors, focused particularly, as Lady Isabella's had, on the

²¹⁷ Mumm, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers*, p.138.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.77.

²¹⁹ Christina de Bellaigue, *Educating Women: Schooling and Identity in England and France, 1800-1867*, (Oxford, 2007), p.18

²²⁰ Mumm, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers*, p.138.

²²¹ *Ibid*, p.140.

²²² Susan Mumm, 'Making Space, Taking Space: Spatial Discomfort, Gender and Victorian Religion',+++ <http://www.anglicanhistory.org> , 2007, 15th September, 2011.

peculiar circumstances of the fortuneless gentlewoman. An advertisement in *The Times* newspaper in February 1859, announcing plans for a 'Ladies Home for poor Gentlewomen ... [at] no.21 Abbey-road, St John's Wood,' requested support, by subscription, from the public.²²³ Repeated in May 1862 once the institution had partially established itself, the second advert described the 'Genteel accommodation' as 'a well ordered home with board, lodging, medicine, advice and every liberty consistent with the arrangements of a well-ordered family'.²²⁴ Specifically for daughters of gentlemen, no religious or benevolent purpose is indicated in the advertisement, instead the focus it seems, was directed solely towards the needs of the distressed gentlewomen.²²⁵ The institution was established by distinguished elite women, similar to Lady Isabella, and those most prominently involved were Mary Greathead and the Countess de Gray and Ripon, who had both recently been widowed.²²⁶ The institution was subject to subscription for its survival and there is no direct evidence to confirm public perception or reception. However the preliminary announcement, which requested subscriptions to support the proposed institution, informed: 'it is proposed to form this establishment when the sum of £600 is collected.'²²⁷ A further plea for subscriptions in the 1862 advertisement, after the institution had begun, which described the then present state of the society, declared: 'All this good has been done on an amount of subscription and donation not exceeding 260l'.²²⁸ The decision to found the institution on a sum far below the original requirement suggests not only that support was unforthcoming but also that the founders were not optimistic of receiving more at that time. Indeed the tone of their second request, which stressed the 'vital importance that additional subscriptions should be obtained,' suggests an anxiety surrounding the financial circumstances of the

²²³ *The Times* (28th February, 1859), p.5.

²²⁴ *The Times* (28th May, 1862), p.72.

²²⁵ Residents were listed as '5 daughters of clergymen, 4 whose father's have held appointments under government, widows of naval and military officers, the daughter of a barrister, the daughter of a civil engineer and 5 whose parents were once wealthy merchants': Ibid.

²²⁶ Born in 1786 Mary Greathead was the daughter of Richard Carr Glyn, city banker and widow of Edward Greathead who died in 1857: John Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire*, 2vols, vol.1 (London, 1834), p.448. The Countess de Gray and Ripon was born in 1793. She was Lady Sarah, daughter of the 4th Earl of Buckingham and widow of Earl of Ripon (formerly Viscount Goderich), who died in 1859: Edmund Lodge, *The Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire*, 13th edn (London, 1861), p.174.

²²⁷ *The Times* (1859), p.5.

²²⁸ *The Times* (1862), p.72.

institution.²²⁹

While success for both institutions seems to have been hard fought, the Anglican Sisterhoods continued into the twentieth century, yet no further evidence of the home for poor gentlewomen has been uncovered. Given the absence of further mention and the poor level of support it seems to have attracted, it is likely this institution was short lived. Nevertheless the existence of two female communities, whose characteristics reveal the dual aspects which Lady Isabella sought to include in one institution, perhaps points to the unlikelihood of the Ladies' Association succeeding in the long term.

Conclusion

In dealing with concerns relating to the single woman at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Lady Isabella drew on a well-established intellectual debate which had been gathering pace since the seventeenth century. Engaging with the problem, early ideas sought to establish a separate space which would be acceptable to society at large, where single women could live independently. Motivation for propositions centred predominantly on the provision of a religious haven where spinsters and widows could live a retired and benevolent life, while proposals which encompassed such spaces as centres of education for women, by rendering the space empowering, politicised the debate.

Ideas for imagined and real communities resonated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and into the nineteenth, with few coming to fruition. Those that did can be characterised as small-scale, local, private, distinctively idiosyncratic and short lived, while more ambitious schemes, which required public support, were thwarted before any attempt was made. Criticism toward these schemes focused predominantly on issues of popery in the wake of the Reformation and on female autonomy, an undesirable condition for women in a still vehemently patriarchal society. As a resolution, from the mid seventeenth century, ideas which embraced the more conservative European Protestant conventual models of the German Chapitres and the Flemish Beguinages emerged,

²²⁹ Ibid.

providing a direct link to Lady Isabella's later experience.

Eighteenth-century discourse was influenced by Mary Astells' *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, published in 1694. While Astell was sensitive to the subject of popery, her plan attracted criticism both in this respect and as an emancipatory female space and, reliant on public support, was never realised. While there is no evidence to suggest her scheme was inspired by earlier ideas, it is highly likely that later ideas, particularly the fictional proposals of Samuel Richardson and Sarah Scott, were influenced by Astell. In addressing the problem of the impoverished gentlewoman in 1813, Lady Isabella in turn took inspiration from Scott's novel *Millenium Hall*, a didactic tale which challenged contemporary social values by offering women an alternative way of life to the limited domestic sphere proscribed for them. Ultimately an imagined community however, *Millenium Hall* has been identified as an early feminist utopia, defined particularly by its providential circumstances and its absolute independence, yet its descriptive detail, practical and benevolent social purpose and its overriding success, provided a credible and tempting vision for Lady Isabella to follow.

While her plan closely resembled *Millenium Hall* in its structure and ethos, it failed to attract the support of independent benefactors. Reiterating the critical historical discourse, disapproval centred on its character in the form of two opposing arguments which asserted both its excessive and deficient religious character. Anxiety relating to the re-emergence of a monastic regime in Britain, nurtured the former, while concerns that such an institution would degenerate into nothing more than a country boarding house, encouraged the latter. Of course, this argument was more concerned with the potential this offered for an independent community of women to establish itself, an unwelcome concept when considered in the light of the more conservative role afforded to women at this time. Sensitive to and requiring public approval, while remaining loyal to her own religious principles and to the genteel status of all involved, Lady Isabella thus shaped the institution through a series of negotiations with public opinion. Looking to learn from contemporary Protestant institutions such as the Moravian Church and the German Chapitres, she established a more conservative model which was reflected in the physical space, the

uniform, the efforts which were made to engage in benevolent activity and in the freedom afforded to residents to leave should other, more suitable circumstances offer themselves.

The lack of historical success, the re-energisation of anti-Catholic feeling and the more conservative prescribed role for women (of the time) were a disadvantage to Lady Isabella, yet, evidence suggests that she made every effort to overcome the obstacles which hindered success. She was realistic in her proposal, sensitive to public opinion and thoughtful and systematic in her research and approach, while at the same time retaining her integrity. The Ladies' Association was born into a context of female communities which were likely to have been founded to satisfy personal needs rather than as a means of addressing social problems on a wider scale, yet calls for the introduction of Protestant conventual institutions were increasingly driven by social need rather than purely by private considerations. How did the public respond to this? Did it make her venture a more attractive proposal to early-nineteenth-century society.

CHAPTER 3

STRATEGIES, BOUNDARIES AND SELF DOUBTS: LADY ISABELLA THE PHILANTHROPIST

Introduction

By 1816, eighteen years of philanthropic activity in voluntary associational charities in Dublin and Bath had equipped Lady Isabella with a range of experiences and proved her capabilities as a philanthropist. Now, aged forty-three, she set herself a new and, as the last chapter has demonstrated, a unique and difficult challenge. While her task was distinctive, examples of women who engaged in charitable work in an active way, negotiating and renegotiating their place somewhere between the private and the public arenas, continue to be uncovered.¹ Research which concentrates on single women's agency increasingly suggests that the nature of their interaction was referenced not only to contemporary codes of conduct, but also reflected personal choices based on individual circumstances, principles and character. The extent of that agency, as Ruth Larsen has proposed, was often the result of a mixture of opportunity, desire and ability.² Studies, however, have tended to examine women's participation from the outside in — concentrating on what they *did* — in order to understand the extent and nature of their involvement.³ Lady Isabella's previous charitable work has necessarily been examined in the same way, driven by available sources — all published — such as accounts of the charities and official charitable records which she supported in Dublin and Bath. While this provides us with information concerning the type of work she in which she was engaged, the positions she held and, to a lesser extent, her

¹ See introduction fn10

² See particularly Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune', p.391; Duncan, 'Power of the Old Maid'.

³ Mary Martin, 'Women and Philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740-1870', *London Journal*, vol.19, 2(November, 1994), pp.119-150; Frank K. Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy, 1790-1830', *International Review of Social History*, vol.19, 3(December, 1974), pp.427-445.

interaction with men operating in the charitable arena in Bath, these sources provide no means of understanding her work from a more personal perspective.

Lady Isabella's papers, which include notes and letters recording her thoughts, hopes and fears surrounding the establishment and management of the Ladies' Association, provide a rich source of material and an opportunity to assay a more complex analysis of her involvement. They not only allow us to examine her actions, and thus give us insight into the mechanics of a single woman's active involvement in the charitable arena, but they also facilitate a consideration of the thinking which underpinned those actions. An examination of Lady Isabella's participation, which includes this extra dimension, reveals a gap or a tension between thought/word and action. A close analysis has uncovered a clear distinction between what Lady Isabella *said* she was capable of and what she *did*, particularly in the planning stages of the Ladies Association: in thoughts and words, she often doubted her ability to act, feared her enthusiasm would hamper her ability to construct a practicable plan and make rational judgements and entertained grave concerns that her wealth and her influence as a single woman were insufficient to support the institution and obtain the support of the rich and powerful. In actively setting up and managing the institution, petitioning support through patronage networks and organising funding which suited her financial circumstances and respectable status, she proved herself a capable, competent decision-maker and manager of the Ladies' Association. While sources do not allow us to assess what Lady Isabella might have said in face-to-face situations, it is unlikely that it was diametrically opposed to what she said in writing to various correspondents. By considering the identity of her correspondents and how she expressed herself, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the strategies — some innovative — that she employed which enabled her to move from (in her view) the impossible to the possible. In tailoring her scheme to fit her personal circumstances, she developed a way to act effectively while still working within her self-defined social and gendered parameters, revealing, in the process, a woman with growing confidence in her own ability.

Enthusiasm and Self-Doubts

In 1813, three years before the foundation of the Ladies' Association, Lady Isabella wrote of her nascent plan: 'I am certain there will be many obstacles to overcome but if the object in view be as good as my imagination pictures, and the evils which it is intended to lessen be as real as I believe them to be the thing is worth any effort which can be made.'⁴ Fuelled by her evangelical beliefs, her empathy/sympathy with the circumstances of impoverished gentlewomen and her wish to put her life to some good purpose, she exhibited at this early stage an upbeat determination to put her imagined concept into practice. Two years later, once plans began to be addressed in more detail and her idea began to materialise, the tone of her writing was far less confident:

When I reflect on my own want of talent to give it a well arranged practical form, — my inability to carry it into effect, and the difficulty in influencing those persons in power whose aid would be necessary to give it consequence and respectability, — I feel astonished at myself for indulging such sanguine hopes of it ever being realised.⁵

These comments were made in confidence to her sister, Jane, and their close relationship, and the tone of the letter more generally, suggests their purpose was for reassurance. In 1815, when initial public support for the scheme was cautious, even reluctant, Lady Isabella questioned her ability to bring her plans to fruition. She feared that she lacked the influence and connexions needed to obtain the requisite patronage and, even if she proved successful in these, she still had grave doubts about her ability to oversee the scheme's implementation. Indeed, in discussing the institution with an anonymous correspondent she fretted about her judgement: 'I am very anxious that there is more of enthusiasm than of sound sense in my disposition'.⁶

Lady Isabella's use of the word 'enthusiasm' and her concerns about being an 'enthusiast' are significant, as they indicate that she understood that being seen as an enthusiast would be interpreted negatively by her contemporaries. Enthusiasm was

⁴ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Countess Rosse, 1813. Lady Isabella's most pressing concern was that these women would be reduced to prostitution in order to survive; see chapter 5 for a more in depth discussion pp.205-6.

⁵ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Jane, Countess of Rosse, nd, but before 1816.

⁶ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anon, nd.

commonly defined as an extreme emotion during the eighteenth century. It was linked to fanaticism and ‘excessive religious feeling’, while in secular terms it signified irrationality and poor judgement.⁷ Women, as emotional beings, were assumed to be more prone both to irrationality and enthusiasm. As a ‘religion of the heart,’ Boyd Hilton has argued, evangelicalism encouraged female believers, such as Lady Isabella, ‘to see themselves as possessing more sensibility than intellect’.⁸

By the early nineteenth century, ‘enthusiasm’ had begun to lose its fanatical overtones. Isaac Taylor in his extremely popular *Natural History of Enthusiasm* (1829) would argue that enthusiasm was one of the dangers of a fertile imagination, leading to visionary ideals, better suited to ‘angels and seraphs’ than earthly beings.⁹ Romantic poet Robert Southey, however, saw Lady Isabella’s enthusiasm as an essential component to the success of such a radical and innovative venture. He wrote: ‘You must not suppose that I disparage enthusiasm, which if allied to madness, is akin to it only in the same degree that genius is; and without which nothing that is magnanimous will be contemplated ... nothing that is above the level of everyday life, or out of its course will be attempted ... nothing that is great will be accomplished.’¹⁰ Lady Isabella’s language in her correspondence during the planning stages of the project was undoubtedly more emotional, visionary and imaginative than practical and, although instilled with a definite sense of purpose, it exhibited uncertainty as to the credibility or practicality of her ideas which she classified in similar terms to Taylor as her ‘castles in the air.’¹¹ Explaining her plan, which she termed her ‘romantic endeavour’ to her sister, Jane and to Mrs Smith, Elizabeth’s mother, she warned of her tendency to ‘branch off into the regions of romance’ and ‘reverie’ when pondering its structure. Indeed she begged another correspondent: ‘let me indulge my imagination in picturing some of the various characters who would benefit by such a system’.¹² The tepid

⁷ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm and Regulation* (Oxford, 2003), p. 1.

⁸ Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People: England, 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p.179.

⁹ Isaac Taylor, *The Natural History of Enthusiasm* (London, 1829), p.14.

¹⁰ Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies*, p.306.

¹¹ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Mrs Smith, nd.

¹² DRO, H7/7/13, letter to her sister, Jane, nd; DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Mrs Smith, nd; DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anon.

reception from many in her networks with whom she shared her initial ideas, in her opinion, reinforced her own concerns. Writing to Mrs Smith before the establishment of the institution in 1815, she confided: 'That something of the kind is desirable seems to have long been the opinion of almost all whom I have named the subject, but most of them listened as if I was telling a pretty dream'.¹³

Although a competent philanthropist, experienced in familiar ventures such as the Monmouth Street Society and the House of Protection, Lady Isabella found establishing the Ladies' Association a daunting challenge. Indeed, in 1817, a year after founding the institution, she was still confiding her self-doubts to a correspondent: 'the very short experience that I have as yet had of the nature of such societies hardly qualifies me to speak'.¹⁴ Even in 1824, eight years after its inception, she reflected that it had been 'an undertaking which appears at the outset to have been considered by some more visionary than rational'.¹⁵

Lady Isabella's concerns about her suitability to spearhead the scheme extended to her personal financial circumstances and the scope of her influence: she feared that each would prove insufficient. As a single woman of independent means, Lady Isabella had both the time to attend to the needs of the Ladies' Association and the relative freedom to make choices, yet she recognised her limitations. Explaining her plan to a bishop in 1814, she regretfully conceded: 'I have not myself the means of funding nor have I influence to obtain the assistance of others, to bestow a trifle from my own small pittance and to devote my time and my thoughts ... is all that is in my power'.¹⁶ Similarly, when responding to a letter from the Hon. Miss Wodehouse in 1817, whose interest in the institution related to a prospective candidate for admission, she revealed the tension that she felt: 'I am fully aware that my want of judgement and of talents may prevent my succeeding in my object and that I ought to make it the height of my ambition to put the undertaking as soon as possible into better

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to Thomas Burgess, then Bishop of St. David's, 18th February, 1817.

¹⁵ DRO, H7/7/7, notes, 1824.

¹⁶ DRO, H/7/13, letter to anonymous bishop regarding the support of the Ladies Association, 1814/5.

hands.¹⁷ While her statement clearly continues to indicate uncertainty as to her competence, her use of 'ought' also suggests her emotional investment in the project and her reluctance to relinquish control. It hints instead at her determination to proceed with the project despite her concerns.¹⁸

Strategies and Boundaries

Lady Isabella's preferred plan for funding the Ladies' Association involved a single founder who would finance the project independently. Confiding her concerns to her sister in 1813, she wrote: 'If you or the Duchess of Buccleuch or any other woman of high ranking character and wealth chose to establish a thing of this sort, I feel that as a humble assistant I could do much.'¹⁹ As widows and matriarchs of senior noble, wealthy families, their social position was certainly consequential: in theory at least they had the potential to fund such an undertaking independently and the power required to influence those whose assistance was essential to the success of the venture.²⁰ In reality however, as mothers and, in some cases, grandmothers, their attention was more likely to be taken up with family matters. While Lady Isabella imagined her role as assisting with, rather than founding, the institution, it seems likely that she would have taken on the role of founder by herself had she been sufficiently wealthy. In an emotionally charged letter to the Dowager Countess Manvers, written at the moment that the Ladies' Association lost its first home, Bailbrook House, in 1819, she made her personal financial commitment to the venture clear: 'If I had wealth I would purchase a place for our establishment.'²¹ Although there are no calculations in Lady Isabella's papers to gauge what it would have cost to fund a project such as the Ladies' Association in this manner, Lady Isabella informed a correspondent that 'some sensible men of business' who were 'well experienced in the expenses of great houses' had advised her

¹⁷ DRO, H7/7/14, letter to Miss Wodehouse, 14th February, 1817; H7/7/13, letter to anon, nd.

¹⁸ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to the Hon Miss Wodehouse, 4th February, 1817.

¹⁹ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Countess Rosse, 1813.

²⁰ Amy Froide contends that singleness 'lost the social status reserved to married matrons.' Froide, *Never Married*, p.184.

²¹ DRO, H7/7/16, copy letter to the Dowager Countess Manvers, January 1819.

‘that no less than a sum of £20,000 would be necessary’ to execute the scheme.²² The extent of Lady Isabella’s fortune at this time is unclear. At her death, her will confirms bequeathed legacies of approximately £5,000, but with much of her wealth devoted to the institution it is difficult to assess her fortune at the time of its formation. Although she described herself as ‘a gentlewoman of some fortune,’ she advised Lady Manvers that her income amounted to ‘only’ six hundred pounds annually.²³ Patrick Colquhoun’s statistical analysis of early nineteenth-century society, taken from the first census figures of 1801, which calculates an average annual income of seven hundred pounds a year for ‘gentlemen and ladies living on income’ and a minimum of fifteen hundred pounds per annum for the gentry, confirms Lady Isabella’s view. While £600 p.a. afforded her a comfortable lifestyle, it by no means would have allowed her to found and support the Ladies’ Association on her own.²⁴ Inspired by Scott’s novel, *Millenium Hall*, therefore, Lady Isabella modified her scheme to accommodate her financial circumstances (see chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of the Ladies’ Association’s financial structure). In taking on the day-to-day management of the institution as its superintendent, Lady Isabella avoided employing a third party, but this role required her permanent residence at the institution as a fee paying Lady Renter.²⁵ Her decision to move to Bailbrook House was made early in the process: by 1815, she had already begun to advertise her home in Great Bedford Street: ‘I am anxiously looking out for a tenant for my house in Bath’ she informed an acquaintance, ‘I would let it from next August or September for £200 a year’.²⁶

²² DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Lady Isabella to anon, nd.

²³ Although Lady Isabella does not indicate where her annual income came from, it was common for single women to invest large sums of money in securities or bonds and use the annual return as living expenses. The figure of £600, which Lady Isabella quotes, was likely to have been interest from her father’s legacy (see chapter 1 for details of her primary inheritance from her father and aunt, Mrs Walcot). Later bequests from her sisters, Eleanor and Jane, on their deaths in 1822 and 1838 respectively, although irrelevant to a consideration of her wealth at the outset of the Ladies’ Association did increase her annual income by £400 and her fortune by £1,000 at those respective times. <http://www.chaptersofdublin.com/books/ball1-6/Ball2/ball2.3.html>, (accessed 23rd April, 2005); Todd, *Rebel Daughters*, p.204; King-Harman, *The Kings of King House*, p.45; Lichfield Record Office, will of Lady Eleanor Elizabeth King, B/C/11, 1822; NA, will of the Right Honourable Lady Isabella Lettice King, PROB 11/2018, Image Ref: 53.; NA, will of Jane, Countess Dowager Rosse, PROB 11/189 Image Ref:144.

²⁴ Patrick Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire* (London, 1816), pp.124-5.

²⁵ DRO, H7/7/13, notes, nd.

²⁶ DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Lady Isabella to anon, nd.

While Lady Isabella's residence at the Ladies' Association was another way of saving money, her decision depended on its respectable character. Writing to her close ally Lady Willoughby six months after the Ladies' Association opened, she expressed her family's — and her own — concerns about maintaining her respectability: 'I could not stay here if the House was in any degree to desire its annual support from public subscriptions, or was even supposed to do so, I do not think my relations would permit my doing it.'²⁷ Her comments indicate that her decision to make her home at the Ladies' Association rested upon its character as an independently funded entity; and, secondly, that the ramifications of her actions extended beyond her own reputation. She could not be seen to be living upon charity. That said, conditions permitting, as a single woman of means Lady Isabella had relative freedom of choice; she could decide to move into the Ladies' Association. A married woman could not have contemplated it. Lady Willoughby, her co-managing patroness, as a wife and mother, could not demonstrate the same level of commitment to the institution even in widowhood, remaining focused instead on the needs of her children, even in adulthood.²⁸ This view of the family as a lifelong priority is likely to have been supported by Lady Isabella, who approved of women who put their familial duties first.

Mary Clare Martin, whose research concentrates on women's involvement in the philanthropic arena in Walthamstow and Leyton between 1740 and 1870, has asserted the importance of single status to the success of female-led charitable ventures. She has argued, based on the study of four female-run institutions, that they 'depended on the close personal involvement of the foundress' for their existence, citing the decline of the institutions after the death of their female foundresses as evidence to support her claim.²⁹ Her argument indicates the high level of commitment required by the creator and manager of such an undertaking, a position which potentially demanded the freedom of time that only a single woman could bring. For Lady Isabella, living at the institution facilitated the focus of her attention and time to the scheme. Numerous comments in correspondence from friends and

²⁷ DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Lady Isabella to Lady Willoughby, 1st October, 1816.

²⁸ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Earl Manvers, nd; see chapter 4, fn.119.

²⁹ Martin, 'Women and Philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton', p.129.

supporters indicate her commitment. A letter from trustee Benjamin Hobhouse to patron, Thomas Burgess, Bishop of Salisbury, in 1828, as Lady Isabella began to consider her retirement, highlights his understanding of her centrality to the welfare of the institution: 'I will not ask myself the question where shall another Lady Isabella be found. Will any lady be willing then to occupy, at a large rent, the spare rooms of Cornwallis House. In the present instance they are the great source of income.'³⁰ Patroness Lady Carysfort also acknowledged the extent of Lady Isabella's commitment. Writing to her towards the end of the life of the institution, Lady Carysfort remarked: 'you devote your every faculty in the cause of benevolence'.³¹ Lady Isabella's notes and correspondence are by no means a comprehensive account of her activity during the lifetime of the Ladies' Association, but they provide little mention of her activities outside the parameters of either Bailbrook or Cornwallis House. Apart from occasional trips to Ilfracombe or Ireland for her health, her papers suggest she remained predominantly at the institution. Indeed, a number of letters indicate that visitors regularly called on her while she was at Bailbrook House; most, she admitted, were connected with the business of the institution, but they came in sufficient numbers to warrant her renting a room especially for their accommodation.

As well as contributing to the institution financially as a fee-paying Lady Renter, Lady Isabella's single status gave her the freedom to use the remainder of her fortune as she wished. Her financial commitment to the institution was extensive; not only did she pay the rent of £400 a year with Lady Willoughby, while the institution resided at Bailbrook House but, as already noted, she also paid generously for her accommodation.³² She further contributed large single sums which ranged between £100 and £2,000 towards the extensions and repairs of Cornwallis House when the institution moved to Clifton. She also considered it her responsibility to make up financial shortfalls when necessary, in order to avoid using funds which were tied up in stock.³³ Discussing the requirements for her

³⁰ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Sir Benjamin Hobhouse to the Bishop of Salisbury, April, 1828.

³¹ DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Lady Carysfort, nd.

³² *Quarterly Review*, vol.22, 43(July, 1819), p.102; see chapter 4 fn119.

³³ DRO, H7/7/13, notes/report of finances, May, 1833.

replacement at the institution in a circular to the patrons and patronesses in 1828, she advised them: 'I have felt it my duty so to limit the expenses of the establishment so that there should generally be in the Bank's hands a supply of money for the next twelve months. This has been effected by economy on the one hand and occasionally the purchase at my own cost of what would have encroached too much on the joint income of the society ... no one ought to [be] appointed who is not able and willing to pay this attention to the interests of the society'.³⁴ Two years later, Benjamin Hobhouse noted once again her importance to the well-being of the institution: 'I dread to think what, when your care and vigilance are unavoidably withdrawn from the society, will be the condition of it - I cannot calculate such on the annually subscribing members'.³⁵ While Lady Isabella worried about her financial limitations, she found a way around them. Although her wealth *was* insufficient to finance the Ladies' Association independently, as she had wished, she restructured the funding of the institution to suit her personal as well as her financial circumstances, thus allowing her to support the project generously.

The same pattern can be identified in Lady Isabella's thoughts and actions relating to the extent and power of her influence. Although she was convinced of her inability to 'obtain the assistance of others,' loyal supporter Mrs Iremonger thought otherwise and was certain of the potency of Lady Isabella's social position. Writing of author Helena Whitford's eagerness to establish a similar scheme, Mrs Iremonger informed her: 'Mrs Helena Whitford ... was very zealous for such an institution but has not succeeded; but she could not have equal opportunity, weight and influence with your Ladyship in giving such a plan the just and impelling force which it requires to mount it on wheels.'³⁶ Coming from the lesser ranks of the elite Mrs Iremonger may have recognised Lady Isabella as an aristocrat first and only later as a single woman, a view which Kim Reynolds has convincingly argued in her claim that aristocratic women were recognised by those beyond their immediate social

³⁴ DRO, H7/7/1/4, hints as to the choice of Lady President, 1828.

³⁵ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, 23rd June, 1830.

³⁶ In 1809 Helena Whitford wrote *Thoughts and Remarks on Establishing an Institution for the Support and Education of Impoverished and Respectable Females*, which put forward an idea for the establishment of a Protestant nunnery: DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Mrs Iremonger, 26th November, 1813.

circles by social status rather than by gender.³⁷ Yet, a tension between Lady Isabella's language and her actions indicate that while she protested her ineffectiveness verbally, her actions, which ultimately secured the patronage and subscription of Queen Charlotte and her daughters' the Princesses, through patronage networks, signified both a truth in Mrs Iremonger's comments and Lady Isabella's willingness to apply. Her means of approach entailed canvassing a more influential and respected, yet personally unknown third party as broker: Sir Henry Halford, the royal physician, whose position placed him in close personal contact with the Queen. Contact was made through a third party via correspondence and her request, though respectful, was direct:

As Lady Isabella has not the honor of being known to Sir H she feels that this perhaps must appear on his time most unwarrantable — her only apology is the anxious wish she feels that the Queen and Princesses should take into consideration the subject of the enclosed paper and she knows of no means so likely to recommend the plan to their notice as its being approved and presented to them by Sir HH.³⁸

Interestingly, although her uncle, George, 3rd Earl of Kingston, enjoyed a close relationship with royalty, (as explained in chapter 1) his help is not documented in Lady Isabella's writing.³⁹ Her application and its recipient indicate both her competence in negotiating the patronage system and her willingness to petition unknown figures of consequence in the highest circles independently of her family.⁴⁰ Indeed, conferring with a correspondent, she acknowledged numerous 'very rich persons to whom [she] applied.'⁴¹

Despite Lady Isabella's concerns about her ability to manage the Ladies' Association, she proved to be extremely competent, particularly becoming increasingly confident as time progressed. As superintendent she held overall responsibility for the internal well-being of the institution, which extended from overseeing the day-to-day minutiae such as reading morning and evening prayers to the more involved managerial

³⁷ Kim Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), p.4.

³⁸ DRO, H/7/13, letter to Sir Henry Halford, c.1814/5. The third party was likely to have been Mrs Holroyd via Fanny Burney, see Fanny Burney, *Diary and Letters of Fanny Burney*, 7vols, vol.1, 1778-1780, (ed.), her niece (Charlotte Barrett) (London, 1854), fn16, p.153.

³⁹ George was a compatriot of the Prince of Wales and Lady Isabella wanted the patronage of Queen Charlotte.

⁴⁰ There is no reference to family connexions in her letter. See chapter 4 for more examples of petitioning through patronage networks.

⁴¹ DRO, H/77/21, letter to anon, nd.

duties. She took ultimate responsibility for all decision-making relating to internal affairs; however, the minutes of the institution indicate that decisions were taken with recourse to a guardian committee of ladies, whose purpose was to support Lady Isabella, via regular meetings.⁴² That said, her notes and correspondence suggest that she kept a tight rein on the institution herself. While general administrative duties after 1819 were carried out by residents who occupied official positions such as Miss Sharrer who held the position of ‘resident secretary for seven years’, her notes record her close attention to their record-keeping. In a memorandum to herself in 1829, she noted: ‘looking over the committee book I can see that Lady Manvers’ acceptance of the office of patroness is not entered’.⁴³ There is no indication that she took subsequent action, but she had long been aware of the importance of her supervisory role. Writing to Thomas Burgess, then Bishop of St. David’s and patron of the Ladies Association, as early as 1817 regarding the role of ‘head of the establishment’ in future institutions, she had forcefully advised him that whoever occupied the position ‘must feel herself supported by the countenance of the patrons and patronesses... should any make the unfeeling mistake of supposing that their office was rather to control than to assist her in her arduous task, she would of course give up’.⁴⁴ As ‘head’ of Bailbrook House and later Cornwallis House, Lady Isabella was in effect setting out her own manifesto and delineating the boundaries of her own authority.

A number of detailed invoices survive for the Ladies Association which provide an indication of her managerial role within the institution. Most relate to Cornwallis House and are addressed to Lady Isabella. They include bills for poor-rate payments, purchases of furniture and household goods, repairs, and the extensive alterations and improvements to Cornwallis House and its gardens (detailed in chapter 2), including charges for the services of an architect and a substantial workforce. Receipts acknowledging payment for goods and work completed, also addressed directly to her, suggest that she dealt personally with the tradesmen and professionals working for her. A bill from architect, James Foster in October

⁴² See chapter 4 for a more detailed account of the meetings pp.170-171.

⁴³ DRO, H7/7/13, notes, nd; DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, 11th December, 1829.

⁴⁴ DRO, H/77/15, letter to Thomas Burgess, then Bishop of St. David’s, 18th February, 1817.

1821, for work done by Mr Hayman at Cornwallis House, advised her: 'I hereby certify work done by Mr Hayman for £1,000 which by his contract allows him to draw £750'.⁴⁵ A note in Lady Isabella's handwriting confirms payment via her own account. Just what part she played in negotiating this, or other, contracts remains unclear, but she certainly handled the payments and, as a single woman, she had the legal ability to make contracts.

While Lady Isabella seems to have been comfortable dealing directly with builders, tradesmen and nurserymen, the more formal business of the institution was carried out in association with a number of trustees appointed for the purpose. A series of letters written between Lady Isabella and two of the four general trustees — Sir Benjamin Hobhouse and Lord Manvers — provide a good indication of both Lady Isabella's role and that of the trustees in the financial management of the institution. As the Ladies' Association was neither a charity in the contemporary sense of the word nor a financially self-sustaining unit, it had required an original financial solution — and, most importantly, one that preserved the respectability of its participants. Lady Isabella achieved this through investment. The trustees' primary role was to invest income raised from two sources: from the residents' annual subscriptions; and, secondly, from public subscriptions raised on behalf of the patrons and patronesses, but then held in the trustees' names. While money raised from the residents was an acceptable source of income for funding the routine expenses of the institution, the use of public subscriptions was more problematical. Not only would funding the institution's day-to-day expenses from this source associate it more readily with charitable institutions, a 'degrading idea' in Lady Isabella's mind, but there was also a danger that an 'income' of this sort could be interpreted as remunerative work.⁴⁶ To prevent this only the interest from the investment of public subscriptions was used to fund specific institutional costs, such as the salaries of the official ladies. This innovative arrangement was fundamental to Lady Isabella's participation in the scheme, as she considered that this

⁴⁵ DRO, H7/7/5/2, 12th October, 1821.

⁴⁶ DRO, H7/7/18, notes, 1828.

indirect use of public funds was an acceptable solution which allowed her involvement while maintaining her respectability.

As ‘acting’ trustee, Hobhouse was Lady Isabella’s first point of contact with the trustees and her letters suggest that she enjoyed a close relationship with him. Commenting regretfully on his death in 1832, she remarked on his loyalty to the institution; his loss had ‘deprived this institution and myself of a valuable friend’.⁴⁷ Given both Hobhouse’s and Manvers’ close relationships with Bath, and Lady Isabella’s practice of receiving visitors engaged in the business of the institution at the institution itself, it is likely that she met her trustees from time-to-time at Bailbrook House. That said, the numbers and the contents of the letters that passed between Lady Isabella and the general trustees indicate that a significant proportion of the institution’s business must have been carried out via correspondence. While recent research into letter-writing has demonstrated its importance to women as an effective space in which to engage with the public realm of rational debate, and Sarah Richardson has recently argued that the ‘indistinct status of letters’ means that they could be ‘variously interpreted as private, semi-private or public’.⁴⁸ Lady Isabella’s surviving letters are revealing of her managerial role: they were an effective practical means of communication, enabling her to conduct the business of the institution by extending the scope of her activities to engage with men in extra-domestic affairs without having to leave Bath or the institution.

As account holders, the trustees’ signatures were required to release funds. Their meetings took place in London on an irregular and infrequent basis, often at their homes; however, financial decisions about when and what to withdraw came from the institution. While in theory the trustees acted on behalf of all patrons and patronesses, the signatures of

⁴⁷ DRO, H7/7/19, letter to Earl Manvers, 16th February, 1832.

⁴⁸ Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot and New York, 2013), p.38; ‘Well-neighbour’d Houses’: the Political Networks of Elite Women, 1780-1860’, in Kathryn Gleadle and Sarah Richardson, (eds.), *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke & London, 2000), p.58; Jane Rendall, “‘Friends of Liberty and Virtue’: Women Radicals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1789-1848’ in Caroline Bland & Marie Cross, (eds.), *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter Writing, 1750-2000* (Aldershot, 2004), pp.77-92; for a study of letter writing in the seventeenth century see Susan Whyman, ‘Gentle Companions: Single Women and their Letters in Late Stuart England’, in James Daybell, (ed.), *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing, 1450-1700* (New York & Basingstoke, 2001), pp.177-194.

the three 'managing' patronesses were sufficient to instruct trustees to proceed, as is indicated by a number of letters of instruction in the archive.⁴⁹ Lady Isabella, as the main point of contact for the trustees, was central to the process. Orders from the patronesses were always transmitted to the co-trustees through Hobhouse.

While it seems clear that the trustees handled the institution's investments, it would be useful to examine the relationship between Lady Isabella and the trustees in detail to understand more clearly how far her role as decision-maker extended and to what extent she understood the financial market. Little attention has been paid to women's investment activity in the charitable arena; while Martin notes that Lady Wigram invested the charitable funds of the Walthamstow Female Benevolent Society through her son, who acted as her trustee, she provides no further indication of the process.⁵⁰ Anne Laurence, Josephine Maltby and Janette Rutterford's collection of essays, which specifically examine women's roles as investors more generally between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, has demonstrated that women were actively involved in financial markets, but also point out the difficulties in identifying the extent of their involvement in the decision making process.⁵¹

The trustees of the Ladies' Association certainly had some input in an advisory capacity. Lady Isabella regarded Hobhouse as 'an ever ready friend and adviser in all that related to the outlay of the collected funds', yet his advice was only submitted when requested. His death prompted her to worry: 'I shall feel at a loss to whom now to look to for advice and assistance should such be required'.⁵² These comments provide an insight into their working relationship, as they imply that Lady Isabella acted autonomously in some instances, whereas in others she consulted Hobhouse, or even relied upon his input. This suggests that Lady Isabella had at least some working knowledge of the financial market and management of funds. Indeed, a letter from Hobhouse which discussed the effects on the

⁴⁹ See for example DRO, H7/7/1/5, letter to Earl Manvers, 29th August, 1821; also see chapter for more information about the managing patronesses

⁵⁰ Martin, 'Women and Philanthropy in Walthamstow and Leyton', p. 131.

⁵¹ Anne Laurence Josephine Maltby & Janette Rutterford, 'Introduction', in Anne Laurence, Josephine Maltby & Janette Rutterford, (eds.), *Women and their Money, 1700-1950: Essays on Women and Finance* (London, 2009), p.10.

⁵² DRO, H7/7/16, letter to Earl Manvers, 19th February, 1832.

financial situation of the Ladies' Association of the conversion of 4% government annuities to 3½%, which took place in March 1830, indicates not only Lady Isabella's understanding of the market but also that she followed it carefully.⁵³ Concerned for the wellbeing of the institution, Hobhouse counselled: 'the extent of your injury I have not had time to look into; you no doubt know of it.'⁵⁴ As someone whose income was likely to have derived from such investments, Lady Isabella may well have had personal knowledge of investing in the market. Even if she did not, as Rutterford and Maltby's research has shown, women could both follow their investments and gather advice about the financial market from newspapers, periodicals and personal networks, as well as from official advisers and trustees.⁵⁵

A letter from Isaac Cooke, a lawyer and local trustee at Bristol, regarding the withdrawal of funds for the purchase of Cornwallis House confirms that Lady Isabella understood the language of the financial market and the process of investment to a sufficient extent that she was able to make informed decisions independently, if she chose. His language, which advised her in unexplained technical terms of the importance to 'sell out such stock for the object before consols shut which will be in about a fortnight', not only indicates that he believed Lady Isabella would understand him, but also that he recognised that the decision to sell rested with her.⁵⁶ An investment made by Hobhouse in March 1828, provides a clear picture of the mechanics of the process. On 9th of the month Hobhouse wrote to Lady Isabella, in response to a request for advice, recommending that: 'as you can afford it, you cannot do better than purchase £300 of 3% stock, as it puts further means of utility into your power'.⁵⁷ Presumably, Hobhouse was referring to the interest it would generate. On Lady Isabella's orders, he then proceeded to instruct her bankers to carry out the investment. Once completed, he informed her: 'immediately on receipt of your letter I wrote to Coutts and Co and directed £300 of stock in the 3% consols to be purchased in the

⁵³ Hansard, 1803-2005, 26th March, 1830, Commons Sitting, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1830/mar/26/conversion-of-annuities-new-three-and-a>, 25th March, 2014.

⁵⁴ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, 18th August, 1830.

⁵⁵ Janette Rutterford & Josephine Maltby, "'The Widow, the Clergyman and the Reckless': Women Investors in England, 1830-1914, *Feminist Economics*, vol.12, 1-2(2006), pp.123-5.

⁵⁶ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Isaac Cooke, 19th May, 1821.

⁵⁷ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, 9th March, 1828.

names of the general trustees ... and when I receive an account of the particulars I will send it to your Ladyship.⁵⁸ The account, which arrived before his letter was sent, was added to the response: it detailed the purchase price of the stock, the total price paid and the charge made for the transaction. The comprehensive documentation of this process clearly demonstrates the part played by both parties. Although Lady Isabella had requested and accepted guidance from Hobhouse, she controlled the process. She requested the advice, made the decision to act upon it and finally instructed Hobhouse to carry out the transaction. Once completed, she was presented with the 'particulars' for her information. While Lady Isabella took Hobhouse's advice on the type of investment to make in this instance, she was already familiar with consuls, as Cooke's letter and others in the archive suggest, and this seems to have been her preferred investment route.

Historians are divided over whether women's investing in this period was gendered; female investment behaviour being more conservative than male and risk-taking was something which women shied away from. Laurence, Maltby and Rutterford have uncovered a range of female investment behaviours, however, revealing women who invested to create incomes, business women, and women who played the market.⁵⁹ With Consolidated Government Stock considered a sound, if safe, investment, Lady Isabella's behaviour clearly fell into the category of safe investing. However, rather than characterising this as 'female behaviour', it can be explained more convincingly by a consideration of its purpose: the money was not Lady Isabella's to take risks with; it belonged to the institution and the purpose of the investment was to generate a regular income. Government bonds, in perpetuity, with regular interest and occasional opportunities to redeem the initial investment, were therefore an ideal option.

