

**‘Role and Ritual: Function and Performance in Domestic Spaces of
Elite Eighteenth-Century English Houses, 1750-1800’**

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Rosanna Lucy Doris C Harrison Master of Arts by Research

The Role of Performance and Ritual within Eighteenth-Century Elite English Households

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Abstract

This thesis offers an, albeit necessary brief, historical analysis of the eighteenth-century incorporation of ritual practises and sociabilities enacted in a few elite interior environments of what I consider to be six of the most interesting English houses, either newly constructed or extended during the course of the eighteenth century. Two of which houses are now demolished in whole, as is the case with Bulstrode Park, situated in Gerrard's Cross, Buckinghamshire, or part, as is the case with Norfolk House, located in St. James's Square, central London.

It is useful to note that before the start of the research for this thesis began it was assumed on the part of the author that eighteenth-century domestic space were increasingly segmented for inflexible and separate activities. There follows a focused discussion of the varying types of display, ritual and sociable interaction made manifest in; the ground floor spaces of the Entrance Hall, Library, State Bedchamber and Etruscan Dressing Room at Osterley House and Great Hall and Long Gallery of Syon House; the Music and Ball Room of Norfolk House; and, finally, the first floor Dressing Rooms of Bulstrode Park, No. 23 Hill Street and Montagu House in Portman Square. Discussion has a concern to establish the ways in which such material display and sociabilities may have served their owners for a variety of ends. Such interior (and exterior) commissions of assimilated materiality and resulting sociabilities are found to serve their male householder, or as is discovered, female head of house, in a number of different, distinctive and often adaptable ways.

Analysis of the specific spatial environments in each elite household discussed reveals that different types of social rituals were often adopted depending upon the individual interests of a patron, their gender and nature of relationship to the head of household. Often divergent strands of cultural influence overlapping forms of ritual practise were incorporated in modernised, areas within a grand household, like that of Bulstrode Park's Dressing Room, which could be tailored to a surprising number of functions and usages, according to the nature of the relationship with the householder. It also emerges, somewhat surprisingly, that strong and educated female patrons included in this thesis incorporated most successfully different cultural forms of practise and unusual methodologies of aesthetic display within the most private spatial areas in their residences. Again, illustrated most notably with the case of Bulstrode Park, that enabled these women to effectively, and creatively, portray a memorable image and identity individual to themselves.

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Preface

This thesis has evolved both out of a life-long fascination with the interior and exterior environments of elite eighteenth-century English houses I have visited, both as a child and adult, and after engaging with art historical and eighteenth-century social history primary and secondary sources when completing my first B. A Hons degree in Art History at the University of Nottingham. I found polite and satirical narrative depictions of daily life and sociable interaction within English grand eighteenth-century houses, often influenced by surrounding artwork and *objets d'art* amassed inside such spatial confines, a fertile area for investigation. This was further explored, with specific reference to the ever continuing 'life history' of objects, such as ceramics, as they pass from one cultural context to another (especially museological environments), in my subsequent thesis for a taught M.A. in Art Gallery and Museum Studies undertaken at Manchester University.

Consequently, when deliberating upon the precise subject matter for this historical research thesis, I found it easy to decide upon providing extended analysis upon different types of ritual and sociability enacted within individual, and often gendered, spatial areas in the households of some of England's most intriguing domestic dwellings. Although it did take me a little while longer to select only a small number of grand English houses on which to focus in order to adequately explore the kinds of social engagement with cultural practices enacted within.

In order to understand better the different aims and ambitions of these heads of houses and assess the different ways they may have utilised sociable cultural practices to effect individual pursuits, as well as more communal rituals, I have taken the step of choosing to examine the more public eighteenth-century areas of sociable interaction first in the beginning of the thesis and then the more private arenas of sociable interaction within the last chapter. I have done this both so as to envisage, and convey, the journey which an eighteenth-century visitor themselves may well have necessarily undertaken in order to reach the inner most enclaves of a grand domestic residence, as well as to try and impart such findings, hopefully, in an interesting and individual manner.

Introduction

During the last few decades of the seventeenth century and the opening decades of the eighteenth century, there emerged a new emphasis on domestic and sociable activity enacted inside elite residences, in both urban and rural environments. This realm encompassed a multitude of conflating and interwoven rituals of entertainment, household duties and cultural pursuits. A host of mid to late eighteenth-century commentary can enhance our understanding of the phenomena of assimilated eighteenth-century social entertainments, new emphasis upon polite etiquette, as well as the burgeoning material and literary culture that aided the behavioural transformation of English elite society in this period. In particular, the desire to endorse polite, cultural activities and display of material consumerism within the house, aided the elaboration of long-standing rituals and the development of new ones.

The practise of ritual is defined by the *Collins English Dictionary* as one following ‘a prescribed order of performing rites... one regularly followed’.¹ The art of performance variously distinguished as ‘the act or process of performing or carrying out’ as a central focus or feature of activity.² For the purposes of this thesis, these ritual uses referred to are termed as those specific entertainments repeatedly undertaken within particular areas of domestic interiors. As Judge William Blackstone noted in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, first published between 1765 and 1769, the island of Britain was becoming a nation of ‘polite and commercial people’.³ The word ‘politeness’, and its related virtues of ‘refinement’, ‘sociability’ and civil ‘manners’, were intrinsically linked in early eighteenth-century English cultural and literary manifestations.

Politeness itself was defined as the practical application of good manners within the newly established culture of sociability. Polite rituals within a domestic sphere normally encompassed ‘a repertoire of manners’ that could be performed on one’s own or, as was more common, for the benefit of family members, close acquaintances and larger groups of

1 Anon, *Oxford Collins English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1115.

2 Anon, *Oxford Collins English Dictionary*, p. 1015.

3 Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 1.

assembled guests. Although the formation of polite rituals in a domestic setting did not overturn the age-old hierarchy of placing the male head of house at the pinnacle of social performance, it did add an elegance of conduct to proceedings taking place within one's own residence, as well as enabling a more convivial atmosphere to prevail when entertaining guests. Importantly, the clear display of such rituals in a theatrical fashion could also illustrate cultured taste, wealth and educated learning.

For Nicholas Cooper, the house of taste reflected 'a willingness to use the interior of the house as the public expression of one's mind [rather] than the personal indulgence of his taste'.⁴ Indeed, the long eighteenth century defined itself as the 'century of taste', the question of whose taste being a crucially important one. David Solkin has put it that, 'for a ruling class who depended more on culture as a means of social control, taste and appearance became a matter of inescapable importance'.⁵ The concept of 'taste' first gained currency in seventeenth-century France, where 'Le Gout' encompassed more than just a physical sense of taste. As Henry Stonecastle noted in *The Universal Spectator by Henry Stonecastle*, first published in 1736, 'Of all our favourite words lately, none has been more in vogue, nor so held in esteem, as that of TASTE'.⁶ Furthermore, the ritual of the Grand Tour for wealthy young aristocrats fuelled interest in and desire for the knowledge of Ancient Roman and Greek culture, broadening the parameters of taste that could be reflected, and even enacted, by the *objets d'art* and ritual of the household.

Although visiting one another's houses in order to partake in a social occasion pre-dated the importation of foreign material culture that occurred from the later stages of the seventeenth century, such novel imports influenced ritual activity in upper-class English

4 Nicholas Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry: 1480-1660* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 319.

5 Angela Rosenthal, 'Unfolding Gender', in *The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of Difference*, ed. by Angela Rosenthal and Bernadette Fort (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 120.

6 Henry Stonecastle, *The Universal Spectator by Henry Stonecastle*, 389 (London, 1736), p. 872.

homes from the turn of the eighteenth century, broadening educational and aesthetic experiences. Such visiting rituals necessarily exposed previously closeted sections of the domestic interior to a number of guests and female congregation. The anonymous artist of *The Spruce Sportsman, or Beauty and the Best Shot* (Fig. 1), previously entitled *A Morning Visit... or the Fashionable Dresses for the Year 1777*, republished in 1780, pictorially translates such preoccupations and captures this new found utilisation of domestic space created by women purely for sociable rituals, while men were subjugated to a secondary role.

As the two women depicted within this mezzotint indicate, greeting one another dressed in the latest exaggerated French headdresses and Continental outfits, rooms similarly updated in the latest style were designed to carry out the practice of these new modes of sociable interaction. As explored in contemporary examinations of the period, this indicated an important psychological shift from past centuries in which the individual was suppressed in the home in favour of a focus on the social life of the family unit headed by the male head of house, built around the young child, various new forms of rituals and conviviality. Thus, in effect, the seventeenth-century interest in the ‘public self’ was replaced with an emerging eighteenth-century awareness in personal development and the individual. Throughout the eighteenth century, different, and often convergent, fashions in material taste – ranging from a penchant for Rococo furniture to a preference for Neo-Classical design, and a predilection for eclectic types of interior designs – ran alongside a multitude of constantly mutating entertainments carried out in the context of the home.