Lady Isabella's correspondence indicates that she was also accepted and respected as a serious participant in the investment market by her male counterparts. Manvers' response to a letter, where she updated him on the financial circumstances of the institution

⁵⁸ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, 24th May, 1828.

⁵⁹ Laurence, Maltby & Rutterford, *Women and Their Money*, pp.2 -3.

in regard to the purchase of Cornwallis House, indicates the regard in which he held her in as the financial manager of the institution. He thanked her for the information which she sent and added: 'the details which your Ladyship has been good enough to furnish me with, relative to the financial prospects of the Ladies' Association up to this present time, affords the strongest possible evidence of the zeal and good management with which those funds have been hitherto administered.'⁶⁰

The Purchase of Cornwallis House in 1821 was a significant transaction for the Ladies' Association, yet the roles of Lady Isabella and the general trustees in the process reflect their overall investment behaviour. Correspondence suggests that the trustees had little involvement in the purchase of the house other than in an advisory capacity and as signatories to release the funds to buy. While this is explicitly confirmed by Hobhouse in a letter to Lady Isabella which discussed arrangements for the withdrawal of funds for the purchase of the house, his advice in the same letter was, as with Cooke's relating to investments, technical. Covering both financial issues and those of purchasing the property, Hobhouse discussed estate agents' and lawyers' duties, mortgages, stock funds and trust deeds in a way that assumed Lady Isabella's prior knowledge on each of the subjects.⁶¹ Although the general trustees played little part in the process, a number of local trustees were recruited for the specific purpose of overseeing the purchase of the house. This decision by Lady Isabella, which was approved by her patrons, patronesses and guardian committee, is illustrative of where Lady Isabella defined her boundaries. A statement sent to the patrons and patronesses by the guardian committee on the sale of Bailbrook House in 1821 advised them that:

deeming themselves [unacquainted with] incompetent to transact the business of the purchase, they have thought it necessary to request the assistance and advice of some gentlemen friends and cordial approvers of the institution ... trustees in whose names the House will be held and who will undertake the security of the purchase, the proper outlay of the money to be granted for additions and repairs, and also to receive the rent which to may be paid half yearly for the house by the resident

⁶⁰ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Earl Manvers, 27th April, 1820.

⁶¹ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, 15th April, 1820.

Guardians.⁶²

This drafted statement, which exposes Lady Isabella's thought process while writing, is helpful in analysing her meaning. While 'incompetent' can be defined in two ways — either as unqualified or incapable — the inclusion of 'unacquainted with' suggests that Lady Isabella's meaning was closer to the former. As such, it is likely that the decision to request the aid of a number of male trustees to complete the purchase was more to do with unfamiliarity with the process rather than a remark relating to the incapacity of women. That said, a similar pattern of activity to that which Lady Isabella employed in investing funds can be seen. She instigated, with advice, the move from Bailbrook House; she identified Cornwallis House as a likely replacement; and, with the agreement of the patrons, patronesses and guardian committee, she instructed the local trustees to carry out the purchase on their behalf. As with the institution's investments, Bailbrook House was held in the names of the trustees. This evidence, taken together, clearly demonstrates Lady Isabella's financial and business capabilities and places her as the inspiration and driving force behind the management of the institution, but in a quasi-public capacity. Although technically all stock holding and deed holding rested in the hands of the trustees, in actuality her papers suggest that she played a more active part.

The promotion of the institution was accomplished in a similar way. In this instance, however, Lady Isabella's wish to maintain a discrete public profile for herself, the residents and the institution raised the concerns of supporter, Southey. His view, which argued that the limited scope this provided for advertising would have a negative impact on the success of the institution, was conveyed through dialogues between the protagonists of his critique of early nineteenth-century English society, *Sir Thomas More, or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*. He judged it 'unfavourable' that 'no public meetings for promoting it are held; no speeches in favour of it are delivered upon platforms, and reported in newspapers; no ladies' committees are formed to collect contributions; and no vanity fair

⁶² The words indicated in brackets have been crossed out by Lady Isabella. DRO, H7/7/2, statement sent by the guardian committee of the Ladies' Association to the patrons and patronesses on the sale of Bailbrook House, May, 1821.

opened in aid of the funds, under the title of a Ladies' Bazaar.'⁶³ Both Davidoff and Hall, and Simon Morgan, have demonstrated that the exclusion of women from formal public arenas at this time saw them denied the opportunity to address the public directly, or through the press, not only denying them a voice but also preventing them from becoming public personalities in their own right.⁶⁴ Morgan explains this absence by asserting that 'unlike men, women's reputations depended on living up to an arbitrary and restrictive ideal of behaviour which effectively prevented them from taking part in open controversy and debate.'⁶⁵ As someone who was very careful not to put her reputation for respectability at risk, it is not surprising that Lady Isabella was unwilling to speak out publicly for the benefit of the Ladies' Association: the numerous male patrons and trustees, as supporters for the undertaking, were well qualified to preside over meetings and address the public if required. The fact that there appear to have been *no* public meetings, coupled with Lady Isabella's further reticence to promote the institution through avenues such as bazaars, may reflect her insistence that the institution remained untarnished by even the smallest hint that it was a charity. The fact that she *did* participate in Bristol and Clifton's Grand Bazaar for the Relief of Distressed Manufacturers, in February 1827, as patroness and committee member, suggests her willingness to take part when appropriate.⁶⁶

A number of articles published in local, national and international periodicals as diverse as *The Christian Remembrancer*, *Belle Assemblée* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, predominantly between 1819 and 1830, provided widespread publicity for the institution.⁶⁷ Several of the pieces were variations of a lengthy composition contributed by Southey in

⁶³ Southey, *Sir Thomas More, or Colloquies*, p.306.

⁶⁴ Simon Morgan, 'A Sort of Land Debatable': Female Influence, Civic Virtue and Middle-Class Identity, c.1830-c.1860, *Women's History Review*, vol.13, 2(June, 2004), p.194. Davidoff & Hall have identified the first quarter of the nineteenth century as a nascent period in women's formal participation. Spaces gradually transformed for their accommodation in the form of viewing galleries which continued the silent but present theme. Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p.433.

⁶⁵ Morgan, 'A Sort of Land Debatable', p.194.

⁶⁶ *Bristol Mercury* (19th February, 1827).

⁶⁷ See for example: *The Christian Remembrancer*, vol.10 (September, 1828), pp.586-588; *Belle Assemblée: Or Court and Fashionable Magazine*, vol.21 (February, 1820), pp.61-64; *Atheneum, Or Spirit of the English Magazines*, vol.14 (November, 1823), pp.120-122; *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.144 (September, 1828), p.217; *The Monthly Repertoire of English Literature*, vol.8 (March, 1820), pp.113-118; *The Quarterly Review*, vol.22 (July, 1820), pp.96-102; *Ladies' Literary Cabinet*, vol.2 (May, 1820), p.6; *The Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine*, vol.7 (August, 1828), pp.148-150.

1819, in the *Quarterly Review*.⁶⁸ His essay may have been a response to an ongoing conversation between Lady Isabella and Reginald Heber, the Bishop of Calcutta in 1817 that discussed the merits of publishing an article in the same periodical with a view to ‘mak[ing] the plan more widely known’ and to ‘remove the foolish objections which every new idea is exposed’.⁶⁹ However, it is difficult to determine whether Southey worked on the article independently or if Lady Isabella was a silent partner as undated notes in her papers, written by her, which match sections of the essay, suggest the latter. Regardless of the origin of the piece, Lady Isabella was forced to weigh-up the benefits the institution would derive from this opportunity to affirm the respectable nature of the Ladies’ Association against the harm which could be caused to that respectability by raising its public profile:

I fear you will think me whimsical when I acknowledge that *Eclat* would in my opinion be injurious to the first establishment. To see it begin quietly without pretension has been my very anxious wish, as I am certain that until its utility has been experienced and its character for good order established by time, *ridicule* rather than admiration is to be expected. Notoriety of any form is disadvantageous to women and I cannot but think that the proposed community would be more respectable and respected in the shade of even obscurity than in the sunshine of courtly fervour.⁷⁰

In this, Lady Isabella was echoing well-established contemporary thinking. As Jean Jacques Rousseau had argued in *Emile* (1762), women’s ‘natural’ environment was the home and ‘their dignity depends on remaining unknown’.⁷¹ Southey reconfirmed this view fifty years later: ‘women in the usual course of life keep in the shade, while men brave the wind, seek the sunshine and are exposed to all weathers.’⁷²

Conclusion

The challenge of establishing an institution such as the Ladies’ Association posed Lady Isabella with a number of real and perceived problems: some emanated from the new and

⁶⁸ *Quarterly Review*, vol.22 (July, 1819), pp. 59-102.

⁶⁹ Letter from Reginald Heber, Hodnett Rectory, May 22nd, 1817: Reginald Heber, Amelia Shipley Heber, *The Life of Reginald Heber DD Lord Bishop of Calcutta by his Widow*, 2vols, vol.1 (London, 1830), p.478.

⁷⁰ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to an anonymous female supporter, Bath, 3rd May, 1815.

⁷¹ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, ou de l’Education*; in *Oeuvres Completes*, 5vols, vol.4 (Paris 1969), p.768.

⁷² Southey, *Sir Thomas More or Colloquies*, p.213.

unique nature of the project, whereas others stemmed from her own lack of confidence. While she worried about her ability to create a practicable plan, manage the institution once established and make rational judgements, she was also concerned about the obstacles created by her perceived lack of wealth to fund the scheme and her lack of influence with the rich and powerful. Yet she proved herself a competent decision maker, a capable organiser and innovative in her solutions to problems. As patroness, president, superintendent and resident of the Ladies' Association she took on a full and leading role in all aspects of the institution's management, particularly in its financial matters. She accepted advice from male trustees, but their participation and the mechanism and timing of financial transactions took place according to Lady Isabella's instructions and final decisions. While financial decisions were approved by patrons and patronesses, responsibility for them ultimately lay with her. In this respect, Lady Isabella acted in concert with like-minded men who accepted her as a serious and competent actor. At the same time she employed strategies, some innovative, to overcome the obstacles which she perceived as problematic to the success and good order of the institution. She restructured the system of funding to suit her financial circumstances and maintain her respectability and that of the institution. By moving in to the institution herself, she not only saved money by taking on the role of superintendent, but also, by situating herself on site, placed herself in a situation where she could give her exclusive attention and time to the needs of the institution.

While Lady Isabella certainly recognised limitations as a woman, she negotiated boundaries which she perceived as restrictive. Although her visible public role was shaped by her understanding of convention and respectability, she secured for herself a voice in formal and informal decision-making regarding the institution through her use of the quasi-public medium of correspondence and by conducting business in her home. Over time, her sources reveal that she gained confidence as a philanthropist and in her decision making, something which would assist her in the construction of her support network.

CHAPTER 4

BATH: CULTIVATING BENEVOLENT CONNEXIONS

Introduction

Reflecting on the life and decline of the Ladies' Association in 1832, Lady Isabella recalled of the institution and its first home, Bailbrook House:

Its vicinity to Bath placed her within reach of cordial friends and advices — in every difficulty she could have recourse to kind and talented neighbours who had leisure and inclinations to assist her and she had frequent intercourse with her co -patronesses.¹

Her words, filled with appreciation and warmth for Bath's generous nature and its benevolent inhabitants, not only spoke of an accessible, like-minded community with strong bonds, open and attentive to her cause, both with their time and their enthusiasm, but also confirm a close working relationship with the patronesses of the Ladies' Association. An emotional statement, it emphasises the importance of the comfort and encouragement which she derived from the support and security the community and her surroundings offered her.

Drawing together the wealthy, powerful and influential, eighteenth-century Bath, primarily renowned for the pursuit of pleasure, was also a meeting place for the exchange of news, ideas and information. A microcosm of elite society, facilitating introductions and nurturing new connections among a diverse visiting population in a relatively neutral and relaxed atmosphere, the ebb and flow of society played a key role in the transference and dissemination of information on a national level. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a subtle shift in its demographics saw a more serious, purposeful mindset developing among a growing residential population, encouraged by an increasing evangelical presence, and a concern for Bath and its residents saw many congregate to engage in charitable good works. Amidst this unique space, intimate and focused, yet one which continued to attract influential and powerful individuals of rank and fortune, women were afforded the space to

¹ DRO, H7/7/1/9, notes on the history of the institution, 4th June, 1832.

participate on an equal footing and the growing trend for private gatherings empowered and encouraged them to address their own agendas in an intimate yet potent setting. In this milieu Lady Isabella worked to construct an extensive support network of like-minded, influential elite individuals for the Ladies' Association, national as well as local. In an age which Boyd Hilton has asserted was more renowned for its 'rakes than its Godly nobles,' its ethos both humanitarian and improving was overwhelmingly evangelical in principle.²

The gradual but wholesale breakdown of this network after the institution removed to Clifton in 1821 not only saw the loss of immediate, personal support for Lady Isabella but also a more general decline in support and interest for the institution. Lady Isabella's recollections, tinged with sadness at their loss, reinforce the vital importance of a close supportive network, both to her effectiveness and to the welfare of the institution itself. Comparing Clifton and its community to that of Bath, she wrote regretfully: 'All who know Bath know how distinguished it has been for *social* and benevolent feeling and after basking in its sunshine for so many years, the transition to Clifton, chilled and almost paralysed all the powers of her mind ... she felt unsupported.'³

With this in mind, this chapter will focus on those networks so crucial to the welfare of the institution. It will determine the scope of support available to Lady Isabella in the context of early nineteenth-century Britain and understand how Bath's ethos as a hub of elite sociability, and later as a growing centre for philanthropy, facilitated their development, establishing it as a key player in their formation and maintenance. It will further examine the networks themselves, their make-up, construction in relation to Bath and each other, and the role each played in supporting Lady Isabella and in the evolution of the Ladies' Association. The chapter will finally explore the effect of the move to Cornwallis House on the power and structure of those networks, once again reflecting on the importance of Bath as a centre for their construction and their importance to the success of the institution.

² Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People: England, 1783-1846* (Oxford, 2006), p.178.

³ DRO, H7/7/1/9, notes on the history of the institution, 4th June, 1832.

Context of Support

Directed by her evangelical principles and by the need to inspire participation and maintain the respectability of those she was proposing to assist, Lady Isabella targeted the affluent and the powerful to support her scheme. Robert Southey, however, with his mind focused primarily on the financial viability of the institution, was critical of this plan and, judging her proposed audience unprofitable, argued:

I can discern in the scheme no other defect than the inevitable one that its appeal for support is made to the higher orders and that large sums may be raised with more facility and more certainty by small contributions among an extensive public, than by the most liberal donations that can be looked for in a limited circle.⁴

Although early offers of support had certainly been forthcoming from members of the middle classes, Lady Isabella was reticent to refocus their active attention and energy from their industrious and flourishing charitable endeavour in the growing arena of urban associative philanthropy, which, immersed in Bath's vibrant philanthropic arena, she would have witnessed firsthand. Writing to Lady Wilton in order to gauge potential interest in her nascent idea in 1813, she made clear her wishes:

Some Ladies and several Gentlemen have offered subscriptions towards its establishment, but as they are all persons of moderate fortune and already doing good amongst the poor to the full extent of their means I should think it wrong to divert their bounty into a new channel. This is an undertaking that belongs properly to other classes ... if the Great and the wealthy *founded* Colleges ... then persons of moderate fortune may do *their* part by supporting them and thus may this good work and the blessings which shall attend it, be divided, to each their appropriate share.⁵

Lady Isabella's intent was not solely to request pecuniary aid from the elite, but also to engage them in her scheme in an active way by requesting their time as well as their financial support. Her thought process, which forcefully advocated her own distinct personal ideal of charitable endeavour and was informed by the evangelical principle of active benevolence, was embedded in an unequivocal belief in more involved, 'neighbourly' charitable participation. This form of charitable participation, which Lady Isabella

⁴ Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1829), p.306.

⁵ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Lady Wilton, 1813.

considered to be the ‘natural duty’ of all, upheld traditional notions of aristocratic paternalistic benevolence and, emanating from a sympathetic viewpoint, also recognised empathy as a motivational force in an age which only had the written word or firsthand experience as tools to rouse sympathies.⁶ Specifically addressing the noble and the wealthy, she prescribed a hierarchical chain of benevolence in which the care and protection of relatives and tenantry were the primary and natural duty of her class. Insisting that they should tend first to relations, for ‘to shrink from them would be rebellion against providence and nature,’ she then directed attention towards their tenantry, advising: ‘we should never desert those over whom Heaven has placed us and whose industry our income is derived’.⁷ David Roberts’ research, which examines early Victorian paternalism, has argued that the nobility regarded the physical and spiritual welfare of both tenants and dependents as their duty and responsibility in return for privilege and power, while Boyd Hilton, focusing on the impact of evangelicalism, asserts that it reminded wealthy Anglicans that they were accountable to God for their privileges.⁸ Once primary obligations were satisfied, or if there were none to satisfy, Lady Isabella’s philanthropic ideal further decreed it the ‘divine’ personal duty of all to assist others in society who were closest in rank and circumstances. Exploring her idea in notes, written in 1813, she asked rhetorically:

Who are the persons we are called upon to serve? — those surely who have the nearest claim on our sympathy. Dependents — connexions — associates — and if our influence can extend wider our own class in society should be the chief objects of our own interest ... those whose minds we can influence those stand next us in the scale of society, those whose habits and life and whose wants and feelings somewhat resemble our own, ought to be the first objects of our care. Providence placing them within reach of our sympathy seems to have pointed out our line of duty.⁹

Her comments, which not only suggest a mission to proselytize, consistent with the evangelical purpose of improvement and moral reform, but also, in stressing the potential to identify more easily with the plight of those whose social circumstances were similar to her

⁶ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anon, nd.

⁷ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to ‘dear sir’, nd, but c.1813.

⁸ David Roberts, *Paternalism in Early Victorian England* (New Brunswick NJ, 1979), pp. 5-6; Hilton, *A Mad Bad and Dangerous People*, p.182.

⁹ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anon, c.1814; DRO, H7/7/13, notes, c.1813.

own, recognised the value of empathy both in motivating charitable actions and in understanding the peculiar circumstances of those in need. Lady Isabella was nevertheless aware of humanity's limitations in this respect. Writing to her great niece, Lady Helena Cooke, she identified and praised the empathetic qualities her husband, Philip, demonstrated in his correspondence. A rare attribute in most, she paid tribute to his compassionate nature: 'There was one sentence in his letter that I loved him for, — it was expressive of what so few can feel, that is sympathy in a case which could bear no resemblance to anything he ever has, or can ever experience. It requires more than mere common benevolence to feel this'.¹⁰ Lady Isabella's views were reflective of contemporary thinking on the subject of sympathy which was dominated by Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a critical examination of contemporary moral thinking which was first published in 1759. Exploring the differences between sympathy and empathy or compassion and the capacity of mankind to experience the latter, he emphasised the importance of 'fellow-feeling,' which he asserted, was accessed through the imagination:

as we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation ... it is by changing place in fancy with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels.¹¹

Perceiving a positive benevolent atmosphere among the respectable classes, Lady Isabella was confident that 'a wish to do good seems to be in the minds of all thinking people.'¹² Previously resident in Dublin and then in Bath, her view of contemporary benevolence was likely to have been in part influenced by the mood and ethos of these energetic, predominantly middle-class driven, charitable urban communities. Turning her attention to aristocratic ideas of philanthropic participation, however, she identified a 'difference of opinion as to the proper mode of serving our fellow creatures.'¹³

Historians generally agree that aristocratic participation in the developing urban

¹⁰ Doncaster Archives, Doncaster, S.Yks., Davies-Cooke family of Owston, Household Records, General Correspondence of Lady Helena Cooke, DD/DC/H7/6/2, letter to Lady Helena Cooke, 1832.

¹¹ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 2nd edn (London, 1761), pp.2-3.

¹² DRO, H7/7/13, notes, nd.

¹³ DRO, H7/7/13, notes regarding the establishment of the institution, c.1814.

charitable arena was overwhelmingly passive in nature.¹⁴ Of those who took part, most did so as either subscribers, albeit prolific in some cases, or as patrons. While Lady Isabella's requirements for participation were more active she understood that in the climate of early nineteenth-century voluntary philanthropy, the influence and status of the rich and powerful as figureheads was important and necessary to the success of the undertaking. Simon Morgan has argued that the success of a scheme depended on having the support of a body of patrons and patronesses whose names carried sufficient weight in the community to ensure adequate publicity and attention and attract other subscribers to the cause, while Frank Prochaska has identified that the higher up the social scale the prominent supporters, the higher the class of subscribers, suggesting that influential supporters not only attracted substantial backing from society in general but also gathered support from their own class. His research has identified that in institutions, particularly those with royal patronage, roughly five to twenty-five percent of women were titled.¹⁵

Lady Isabella acknowledged the important validating and emulative nature of elite support in her aim to solicit the aid of those in the highest circles. 'One of my first wishes,' she communicated to an anonymous bishop in 1813, 'was to see the plan mentioned to her majesty and next my thoughts and my hopes turned where general report told me everything was combined which could render patronage both honourable and effectual.'¹⁶ Indeed, speaking later of the proposed appointment of trustees to the institution, she confirmed her understanding of their primary role: 'It is wished that [they] should be Noblemen whose rank and character may tend to give consequence to the undertaking — and to induce the public, should the first experiment succeed, to give ... bequests and donations'.¹⁷ Yet, listing the qualities of 'Rank, talents, wealth, high character and unbounded benevolence' as

¹⁴ R.J. Morris, 'Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites, 1780-1850: An Analysis', *The Historical Journal*, vol.26, 1(March, 1983), pp.96, 113; Leonora Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London, 1987), p.422; Kim Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), p.111.

¹⁵ Simon Morgan, "'A Sort of Land Debatable': Female Influence, Civic Virtue and Middle-Class Identity, c.1830-c.1860", *Women's History Review*, vol.13, 2(June, 2004), p.190; Frank K. Prochaska, 'Women in English Philanthropy, 1790-1830', *International Review of Social History*, vol.19, 3(December,1974), p.433.

¹⁶ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anonymous bishop, nd.

¹⁷ DRO, H7/7/3, notes, nd.

essential elements for a charity's 'figurehead' to possess, her words, in line with her ethos, suggest her requirements amounted to more than a passive contribution.¹⁸

Lady Isabella also considered the implications associated with employing particular and specific groups to support her cause. In the case of a small localised association, as was the nature of many independent female forms of charitable endeavour at this time, she believed that the undertaking would have no opportunity for expansion, and suggested that any such enterprise, although useful for its duration, would remain a relatively anonymous local concern which would cease when its main supporters died or were no longer able to contribute to its management. Having previously been extensively involved in Bath's charitable arena, it is likely that Lady Isabella had seen other charitable ventures fail in this way. Intent on extending her project nationwide, she was convinced that although more high-profile influential and national backing would guarantee a wide-spread and a long-term project, it could also, if tinged with the principles of those most closely involved, deviate from its intended course. She consequently believed that the only form of support which would ensure the success of her project in the long term would be the patronage of Queen Charlotte, which would provide the institution with both status and in consequence, an elite and impartial support network:

Should the thing be set on foot by a few individuals it might do good so far as it went but it would be very limited and would die (as in former instances) with those who upheld it. If taken up and patronised by a powerful party it would then be more extensive and more durable but the particular prejudices and tenets of that party would be interwoven with the plan but if brought forward by the Queen of England it would then indeed be placed upon its proper ground and would continue from age to age a national blessing.¹⁹

Despite the intended empathetic draw, Lady Isabella was disheartened at the poor response to her preliminary proposals for pro-active participation and she frustratingly recorded her thoughts: 'I have been disappointed in my hope that some of the more wealthy of our female nobility would adopt my plan and become founders of Colleges. *Some* of the

¹⁸ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to an anonymous bishop, nd.

¹⁹ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anon, nd.

wisest and best of my friends have denied me the aid of their talents'.²⁰ While some, focusing on financial contributions, put the poor response down to the dismal economic climate, a time which Hilton has described as a 'period of grave economic strain,' Lady Isabella identified a more fundamental explanation.²¹ Lamenting that the 'nearer duties [are] often overlooked', she exposed a viewpoint at odds with her own.²² Focusing on her own and preferred model of philanthropic endeavour for this purpose, she identified a general lack of empathy with the dilemma of the distressed gentlewoman which manifested itself in a lack of interest which saw many from her class reluctant to engage with or even acknowledge the existence of a problem:

I wish someone who has had the opportunities of observing the mental state of society, and who possessing talents accurately to describe what they know, would point out to the benevolent and the powerful the sad situation of unpositioned females. Often does it press itself on the notice of those who move in the humbler walks of life but to the great it is scarcely known.²³

Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, although written almost a century earlier, explored the charitable impulse and, focusing on contemporary issues of individualism and self-interest, bears relevance to Lady Isabella's argument. Reasoning that although all mankind was endowed with the virtue of compassion, an emotion which was 'raised ... when the suffering and misery of other creatures make so forcible an impression upon us, as to make us uneasy,' Mandeville contended that 'the more remote it is the less we are troubled with it.'²⁴

Discussing the disappointing reaction by those she had hoped would support her scheme, Lady Isabella identified this impersonal and isolated perspective amongst the elite, a stark contrast to her own. 'The rich are inclined to think the world goes on very well and

²⁰ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Mrs Smith, c.1814 .

²¹ Writing to Lady Isabella in July 1816, Lady Carysfort proffered her explanation for the slow pace of contributions towards the institution; 'the establishment was originally formed at a most unfortunate moment when the extreme pressure of the times , certainly of necessity shut up the purses of many'. Money raised in subscription in the first year at £5,000 fell short of the target of £15,000: DRO, H7/7/15, 12th July, 1816; Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People*, p.7.

²² DRO, H7/7/13, notes, nd.,.

²³ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to her sister, Jane, nd.

²⁴ Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits. With an Essay on Charity and Charity Schools* (London, 1795), p.156.

they wish not for institutes of this kind.’²⁵ Even detailed and explicit accounts of specific individuals, offered by her in correspondence as evidence, were insufficient to convince many. Responding to Lady Isabella’s early application, detailing her firsthand and ‘painful’ experience of the situation, Lady Wilton reported back that the plan was not received favourably at Eaton Hall, asserting casually that ‘unpositioned young women [were] taken care of by their relations’.²⁶ This detached, unemotional response, likely encouraged by her distance both mentally and physically from women in this condition bears witness to the inadequacies of communication in appealing for support through the written word. Lady Wilton’s words also confirm the continued relevance of Mandeville’s observations, thoughts which were reiterated by Adam Smith, who maintained that our sympathies are most strongly aroused ‘when we either see it or are made to conceive of it in a very lively manner.’²⁷ This problem then was a contemporary one, part of the spirit of the time, and was echoed in the campaign for abolition. William Wilberforce believed that the lack of support for his mission was because it was easier for white people to identify with plantation owners than with slaves.

The general remoteness and impersonality of the character of organised urban aristocratic philanthropy, Lady Isabella believed, was accompanied by a wish for charitable reimbursement which, she argued, saw her class choose to participate in charitable endeavour in a way that courted gratification with minimal personal input. Although she acknowledged the generosity of the elite in monetary terms, she saw their often high-profile contributions as ostentatious and self-interested, enticing social esteem through public recognition. Notes written to regulate her early thoughts concerning the scheme confirm her critical viewpoint:

The rich and the great give also they found hospitals, they build charities, they establish charity schools they [act as] patrons they protect. All this can be done without the sacrifice of their own comforts and brings its

²⁵ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Lady Manvers, Bath, 3rd May c.1814.

²⁶ DRO, H7/7/15, letter in response to Lady Wilton’s, 1813; Doncaster Archives, Doncaster, S.Yks., Davies-Cooke family of Owston, Household Records, General Correspondence Lady H.C. Cooke, DD/DC/H7/6/2, letter from Lady Isabella, 6th December, 1832.

²⁷ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p.2.

reward in the praises of the world ... [and] may certainly obtain more notoriety, [and] excite louder expressions of gratitude.²⁸

These flamboyant yet detached gestures, as Lady Isabella saw them, are closely aligned with Mandeville's views that had criticised eighteenth-century elite charity for its self-interested spirit. Recognising the motivations behind the grand donations towards the establishment of prestigious local or national charitable institutions for the welfare and improvement of society as egocentric, he condemned the 'Pride and vanity' which he informed his readers 'have built more hospitals than all the virtues together.'²⁹ Lady Isabella was further convinced that to gain the optimum appreciation and admiration, those of high birth and refined education not only chose to advertise their actions through the public nature of their voluntary charitable endeavour but also, more often than not, aimed their support towards the huge numbers of poor, thus giving the impression of prolific giving. She observed, 'for the same sum that would have kept one Orphan Girl in the gentler ranks of life from poverty might serve to feed twenty children amongst the vagrant poor, or to give a comfortable glass of gin to as many hundreds.'³⁰

Catherine Macaulay, also questioning the benevolent motives of the rich at the turn of the century, criticised the 'idle spirit of those who tread the giddy round of fashionable life' and condemned them for failing to 'give up a small portion of their time to the happiness of others'.³¹ Her disapproval is evident in her acerbic description of their philanthropic contribution:

But shall the fine gentlemen and ladies leave the pleasures that belong to opulence, and amuse themselves in the drudgery of business for the advantage of wretches fed by public charity? ... and this without any probability of gaining by it a title or reaping the distinctions or emoluments of office? Forbid it fashion — forbid it common-sense!³²

Of course, although Macaulay's perspective agreed with both the current stream of thought

²⁸ Ibid; DRO, H7/7/3, notes, c.1815; DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anonymous, nd.

²⁹ Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, p160. Jeremy Gregory's article on humanitarianism has also drawn attention to the aspect of late eighteenth-century involvement that was ego driven. Jeremy Gregory, 'Homo religiosus': masculinity and religion in the long eighteenth century', in Tim Hitchcock & Michele Cohen, (eds.), *English Masculinities, 1660-1800* (London, 1999), pp.85-110.

³⁰ DRO, H7/7/13, notes, c1813.

³¹ Catherine Macaulay Graham, *Letters on Education: with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (London, 1790), p.289.

³² Ibid, pp.289-290.

and Mandeville's earlier observations, her diatribe against the aristocratic classes came at a time when they were open to extensive criticism for their increasingly extravagant and decadent lifestyles and there is no doubt that Lady Isabella, from her devout viewpoint, which saw charity as a Christian virtue, would have been equally critical of the opulence and excess of some of her class. Historians, such as Hilton have pointed to the 'lax aristocratic values' of the Regency, while David Spring, researching the social mores of the period, advocates that their significance was exaggerated, arguing that the evangelical 'mood of seriousness was so plainly in the ascendant that what we call the Regency may have been in the nature of protest' against its restrictive ethos.³³

Lady Isabella believed that these attitudes towards philanthropic giving were wholly inappropriate to those closest in rank in need. Whilst she intrinsically understood the peculiar situation of those she was proposing to assist, the physical and mental distance of most in her class rendered them unable or unwilling to comprehend the delicately balanced nature of the undertaking. Writing to an anonymous supporter to explain her intended plan she defended the respectable status of the distressed gentlewoman:

I have been told that if I would propose an almshouse or asylum for the orphan daughters of gentlemen the subscriptions would soon fill because an almshouse is a kind of charity which everyone understands and it would also be a *public* thing but my object is not to ask *alms* for the Daughters of Gentlemen, but to do for them as I in their place would wish to be done by- To secure them a creditable home- good society and respectable friends without wounding their feelings by proposing to assist them as one would assist paupers.³⁴

Angered by this view of aristocratic benevolence she asked agitatedly, 'if among their own class *they* find affliction and penury, in what manner do they offer help? Do they befriend doing as they would be done by?'³⁵ Answering her own question she concluded regretfully, 'they take from their charity purse as they would a pauper.'³⁶ Perceiving it disrespectful and remote, bringing its rewards through little effort, without consideration for

³³ David Spring, 'Aristocracy, Social Structure and Religion in the Early Victorian Period', *Victorian Studies*, vol.6, 3(March, 1963), p.265.

³⁴ DRO, H7/7/3, letter to anonymous, c.1815.

³⁵ DRO, H7/7/3, notes, nd.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

the circumstances of the recipient, she looked towards a more personal, sympathetic and morally improving way of contributing. With Lady Isabella's model of philanthropic participation seemingly at odds with the perceived general trend in elite circles, those at her disposal who were willing to assist in an active manner appear to have been limited. Moreover, permanently resident in Bath, a city renowned for its superficiality, her chances of successfully recruiting a network of support were ostensibly further restricted.

Bath

Although developed principally as a health resort during the early years of the eighteenth century, Bath's simultaneous development as a resort for the elite and wealthy led it to earn the reputation of Britain's, if not Europe's, 'premier resort of frivolity and fashion'.³⁷ Whilst distinguished for its elegance, it became synonymous with dissipation, ostentatious sociability and excess. It has been portrayed as pretentious, capricious and profligate, a gay scene of giddy abandonment and conspicuous consumption, where 'the pleasure of the moment was the only ambition worth pursuing and where even the most prudish found a fearful joy in playing hide-and-seek with vice'.³⁸ However, the serious-minded academic, Benjamin Silliman, visiting the city in 1806, thought Bath was 'the most dissipated place in the kingdom,' inhabited overwhelmingly by 'that class who wear away life in a round of fashionable frivolities, without moral aim or intellectual dignity'.³⁹ Silliman was an example of a strand of criticism which can be detected throughout Bath's eighteenth-century heyday. Often religiously inspired, individuals such as John Wesley had taken Bath to task for its hedonism, frivolity and secular consumerism.⁴⁰ The evangelical, Hannah More, was similarly critical of the city while residing there at the end of the eighteenth century against a

³⁷ Graham Davis & Penny Bonsall, *Bath: A New History* (Keele, 1996), p.28; Penelope Corfield, 'Georgian Bath: The Magical Meeting Place', *History Today*, vol.40, 11(November, 1990), p.27; R. S. Neale, *Bath: A Social History, 1680-1850, or a Valley of Pleasure, Yet a Sink of Iniquity* (London, 1981).

³⁸ Thornton Hall [pseud], *Love Romances of the Aristocracy* (London, 1911), p.25.

³⁹ American chemist and professor at Yale University,

www.peabody.yale.edu/collections/archives/biography/benjamin-silliman, 6th August, 2011; Benjamin Silliman, *A Journal of Travels in England, Holland and Scotland, and of Two Passages over the Atlantic in the Years 1805 and 1806*, 2vols, vol.2 (Boston, 1812), p24.

⁴⁰ John Telford, *The Life of John Wesley* chapter 8, 'The Beginning of the Great Awakening', Wesley Center Online, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/?id=90>, 10th June, 2014.

backdrop of war and economic distress. Complaining bitterly of Bath and its visitors she made her stance clear:

I do not like this foolish frivolous place ... Gay happy inconsiderate Bath! bears no sign of the distress of the times: we go about all the morning lamenting the impending calamities, deploring the assessed taxes, and pleading poverty; and at night every place of diversion is overflowing with fullness unknown in former seasons ... O Lord! fit me for the duties and keep me from all of the temptations of it. I thank thee that the vain and unprofitable company with which this place abounds is a burden to me.⁴¹

Her denunciation of the superficial values of fashionable society echoed those of Catherine Macaulay written seven years earlier, while Lady Isabella's views, evangelically influenced and with an already identified predilection for the more intellectual and serious, are also likely to have coincided. Yet in this milieu and encouraged by circumstances around her to establish the Ladies' Association, Lady Isabella worked to create a network of supporters to assist her in the undertaking.

Although its reputation for the frivolous predominated, Bath was a unique place. An integral part of the social round of the season, it had historically attracted large numbers of powerful and influential people of rank and wealth throughout the eighteenth century, including civic, religious, political and intellectual figures. Visitors emanated not just from the aristocracy but also from the landed gentry and the burgeoning and diverse middle class, indeed anyone who could call himself a 'gentleman' and could afford to participate was welcomed.⁴² Penelope Corfield's research on the city highlights the diversity of its visiting population, specifically drawing attention to the meeting of town and country, gentry and bourgeois, men and women, in an atmosphere in which, although deference still had its place, was relatively informal.⁴³ Once removed from the reality of day-to-day life, in the metropolis or at home, Bath offered a more open, fluid atmosphere, one which encouraged participation on a more equal level. Elizabeth Child's research into women's literary circles in the city has proposed that the development of Bath created a new kind of space, 'an urban

⁴¹ William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More*, 4vols, vol.1 (New York, 1837), p.454, diary entry for 15th December, 1794.

⁴² Penelope Corfield, *The Impact of Urban Towns, 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982), p.57.

⁴³ Corfield, 'Georgian Bath', pp.29-31.

environment unusually flexible in its social, economic and cultural dynamics' which 'enabled a degree of intercourse across the social strata that might have been unlikely in London'.⁴⁴ In this respect, Corfield has drawn attention to Bath's specialist role as a social forum, a space which she has afforded a crucial role in Britain's social network: 'a key social meeting place within the national community of eighteenth-century Britain.'⁴⁵

In this atmosphere women also had a voice and Alison Hurley, whose research concentrates on female friendships and conversation in eighteenth-century spas, points to the spa's primary identity as a forum for 'heterosexual' conversation.⁴⁶ Spaces open to women encouraged their participation and venues ranged from the vast public assemblies for which Bath was renowned, to the more intimate private settings of salons, or the pulpit, the circulating library, bookshop and even a female designated coffee-house. Advocating women's agency in this arena, Elizabeth Child, has argued that women in Bath's female literary community 'exploited these forums both as a means of self-expression and as a vehicle to promote notions of the 'good community.''⁴⁷ James Van Horn Melton's reassessment of Habermas's conception of the public-sphere concurs, extending the argument by concluding that 'spas and resorts were places available to intellectually ambitious women as arenas where they could put their opinions forward and be heard'.⁴⁸ A focus on Bath's local, more intimate setting further highlights the possibilities for women. Child has also argued, citing literary women such as Hannah More, Catherine Macaulay, Lady Miller and Sarah Scott, all sometime residents of Bath, that women were able to 'wield a great deal of cultural authority on the local scene, attracting and inspiring other literary minded men and women,' in contrast with their peripheral profile in London's literary arena

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Child, 'Virtuous Knowledge Woman's Truest Pride: Civic Ethos and Women's Literary Community in Eighteenth-Century Bath', in Rebecca D'Monte & Nicole Pohl, (eds.), *Female Communities, 1600-1800* (Basingstoke & New York, 2000), pp.219-230.

⁴⁵ Corfield, 'Georgian Bath', p.27.

⁴⁶ Alison Hurley, 'A Conversation of their own: Watering Place Correspondence among the Bluestockings', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol.40, 1(September, 2006), p.3.

⁴⁷ Child, 'Virtuous Knowledge Woman's Truest Pride', p.223.

⁴⁸ James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Republic in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.211-212.

which, she argues, tended to revolve around powerful male figures.⁴⁹ Child's argument links in with Kathryn Gleadle's use of the term 'parochial' as a third sphere of activity, which is particularly pertinent here. She has argued that this space, defined in both concrete and abstract terms, was particularly important for female agency, asserting: 'within their communities women could act as authoritative public figure in ways that were strikingly at odds with the highly feminized modes of action with which they were associated in the wider 'public sphere' of national campaigns'.⁵⁰

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, although the prominence of sociability centred on pleasure and frivolity continued to characterise Bath, a more serious, purposeful and directed strand of interaction, encouraged by an increasingly discernible evangelical presence and witnessed in the burgeoning number of charitable institutions in the city, can be identified. A rapidly increasing residential population, and a growing concern for Bath and its inhabitants, effected a community which was characterised by a distinctive combination of religious diversity and philanthropic verve.⁵¹ Elizabeth Montagu, noting as early as 1779, the distinctive characteristics of the growing residential population, established Bath's residents as a community with the appetite and initiative to make a difference: 'there are many people established at Bath' she said, 'who were once of the public and busy world so they retain a certain politeness of manners and vivacity of mind one cannot find in many country towns.'⁵² Indeed, in 1809 the *Improved Bath Guide* proudly called attention to 'the benignity of disposition which characterise the people of this highly favoured city', while an anonymous visitor to the city in 1826, also commenting on the residential population, drew attention to the contrasting character of Bath's sociability: 'One

⁴⁹ Child, 'Virtuous Knowledge Woman's Truest Pride', p.160.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender and Political Culture in Britain, 1815-1867*(Oxford, 2009), p.123.

⁵¹ Census figures confirm that during the eighteenth century Bath's residential population had risen from c.2,000-3,000 at the beginning to 33,000 in 1801, 38,000 by 1811 and further increased to 46,668 by 1821: Sylvia McIntyre, 'Bath: the Rise of a Resort Town, 1660-1800', in Peter Clark, (ed.), *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England* (Leicester, 1981), p.213; Davis & Bonsall, *Bath: A New History*, p.28; Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns*, p.58.

⁵² Authentic letters of Mrs Elizabeth Montagu, no.IX, letter to Mrs W.M. Robinson from Sandleford, 13th June, 1779, *Ladies' Companion*, (December, 1852), p.322. Elizabeth Child, defending Bath against criticisms of profligacy and frivolity argues that 'citizens of Bath were an increasingly large and prosperous group, many of them deeply invested in numerous worthy projects': Elizabeth Child, "'To Sing the Town': Women, Place and Print Culture in Eighteenth-Century Bath", *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, vol.28, (1999), p.162.

thing I must not omit in relation to the sentiments of Bathonians; — no other city in England contains an equal number of charitable establishments; so that if there be an abundance of folly here, there is, likewise, an abundance of charity'.⁵³

Divergent pictures of the charitable arena in the city presented by the *New Bath Guide* for 1789 and *Gye's Bath Directory* for 1819, provide evidence to confirm its astonishingly rapid expansion during this time. Under the heading of 'charity', the 1789 guide lists four institutions which comprise Bath's charitable activity at this time; two endowed charitable institutions established in the city in the reign of Henry II and James I and the Bath General Infirmary and the Pauper Hospital, both established mid-eighteenth century for the benefit of those visiting the city for medical purposes. By 1819, however, Gye's directory, while reiterating those institutions recorded in the 1789 guide, lists an additional twenty voluntary institutions which focus specifically on the peculiar circumstances of Bath and its population.⁵⁴ This not only provides evidence to confirm extensive activity and a focused intent in the charitable arena in Bath during the period, but also establishes the philanthropic character of the early nineteenth-century charitable institution as a new phenomenon. Ford K. Brown, defining the purpose of this new breed of charity as 'devoted to public morals and benevolence' has not only identified their objective as evangelical in principle but has also drawn attention to the fulfilment of the equally important evangelical goal of converting the elite through their participation. He argues that the recruitment of elite support 'achiev[ed] the basic evangelical aim of bringing influential people to live by the gospel.'⁵⁵

The *New Bath Guide* for 1811 establishes the intrinsic relationship between charity and religion in the city by combining the 'Ecclesiastical Structures and Eleemosynary Institutions' together in one chapter, while further and perhaps more convincing, many of the charities set up in Bath at this time were established and run by religious communities in

⁵³ *Improved Bath Guide*, 1809, p.52; *The Inspector and National Magazine*, vol.2 (January, 1827), p.291-300.

⁵⁴ *New Bath Guide*, (1789), pp.28-34; *Gye's Bath Directory* (Bath, 1819), pp.21-22.

⁵⁵ Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961), p.326.

the city.⁵⁶ Moreover, the extensive inventory of churches and chapels listed in the early nineteenth-century Bath Guides, which Peter Borsay asserts reflected a marked trend not only towards religiosity but also to respectability, confirm a comparable frenzy of activity in this arena.⁵⁷ The inventory, which includes a number of dissenting establishments, also confirms the diversity of Bath's religious community which an anonymous resident of the city, commenting on the piety of Bath's inhabitants, particularly highlighted in 1811:

Yet take all in all, and you seldom shall see,
A people more godly, and pious than we,
Our churches with steeples are not very plenty,
But chapels and meetings, of them we have twenty.⁵⁸

Indeed, in 1817 the *New Bath Guide*, confidently asserting 'religious toleration is nowhere more practiced and religious feuds nowhere more uncommon', confirmed Bath's open and fluid approach to sociability was also reflected in its attitude towards religion in the city.⁵⁹

In this environment, evidence to confirm a growing [Anglican] evangelical purpose can also be identified, the seeds of which could be detected as early as 1791. On his arrival in Bath in that year, the Revd William Jay, dissenting minister and a proponent of the cause, noted: 'the state of things was not considerable, but it was encouraging, and there seemed to be an open door, and not only room but a call for increased exertion'.⁶⁰ Influenced and encouraged by William Wilberforce, a friend and a regular visitor to the city at this time, he was directed specifically towards the 'poor wretched upper classes' and 'the sense of their wretched ignorance in spiritual things' for particular attention.⁶¹ By the early years of Queen Victoria's reign evangelicalism had become so pervasive in the city that George Broderick, nephew of Mary Broderick, local guardian of the Ladies' Association, and son of William Broderick, rector in the city at that time, commented that 'Bath was then a famous Evangelical stronghold, the Refectory which my father held being in the gift of Simeon's

⁵⁶ *New Bath Guide*, (1811), p.59.

⁵⁷ Peter Borsay, 'Image and Counter Image in Georgian Bath', *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol.17, 2(September, 1994), p.167.

⁵⁸ *The Wonders of a Week in Bath* (London, 1811), p.75.

⁵⁹ *New Bath Guide*, (1817), p.27.

⁶⁰ Excerpt from a sermon delivered by Jay on 31st January, 1841, the 50th anniversary of his ordination of the congregation at Bath; *Evangelical Register*, vol.13 (January, 1841), p.95.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

trustees, and all the churches, with (I think) two exceptions, being in the hands of evangelical clergymen.’⁶² Although Bath and other spas were given particular attention by Simeon during the late 1820s and 1830s, the fervour of evangelicalism in the city could be detected as early as 1817, and was demonstrated in the furore surrounding the inaugural meeting of the Bath branch of the Church Missionary Society. An elite local perspective of events was recorded by Mrs Piozzi in her diary:

You will kindly rejoice that I came out alive from the Octagon Chapel, where Ryder, Bishop of Gloucester, preached on behalf of the missionaries to a crowd such as my long life never witnessed; we were packed like seeds in a sun-flower ... At the Guildhall two days after, when pious contributors were expected to come and applaud, Archdeacon Thomas suddenly appeared, and protested against the meeting as Schismatical. SO he was hissed home by the serious Christians, Evangelicals as they sometimes call themselves, — half of the population at any rate.⁶³

While Mrs Piozzi’s comments should not be taken at face value, it does point to a substantial evangelical element in Bath at the time. Indeed, the denigration of idle sociability by Lady Isabella’s Irish compatriot and close friend Thomas O’Beirne, Bishop of Meath, in a sermon which he delivered in Bath in March 1803, which warned ‘against Card Parties and Concerts on Sunday evenings,’ was perhaps also representative of a growing evangelical mind-set.⁶⁴ His condemnation of these practices as violations of the Sabbath, a prominent and crucial issue to the evangelical campaign at this time, may have been supported by Lady Isabella. The general tenor in the city and the increasing numbers of people critical of inappropriate sociability on the Sabbath can be gleaned from the journal of Mrs Lybbe Powys, visitor to the city until 1808, who, admitting ‘how unfashionable I am in disliking

⁶² George Broderick, *Memories and Impressions, 1831-1900* (London, 1900), p.48. Simeon’s Trustees: Charles Simeon was one of the trustees of ten livings that were left to the Evangelicals by Henry Thornton in 1813 to provide evangelical clergymen with a parish at a time when discrimination rendered their appointment sparse. Simeon saw the importance of this and using a legacy left to him together with substantial donations, he purchased further advowsons in resorts such as Bath and Cheltenham and in industrial towns such as Birmingham and Bradford thus strengthening the evangelical position. On his death in 1836 the movement owned twenty-one livings. Leonard W. Cowie, ‘Simeon Charles (1759-1836)’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, October 2005, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25559>, 5th December, 2011.

⁶³ Abraham Hayward, (ed.), *Autobiographical Letters and Literary Remains of Mrs Piozzi (Thrale)*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1861), pp.388-389.

⁶⁴ Stephen Powys Marks, ‘The Journals of Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys (1738-1817): A Half Century of Visits to Bath’, *Bath History*, vol.9, (Bath, 2002), March 1803, p.50.

the immense evening parties,' also felt the same.⁶⁵ She noted on 11th November 1799, that she 'quite agreed with the two amiable Duchesses of Newcastle and Hambleton, who never appear there on those [Sunday] evenings', further recording the complaints of a resident hostess who revealed that she had received '28 Cards of refusals to her next Sunday party'.⁶⁶ Her observations are a further indication of Bath's increasing affirmation towards the wider energetic and intensifying evangelical campaign which was prevalent at this time.

Early nineteenth-century Bath remained a female friendly city. Of the growing residential population, census records draw attention to important differences between the numbers of men and women.⁶⁷ The first census, published in 1801, confirms a substantial female population of sixty-one per cent, while the 1851 census confirms a continued prominent female presence of fifty-eight per cent.⁶⁸ Graham Davis suggests this imbalance reflected the increasing popularity of spa towns particularly as places of genteel residence for unmarried women and widows.⁶⁹ Numerous accounts of single women who resided in Bath exist to support this assertion, including those of Katherine Plymley, a regular visitor to the spa between 1794 and 1807, who noted that 'Bath ... is the great retreat of widows and unmarried ladies,' citing distant relative, Mrs Isted, who, along with her daughters, 'retreated to Bath after the death of Mr Isted'.⁷⁰ Mrs Piozzi, resident at the beginning of the nineteenth century, agreeing with Lady Isabella's view of the city, drew attention to the kindness of the residents as a particular benefit: 'Bath is the best place for single women that can be found; and the friendship I have experienced here, hands me to choose it as the last ... you scarce

⁶⁵ Powys Marks, 'The Journals of Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys', 3rd April, 1798, p.41.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 1799, p.44; 1803, p.50.

⁶⁷ Davis & Bonsall, *Bath: A New History*, p.69.

⁶⁸ Total population of 33,196, consisting of 12,820 males and 20,376 females; *New Bath Guide*, (1813), p.142; <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>, 25th June, 2009.

⁶⁹ Davis and Bonsall, *Bath: A New History*, p.69. Occupations recorded in the 1841 census for Bath, which indicate both the presence of single women in the city at the time and the nature of their circumstances substantiates this claim. It is difficult to determine exact numbers, however of the 14,194 females over the age of twenty documented 2,206 were listed as of 'independent means' while 3,298 of the 5,766 in employment recorded, were designated domestic servants. It would be fair to assume from these figures that a large proportion of women in these two categories would have been single. Comparisons of numbers of males and females under and over 20, (6,594, 7,672 and 6,475, 14,194, respectively) further indicate that the predominance of single women in Bath at the time were adults. <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>, 25th June, 2009.

⁷⁰ Diaries of Katherine Plymley, Shropshire Record Office, cited in Ellen Wilson, 'A Shropshire Lady in Bath, 1794-1807,' *Bath History*, vol.4, (Bath, 1992), pp.95-123.

can think how kind these dear Bath people are'.⁷¹ Fanny Burney confirmed the physical freedom which the city offered women: 'to walk the streets is as safe, easy and clean as to walk in a court yard. The people are so honest, innocent, that Bars and Bolts, even at night, seem superfluous.'⁷²

Evidence from the diaries of prominent elite residents and acquaintances of Lady Isabella such as Mrs Holroyd and renowned diarists Mrs Piozzi and Fanny Burney, confirm her absence from their social gatherings. Although it is likely that as a member of the aristocracy, Lady Isabella participated socially in Bath, especially in the more important social events in the city, diary entries, while full of sociable interaction with other members of Bath society, do not mention her except in relation to her role as founder of the Ladies' Association.⁷³ Moreover, much of the evidence available which relates to her activity in the city before her involvement with the institution, centres on her association with the city's philanthropic circle and indicates preference for a more purposeful form of sociability.

Some evidence of Lady Isabella's activity in Bath's social arena has already been identified in chapter 1. Percy Vere Turner's description of an evening party in his *History of the Monmouth Street Society*, which she hosted at her home in January 1805, not only reveals details of a conversation which took place, centred on 'what best could be done for the benefit of Bath,' but also discloses her fellow participants as local male elites, most prominent being John Shute Duncan, evangelical and later guardian of the Ladies' Association.⁷⁴ This evidence, although limited in its information, not only establishes Lady Isabella as a hostess in the city, but also establishes her evening party as a space where like-minded people gathered for purposeful socializing, powered by intellectual conversation and

⁷¹ Edward Alan Bloom & Lillian D. Bloom, (eds.), *The Piozzi Letters: Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784-1821* (Newark & London, 2002), p.43.

⁷² Warren Derry, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* (Oxford, 1982), letter 989, to Mrs Locke, 10th May, 1816, p.126

⁷³ The only mention Madame D'Arblay makes of Lady Isabella was in a letter written to her husband in 1817: 'Spent the evening in an Assembly at Mrs Holroyd's, where I was presented to Lady Isabella d'Espagn, an English Earl's Daughter, who is wife to a Dutch baron ... she is pleasing and sensible, well bred and well informed ... [she] is niece and God daughter to Lady Isabella King who is at the head and Lady President of the *Ladies College* near Bath Easton'. Her comments suggest that although she knows her she is not a close acquaintance: Derry, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, letter 1094 to M D'Arblay 21st-29th June, 1817, pp.506-507.

⁷⁴ Percy Vere Turner, *Charity for a Hundred Years: The History of the Monmouth Street Society* (Bath, c.1914), p.1; *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.176, (1844), pp.97-98.

rational debate which focused on an improving agenda. A letter from fellow staunch Protestant, Mary Fairfax of Gilling Castle, Yorkshire, which relates to a visit to Bath and a meeting with Lady Isabella in 1814, provides direct evidence, confirming that the Ladies' Association was a working topic of conversation at her home. Thanking Lady Isabella for her hospitality, Mrs Fairfax complimented her on her stimulating company and praised her charitable efforts: 'I have often reflected with delight on the few agreeable evenings I was allowed to pass in society so interesting ... I am ... most truly glad to find that some progress is made towards the establishment of an institution, the motive and end of which are so excellent and have no doubt the means will be proved by experiment.'⁷⁵

Once in residence at Bailbrook House, evidence from the main archive confirms that Lady Isabella continued to nurture and extend her networks of support, holding evening parties and receiving visitors on a regular basis. Even the Queen made a personal visit to the institution while at Bath in 1817. The *Bath Chronicle* recorded that she was 'politely received' by Lady Isabella, who hosted 'a déjeuné prepared for the occasion'. On her return to the city the Queen was reported to have been 'highly gratified with this visit to this Association of Ladies' which she christened 'a blessed asylum.'⁷⁶ These visits, while contributing to the dissemination of information to a wide audience, also served to connect Lady Isabella's guests personally with the residents, their circumstances and the institution itself and Lady Isabella felt it useful to introduce visitors and residents 'when of opinion that it would afford mutual gratification'.⁷⁷

For Lady Isabella, as a single woman, the role of hostess was an empowering position, enabling her, through choice of guests and topics of conversation, to create a space tailored to her requirements. Dale Spender, whose research focuses on French salons, has asserted that the salon enabled the hostess to 'create a forum ... [facilitating] dialogue

⁷⁵ DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Mary Fairfax in response to Lady Isabella's of the 29th April, 1814 & 18th May, 1814, Gilling Castle.

⁷⁶ *BC* (4th December, 1817).

⁷⁷ DRO, H7/7/10, rules and regulations of Cornwallis House, 1826.

between those who had power and those who ostensibly did not'.⁷⁸ A potent figure in her arena, Lady Isabella was not only able to exert her influence and encourage by example, but also had the opportunity to control and extend her agenda, cultivating the exchange and dissemination of information, creating channels of communication and networks between both local influential figures and those who were more geographically disparate, with the potential to permeate all levels of society.

Networks

No subscription lists for the Ladies' Association have been uncovered to determine the full extent of support for the undertaking, however, a comprehensive picture of Lady Isabella's closest supporters can be pieced together through their official appointments as patrons, patronesses, trustees and members of the local guardian committees, both in Bath and Clifton. From the information available, Lady Isabella's early support can be characterised as a specific interlocking network which naturally divided itself into four overlapping groups, reflecting her involvement in Bath's community: a literary network, locally based and closely linked to her philanthropic activities in the city; a philanthropic network, comprised entirely of local elites; an elite, predominantly aristocratic network, which included not only influential figures and members of the aristocracy but also family members; and an evangelical network, which embraced individual members from all the networks.

Other letters and notes included in the key source by Lady Isabella provide further indication of more peripheral support. While it is unlikely that these constitute a complete record of supporters, they provide a sample of those who were pro-active in their efforts. Promoting the institution in May 1821, at a time when donations were being solicited to buy Bailbrook House, the *New Monthly Magazine* indicated prerequisites which restricted the range of their promotional campaign: 'some steady and zealous friends of the institution are actively employed in collecting the means to forward this good work, but their endeavours

⁷⁸ Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas and What Men Have done to them* (London, 1983), p.108.

are necessarily circumscribed within the limits of their immediate connexions and the issue is consequently uncertain'.⁷⁹ Constrained by social and ideological boundaries, and by self-imposed restrictions which related to the maintenance of respectability for all, petitions for support were limited to private circles and not instigated on a public footing.

Lady Isabella's literary network was centred on Bath and can be situated within a tradition of intellectual women and female writers in the city.⁸⁰ It can be characterised most accurately as interlocking, with Lady Isabella's most active support for the Ladies' Association coming from those women who were also in closest proximity to her and were linked to Bath's philanthropic network. Other female supporters, who were less immediately involved, were engaged in diffusing knowledge about the institution within intellectual circles both locally and nationally. During his visit to Bath in 1810, Lord Glenverbie remarked upon Bath's female intellectual circle, confirming Lady Isabella's position as its leading figure.⁸¹ 'There is a set of bluestocking ladies here, a sort of academy of provincial and *local* critics ... Lady Isabella King is I understand at the head of this Areopagus.'⁸² Glenverbie's allusion to Lady Isabella as the archon, or the chief magistrate of a Greek city-state, is in itself a telling recognition of the position and respect in which she was held in Bath at the time; it is also characteristically classical and tinged with gendered irony. Born in 1743, Glenverbie was a conventional man and, at nearly seventy in 1810, his thinking about intellectual women may have been increasingly representative of an earlier generation.⁸³ Indeed, Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton have recently argued that the reception of intellectual women was shifting by the beginning of the nineteenth century. They suggest that 'contemporary opinion was increasingly ambivalent',

⁷⁹ *New Monthly Magazine*, vol.3 (May, 1821), p.252.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Child's research has focused on female literary communities in the city, particularly Bath's well-known mid-century Bluestocking circle: Child, 'Virtuous Knowledge Woman's Truest Pride', pp.219-253; 'To Sing the Town', pp.155-172.

⁸¹ Nicole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg have identified Bath as a venue for Elizabeth Montagu's intellectual gatherings in the eighteenth century, while Anna Meignon has also noted the participation of Sarah Scott, author of *Millennium Hall*, and sister of Montagu, in Bath and Batheaston; Nicole Pohl & Betty Schellenberg, 'Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, vol.65, 1-2(2002), pp. 1-20; Anna Meignon, 'Biographical Sketches of Principal Bluestocking women', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, vol.65, 1-2(2002), p.33.

⁸² Sylvester Douglas, *The Diaries of Sylvester Douglas (Lord Glenverbie)* (London, 1928), pp.52-53.

⁸³ Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona Ó Gallchoir & Penny Warburton, (eds.), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge & New York, 2006), p.2.

citing Maria Edgeworth's view of intellectual women as a counter-perspective. Edgeworth argued: 'Women of literature are much more numerous of late than they were a few years ago. They make a class in society, they fill the public eye, and have acquired a degree of consequence and appropriate character'.⁸⁴ Eger et al point out that Edgeworth's assertion that women were 'acknowledged publicly as writers [was] dignified and indicative of progress'.⁸⁵ Looking back in 1852, George Monkland corroborated this more positive approach to the literary 'bluestocking' salons of the early nineteenth century. In an essay which was read at the Literary Club in Bath, he confirmed the intellectual nature of her participation in Bath's social arena and praised her as one of the city's leading intellectual hostesses.⁸⁶

Nor is it to the Lords of creation alone that we have been indebted for intellectual *reunions*, since Ladies of rank and fashion have been the cynosure to lead us into the paths of literature; and regardless of the lighter pleasures of general society, have cultivated the company of persons of talent and information. Thus the salons of Lady Isabella King, Lady Isabella Douglas and the Honourable Mrs Holroyd used to be thrown open to those who enjoyed the intercourse of mind, or who love to gain and impart knowledge.⁸⁷

Monkland, in identifying Bath's female intellectual leaders, placed Lady Isabella together with her co- custodians of the Ladies' Association: Mrs Holroyd, sister of the Earl of Sheffield; and Lady Isabella Douglas, sister of the Earl of Selkirk. Both were, like Lady Isabella, mature, elite, single women of some standing in the city and both were integrally linked to Bath's philanthropic arena.⁸⁸ Fanny Burney, speaking of her acquaintances in Bath in 1815, not only confirmed that Mrs Holroyd was a spinster, but also alluded to her moral and charitable vigour, as well as her literary inclinations. While Burney did not include Lady Isabella in her reference to this group of local 'bluestockings', who were also closely linked

⁸⁴ Maria Edgeworth, *Letters for Literary Ladies: To Which is Added an Essay on the Noble Science of Self-Justification* (London, 1795), p.23.

⁸⁵ Eger et al., *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*, p.2.

⁸⁶ George Monkland, *The Literature and Literati of Bath, 'An Essay Read at the Literary Club'* (Bath, 1854), p.44.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Mrs Holroyd was a member of the local guardian committee of the Ladies' Association; for her charitable activity in Bath see fns.106-110; Lady Isabella Douglas, 'contributing largely towards the purchase of the [Cornwallis] house' was afforded honorary membership of The Ladies' Association. She also subscribed to the Monmouth Street Society and was integral in the establishment and patroness of the Servants Friendly Society in Bath in 1808: John Shute Duncan, *Collections Relative to Systematic Relief of the Poor* (London, 1815), p.178.

to the charitable arena, they were part of Lady Isabella's network:

amongst them I am informed still remain 4 gentle Females who, even in those ancient days were already yclept Votaries of Diana, yet who, in this City of Hygeia are kept in perfect preservation: viz Mrs Holroyd, Mrs Frances, Mrs Harriot Bowdler and Mrs Benson, all 4 renowned not alone for *Bluism* and Dianaism, but with equal truth and greater merit, for high principles and active charity.⁸⁹

Harriet Bowdler, in particular, was a close friend of Lady Isabella and a strong supporter of the Ladies' Association. She and Miss Benson, were contributors to, and committee members of, a number of charitable ventures in Bath, including the Monmouth Street Society and the House of Protection, both of which were personally important to Lady Isabella.⁹⁰

Evidence of Lady Isabella's wider literary connexions also exists. Mrs Holroyd, translator of *Reflections on the Work of God, and of his Providence, Throughout all Nature, for Every Day of the Year*, written in 1788, was, according to Fanny Burney, 'of lively mind and eager hospitality,' and regularly entertained visitors at her home in Bath.⁹¹ These included literary figures such as the poet Catherine Maria Fanshawe and her sisters Penelope and Elizabeth who, Fanny Burney reported, stayed with her from September to December 1816, and Mrs Ann Kennicott.⁹² Although there is no evidence to suggest that Lady Isabella herself published, her participation in the literary arena as a subscriber and patron to female writers, including Joanna Baillie and Charlotte Nooth, confirm her wider literary connexions.⁹³ Lady Isabella's most intimate literary connexion, however, was with author

⁸⁹ Derry, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, letter 939 to HRH the Princess Elizabeth, pre 29th November, 1815, p.14-15; letter 989, to Mrs Locke, 10th May. 1816.

⁹⁰ Harriet Bowdler subscribed to the Monmouth Street Society, the House of Protection, the Hibernian Society and the Auxiliary Bible Society, while Miss Benson was governess of the House of Protection and subscriber to the Monmouth Street Society, the House of Protection and the Hibernian Society: *First Annual Report of the Bath Auxiliary Bible Society 1812*, (Bath, 1813); *Report of the Hibernian Sunday School Society for Ireland*, (Dublin, 1810); *Report of the House of Protection, Bath*, (Bath, nd but before 1819); *Report of the Bath Society for the Suppression of Vagrants, Street Beggars and Impostors: Relief of Occasional Distress and Encouragement of Industry* (Bath, 1808).

⁹¹ S. Holroyd, *Reflections on the Work of God, and his Providence, throughout all Nature, for every Day of the Year. Translated first from the German into French; and now from French into English, by a Lady*, 3vols (Edinburgh, 1788); Derry, *The Journal and Letters of Fanny Burney*, letter 1044, to HRH Princess Elizabeth, pre 25th December, 1816, p.294; Henrietta Adeane, *The Early Married Life of Maria Josepha Lady Stanley* (London, New York & Bombay, 1899), letter to Maria Josepha Stanley, Bath 2nd January, 1817, p.395.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Joanna Baillie's poems were widely subscribed to and contributors included many that were connected to the Ladies' Association, ranging from members of the local committee and patron/esses to residents: Joanna

Margaret Holford whom, according to the acerbic Glenverbie, she ‘patronise[d]and eulogise[d] ... as the first genius of the age,’ when defending Holford against supporters of Scott’s *Marmion*.⁹⁴ These literary women were, in return, active in their support for the Ladies’ Association. Holford and Baillie’s correspondence confirms an active interest and concern for the well being of the Ladies’ Association:

I suppose from what you said in your last letter that this will find you at Bailbrook House and I was very glad to hear the flourishing accounts you gave me of the money matters of that establishment. Long may it continue to flourish for the sake of lonely gentlewomen who abound not in this world’s goods!⁹⁵

Baillie’s empathy for the residents of the Ladies’ Association may well have been borne out of personal experience. A life-long spinster herself, she had experienced financial difficulties on the death of her father. By 1820s, however, she was well-connected by this time with many prominent literary figures in London, including Robert Southey, who was another of Lady Isabella’s active supporters.

Alongside Lady Isabella’s literary circle, Bath’s vibrant charitable community consisted of a small identifiable group of participants drawn from the local middling sort and elite, including women, many of whom were single or widowed, and who had become permanent residents in the city. As with the literary arena, Lady Isabella’s participation fostered a host of connections which supported the Ladies’ Association.⁹⁶ Initially eleven locally based women were invited by Lady Isabella to join her in forming the Local Guardian Committee.⁹⁷ As approved by the patrons and patronesses of the association, their role was essentially threefold: they acted as ambassadors to ‘general society’; they managed the institution on a day-to-day basis; and they provided Lady Isabella with an immediate and

Baillie, (ed.), *A Collection of Poems: Chiefly Manuscript and from Living Authors* (London, 1823); Charlotte Nooth, *Original Poems and a Play Entitled :Clara; or, the Nuns of Charity* (London, 1815).

⁹⁴ Cf. Ch. 1, p.50.

⁹⁵ Judith Bailey Slagle, (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Joanna Baillie* (Cranbury, NJ, London & Ontario, 1999), p.562.

⁹⁶ See appendix 2.

⁹⁷ Mrs Holroyd lived at 3, Queen’s Parade; Lady Bateman lived firstly in Lansdowne Grove and then at 94, Sydney place; The Hon. Miss Broderick lived at 23, Marlborough Buildings, The Hon. Mrs Strange at 13, Cavendish Place, Mrs Claxton in Somerset Place, Mrs Sutton at 1, Brock Street, Miss Fitzgerald at 15, St James Square, Mrs Stackhouse in Edgar Buildings and Miss Newcome lived at number 2, Park Street.

accessible local network of support.⁹⁸ The necessity of regular personal contact that this role demanded is likely to have directed Lady Isabella's choice; however, her connections in the city made it possible.⁹⁹ The first prospectus for the institution introduced the members of the committee as: 'the Right Honourable Lady Willoughby, the Right Honourable Lady Clonbrock, Lady Isabella King', all managing patronesses, as well as 'Lady Bateman, Mrs Holroyd, Mrs Sutton, Mrs Claxton, Miss Fitzgerald and Miss Newcome (Park-street, Bath) Secretary'.¹⁰⁰ The resignation of Miss Newcome in 1819 saw position of secretary filled by the Hon. Miss Mary Broderick, while Mrs Susannah Stackhouse joined the same year, and the Hon. Mrs Strange accepted the position of guardian on the death of Mrs Holroyd in 1820. Lord Sheffield congratulated Lady Isabella on her choice of guardians, commenting: 'it appears to me that the above named ladies are highly proper to form the local committee'.¹⁰¹ The stability of the membership of the committee during the lifetime of the Association gave Lady Isabella a sense of security.

All women had close associations with Bath's charitable arena and, closely aligned with Lady Isabella's charitable activity, were of like-minded purpose.¹⁰² As with the literary circle, a number were significant subscribers to Lady Isabella's first charitable venture, the Monmouth Street Society, while others were subscribers and more active committee members of the House of Protection.¹⁰³ Lady Isabella's donations to the Bath Penitentiary were accompanied by those from Miss Broderick, Mrs Sutton, Mrs Strange, Miss Fitzgerald and Sir Hugh Bateman, husband of Lady Bateman, while Mrs Strange, Mrs Sutton and Miss Fitzgerald were also more active committee members. Other female-orientated charities in the city, although not supported directly by Lady Isabella, were also heavily supported by

⁹⁸ DRO, H7/7/19, notes, 1832.

⁹⁹ DRO, H7/7/15, copy of Miss Newcome's letter to the patrons and patronesses of the Ladies' Association enclosing for their approbation the names of the local guardian committee, September, 1815.

¹⁰⁰ *PSLIRC*.

¹⁰¹ DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Lord Sheffield approving the guardian committee, Sheffield Place, 18th October, 1815.

¹⁰² See appendix 3.

¹⁰³ Mrs Holroyd, Mrs Claxton, Mrs Stackhouse were all subscribers; *MSS* (Bath, 1808); Mrs Holroyd, Mrs Claxton, Miss Fitzgerald and Mrs Stackhouse subscribed while Miss Fitzgerald and Mrs Stackhouse were also governesses with Lady Isabella. *Report for the House of Protection* (Bath, 1819).

members of the guardian committee.¹⁰⁴ Members of the guardian committee were also supporters of more overtly evangelically associations. Mrs Holroyd, Mrs Strange and Lady Bateman's husband joined Lady Isabella in contributions towards Bath's newly formed Auxiliary Bible Society in 1812, while all the members of the guardian committee were subscribers to the Hibernian Society formed in the city in 1815.¹⁰⁵

All the members of the committee were over the age of fifty at the time of their recruitment and most were either single or widowed.¹⁰⁶ They had both the time and the means to participate. For those women with families, however, familial commitments could at times result in a conflict of interest. Writing to Lady Isabella in 1821, her loyal supporter Mrs Sutton apologised for her absence during negotiations to purchase Cornwallis House: 'that I should be an absentee at this interesting moment is a subject of sincere regret to me, but my earnest wish to attend a beloved daughter in her confinement and who will shortly leave England, must be my apology'.¹⁰⁷ She promised Lady Isabella that she would call at Bailbrook House on her return to Bath.

The nature of participation for the local guardians centred on regular, monthly committee meetings held at the private homes of members, particularly those of managing patronesses, Lady Willoughby and Lady Clonbrock and secretary, Miss Broderick. Minutes of meetings which are conserved in the archive and cover the period April 1819 to May 1821, indicate that Bailbrook House itself was rarely used as a venue. Minutes further reveal that Lady Isabella was always in attendance along with either Lady Willoughby or Lady Clonbrock, while the participation of other members of the committee varied. Most committee members attended regularly, but Lady Bateman, Miss Fitzgerald and Mrs.

¹⁰⁴ Society for the Relief of Poor Married Lying-in Women- honorary member, Mrs Strange; committee members Mrs Holroyd, Mrs Stackhouse. *Meyler's Original Bath Guide*, (1822).

¹⁰⁵ English members – Lady Bateman, Mrs Sutton, Mrs Stackhouse, Mrs Claxton and Miss Newcome. Irish members along with Lady Isabella – Mrs Holroyd, Mrs Strange and Miss Fitzgerald. *Eighth Report of the Sunday School Society for Ireland for the year ending 22nd April, 1818* (Dublin, 1818).

¹⁰⁶ Mrs Holroyd, Miss Broderick, Miss Fitzgerald and Miss Newsome were spinsters; Mrs Sutton and Mrs Claxton were widows at the time the institution was founded in 1816. Lady Bateman was widowed in 1824, Mrs Stackhouse was widowed in 1819, the year she joined the association, while Mrs Strange was the only member who was married throughout the lifetime of the institution: see appendix 2.

¹⁰⁷ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Mrs Sutton, 11th May, 1821.

Strange were the most dedicated.¹⁰⁸ Although the minutes reveal that the main focus of the meetings during this period centred on the move from Bailbrook to Cornwallis House, which raised financial, administrative and recruitment matters, they also provide an insight into the workings of the guardian committee. Issues discussed included the election of new members of the committee and the nomination of residents, including both Lady Renters and Lady Associates. The committee also discussed the salaries of official members, the printing of prospectuses and other administrative documents and the collection of subscriptions by friends of the association.¹⁰⁹ This varied yet vital workload suggests that the committee was fundamental to the smooth organization and running of the institution; it also asserts the committee members' importance as primary decision-makers in conjunction with the managing patronesses in affairs of the institution.

While the direct support of the institution constituted their most important role, elite status, and social activity in the city afforded some important connexions which also contributed to the progress of the institution. Mrs Holroyd enlisted the support of her brother, the Earl of Sheffield as a patron and Fanny Burney's correspondence suggests that it was likely that she also personally addressed the Queen for support on behalf of the Ladies' Association.¹¹⁰ Moreover, her extensive social activity as a hostess in Bath, along with that of Lady Bateman, was likely to have forged further beneficial connexions for the institution.¹¹¹

The roles of Lady Isabella, Lady Willoughby and Lady Clonbrock, as both local guardians and patronesses, connected the local philanthropic network with a wider circle of elite support which centred primarily around the roles of patronesses, patrons and trustees who Lady Isabella directed should be 'chosen and were chosen from subscribers of a stated

¹⁰⁸ Lady Bateman attended seven of the eight meetings which are recorded; Miss Fitzgerald was present at six, while Mrs Strange attended all meetings that were arranged after she joined in 1820.

¹⁰⁹ DRO, H7/7/2, minutes of guardian committee meetings 8th April, 1819 – May, 1821.

¹¹⁰ Derry, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, letter 997, to HRH Princess Elizabeth, June, 1816, p.153.

¹¹¹ Hester Piozzi and Fanny Burney's correspondence provide sample evidence to confirm both Mrs Holroyd and Lady Bateman as socially active hostesses in Bath: Bloom & Bloom, *The Piozzi Letters*, pp.91,105,132,142-143,416; Derry, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, pp. 34-35,43,184,186,275,294,429.

rank – A Baroness to be the lowest'.¹¹² A prospectus published in 1817 identified the founder participants:

Patronesses- her Grace the Duchess Dowager of Buccleuch, her Grace the Duchess of Wellington, the Marchioness of Exeter, the Marchioness of Ormonde and Ossory, the Countess of Fortescue, the Countess of Carysfort, the Countess of Liverpool, the Countess Manvers, the Viscountess Anson, the Lady Isabella King, the Lady Olivia Sparrow, the Right Honourable Lady Willoughby, the Right Honourable Lady Clonbrock ... Patrons- The Lord Bishop of Durham, the Lord Bishop of St David's, the Lord Bishop of Meath, the Earl of Sheffield ... Trustees- The Earl of Shaftesbury, the Earl Manvers, the Honourable George Vernon, Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, Bart.¹¹³

The average age of the patronesses and patrons in 1816 was fifty-three and seventy-three respectively: like the local guardians, Lady Isabella's elite advocates were of her generation and older.¹¹⁴ Of the original thirteen patronesses, eight were widowed (five before the establishment of the institution and three during its lifetime).¹¹⁵ Lady Isabella was the only spinster, despite her request for single women, similar to herself, to help found colleges. Given that aristocratic spinsterhood in England remained steady at around twenty-five per cent during the eighteenth century, and with historians arguing for a more active role for aristocratic spinsters, this seems an anomaly.¹¹⁶ However, research thus far carried out has tended to centre on the domestic setting and has generally been conducted in terms of familial relationships, which may suggest that many elite spinsters remained primarily in a family-based location.

While evidence is not conclusive, it is likely that many, if not all official supporters, as members of elite society, spent time in Bath or had links with the city. Evidence which corroborates this lies in Bath's charitable documents and, as with the local guardian committee, almost all can be linked directly, or through spouses, with Bath's philanthropic

¹¹² DRO, H7/7/7, Clifton, 1823; see appendix 4.

¹¹³ *PSLIRC*.

¹¹⁴ This calculation excludes the Duchess of Ormonde and Ossory who, at the age of twenty-six, was the youngest by eleven years but died in 1817 and played little part in the institution from the outset.

¹¹⁵ The five Patronesses widowed before the establishment of the institution were the Dowager Duchess of Buccleuch, Marchioness of Exeter, Countess Manvers, Lady Olivia Sparrow and Lady Clonbrock (remarried). Those widowed during its lifetime were Viscountess Anson, Countess Carysfort and Lady Willoughby; see appendix 4.

¹¹⁶ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), p.184; Alison Duncan, 'Power of the Old Maid: The Never-Married Gentlewoman in her Family, 1740-1835', *Women's History Magazine*, vol.63, (summer, 2010), p.11; Ruth Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune: Elite Singlewomen's Experiences in Yorkshire, 1730-1860,' *Women's History Review*, vol.16, 3(July, 2007), p.390.

activity.¹¹⁷ Managing patronesses, Lady Clonbrock and Lady Willoughby were both actively involved in Bath's charitable arena, both as subscribers and as patronesses and governesses to the female focused Society for the Relief of Poor Married Lying-in Women, which was specific to Bath.¹¹⁸ Other supporters contributed to different charities in the city, predominantly the larger institutions which were replicated and recognised nationally as well as charities which were connected with women. The Bath Penitentiary, a locally run, but nationally replicated charity for penitent fallen women in need of moral reformation, established in Bath in 1805, provides a good example. The Annual report for the year 1816 includes a significant number of patrons and patronesses of the institution or their spouses, together with members of the local guardian committee.¹¹⁹ Nine of the thirteen patronesses are represented, plus later addition, the Countess of Clare, along with patron, the Bishop of Salisbury and trustee, Earl Manvers.¹²⁰ Contributions reflect a like-minded purpose and sympathy with the condition of women at this time and a connection with the city itself, its residents and members of the local guardian committee.

Some supporters, while not permanent residents, spent extended periods in the city and became intimately involved in its welfare, lending their names to local charitable endeavours. Lady Willoughby, managing patroness and Lady Isabella's foremost and most prolific supporter, resided at 30, Royal Crescent with her husband, Peter Burrell, Lord Gwydir, from the 1790s and mixed with both local elites and the highest ranking visitors.¹²¹ A visitor to the city in 1794 reported that 'at Lady Willoughby's heard Prince of Wales, the Miss Gubbins and Lord Gwydir sing', while the Bath Chronicle notes that on 4th April 1799, HRH The Prince of Wales 'dined on Sunday with Lord Gwydir, Lady Willoughby and the

¹¹⁷ See appendix 3.

¹¹⁸ *Meyler's Original Bath Guide*, 1822.

¹¹⁹ Seven local guardians are represented; all four male guardians elected in the city in 1821 held official roles. *The Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital Report of the Committee for the Year 1816* (Bath, 1817); see appendix 5.

¹²⁰ Of those who weren't represented, three of four (Lady Fortescue, Lady Sparrow and the Marchioness of Ormonde and Ossory [d.1817]) had little involvement in the Ladies' Association, except as figureheads.

¹²¹ Lady Willoughby jointly paid the annual rent of £400 a year for Bailbrook House and as an absent renter continued to make munificent contributions at Cornwallis House. 'Lady Willoughby under the name of a Lady Renter contributed £100 annually to the private household fund of the resident society upon its removal to Cornwallis House – previous to that time her Ladyship joined Lady Isabella King in paying the rent of Bailbrook House': DRO, H7/7/13, notes, 1833.

Duchess of Hamilton at his Lordship's house in the Crescent'.¹²² Records confirm that it is likely that this remained their Bath residence until Lord Gwydir's death in 1820, after which Lady Willoughby continued to visit the city, albeit less frequently, residing at the Circus.¹²³ Integrally involved in Bath's charitable arena, Lord Gwydir not only contributed financially to charitable ventures in the city during the early years of the nineteenth century, but also accepted more prominent roles, intermingling with other prominent members of Bath's charitable community, and as co-leaseholder with Lady Willoughby and Lady Isabella, he also played a central role in the acquisition of Bailbrook House for the Ladies' Association in 1816.¹²⁴ His obituary noticed his links to Bath and his profuse charitable commitment to the city: 'to the necessities of the poor in general, this nobleman was ever a ready contributor; in Bath particularly, where his lordship had latterly spent a considerable portion of his time, his public and private charities were numerous and munificent'.¹²⁵

The peripatetic nature of elite life meant that many of this class spent a large proportion of their time on country estates or in London, and numerous letters written to Lady Isabella from patronesses are addressed from either London or their country residences, some confirming meetings with each other in the capital or visits to homes in the country. Jessica Gerard's research, concerned with female aristocratic philanthropic participation proposes that the peculiar circumstances of women of the landed class rendered them a distinct group. Although life included seasons in towns, many aristocratic women, she believes, considered their primary role as Lady Bountiful.¹²⁶ Kim Reynolds agrees,

¹²² The Duchess of Hamilton was Lord Gwydir's sister who was divorced from the Duke of Hamilton in 1794 and after his death remarried the Marquess of Exeter 9th August, 1800: www.thepeerage.com/p10946.htm#i109453, 24th July, 2010; *BC* (4th April, 1799); Lincolnshire Archives, Hawley papers, Hawley/6/3/35, 12th April, 1794.