Fig. 1. Anon., 'The Spruce Sportsman, or Beauty and the Best Shot', coloured mezzotint, 1780, Lewis Walpole Library.

Publicly, the busy eighteenth-century thoroughfare of The Strand in the centre of the sprawling London metropolis sported visible demonstration of the flourishing and fast-paced consumerism of luxury foreign material goods and fashions throughout the first few decades of the eighteenth century. Many prints depicting sociable interactions and men and women in fashionable dress were produced during this period, Boitard's highly finished hand-coloured etching, *Taste a la Mode* (Fig. 2), produced in 1735, being one such excellent visualisation of this issue. Notably, *Taste a la Mode* also alludes to the twin ills of social antagonism and prostitution, both perceived as intrinsically linked to, and symbolic of, the growing

commercialisation of British society, while also pointing up the foreign influenced fashions of the middling and upper classes.



Fig.2. Louis-Phillipe Boitard, 'Taste a la Mode as in the Year 1735', hand-coloured etching, 1735, Lewis Walpole Library.

The much analysed eighteenth-century luxury debates that took place in England from the closing decade of the seventeenth century were inextricably linked to, and resulted from, the observable rise in this overseas trade in artefacts and artwork, as well as native commercial activity. Thomas Cole, the preacher of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, published a series of sermons in direct response to the perceived threat of 'Luxury, Infidelity and Enthusiasm' in the mid eighteenth century. First and foremost amongst Cole's castigations was:

ostentatious display... continuously displaying itself in every part of this voluptuous city, and amongst all ranks and conditions of men. An endeavour to out vie each other in the elegant accommodation of life... and almost universal passion of the age.⁷

This growing excess of material culture was aided by the social mobility that new wealth afforded in the upper middle-class home. As Daniel Defoe noted in 1735, ‘Wealth however got in England makes Lords of mechanics, gentlemen of rakes’.⁸

Consequently, this emerging visual culture elevated cultural status in a very visible manner through the more subtle rendition of refined manners and rituals within the domestic and social space of elite private residences. Chief amongst the instigators of such a change was female agency and discernment, central to most ritual performed and managed in the household. Feminine taste and consumerist decision making were also intrinsically associated with the setting up of a new home as part of adulthood, marriage and child bearing. Domestic ritual was part of marriage, corresponding to the ability to govern oneself, one’s household staff, household duties and even the space around oneself. The value and character of female discernment and interest dictated rituals in most households.

Coupled to this was the parallel development from the late seventeenth century of a rise in a new mode of sociability amongst the emerging British middle class, gentry and aristocracy that had a transforming effect upon domestic rituals. Married couples were expected to entertain inside the home in a series of ritualistic entertainments, while the interior decoration could reflect the learning and culture of the owners and create a suitable platform for the evolving obsession with taste to be met. In one sense, this allowed for a ‘new way of understanding culture’.⁹ As we today define ourselves by our aesthetic experiences, so too the rituals played out in the interior of the great eighteenth-century house were a demonstration of

7 Thomas Cole, *The Sermons of Reverend Thomas Cole* (London, 1775), p. 5.

8 Daniel Defoe, *God and Government in an ‘Age of Reason’* (London, 1735), p. 133.

9 Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors, At Home in Georgian England* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 18.

magnificence and polite sociability, supposed to be understood as a visual statement of nobility of mind, learning and taste.

Besides this, the type of visitor and their individual relationship to the homeowner was of key importance to the level of access and type of ritual performed inside an elite residence. While relative strangers may only have been allowed chaperoned access to specific areas within a house, often when the owners were absent, close companions of members of a household could expect a more informal, intimate, ritualistic engagement with their host within more secluded rooms. The incorporation of unusual and specific material decoration and display inside houses – comparable to the ‘cabinet of curiosities’ displayed inside Bulstrode’s Park’s Dressing Room (discussed in chapter three) – also impacted upon the route and ritual of any visitor, as well as on the house owner themselves. The most eye-catching decoration, like that displayed in the Music Room at Norfolk House, would attract sociable groups of guests in ritualistic social activity.

Smaller displays of material possessions or scientific findings; housed in display cabinets or in bookcases within smaller spatial enclaves of the house, required studied observation on the part of those who entered for purely recreational activity or for more specific, ritualistic practise to occur. Some current secondary source material also suggests that, as the eighteenth century progressed, rooms in larger English residences became increasingly segmented, and demarcated, for one or two individual uses.

This thesis will analyse different types of ritual and performative sociabilities enacted within elite English residences that were extended, commissioned or redesigned between 1740 and 1800. These examples have been chosen for several reasons. Firstly, all of the examples discussed were owned by elite men and women. This is necessarily an important factor as only the very wealthy could develop and extend their homes in order to incorporate the most novel (and expensive) domestic spaces in which to entertain and conduct sociable rituals. Secondly, only the wealthiest sector of the population could afford to devote spaces within their home to the specific educational and sociable recreations explored at length in this thesis. These ritualistic entertainments were commented upon and recorded in diary extracts, letters, inventories and sale catalogues.

Furthermore, the Music Room at Norfolk House, discussed in chapter two, represents an important eighteenth-century prototype of functionality and design. The Etruscan Dressing Room at Osterley House and the Dressing Rooms of the second Duchess of Portland and Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu (analysed in chapters one and three respectively) offer an opportunity to compare and contrast domestic space controlled by sole female agency. Ones that rarely for eighteenth-century spaces controlled and organised by women, were well known, and documented, before and during the first few years after their completion.

The chapters of this thesis are arranged so as to concentrate first upon homo-social ritual and theatrical procession enacted in the Entrance Hall, Etruscan Dressing Room, State Bedroom and Library at Osterley House, West London, as redesigned for the banker Sir Robert Child, and the Library, Long Gallery and Closets at Syon House, commissioned by the first Duke and Duchess of Northumberland; secondly, rituals of entertainment and processional performance encouraged in the Music Room and Ballroom of Norfolk House, London, commissioned by the ninth Duke and Duchess of Norfolk; and, finally, the flexible function of the Dressing Room at Bulstrode Park, designed for the second Duchess of Portland, and the Dressing Rooms of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu at her houses at Hill Street and Portman Square, for more intimate rituals of sociability and female bonding that prove an interesting counterpart to the function and design of those domestic spaces discussed in chapter one. It is hoped that this particular structure will give a sense of progression into the innermost enclaves of the house, much as an eighteenth-century visitor would experienced. By taking this approach, gender roles, overlapping divisions of public and private spaces and processional routes taken by guests can be explored.

Chapter 1

**‘Educated and Eclectic Pursuits’: The Role of the Entrance Hall,
Library, State Bedchamber, Ground-Floor Dressing Room and Long
Gallery in Defining Educational and Theatrical Ritual at Syon and
Osterley Park**

Robert Child Esq... rebuilt the Shell [of Osterley], ornamented, beautified, and new furnished the whole, in a Style of Elegance and Magnificence that evince at once both his Taste and Liberty.

-W. Watts, *Seats of the Nobility and Gentry*, 1779.

So wrote William Watts of Osterley, located in south-west London, in his comprehensive guide book, *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry in a Collection of the most interesting and Picturesque VIEWS* (1779), after touring some of the most notable elite houses in England.

Within this guidebook, Watts continues:

The House is large, and of quadrangular form...The principle Front is decorated with a Portico, of the Ionic order, from whence a spacious Court leads to the Saloon, an elegant Apartment, also of the Ionic order... superbly ornamental and enriched with antique Marble Statues, Basso Relivos, Vases, &c. Opposite the grand Entrance of the Saloon, a Corridor leads to the Picture Gallery, &c.¹⁰

These observations were echoed by the influential eighteenth-century political and social commentator Horace Walpole, who recorded one such visit to Osterley in a letter to the Countess of Orssy, dated 21 June 1773, stating, ‘it is a palace of palaces... so improved and enriched that all the Percies and Seymours of Sion must die of envy’.¹¹ Such opinion gives some indication of the influence, and integration, of theatrically-inspired design upon the renovations undertaken at Osterley and its relationship with nearby Syon. It also points up, as Paul Langford has stated, the:

Paradoxical flavour of the nationalism of propertied and un-propertied Englishmen. The same classes which maintained their commitment to the special status of all things English also displayed their dedication to foreign fripperies.¹²

10 W. Watts, *Seats of the Nobility and Gentry* (London, 1779), p. 89.

11 Mrs. Paget Toynbee, ed., *Letters of Horace Walpole, 1791-1797*, 15 (London: Batsford, 1904), p. 376.

12 Langford, p. 322.

Langford goes on to explain that ‘Italy’s particular combination of inherited glory and political feebleness made it highly suitable for a form of colonisation’ for members of the English elite who desired ritualistic performances conducted on the most assessable level of their residences.¹³ The processional route taken along the rooms of grand mid to late eighteenth-century houses could add a great theatricality and almost ‘stage-set’ magnificence to rituals conducted along them.¹⁴ These rituals ranged from mixed activities undertaken in closets in grand eighteenth-century houses, to that of eclectic feminine entertainments and homo-social practises enacted in the semi-private enclaves of ground-floor spaces, like those of the Library and Dressing Room.