¹²³ Bloom & Bloom, *The Piozzi Letters*, pp.272-274, letter from Mrs Piozzi to Sir James Fellowes, 6th June, 1819.

¹²⁴ President of the Bath Penitentiary and Lock Hospital, member of the Bath and West of England Agricultural Society from at least 1797-1816, (with Sir Benjamin Hobhouse— President), Vice President of the Bath branch of the Church Missionary Society (with other elite residents: Sir Cockburn Bart, mayor of Bath, John Stackhouse, Charles Phillott); *Sporting Magazine: or Monthly Calender*, vol.11 (December, 1798), p.158; *Letters and Papers on Agriculture etc.*, vol.14 (London, 1816); *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa*, vol.19, (London, 1819), p.58; Historic Landscape survey, Bailbrook House, June, 2007, H4/01.

¹²⁵ *New Monthly Magazine*, vol.4 (August, 1820), p.223.

¹²⁶ Jessica Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Class and Rural Philanthropy', *Victorian Studies*, vol.30, 2(winter, 1987), pp.184-189.

claiming that estate responsibilities took a toll on their time even when they were away.¹²⁷ Reynolds furthers her argument by proposing that the rationale of aristocratic women in philanthropy centred on its part time nature, concluding that charity for these women was not a 'career, a vocation or full-time occupation, rather, it was part of the whole series of aristocratic duties'.¹²⁸ Indeed, not all supporters chose to take on an active role, some, simply lending their names to the institution as figureheads, had little involvement. Speaking from her partial perspective as foundress and promoter of active charitable support, Lady Isabella criticised both Lady Fortescue's and Lady Olivia Sparrow's inaction, noting that the former, 'takes no interest in it' and the latter 'has never cared about it'.¹²⁹ However, with nine children, Lady Fortescue's family commitments were almost certain to have been time consuming, while Lady Olivia Sparrow, a committed evangelical and philanthropist, whose deep seated belief in the education and care of the poor saw her energies directed towards charitable activity in her own locality, had her own philanthropic agenda.

For those who chose to participate on a more active level, while correspondence in the main archive during the early years at Bath, is limited, it is possible to identify a trend.¹³⁰ Although enthusiastic and eager to participate actively, an elite lifestyle, including geographical remoteness, family commitments and for some, age and infirmity, rendered it difficult for the patronesses to communicate in person as regularly as they would have liked.¹³¹ Lady Carysfort, who spoke extensively of her circumstances and the limitations they imposed on her activity in the Ladies' Association, acknowledged the importance of face-to-face contact: 'I most sincerely wish that there was any chance of our meeting as one hour's conversation does more than many letters'.¹³² Her letters, written almost exclusively from her country home, Elton Hall in Cambridgeshire, demonstrate her distance both from Lady Isabella in Bath and the other patronesses. Although a fervent supporter of the

¹²⁷ Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women*, p.105.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.102-104.

¹²⁹ DRO, H7/7/12, memorandum for the local trustees, 1833.

¹³⁰ Particularly Lady Willoughby, Lady Exeter, Lady Clonbrock, Lady Carysfort, Lady Anson, Lady Manvers and Lady Liverpool, until her death in 1821.

¹³¹ Letters confirm attempts to arrange meetings both in Bath and in London, but no information has been uncovered which confirms their taking place: DRO, H7/7/17, letter from Lady Willoughby, nd.

¹³² DRO, H7/7/15, 22nd June, 1816.

institution, her primary commitment was to her family as a wife and mother. Her concern for them, particularly the ‘anxiety’ which she felt for her ‘suffering husband’, an invalid for an extended period before his death in 1828, limited her participation.¹³³ Writing to Lady Isabella in 1816 regarding his ill health, she apologised for her inactivity: ‘all my time and my thoughts are so entirely occupied by one subject. Most day passes after day without my being able to get through what I wish to do’; yet, she continued, ‘I have not lost my anxious wish for the success of *our* establishment.’¹³⁴ While both physically and mentally occupied with family concerns, her specific emphasis on her personal connection with the institution suggests a committed engagement with the scheme and writing again in 1818, she acknowledged the ‘adequacy’ of epistolary exchanges under these conditions: ‘I should be very glad if any circumstances were likely to take me to Bath where I might have a chance of again cultivating a society which I derived so much pleasure during my last visit here. This however seems at present quite improbable and I must content myself with this mode’.¹³⁵ These comments, although confirming Lady Carysfort’s contact with Lady Isabella on previous visits to the city, also imply that they centred on purposes other than institutional business. While it was customary for men to make journeys specifically for business purposes, her remarks suggest that women did not or could not. In this light Lady Carysfort’s letter re-emphasises the importance of Bath as a draw, attracting the supporters that Lady Isabella needed. Perhaps more importantly though the mere fact that women needed an additional reason to come to Bath, that the business of the institution was not enough in itself, provides an insight into the constraints on women, economically or emotionally, which limited their freedom of movement and further highlights the complications which Lady Isabella faced in her task.

Although each patroness’s circumstances varied to some extent, Lady Carysfort’s circumstances as wife and especially as mother generally reflected the whole, and information available, while indicating a high level of commitment, has overwhelmingly

¹³³ DRO, H7/7/17, 15th August, 1822.

¹³⁴ DRO, H7/7/15, 12th July, 1816.

¹³⁵ DRO, H7/7/16, 18th February, 1818.

pointed to a primary loyalty to family responsibilities and the constraints which it imposed.¹³⁶ Of course, from a more cynical perspective, it could also be used as an excuse for a less active engagement. Prominent supporter, Lady Clonbrock, expressing her sadness that she could not give more time to the undertaking, highlighted her priorities: ‘I often regret that I cannot share with you some of the labours of [missing] but my poor motherless granddaughter at present requires all my attention.’¹³⁷ Lady Manvers, writing from her home, Holme Pierrepont in Nottinghamshire, and apologising to Lady Isabella for her delay in replying to a letter, emphasised the toll that family matters took on her mentally: ‘my mind has been and is much disturbed by the sorry continued indisposition of my daughter so that perhaps I am less observant upon other points than I might be.’¹³⁸ Participation by the patronesses was adapted to suit these circumstances, and numerous letters and circulars in the archive confirm that much of the business carried out by them as financial decision makers and signatories was conducted through correspondence; a round robin of virtual meetings, circulars and signatures.¹³⁹ Later correspondence from trustee Earl Manvers, which related to official business at Cornwallis House, provides a good example of the process:

I am happy in being able to send you the enclosed memo as a clear and simple expose of the forms by which our proceedings are to be guided under the trust deed ... Lady Manvers has signed the ‘order’ to which your signature is affixed and I will transmit by this nights post to the Dowager Lady Exeter for hers, coupled with a request that it may be immediately returned here, where I will sign and transmit it to my co-trustees, considering *that* if not the shortest, at least the safest way of effecting the object in view.¹⁴⁰

This primary network also worked, with Bath as its central point of reference, to

¹³⁶ All patronesses except Lady Isabella and the Marchioness of Exeter had children; numbers ranged from two to nine.

¹³⁷ ‘One of its most munificent benefactresses’; DRO, H7/7/12, memo for the local trustees, 1833; her daughter-in-law Anastasia [Blake] died in 1816, leaving a daughter, Letitia, who was born in September 1809; DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Lady Clonbrock, Cheltenham, 1817.

¹³⁸ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Countess Manvers, Holme Pierrepont, 4th March, 1819.

¹³⁹ Official papers circulated extant in the archive include a request for approval of the local guardian committee, 14th September, 1815; letter of assent to purchase Cornwallis House, May, 1821; annual statement of account, July, 1824 and a statement sent at the end of the first three years of experiment of what has passed, in January, 1819. Other communications include requests for signatures to release funds for payments of various sorts: DRO, H7/7/15, 14th September, 1815; DRO, H7/7/16, May, 1821; DRO, H7/7/17, January, 1819; DRO, H7/7/7, notices respecting the outlay on the purchases and improvements of the place [Cornwallis House], Clifton, 1823.

¹⁴⁰ DRO, H7/7/19, letter from Lord Manvers, 22nd February, 1832.

establish wider links and disseminate information to as wide an audience as possible within appropriate circles and contributions to support and extend the network through influence, family and third parties had a significant impact. Lady Willoughby's input in creating an extended satellite network centred on her family was very important in this respect. Engaging the support not only of her husband, Lord Gwydir, at the outset, but also that of her brother-in-law, George James Cholmondely, 1st Marquis of Cholmondely, Earl Rocksavage, her daughter, the Countess of Clare, and her sister-in-law, the Marchioness of Exeter, as patron and patronesses of the institution, her contribution extended far beyond financial support.¹⁴¹ That Lady Exeter's interest was directed through Lady Willoughby is evidenced in a letter written to Lady Isabella from Lady Willoughby in 1821:

You cannot think how often and how kindly Lady Exeter mentions the Bailbrook society: she is become quite interested in its success. She talked the other day of paying me a visit during my stay[sic] at Bath, if so I should be happy in the opportunity of making you acquainted with her.¹⁴²

Lady Willoughby was an important cog in the construction and maintenance of the system of networks, but Bath was the hub. Moreover, Lady Exeter's role as an ambassador for the institution can also be identified as crucial. Writing to her after its suspension in 1833, Lady Isabella paid tribute to her valued contribution which extended to the highest circles by recalling Queen Charlotte's views who, Lady Isabella informed, 'considered your ladyship and Lady Willoughby the chief pillars.'¹⁴³ Lady Exeter's important connection to royal circles and Lady Willoughby's third party role were acknowledged by Lady Carysfort in a letter written to Lady Isabella in 1816, which related to the collection of annual subscriptions: 'I have got the money from those of my friends who had engaged themselves to me; but I fear that few other annuals have been paid this year; and *not the Queen's*. Perhaps Lady Willoughby could through Lady Exeter get that important sum'.¹⁴⁴

Other patronesses also drew on family connections, directly and indirectly, to bolster

¹⁴¹ Earl of Rocksavage was married to Lady Willoughby's sister, Lady Georgina Charlotte Bertie: www.thepeerage.com, 17th May, 2007; www.thepeerage.com, 17th May, 2007.

¹⁴² DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Lady Willoughby, 18th April, 1821.

¹⁴³ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Marchioness of Exeter, Windsor, 22nd February, 1833.

¹⁴⁴ DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Lady Carysfort, 22nd June, 1816.

support for the institution. Indeed, historians, focusing more specifically on the formation of political networks, have pointed to the importance of family ties ‘to gain new, influential and wealthy supporters.’¹⁴⁵ Lady Carysfort recruited her sister, Lady Hester Fortescue as patroness, as already identified, patron, Lord Sheffield was recruited by his sister, local Guardian, Mrs Holroyd, Lord Vernon, trustee of the institution, and Lady Ford, a prolific supporter, were cousin and sister-in-law respectively to Lady Anson, while Lady Clonbrock, although not recruiting family members directly, looked to her daughters to extend the network further. Writing to Lady Isabella on the eve of the move to Clifton in 1821, she advised: ‘I am rejoiced to hear that Lady Warwick is become such a liberal friend and advocate in our cause – my daughter Anne is now in London and I shall write to her this week to endeavour to interest Lord and Lady Ennismore and others for this institution.’¹⁴⁶ The effectiveness of the energetic and swiftly expanding network was confirmed by Lady Carysfort. Assessing the extent of support by 1816 she considered: ‘our names are now so numerous and respectable that we need not stand so much in fear of public ridicule or censure’.¹⁴⁷

Orchestrated from Bath, other women took every opportunity to circulate information as widely as possible to the appropriate circles, given their often frustratingly remote circumstances. Writing to Lady Isabella from her home, Acton Park near Wrexham, in response to an application for assistance, Lady Cunliffe not only confirmed the inconvenience of being out of circulation but also confirmed Lady Isabella’s use of correspondence to communicate and her intent to petition others to circulate prospectuses more widely: ‘Lady Cunliffe has been highly flatter’d by Lady Isabella King’s communications. She most sincerely wishes that the influence extended so far, as [?] of the least service in so grand a cause ... in so distant a corner she feels that she cannot be of any use but in circulating the papers which have gratified her and open’d new lights on the

¹⁴⁵ Reynolds, *Aristocratic Women*, p.114; Sarah Richardson, ‘“Well neighbour’d Houses”: the Political Networks of Elite Women, 1780-1860’, in Kathryn Gleadle & Sarah Richardson, (eds.), *Women in British Politics, 1760-1860: The Power of the Petticoat* (Basingstoke & London, 2000), p.57.

¹⁴⁶ Lady Ennismore was Lady Clonbrock’s daughter: DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Lady Clonbrock, Cheltenham, 7th May, 1821.

¹⁴⁷ DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Lady Carysfort, Elton Hall, 12th July, 1816.

subjects'.¹⁴⁸ Lady Manvers also confirmed her remote activity and Lady Isabella's communications with her; 'I speak of it as frequently as opportunity occurs in my retirement ... that the good purpose should be widely diffused. The statement you have been so good to send me should [?] inform my [?] in the hope that some may peruse it and *some* perhaps be interested to lend their aid'.¹⁴⁹

Women worked through family and local connexions to extend knowledge and develop networks of support for the Ladies' Association. Mary Fairfax, visitor to Bath in 1814, provides a good example of the efficient nature of the channel of communication effected by the ebb and flow of visitors to the city.¹⁵⁰ Responding to a letter from Lady Isabella which follows up a meeting between them in the city concerning the establishment of the Ladies' Association, she provides clear evidence of the process of networking; face-to-face contact, followed by letter-writing, followed further by local, third-party networking as a result. Although dismayed at not being in a position to assist Lady Isabella more fully, Mrs Fairfax demonstrated her enthusiasm and ability to contribute within the confines of her circumstances, selecting those who could provide useful contributions, not just financial but also practical and advisory, and creating a network of assistance within her community by using local, family and philanthropic connections to further the cause:

I only regret that I cannot contribute to its success either by pecuniary aid or otherwise. I have from many causes more employment than usually falls to the lot of a mother of a family, but I feel not less anxious to be of any service beyond that narrow sphere ... I have had some conversation with several Gentlemen who belong to a Roman Catholic College in this neighbourhood and they are very willing to give me any particulars concerning the domestic oeconomy of regulations in convents ... I delivered the pamphlet to Mrs Cappe immediately on my return into Yorkshire, but could only see her for so very short a time as to afford little opportunity for conversing upon the subject. I understood she had some letter publication in the press upon the subject of charity schools which she purposed to send and accompany with a letter and is probably waiting for that- I will take every opportunity of circulating the paper where I think there is a chance of success- there is a lady in this county of very large prosperity and totally unfettered as to any claims upon it and who has in several instances contributed very liberally to charitable

¹⁴⁸ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Lady Cunliffe, 29th March, 1819.

¹⁴⁹ DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Lady Manvers, Holme Pierrepont, 29th October, 1818.

¹⁵⁰ Other visitors included Mrs Iremonger, the Hon Miss Wodehouse, Charles Shipley, (brother-in-law of Reginald Heber, the Bishop of Calcutta), Ignatius Latrobe and Roman Catholic priest, Peter Baines.

institutions, or donations for good purposes, her property is such as that to found the College would be a trifling object ... although I am not personally acquainted with her, yet her family and mine were formerly in habits of friendship and I think I can venture to make the request through some friends.¹⁵¹

This was typical of work that was carried out nationally on Lady Isabella's behalf.

Mrs Iremonger, perhaps one of Lady Isabella's most hard-working supporters, having visited Bath in November 1813, also worked tirelessly to furnish Lady Isabella with influential and well-situated supporters who could contribute to the maintenance and improvement of the institution in a constructive way. Working from London, her net cast wide and those she petitioned included relative, Mr Morton Pitt, friend Lady Molesworth, Sir James Macintosh, head of the committee for Lancastrian schools, Lord Robert Seymour, a prolific philanthropist and 'renownedly good and active in the field of humanity' and Mr Thomas Palmer, an active and attentive governor to the Magdalen asylum in London.¹⁵²

Members of Lady Isabella's family can also be identified as members of her support network. With family ties central to her life, this subset of the elite network was an important element. Engaging in a myriad of roles, some acted directly from Bath while others took on an indirect role as donors and as personal support for Lady Isabella. Her nephew, Lord Lorton and extended family member, Gerald Fitzgerald, perhaps occupied the most prominent roles as patron and guardians respectively, once the institution moved to Clifton, while Miss Fitzgerald and Lady Isabella's niece, Lady Louisa de Spaen, were local guardians at Bath and Clifton. Her sister-in-law, the Dowager Countess Kingston recommended several residents to the institution, while other family members visited Lady Isabella both at her house in Great Bedford Street and later at Bailbrook House. Reminiscing in 1836, resident Miss Brotherson 'remember[ed] Miss Louisa King at Bailbrook,' while Lady Isabella's cousin, Miss Stewart, who played an active role in the dissemination of

¹⁵¹ Mrs Fairfax's communication with Catherine Cappe was of particular significance, prompting the initial and important connection between Lady Isabella and one of her most loyal and munificent supporters, Lady Clonbrock: DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Mrs Fairfax, Gilling Castle, 29th April, 1814; Catherine Cappe, *Thoughts on Various Charitable and other Important Institutions* (London & York, 1814).

¹⁵² DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Mrs Iremonger, 26th November, 1813.

information, spent time with Lady Isabella at her home in the city.¹⁵³ Visiting Bath in 1813, Mrs Iremonger confirmed both her presence and the nature of her participation: ‘Your excellent little sketch of your benevolent and public spirited plan was most safely and punctually transmitted to me ... from your interesting little cousin Miss Stewart, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at your house in Bath.’¹⁵⁴ Lady Isabella’s sisters, Dowager Countess Rosse and Lady Eleanor, both supported her personally and through contributions to the establishment of the institution at Cornwallis House. Countess Rosse’s donations were so munificent that that she was later made an honorary member of the institution.

The vital role these networks played not just in undertaking the managerial duties of the institution but also in their constant recruitment of support in whatever form, towards the advancement of the institution is clear. Each network played its own specific role, tailored to its own specific set of circumstances, establishing a range of connexions on a variety of levels, locally and nationally which benefitted the institution.

The evangelical network worked on a slightly different level. As Hilton has acknowledged, this period was marked by ‘the gradual permeation of the new Puritanism even among the aristocracy,’ and this can be detected in the strong evangelical thread which ran through the networks.¹⁵⁵ A number of Lady Isabella’s initial supporters were evangelically inclined and their affiliation with the Ladies’ Association increasingly shaped its character.¹⁵⁶ More visible figures, identified by Ford K. Brown in his study of charity and evangelicalism, included the Duchess of Buccleuch, Countess Manvers and Countess Carysfort whose husband, the Earl of Carysfort has been described as ‘a zealous observer’ in relation to his religious principles, ‘both in family prayer and public worship.’¹⁵⁷ Lady Olivia Sparrow’s evangelical devotion is well documented and confirmed in her friendships with Bishop Chase, Hannah More, William Wilberforce and other members of the Clapham sect. While there is no conclusive evidence to confirm Lady Willoughby’s personal religious

¹⁵³ DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Miss Brotherson, 1836.

¹⁵⁴ DRO, H7/7/15, letter from Mrs Iremonger, 26th November, 1813.

¹⁵⁵ Hilton, *A Mad Bad and Dangerous People*, p.179.

¹⁵⁶ See appendix 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol.108 (May, 1828), p.469.

standing, her husband, Lord Gwydir, elected as vice-president of the Bath branch of the Church Missionary Society in 1817, was fervently committed, describing its objective as ‘the fulfilment of a great Christian duty.’¹⁵⁸

Similarly, although there is also no definitive evidence to support the personal religious views of members of the local guardian committee, several had important family connections with evangelical circles; Lady Bateman’s brother was prominent evangelical and close friend of William Wilberforce, Thomas Gisborne and Henry Drummond, the High Tory, eccentric politician, who has been described as ‘an extraordinary amalgam of the religious enthusiast and the ultra conservative’ was the son of the Hon. Mrs. Strange.¹⁵⁹

However, while there was undoubtedly a noticeable evangelical presence not all those who supported the Ladies’ Association were overtly evangelical, particularly during the early years of the institution. Although Lady Isabella’s supporters were devout Christians, for some, their evangelical affiliation was less obvious. As a prominent member of the established Church, Shute Barrington, Bishop of Durham, was sympathetic to the evangelicals but never formally identified himself with them, while Thomas Burgess, Bishop of St David’s and later of Salisbury was High Church, yet he had many evangelical friends and was a strong supporter of the Bible Society. Lady Liverpool, wife of Robert Banks Jenkinson, 2nd Earl of Liverpool and British Prime Minister between 1812 and 1827 ‘the dull and conventional daughter of the Earl of Bristol,’ was famous for her piety, while members of the local guardian committee were all known for their piety or religious connections.¹⁶⁰

While this is evidence of a more inclusive approach, Lady Isabella interacted with prominent evangelicals visiting Bath. William Wilberforce, visited her while she was at Bailbrook in 1821, and addressing her as ‘dear Lady Isa’ in subsequent correspondence, confirmed his friendship with her.¹⁶¹ Indeed this is the only letter in the archive which

¹⁵⁸ *Christian Herald*, vol. 6 (March, 1819), p.204.

¹⁵⁹ Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c.1800-1850* (Oxford, 2004), pp.157-160.

¹⁶⁰ Lucille Iremonger, *The Fiery Chariot: A Study of British Prime Ministers and the Search for Love* (London, 1970), p.55.

¹⁶¹ Lady Isabella also had connections with the Spooner family through her sister the Dowager Countess Rosse who leased Elmdon Hall from them: DRO, H7/7/21, letter from William Wilberforce, 3rd May, 1821.

addresses her in such an informal manner. Although there is little direct evidence to confirm their association, it is highly likely, given the information that is available and the circles in which she mixed, that she was also associated with Hannah More, while a letter written to More from Henry Thornton's wife Marianne, describing an evening with Lady Isabella at Miss Maltby's, spinster, resident and prominent member of Bath's charitable arena, confirms that she also spent time with Lady Isabella while at Bath in 1812.¹⁶²

On its removal to Cornwallis House the institution adopted a more overtly evangelical public profile, a conscious choice made by Lady Isabella through the appointment of prominent evangelical figures Wilberforce, Babington and John Scandrett Harford as trustees and guardians as has been discussed in chapter 1. While there is no evidence to confirm the reason for this choice, several factors may have prompted her decision. It is possible that her increasingly evangelical views may have played a role, while a need to define the institution more clearly or perhaps a perceived acceptance of a more overt evangelical profile once at Clifton motivated her actions. Other local evangelical notables were also petitioned to join the institution, including Isaac Cooke, Arthur Foulks and Gerald Fitzgerald, while Henry Ryder, Bishop of Gloucester, the first recognised evangelical to be elevated to the episcopate and Lord Lorton, a devoted evangelical Anglican, were also invited to become trustees. Lady Isabella considered them all to be 'gentlemen of high respectability who have shewn a real interest in its welfare.'¹⁶³ However, while all ultimately acquiesced to her request, correspondence suggests that some were not wholly supportive. Most conspicuous was Thomas Babington, who Wilberforce reported, indicated 'great fear of joining the institution', but hoped to 'succeed in overcoming his

¹⁶² Both Hannah More and Lady Isabella lived in Bath and then at Clifton at similar times and Hannah More also subscribed to many charities which aligned themselves with Lady Isabella: in particular, the Ladies' Association and the Society for Educating Clergymen's Daughters, a charitable institution run by the Reverend Carus Wilson (the notorious 'Lowood' of *Jane Eyre*) which was chosen by Lady Isabella to benefit from the proceeds of the sale of Cornwallis House. Other charities which More subscribed to were also supported by Lady Isabella: they included the Bristol Anti-Slavery Society, the Clifton Infant School, the Moravian Missionary Society, the Hibernian Society, the Irish Religious Tract and Book Society and Bishop Chase's Diocese of Ohio; Cambridge University, Thornton papers, Add7674/1F1, c. January-February 1812. I'd like to thank Dr. Anne Stott for pointing this source out to me.

¹⁶³ All were dedicated supporters of the Church Missionary Society; the Bishop of Gloucester was president of the Bath branch, Arthur Foulks was treasurer of the Bristol branch and made donations and subscriptions with his four daughters, as did Isaac Cooke with his wife, children and servants. *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa*, vol.19 (London, 1819). Bristol Association [est. 1813].

scruples'.¹⁶⁴ It is likely that Mr Babington's concerns about being associated with the undertaking centred not on its more conspicuous evangelical profile but on his patriarchally driven, critical view of female orientated initiatives, evidenced more forcefully in his opposition towards female associations in the anti-slavery movement. If this is the case, it is likely that Wilberforce, a co-objector to independent female participation in the anti-slavery movement would also have had reservations about Lady Isabella's scheme. Indeed, although he agreed to the appointment immediately, his tone suggests a detached cool stance. Relaying Mr Babington's response he confirmed simply: 'I however have rejoined', continuing, in response to Lady Isabella's request to petition other would-be trustees, that 'on reflection I am clearly of opinion that your ladyship had better write yourself to the Bishop of Gloucester in London, Mr Babington Temple Rothley nr Leicester, JS Harford Christ's College Cambridge.'¹⁶⁵ As a friend of Lady Isabella's, and given Wilberforce's character, it seems probable that his acceptance was a result of not wanting to disappoint. Indeed, a letter written to Wilberforce in May 1821 confirms Lady Isabella's persuasive manner. Discussing his own appointment, the unknown writer advised: 'Lady Isabella pressed me so earnestly to accept the same situation[s], of Guardian and Trustee, hoping that I should be associated with the Bishop of Gloucester, yourself, Mr Babington and Mr Duncan, that I could not refuse'.¹⁶⁶

There were also concerns that this move towards a higher evangelical profile would 'alienate' her from some of her 'grandee friends'. Of her closest supporters, this seems unlikely given the pious principles of many. Indeed the specific appointment of evangelically connected guardians and trustees not only seems to have been embraced but was also a shared decision. Writing to Lady Isabella regarding their appointments in 1821, Lady Clonbrock expressed her pleasure at the consent of the new trustees and guardians and confirming their choice as unanimous, declared: 'Nothing could gratify me more than Mr

¹⁶⁴ DRO, H7/7/21, letter from William Wilberforce, 3rd May, 1821.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Letter from anonymous to William Wilberforce, Bath 2nd May, 1821, Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, William Wilberforce papers, 1782-1852, 5-15-56.

Wilberforce's kind acquiescence to our wishes. Has the Bishop of Gloucester been equally friendly to us?'¹⁶⁷ However, while there is no evidence to substantiate it, giving 'such a religious character' to the institution may have affected its reception on a wider level. Nevertheless later additions to the positions of patron and patroness, directed by their 'real interest in the success of the undertaking' to ensure that '*no attempt would be made* to alter [its] object' included trustee Henry Ryder, who by 1824 had been appointed Bishop of Lichfield, the Bishop of Winchester, Charles Richard Sumner, evangelical and brother of the archbishop of Canterbury, both cousins of Wilberforce, William Magee, Archbishop of Dublin, proponent of the second reformation in Ireland and ardent evangelical, the Duchess of Beaufort.¹⁶⁸

Clifton

The decision to choose Cornwallis House at Clifton as the permanent residence of the Ladies' Association in 1821 was made on the grounds that it was 'the cheapest and most commodious mansion available within a moderate distance of Bath.'¹⁶⁹ At the time, Lady Isabella's priorities, although centred on space and cost, also took into consideration its proximity to Bath, yet its location still proved too remote for many to make personal connexions. For the many whose business or pleasure took them specifically to Bath, Clifton was an undesirable extension of their journey. While people did go back and forth and coaches travelled between Bath and Clifton frequently, a visit to Clifton would have entailed more than an afternoon visit.¹⁷⁰ Having previously become acquainted with Lady Isabella and the institution at Bailbrook House, Moravian minister, Ignatius Latrobe, unable to reach Clifton, sent his apologies to her, and conveyed the 'great disappointment' it was to him 'to be obliged to leave Bath without having an opportunity of visiting Bristol and Clifton.'¹⁷¹ The deterioration of Lady Isabella's network of support once at Clifton provides ample

¹⁶⁷ DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Lady Clonbrock, Cheltenham, 7th May, 1821.

¹⁶⁸ DRO, H7/7/13, notes, May, 1832.

¹⁶⁹ DRO, H7/7/19, remarks respecting the friends of the association, 1832.

¹⁷⁰ *Gye's Bath Directory* lists a number of coaches which travelled daily between Bath and Clifton. *Gye's Bath Directory* (Bath, 1819), pp.24-25.

¹⁷¹ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Ignatius Latrobe, nd.

evidence of the significance of Bath's unique status as a crucial element in its construction and maintenance. After the suspension of the institution in 1832, Lady Isabella, reflecting on the reasons for its decline, identified several factors relating to the support network which contributed to its demise.

Once at Cornwallis House, Lady Isabella found it almost impossible from the outset to form a local guardian committee, a support body which has been identified as crucial to both her and the welfare of the institution. Notes which she wrote in retrospect recorded the transient nature of Clifton's society and observed a more dispassionate response to the scheme: 'At Clifton it is very difficult to form an efficient committee — society there is so fluctuating and among the *few* who take some degree of interest in the institution there is *not one* who has leisure and ability to act for the committee *as Secretary*.'¹⁷² Phyllis Hembry's research on British Spas has determined that in 1825, Clifton was still a fashionable resort, but also points out that competition from other fashionable locations rendered it in decline, while A.B. Glanville, reporting on the medicinal facilities at Clifton a few years later, observed the make-up of its residential population: 'Clifton is hardly a watering place now. It is either a colony of half-pay notables, who have lineage and little cash, or it is a station of transition for Wales and Ireland and also for the West Indies and (now) America'.¹⁷³ Indeed, updating Lady Isabella on the most recent news at Cornwallis House in 1836, while she was visiting relations in Ireland, resident Miss Brotherson reported the visit of acquaintances who: 'were all come to Bristol to embark for Madras'.¹⁷⁴

Evidence however does confirm a charitable community in Clifton, which included a number of charitable institutions specifically related to the community to which Lady Isabella contributed. Together with sometime guardians Hon Emily Powys, and Lady Hartopp, Lady Isabella was patron of the Clifton infants school, she was also one of three titled women included in the membership of Bristol and Clifton Anti-Slavery Society, along

¹⁷² DRO, H7/7/19, notes, 1832.

¹⁷³ Phyllis May Hembry, Leonard W. Cowie & Evelyn Elizabeth Cowie, *British Spas from 1815 to the Present: A Social History* (Cranbury, NJ, 1997), pp.123-124; Augustus B. Granville, *The Spas of England and Principal Sea-Bathing Places* (London, 1841), chapter 2, Clifton Hot-Wells.

¹⁷⁴ DRO, H7/7/20, letter from Miss Brotherson, 1836.

with Hannah More, whose membership totalled sixty-six, while newspaper reports and letters from resident, Miss Brotherson confirm participation in both the Clifton and Moravian Baazars.¹⁷⁵ Several members of the local guardian committee can also be identified as evangelically, connected. Supporters of the Bristol branch of the Church Missionary Society included Lady Hartopp, Mrs Enraught, Mrs Hensman and Hon Emily Powys, friend of Hannah More.¹⁷⁶

Lady Isabella noted those who she invited to become members of the guardian committee once installed at Clifton and her list, compiled in 1824, just two years after the institution was fully established there, clearly illustrates their ephemeral nature: ‘Lady Louisa De Spaen (no longer resident at Clifton), in her place was elected Miss Stanhope (who also left Clifton), Mrs Hensman (withdrew from the committee), Hon Emily Powys, Lady Hartopp (was requested and finally agreed to become a member of the committee), Mrs Austen and Mrs Enraught, Mrs Townsend and Miss Townsend (now gone too), Hon Mrs Charles Irby.’¹⁷⁷ Her bracketed comments confirm that many of those who were approached, unlike members of the local guardian committee at Bath, were not permanent residents of Clifton and her closing remarks, which confirmed that with ‘five members require to form a board’, no efficient committee could be elected, provide conclusive evidence of the failure to successfully assemble a stable and reliable local support group.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, by 1833 only three guardians, Lady Hartopp, Hon Mrs Irby and Mrs Enraught remained as active members. Conversely, the continued support offered by the committee at Bath is evident in Lady Isabella’s response to the situation at Clifton. In the absence of a valid or reliable official committee at Clifton, communications were sent to the Bath committee for their approval. Her notes specify that ‘the following paper was sent to Bath for the approbation of *the original committee* resident there and was approved and signed by all the members present at the meeting ... namely Rt Hon Lady Clonbrock (Pess), Hon Miss

¹⁷⁵ Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: The Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port* (Bristol, 2001), p.205; DRO, H7/7/20, letter from Miss Brotherson, 1836; *Bristol Mercury* (19th February), 1827.

¹⁷⁶ *Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society for Africa*, (London, 1824), pp.263, 268, 287.

¹⁷⁷ DRO, H7/7/7, notes, 1824.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Broderick (Bath Sec), Hon Mrs Strange, Lady Bateman, Mrs Sutton, Mrs Stackhouse, Miss Fitzgerald'.¹⁷⁹ This practice not only reinforced the importance of Bath's local guardian committee to Lady Isabella personally, as a stable and steadfast body of support which she could consistently rely on, but also emphasised the significant role which a guardian committee played in the maintenance of the institution.

Lady Isabella's notes disclose the effects a poorly staffed guardian committee at Clifton had on the institution. A breakdown of administration and communication manifested itself in various ways. According to Lady Isabella: 'difficulties are thrown in the way of candidates who are wishing for information, of regular meetings being called, of letters to the Committee being received and answered, of minutes being taken after the meetings which do take place, and properly entered into the Cornwallis book etc.'¹⁸⁰ The absence of an immediate support network also impacted on the perception and reception of the institution in Clifton itself and disconsolately acknowledging the improbability of establishing such a body of support, Lady Isabella pointed out their crucial role as local ambassadors: 'that important feature in the plan, *a Guardian or managing Committee*' whose role she explained included 'forming links between the institution and general society, is scarcely attainable at Clifton.'¹⁸¹ Lack of contact with the local community created a void where misunderstandings and misgivings concerning the institution could breed and with no voice to correct them, became fact and comparing Clifton to Bath's nurturing atmosphere, Lady Isabella drew attention to the consequences:

Separated ... in a great degree from those benevolent friends at Bath who took such interest in its formation and have held so much [?] for its prosperity ... [its] place cannot be supplied by any of the inhabitants of Clifton, where in fact it is so little understood that Enquirers I find have been misinformed as to the manner in which it is *supported* and the object for which it is founded, and thus suitable candidates have been in many instances discouraged from seeking admission — I have learned this upon becoming acquainted with persons who had been anxious for information, and who thought it impossible that those to whom they applied could be ignorant of the plan of an Establishment which had been

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ DRO, H7/7/19, notes 1832.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

so long situated in their neighbourhood.¹⁸²

Misunderstandings centred on beliefs that the institution was wholly funded through subscription and many, unwilling to surrender themselves to such a scheme, chose not to apply. Fuelled not only by the absence of a corrective voice but also by the institution's unique approach to funding, confusion regarding the true nature of the scheme proliferated nationally.

In this respect Lady Isabella identified a second factor which was contributory to the demise of the Ladies' Association: the 'want of more frequent communication with the Patronesses.'¹⁸³ Her distance from Bath not only alienated her friends who lived there but also the patronesses, with whom she had little contact. Confiding in an anonymous correspondent she complained: 'Indeed it is a long time since I have had any communication with its original friends for unfortunately none of them ever visit Clifton'.¹⁸⁴ This not only affected her physical performance, but also stifled her mental creativity. Lady Isabella felt completely isolated, her residence in Clifton, she regretted, 'chilled and almost paralysed the powers of my mind'.¹⁸⁵ Speaking of a '*dream like visit*' to Cornwallis House in the autumn of 1823, Lady Willoughby recognised the detrimental effects a lack of mental stimulation could have:

though I had not time to say half What I'd wished ... I trust you have in thought, supplied all that was wanting: ... I am only the more sensible of your value, and of the cause I have to regret our irksome separation ... as your active mind always so zealous in the work of benevolence, must, *now*, often receive a check in its best views, from not having a friend, near at hand to co-operate in them.¹⁸⁶

Her comments which draw attention to the valuable reciprocally mentally stimulating aspects of face-to-face contact and conversation which are beyond the reach of letter writing, yet again emphasise the importance of regular contact as a necessary component to continued motivation. Indeed, Lady Willoughby's letter also intimated her

¹⁸² DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Mrs Edward Morse and Mr Markham regarding the decline of the institution, 2nd May, 1833.

¹⁸³ DRO, H7/7/19, notes, 1832.

¹⁸⁴ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anon, 1831.

¹⁸⁵ See Introduction.

¹⁸⁶ DRO, H7/7/17, letter from Lady Willoughby, 2nd January, 1824.

own reconnection with Lady Isabella and the institution as a result of the visit and in doing so her words stress the value of primary contact not only as a stimulus for Lady Isabella but also to feed the enthusiasm and energy of her support network. A visit to Cornwallis House by prospective London secretary, Caroline Fry in 1826, in order to familiarise herself with the institution and its members, engendered a connection which distance would not have realised. Lady Isabella acknowledged the benefit of the visit: ‘Miss Fry’s interest in the welfare of the institution has been encreased by her visit to Cornwallis House — and as the President and society are sensible of the important services an agent of Miss Fry’s principles may render the institution in *its present fallen state* she is now to be considered ... as a member of the society’.¹⁸⁷ For others, the lack of communication did indeed serve to erode the interest and weaken their attachment and the effects of distance became clear. In 1833, Lady Carysfort, who Lady Isabella had in the same year described as ‘very old but very true’, relinquished her role as an active supporter of the institution stating: ‘I must decline the request [sic] to give your plans the assistance which I am quite unequal to afford as I have now so long lost sight of the plan’.¹⁸⁸

It is however also important to point out the age of the patrons and patronesses as a contributory factor to the decline in interest. Commenting on the dwindling numbers, Lady Carysfort advised Lady Isabella of ‘the necessity of immediately supplying the place of those patronesses, who like myself by the burthen of *threescore* years and *two* are both unable and unwilling to engage again in the business’.¹⁸⁹ With average ages of fifty-three and seventy-three at the outset, six of the patronesses died during the lifetime of the institution, while three of the four patrons died by 1826. Corresponding with Lord Manvers, Lady Isabella acknowledged the void created by their death ‘The kindness your Lordship has shown ... leads me to hope that I may look to you and Lady Manvers as friends to the undertaking, now that death has removed so many of those who united with me in first

¹⁸⁷ DRO, H7/7/2, matters to be spoken of to inmates of Cornwallis House previous to the half-yearly election, September, 1826.

¹⁸⁸ DRO, H7/7/12, memo for the local trustees, 1833; DRO, H7/7/19, letter from Lady Carysfort, Upper Grosvenor Street, 13th May, 1833.

¹⁸⁹ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Lady Carysfort, 10th July, 1829.

forming the plan'.¹⁹⁰

Perhaps most significant were the deaths of Queen Charlotte and Lady Willoughby, undoubtedly key figures, as factors which contributed to the demise of the institution: 'And first in importance is the great loss sustained by the Institution when deprived of the protecting influence of the Queen, whose notice and approval had until the day of her death animated and strengthened the hands of its managers'.¹⁹¹ Regarding the Queen as the principal figurehead, Lady Isabella considered her role crucial to the profile of the institution. Endowing it with an elevated status and thus with the respectability so important to all involved, she felt Queen Charlotte was not only its 'royal protectress' but also an emulative figure which critics and supporters alike referred to as its defining landmark.¹⁹²

The death of Lady Willoughby, a powerful and close ally of Lady Isabella's, in December 1828, was as Lady Isabella herself admitted, 'another serious blow to the prosperity of the Institution'.¹⁹³ Lady Willoughby's network of support, which had been so potent a force, lost the impetus to continue and, reflecting on the institution's demise, Lady Isabella confirmed the impact: 'When this connecting link was broken- all communication with those whom she had interested in the cause-, seemed to end.'¹⁹⁴ While Lady Willoughby was alive, both Lady Exeter and the Earl of Rocksavage were fervent supporters of the institution, Lady Isabella acknowledging Lady Exeter as one of the patronesses who had taken 'the warmest interest in the well-being of the institution.'¹⁹⁵ However, after her death, the channel of communication no longer extant, Lady Exeter, remote and disconnected from the institution, lost motivation and interest. Annotations by Lady Isabella to a copy letter sent to Lady Exeter in 1833 in which Lady Isabella requested a meeting noted a silent response: 'No notice was taken by Lady Exeter of this letter', while her final comments towards both Lady Exeter and the Earl of Rocksavage, 'once zealous friend[s]

¹⁹⁰ DRO, H7/7/19, letter to Lord Manvers, 16th February, 1832.