A plethora of satirical tales, polemics and artwork produced in this era illuminate the continuous development of refinement in eighteenth-century elite English residences through the layout of domestic space and use. An alteration in spatial purpose and meaning could offer a chance for theatrical performance to develop naturally or, alternatively, enhance the process and visibility of social ritual. In many cases, like that of Syon House, earlier sixteenth and seventeenth-century ground-floor rooms, originally created for a procession of people to pass through the Great Chamber, then the Presence Chamber and Privy Chamber, next the Withdrawing Chamber and, finally, the Bedchamber (if the status of the guest was sufficient to warrant it), began to be modified in the first third of the eighteenth century to accommodate new social uses of space for greeting and educational, cultural and conversational ends.¹⁵

13 Langford, p. 312.

14 Richard Pailthorpe, ed., *SYON: London Home of the Duke of Northumberland* (Derby: Heritage House Group, 2003), p. 22.

15 Pailthorpe, ed., p. 10.

The building of villas became increasingly popular from the 1730s. This seemingly ‘natural and simplified taste’ in architectural design, largely adopted by members of the wealthy London elite, was, in fact, an exceedingly artificial concept. It was a concept of architectural assimilation often targeted by satirists as a sign of elitist obsession with Italian cultural artefacts. Joseph Addison, within his *Epistle to Lord Burlington*, first published in 1733, expressed just such a view when he quipped:

You show us, Rome was glorious, not profuse
 These Pompous buildings once were things of use...
 yet still [my Lord] your noble rules have left half the land with imitating fools...
 Tis strange, the miser should his cares employ
 To gain those riches he can ne'er enjoy
 For what his Virro painted, built, and planted?...
 What brought Sir Visto's ill got wealth to waste?
 Some daemon whisper'd, "Visto! have a taste
 Conscious they act a true Palladian part
 And, if they starve, they starve by rules of art."¹⁶

Addison was a key advocate of polite and civil manners in eighteenth-century society, which could add ‘a little elegance’ to traditional rituals conducted in the house, but ones that were grounded in ‘the rules of decorum’ rather than slavish copying.¹⁷ From the 1750s onwards, the ‘villa retreat’ became an increasingly common theatrical visual statement of both power and taste along the stretch of the River Thames. Charles Middleton, writing in 1793, suggested that these English villas could be categorised into three distinct types:

the occasional and temporary retreats of the nobility and persons of fortune, the country houses of wealthy citizens and persons in official stations which also cannot be far removed from the capital... and as provincial hunting seats or the habitations of country gentlemen of moderate fortune.¹⁸

Many such villas tended to be places of retreat, often individual and luxurious in appearance, in part by virtue of their optimum location near, but crucially, *not in* the capital. Houses extended to incorporate façades, like Osterley Park, were, as Christopher Christie has pointed out, ‘often positioned near cities and London’s wooded environs, especially the banks of the

¹⁶ John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1800* (London: Penguin Press, 1969), p. 216.

¹⁷ Vickery, p. 53.

¹⁸ Christopher Christie, *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 68.

Thames... a favourite of politicians and literary figures'.¹⁹ Syon Park, owned by one of the most aristocratic families of England, the first Duke, Hugh Smithson (1714 -1786), and Duchess of Northumberland, Elizabeth Seymour (1716 -1776), was situated only ten miles from Osterley Park. The alderman Sir Charles Asgill's Richmond Place, now renamed Asgill House – described in the fourth volume of Colin Campbell's 1769 *Vitruvius Britannicus* as of 'remarkable for its... simple elegance' – was located a few miles downstream in Richmond.²⁰

This highly stylistic cultural and architectural model was adopted by a number of mid eighteenth-century English elite home owners when extending and renovating their home. They imposed a new spatial format upon their houses through extensive renovations and demolitions, most notably manifested internally by re-organisation of the plan. The new shifting spatial demands of reception rooms from the mid eighteenth century was commented upon by the influential eighteenth-century architect Isaac Ware in 1756, who stated 'we see an addition of a great Classical room now to almost every house of consequence'.²¹ These residences were not "squirearchical" but elegant... residences for men who... wished for the fresh air of the country close at hand... and maintained a carefree, boisterous atmosphere'.²²

The functional and ritualistic use of space in the Entrance Hall, State Bedchamber, Etruscan Dressing Room and Library at Osterley House and the Turret Rooms and Long Gallery at Syon House are particularly representative of the new forms of theatrical social practises devised for the expansive spaces of the ground floor of English eighteenth-century country houses. An assessment of these two houses may also prove relevant if it is noted that a long-standing member of the aristocracy owned Syon while Osterley was extended for a rich banker's family. Such a comparison is made further appropriate if we consider both parkland

19 Christie, p. 69.

20 Colin Cambell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, 4 (London: J.Woolfe and J.Gandon, 1769), p. 74.

21 Isaac Ware, *A Complete Body of Architecture* (London: T. Osborne, J. Shipton, et al., 1756), p. 1.

22 Christie, p. 69.

estates lie less than three miles from each other and were redesigned by the same Scottish architect, Robert Adam, in a similar Classical style.

As such, the ritualistic performances and sociable activities of the State Bedchamber, Etruscan Dressing Room and Library within Osterley House, together with the two ‘Turret’ Rooms (located at either ends of the Long Gallery) and Long Gallery at Syon House will be analysed as facilitating theatrical ceremonies. These social practises will also be analysed as aiding homo-social bonding and feminine entertainment in contrasting, but complementary, spaces.

This chapter will be organised as such, with the more formal functions discussed first, followed by the less structured rituals linked to close associates focused on later in the chapter. Discussion of gender and the various types of public and sometimes more private engagement will be analysed. Comparison between the social activities enacted in the two ‘Turret’ Rooms and the Dressing Room of the second Duchess of Portland at Bulstrode Park, and discussion of Mrs. Child’s first-floor Dressing Room at Osterley will also be included. Such examples (and comparisons) have also been chosen in order to elucidate the different ways in which space in eighteenth-century country houses was used to create male and female spheres of sociability.

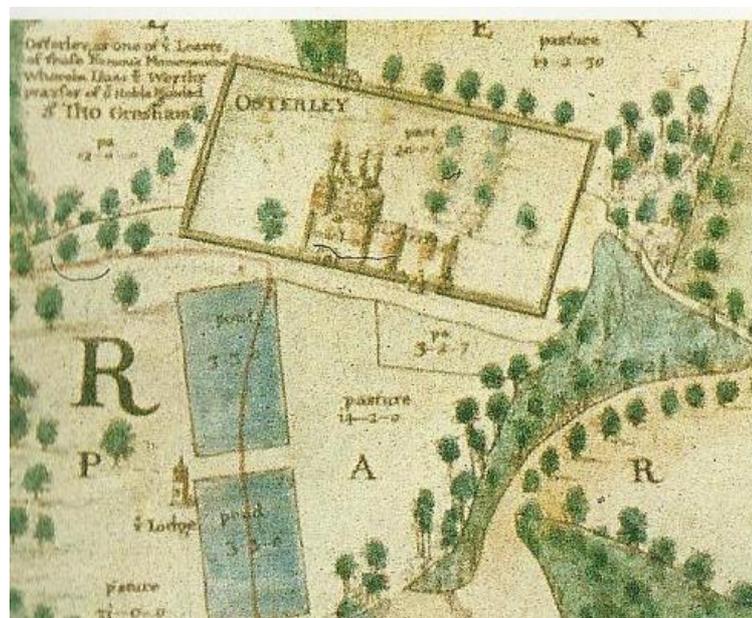


Fig. 3. Moses Glover, The Tudor Manor House at Osterley Park (shown in the rectangle), hand-coloured map of Isleworth, 1635, Twickenham Museum.



Fig. 4. Anon., A Cartographic Map of Middlesex, OS Ordnance Survey First Series Map for Brentford, Isleworth, 1805, The British Museum.

Sir Thomas Gresham had first used the Osterley estate before this time as a paper mill. The Tudor financier and commercial agent to Queen Elizabeth I commissioned the house that Child purchased to replace an older farmhouse described by John Nordon as a rectangular manor house:

faire and stately building of bricke, erected by Sir Thomas Gresham... and finished about 1577. It standeth in a parke by him also impaled, well wooded and garnished with manie faire ponds, which afforded not only fish and fowle, as swannes, and other water fowle; but also great use for milles, as paper milles and corn milles.²³

²³ Eileen Harris, *The Genius of Robert Adam: His Interiors* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 157.

Originally laid out as three rectangular blocks surrounding a courtyard and turreted at each corner, Osterley today still incorporates some of this structure. Sir Francis Child the Elder (1642-1713) found himself in a position to buy the property in lieu of a mortgage debt after its previous owner, Nicolas Barbon, died in 1698. Gradual improvements were made before a grandchild also called Francis inherited the house. He died suddenly in 1763 a week before his own wedding, leaving Osterley Park to his brother Robert. As Sir Robert Child was not active as an MP or central to running the Child Bank, it was to Osterley that he returned most regularly and could devote most time and money on improving.

Sir Robert Child exerted an impressive influence over his own profitable lands, especially those directly surrounding Osterley, through shaping and subsequently altering its natural geography. Moses Glover's hand-coloured map of the Tudor Manor House at Osterley Park (Fig. 3) and comparable to a map produced in 1741 (Fig. 4), both illustrate an impressively formal arrangement of avenues, but the Manor was destroyed in 1760 by Sir Robert Child in favour of an open landscape that could offer a clearer view of the frontage. Visitors aided the cultural ambience within Osterley House, and, consequently, through disseminating descriptions of what they had seen there.²⁴ In this way, Sir Robert Child could create a modern ideal based on an architectural manifestation that denoted wealth and power.

Similarly, the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland transformed their estate at Syon, itself described as 'one of the finest villas in Europe' by Walpole after renovation and redecoration by Adam in the early 1760s, prompting his work at Syon to be thought of as the place where 'the Adam style was initiated'.²⁵ The Duke was one of Adam's chief patrons, employing him shortly after his trip to Italy in the late 1750s. A list of subscribers printed on the first pages of Adam's *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro Folio*, first published in 1764, include Francis Child Esq., as well as the first Duke and Duchess of

²⁴ Dana Arnold, *The Georgian Villa* (London: Alan Smith Publishing, 1996), p. 2.

²⁵ Pailthorpe, ed., p. 22.

Northumberland.²⁶ Adam redesigned the five principal rooms in the Neo-Classical style, shown along the floor plan of the house as depicted at the time of the third Duke's death in 1847 (Fig. 5), and planned a temporary rotunda to be erected in the courtyard. The Duchess, too, kept a particular eye on the expansion of Syon House. She was an avid collector and commentator on social and cultural events. Hence, Sir Robert Child and the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland could display the most fashionable pieces of furniture as visual proof of their taste, as well as utilising the space as a focus for pleasure and political dealings, and as access to spheres of exclusively masculine and predominately female sociability.

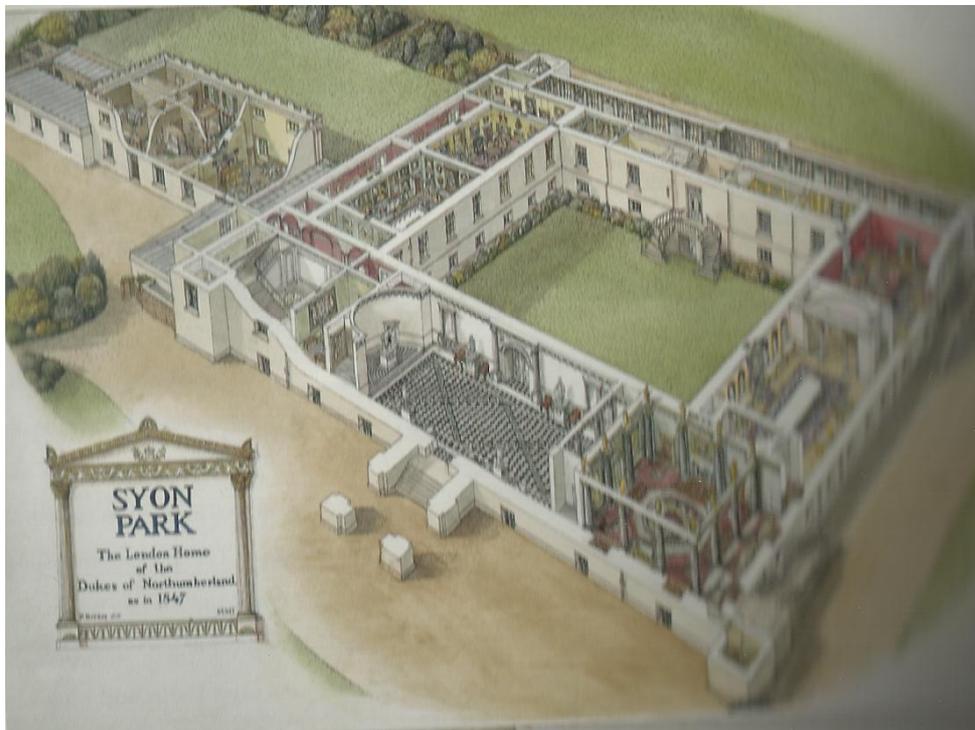


Fig. 5. Peter Brears, Raised Floor Plan of Syon House as depicted at the time of the 3rd Duke of Northumberland's death in 1847, coloured pencil, watercolour and inks, 1847, Syon Park.

After visitors drew up to the entrance of Osterley House, Sir Robert Child could receive them in a ritual of greeting in the most public manner. Sir Robert Child asked Adam to build

²⁶ Robert Adam, *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro Folio* (London: Robert Adam, 1764), p. 1.

the grand ‘transparent’ Portico, that could channel visitors to walk between the newly built columns in an almost dramatic manner, across the courtyard and into the Entrance Hall.²⁷ Indeed, Walpole described the double portico, ‘that fills the space between the towers of the front’, as ‘noble as the Propyleam of Athens’.²⁸ This walk through the courtyard would also permit the visitor to admire the redesigned building as they moved towards the Entrance Hall, while also allowing family members and guests to observe who was about to enter the main body of the house. The impressively tall portico columns and Entrance Hall, transformed and remodelled by Adam between 1760 and 1767 (Figs 6–8), were among the earliest architectural spaces to be created by Adam at Osterley. Indeed, such influences upon architecture and interior design, ones that ‘under the influence of fashion... became a more complex and self-conscious process’, effected profound changes in the resulting sociability that was enacted within its spaces.²⁹ Thus, the Entrance Hall at Osterley functioned simultaneously as a place of arrival, departure and significant communal sociability.³⁰



Fig. 6. Exterior View of Osterley House and Portico, designed by Robert Adam c. 1761.

²⁷ Ralph Dutton, *The English Country House* (London: Batford Press, 1962), p. 124.

²⁸ Horace Walpole, *The Letters of Horace Walpole, fourth earl of orford*, vol 8 (London: H.G Bohn, 1861), p. 293.

²⁹ Evans, ed., p. 5.

³⁰ Vickery, p. 274.

After first passing through the columns of the portico, guests of both sexes were implicated in what E. P. Thompson has described as the theatre of 'power', instigated by the architecture of classical inspiration and design.³¹ The Neo-Classical entrance of Osterley House, part private, part public, while being restricted from the eyes of the uninvited, was the most openly demarcated space in the house, with little sense of sense of seclusion. Vanbrugh stated that similar designs for Entrance Halls illustrated 'a very Noble and Masculine Shew [illustrating] a Manly Beauty', which Sir Robert Child cultivated in order to portray himself as an educated man, suitably informed of the original cultural context of the Classical decoration of his home and, more importantly, a man of 'taste'.³² As the Entrance Hall was also used as a meeting point for sporting expeditions and meetings, such occurrences would additionally have given rise to a predominately male sociability and facilitated opportunities for 'homo-social' companionship and political networking.³³ Hence, Osterley's Entrance Hall would have acted as a theatrical stage for newly refined congenial behaviours such as sociable conversation and visiting rituals, that established native traditions of sociability.

31 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 41.

32 Christie, p.72.

33 Christie, p.72.



Fig. 7. Exterior View of Osterley and Portico from Outside the Main Entrance.



Fig. 8. The Entrance Hall, looking South, Osterley Park, designed by Robert Adam c. 1767.

The space within the arena of the Entrance Hall could encompass a multitude of theatrical performances – involving homo-social bonding, discussion, ritual greeting, exit and entrance from the North and South Passage – in an almost continuous flow of human passage and performance, the passageway itself clearly seen in the plan of the house (Fig. 9). It is

important to note that, because the main entrance to the Long Gallery is directly accessible from the Hall, and as the two rooms sit parallel to each other, there would have been a constant movement of people within this space. Mrs. Delany, writing in her diary in 1792, gives an indication of the seeming multitude of behaviours that the Entrance Hall and reception rooms of country houses were being remodelled to accommodate:

In the entrance hall well filled with servants... the ceiling stucco... round the room, marble tables between the windows... We meet at breakfast about ten, chocolate, tea, coffee, toast and butter, and caudle etc., are devoured without mercy. The hall is so large that very often breakfast, battledore and shuttlecock, and the harpsichord, go on at the *same time* without molesting one another... Yesterday... we danced two hours there in the evening, and afterwards till supper is on the table the harpsichord is engaged.³⁴

Importantly, this large space could also accommodate evening assemblies of music, dancing and card playing as the first in a series of reception rooms. Thus, acting as a simultaneous passage of space to two other communal corridors, the first reception room within Osterley House was both a classically refined 'ideological boundary of great power' and a space in which sociability in different contexts could be enacted.³⁵

³⁴ Mrs. Delany, *The Diaries of Mrs Delany* (London, 1792), p. 122.