¹⁹¹ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anon, nd.

¹⁹² DRO, H7/7/19, notes, 1832.

¹⁹³ DRO, H7/7/13, copy letter regarding the decline of the institution, nd.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ DRO, H7/7/19, letter to Lord Manvers, 16th February, 1832.

while lady Willoughby lived,' attest to Lady Willoughby's profound influence.¹⁹⁶ The loss of supporters had a snowball effect, while old age and death left the institution devoid of ambassadors and figureheads, the lack of a supportive voice and an emulative presence in turn did little for the recruitment drive which Lady Isabella was so desperate to forward.

Attempts to replace patronesses with like figures proved unsuccessful. First and foremost Lady Isabella sought patronage from the Prince Regent, perhaps a desperate measure by this stage, as its principal supporter after the Queen's death. Lady Manvers was hopeful that he would 'accede to the request made him that he should take the place of Chief Patron to the institution held by his honor'd parent our late good queen'.¹⁹⁷ Yet his negative response was echoed by later appeals to the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria and by other nobles who, while contributors, were unwilling to accept a more prominent position.¹⁹⁸ Names of those approached ranged from the Duchess of Buckingham who made a 'regular contribution of £20 annually to funds and [had] given £200 towards the *purchase of the house* and £220 towards the *endowment fund*,' the Duchess of Northumberland, who Lady Isabella believed 'would be a valuable addition to our number' and Lady Denbigh.¹⁹⁹ As with the local committee, the deterioration of Lady Isabella's elite support network not only starved her of personal and managerial support but also rendered the voice of the institution silent on a national level. A network whose work had previously and successfully recruited both residents and supporters, and promoted and defended the scheme on Lady Isabella's behalf in all corners of Britain, its gradual disintegration effectively shut down lines of communication not only within the association itself but also with the public in general.

Conclusion

Lady Isabella's endeavour to draw together a group of like-minded people to support the

¹⁹⁶ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Lady Exeter, Windsor, 22nd February, 1833; DRO, H7/7/12, notes, 1833.

¹⁹⁷ DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Lady Manvers, 1819.

¹⁹⁸ DRO, H7/7/16, letter to anon, nd; DRO, H7/7/13, notes, 1833.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Ladies' Association was directed both by the need to fashion a support system that was conducive to the maintenance of respectability of its prospective residents and by her profound evangelical conviction. In both respects she targeted the noble and the wealthy, particularly single women in similar circumstances to herself, who she believed, as neighbours in rank, would be moved to contribute and whose participation would not only encourage others to do the same but would also foster a morally improving mindset amongst a class who, according to evangelicals were in need of moral regeneration. Her objective for a purposeful, committed and more personal form of participation however, was at odds with the general trend of elite philanthropy. Characterised by remoteness and impersonality, this mode of charitable involvement manifested itself in the effortless act of giving in a society which, despite adverse economic conditions, Lady Isabella believed was driven by its self-interested spirit. These discordant attitudes consequently yielded a limited pool from which Lady Isabella could draw.

Bath, while synonymous with ostentatious sociability and excess, was conducive to this purpose. A unique space, it was an integral part of the social round and drawing together the titled, the influential and the wealthy, a diverse, yet concentrated and potent cross section of elite society, it invited all to participate in an open yet intimate atmosphere, facilitating introductions and new connexions on many levels which resonated nationwide. A more serious mindset, centred on the closely associated subjects of charity and religion and encouraged by the developing evangelical impulse, practical and vital in purpose, which could be perceived in the city by the beginning of the nineteenth century, advanced Lady Isabella's objective. In tune with her more intellectual and purposeful disposition, Bath's distinctive atmosphere encouraged her to use her home, her social skills and her social position to cultivate a network of support through the exchange and dissemination of information, opening up channels of communication between local influential figures and those who were more geographically disparate. Creating an environment of polite sociability in which intellectual and influential visitors joined local elites to engage in purposeful rational debate, developing new ideas towards common goals and engendering the

development of a diffuse cultural network , Lady Isabella once again adapted the resources she had available to her to access arenas and individuals which were vital to her scheme, raising her profile and affording herself respectable visibility, credence and a platform to recruit.

Bath's vibrant philanthropic community was the basis from which Lady Isabella's support network emanated. Elite, influential, like-minded, charitable and pious, her network naturally divided itself into four interconnecting groups, each with their own particular role and peculiar set of circumstances which contributed to the growth and maintenance of the institution. Members of the local philanthropic community constituted the local guardian committee and comprised predominantly single or widowed female local elites, whose roles were ambassadors, day to day managers and perhaps most importantly an immediate support network for Lady Isabella. Resident in Bath, their participation was characterised by direct and personal interaction. The second network centred on Lady Isabella's literary affiliations. Also locally based, it permeated the wider echelons of Britain's literary arena via the ebb and flow of information by literary visitors, disseminating information both through correspondence and verbally, once returned, and Lady Isabella's role as orchestrator of this information network reinforced the strength of her position in Bath. While the philanthropic network fulfilled a crucial role in its immediacy to Lady Isabella, the aristocratic network was of equal importance and significance. Predominantly composing the patrons and patronesses who represented the institution, it was integrally linked to Bath through the local charitable arena. An efficient network while the institution was based at Bath, it not only acted as a decision making and governing body but also worked to extend the network both as figureheads and through the active dissemination of information nationally to appropriate circles. With most participants remotely based due to the peripatetic lifestyle of the aristocracy, communication, again centred on Bath, pivoted on a network of correspondence rather than on regular personal communication and although commitment was unqualified for most while the institution remained at Bath, aristocratic responsibility and lifestyle rendered it just one part of a chain of aristocratic duties. An evangelical network, which

included independent supporters but which also embraced the network as a whole through the permeation of evangelicalism among the ranks of its supporters, increasingly served not only to unite the networks in their purpose but their affiliation to the Ladies' Association also reinforced the evangelical ethos which increasingly helped to define the character of the institution. This sturdy support network which worked on many levels, locally, face-to-face, hands-on and more remotely to support, promote and recruit on behalf of the institution, was an efficient machine and the powerhouse which drove the institution forward.

Once the Ladies' Association moved to Clifton, the lack of support locally and the remoteness of Lady Isabella from her patrons and patronesses saw its rapid deterioration. The character of Clifton's small residential population, although demonstrating a charitable and evangelical impulse, evinced insufficient interest to form an effective and stable local guardian committee, rendering Lady Isabella and the institution unsupported in its immediate vicinity, while the distance of the patrons and patronesses served both to erode their interest and weaken their attachment. Lady Isabella's alienation from her patronesses, which not only rendered them disconnected but also stifled her own mental performance, effected a void which compounded itself by its consequent incapacity to replace those older members who had died or resigned.

Lady Isabella's support network was of central importance to the success of the institution; Bath nurtured it while Clifton neglected it. In its prime at Bath it was supported by a multilayered national network, by the end it had become, as Lady Isabella had feared, a small local enterprise, unsupported even in the vicinity of Clifton. Her vision of a nationally supported institution cemented in its purpose and character by the patronage of Queen Charlotte ultimately became a one-generation local concern which ceased when its main supporters died or no longer chose or were able to contribute to its advancement. In this respect the social cohesion of the closely allied network, linked together by one united purpose and nourished by personal or regular interaction has been proven crucial to its continuance and to the welfare of the institution and is central to all groups who played a role in the life of the Ladies' Association, including those it was created to assist.

CHAPTER 5

THE ‘BOTTLED WASPS’: THE RESIDENTS OF THE LADIES’ ASSOCIATION¹

Introduction

In May 1821, an article written in *The New Monthly Magazine*, in celebration of the Ladies’

Association, proclaimed:

What can be more delightful than to contemplate a society of educated females sheltered from the turmoil and cares, the deprivations and mortifications that too often assail unprotected loneliness and uncheered solitude – bound by no monastic rules, united only by attention to religion and social duties, and subject to no restrictions save those which good breeding and domestic harmony require, all enjoying the advantage of a well regulated community.²

Written at a time when the institution was at its height, this harmonious image embodies the essence of Lady Isabella’s conceptualization of a happy asylum for impoverished gentlewomen ‘which unites them as one family’, in which she envisioned ‘companions ... contented and daily growing in every Christian Grace’ who would ‘comfort ... encourage and edify each other’, and offers a convincing case to engender optimistic expectations for the continued success and future development of the Association.³ Critics of the scheme, however, were unconvinced that such a plan could result in the ‘domestic happiness and social retirement’ which Lady Isabella strived for, on any permanent basis, and the most persistent and frequent criticism put forward in this respect, blamed the inconstant nature of English women:

A society of *Women- English Women-* belonging to the Church of *England-* Could never be expected to live together in peace ... their love of variety and change, their impatience of restraint, and above all, the

¹ The *Bath Chronicle* reported that the ‘gossip, quarrels, hatred, malice and uncharitableness which proceeded from that unlucky establishment soon earned for it the title of *Bottled Wasps* by which it was generally known in the social circles of Bristol and Bath’: *BC* (October, 1873), p.6.

² *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, vol.3 (May, 1821), p.252.

³ DRO, H7/7/9, notes, nd; DRO, H7/7/17, copy of a letter to Mrs Friend regarding an enquiry for Cornwallis House as a desirable residence for two ladies, 26th March, 1826; DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Sir Henry Halford physician to the Queen, 1815.

absence of any religious bond, would render it impossible to give stability or happiness to such an association.⁴

Lady Isabella's determination to answer her critics 'with the fervent hope of proving that these reflections on our sex, our country, and our religion are unfounded,' hinged on the selection of a compatible and cohesive group of 'ladies of respectability ... differing in fortune only, but equally Gentlewomen in principles, education and manners' and chosen from the 'higher classes' and the 'higher professions,' particularly daughters of the clergy and officers in the army.⁵ Further, the character of these women, Lady Isabella was adamant, must be such that would suit the retired, improving, benevolent and religious ethos which she believed was essential to the prosperity of such a community.

The rigorous selection procedure which she devised not only indicates her determination to select a suitable group of women, but also that she understood the potential difficulties involved in the process. In a society which was increasingly less rigidly defined, where status could be determined by the indeterminate concepts of politeness and respectability rather than by tangible characteristics of birth, Lady Isabella's task in selecting a homogenous and appropriate group of women proved difficult. Within the social milieu of early nineteenth-century society, the distressed gentlewoman was an increasingly common phenomenon and effected a myriad of forms, yet, with marriage still the dominant force, and further, as a subset of the minority category of single woman, she has suffered a narrow and negative interpretation. In failing to accommodate the complexities of this category, the infinite variety and range of experiences and circumstances are masked.

By focusing on the residents of the Ladies' Association, this chapter will examine the category of the distressed gentlewoman and will offer evidence to corroborate its broad and diverse nature. It will argue that within the category there existed a myriad of women from the modest ranks of the middling-sort to the higher ranks of the aristocracy, whose

⁴ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to the Hon Miss Wodehouse, 14th February, 1818; DRO, H7/7/16, letter to Miss F. regarding an enquiry on behalf of a potential Lady Renter, 1818.

⁵ Ibid, notes regarding the purpose of the Ladies' Association, nd; DRO, H7/7/2, letter to Lady Manvers regarding prospective candidate, Miss Payne, 15th July, 1829; DRO, H7/7/1/8, minutes of guardian committee meeting, 15th April, 1819.

varying circumstances, ages and dispositions required assistance yet encouraged a variety of responses to their situations. It will consequently argue that the disparity in character and circumstances of the residents, combined with an internal hierarchy, played out through a gradation of rank by wealth, contributed to the breakdown in the social system of the Ladies' Association, which in turn contributed to the decline and eventual demise of the institution.

Distressed Gentlewomen

In his *Lectures on Female Education* first written in 1793, John Burton succinctly outlined women's perceived natural evolutionary progression through life: 'to be obedient daughters, faithful wives and prudent mothers [and] to be useful in the affairs of the house ... are, without doubt, the principal objects of female duty.'⁶ His words, which mapped out every woman's journey from cradle to grave, echoed the dominant view of a still fiercely patriarchal society. He further determined that: 'the accomplishments therefore which you should acquire, are those that will contribute to render you serviceable in domestic, and agreeable in social life'.⁷ His didactic prose left no one in doubt that a woman's lot was determined by her male counterpart and her entire life was tailored to this end.

It is overwhelmingly agreed that eighteenth and nineteenth-century society defined itself with reference to the family, the fundamental unit of society in which marriage was central and where the construction of gender roles were carved out by the division of duty responsibility and power. The intrinsic belief that men and women should inhabit distinct social positions within the union of marriage was based on the assumption that they were naturally different. While women had an innate predisposition toward being virtuous, 'naturally' submissive and obedient and whose primary role was procreation, men claimed they were more rational, astute and consequently more suited to a public role. This patriarchal paradigm was, by the end of the eighteenth century, increasingly influenced by

⁶ John Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners*, 2vols, vol.1 (London, 1793), p.111.

⁷ Ibid.

the emerging evangelical ethos and validated by the male instituted ideology of separate spheres.⁸

The natural assumption then was that only by marriage could a woman really fulfil her true destiny. Marriage was a mark of inclusion, of entry into society as a full adult, and further, with a woman's financial security and status depending almost exclusively on her choice of husband, it was a crucial and extremely important decision.⁹ With this in mind, Paul Langford has proposed that marriage was the 'prime social weapon' of the social war, the principal means for a woman to acquire position and property, witnessed in what Bridget Hill has termed 'the pathological pursuit of husbands' and as the eighteenth century progressed education increasingly became tailored to groom young women for the marriage market.¹⁰ Contemporary author and philanthropist Priscilla Wakefield, was one of a number of writers who condemned this fashionable, accomplished education in favour of more traditional educational and occupational opportunities for women, reluctantly acknowledged that 'in every rank an advantageous settlement in marriage is the universal prize.'¹¹ Conduct writers voiced their opinions bluntly, one declared: 'I presume it will not be thought any affront to suppose that the chief aim and leading passion of every young lady in Great Britain is to get herself a good husband.'¹² For most then this role was acknowledged, if reluctantly accepted as Mary Astell, in her critique of marriage and patriarchalism at the

⁸ Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society: The Emergence of Separate Spheres, 1650-1850* (Harlow, 1998), chapter 4; Ingrid H. Tague, 'Love Honor and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Journal of British Studies*, vol.40, 1(January 2001), pp.76-106, A. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), p.17.

⁹ Although marriage provided a secure environment and social acceptability, it deprived a woman of her independence, especially in the eyes of the law. Once married she ceased to exist, her person, property, earnings and children all passed into the absolute control of her husband. Tanya Evans, 'Women, Marriage and the Family', in Hannah Barker & Elaine Chalus, (eds.), *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850, An Introduction* (London & New York, 2005), p.58. An anonymous author writing in 1747 advised men; 'the husband must govern with absolute power', by marriage 'he is put into a better State of Freedom, and is possessed of a wife who deposits in his hands, her Liberty, her Will, her Fortune, her Care, her Obedience, her Life and even her very Soul'. Anonymous, *The Art of Governing a Wife: with Rules for Batchelors to which is Added, an Essay Against Unequal Marriages* (London, 1747), pp.41-44.

¹⁰ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1998), p.112; Bridget Hill, *Eighteenth-Century Women: An Anthology* (London, 1984), p.71; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1990), p.247.

¹¹ Priscilla Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex, with Suggestions for its Improvement* (London, 1798), p.29; Ann B. Shteir, 'Wakefield, Priscilla (1750-1832)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28420>, 10th August, 2007.

¹² Anonymous, *An Essay on Modern Gallantry. Address'd to Men of Honour, Men of Pleasure and Men of Sense: with a Seasonable Admonition to the Young Ladies of Great Britain* (London, 1750), pp.44-45.

beginning of the eighteenth century wryly commented ‘They are for the most part wise enough to love their chains and to discern how becomingly they fit.’¹³

However, although it was clear marriage was crucial to a woman’s identity and expected to be universal, at any one time during this period a third of women were single.¹⁴ Singleness was an inevitable part of all women’s lives, a temporary condition for many but for those who remained single, through choice or otherwise, and who did not have the financial freedom which Lady Isabella enjoyed or the support of a family, life was more problematic. Free from the constraints of marriage and enjoying the same legal rights as men they were ostensibly independent entities, yet their peculiar circumstances saw them far more socially and economically vulnerable.

The distressed gentlewoman has been typically perceived as a product of the middling sort and has consequently been defined as middling, respectable and educated for marriage. Her impoverished circumstances, the consequence of the death or professional ruin of her father or husband, often left her with no support and her only option was reliance on a ‘respectable’ occupation to make ends meet. Often represented in the image of the oppressed governess, vulnerable, timid and retiring, she was a stereotype borne of the prevailing contemporary socio economic conditions; inadequate female education, middle class insecurity, family impoverishment and employment difficulties, and her circumstances highlighted the vulnerability of the middling section of society.¹⁵ Kathryn Leviton’s research on the ‘surplus woman’ problem maintains that it was labelled a middling phenomenon because of the specific challenges that middling women faced in attempting to support themselves under these conditions. For single women left with no income or families to support them, options available were severely limited to occupations such as governess, teacher, or companion, although respectable in theory, and respectability was of paramount

¹³ Mary Astell, *Reflections on Marriage*; 3rd edn to which is Added a Preface in Answer to Some Objections (London, 1706), preface.

¹⁴ Anne Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-1760* (London, 1994), p.241; Christine Adams, ‘A Choice Not to Wed? Unmarried Women in Eighteenth-Century France’, *Journal of Social History*, vol.29, 4(1996), p.883, Froide, *Never Married*, p.3.

¹⁵ See James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen, Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914* (London, 1979), p.23.

importance, such work was commonly assumed to involve numerous humiliating and difficult circumstances.¹⁶ For those struggling with a limited income, the situation was little better. Research confirms that although individual circumstances varied, estimates of minimum income necessary to maintain a lifestyle consistent with the middling orders was fifty to eighty pounds a year, a figure which Harriet Martineau confirmed in an article addressing the peculiar class of distressed gentility, bona fide members of the deserving poor but prevented from applying for charity by their respectable status.¹⁷ A breakdown of expenditure, which she composed as corroborative evidence, provides a stark image of just how frugal the lifestyle of a distressed gentlewoman needed to be to accommodate such a meagre income. She continued: 'She may obtain respectable board and lodging for £30; and by close management, she may make the other £20 serve for dress, washing, postage and stationery; though hardly for medical attention, and certainly not for any sort of travelling, or other recreation that costs money'.¹⁸ While many struggled to make the best of their situation, recent research by historians such as David Green and Alastair Owens has led them to argue that while women's choices were certainly restricted, for women with a limited income, alternative strategies other than employment were available through investment and women were never totally denied access to money-making opportunities.¹⁹

Selecting the Residents

The direction which Lady Isabella took in attempting to create a harmonious and prosperous society for these women was not only determined by those she intended to assist but was also significantly influenced by a determination to silence her most vociferous critics who were unyielding in their belief that a society of English women belonging to the Church of

¹⁶ Kathryn Levitan, 'Redundancy, the 'Surplus Woman' Problem, and the British Census, 1851-1861', *Women's History Review*, vol.17, 3(July, 2008), p.364.

¹⁷ Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (London, 1996), p.14.

¹⁸ Harriet Martineau, 'Associated Homes for Poor Ladies', *The Leader*, vol.1, 30(October, 1850), pp.708-710.

¹⁹ David R. Green & Alastair Owens, 'Gentlewomanly Capitalism? Spinsters, Widows, and Wealth Holding in England and Wales, c.1800-1860', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, vol.56, 3(August, 2003), p. 511.

England could never live together peacefully. The prosperity of her venture, she believed, depended ‘on the *principles* upon which these communities are *regulated*, and the *dispositions* of those persons whom the community consists’.²⁰ The fragility and consequence of the institution’s early reputation demanded that she was specific in her choice of resident, rigorous in her selection procedure and purposeful and unequivocal in formulating the character of the institution. By choosing women of similar status, principles and temperament and ‘uniting them as one family’, in an active and benevolent way, Lady Isabella was convinced success could be achieved.²¹ The first printed prospectus for the institution, circulated in 1815, and headed ‘Plan for improving the situation of Ladies of respectable character and small fortune’ classified the nature of proposed residents as ‘females of respectable families who are, by the death of their parents or by other calamities, much reduced below the station of comfort to which they have been accustomed’.²² Her prospectus places weight on the importance of respectability to any successful application, a concept which was, by the early nineteenth century a marker of middle-class moral worth.

Contemporary notions of respectability, in tandem with the development of the middling ranks, challenged traditional notions of gentility and increasingly became less associated with birth and progressively linked to social standing by actions and reputation. Woodruff Smith asserts that embracing a redefinition of much of the terminology of gentility to correspond to notions of status in the world of respectability opened the doors for almost anyone (lower classes generally excepted) to aspire to the status of Gentleman and Lady, and to esteem themselves members of a social and moral elite.²³ With this in mind Lady Isabella’s reference to respectability in isolation initially suggests her targeted group of women cast a wide net. However, additional information offered in the prospectus defined them further: ‘Bailbrook House ... offers a desirable residence to Ladies of respectability,

²⁰ DRO, H7/7/7/11, notes relating to the purpose of the institution.

²¹ DRO, H7/7/9, printed circular, 1827.

²² *PSLIRC*.

²³ For further discussion see Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (London & New York, 2002), chapter 7.

who by birth and education are placed in the rank of gentlewoman.’²⁴ This second statement clarifies her definition and limits the category further. By grounding gentility in family and inheritance or ‘birth’, and in a ‘liberal education’, Lady Isabella defined the term gentlewoman in more traditional terms.²⁵ Having ascribed a hereditary definition to gentility it is likely then that her use of the term respectability was more a description of good character and moral standing within that group and was her own definition which drew on contemporary thought and personal experience.

Her directive, which listed specifically the ranks from which her intended residents were to be chosen, confirmed this: ‘Instituted at Bailbrook shall be the daughters of deceased persons in the higher professions’, and continued, ‘widows and daughters of Clergymen and of Officers in the Army and Navy, have a decided preference over all other candidates’.²⁶ Writing to Lord Manvers, in 1819, regarding the proposal for the establishment of the orphan school connected to the institution, Lady Isabella further indicated the inclusion of widows and daughters of ‘Merchants and Gentlemen,’ in her classification.²⁷ These families at first glance belonged firmly among the middling sort but financial limitations imposed by primogeniture saw many younger sons of elite families, with little prospect of any substantial inheritance enter the professions in order to earn a living. As officers in the army, members of the Anglican clergy, lawyers, barristers or physicians, they inhabited the higher echelons of their professions and mingled with other professionals of varying social status. Lady Isabella’s letter to Lord Manvers disclosed the often precarious circumstances which befell many of this class regardless of status ‘whose income arising solely from their professions, each loses [sic] their life ... before they have been able to make any provision for their children’.²⁸ These circumstances, peculiar to this class, exposed the vulnerability of women in this rank to financial distress.

²⁴ *PSLIRC*.

²⁵ DRO, H7/7/11, extracts from the book of general regulations, summer, 1831.

²⁶ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anonymous regarding the establishment of the institution, 1814/5; *PSLIRC*.

²⁷ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Lord Manvers, 1819.

²⁸ Ranges in income not just between middling occupations but within occupations, determined a wide range of circumstances and experiences: DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Lord Manvers regarding a proposal for an orphan school, 1819.

Lady Isabella's ambitions focused on two specific sets of circumstances which afflicted single gentlewomen. Addressing potential supporters she singled out 'Such as are well born but not well provided for, the means of living independently upon a very small income ... without ... lessening their consequence or losing their place in the society of their equals'.²⁹ Harriet Martineau's 1850 article, which further engaged with the continuing and peculiar problem, lends verbal support for

the gentlewomen with extremely small incomes, who are scattered through London to the number of very many hundreds, living a comfortless and listless life on means which might secure for them a much brighter existence, if they would but unite their very small funds, and avail themselves of the oeconomy of association.³⁰

The second group which Lady Isabella identified she feared were at real risk. Writing to a potential supporter, she appealed for assistance 'to save from the incident dangers of friendlessness and poverty the orphaned daughters of many an army officer and many a pious minister who possessed nothing to bequeath to his children except his well earned claims on his family's gratitude'.³¹ Justifying her implications she wrote to her sister Dowager Countess of Rosse: 'a gentleman who had some share in the management of one of the London Magdalen Asylums told a friend of mine that a great number of those who sought shelter there were clergymen's daughters'.³² Of course her poignant pleas, based on a second hand account may well have been an emotional or moral appeal, designed to pull at the purse strings. Historians today argue the extent and frequency of such cases. Paul Langford draws attention to the many London prostitutes who claimed to be the respectable daughters of impoverished clergymen as one of the stock jokes of the period, while at the other end of the spectrum Bridget Hill has suggested that with declining employment opportunities in many areas the only means for a woman to exist was by marriage or prostitution.³³ Contemporary views also differed. *The Bath Chronicle*, reporting on destitute women and prostitutes in London concluded that due to lack of employment ninety per cent

²⁹ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to a prospective supporter, 1814/15.

³⁰ Martineau, 'Associated Homes for Poor Ladies', p.710.

³¹ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to a prospective supporter, 1814/15.

³² DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Dowager Countess Rosse, 1813.

³³ Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, p.79; Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850* (New Haven & London, 2001), p.238.

of prostitutes appeared to be from middle class families, while perhaps a more realistic and balanced view was offered by Abraham Booth, Hon Secretary to the Metropolitan Female Asylum.³⁴ Writing to *The Times* in January 1830 regarding the inadequacy of the Magdalen Asylums, he revealed that residents of these institutions were personally selected and only a very small minority of those on the streets were given the opportunity to be admitted:

In order to exhibit the inadequacy of the present institutions for their reception it is only necessary to contrast the numbers of those who are annually admitted, not only with those who are rejected by them, but with the numbers who nightly prowl the streets of this metropolis:- the London Female Penitentiary contains 110, the Magdalen 80 (who are retained in each of these institutions for two years); the Guardian, 48; and the Lock Asylum, 20: total 258. The number of unfortunate females who nightly prowl the streets of the metropolis has been variously estimated; but it probably far exceeds 50,000.³⁵

While there is no evidence to confirm the class of women chosen for admission, this could explain the high frequency of middling women reported as prostitutes.

Circulars for the Ladies' Association, printed in 1827, remind prospective recommenders that the 'admission of a candidate must ever depend on the persuasion of the society that her temper, habits and disposition are such as would render her a desirable companion in the small and select society into which she seeks to be admitted'.³⁶ With the success of the institution uppermost in Lady Isabella's mind, it was imperative, she believed, that residents should possess these qualities. Responding to an enquiry on behalf of a prospective candidate for admission, she insisted: 'good temper and good breeding are I need not add necessary qualifications where people live under the same roof'.³⁷ While a common set of pragmatic personal characteristics was essential, in Lady Isabella's opinion, to creating a harmonious and successful atmosphere, good breeding was also an important requirement to create and maintain an appropriate environment for genteel women to inhabit. Investigations into family and background determined status by birth and in theory confirmed that disposition, habits and manners matched. The family was central to the

³⁴ Leading article on 'search night' in St. Martins Lane London and later committal to prison: *BC* (17th November, 1785).

³⁵ *The Times* (19th January, 1830), p.3.

³⁶ DRO, H7/7/9, circulars, 1827.

³⁷ DRO, H7/7/17, copy of a letter to Mrs Friend regarding an enquiry for Cornwallis House as a desirable residence for two ladies, 26th March, 1826.

discourse of respectability in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, the fundamental structure on which much of the respectable world was supposed to rest and its importance as the educator of moral behaviour and virtue was paramount; respectable people were products of a respectable family.³⁸ Yet respectability could also be a deceptive concept. The increasingly fluid and status conscious nature of the middling orders which permeated the upper ranks of society encouraged an intensely socially competitive society, hungry for recognition in the social arena and the intangible and superficial nature of respectability allowed social pretenders to assume a role which they were perhaps not entitled to own.

Lady Isabella was however, fastidious and disinterested in her choice of resident, demanding no less from recommenders than she expected from herself: 'I have never proposed any Candidates to the society without taking pains first to ascertain the suitability of her character and temper to views of the institution'.³⁹ In order to provide the best chance of successfully nominating fitting candidates, she devised a rigorous selection procedure which, on paper, ensured that unsuitable applicants would be identified and rejected and was based on the recommender's personal in depth knowledge of an applicant's circumstances and family. Of course this relied on the recommender's trustworthiness and a primary concern for the welfare of the institution rather than that of the applicant. Lady Isabella emphasised the importance of personal knowledge to Lady Manvers, and implored: 'Besides the sanction of a Patroness, each recommendation must be signed *by a lady to whom the candidate is personally known and the recommended Lady must be an acquaintance either of some of the resident members or of the Guardian Committee*'.⁴⁰ Qualifying her plea, she warned: 'these cautions are requisite in a society which could not

³⁸ Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, p.210.

³⁹ DRO, H7/7/1/4, hints as to the choice of a Lady President, 1828.

⁴⁰ Writing to a prospective client Lady Isabella explained the vital importance of personal recommendation: 'to ascertain whether the candidate has taken into consideration the *duties* as well as the advantages of an institution of this nature – whether she is actuated by feelings which affect *self-only* or whether sentiments of a social benevolent or religious nature mingle with her views – whether she is likely to view herself as the mere inmate of a lodging house, or to keep in mind that she is an *elected member* of a friendly and united society, with whose motives it is her *duty* to become acquainted, and whose happiness and prosperity she is bound to promote': DRO, H7/7/16, letter to a prospective candidate, 1818.

hold together if disagreement or dislike were to take place among its members'.⁴¹ As a further safeguard, a resolution was passed by the guardian committee which required anyone recommending a potential candidate for admission to sign the following statement:

I have taken every means in my power to ascertain whether the Lady now proposed would be a desirable inmate of the Bailbrook establishment, having reason to believe that her Birth, her education and her character are such as to entice her to admittance into that society.⁴²

Lady Isabella recognised that, paramount to the well-being of the society, was the unanimity of its members and conceded that the ultimate responsibility for nomination of candidates must therefore lay with the residents themselves, a principle which, she confirmed in 1821, when the institution was at its zenith, was 'strictly adhered to' and one 'which will account for the internal concord and good order of the society'.⁴³

Also fundamental to the prosperity of the Ladies' Association, as far as Lady Isabella was concerned, was an ethos which promoted respectability through 'order and goodwill' within the home.⁴⁴ Careful to point out in early communications to prospective supporters that the 'Object of the Association is not ... the mere accommodation of the affluent', but 'incitements to a higher and nobler line of duty,' she laid out clearly in the society's first prospectus her vision for success:

In order to give respectability to *any* social institution, worthier objects should be kept in view than those of convenience only ... We can scarcely expect harmony and happiness to continue where there exists no principle of union beyond that which is produced by the calculation of self-interest. The members of such societies ought therefore to be influenced by a sincere desire of promoting, according to their abilities, the welfare of the establishment and the good order of the neighbouring poor.⁴⁵

⁴¹ DRO, H7/7/1/8, letter to the Dowager Countess Manvers regarding Miss Payne, a prospective candidate, 15th July, 1828.

⁴² By 1818 a printed official form of recommendation was used: DRO, H7/7/13, minutes of guardian committee meeting, 1816.

⁴³ In a letter to Lady Manvers Lady Isabella stressed 'the importance of making personal merit the only recommendation which can ensure admittance'. Indeed she considered it imperative to 'save the institution from becoming a temporary asylum to persons who from discontented mind, unamiable disposition and uncontrollable temper have become a nuisance to other friends and relations'. Qualifying her use of the term temporary, she continued: 'I say a temporary asylum for such persons would soon quarrel and part and so justify the opinion of those who asset that among women of this *Country* and this *Church* no bond of union can exist': DRO, H7/7/16, letter to Dowager Countess Manvers, January, 1819; DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Mary Brotherson in response to an enquiry from a prospective candidate, 1st May, 1821.

⁴⁴ *PSLIRC*.

⁴⁵ This viewpoint is clearly evidenced in *Millenium Hall*; 'an idle mind like fallow ground, is the soil for every weed to grow in; in it vice strengthens, the seed of every vanity flourishes unmolested and luxuriant;

While the institution was undoubtedly intended as a sanctuary for those gentlewomen in distressed circumstances, Lady Isabella was determined that it should only be inhabited by those whose character demonstrated an unselfish and benevolent disposition. Her objectives in this respect which were also vital to the inculcation and maintenance of respectable values and in turn to the encouragement of a happy and cohesive society centred on ‘Mental Improvement, active exertion, benevolent occupations and above [all] religious principles and religious practice’.⁴⁶ Indeed, rules for the information of new members issued in 1831 stated specifically that ‘all....should be distinguished by that Christian deportment and good breeding which are suited to an institution intended exclusively for ladies of religious principles and liberal education.’⁴⁷

In conjunction with an improving benevolent and pious ethos, Lady Isabella was eager that the institution should reflect the family unit, a decision which seems likely that she made to strengthen the bond between the residents. Fundamental to the welfare of the venture was the support of the wider public and by fashioning an environment which conformed to and resembled the ‘normal’ social unit of society, while at the same time distancing it from forms of institutionalised charity, Lady Isabella hoped to court approval. Further, and perhaps most importantly to her, the family as the fundamental structure which oversaw the moral and religious development of its members, once again reinforced respectable values. Offering suggestions to a potential sponsor she advised: ‘If I were to describe the style of character that I think would be most certain of finding happiness in our little society I should say a person of kind and benevolent feelings — fond of home

discontent, malignity, ill humour spread far and wide, and the mind becomes a chaos.’ Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall* (ed.), Gary Kelly (Ontario, New York & Hadleigh, 1999), p.118; DRO, H7/7/3, manuscript first shewn to Lady Liverpool in 1813; DRO, H7/7/10, notes relating to the purpose of the institution, nd; *PSLIRC*.

⁴⁶ DRO, H7/7/1/2, hints for a working and reading association, 1823.

⁴⁷ DRO, H7/7/11, summer, 1830. This ethos was reinforced by the regular and communal nature of meals and prayers. General household rules which all were expected to follow equally centred on regularity at meal times and prayers and stipulated communal attendance: ‘morning prayers at nine o’clock, breakfast immediately after, Dinner at two oclock — Tea at six oclock, Evening prayer about nine’. Rules further stipulated that ‘regular attendance at family prayers and at the hour of meals is expected’: DRO, H7/7/11, household rules and regulations, 1831.

occupations — preferring the society of a domestic circle’.⁴⁸ The creation of a permanent family-like environment, Lady Isabella believed, would also engender a sense of stability ‘where the [residents] may enjoy the comforts of social retirement’, and promote a sense of belonging to a community which residents could refer to for identity: ‘uniting as *one* family the rich and poor, the old and young’ with Lady Isabella as ‘the parent’.⁴⁹ This was an attractive proposition for some single women who, unable to refer to a family of their own, had no other point of reference in a society which determined women’s identity absolutely in terms of the family unit and provided no legitimate space for them.⁵⁰ Radical in her methods as a philanthropist and seeking to carve a valid space for these women in a society where none existed, Lady Isabella’s use of the approved ‘respected’ paradigm as her model demonstrates the importance which she assigned to the maintenance and furtherance of respectability for these women.

The Residents

Information relating to the residents of the Ladies’ Association within the key source is sketchy and imprecise. Official records are either missing or incomplete save one full handwritten list of all residents admitted during the lifetime of the institution.⁵¹ As a result, most information has been retrieved from snippets in letters and notes written by Lady Isabella and expanded and broadened further by information from external printed and manuscript sources. In order for a comprehensive evaluation to be fully effective, evidence concerning the resident women must include details relating to their status and background, circumstances of deprivation and the consequent choices they made. With very little evidence available from personal accounts in the form of letters, diaries or journals for these

⁴⁸ DRO, H7/7/17, copy of a letter to Mrs Friend regarding an enquiry for Cornwallis House as a desirable residence for two ladies, 26th March, 1826.

⁴⁹ DRO, H7/7/13, notes relating to the suitability of candidates, nd; DRO, H7/7/13, letter written to anonymous relating to the decline of the institution, 1832; DRO, H7/7/13, general government of the household, nd.

⁵⁰ A woman who never married had to construct her identity without recourse to such roles as wife and mother: Froide, *Never Married*, p.195; see chapter 1 for further discussion.

⁵¹ This list comprises of surnames with no further information: DRO, H7/7/1/1, list of admitted candidates to Bailbrook House.

women, reliance on circumstantial evidence has precluded any personal perspective.⁵² With this in mind sufficient evidence has been recovered to piece together the circumstances of twenty-five out of a total of fifty-nine (approximately forty-two per cent) of the women who were resident at the Ladies' Association between 1816 and the time of its suspension in 1832.

The resident ladies in the association fall into three well defined categories, all classified as of good birth, education and respectability. The first comprised Lady Renters, older, lone women, either single or widowed, of independent fortune who, by renting apartments, contributed financially to the well-being of those in reduced circumstances. The sample of women recovered for research purposes includes information relating to two Lady Renters, whose circumstances, although not relevant to a comparative evaluation of the distressed gentlewoman, must be considered in any analysis of the dynamics of the group. The second category, and the largest, falls under the heading of Associate Ladies who consisted of single or widowed women in reduced circumstances, whose income amounted to no more than one-hundred pounds a year but was sufficient to pay an annual sum of fifty pounds for board which would entitle them to a small furnished bedroom.⁵³ The last group, introduced in 1819, and termed Endowed or Official members, were classed as 'places of refuge for indigent females', who were 'so far reduced in fortune as to be unable themselves to contribute the regulated sum of fifty pounds yearly towards the joint income of the society'.⁵⁴ Although clearly the financial circumstances of these women differed, they were gentlewomen by birth and Lady Isabella considered them to be 'equally Gentlewomen in principles, education and manners' and as such an analogous and unified group.⁵⁵

The sample of women suitable for analysis includes four Endowed Ladies out of a known four, nineteen Associates out of a known forty-four and eight ladies whose position

⁵² In her will resident Mary Anne Cameron 'particularly request[ed] that all [her] letters may be burnt by[her] executors without either reading them or permitting them to be read': NA, will of Mary Anne Cameron, prob 11/2161, image ref: 132.

⁵³ DRO, H7/7/13, general government of the household, nd.

⁵⁴ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to the Bishop of Salisbury, 28th August, 1829; DRO, H7/7/19, remarks respecting friends of the Ladies' Association, February, 1832.

⁵⁵ DRO, H7/7/11, notes regarding the purpose of the Ladies' Association, nd.

within the institution was unknown, together with the two Lady Renters out of a known three.⁵⁶ Although these figures provide information for all three categories they offer a far more complete picture of Endowed members, generating ostensibly a one hundred per cent return. However, bearing in mind that the numbers involved relate to the lifetime of the institution it is extremely unlikely that there were only four Endowed members overall. It is more likely that several of the unknowns also held endowed situations, as Lady Isabella intimated in remarks respecting friends of the Ladies' Association in 1832: 'At the commencement of this plan friends of the institution united in annual contributions, thus for some years forming a third and fourth endowment. Most of these contributions have fallen off yet still two ladies sometimes three enjoy the comfort of a home free of expense.'⁵⁷ Nevertheless, with the section of women categorised as associates generating only a forty-four per cent return the category of 'Endowed member' is heavily represented. With this in mind it is these two sections which will be used to analyse the nature of Lady Isabella's distressed gentlewomen.⁵⁸ A preliminary and cursory assessment of this group of women confirms that all possessed a number of similarities. All residents included in the sample were gentlewomen by birth and education. They were also all single, their main dependent was deceased, and all were severely compromised financially on entering the institution. Ostensibly this group possessed all the characteristics ascribed to the stereotype of the distressed gentlewoman and in Lady Isabella's opinion were united in all but fortune, and yet their widely differing circumstances offer evidence to dismiss this typical image.⁵⁹

With Bath as the experimental location of the Ladies' Association and the focus of its network of support, and as a city with a dominant female and single population, as has been identified in chapter 3, it would be logical to assume that residents were likely to have been selected locally. Evidence however confirms that residents emanated from or had connexions with a wide variety of locations nationally and internationally. The Ladies

⁵⁶ See appendix 6.

⁵⁷ DRO, H7/7/19, remarks respecting friends of the Ladies' Association, February, 1832.

⁵⁸ For a more complete profile of the residents, see appendix 6.

⁵⁹ DRO, H7/7/11, notes regarding the purpose of the Ladies' Association, nd.