³⁵ Summerson, p. 216.

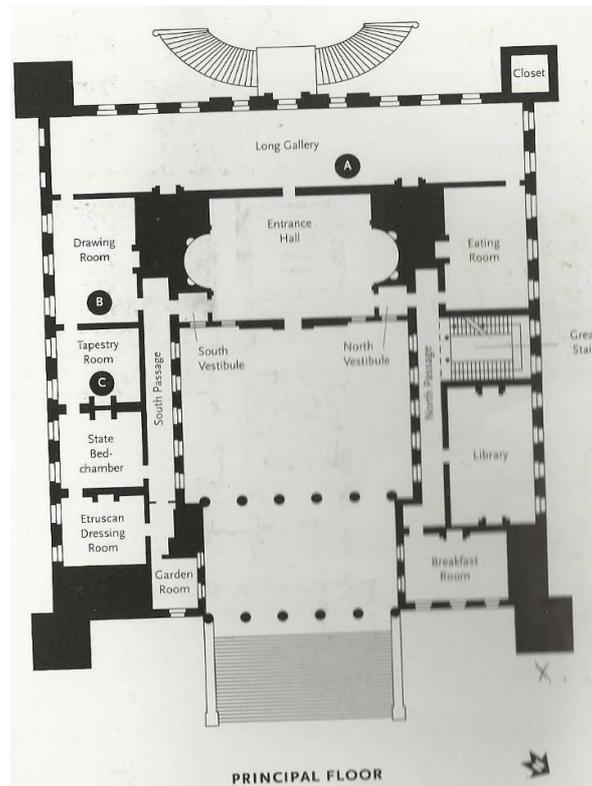


Fig. 9. Ground Floor Plan of Osterley House, Osterley House Guide Book.

As well as large social events staged in this area the entrance space could have served from the mid eighteenth century as a ‘retreat... for ladies wanting to withdraw from the buzz of social activities in the gallery *before* and *after* dinner, although there would have been the presence of servants, either preparing the room for such an activity or clearing up afterwards.³⁶ The furnishing of this room, completed with two ornate fireplaces situated within the alcoves, indicate that male conviviality and sociability would have taken place in all seasons within this room.³⁷ Sir Robert Child’s guests may also have sat in the alcoves at opposite ends of the room on occasion in warmer weather, or, indeed, by the fireplace flanked by niches (Fig. 10),

³⁶ Vickery, p. 258.

³⁷ Harris, p. 180.

³⁸ Robert Adam’s designs for the ceiling and walls are dated 1767, while his designs for the chimneypieces date to 1768. Each alcove contains a fireplace flanked by niches that contain eighteenth-century copies of classical statues of Hercules, Ceres, Apollo and Minerva.

which were intended to create the impression of a spacious environment within the symmetrical form of the Entrance Hall.³⁸



Fig. 10. Fireplace situated in the South Niche of the Entrance Hall, designed by Robert Adam c. 1767.

Syon House's Great Hall (Fig. 11), finished in 1769 was intended to 'create a place of Graeco-Roman splendour' that would have also functioned as a theatrical space.³⁹ Rituals of greeting and receiving would have also been conducted in this room, before guests moved round the processional ground-floor route.⁴⁰

³⁹ Robert and James Adam, *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam, Esquires*, vol 1 (London, 1778), p. 1.

⁴⁰ Adam, p. 6.



Fig. 11. Robert Adam, Entrance Hall, Syon House, designed in 1762.

The Long Gallery at Syon House (Fig. 12) was the centrepiece of the processional tour of the principal rooms, it offers a parallel sphere of female ritual to that of the Great Hall, lying adjacent to its more public counterpart. Within the Long Gallery, rituals could be conducted on a slightly more individual level and in clustered groups, while still being part of a grand processional route around the rectangular shape of the ground floor. The spectacularly designed and furnished Long Gallery is the former Tudor Long Gallery, measuring 41.4 metres by 4.2 metres, taking up the entire length of the east front of the house. Completed in 1765, Adam designed this room specifically so it was, in his own words, for the particular

delights of women, ‘finished in a style to afford variety and amusement, and is, for this reason, an admirable room the reception of company before Dinner, or for the ladies to retire to after it...’.⁴¹

After a visit to Syon, Walpole recorded in diary entry dated 27 August 1764, that ‘I have been this evening to Syon, which is becoming another Mount Palatine. Adam has displayed great taste, and the Earl matches it with magnificence’, adding that the ‘Gallery is converted into a museum in the style of a columbarium...’.⁴² Such an ‘addition’ in functionality for display purposes signalled a key change in usage from a century earlier, when the Long Gallery had been considered as a room for, as the English lawyer and biographer, Roger North asserted, ‘no other use but pastime and health, so far as the gentle moving usual within the walls an house may concerne it’.⁴³ However, Syon’s Long Gallery does retain some of its original purpose, North confirming in the 1690s that a gallery should be one, ‘not wholly dedicated to parade, nor to private use, but such as may reasonably serve to both purposes and not pretend to be the height of grandeur as usually is expected... [thus] capable of being adorned’.⁴⁴

Notably, in this room, Adam’s stucco arabesques, polished stucco, and colouring of pink, blue (this was repainted green in the nineteenth century) and gold give pleasure, and ‘a light-lighted’ joy to a formerly traditionally outfitted medieval Long Gallery.⁴⁵ In Adam’s hands,

41 Adam, p. 3

42 James Greig, ed., *The Diaries of a Duchess: Extracts from the Diaries of the first Duchess of Northumberland (1716-1776)* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), p. 1.

43 Quoted in Rosalys Coope, ‘“The Long Gallery”: its Origins, Development, Use and Decoration’, *Architectural History*, 29 (1986), 43-84, (p. 59).

44 Coope, p. 59.

45 Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 191.

the gallery was radically transformed from a Tudor oak-panelled space, giving instructions that the eleven windows on the wall opposite be divided into five bays centred on three doors and two large fireplaces, and these divided by four groups of pilasters comprising a number of book shelves (Fig. 13), although some bookshelves were introduced in the nineteenth century. A sense of intimacy is achieved through Adam's clever devise of dividing the length into four clear units, as well as by the detailed ornament and reliefs included in the room's material display.

Alcoves form part of the variety of ornament and design in this room, originally intended to display busts and vases either side of the doors, and the walls appear taller than in reality through the incorporation of sixty-two Corinthian pilasters, painted by Michelangelo Pergolesi. As Adam stated, this decoration was added to help create 'a greater movement and variety'.⁴⁶ The gallery also contains intricate stucco roundels, lunettes placed above the fireplaces, a number of painted panels at either end of the gallery by William Marlow, and medallion portraits placed around the gallery illustrating the lineage of the Percy family. Upon entrance to the gallery from the Red Drawing Room there is a false bookshelf, which, is, in fact, a small door that leads to the south lawn. At each end of the Gallery are 'Turret' Rooms, designed as small, complementary boudoirs or closets that offer the opportunity for more intimate entertainment, comparable to Dressing Rooms like that of the second Duchess of Portland.

⁴⁶ Adam, p. 6.



Fig. 12. Long Gallery at Syon House, redesigned by Robert Adam in 1775.



Fig. 13. The Bookshelves in the Long Gallery at Syon House.

The flexibility of function in this gallery allowed for female or mixed-sex groups to process down the Long Gallery, walking in procession, and, stopping at intervals, if so desired, to view the paintings and stucco decoration. As Adam stated, in this room:

we have added a beautiful variety of light moulding, gracefully formed, delicately executed and arranged with propriety and skill... and have added grace and beauty to the whole, by a mixture of antique stucco, and painted ornament...⁴⁷

In this manner, the Long Gallery also maintained another traditional function, acting as ‘neutral’ ground between the ‘lesser sequence of public rooms’ and access to rooms of a more private nature, making it an ideal space in which to conduct minor political dealings or negotiate delicate conversations.⁴⁸ For example, in a letter dated 5 November 1778, a close friend of the Duke, Mr. Peter Stochen, expressed his desire to ‘hold Court at Sion’, proposing ‘Monday 23rd of this November’ as an agreeable date if the Duke had no previous ‘obligations’, and, if set, adding requests to ‘... make my bed ready, of the bed aerate

⁴⁷ Adam, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Coope, p. 59.

properly... and make the library ready for discussion'.⁴⁹ Although it is unlikely the Duke of Northumberland would have conducted political dealings here, more likely the Duchess conducted sociable gossip. The inclusion of two small circular ship mirrors in Adam's redesign of the gallery, one convex and one concave, positioned at eye level either side of two windows in the centre of the right-hand wall, further the sense of novelty in ritual enacted in this room. As Adam confirmed, 'the rising and falling, advancing and receding, with the convexity and concavity, and other form of the great parts, have the same effect in architecture... that is, they serve to produce an agreeable... contour... that creates a variety of light and shade...'.⁵⁰

The unusual placement of these two mirrors in the Long Gallery would have instructed male and, in particular, female communal and individual ritual in a number of theatrical ways. Visitors of the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland would have observed their reflection in the concave mirror placed to the right of the bay windows, which bows inwards so that shapes appear stretched towards the outer rim of the mirror and expanded in the centre, at a small distance. Such an unusual and amusing form of trickery, which had the flexibility to be conducted in larger or more intimate groups if chosen, effectively broke up the traditional processional parade conducted in medieval, Tudor and other eighteenth-century Long Galleries. Additionally, such a ritual, involving both the faculties of the mind and physical movement, may have provided amusement for the Duchess of Northumberland herself, as well as reflecting favourably upon her ingenuity and desire for scientific, modish objects of pleasure.

Of course, reading was done in both a public, and semi-private, context inside the Long Gallery. The bookshelves displayed some first edition, learned and educative texts, totalling over 3000 books, most of which were collected during the time of the first Duke and Duchess of Northumberland. As can be viewed today, the titles include a large number of botanical, architectural, historical and zoological subject matter, examples of which include titles such as: Palladio's *Ancient Architecture*, Yarwell's *Book of British Fish*, Johnston's *Book of*

49 London, British Library, Letters relating to the 1st Duke of Northumberland, MS 303, Mr. Peter Stochen to the 1st Duke of Northumberland, 5 November 1778.

50 Adam, p.6.

Zoophytes, *The Journal of Major John North*, several books by Lord Burlington, and works by Hutchins and Gibbons.⁵¹ Guests of both sexes could pluck books such as these from the shelf and read, individually or as part of a small group, in chairs placed either side of the fireplace, or carried into the Duchess of Northumberland's Red Drawing Room. As Queen Charlotte stated in a letter dated to 22 August 1776, to whom the Duchess was Lady in Waiting at the time, enquires, after the Duchess had been ill for a short period of time, as to when she 'may have the pleasure of seeing and sitting with you [the Duchess] in the gallery at Sion in London'.⁵² Alternately, guests could sit on the bay window seats to read or walk up and down the entirety of the gallery with their chosen book. Besides this, in cold weather, guests could sit, in small groups or as part of a larger collective, or play cards, chess or promenade against a backdrop of elaborate lighting.

A useful complementary arena to the Long Gallery's multiplicity of functions and design for 'variety and amusement of the ladies', lies in Adam's Library (Fig. 14) for Osterley House, but in a more restricted, bold and distinctly masculine, environment.⁵³ Christopher Hussey confirms that 'architecturally designed libraries are a feature of Adam's country houses... the heart and soul of the country house'.⁵⁴ A door from the North Passage provided single access to the Library. Thus, it was not a thoroughfare to another domestic destination, such as guaranteed by the Long Gallery at Syon. Instead, it was strictly controlled by invitation of Sir Robert Child.

This Library is representative of a typical Georgian Library, illustrating the educated knowledge, wealth and learning of Sir Robert Child in the choice of books displayed.⁵⁵ The

51 These books are still displayed on the bookshelves today, as they would have been in the late eighteenth century.

52 London, British Library, Letters relating to the period 1613 -1863, MS 324, Queen Charlotte to the 1st Duchess of Northumberland, 22 August 1776.

53 Pailthorpe, ed., p. 46.

54 Matthew Beckett, "'To add a library to a house is to give that house a soul"; the rise of the country house library', *Wordpress* (2012) <[wordpress.com/... /to-add-a-library-to-a-house-is-to-give-that-house-a-soul-the-rise-of-the-country-house](http://wordpress.com/.../to-add-a-library-to-a-house-is-to-give-that-house-a-soul-the-rise-of-the-country-house)> (p. 4.)

55 Sian Evans, *Osterley Park and House* (London: Greenshires, 2009), p. 20.

fifteen Caxton volumes listed in the 1782 inventory of Osterley, give some indication of the type of subject matter displayed inside this room.⁵⁶ The room was specifically a place of masculine retreat, contemplation, relaxation and education, in contrast to the mixed sex readership of texts in Syon's Long Gallery. Male guests invited inside the Library were met with a decorative scheme dominated by Ionic pilasters and rectilinear forms. The eight lyre-backed armchairs bear the ormolu cameo of a classical head, while the large pedestal desk is embellished with symbols of architecture, sculpture, painting and music, inlaid with different woods. The room also contains a large fireplace and paintings by Antonio Zucchi on themes of Arts and Sciences, appropriate for a library and frequently associated with masculine virtues.



Fig. 14. Detail of the Fireplace in the Library at Osterley House, designed by Robert Adam c. 1767.

⁵⁶ Evans, p. 20.

Within this Library, the display of paintings, as well as the exhibition of books, somewhat reflects the traditional function of the older vestige of the seventeenth-century ‘closet’ or ‘library closet’.⁵⁷ Walpole records his own visit to Sir Robert Child’s library in his letter to the Countess d’Orssy, described alongside the ‘hall... breakfast-room [and] eating-room’, as part of ‘the Chefs-d’oeuvre of Adam’.⁵⁸ Thus, these rooms were generally halfway between rooms private to the male head of house and rooms accessible to others.⁵⁹ The inclusion of a notable number of fine secular paintings, not least those by Zucchi, indicate that Sir Robert Child’s Library was not only a receptacle of artwork and literary works in the same way as a cabinet or closet might have been in earlier times, but one that was used to entertain male guests on occasion. The ormolu-mounted furniture in the room also indicates the highly finished chairs were designed to be made use of by small groups of male guests in rituals of homo-social bonding, cultural and political discussion during the afternoon or, indeed, after dinner parties.

Additionally, as reading was no longer the accoutrement of the expert, and Sir Robert Child’s library reflect a wide range of historical, popular fictional, secular, and scientific texts, he may have used the Library as a smaller, informal Living Room in which male associates could relax and read.⁶⁰ Besides this, if we take note of the fact of the geographical closeness of the Library to the Breakfast Room it is likely that Sir Robert Child retired here after morning breakfast to write, read, and conduct business affairs, or, if after a larger, breakfast party given for invited guests, with a few close male companions.

The most private function of this ‘book-lined study’ would no doubt have been as a private retreat, not only for moral improvement and letter writing, but as a sanctum, similar to that of the Duchess of Portland’s Dressing Room (to be discussed in chapter three). Sir Robert Child would have been able to control access and the level of privacy to his Library.

The State Bedroom (Fig. 15), forming an exaggeratedly theatrical thoroughfare in the State Apartment, constituting an interlinking arena between the Tapestry Room and Etruscan

57 Girouard, p. 170.

58 Walpole, p. 293.

59 Girouard, p. 170.

60 Evans, p. 20.

Dressing Room, and provided a contrasting domestic sphere of function and design. This relatively small room is dominated by the exaggeratedly tall, domed lacquered and festooned eight-poster bed, so tall that steps were required to get in it. It is important to note that Sir Robert and Sarah Child slept directly upstairs in a far more modestly decorated room. Hence, the centrepiece was intended purely to impress, rather than for any daily use, a fact enhanced by the location of this room on the ground floor, and its function as part of the State Apartment, a material reminder of an earlier custom of lords and ladies sleeping in public rooms behind curtains.

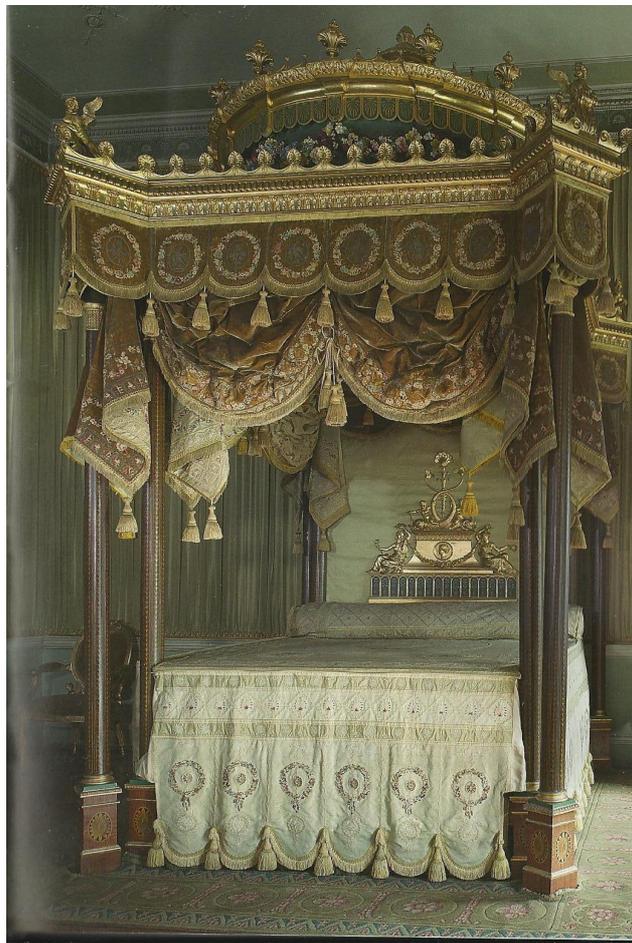


Fig.15. The State Bedchamber at Osterley House, designed by Robert Adam c. 1767.