Frances and Janet Erskine's and Jane and Harriet Rainsford's families came from or had family connexions in Scotland as did Martha and Alicia D'Arcy, from county Westmeath, Ireland.⁶⁰ All were substantial family homes. Other residents' family homes spread from Yorkshire in the north of England to Suffolk in the east and Cornwall in the far south and varied in size from a modest parsonage to a castle.⁶¹ Some residents' roots were located closer to Bath. While her husband, Colonel Stevens was still alive, Mrs Stevens and her daughter lived at Discove House near Bruton in Somerset, while Miss Brotherson, previous to her residence at the Ladies' Association, had resided in or near Chippenham in Wiltshire.⁶² Further, several of the residents had connections overseas. Miss Brotherson's family owned a plantation on St Kitts in the Caribbean, Baroness D'Uklanski was the widow of Baron Carl Theodore D'Uklanski of Prussia while Harriet and Jane Rainsford lived on St. Helena with their parents prior to their admission into the Ladies' Association.⁶³ Through their father's family the Rainsford sisters also had extensive family connexions in New Brunswick.⁶⁴ Constance Ingilby, although her family roots were Ripley Castle, North Yorkshire, also had close connections abroad, having spent a large portion of her childhood living in Berne, Switzerland with her father who fled to Europe to escape debtors.⁶⁵

The ages of residents varied from under eighteen, through to the age of fifty-two on entry.⁶⁶ The preliminary prospectus for the institution stated that 'there is no limitation as to age, for it is hoped that these establishments may be at once a protection for the young and a peaceful retirement in declining years'.⁶⁷ Of the twenty-three known associates and endowed members, information relating to their siblings is available for fourteen ladies who came

⁶⁰ National Library of Ireland, D'Arcy of Hyde Park Papers, MS 42,022-42,023 & MS44, 510-44,583.

⁶¹ Constance Ingilby's family home was Ripley Castle, Yorkshire, Louisa Smear came from Frostenden, Suffolk, while Jayne Louisa Willyams' family home was at Carnanton, near St. Columb, Cornwall.

⁶² *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.101 (December, 1831), p.44; DRO, H7/7/20, letter from Miss Brotherson, 1835; Rev'd John J. Daniell, *The History of Chippenham* (London, 1894).

⁶³ NA, will of Lewis Brotherson, prob 11/1100, image ref: 91; William Bingley *Travels in North Europe: from Modern Writers, with Remarks and Observations* (London, 1822), pp.161-171; William V. Hannay, *Genealogy of the Hannay Family* (Albany, New York, 1913).

⁶⁴ University of New Brunswick, Loyalist Collection, Rainsford Family Papers, 1766-1854, MIC- Loyalist FC LFR. R3F3P3.

⁶⁵ West Yorkshire Archives, Ingilby Records, WYL230/ACC2662/17.

⁶⁶ Of the sample of twenty-three women, approximate ages of seventeen are known; eleven were under thirty, two were between thirty and forty and four were over the age of forty; see appendix 6.

⁶⁷ *PSLIRC*.

from nine families.⁶⁸ The number of siblings per family ranged from three to eleven, averaging out at seven children per family and there was no evidence that any particular rank had a tendency towards more or less children per family. In all but one there were more daughters than sons and a high proportion of those women were unmarried. Out of a total of thirty-eight daughters (average of four per family), only sixteen, less than half, were married at the time the residents entered the institution.⁶⁹ Many in the institution were also members of the same family.⁷⁰ The Ladies Erskine and the Rainsford, D'Arcy and Sampler sisters were all pairs from the same families while the Zouche sisters were three of a kind and the Stevens' and the Harpers' were widows and daughters. Further, Mary Poulett Stevens, the daughter of Mrs Stevens was the youngest and only daughter who entered the institution with her.⁷¹ In line with contemporary historical argument, the general trend was that those who became residents of the Ladies' Association tended to be younger daughters; only Harriet and Jane Rainsford were the elder siblings. In her study of the Victorian governess, Kathryn Hughes has argued that it was common in large families for the youngest daughter to remain single in order to care for their ageing parents while Richard Wall's research into the age at which women left their natal home argues that although younger children were more likely to stay at home than first born, he disputes proposals that any particular child was chosen.⁷²

It is impossible to determine from these figures the number of lifelong single women since there was always the possibility of marriage, however, it is a commonly held

⁶⁸ See appendix 7.

⁶⁹ This conforms with Amy Froide's estimation that at any one time at least a third of all women were single, while Alison Duncan, concentrating on gentry families in Scotland, asserts that it was not unusual for daughters in large families to remain single. Froide, *Never Married*, p.3; Alison Duncan, 'Power of the Old Maid: The Never-Married Gentlewoman in her Family, 1740-1835', *Women's History Magazine* 63(summer, 2010), p.11. See also chapter 1.

⁷⁰ Amy Froide has suggested that singlewomen ran in families and single sisters often came in pairs or multiples, often enjoying close emotional and companionate relationships by living with each other, while Amanda Vickery's research has uncovered living arrangements between widows and their daughters and 'braces of sisters' as a common feature. Froide, *Never Married*, p.55; Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors; At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven & London, 2009), p.211.

⁷¹ *New Monthly Magazine*, (January, 1832), p.44.

⁷² Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (London, 1993), p.117; Richard Wall, 'The Age of Leaving Home', *Journal of Family History*, vol.3, 2(summer, 1978), p.198.

assumption that the chance of marrying declined with age.⁷³ Notwithstanding this, records provide evidence that at least two of the older residents did marry.⁷⁴ From the known sample, four women were widows. Typically characterised as older women, who would potentially have viewed the Ladies' Association as a permanent abode, only Mrs Halknett, widow of Lt Col John Lindesay and mother of Sir Patrick, 8th Earl Lindesay, remained at the institution until its suspension in 1832.⁷⁵ Of the other three widows, Mrs Harper, wife of Bishop Harper accepted an invitation from Queen Charlotte to become governess to the illegitimate daughters of the Duke of Clarence, and left the institution in 1818, after only a short stay, Baroness D'Uklanski, wife of Prussian nobleman, Baron Karl Theodore D'Uklanski who was widowed at the age of eighteen after only two years of marriage left the institution before 1825, and Mrs Stevens died at Cornwallis House in 1826.⁷⁶

Wide ranging circumstances are evident in the make-up of the residents whose status ranged from daughters of the parochial clergy to the ranks of the aristocracy and who emanated not just from all corners of Great Britain but had connexions worldwide. At the top end of the scale were Ladies Frances and Janet Erskine, daughters of John Thomas Erskine, 25th Earl of Mar. Although their residence at the Ladies' Association lasted for only eighteen months, Lady Isabella saw them as 'a welcome addition to the society', the perfect residents for who the 'establishment is a perfectly suitable home'.⁷⁷ Emanating from the highest ranks of the nobility, they were joined by Constance Ingilby whose family also inhabited the ranks of the elite. She was the daughter of Sir John Ingilby Bart of Ripley Castle in Yorkshire, an ancient family whose financial circumstances were bolstered by his marriage to Elizabeth Amcotts, heiress of Sir Wharton Amcotts, Bart of Kettlethorpe,

⁷³ Olwen Hufton, 'Women without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Family History*, vol.9, 4(winter, 1984), p.357.

⁷⁴ Susan Sharrer and Martha D'Arcy were both married for the first time to widowers Rev'd C.F. Reichel and Fleming Handy; Miss Sharrer was in her forties while Miss D'Arcy was fifty-two. Joseph J. Howard, *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica* (London, 1874), p.277; John Burke, *Burke's Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry*, 2vols, vol.1 (London, 1847), p.307.

⁷⁵ *Annual Register*, (January, 1788), p.212; Peter B. Dewar, *Burke's Landed Gentry of Great Britain: Together with Members of the Titled* (Wilmington, Delaware, 2001), p.67.

⁷⁶ Richard E.M. Peach, *Historic Houses of Bath and their Associations*, 2vols, vol.2 (London & Bath, 1884), p.2; Posthumous Work of Baron D'Uklanski, *New Monthly Magazine*, vol.5 (July, 1816), p.504; NA, will of Mrs Stevens, prob 11/1712, image ref: 765, proved 2nd May, 1826.

⁷⁷ DRO, H7/7/1/8, letter to Earl Manvers respecting a new candidate, 25th June, 1829.

Lincolnshire.⁷⁸ The gentry were represented by Martha and Alicia D’Arcy, sisters, whose father was James D’Arcy of Hyde Park County Westmeath, and by Jane Louisa Willyams the daughter of James Willyams of Carnanton in Cornwall; both men were extensive landowners.⁷⁹ At the other end of the scale, residents included Mary Anne Cameron, the daughter of Charles Cameron, M.D. of Worcester and Susan Sharrer and Louisa Smear, daughters of parochial clergymen. The Reverend John Sharrer, son of John Sharrer a Silk Merchant and Gentleman from Whitechapel in London was Vicar of Canwick in Lincolnshire and was appointed to the benefice by its Patrons, the Mercers Company of London, surely a connection with his father, while the Reverend Christopher Smear held the office of Rector of Frostenden in Suffolk, just one of a long line of family appointments to benefices in the diocese of Norwich from 1670 onwards.⁸⁰

The increasingly vague boundaries between the middling and to a lesser degree upper ranks, exacerbated by a society in which opportunities for marriage beyond immediate social boundaries were becoming more and more acceptable and frequent, was also noticeable amongst the residents of the Ladies’ Association. The marriage of Frances Sharrer to Charles Proby, saw Susan, her sister, achieve a family connection with Lady Carysfort, a Patroness of the Ladies’ Association, subtle perhaps but important in a society so defined by its status and connexions.⁸¹ Other residents also demonstrate the increasingly foggy definition of class boundaries and possibilities in terms of connexions. The Zouche sisters, Frances, Elizabeth and Augusta, whose father was appointed as first clerk to the Treasury in Ireland in 1794, were also seemingly grounded amongst the higher echelons of

⁷⁸ John Debrett, *Debrett’s Baronetage of England: Containing their Descent and Present State*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1815), pp.866, 1023.

⁷⁹ National Library of Ireland, D’Arcy of Hyde Park Papers, MS 42,022-42,023 & MS44,510-44,583; Sir Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1863), p.1675.

⁸⁰ John Sharrer, gentleman of Whitechapel owned a silk throwing business employing 1500 hands in mills in London, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Cheshire. It is likely that his connection with the Mercer’s Company (patrons of the benefice) prompted the appointment of his son to the living at Canwick: www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/index.jsp, 15th September, 2009; H. Symonds, ‘The Silk Throwing Industry in Wessex’, *Dorset History*, vol.37 (Dorchester, 1916), pp.67-93; *House of Commons Journals*, December, 1765; J. Venn, E.S. Roberts & E.J. Gross, *Biographical History of Gonville and Caius College, 1349-1897* (Cambridge, 1898), p.76; www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/index.jsp, 15th September, 2009.

⁸¹ Charles James Proby was a member of a junior branch of the Proby dynasty and first cousin to Lord Carysfort.

the middling sort, and yet were the cousins of Lord Lonsdale by the marriage of their aunt to Sir William Lowther, while resident, Baroness D'Uklanski, nee Miss Emma Eyre, married Prussian nobleman Baron D'Uklanski in 1814 after his arrival in England having fled Europe and Napoleon's army.⁸²

The residents not only exhibited evidence of upward mobility but several were the victims of a downward shift too. Residents Harriet and Jane Rainsford were separated from their elite roots by the marriage of their mother Jane Hannay, daughter of Sir Samuel Hannay of Kirkdale, to Thomas Rainsford.⁸³ A captain in the British army, he was the eldest of the fifteen children of Andrew Rainsford, an officer in the British Army who emigrated to America in 1773.⁸⁴ Jane's decision to marry a man deemed beneath her and her consequent elopement resulted in rejection by her family and a redefinition of familial status. Mary Brotherson's family suffered a similar experience. Her father, Benjamin Markham Brotherson was disinherited by his father, wealthy plantation owner Lewis Brotherson, of St Kitts, for marrying Anne Verchild, daughter of James, governor of the island.⁸⁵ The change in circumstances affected the entirety of Miss Brotherson's life.

Recent research argues for the affective nature of elite families. Ruth Larsen asserts that because of the affectionate nature of elite family life, single women often had the continued support of their relations, further emphasising that the most practical way in which they could support their unmarried kin was to invite them into their homes, which she describes as a reciprocal 'alliance of unmarried siblings'.⁸⁶ Alison Duncan believes that the frequency of singleness among the elite saw 'gentry families concentrate their resources' in order to support them, while the single women themselves fulfilled a variety of family roles

⁸² *Freemasons' Magazine; or, General and Complete Library*, vol.2, (1794), p.475; John Debrett, *The Peerage of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2vols, vol.1 (London, 1816), p.337; Posthumous Work of Baron D'Uklanski, *New Monthly Magazine*, July, 1816, p.504.

⁸³ Hannay, *Genealogy of the Hannay Family*.

⁸⁴ British grant awarded to Andrew Rainsford; '1250 acres on the Mississippi River adjacent to tract surveyed for Johnathan Ogden', 12th May, 1773, Mississippi Department of Archaeology and History, *Journal of Mississippi History*, (1966), p.153. Andrew Rainsford, *Ensign, A List of the General and Field Offices as they Rank in the Army*, Army list 1756, p.39.

⁸⁵ Anne Verchild was the daughter of James, Governor of the Island of St Kitts: J. Baker, *The Diary of John Baker, Barrister of the Middle Temple, Solicitor-General of the Leeward Islands*, Transcribed and edited by Philip C. Yorke (London, 1931), p.105; NA, will of Lewis Brotherson, prob 11/1100, image ref: 91.

⁸⁶ Ruth Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune: Elite Singlewomen's Experiences in Yorkshire, 1730-1860,' *Women's History Review*, vol.16, 3(July, 2007), p.392.

in return.⁸⁷ Although close relationships with female relations were the most important and prevalent, ties which are evident in the make-up of the residents, Froide points to the abundant evidence of close relationships with male siblings as well, which she maintains was characterised more by material assistance than emotional.⁸⁸ Resident Mary-Anne Cameron, who had six brothers, left the bulk of her estate to her younger brother Donald, perhaps voicing materially her understanding of his subordinate position within the family, while a letter written between Martha D'Arcy's nephews in 1849, discusses who should take responsibility for their 'poor aunt Martha', who only had ten pounds a year to live on instead of twenty pounds.⁸⁹ Evidence also shows that brothers often provided a home for their sisters while they were still single but once married circumstances often changed.⁹⁰ On the death of their father in 1803, Martha and Alicia D'Arcy remained in the family home with their recently widowed brother John.⁹¹ However, records confirm that on his remarriage in 1817, both girls applied to the Ladies' Association to become associate members. There is no documentary evidence to explain their decision but it seems likely that either the sisters or the brother prioritised marriage and immediate family over sibling ties.

Conversely, Lady Isabella was certain that many women were not provided for. Responding to Lady Wilton's view that 'unpositioned young women are taken care of by their relations,' she responded from experience:

I could answer by relating numberless melancholy instances to the contrary which have come even within my own observation ... [It] is a fact that I believe because in many instances I have actually *known* it to be the case that individuals rolling in wealth [forget] so often refuse to assist their poor relations. But suppose that such sad want of principle did never exist [there are] many families amongst the poorer gentry [who] are *unable* to provide for the orphan children of their relations.⁹²

Her anger is apparent in the alteration in her letter. Replacing the word forget with refuse is a clear indication of blame. Further, Ruth Larsen points to the vulnerability of single women

⁸⁷ Duncan, 'Power of the Old Maid', p.11.

⁸⁸ Froide, *Never Married*, p.60.

⁸⁹ NA, will of Mary-Anne Cameron, prob/11/2161, image ref: 132, proved 27th November, 1852; letter from Joshua D'Arcy Sirt to his cousin James Norman D'Arcy, June, 1849, National Library of Ireland, D'Arcy of Hyde Park Papers, Collection List No. 132, MS44, 580/5.

⁹⁰ Froide, *Never Married*, pp.62-63.

⁹¹ National Library of Ireland, D'Arcy of Hyde Park Papers, MS44,549/1.

⁹² DRO, H7/7/15, letter to Lady Wilton in reply to her response to the initial unveiling of the scheme in 1813.

within the family who relied on the senior male family members who held the purse strings and so were subject to the vagaries of their family's fortune.⁹³ Ladies Frances and Janet Erskine experienced such circumstances. The death of their father at the hands of an opium addiction saw the family's financial circumstances extremely compromised. Their brother, John inherited huge debts which led to a family dispute over ill afforded provisions of £10,000 which had been made by the late earl for each of his daughters. A legal case ensued but was eventually dismissed and both daughters received their settlements.⁹⁴ It seems likely however that the dispute caused a family rift; with no more than a yearly income of £120, the Ladies joined the institution as associate members shortly after their father's death in 1828, suggesting a refusal or inability by their brother to support them. Constance Ingilby's family suffered similarly. With the family fortune all but lost by her father, financial security was provided for Constance and her six sisters through the provision of a £4,000 dowry each, bequeathed by maternal grand-father, Wharton Amcotts in his will.⁹⁵ These circumstances, although temporary for some, provide evidence to demonstrate the wide range of women who were affected by genteel distress in myriad ways, a confirmation of the often precarious existence women experienced at the mercy of male family members or by the choices made by previous generations.

Endowed members suffered equally and although for some their experience was more consistent with the middle class phenomenon of the distressed gentlewoman, for others it varied. Susan Sharrer, the daughter of John, vicar of Canwick in Lincolnshire, a small community of two hundred and fourteen parishioners, was perhaps one of the more typical. Her father's living, valued in The King's Books at £5.8s 6d, was small, and provided little opportunity for anything but the provision of 'daily bread'.⁹⁶ A member of a family of at least four children, with a small income, and by the age of thirty, no prospect of a husband,

⁹³ Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune', p.392.

⁹⁴ J.W. Dickson, W.H. Dunbar et al (Advocates), *The Scottish Jurist*, vol.4, (1832), pp.385-389; J. Wilson & P. Shaw, (Advocates), *Cases Decided in the House of Lords: on Appeal from the Courts of Scotland*, vol.5, (Edinburgh, 1835), pp.611-615; L. Foxcroft, *The Making of Addiction: the Use and Abuse of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2007), pp.83-86.

⁹⁵ NA, will of Wharton Amcotts, prob 11/1468, image ref 38.

⁹⁶ James Bell, *A New and Comprehensive Gazetteer of England and Wales* (Edinburgh & Glasgow, 1836), p.405; *The Ecclesiastical and University Annual Register* (1809), p.569.

the inevitability of her situation was apparent. On the death of her father in 1818, the living and vicarage was taken over by her brother, John, and it is likely that her arrival at the Ladies' Association coincided with these events.⁹⁷ As an endowed member, Miss Sharrer's income would have been sufficient to provide for clothing but 'so far reduc'd ... as to be unable ... to contribute to the regulated sum of fifty pounds yearly towards the joint income of the society.'⁹⁸ For Harriet and Jane Rainsford, also endowed members, their circumstances were wholly different. Not only did their parents' decision to marry separate them from their elite roots, but the financial stability which came with those roots was undermined by their maternal grand-father, Sir Samuel Hannay, who not only squandered the family fortune but also amassed debts of almost £200,000.⁹⁹ On the death of both parents, within a few months of each other, at St Helena, the sisters joined the Ladies' Association as endowed members, 'totally destitute of fortune'.¹⁰⁰

For Jane Willyams it was a matter of choice to become a member of the Ladies' Association. On the death of her father, in 1828, and at the age of forty-three probably settled as a spinster, authoress Jane sought to 'obtain society without dissipation and a union of sentiment and operation in promoting those great ends of the Christian life'.¹⁰¹ Living with friends, she confirmed her intention to join as an associate member and bring with her 'furniture and plate to which the provident care of my father bequeathed me'.¹⁰²

For most who became residents, however, their circumstances were the result of the actions and choices of other family members, [not always male] and demonstrate through their dependence, vulnerability, and powerlessness, the lack of control they had over their lives. In 1865, a reviewer of Bessie Rayner Parkes book *Essays on Woman's Work*, first

⁹⁷ www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/persons/index.jsp, 15th September, 2009,

⁹⁸ DRO, H7/7/19, February, 1832.

⁹⁹ Hannay, *Genealogy of the Hannay Family*.

¹⁰⁰ Captain Thomas Rainsford accepted the office of Commissary General of Police to guard Napoleon at St. Helena in early 1816. Arnold Chaplin, *A St. Helena Who's Who: or a Directory of the Island During the Captivity of Napoleon* (London, 1919), p.117; Barclay Mounteney, *A Historical Enquiry into the Principal Circumstances and Events Relative to the Last Emperor Napoleon* (London, 1824), p.340; DRO, H7/7/17, notes regarding endowed situations, 1819.

¹⁰¹ Sir Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1863), p.1675; DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Miss Willyams prior to her joining the Ladies' Association, 16th December, 1828.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

published in the same year, remonstrated in support: ‘in every rank of life women are exposed to peculiar misery from events over which they have no control’.¹⁰³ And yet their individual decisions to join the Ladies’ Association act as expressions of choice, of human agency.

The wide range of circumstances demonstrated by these women affected the choices they made regarding their ultimate future. The requirement for all centred on security, whether that was in the shape of a female communal environment such as the Ladies’ Association could offer, or by finding a husband, returning to a supportive family or through personal independence. By far the largest proportion of residents married. Of the known residents, ten, a figure of almost half, chose marriage as their future, perhaps not unexpected in a society who placed such a high value on marriage. Younger members were more likely to marry; eight of the ten women who married were under thirty. The remaining two were Susan Sharrer, who married after the closure of the institution and Martha D’Arcy, who married widower, Fleming Handy, at the age of fifty-two.¹⁰⁴ Despite compromised circumstances most achieved respectable matches to members of the gentry and professions; surgeons, physicians and clergymen. Several however, experienced hardship. Elizabeth Zouche, married clergyman Edward Martin of Knightsbridge Chapel who fell ill and, unable to work, suffered the loss of his income.¹⁰⁵ Writing to Lady Isabella in 1836, Mary Brotherson lamented her wretched circumstances: ‘she has five children — with nothing for their maintenance but a very small allowance from a friend far advanced in life.’¹⁰⁶ Another resident, Charlotte Sheppard, also suffered hardship. Her husband George Fitzmaurice, retired injured from the Army Medical service, was by 1859 listed as a bankrupt, and lodging house keeper in the *Solicitors Journal and Reporter*.¹⁰⁷ Approximately half of those

¹⁰³ *Westminster Review*, vol.27 (October, 1865), p.48; Bessie Rayner Parkes, ‘Educated Destitution’, in Bessie Rayner Parkes, *Essays on Woman’s Work*, (London, 1865), pp.76-83.

¹⁰⁴ DRO, H/7/13, copy of Mr Duncan’s suggestions respecting the sale of Cornwallis House and the disposal of the funds of the institution, 26th May, 1835; Howard, *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, p.277.

¹⁰⁵ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 214 (April, 1863), p.528.

¹⁰⁶ DRO, H/7/20, letter from Miss Brotherson, 25th January, 1836.

¹⁰⁷ Dr Fitzmaurice was listed as a lodging housekeeper at 97, Gloucester Place, Portman Square, Middlesex. It was common for the male householder to be listed but it was likely that Charlotte, his wife, ran the boarding house. *The Solicitors Journal and Reporter*, vol.3, (1858-1859), p.318.

that married left the institution after only a relatively short stay. Harriet Rainsford married Mr Hurst in November 1820, after a stay of only a year, Charlotte Shepherd married in 1830 after joining the Ladies' Association in 1828 while elite residents Frances and Janet Erskine and Constance Ingilby, whose hefty marriage portions made them attractive prospects in the marriage market, left after a year or so.¹⁰⁸ There could be little sense of permanent distress or permanent singleness for these women who, once married would regain their financial and social status.

Of the fifteen ladies that remained single, only five were under the age of thirty-five. Although there is no evidence to confirm the path which Baroness D'Uklanski took once she left the institution it seems likely, having been widowed at the age of eighteen that she remarried. Jane Rainsford and Miss Browne were both invalids. Viewed as an impediment to marriage, a 'comfortable arrangement was made for [Miss Browne] at Swansea' who 'struggled with ... [a] painful disease' while Jane Rainsford was accepted back into her extended family to be cared for.¹⁰⁹ Writing to Lady Isabella in 1827 she said of her condition: 'for the last twenty months [I] have been a great sufferer and for more than a year [I] have been constantly confined to bed ... I have very little hope of ever walking again'.¹¹⁰ Frances Zouche, still in her twenties died at Cornwallis House in 1825, while Mary Anne Cameron left the institution sometime between June 1828 and 1830.¹¹¹ Although there is no information relating to her after this date, she may have been living in Dover or Margate.¹¹² Of those older members that did not marry, some ladies chose to make the Ladies' Association their home, residing at the institution on a permanent basis. Mary Brotherson remained at Cornwallis House after its suspension in 1832 and oversaw the sale of the house

¹⁰⁸ *Bristol Mercury* (27th November, 1820); *Jackson's Oxford Journal* (2nd December, 1820); Weymouth and Melcombe Regis St Mary's marriages, 1821-1830, <http://www.opcdorset.org/WeymouthMelcombeFiles/MelcombeSM-Mars1821-1830.htm>, 10th June, 2010; Edmund Lodge, *The Peerage of the British Empire as at Present Existing: Arranged and Printed from the Personal Communications of the Nobility* (London, 1834), p.306; *The Ladies' Magazine*, vol.1 (November & December, 1830), p.290; *The Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.148, (October, 1830), p.365; *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.89 (August, 1819), p.178.

¹⁰⁹ DRO, H7/7/17, letter to Mrs Bowdler, nd.

¹¹⁰ DRO, H7/7/21, letter from Jane Rainsford with news of her circumstances, 15th October, 1827.

¹¹¹ NA, will of Frances Zouche, prob11/1704, image ref: 71; *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol.45 (August, 1825), p.190.

¹¹² Witnesses to her will signed themselves as resident at Dover and Margate. NA, will of Mary-Anne Cameron, prob/11/2161, image ref: 132, proved 27th November, 1852.

and its contents. As Lady Isabella's personal assistant she was perhaps the most committed member and viewed the house as her home and the other residents as her family, keeping in touch with many after they left. As an endowed lady who worked hard for the good of the society, Susan Sharrer was also a committed member and 'was by the suspension of the institution in 1832 deprived of the home in which she had hoped to spend her life'.¹¹³ Widow Mrs Halknett would also have liked to remain at the institution as a resident while Mary Bowles and Mary Calvert, both Lady Renters were also committed members, who both died at Cornwallis House along with widow, Mary Stevens. The remaining residents, Mrs Harper and Miss Hislop-Wood, chose to leave the institution and take up posts as governesses, while Miss Willyams 'disappointment at not finding the society composed of consistent and self-denying Christians', saw her return to her friends and make her own way as an authoress.¹¹⁴

Discordant Relationships

Essential features, which create a unified social group, hinge on similarity among its members. A commonality in circumstances, opinions, beliefs, and goals and engagement in similar behaviours creating a shared social identity are crucial to the prosperity of a successful community, characteristics which are manifested in stability in membership, high and committed levels of participation, interaction and interdependence within the group and resistance to disruption and conflict; feelings of responsibility in group outcomes. A group is only cohesive to the extent that the group members feel they are a part of it and want to remain in it.¹¹⁵ Charles Stangor, investigating social groups, has concluded that groups in which members have similar ideas regarding goals and the means of attaining them have been found to be happier and more satisfied.¹¹⁶ Qian Ma has argued that this concept was understood by Sarah Scott. She asserts that 'the friendship among women is one of the most

¹¹³ DRO, H7/7/13, 26th May, 1835.

¹¹⁴ Peach, *Historic Houses of Bath*, p.2; DRO, H7/7/20, letter from Ann Hislop-Wood, 31st August, 1835; DRO, H7/7/18, letter to Miss Willyams, 15th February, 1830.

¹¹⁵ Charles Stangor, *Social Groups in Action and Interaction* (New York & Hove, 2004), p.17.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

important themes in the novel ... the very ideal of *Millennium Hall* is based on the loving bonds of its lady members.’¹¹⁷

And yet it has become clear that the residents of the Ladies’ Association, although possessing the common characteristics of gentlewomen in reduced circumstances, differed widely in other respects. Differing in age, single status and rank, in financial and family circumstances and geographically, they were brought together under the umbrella of the Ladies’ Association and its group culture, to share a common identity based on singleness and genteel distress. With this in mind it would be naive to assume that all viewed and approached membership in the same way. Their diverse characteristics and circumstances were contributory to and impacted on individual decision making, creating divergent goals and expectations which, in turn, informed relationships with the institution and with fellow members in terms of loyalty and commitment, contributing significantly to complicating the structure and internal dynamics of the institution.

Although indications from circumstantial evidence suggests that for the majority, the decision to join the Ladies’ Association was based on limited options, a choice precipitated by the death of a father or husband and one made out of necessity, there is little evidence to confirm this decision making process. Of the twenty-five known residents it is likely that it was a pro-active choice for only several of the older residents, as well as the Lady Renters, and for those few the Ladies’ Association was the ideal and permanent solution to their circumstances.¹¹⁸ These women embraced the concept of female communal living and committed themselves as members of a supportive community which offered a comfortable, respectable and secure home with other women suffering similar financial constraints. However, for others the idea of allying themselves completely with such a scheme was likely to have been a concern. The prospect of a ‘comfortless and listless’ life may have been daunting but, it still entertained a modicum of independence and everyone preferred to live

¹¹⁷ Qian Ma, *Feminist Utopian Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Chinese and English Fiction: A Cross Cultural Comparison* (Aldershot & Burlington, 2004), p.108.

¹¹⁸ Letters written by Miss Brotherson to Lady Isabella between 1835 and 1836 provide evidence which suggests that Miss Brotherson saw the Ladies’ Association as her family, continuing correspondence with former residents, while remaining at Cornwallis House until it was sold in 1836: DRO, H7/7/20; DRO, H7/7/21.

in a space which they could call their own. Indeed, although Lady Isabella was conscious to place the institution on a footing conducive to the respectable status the residents deserved, 'to secure them a creditable home- good society and respectable friends without wounding their feelings by proposing to assist them as one would assist paupers', the set-up could, and indeed was perceived by some as evocative of forms of institutionalised charity.¹¹⁹ With this in mind Frank Prochaska advocates that for the indigent genteel it was a humiliating experience to find themselves dependent on 'charity'. Often made to feel in need of moral reformation in the climate of evangelical social improvement it was a difficult adjustment for them to acquiesce to institutional authority. Labelling it a subtle form of social subordination he suggests they must have felt something of the stigma associated with the poor in receipt of charity.¹²⁰

Lady Isabella's carefully considered plan, although conservatively designed to maintain respectability and to court acceptance, necessarily demanded active commitment and loyalty to other residents and to the prosperity and well being of the institution. However, any decision to align oneself with a community that could be conceived not only as institutional but also as female, and consequently generally still unacceptable amidst an emphatically patriarchal society, would have not only required embracing an unconventional and institutional regime but also required mustering the commitment and resolve to combat the prejudice and discrimination prevalent amid the general hostility towards such institutions; it was a decision which would have been significant and burdensome for some. Social judgement differentiates and labels human variations as a means to identify and control deviancy. Labels applied by the majority can activate knowledge about minority group members and the creation of a physically separate female environment with which residents were identified, not only emphasised a disconnection from society but also promoted the sense of 'otherness' attributed to minority groups. Admittance to the Ladies' Association then not only confirmed those labels but also made public (especially with the

¹¹⁹ DRO, H7/7/13, notes relating to the establishment of institution, c.1814.

¹²⁰ Frank K. Prochaska, 'Philanthropy', in F.M.L. Thompson, (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1770-1950*, 3vols, vol.3, Social Agencies and Institutions (Cambridge, 1990), pp.377-378.

use of more overt signifiers of association such as uniforms) previously concealed personal circumstances.¹²¹ Indeed, within the locality of Bath itself the gossips were hard at work. In a letter to Lady Willoughby at the end of the first year of the Ladies' Association, Lady Isabella advised of:

the extreme impertinence to which my residence here has subjected me from the Bath Gossips, owing to the light in which the institution at first stood,- and if I were *not* here all that impertinence would have been still more insupportable to the other ladies.— They would not have stayed.¹²²

There is no further information to confirm who the 'gossips' were or evidence to confirm the initial perception of the Ladies' Association in Bath, however, Fanny Burney, while visiting in 1780 confirmed the gossiping nature of the town: 'Bath is as tittle-tattle a town as Lynn; and people make as many reports and spread as many idle nothings abroad, as in any common little town in the kingdom'.¹²³

In the climate of early nineteenth-century England then, residents understood that by aligning themselves with the institution and what it stood for, reputations in the wider community were at risk, and further, with acceptability, respectability and conformity to society's norms in the form of marriage still paramount to most, participation and engagement with society in the conventional manner was vital and evidenced in the number of residents who married. Harriet Martineau, in defence of institutions for single women in reduced circumstances confirmed this view by those most critical of such schemes: 'For fifteen years I have been talking of such a scheme of life as worthy of trial, and listeners have shaken their heads, and said ... that they would not have courage so to pronounce upon themselves as single women or widows.'¹²⁴

In this context some viewed the Ladies' Association not as a permanent residence but simply as a steppingstone to a future position or a safe haven; a base for introduction into society or a home in between homes, filling a gap until they could take their place in a

¹²¹ See chapter 2, p.109.

¹²² DRO, H7/7/15, letter to Lady Willoughby, 1st October, 1816.

¹²³ Fanny Burney, *Diary and Letters of Fanny Burney*, 7vols, vol.1, (ed.), her niece (Charlotte Barrett) (London, 1854), p.197.

¹²⁴ Martineau, 'Associated Homes for Poor Ladies', p.710.

society whose members were ‘each a link of one great chain’.¹²⁵ Indeed, the original prospectus distributed in 1814/5 which described the association simply as ‘a desirable residence [for] Ladies of respectability, who by birth and education are placed in the rank of gentlewoman’, contributed to a prevailing confusion as to its purpose.¹²⁶ Although precise regarding the class of person the society wished to attract, its vagueness regarding the institution’s character led many to believe it was ‘a desirable residence’ simply for as long as was required. The contradiction between this understanding of the Ladies’ Association as a temporary residence and Lady Isabella’s vision of permanence and retirement created tension and, significantly, fed critics’ arguments. As far as Lady Isabella was concerned, permanence fostered stability and a sense of community, encouraging a specific group identity, one which she was determined to cultivate by ‘promot[ing] sisterly union amongst all future associates’; perhaps most importantly though, it was the recipe for success.¹²⁷ Her strength of conviction was evident in her deliberations regarding suitable residents:

The institution does not seem adapted to persons anxious to designs of engaging in active life and pushing their way in society. The objects they have in view may be better attained elsewhere ... those requiring a permanent home and social retirements should be the persons selected and preferred rather than such as want a temporary lodging or are seeking an advantageous settlement [by marriage].¹²⁸

This tension was further fuelled by Lady Isabella’s wish that the association should also attract women who preferred ‘the comforts of social retirement’ and was compounded by the misunderstanding on the part of some at the outset that The Ladies’ Association was simply a base from which single ladies could be introduced into Bath society.¹²⁹ Writing to Lady Olivia Sparrow in 1820, Lady Isabella confirmed that ‘considerable difficulties attended the commencement of the undertaking and there was at first some fluctuation in the society owing to the mistaken expectation of those who sought admittance surely with a view to

¹²⁵ *The Rich Old Bachelor: A Domestic Tale in the Style of Dr Syntax*, by a Lady (Canterbury, 1824), p.70.

¹²⁶ *PSLIRC*.

¹²⁷ DRO, H7/7/7/2, 1826.

¹²⁸ DRO, H7/7/13, notes relating to the suitability of candidates, nd.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*.

being within reach of the company and amusements of Bath'.¹³⁰ Evidence confirms this: of the twenty-four residents who joined the institution between its inception in June 1816 and the end of 1818, only two, Miss Brotherson and Mrs Belgrave, both long-term committed members, were still resident by 1825.¹³¹ With this in mind Lady Isabella courted 'an earnest endeavour to prevent our institution becoming' what she feared could be 'merely an accommodation to the selfish, or one of the transient resting places of the discontented and whimsical.'¹³²

From this perspective, one of the key problems was Bath as a location, although perfect in terms of charitable and personal support for Lady Isabella, its identity and reputation as a leisure resort, where excess was considered the norm, potentially projected the wrong image of the institution, inviting applications from candidates with aims and goals which were at odds with Lady Isabella's design.¹³³ A conversation with a prospective recommender alerted her to the problem and exposed the depth of her feelings for a permanent and retired ethos:

From a few words that passed I rather fear that it is imagined that inmates of this society may not have sufficient opportunity of mixing in the world. I wished in explanation to say that there does not exist *any rule* against visits to friends- or excursions into Bath- or amusements of any sort whatever. At the same time I acknowledge that I *would* wish if *possible* to promote among our younger ladies who may join [our] society preference for home occupations, and for such employment of time as I believe to be most conducive to their respectability and to their *zeal [and] happiness*. I hope I am not very wrong in dissenting from the wish of some sincere friends of the institution, who are anxious that it should be rendered an introduction into Bath Society.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ DRO, H7/7/ 15, letter to Lady Olivia Sparrow requesting a donation towards the purchase of Bailbrook House as a permanent residence for the Ladies' Association, 1820/1.

¹³¹ NA, will of Lucy Hume, prob 11/657, image ref: 74; *Gentleman's Magazine*, (August, 1819), p.178; Howard, *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, p.277. Mrs Harper's decision to quit the institution was precipitated by the offer of a position as governess by Queen Charlotte, who, on her visit to the institution in 1817, 'was so much pleased with her manners'. Had Mrs Harper not been so petitioned, her disposition and widowed status suggests that it is likely that she would have made the Ladies' Association her home. Further, it seems unlikely that either Constance Ingilby or Martha D'Arcy frequented Bath society with the intention of marriage as both husband's relate to their past lives. The absence from the records of other residents who left before 1825 may indicate the briefness of their stay: Peach, *Historic Houses of Bath*, p.2.

¹³² DRO, H7/7/16, copy letter written on the occasion of a lady having requested her name might be [?] as a candidate upon the footing of a Lady Renter Resident Guardian, 1818.

¹³³ Mrs Cameron, later friend of Lady Isabella, wrote of Bath in 1800; 'Bath was a place abound with temptations to vanity...it was then much more fashionable than it is now [1842] but the characteristic of Bath manners was very second rate, it was dashing'. Charles Cameron, (ed.), *The Life of Mrs Cameron: Partly an Autobiography, and from her Private Journals* (London, 1861), p.104.

¹³⁴ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to Hon. Miss Wodehouse regarding a prospective candidate, 14th February, 1818.

Although Lady Isabella acknowledged the sociable character of contemporary society she was also conscious of the attraction of the young to ‘frivolous sociability’.¹³⁵ Considering it a danger to their future respectability, her keen sense of responsibility, her evangelical views and her resolve to silence her critics elicited a determination in her tone to shape the institution according to her views and principles and Lady Isabella was reluctant to veer from her course.¹³⁶ Writing to the Hon Miss Wodehouse in 1818 she asserted: ‘Whenever I cease to preside here the Establishment may perhaps assume a gayer character — but while it is regulated by me, I hope to be permitted to act upon my own principles, and openly declare them.’¹³⁷ Early in the eighteenth century, exploring the potential of an academy, similar to Mary Astell’s plan, Daniel Defoe pondered the problem:

I know ‘tis dangerous to make Publick Appearances of the Sex; they are not either to be confin’d or expos’d; the first will disagree with their Inclinations, the last with their Reputations; and therefore it is somewhat difficult; ... For, Saving my respect to the Sex, the levity, which perhaps is a little peculiar to them, at least in their Youth, will not bear the Restraint; and I am satisfied, nothing but the height of Bigotry can keep a Nunnery.¹³⁸

The rules of the institution laid out in the original prospectus confirm that although Lady Isabella was intent on shaping the society according to her views, she accepted, to a degree, that its structure could not be solely derived from her own principles but must be balanced in order to accommodate contemporary women, but in a manner most conducive to the prosperity of the institution. Working with the residents Lady Isabella devised mechanisms for regular reviews in the form of democratic half-yearly elections by the members

¹³⁵ In his *Lectures on Female Education and Manners*, John Burton attested to the often superficiality of contemporary society and to women’s vulnerability; ‘they imagine that to make conquests of the men, should be the first object of their attention. To this end they dress, visit and appear continually in public; without considering that those whom they will find there, are not, in general, men of strictest honour, and most regular life. They are chiefly men of pleasure, who study to render themselves agreeable to your sex, by the graces of their external behaviour’: Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners*, p.198.