Adam provided designs for the embroidered bed hangings and counterpane (Fig. 16) to cover the bed and frame that enhanced it in a suitably magnificent manner. Importantly,

Adam was also providing designs for the canopied bed at the Italian Theatre in Haymarket. In a sense, the Osterley State bed can be seen as a dramatic stage prop, its design transplanted directly from those theatrical, oversized set designs of the popular theatres in London, as the entire room can almost be seen as the inside of a small theatre, with the bed providing the focal point for the audience. The two tied up canopy hangings that part either side of the middle of the bed also bring to mind the opening and closing of theatre curtains. Indeed, Walpole commented in a letter of 1778 that it was, ‘too theatric and too like a modern head-dress...What would Vitruvius think of a dome decorated by a milliner?’⁶¹

The addition of large and very expensive pier-glasses imported from France compound the sense of theatricality and magnificence inherent in this room. Particular attention is paid to the type of flower included in the design, the embroidered marigolds symbolising Child’s Bank appearing on the valance, while the poppy heads on the curtain cornices symbolise sleep. The ceiling was decorated with subtle references to themes of romance and fertility, the central medallion inspired by Angelica Kauffman’s painting of Aglaia (one of the Three Graces) being enslaved by Love, depicted sitting under a tree surrounded by three winged Cupids. The smaller paintings around the central medallion are attributed to Zucchi and feature tranquil pastoral scenes. They enable a striking parallel to be drawn with the very masculine interior of the Library, not least by the different subject matter painted by Zucchi for each of these two rooms. Zucchi placed the theme of romance and abundance at the heart of the paintings commissioned for the State Bedroom, while the virtues of dynamism, creation and academic achievement are expressed in paintings intended to reflect upon the character of Sir Robert Child, and his activities in the Library.

As such, male and female visitors could parade through the Tapestry Room while enjoying evening ball assemblies or dinner parties, or during the day in smaller parties, taking in the magnificent set of tapestries created by the Gobelins factory from designs by François Boucher in 1776, and into the State Bedchamber. This chamber features an even more theatric, almost unreal, stage-set setting, its material outfit of embroidered green textiles a sharp contrast to the pink colour of the tapestries in the preceding room, thus providing a

⁶¹ Quoted in Evans, p. 14.

pleasing variety in colour and outfit of room for any guest. Guests could walk past this room's centrepiece, passing comment upon the bed and embroidery as they made their way to the Etruscan Dressing Room.

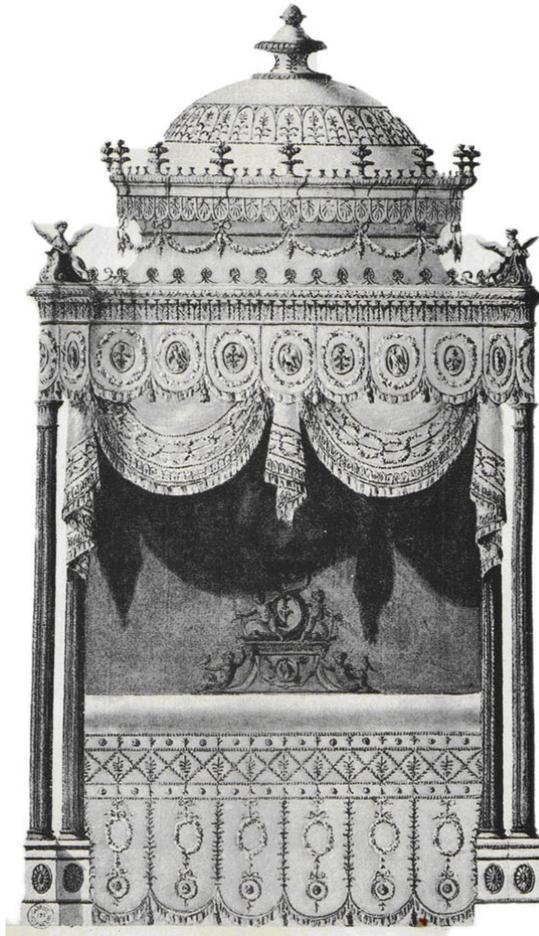


Fig. 16. Robert Adam, Design for the State Bed in the State Bedchamber, coloured inks, 1766, Sir John Soane's Museum.

The sense of intentional theatricality and fantastic stylisation of design is carried to a conclusion in the Etruscan Dressing Room (Figs 17–18), placed at the end of the processional route for guests. The Classical material associations that Sir Robert Child formed in the Entrance Hall are carried through to this smaller sphere. The interior decoration of this room may have been inspired by the Etruscan vases in the collection of the diplomat Sir William Hamilton's collection, published by D'Hancarville in four volumes from 1767. The designs for this room were completed in 1775, copied by the ornament painter Pietro Maria Borgnis

onto sheets of paper, then fixed to the walls using battens. As such, the space was effectively reinvented to create novelty of design and invention that reflected favourably upon Sir Robert Child and invented a new 'Arcadia' of sorts.⁶² Walpole described the Etruscan Dressing Room 'as a kind of pergola and thought it 'would be a pretty waiting-room in a garden', adding that it appeared 'to be painted all over like Wedgwood's ware, with black and yellow small grotesques... It is like going out of a palace into an Oriental potter's field'.⁶³

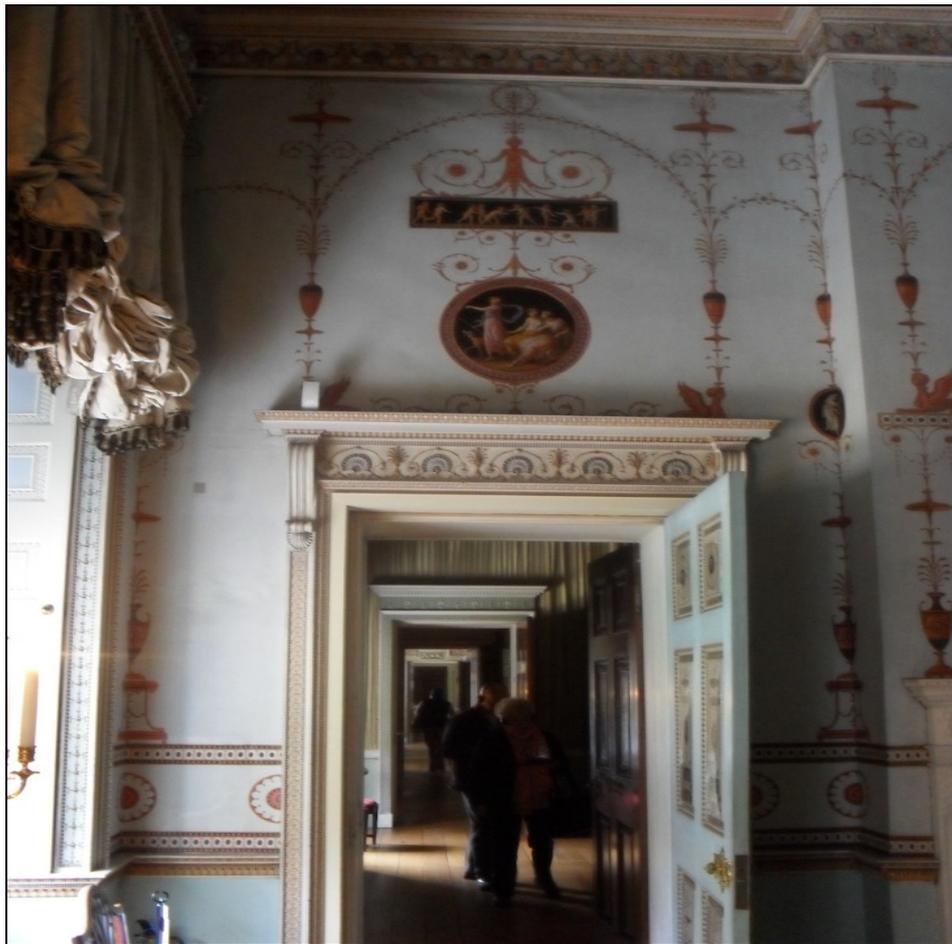


Fig. 17. Enfilade from the Etruscan Dressing Room, Osterley House.

The variety to be found in the depiction of each Etruscan female figure painted (each figure is depicted differently from the next) adds to the sense of novelty conveyed by the

⁶² Arnold, p. 11.