¹³⁶ Burton further endorsed Lady Isabella’s rationale by asking; ‘but where shall we find the blushing fair one?’ Referring to the perfect female for marriage, he continued; ‘not in the crowds and assemblies, but in the sequestered walks of domestic retirement, that face which is ever-courting the public eye, is sure to lose its modest sweetness and pleasing novelty. Those, who would wish to find the prudent and discreet female, one susceptible to the tender affections of wife and mother and capable of discharging the respective duties of each, will look for her, not at public resorts, but in privacy and retirement. They therefore fail of their design, who think to captivate the heart, by appearing in all places of general amusement’: Ibid, p.185.

¹³⁷ DRO, H7/7/15, letter to Hon. Miss Wodehouse regarding a prospective candidate, 14th February, 1818.

¹³⁸ Daniel Defoe, *Essays Upon Several Projects: or, Effectual ways for Advancing the Interest of the Nation* (London, 1702), pp.285-286.

themselves, originally by ballot and later changed to a vote by signature to ‘secure each individual from the effects of capricious dislike’.¹³⁹ The purpose of the elections were to ‘prove that the residents remain together by mutual consent’ and exclusion could only be achieved by a unanimous vote for new members and a majority of two-thirds was required to exclude an elected member.¹⁴⁰ Residents were also given the opportunity to ‘give notice [six monthly] whether it is her intention to withdraw, or her wish to be re-elected’.¹⁴¹

Although Southey boldly proclaimed that ‘no Lady quitted the society’ once the society’s principles were more generally known and its regular and retired habits more fully understood, evidence suggests that many ladies still continued to prefer the option of marriage to a permanent residence at the Institution.¹⁴² Of the nineteen known residents from the sample who were eligible for marriage and whose residences at the institution spanned its lifetime, ten married.¹⁴³ These ladies commitment and loyalty towards the society and interactions with other members were likely to have been less significant than for those who were committed to and identified strongly with the group, those who viewed themselves truly as group members.

Of course not all women who left the institution did so to marry or through choice. Fluctuation in membership was also affected by death and by others who chose or were asked to leave for reasons of ill health, or incompatibility.¹⁴⁴ Invalid, Miss Browne, no longer agreeing with the regime, left the Ladies’ Association after five years, at Lady Isabella’s request. Lady Isabella reported: ‘I endeavoured to suit her duties to her abilities and inclinations but with her *views and feelings* it is better she should be placed where there

¹³⁹ DRO, H/7/7/2, elections and re-elections, June, 1828.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ *PSLIRC*.

¹⁴² *Quarterly Review*, vol.22, 43(July, 1819), p.98.

¹⁴³ Of the original twenty-five, four died and two were permanent invalids and in this respect ineligible for marriage; see appendix 6.

¹⁴⁴ Of the sample of twenty-five women, four died whilst at the Ladies’ Association (Miss Bowles and Mrs Calvert, both elderly Lady Renters, Mrs Stevens, widow and Frances Zouche, a younger member). In 1826 Lady Isabella advised a potential recommender that there were vacancies owing to ‘marriages, death and the removal of a few who found they could not be happy’: DRO, H7/7/17, copy of a letter to Mrs Friend regarding an enquiry for Cornwallis House as a desirable residence for two ladies, 26th March, 1826; see appendix 6.

is no *duty* to perform'.¹⁴⁵ Although changes in membership were unsettling, in some circumstances Lady Isabella supported them for the good of the institution. Jane Louisa Willyam's choice to leave the institution after a stay of only a year, on the other hand, was viewed by Lady Isabella as regretful. Writing to Miss Willyams, Lady Isabella remonstrated:

I much fear that the frequent stranger in our society will soon prevent people of steady habits from seeking or enjoying a residence in the institution — this is to be deplored, but it is what almost everyone foretold would be the case in any attempt to form a society of Ladies in connection with the Church of England ... I regret that [you] should be *one* of the fulfillers of that prophesy, instead of continuing the friendship and association of [your] sincere well wishers.¹⁴⁶

Recurrent changes in membership contributed to a less cohesive, more individual environment where personal goals were more important than group unity towards the prosperity of the institution and, thus reflecting on the difficulties standing in the way of the institution's continuance and welfare, Lady Isabella attested to the 'discomfort of living in a fluctuating society.'¹⁴⁷

In 1832, Lady Isabella collated, in note form, the reasons which she perceived to cause the decline of the Ladies' Association from the perspective of the residents and although instability in membership was undoubtedly a crucial factor, and sporadically continued to be the case throughout the lifetime of the institution, her list focused predominantly on relationships between residents once at Cornwallis House. There is no documentation amongst Lady Isabella's longhand papers that point towards internal disputes or quarrels at Bailbrook House, indeed Lady Isabella reported that after the first two years of the life of the institution, once its nature was understood, it flourished and really answered the purpose for which it was intended:

When the society was established at Bailbrook House the plan was happily realised of uniting as one family, the rich, and poor, the old and young, the young had the advantage of a protecting home, with just that

¹⁴⁵ Lady Isabella's benevolent nature ensured that Miss Browne had alternative, comfortable accommodation. Thanking associate, Harriet Bowdler, for her part in organising alternative accommodation, she confided; 'I feel most thankful that such a comfortable arrangement has been made for her at Swansea....and am convinced that this plan is every way better for her than the situation she had here': DRO, H7/7/17, letter to Harriet Bowdler, nd.

¹⁴⁶ DRO, H7/7/18, letter to Miss Willyams on her decision to quit the Ladies' Association, 1830.

¹⁴⁷ DRO, H7/7/13, notes, 10th December, 1829.

degree of salutary restraint which respect to the *elder* members imposed.¹⁴⁸

Visiting the Ladies' Association in July 1820 Bishop John Jebb further confirmed the successful nature of the institution at this time and the convivial atmosphere among the residents: 'Miss B brought me one evening to Lady Isabella King's institution at Bailbrook. It is interesting and I am told flourishing: the residents seem comfortable, cheerful and thoroughly united.'¹⁴⁹

The period of prosperity continued for a short period after the move to Cornwallis House. By 1823, Lady Isabella report that with 'candidates ... ever on the list to take advantage of every vacancy that occurs' the 'full number of its members [was] completed' and by 1824 Lady Willoughby exuberantly informed Lady Isabella that she 'delight[ed] in its prosperity'.¹⁵⁰ By 1826, however, disagreements, changes and diminishing numbers had begun to promote a damaging public impression, particularly locally, and Lady Isabella reported to residents at a meeting prior to the half yearly re-election in September 1826, that as a consequence, public perception supposed 'that the house is a mere lodging house where each has her separate interests her separate pursuits and where exists no social bond'.¹⁵¹ Her comments provide evidence to suggest an increasing atmosphere of self-interest and division within the institution, contributing to a developing sense of disunity, a milieu which again identifies with critics' predictions.

Her list provides, in more detail, information which exposes the nature of the disagreements and consequent changes within the institution at this time and cites numerous instances of disrespect, antagonism, hostility, coalition and selfishness, behaviour which manifested itself in various ways. A general disrespect shown by some of the younger

¹⁴⁸ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Mrs Edward Morse and Mr Markham regarding the decline of the institution, September, 1832.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Bishop John Jebb to Alexander Knox, Henbury, Bristol, 27th July, 1820. Charles Forster, (ed.), *Thirty Years Correspondence between John Jebb and Alexander Knox*, 2vols, vol.2 (London, 1836), p.450.

¹⁵⁰ DRO, H7/7/7, an account of the funds, 1824; DRO, H7/7/1/2, hints for a working and reading association, 31st March, 1823; DRO, H7/7/17, letter from Lady Willoughby, 17th March, 1824.

¹⁵¹ In March 1826 Lady Isabella reported that 'the usual number of members is sixteen but...marriages, deaths and the removal of a few who found they could not be happy, have occasioned some vacancies': DRO, H7/7/17, copy of a letter to Mrs Friend regarding an enquiry for Cornwallis House as a desirable residence for two ladies, 26th March, 1826; DRO, H7/7/2, matters to be spoken of to inmates of Cornwallis House, 1826.

residents towards older residents, evinced in persevered efforts to cause them to leave, indeed resulted in the decision by several of the more committed residents to quit the institution. Writing to Thomas Burgess, then Bishop of Salisbury, in 1828, Lady Isabella dejectedly advised him: ‘discouragement has occurred of an intimation ... from Miss Bowles that her residence here is uncertain besides this Miss Cooper has found that she could not be happy in the society and has left it’.¹⁵² Miss Bowles and Miss Cooper, Lady Renter and Associate, were older, esteemed members of the association and Lady Isabella increasingly relied on those from the older ranks whose more traditional values agreed with and supported her efforts and the loss of any such member was felt keenly by her.¹⁵³ Indeed reflecting on this point she believed that while the institution was inhabited by those who genuinely embraced its concept she ‘had the comfort of suitable companions and the younger persons who were admitted felt the necessity of behaving respectfully to their elders and courteously to each other’.¹⁵⁴ This valuable deterrent, she believed, ‘preserved order and prevented the vulgar jarring which is always to be apprehended in a mixed society if there is no controlling influence to keep in check the selfish and the rude’.¹⁵⁵ In his *Colloquies*, Southey proposed a number of principles which he considered were essential to the wellbeing of an establishment such as the Ladies’ Association and were summed up by his son Charles in his biography of his father: ‘there must be a centre of union sufficient to overpower, or at least keep in harmonious subjection individual characters — this can only be supplied by religion and the habit of obedience.’¹⁵⁶ Yet Charles recorded that his father

¹⁵² DRO, H7/7/18, letter to the Bishop of Salisbury, 26th September, 1828.

¹⁵³ A note written by Lady Isabella on Miss Cooper’s application form confirmed her credentials as ‘amiable and particularly Ladylike in manners and favourable [sic] in principles’ but added that ‘she was unhappy in the institution and left it to our regret’: DRO, H7/7/18, application from Miss Cooper as a candidate, 1828. By 1829 Lady Isabella informed the guardian committee that she specifically ‘prefers older Ladies as Lady Renters as support to the influence of the presiding Lady in her wish to make the institution a protecting home to the young’: DRO, H7/7/1/7, forms to be observed by the Committee of the Institution at Cornwallis House *previous* to the Midsummer half yearly election of its members, May, 1829. Writing to Lady Isabella in 1824 after the death of one such member, Lady Willoughby sympathized: ‘I fear the loss of Mrs Belgrave must have been a painful influence on your spirits and I feel sincerely for you from the chasm which so valuable a member of your society must have made on it’: DRO H7/7/17, letter from Lady Willoughby, February 1824.

¹⁵⁴ DRO, H7/7/13, notes relating to the suitability of candidates, nd.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Charles Southey, (ed.), *The Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, 6vols, vol.5 (London, 1850), p. 29.

‘did not expect that these requirements would be easily met with in this age’ concluding that he himself attributes ‘the little success of some institutions to the want of them.’¹⁵⁷

Inappropriate behaviour by the younger members was not only directed towards the older residents but also focused on the young and vulnerable members of the institution and Lady Isabella’s list further reports the introduction of a ‘wretched spirit of ridicule by which the feelings of the more gentle and amiable were deeply wounded.’¹⁵⁸ The main archive includes a number of documents which support this charge and relate to a ‘disturbance which nearly broke up [the] institution’ in 1828.¹⁵⁹ The quantity of letters and notes relating to the incident, which Lady Isabella chose to include, suggest its significance as a potential threat to the institution and the circumstances render it important in demonstrating the increasingly dysfunctional nature of the Ladies’ Association by this time. A retrospective account of the incident by Lady Isabella disclosed the events: ‘a little band united in sending a new member (a young lady of worth and respectability) to Coventry ... [and] endeavoured to justify this unladylike conduct by seeking to depreciate the object of their unkindness in the eyes of others’.¹⁶⁰ To Lady Isabella’s further mortification, a message from the culprits, offering to quit the institution was transmitted to her via a visitor, thus, in Lady Isabella’s words: ‘in the most unprecedented manner were the private transactions of the society communicated to strangers’.¹⁶¹ Any public disclosure in the form of gossip, as far as Lady Isabella was concerned, would be harmful not only to the respectability of the institution but also to the residents as ‘notoriety of any form is disadvantageous to women’.¹⁶² Two of the ladies involved were unnamed ‘Ladies Assistants,’ who Lady Isabella reminded other residents, ‘were bound in duty and honour to assist the Lady President in all matters of difficulty [and] to stand faithfully by her side’.¹⁶³ Although she was extremely disappointed by the behaviour of these two women, who, as endowed members, were personally selected

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ DRO, H7/7/1/9, private memos to help my own memory when a conference with the original friends of the institution takes place, 4th June, 1832.

¹⁵⁹ DRO, H7/7/18, letter from Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, 10th March, 1828.

¹⁶⁰ DRO, H7/7/13, notes, nd.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² DRO, H7/7/13, letter to anonymous, 3rd May, 1814/15.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

and vouched for by her she was perhaps even more disappointed by the revelation that the leader of the 'band' was associate member, Mary Poulett Stevens.¹⁶⁴ Well thought of by all, she had been elected as the first Lady Superior, a trustworthy position. This was a new role established in October 1826. Elected half yearly by residents and agreed on by Lady Isabella, the position carried a weight of responsibility, upholding the principles of the institution among the residents, promoting unanimity and harmony and acting as adviser and guardian, especially to the younger and new residents.¹⁶⁵

The incident demonstrates a change in atmosphere and evidences developing alliances by some members in order to effect specific conditions, shaping the institution and its residents to suit their personal requirements. These actions were facilitated by the formation of small groups which congregated privately in residents' rooms. Retrospective advice from Lady Isabella to young members on entering the institution informed them:

When the institution was in its happiest state, at Bailbrook, it was not the custom for the Ladies to visit each other in their bedrooms. Some of the party liked to sit and work and read together of a morning, but they met, not in the sleeping rooms, but in the room where they breakfasted. Indeed it was not for some time after our removal to Cornwallis House that the Ladies all separated immediately after breakfast, they used to remain together at their different associations for sometime.¹⁶⁶

This newly forged environment, Lady Isabella was aware, could be threatening, uncomfortable and unwelcoming, facilitating coalitions, creating an atmosphere of us and them and potentially inciting dissociation and quarrels which could prove hurtful to other residents. It was perhaps her greatest concern: 'It is obvious that the spirit to be feared in a society such as Cornwallis House, is a spirit of cabal — intimacies without Christian friendship and petty coalitions without any benevolent aim — Ambition on a small scale, seeking to lead a stirring up of party feeling where general kindness ought to prevail.'¹⁶⁷ Although she appreciated and supported personal friendships Lady Isabella's words were stark and a clear indication of the gravity she assigned to the situation. She warned of

¹⁶⁴ Endowed Ladies were not selected by other members but were chosen personally by Lady Isabella.

¹⁶⁵ DRO, H7/7/10, rules and regulations of Cornwallis House, 1826.

¹⁶⁶ DRO, H7/7/11, advice to young members on entering the institution, 28th December, 1830.

¹⁶⁷ DRO, H7/7/18, notes respecting Lady Renters, 1828.

‘sudden intimacies [which] seldom end in real friendship’, and condemned ‘any individual who makes the faults and foibles of her companion the subject of her conversation’, further cautioning that they ‘ought to be particularly avoided’.¹⁶⁸

Lady Isabella’s condemnation of these behaviours confirms that she recognised them as a threat to the communal ethos of the institution. Denouncing them as ‘an undisguised manifestation of selfish rudeness, arising to absolute vulgarity: each thinking of her *own* feelings, her *own* indulgence, the gratification of her *own* whimsies in direct defiance of those Christian precepts so well known to all who have read the scriptures’, her words were perhaps inclined to one extreme.¹⁶⁹ Looking back, after the experience of the failure of the institution, an aura of vexation and anger invaded her retrospective thoughts exacting a single minded and unforgiving tone. There is no doubt that in the context of early nineteenth-century England behaviour such as this would not have been classed as respectable, however Lady Isabella’s demanding requirements within the institution, measured against the Christian principles she followed which prompted prominent and persistent evangelically biased references to ‘ungodly behaviour’ tended to the other extreme and were perhaps unrealistic in an increasingly individual and secular society.¹⁷⁰

Although influenced hugely by her evangelical beliefs her notes and letters attribute the unfavourable shift in conditions predominantly to a lack of support from Clifton and from old allies, resulting in less interest and fewer applications, which, she believed, coupled with recommendations from those whose best interests lay with candidates and not with the institution, severely compromised the quality and quantity of residents by this time.¹⁷¹ Lady Isabella herself admitted that she was ‘often under pressure to propose inappropriate candidates, either by recommendation or by family ‘donation’, and had in some instances

¹⁶⁸ Lady Isabella felt compelled to elucidate further to young members after the disruption in 1828; ‘Persons living under the same roof as one family must of course become acquainted with every defect or singularity in each other’s character. To take advantage of this knowledge with the view of depreciating those whom they may happen to dislike is *dishonourable*. With persons of this description, all intercourse should be avoided beyond what courtesy and good nature demand.’ Ibid; DRO, H7/7/11, advice to young members on entering the institution, 28th December, 1830.

¹⁶⁹ DRO, H7/7/1/9, private memos, nd.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ By 1828 Lady Isabella reported that numbers had dwindled to half (nine); DRO, H7/7/2, elections and re-elections, June, 1828.

‘failed to obtain accurate information’ which had resulted in the admission of ineligible candidates:

It is to be observed that much serious evil has been caused by want of consideration on the part of recommenders ... it is to be lamented that anyone should in their zeal to benefit an individual, disregard the welfare of an institution whose prosperity; whose very existence depends on the conduct and unanimity of its members.¹⁷²

Lady Isabella’s condemnation brought with it a zealous affirmation that she had ‘not in any one instance brought a previous acquaintance or intimate of my own or given a preference to persons recommended by our friends to the rejection of others as suitable to the establishment’.¹⁷³

Although there is no doubt that the lack of interest and the selection of inappropriate residents was detrimental to the prosperity of the institution, evidence suggests that other factors also contributed to its increasingly discordant nature. Age differences were a common factor in disputes, many of those involved were younger members, whose opinions, manners and dispositions were at odds with those which Lady Isabella identified as imperative to the success of the institution and this disparity manifested itself in the quarrels aimed at the older residents, who upheld the more traditional values of the institution. Evangelical, Thomas Gisborne, brother in law of Thomas Babington and brother of Lady Bateman, both of whom would become active supporters of Lady Isabella’s cause, blamed women’s contemporary education for young ladies behaviour: ‘if the whole purpose of a woman’s education was display, then women would behave accordingly’.¹⁷⁴ William Alexander, exploring the influences of women’s education on the shaping of their manners

¹⁷² In a letter to a prospective candidate, Mary Brotherson elaborated on Lady Isabella’s greatest concerns regarding the consequences of admitting such candidates: ‘An institution where such persons [relations of the Wealthy and Great] might *purchase* admission for their Dependants would probably obtain an ample endowment but peace, goodwill, and respectability, would be the sacrifice, and then when the heterogeneous group they had driven under one roof began to quarrel, as people would *do* among whom existed no bond of union, no *dependence on each other*, ... Women of gentle and amiable disposition would soon be driven from the scene of discord and the wilful and the arrogant alone would keep their ground’: DRO, H7/7/16, letter from Mary Brotherson to a prospective candidate, 1st May, 1821; DRO, H7/7/1/4, hints as to the choice of a Lady President, 1828; DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Mrs Edward Morse and Mr Markham regarding the decline of the institution, 2nd May, 1833.

¹⁷³ DRO, H7/7/1/4, hints as to the choice of a Lady President, 1828.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London, 1797), pp.76-77; Robert Hole, ‘Gisborne, Thomas (1758–1846)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct, 2005, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/107822doc?Pos=2>, 10th August, 2007.

at the end of the 18th century concurred, commenting sarcastically: ‘as well we might sow weeds and expect to reap corn’, while Clara Reeve drew attention to the potential prospects of many, who ‘with no fortune and airs and graces ... will not attract a husband and far greater the number of them become useless and some mischievous’.¹⁷⁵ The potential for conflict caused by age differences was unacknowledged by Lady Isabella at the outset, perhaps due to her lack of experience, and her inceptive directive of all welcome, is perhaps a good illustration of the disparity between her benevolent vision and the practical reality.¹⁷⁶ It is clear that as age became more of an issue, Lady Isabella reconsidered her position and later notes confirm a consequential tightening of rules respecting admission.¹⁷⁷

Although Lady Isabella was insistent that residents were equally gentlewomen in status critics were eager to attribute the decline of the institution both to the hierarchal structure imposed within the institution and the continued recognition of social status. As an aristocrat, rank was of significance to Lady Isabella and was reflected in her requirements for residents. She consequently read the experience of the Ladies’ Association as confirmation that those whose credentials did not meet the criteria of high birth were not only unlikely to fit in but could threaten the well being of the institution, thus stressing the importance of appropriate selection rather than acknowledging class distinction as damaging.

We have found cause in two or three instances to lament the admission of Ladies whose manners and habits rendered it evident that in entering this society they were raised out of their accustomed sphere. Such if gentle feel depressed by a consciousness of inferiority, and if of a proud spirit they are continually taking offence and disturbing the harmony of the society by their resentments. The disaffections stirred up by persons of this description had at one time nearly caused the dispersion of the society.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ William Alexander, *The History of Women from the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time* (London, 1779), p.3;

Clara Reeve, *Plans of Education with Remarks on the Systems of other Writers: In a Series of Letters Between Mrs Darnford and her Friends* (London, 1792), pp. 60-61.

¹⁷⁶ *PSLIRC*.

¹⁷⁷ This also applied to members of the same family. In 1821 Lady Isabella advised an applicant widow with two daughters; ‘it has been found expedient to decline placing on the list of Candidates more than one of a family’: DRO, H7/7/16, 16th June, 1821.

¹⁷⁸ DRO, H7/7/1/8, letter to Lord Manvers regarding a prospective candidate, 25th June, 1829.

The author of an article written in the *Daily News* in 1858, however, recognised the problems associated with selection based so rigidly on rank. Discussing the establishment of a similar scheme he advocated the abolishment of class distinction rather than its reinforcement. Speaking specifically of the Ladies' Association he commented: 'success was rendered impossible from the outset by the introduction of the two most fatal influences that could be devised — the gradation of ranks in the house by the scale of pay, compounded with some aristocratic associations about birth ... The inmates were jealous and irritable, proud or mortified, aggressive or suffering and all in bondage'.¹⁷⁹ Harriet Martineau agreed with his comments regarding financial status. Mulling over the problem later, in 1837, she was convinced that if future, similar establishments were to succeed 'there must be no distinction between rich and poor'.¹⁸⁰ Although all contributed annually to the upkeep of the institution, promoting an equal sense of belonging, the institutionally imposed gradations of Renter, Associate and Endowed member, based on financial circumstances, created hierarchal identities within the institution. Reflecting the hierarchal nature of the family unit, Lady Isabella as the 'head', represented the householder while the older, Lady Renters, supporting her policies, closely followed: 'Ladies avowedly entitled from their age, rank or character, to be looked up to with consideration and treated with deference'.¹⁸¹ They were followed by Associates and Endowed members, with servants taking their place at the bottom of the ladder. Hierarchal awareness and identity was further reinforced through living and working arrangements. Although there is no information to disclose where rooms were situated in the house, evidence confirms that Lady Isabella's accommodation comprised a suite of rooms which was sumptuously furnished, Renter's rooms, which varied depending on their financial contribution, were also well appointed, while Associates and Endowed members were allocated a single room each, usually furnished.¹⁸² The assignment

¹⁷⁹ Scheme announced by Lord Brougham: *Daily News* (27th November, 1858).

¹⁸⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography and Memorials*, (ed.), Maria W. Chapman, 3vols, vol.2 (Boston, 1877), p.203.

¹⁸¹ DRO, H7/7/18, statement of account, April, 1828; DRO, H7/7/18, respecting Lady Renters, 1828.

¹⁸² Lady Renter's rooms varied according to their annual payments. Notes state; 'it is to be observed that they differ according to the size and number of the rooms. A Lady proposing two or three rooms may find her payments amount to £200, £300 or near £400 a year, but if she is content with merely a bedroom, and has no

of official duties to endowed members which enabled them to pay for their board, also contributed to an awareness of rank within, placing them below associates but above the servants.

Each resident then inhabited an allocated space within the community and while deference maintained acceptance and popularity, a failure to conform, in theory at least, risked unpopularity or even exclusion. Yet the increasingly hostile behaviour noted by Lady Isabella is evidence of disrespect and a rejection of the structure of the institution. Indeed, her list further disclosed ‘a wish and intention [by a few] to supercede some of the original Bath members’, actions which she associated with ‘a degree of ascendancy [which] rendered the house disagreeable to ... any, who would not submit to their dictation.’¹⁸³

By 1829 Lady Isabella was exhausted and with her health and spirits ‘crushed’ she felt she could no longer manage the increasingly deteriorating conditions at Cornwallis House.¹⁸⁴ Confirming that even she had been subjected to the disrespect of a number of residents she wearily admitted:

There now exists no degree of attachment among them which can render separation painful and as they seem to desire more health and happiness from their excursions to different watering places than from a residence at Cornwallis House it can be no unkindness to release them from their payments to the institution.¹⁸⁵

Although there is no doubt that the disparity among residents contributed to the disunity and eventual demise of the institution, Lady Isabella was anxious to point out that far from comprehensive rejection of the scheme the number of residents who contributed to its downfall was minimal, many she stressed, participated and supported the institution unequivocally. ‘I may say with truth that the *majority* of those to whom it has afforded an asylum have been fully sensible of its advantages the greater number of those admitted having remained until some happy change of circumstances placed them in homes of their

maid, her payment may, if her room be a small one, not exceed £100 a year’. Lady Associates and Endowed members were allocated ‘a furnished apartment rent free’: DRO, H7/7/18, respecting Lady Renters, 1828; DRO, H7/7/10, rules and regulations of Cornwallis House, nd.

¹⁸³ DRO, H7/7/1/9, advice to young members on entering the institution, 28th December, 1830.

¹⁸⁴ DRO, H7/7/19, notes, nd.

¹⁸⁵ DRO, H7/7/1/9, private memos to help my own memory when a conference with the original friends of the institution takes place, 4th June, 1832.

own or in some lucrative situation'.¹⁸⁶ Her comments, written in retrospect, come from the perspective of examining the undertaking as a whole and are perhaps evidence that experience taught her that the permanence and retirement she was so keen to realise and which she was certain was so important for the success of the institution was of the past and not generally conducive to the spirit of contemporary female society.

Conclusion

The category of the distressed gentlewoman has been identified as diverse in many respects, rendering the stereotype borne of the prevailing socio economic conditions problematic. Encompassing a vast range of circumstances and affecting women of varying ages from young daughters, widows and established spinsters of the aristocracy and gentry to the parochial clergy, its heterogeneous nature prompted a wide variety of responses. Marriage, as the purveyor of status and respectability, in a still fiercely patriarchal, but increasingly fluid society, was paramount to most, if the opportunity arose, while others, destined to remain single through choice, age, or as a consequence of disability or illness, followed other paths.

The lack of homogeneity among this class rendered Lady Isabella's task of selecting candidates who would be conducive to the success of an institution, which in general was unwelcomed, infinitely more complicated. Her rigorous and meticulous selection process, founded in the understanding that success was dependent on the 'conduct and unanimity of its members', pivoted on the uncompromising requirements of similarity in membership, character and disposition, and was further reinforced by an unequivocal ethos of benevolence, selflessness, and piety in a permanent and retired environment.¹⁸⁷ Although these considerable requirements were put in place with the creation and well being of a successful community in mind, they, combined with a reliance on the active engagement of

¹⁸⁶ DRO, H7/7/19, letter to Lord Manvers regarding the death of trustee Sir Benjamin Hobhouse, 16th February, 1832.

¹⁸⁷ DRO, H7/7/13, letter to Mrs Edward Morse and Mr Markham regarding the decline of the institution, 2nd May, 1833.

loyal supporters and on the word of recommenders, sources who both ultimately let Lady Isabella and the institution down, rendered the task of faultless selection, to which Lady Isabella's vision aspired, unrealistic.

Selected residents included women who chose to marry, some who did not agree with the regime or the atmosphere and women whose dispositions did not suit the institution. The consequent lack of commonality created a disunified and dysfunctional society which manifested itself in instability in membership, affecting the permanent and retired ethos of the institution and later, in conflict, in the form of disputes, antagonism and hostility, and coalition. Although the resulting discordant atmosphere was undoubtedly precipitated by varying temperaments and circumstances it was also aggravated by the observance of gradation in rank and a self-imposed hierarchal system which saw all as equal but some more equal than others. These fundamental differences ultimately contributed to the breakdown in the social system within the institution and to its consequent demise. The disunity also projected itself to wider society. Critics were resolute that 'universal amiability need never be looked for among persons ... who are arbitrarily brought together, without regard to natural affinity, and in circumstances provocative of jealousy, egotism and discontent'.¹⁸⁸ Contributing to an already generally unsupportive public perception of the institution, it reinforced the view of the association as nothing more than a transient home for gentlewomen, self-serving and fragmented with no unified identity and no sense of benevolent community spirit, confirming what many had questioned from the outset: 'When this institution was started many opinions were entertained as to its permanency and whether so many females of various tempers dispositions and habits would long reside amiably together.'¹⁸⁹

Did Lady Isabella foster unrealistic expectations in her endeavour to create an independent, unified and harmonious community of women? There is no doubt that the challenge which she faced in amalgamating a myriad of lives into one category under the

¹⁸⁸ *Daily News* (27th November, 1858).

¹⁸⁹ George Monkland, *The Literature and Literati of Bath, 'An Essay Read at The Literary Club'* (Bath, 1854), p.44.

heading 'Ladies' Association' by fashioning a space to fit all for a harmonious outcome was complex. The dichotomy between her unique evangelically influenced and retrospective vision to achieve the ideal environment, and the reality, once put into practice, has highlighted the difficulties which she experienced in formulating such a social system in the context of early nineteenth-century society and the demands of balancing the diverse wants and needs of contemporary women with a system that would foster unity and respectability, while at the same time considering her own views and the views of a critical public ultimately proved impossible to achieve on any permanent basis.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored the development and implementation of the idea of a Protestant nunnery as it was put into practice in early nineteenth-century Bath, and later, Bristol through a case study of Lady Isabella King and the Ladies' Association. In doing so it has also recovered Lady Isabella as an important historical figure, providing us with new insights into the opportunities for agency and activity available to a socially conventional but determined elite single woman and philanthropist at this time. Although Lady Isabella's commitment to realising her ideal made her an exceptional example of an elite female philanthropist, this study of her life and the institution demonstrates the possibilities for women of similar status at the time.

Motivated by her wish, as a single woman, to make herself useful, and by her evangelical principles to do good, Lady Isabella drew upon her early philanthropic experiences in Dublin and Bath when she turned her attention to the plight of distressed gentlewomen. Using her relatively small independent income, supplemented by donations from her connexions and patrons, she set up the Ladies' Association in June 1816. This institution at its peak boasted eighteen residents and operated first at Bailbrook House in Bath and after 1821, in Clifton (Bristol) for almost twenty years. Although the institution was a philanthropic venture, it was established as a private Trust and not a public charity in order to protect Lady Isabella's respectability and the respectability of the Association's residents.

Even though the institution only existed for one generation, it was described in an article discussing schemes for single women and widows in 1858 as, 'that which approached nearest to maturity'.⁸⁷¹ Lady Isabella's activity as an elite philanthropist was key to its relative longevity. Her elite social position, which provided her with access to influential networks and financial independence, and her single status which offered her the relative freedom to act independently, were arguably her most powerful assets. They enabled her to access influential social circles, commit her

⁸⁷¹ *Daily News* (27th November, 1858), p.4.

personal income to the institution and even make the decision to live as a resident at both Bailbrook House and Cornwallis House. Although she was initially beset with self-doubts about her suitability to spearhead the scheme, she gradually gained confidence as she developed ways to implement and manage the project. This is demonstrated particularly well in her relationship with the institution's male trustees, which show that she was conversant with financial affairs and fully and directly involved with the management of the institution, taking advice from them only when necessary. Her construction of a set of interlocking support networks, drawn from elite circles and functioning on both local and national levels, was crucial to the success of the institution. In this respect Bath was of central importance, too. Bath was a microcosm of elite society and the ebb and flow of visitors to the city enabled Lady Isabella to recruit supporters among like-minded individuals, who would in turn spread the news of the venture when they left Bath. Lady Isabella's extended Bath connexion played an important part in promoting the institution nationally and internationally.

Any institution that survives for nearly two decades may be deemed a success, particularly given its experimental nature and the failure of other similar types of institution; however, the Ladies' Association was a failure in that it remained unique and Lady Isabella was unable to fulfil her dream of extending the scheme nationwide for future generations. This ultimate failure can be attributed to four key factors. To begin with, the very concept of a Protestant nunnery was problematic. While the idea can be traced back to the dissolution of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII, and various proposals were posited — both fictional and real — over the intervening centuries, there were few actual examples of any significance upon which Lady Isabella could model her scheme. By following closely the plan of Sarah Scott's utopian novel, *Millenium Hall*, Lady Isabella set herself a challenge which was difficult to realise successfully. At its zenith, the Ladies' Association attracted interest from many potential applicants and was supported by such prominent individuals as Queen Charlotte, William Wilberforce and Robert Southey, as well as other less well-known, but influential members of elite society. Yet, in a fervently Protestant and patriarchal society which witnessed a re-energised authoritarianism in the wake of the French Revolution, the idea of an institution for independent single women that was modelled on Catholic practice generated a significant current of criticism. Secondly, although *elite* society tended to be less critical of the scheme, it was not sufficiently

forthcoming in its financial support for the Ladies' Association to ensure its continued viability. Unlike Scott's 'arcadia', which was separate from society and had no need of funding, the Ladies' Association relied on public support for its well-being. Lady Isabella could not afford to fund the entire institution on her own and the consequent lack of funding in the later years of the institution's life, as Lady Isabella's earlier supporters aged and died, contributed to its decline. By the 1830s Lady Isabella's utopian vision, as a solution to the problem of distressed gentlewomen, may simply have been out of step with the time. The fact that she was unable to locate a successor to take over the institution as her health began to fail is in itself telling. Finally, the residents of the Ladies' Association — a fascinating set of distressed gentlewomen who are, in themselves, worthy of further study — arguably played the central role in the life of the Ladies Association and a significant part in the institution's decline. Discord among the residents became an increasing issue after the move to Clifton in 1821. While this may have been the result of the disparate nature of the group and the women's differing motivations for residency, tensions were exacerbated by the hierarchical structure of the institution (based upon their financial contributions) and by Lady Isabella's unrealistic expectations that they should form a retired community of evangelically minded women. Numbers consequently dwindled by 1828, leading to the institution's closure in 1835.

As an evangelical at heart and a paternalist by instinct, Lady Isabella was ultimately not a reformer. While she put forward innovative ideas for philanthropic schemes to improve, in the immediate, problems created by contemporary circumstances, her focus was not on making a fundamental change to the status of women in nineteenth-century society. In this respect, her attempt to establish a home for distressed gentlewomen was a considered and interactive project instituted to provide impoverished gentlewoman with an immediate solution to their problem. By adapting the shape of her plan to court public acceptance of the scheme, and by using the financial and social resources available to her, she was able to achieve, if not her ideal, then the best possible outcome in contemporary social circumstances.

Lady Isabella's endeavour was an exceptional accomplishment, particularly given the time, and must go down in British history as the most concerted, effective and long-lasting attempt to create a non-religious, yet chapitre-like institution, for the benefit of distressed gentlewomen. Robert

Southey recognized this as early as 1820: 'Should its success be answerable to the trial which has been made and to the real and paramount utility of the scheme she will be deservedly remembered as one of the greatest benefactresses her country and the greatest to her sex that any country has ever produced'.⁸⁷² At the height of its popularity in Bath, the Ladies' Association was a credible and nationally encouraged response to the problem of the distressed gentlewoman; however, even its eventual disintegration is important. Lady Isabella achieved a great deal as an individual over the years to create, steer and direct the development of the Ladies' Association; her continued belief in the importance of her venture meant she never gave up hope that the institution would succeed eventually. In collecting and annotating her documents for future use, *she* reaffirmed her belief in what she had achieved, recognising that it had been important and that her experience might be of interest to future reformers. That it was seems tantalizingly likely. While it is impossible to prove a direct link between Robert Southey's development of the Anglican Sisterhoods, first established in 1845, and his involvement with Lady Isabella and the Ladies' Association, it would have been highly unlikely if her experience had not informed his thinking.

⁸⁷² *Quarterly Review*, vol.22 (July, 1819), p. 96.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

FAMILY TREES

Main Family Tree

Chart A: St Lawrence (Earls of Howth) Family

Chart B: Stewart (of Killymoon) Family

Chart C: Knox (of Castlereagh) Family

Chart D: Widman-Wood Family

Chart E: (Galbraith) Meares Family

Chart F: (Fitzgerald) King Family

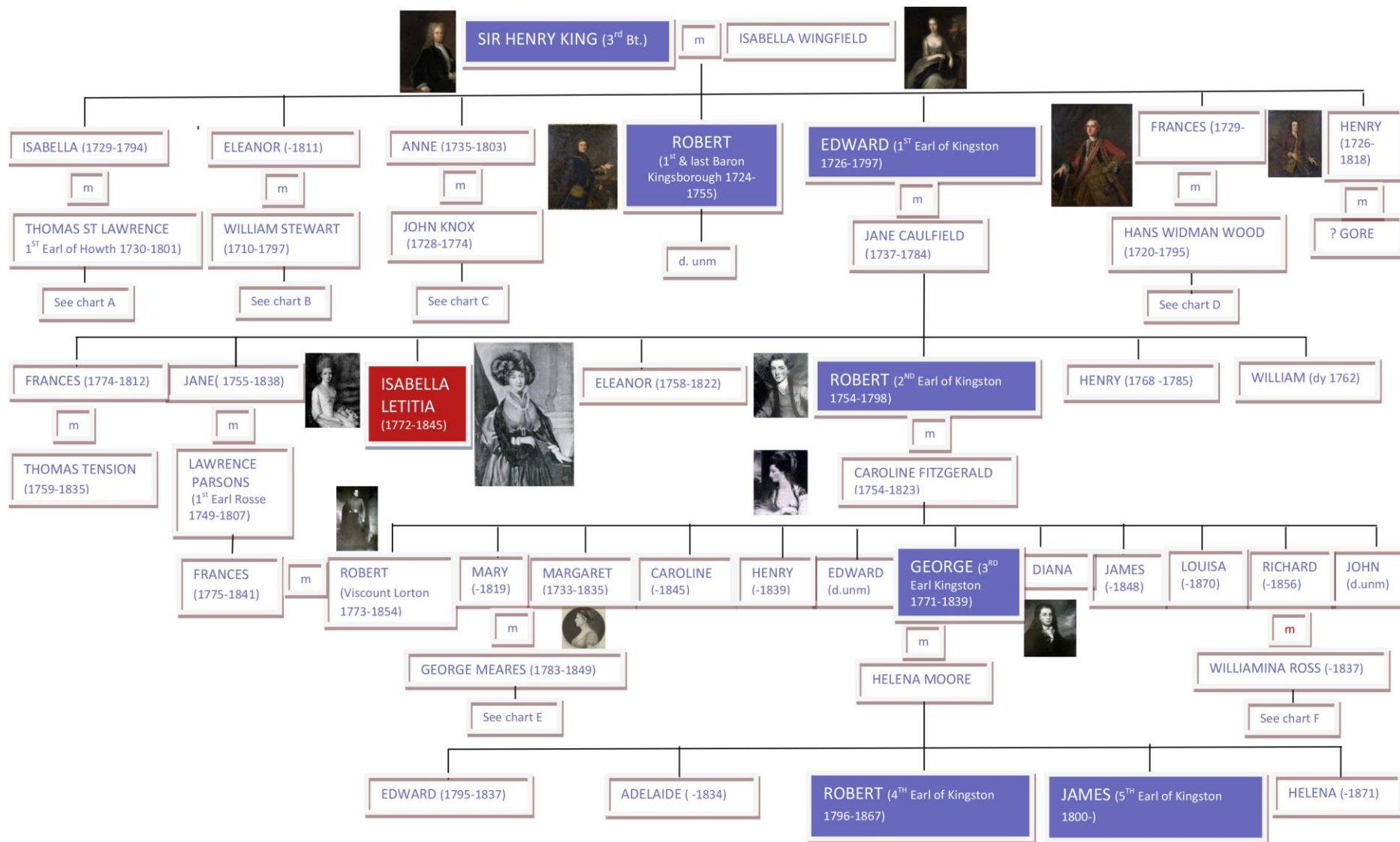


CHART A – ST LAWRENCE (EARLS OF HOWTH) FAMILY

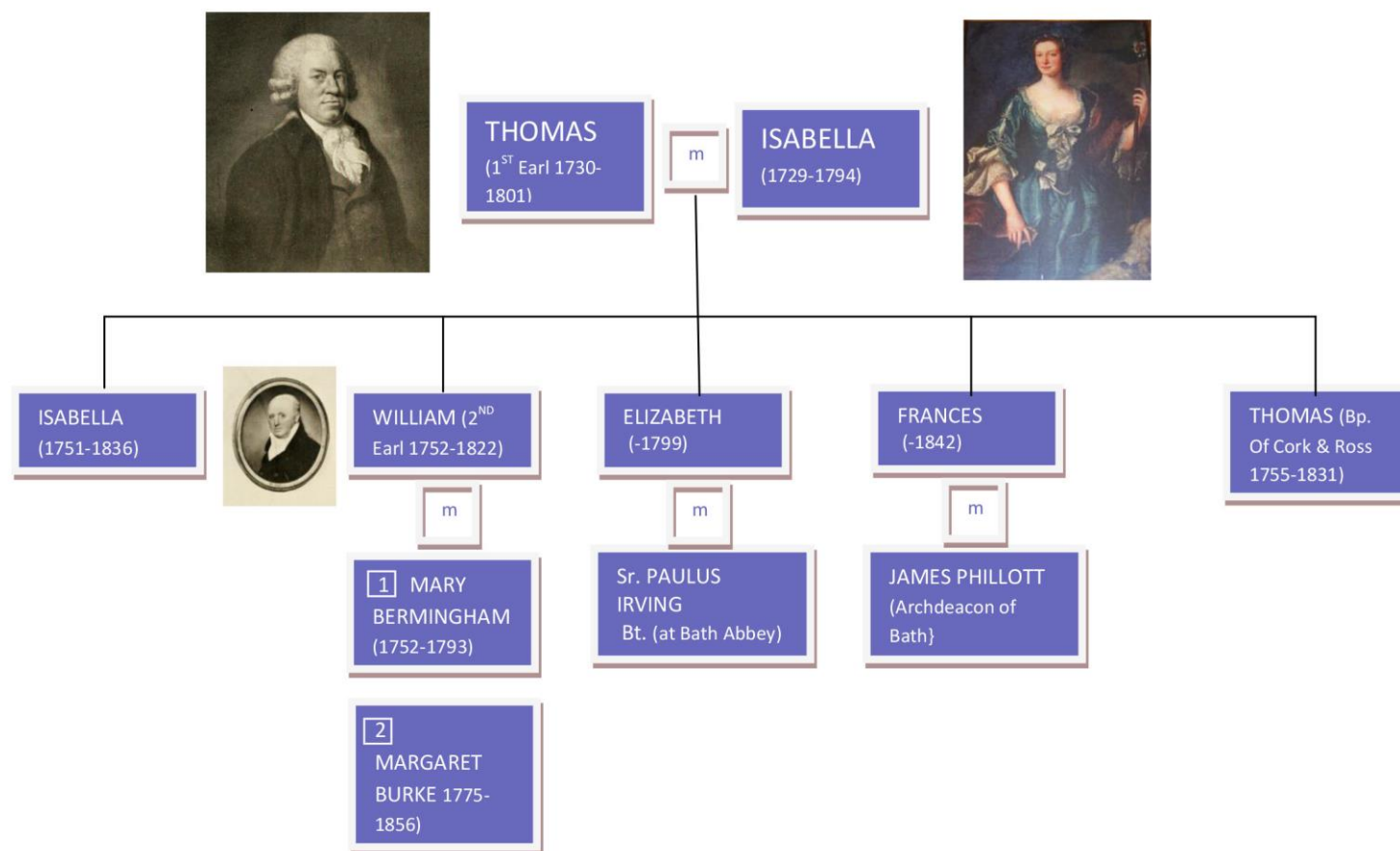


CHART B – STEWART (OF KILLYMOON) FAMILY

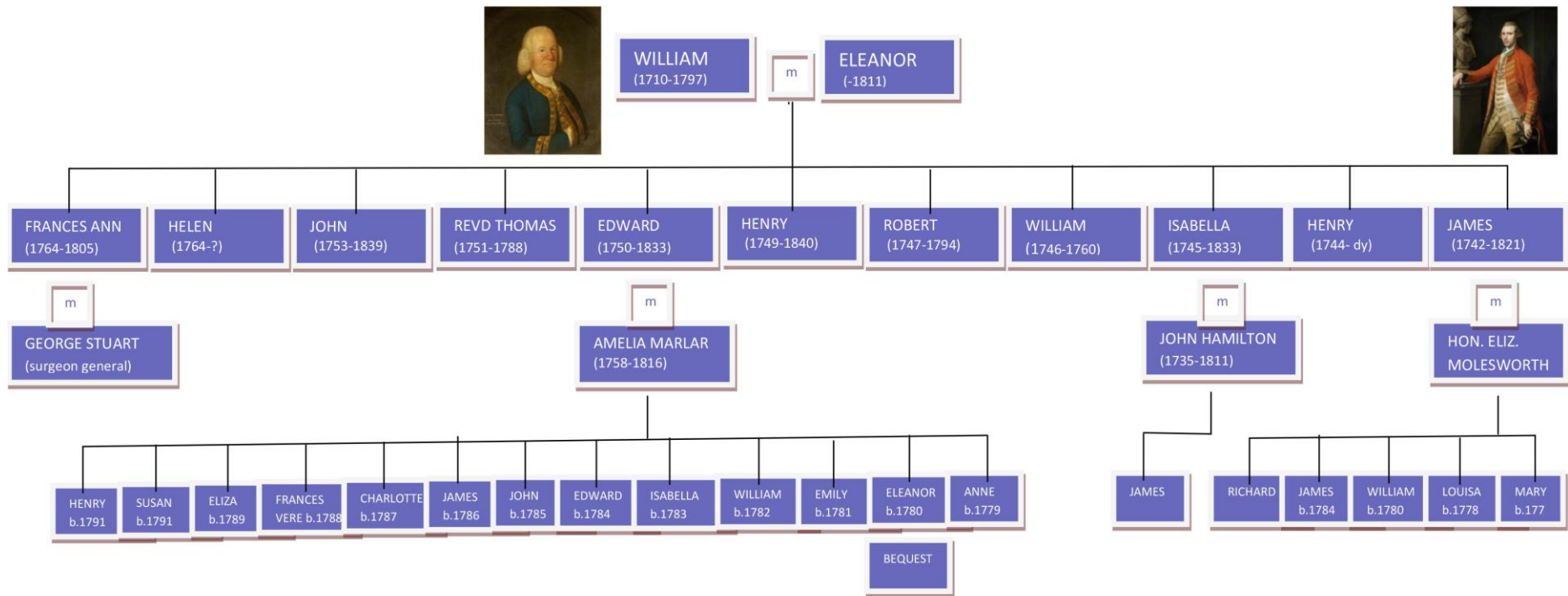


CHART C – KNOX (OF CASTLEREAGH) FAMILY

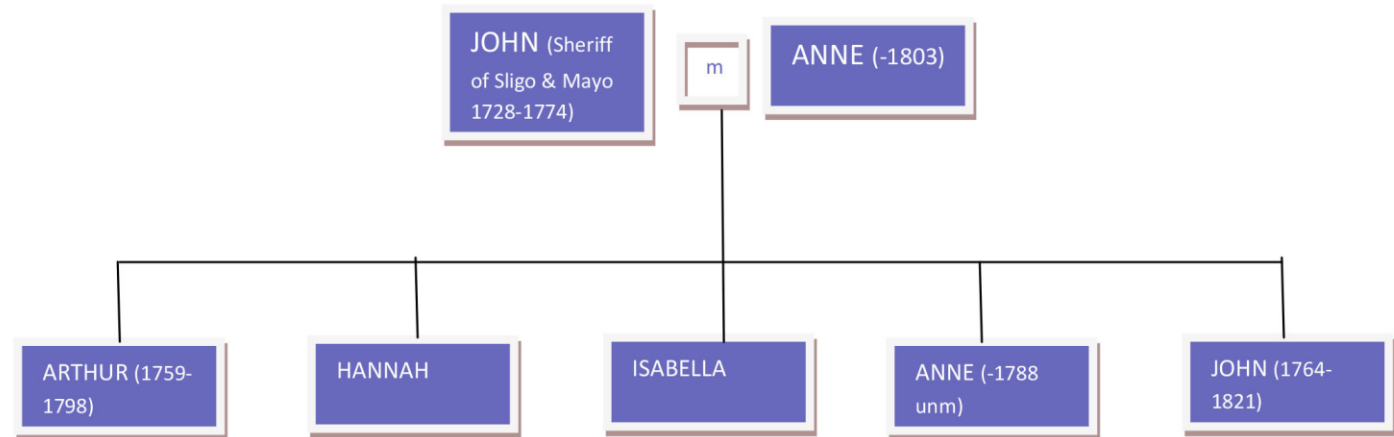


CHART D – WIDMAN-WOOD FAMILY

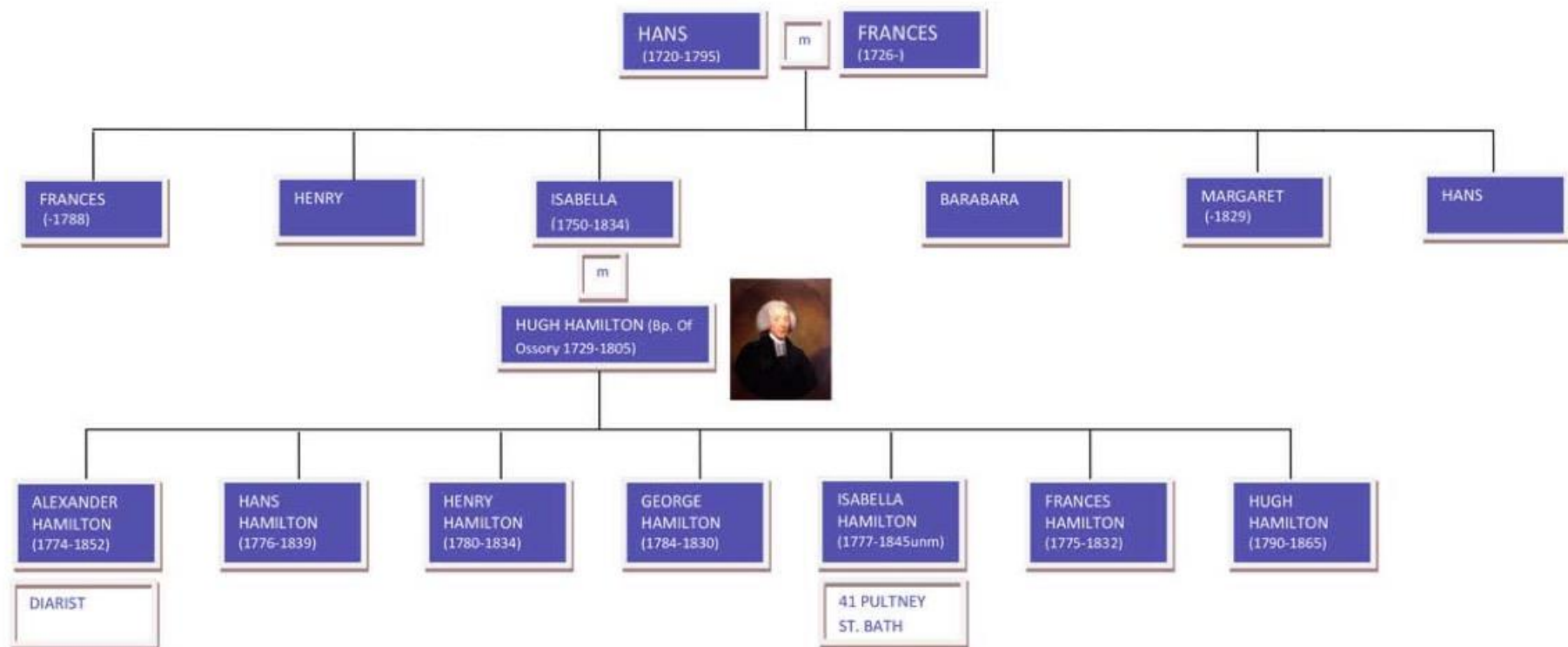


CHART E – (GALBRAITH) MEARES FAMILY

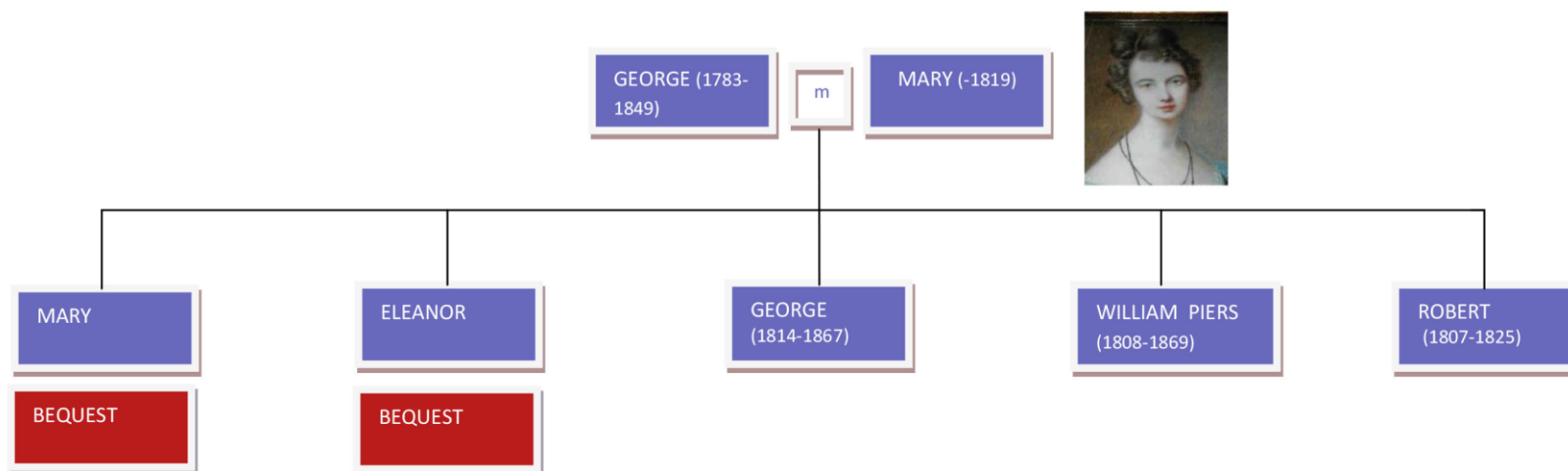
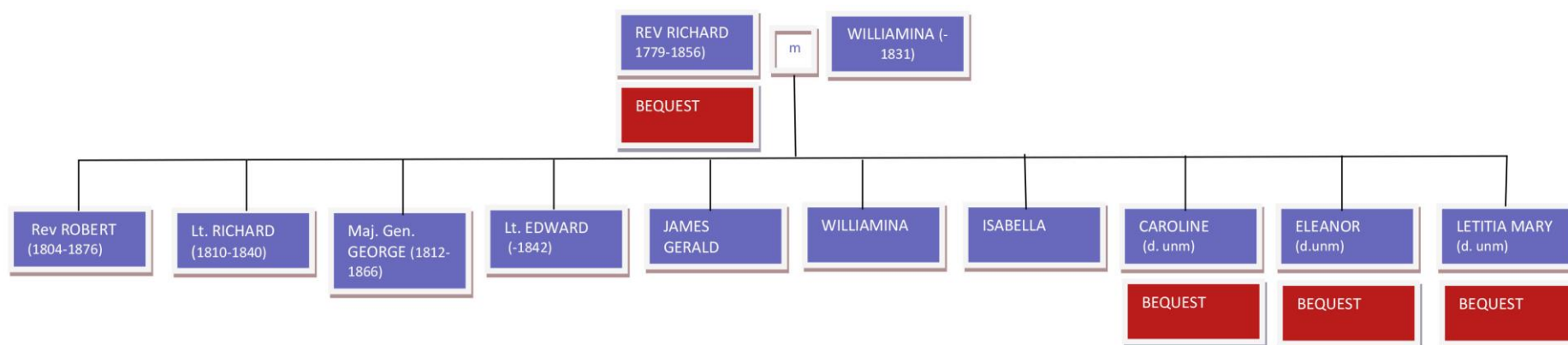


CHART F – (FITZGERALD) KING FAMILY



Appendix 2

INDEX OF TRUSTEES AND LOCAL GUARDIANS OF THE LADIES ASSOCIATION 1816-1836

Name	Place	Position	Date Appointed	Age on Appointment	Marital Status
Thomas Benjamin	Clifton	Local guardian/trustee	1821	63	-
Lady Temperance Bateman	Bath	Local guardian	1817	c 57	Widowed 1824
Hon. Mary Broderick	Bath	Local guardian	1819	56	Spinster
Elizabeth Claxton	Bath	Local guardian	1816	-	Widowed 1811
Lady Clonbrock	Bath	Local guardian	1816	58	Widowed 1795
Rev. J.J Conybeare	Bath	Local guardian	1821-24 (d.)	-	-
Isaac Cook	Clifton	Local guardian	1821	-	-
John Shute Duncan	Bath	Local guardian	1821	52	-
Mrs Enraught	Clifton	Local guardian	1821	-	-
Gerald Fitzgerald	Bath	Local guardian/trustee	1821	43	-
Miss Mary Fitzgerald	Bath	Local guardian	-	-	Spinster
Arthur Foulks	Clifton	Local guardian/trustee	1821	43	-
Wyndham Goodden	Bath	Local guardian/trustee	1821	c 60	-
John Scandrett Harford	Clifton	Local guardian/trustee	1821	34	-
Lady Hartopp	Clifton	Local guardian	1821	-	Widowed 1834
Rev. H.H. Hayes	Bath	Local guardian	1821	-	-
Mrs Hensman	Clifton	Local guardian	1821-28	-	-
Serena Martha Holroyd	Bath	Local guardian	1816-20 (d.)	76	Spinster
Sir Benjamin Hobhouse	Bath	Original guardian/trustee	1816-31 (d.)	58	-
Hon. Mrs C. Irby	Clifton	Local guardian	1821	-	-
Lady Isabella King	Bath	Local guardian	1816	44	Spinster
Lady E. Lindsay	Bath	Local guardian	1828	59	Widowed 18?
Viscount Lorton	Clifton	Local guardian	1821	48	-
Earl Manvers	Bath	Original guardian/trustee	1816	38	-
Miss Anne Newcome	Bath	Local guardian	1816-19	-	-
Hon. Miss E. Powys	Clifton	Local guardian	1821	38	-
H Ryder Bishop of Gloucester	Clifton	Local guardian	1821-24?	44	-
Earl of Shaftesbury (5 th ?)	Bath	Original	1816	45	-

	guardian/trustee				
Lady Louisa De Spaen	Clifton	Local guardian	1821-24	-	Widowed 1805
Mrs S. Stackhouse	Bath	Local guardian	1819	66	Widowed 1819
Hon. Mrs A. Strange	Bath	Local guardian	1820	53	-
Mrs E. Sutton	Bath	Local guardian	1816	-	-
Miss Townsend	Clifton	Local guardian	1821-29	-	-
Lord Vernon	Bath	Original guardian/trustee	1816	37	-
William Wilberforce	Clifton	Local guardian	1821	62	-
Lady Willoughby	Bath	Local guardian	1816-28 (d.)	55	Widowed 1820

ORIGINAL GENERAL TRUSTEES

1815

The Earl of Shaftesbury
The Hon George Vernon

The Earl Manvers
Sir Benjamin Hobhouse (Acting Trustee)

1832

The Earl of Shaftesbury
The Hon George Vernon

The Earl Manvers (Acting Trustee)

LOCAL TRUSTEES (MEN)

1821 (On the removal to Cornwallis House Clifton)

Mr J S Harford
Mr G Fitzgerald

Mr A Foulkes
Mr I Cooke

LOCAL GUARDIANS (MEN)

1821 (On the removal to Cornwallis House Clifton).

Bristol

Viscount Lorton
Mr W Wilberforce

Bishop of Gloucester (Henry Ryder-1824)
Mr T Babbington

Bath

Mr W Goodden
Mr J S Duncan

Rev'd H H Hayes
Rev'd J J Conybeare

LOCAL GUARDIANS AND TRUSTEES (MEN).

1833 (Cornwallis House)

Mr J S Duncan
Mr W Goodden
Mr G Fitzgerald

Mr I Cooke
Mr A Foulkes
Mr J S Harford

LOCAL GUARDIANS (WOMEN) “Ladies of Rank”

1815

‘When the plan for the female establishments was proposed and an association of Ladies formed for the purpose of carrying it into effect; the then patronesses of the undertaking agreed to commit the management of the institution to the management of a committee appointed for that purpose. Ladies who accepted that offer were:⁸⁷³

(Lady Willoughby, Lady Clonbrock and lady Isabella King agreed to form the first local committee).

Lady Willoughby

Mrs E Claxton

Lady Clonbrock

Miss A Newcome (Sec)

Mrs S M Holroyd

Miss M L Fitzgerald (one of the 1st committee members at Bath .)

Mrs E Sutton

Lady Isabella King

1817

(As above)

Lady T Bateman

1819

(As above except Miss A Newcome replaced by Hon Miss Brodrick as sec and possibly Mrs Claxton).

Mrs S Stackhouse

Hon Miss M Brodrick (Sec)

1820

(As above except Mrs Holroyd (d. 1820))

Hon Mrs A Strange

1821

(As above for Bath)

Clifton

‘The Ladies who were invited to become members of the guardian committee when the institution was removed to Clifton were:⁸⁷⁴

Lady Louisa De Spaen – (no longer resident at Clifton by 1824)

Miss Stanhope – (who also left Clifton in 1824 [listed in 1824 so probably left that year])

Mrs Hensman – (withdrew from the committee[1821-?])

Hon Miss Emily Powys – [left before 1833]

Lady Hartopp – (was requested and finally agreed to become a member of the committee)

Mrs Austin & Mrs Ensought(?)

Hon Mrs C Irby

Mrs & Miss S Townsend (as secretary, now gone to ?[1821-1829/32])

1824

‘As in 1824 there was no efficient committee at Clifton (five members being required to form a board) the following paper was sent to Bath for the approbation of the *original committee* residing there and was approved and signed by all the members present at the meeting namely:⁸⁷⁵

⁸⁷³ DRO, H7/7/15, copy of Miss Newcome’s letter to the patrons & patronesses of the Ladies’ Association 25, September, 1815.

⁸⁷⁴ DRO, H7/7/7, 1824.

⁸⁷⁵ DRO, H7/7/7, 1824.

Lady Clonbrock	Hon Miss M Brodrick (sec)
Hon Mrs A Strange	Lady T Bateman
Mrs E Sutton	Mrs S Stackhouse
Miss M L Fitzgerald	
Lady Eleanor Lindsay	
(Missing – Lady Isabella King, Lady Willoughby)	

1828

(As above except Lady Willoughby (d. 1828))

1832

‘To the Ladies of the guardian Committee who reside at Bath’⁸⁷⁶

Lady Eleanor Lindsay	Mrs S Stackhouse
Mrs E Sutton	Miss M L Fitzgerald
Lady Bateman	

1833

Hon Miss Brodrick (sec to the Patronesses)

Lady Clonbrock (Cheltenham) Lady Isabella King (Ireland)

Lady Bateman, Mrs Sutton, Miss Fitzgerald, Mrs Stackhouse (Bath)

Hon Mrs Irby (?) , Lady Hartopp, Mrs Ensought(?) (Clifton) (no sec to be obtained at Clifton.)

⁸⁷⁶ DRO, H7/7/19, Reminders respecting the funds of the Ladies’ Association.

Appendix 3

TABLE OF CHARITABLE AND EVANGELICAL ACTIVITY

	Evangelical	House of Protection Monmouth Street Society	Hibernian Sunday School Society	Bath Penitentiary	Church Missionary Society
PATRONESSES					
Duchess of Buccleuch	✓			✓	
Marchioness of Exeter					
Countess of Carysfort	✓			✓	
Viscountess Anson		✓		✓	
Lady Clonbrock			✓		
Lady Willoughby	✓		✓	✓	✓
Lady Isabella King	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lady Olivia Sparrow	✓				✓
Duchess of Wellington				✓	
Duchess of Ormonde and Ossory					
Countess Manvers	✓		✓	✓	
Countess Fortescue					
Countess of Liverpool				✓	
Countess of Clare			✓		
Duchess of Beaufort	✓				✓
PATRONS					
Bishop of St David's/Salisbury				✓	
Bishop of Durham					
Earl of Sheffield					
Bishop of Meath				✓	

Earl of Rocksavage	✓		✓		✓
Bishop of Lichfield	✓				
Bishop of Winchester	✓				
Archbishop of Dublin	✓				
TRUSTEES					
Earl Manvers				✓	
Sir Benjamin Hobhouse Bt.				✓	
Lord Vernon					
Earl of Shaftesbury					
LOCAL GUARDIAN COMMITTEE BATH					
Mrs Holroyd		✓	✓		
Mrs Stackhouse		✓	✓	✓	✓
Mrs Sutton			✓	✓	
Mrs Caxton		✓	✓		
The Hon. Miss Broderick				✓	
Miss Newcome			✓		
Lady Isabella King	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lady Willoughby	✓		✓		✓
Lady Clonbrock			✓		
Miss Fitzgerald		✓	✓		✓
Lady Bateman	✓		✓	✓	
Hon Mrs Strange			✓	✓	✓
GUARDIANS BATH (1821)					
Wyndham Goodden				✓	
J S Duncan	✓	✓		✓	
Rev H Hayes				✓	
Rev J J Conybeare					
GUARDIANS CLIFTON (1821)					
Lord Lorton	✓		✓		✓
Bishop of Gloucester	✓		✓	✓	✓
William Wilberforce	✓		✓		✓

Thomas Babington	✓	✓	✓
TRUSTEES CLIFTON (1821)			
J S Harford	✓		✓
Gerald Fitzgerald	✓	✓	✓
Arthur Foulks	✓		✓
Isaac Cooke	✓		✓

Appendix 4

INDEX OF PATRONS AND PATRONESSES OF THE LADIES ASSOCIATION 1816-1836

“The Patronesses were to be chosen from subscribers of a
stated rank. A Baroness to be the lowest.”⁸⁷⁷

Patronesses	Date Appointed	Age on Appointment	Marital Status	Died
Duchess of Beaufort	1824	53	M	-
Duchess of Buccleuch	1816	73	Dow 1812	1827
Duchess of Wellington	1816	43	M	1831
Marchioness of Exeter	1816	59	Dow 1804	-
Marchioness of Ormonde & Ossory	1816	26	M	1817
Viscountess Anson	1816	37	Dow 1818	-
Countess of Carisfort	1816	60	M	-
Countess of Clare	1828	35	M	-
Countess of Fortescue	1816	56	M	-
Countess of Liverpool	1816	40	M	1821
Countess of Manvers	1816	60	Dow 1816	1832
Lady Isabella King	1816	44	Spinster	-
Lady Olivia Sparrow	1816	42	Dow 1805	-
Rt Hon Lady Willoughby	1816	55	Dow 1820	1828
Rt Hon Clonbrock	1816	58	Dow 1795	-

⁸⁷⁷ DRO, H7/7/7 Clifton, 1823.

Patrons	(rem 1802)			
Lord Bishop of Durham (Shute Barrington)	1816	82	-	1826
Lord Bishop of St. David's & then Salisbury (Thomas Burgess)	1816	60	-	-
Lord Bishop of Meath (Thomas O'Beirne)	1816	67	-	1823
Lord Bishop of Winchester (.....?)	1828	38	-	-
Lord Bishop of Lichfield (.....?)	1828	51	-	1836
Archbishop of Dublin (.....?)	1828	62	-	1831
Earl of Sheffield	1816	81	-	1821
Marquess of Cholmondeley	1824	75	-	-
Viscount Lorton	1828	55	-	-

1816

Patronesses

Her Grace the Duchess of Buccleuch
Her Grace The Duchess of Wellington
The Marchioness of Exeter
The Marchioness of Ormonde & Ossory
The Viscountess Anson
The Countess of Liverpool
The Countess of Carysfort
The Countess Fortescue
The Countess Manvers
Lady Isabella King
Lady Olivia Sparrow
The Rt Hon Lady Willoughby
The Rt Hon Lady Clonbrock

Patrons

The Lord Bishop of Durham
The Lord Bishop of St David's
The Lord Bishop of Meath
The Earl of Sheffield

1819

Patronesses

(As above but death of The Marchioness of Ormonde and Ossory (d. 1817))

Patrons

(As above)

1821

Patronesses

(As above but death of Lady Liverpool (d. 1821))

Patrons

(As above but death of Earl of Sheffield (d. 1821))

1824

Patronesses

(As above)

The Duchess of Beaufort

Patrons

(As above but death of Bishop of Meath (d. 1823))

The Marquess of Cholmondeley

1828

Patronesses

(As above but death of Duchess of Buccleuch (d. 1827))

The Countess of Clare

Patrons

(As above but death of Bishop of Durham (d1826))

Lord Bishop of Salisbury (previously Bishop of St David's)

Lord Bishop of Winchester

Lord Bishop of Lichfield

The Archbishop of Dublin

Viscount Lorton

1832

Patronesses

(As above but deaths of Lady Willoughby (d1828) and Duchess of Wellington (d1831))

The Marchioness of Exeter (Once a zealous friend while Lady Willoughby lived).

The Viscountess Anson (An efficient patroness).

The Countess Carysfort (Very old but very true).

The Countess Fortescue (Takes no interest in it).

The Countess Manvers (Wishes it well).

The Countess of Clare (Abroad).

The Duchess of Beaufort (Has not even subscribed).

Lady Isabella King

Lady Olivia Sparrow (Has never cared about it).

Lady Clonbrock (One of its most munificent benefactresses).

Patrons

(As above but death of Archbishop of Dublin (d1831))

Bishop of Salisbury (Is indeed a Patron).

Bishop of Winchester (Does not care).

Bishop of Lichfield (Does not care).

Marquess of Cholmondeley (Once a zealous friend while lady Willoughby lived).

Viscount Lorton (A friend).⁸⁷⁸

⁸⁷⁸ DRO, H7/7/12, Memo for the local trustees.

Appendix 5

ANNUAL REPORT FOR
BATH PENITENTIARY AND LOCK HOSPITAL 1816
[NAMES LINKED TO THE LADIES ASSOCIATION ONLY ARE INCLUDED]

President

Lord Gwydir

Honorary Vice-Presidents

Lord Manvers

Lord Carysfort

Bishop of Salisbury

Trustees

W. Goodden

J.S. Duncan

James Strange

Committee

James Strange

Gerald Fitzgerald

Select Committee

J.S. Duncan

Gerald Fitzgerald

James Strange

Ladies Committee

Hon Mrs Strange

Donations/Subscriptions

Viscount Anson
Sir H Bateman
Mrs Sutton
Duke of Buccleuch
James Strange
Bath Corporation
Lady Sydney
Hon Miss Broderick
J Stackhouse
Earl of Carysfort
Duke of Wellington
J.S. Duncan

Lady Willoughby
Gerald Fitzgerald
W. Goodden
Lord Gwydir (£100)
Bishop of Gloucester
Rev H.H. Hayes
Lady Isabella King
Earl of Manvers
Dowager Countess Manvers
Bishop of Meath
Hon Mrs Strange

Appendix 6

RESIDENTS OF THE LADIES ASSOCIATION

Name	Age & date of entry	Family Background	Circumstances	Outcome
BELGRAVE Mrs	1818			Died at Cornwallis House 1824.
BOWLES Mary		Father of Wanstead Grove – Glass manufacturer		Died in 1831, unmarried
BROTHERSON Mary	Approx 43 1817	Father – Benjamin Markham Brotherson, of Capisterre, St Kitts.(Father –Lewis Brotherson, plantation owner.) Mother – Anne Verchild of St Kitts. (Father – James Verchild, President of St Kitts.)	Father died 1813. Disinherited by his father, Lewis ,for marrying Anne against his wishes.	Mary was paid personally by Lady Isabella as her personal assistant and she remained at Cornwallis House until it was sold in 1836. Received a bequest from the Ladies Association.
BROWNE Miss	1819			Left in 1826/7 to live in Swansea. Situation arranged by Miss Bowdler. Invalid, ‘struggle[d] with so painful a disease’[R2 7/17/ 373-5] Views conflicted with lady Isabella’s. ‘I endeavoured to suit her abilities and inclinations but with her <u>views and feelings</u> it is better she be placed where there is no <u>duty</u> to perform[R2 7/17 373-5]
CALVERT Mrs Mary (Lady Renter)	At least 58 June 1816 (at the start)	Husband – Richard Calvert of Fulmer Bucks and Lincolns Inn. Secretary to the Lord Chamberlain and Commissioner of Bankrupts	Husband died 13.11.1814.	Died between 1825 and 1828.
CAMBRIDGE Miss				
CAMERON Mary Anne	28 After 1819	Father – Charles Cameron MD of Worcester. Sister-in-law of Lucy Lyttelton Cameron(children’s author).	Father died Dec 1818 Mother dies Nov 1815	Left after 1828, died unmarried 14.11.1852.
COLLINGWOOD Miss	June 1818			Left by 1825
COOPER Miss	1828			Requested to leave in 1828 - unsuitable
CROSBIE Miss				
D’ARCY Martha	45 May 1817	Father – James D’Arcy, Landowner of Hyde Park, Co	Father died 1803. Brother’s 1 st wife, Emily Purdon died in	Married Fleming Handy (3 rd son of Samuel Handy of Bracca Castle, co Westmeath died 1828.) 1825.He died in 1826. Martha received a bequest

		Westmeath, Ireland. Mother, Martha Grierson (heiress), died 1782.	childbirth 1803. Remarried, Mary Anne Cary, 1817. SIBLINGS???	from the Ladies Association but was later destitute with 'only £10 a year to live on'.
D'ARCY Miss Alicia	48 May 1817	As above	As above	Left by 1825. Received a bequest from the Ladies Association
DONOVAN Miss	Jan 1818			Left before 1825
DOWNES Miss	Aug 1816			Left before 1825
D'UKLANSKI BARONESS (Emma)	19 1817	Husband – Baron Karl Theodore D'Uklanski, displaced Prussian landowner and author. Father – Robert Eyre	Married aged 16 in 1814, widowed 1816.	Left before 1825
ERSKINE Frances Jemima	Over 18 Dec 1828	Father – John Thomas Erskine, Earl of Mar Mother – Janet Miller died 25.8.1825	Father , opium addict, died bankrupt 20.9.1828	Marriage portion - £10,000 (bequeathed by father in will. Later contested by her brother) Married William James Goodeve of Clifton, Surgeon, 12.10.1830.
ERSKINE Janet Jean	Under 18 Dec 1828	Father – John Thomas Erskine, Earl of Mar Mother – Janet Miller died 25.8.1825	Father, opium addict, died bankrupt 20.9.1828	Marriage portion - £10,000 (bequeathed by father in will, later contested by her brother.) Married Edward Wilmot Chetwode of Woodbank, Queens County, Ireland , 29.4.1830
FRY Elizabeth	1825			Died 1830 Will proved 10/1/1831
GALLWAY Teresa Maria	Before 1828			Died 1830
GIBBONS Miss	Nov 1818			Left before 1825
HALKETT Margaret Craigie	52 1828	Husband – Lt Col John Lindesay , died 1780 Son – Sir Patrick, 8 th Earl Lindesay. Father – Colonel Charles Halkett of Hall Hill		Remained at the ladies Association until it was suspended in 1832.

HARPER Mrs & Miss	1817	Husband – Bishop Harper		Governess to Fitzclarence children after Dec 1817
HISLOP-WOOD Anne	After 1825	Father - General Sir Thomas Hislop Bart (illegitimate daughter?)SIBLINGS?? Died 1843	Father, and Major John Thomas Wood (?) both sustained heavy financial losses in fighting for the Deccan prize money. A scandal which led, in 1826, to the suicide of Major Wood.	Left the Ladies Association after 1828 and took the post of governess in Devon. Received a bequest from the Ladies Association
HUME Miss	June 1816			Left before 1825
INGILBY Constance	22 May 1817	Father – Sir John Ingilby 1 st Bt of Ripley Castle, Yorkshire Mother – Elizabeth Amcotts (heiress), died 1812.	Father, fled to Europe with family in Oct 1794 to escape debtors, separated from his wife in 1800. Died heavily in debt 8.5.1815 SIBINGS???	Marriage portion of £4,000 raised by maternal grandfather on the death of her father. Married Mark Theodore de Morlet of Berne, MD, 5.7.1819.
JAMES Miss				Left by 1828
KENNICOTT Mrs	1831?			Remained at the Ladies' Association until it was suspended in 1832
MACKENZIE Mrs	May 1817			
MARRIOTT Miss				Married Mr Saunders of Clifton by 1836
MORRISS Miss				
PATRICK Miss				
PAYNE Miss	1829			Remained at the Ladies' Association until it was suspended in 1832
RAINSFORD Harriet	22/4 1819	Father – Capt Thomas Rainsford (father –Merchant, colonial settler who emigrated to America in 1773) Mother – Jane Hannay (father was Sir Samuel Hannay of Kirkdale who accumulated huge debts during his lifetime)	Mother disinherited on her marriage. Father , accompanied by family, sent to St Helena to guard Napoleon in 1816. Both parents died there in 1817	Married Henry Frederick Hurst Nov 1820
RAINSFORD Jane	22/4 1819	As above	As above	Permanent invalid, left Ladies Association after 1825 and before 1828. Returned to family home Kirkdale, Scotland. Received bequest from the Ladies Association.

SADLER Miss	1817			Left before 1825
SAMPLER Miss's (2)		Irish		Received bequest from the Ladies' Association
SHARRER Susan	30 - 1823 Before 1823	Father – Rev'd John Sharrer, vicar of Canwick, Lincs (died 20.6.1818)	Daughter of minor clergy, at least two sisters -Francis married Charles Proby cousin of Earl of Carysfort	Remained at the Ladies Association until it was suspended. Married Rev'd CF Reichel (Moravian, Fulnec) after 1832. Received bequest of £50 from The Ladies Association
SHEPHERD Charlotte Naomi	Aug 1828			Married George Lionel Fitzmaurice, Army surgeon, injured and retired. (Bankrupt) 13.7.1830.
SMEAR Louisa	37 1819	Father – Rev'd C Smear of Frostenden Suffolk died 1803 2 sisters		Left by 1825
STEVENS Mrs	Before 1823	Husband – Colonel Stevens of Discove House, Bruton, Somerset. Father – possibly Earl of Poulett of Somerset.	Husband died before 1823	Died at Cornwallis House in 1826.
STEVENS Mary Poulett	Before 1823	Father - Colonel Stevens of Discove House Bruton	Father died before 1831	Married Benjamin Travers (3 rd marriage) surgeon extraordinary to the Queen and Prince Consort, 1831.
TRESEVEN [sic] Miss				
WATSON Penelope	1825?			Died before 1828
WEBSTER Mrs & Family (7) (Lady Directress)	50's June 1816	Irish?		
WILLYAMS Jane Louisa	43 May 1829	Father – James Willyams of Carnanton, Cornwall.	Father died 10.2.1828, fourth of five daughters	Left May 1830. Disappointment with unsettled and unchristian ethos of the institution . [R2 7/18 520-21] Authoress.
WINSTONE Mrs & Miss	1816/17			Left before 1825
ZOUCHE Augusta	1820	Father – Richard Zouche of Wakefield, Merchant. Appointed 1 st clerk to the treasury in Dublin by Ld Lieut of Ireland 1794. (Brother of Rev'd Thomas Zouche,	Father died before 1825 SIBLINGS???	Left before 1825, married Rev'd Charles Morice, Quebec, 1845.

		Prebendary of Durham) Mother – Miss Hare, daughter of Rev'd Charles Hare, Dublin.		
ZOUCHE Elizabeth	1820	As above (Family probably a branch of the Zouches, Barons of Harrington)	As above	Married Edward Martin, Clergyman, 1826. Faced extreme poverty after her husband contracted a debilitating mental illness. Received bequest from the Ladies Association
ZOUCHE Frances	20's 1820	As above	As above	Died, at Cornwallis House, Bristol, 3.7.1825.

COLOUR KEY:

Lady Renters

Associate Ladies

Endowed Ladies

Unknown

Appendix 7

SIBLINGS

Name	No. of Siblings	Brothers	Sisters	Sisters married on entry	Ranking
Brotherson	Unknown	-	-	-	-
Browne	Unknown	-	-	-	-
Cameron	10	6	3	1	2 nd of 3 Girls
D'Arcy	8	3	3	3	2 nd & 3 rd of 5 Girls
Erskine	3	1	0	0	2 Youngest
Hislop-Wood	Unknown	-	-	-	-
Ingilby	11	4	6	4	Youngest
Rainsford	8	4	2	0	2 Eldest
Sharrer	4	1	2	2	2 nd of 3 Girls
Shepherd	Unknown	-	-	-	-
Smear	7	1	5	2	Unknown
Stevens	Unknown	-	-	-	-
Willyams	8	3	4	4	Youngest
Zouche	5	2	0	0	Unknown

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