⁶³ Walpole, p. 293.

decoration. The inclusion of the Three Graces, taken directly from Ancient Greek mythology, in both preparatory and finalised designs, is again included in a larger painted motif directly over the door leading to the State Bedchamber, further associating this room with a tranquil atmosphere. Adam himself was reported to have stated that the panels in this room were ‘so japanned as to appear like glass’, an intentional contrast to the grandeur and opulence of the room next door.⁶⁴

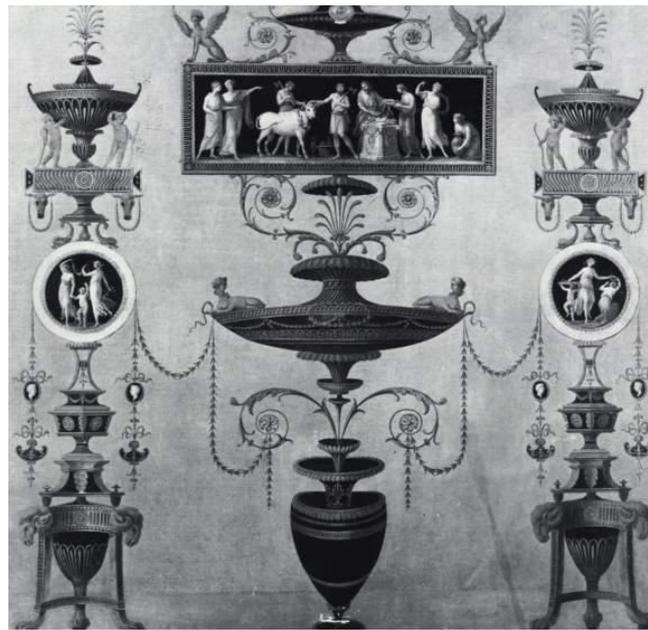


Fig. 18. Robert Adam, Preliminary Elevation for the East Wall of the Etruscan Room at Osterley House, coloured inks, 1778, Sir John Soane's Museum.

As visitors could also enter this room from doors leading in from the South Corridor and Vestibule, access to visitors would have been more restricted than that to the first two rooms that made up the State Apartments, but still accessible to mixed-sex groups of visitors, though in smaller numbers, due to the size of the room. Admittance to this room would have been less strict, both men and women spending time here, in its most public context as a thoroughfare from the State Bedchamber, in order to talk amongst themselves, comment on their surroundings, and to rest after walking through the parade of State Rooms.

⁶⁴ Walpole, p. 293.

Essentially, within the Etruscan Dressing Room, Sir Robert Child could develop the role of scholar-gentleman, while Sarah Child, in common with other Georgian elite ladies, could draw upon the congenial mode of sociable behaviour with guests, involving refined conversation that may have reflected the sights seen in the preceding State Rooms. Dressing Rooms were championed by many elite women of the period, including the second Duchess of Portland, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu and Mrs. Mary Delany. A set of eight elegant Chippendale armchairs (Fig. 19), specifically designed for this room, indicate the sociable interchange that would have occurred after its completion.⁶⁵

In addition, this room demonstrates a complete uniformity of design that would have lent itself to be considered an arena in the house to be viewed much as a cabinet of curiosities would have been for eighteenth-century visitors.⁶⁶ This feeling would have been increased for guests of Sir Robert Child, due to the close proximity of the Vestibule, containing the family's display of porcelain, including splendid examples of mid eighteenth-century Sèvres. Visitors seated in the Etruscan Dressing Room could thus pass out of the room into the South Corridor to view this magnificent display and then return to discuss the ceramics, or even led out into the Vestibule by either Sir Robert Child or his wife to be given a more personal account of these objects.

If the rituals enacted in the Etruscan Dressing Room are compared to those conducted in Mrs. Child's own Dressing Room, located upstairs, the function of the downstairs Dressing Room is highlighted as demonstrating a less personal, more accessible nature to both sexes. This upstairs Dressing Room must have been a more private space for Mrs. Child. Mrs. Child's Dressing Room served primarily as a boudoir or informal sitting room in which to relax or entertain guests with drinking tea and coffee, playing cards or embroidering when her husband was out hunting. Walpole also lists a number of the curious objects displayed in Mrs.

65 Evans, p. 14.

66 Evans, p. 14.

Child's Dressing Room in his letter, seen during his visit in 1773, declaring it 'full of pictures, gold filigree, china, and Japan'.⁶⁷ Such observations indicates both the important functionality of display Mrs. Child chose for this room, as well as the involvement of mixed-sex companies of guests during the daytime and early evening. Moreover, the 1782 inventory entry of 'A Pocket Telescope' for this room, signals that Mrs. Child partook in far more individual pursuits in this room, and on her own, for at least some of the time.⁶⁸



Fig. 19. One of the Set of Eight Chippendale Arm Chairs, designed by Robert Adam for the Etruscan Dressing Room in 1778.

At Syon House, it is the Turret Rooms, each forming a separate space off the Long Gallery, that facilitate the most intimate entertainment for late eighteenth-century female guests in the ground-floor processional route. Both rooms offered slightly different forms of female sociability and entertainment, as well as subtly distinct levels of access, and subsequently, privacy. The south east Turret Room (Fig. 20), located to the right of the door that opens from the Red Drawing Room, is square in shape, hung with silk and two large, rectangular mirrors that stretch to cover the entirety of the wall. Each mirror is hung in such a

⁶⁷ Walpole, p. 293.

⁶⁸ Evans, p. 25.

way so as to a way reflect each other in an infinite number of replications when a figure is placed to the side of either mirror. Placed around the walls are a late eighteenth-century Chinese cabinet of curiosities, five inlaid chairs whose floral patterns reflect the pink and pale blue silk and stucco, and a side table and card table. Adam described the ‘little closets or cabinets’ at each end of the gallery, as designed ‘one circular for china, and the other square for miniatures’, in addition to ‘serving additional amusement’.⁶⁹ The Duchess did indeed collect and display an array of objects which she later described in a Catalogue of *Historical Curiosity’s*, dated to 1773 – running to nine volumes, including a volume of prints, books and curiosities – as a ‘Musaeum’, first mentioned in the Duchess’s diary in 1762.⁷⁰ In 1765 the Duchess even purchased objects including ‘Queen Elizabeth’s gloves, knife and fork, pin-cushion and tooth-pick’ from the sale of the effects of Elizabeth Mussell (lot 77).⁷¹

The Duchess of Northumberland’s female guests might have enjoyed tea and conversation in the south east Turret Room. As this small closet only has room for a few people, it is likely that visitors spent a limited amount of time here during the day if visiting the Duchess, or, in the evening, when touring through the Long Gallery and stopping to view the interior decoration of this closet, one by one. Another key entertainment in this Turret Room involved the examination of ones reflection in the mirrors, which necessitated its single door to be kept open to the Long Gallery to allow light into the tiny room in order to enable reflections to be seen properly, in addition to add light to the room.

The north east circular Turret Room (Fig. 21), positioned at the opposite of the Long Gallery was nicknamed the ‘wedding cake’ by late eighteenth-century guests. It is exquisitely decorated in stucco ribbons, arabesques and pale pink and blue wallpaper.⁷² Four circular alcoves in this larger Turret Room increase the floor space, whilst the rounded ceiling reflects the same colouring and stucco design as the walls. This overwhelming totality of design helps to illustrate the same effect achieved by Adam in Osterley’s Etruscan Dressing Room, furthered by the novel inclusion of a striking late eighteenth-century gold birdcage hanging

69 Adam, p.6.

70 Northumberland, Alnwick Castle Archive, unpublished exhibition notes on Elizabeth, Duchess of Northumberland, Item 4, Clare Baxter, June 1996.

71 Unpublished exhibition notes on Elizabeth, Duchess of Northumberland, Item 4, Clare Baxter, June 1996.

72 Pailthorpe, ed., p. 46.

from the ceiling. This large birdcage features a mechanised singing canary inside connected to a timepiece and decorative clock face placed upside down on the birdcage, viewable from below. Around the sides of the room, four embroidered chairs completed by John Fowler in the same colour scheme as the decoration also finished by him in the late twentieth century, fit neatly in the alcoves, which would have been used for congenial conversation and tea drinking with the Duchess of Northumberland when the two double doors (one decorative outer door and a thinner inner door), leading into this space, were open or closed.

Games of chess, that comprise two sets of white and red carved pieces, could be played on the large eighteenth-century chess table which opens out to hold the chess pieces, as well as card-playing on the delicate card-table placed under the Turret window. Alternately, female guests of the Duchess could delight in winding up the timepiece on the automated singing canary and listen to its song, whilst sitting in circular fashion facing each other. As the Duchess also collected and displayed china within this Turret Room, the function of this room mirrors the use of the Vestibule at Osterley, although the unique artefacts commissioned for this room highlight the very fashionable interests of the Duchess of Northumberland, made manifest within her sphere of domestic influence. If compared to the second Duchess of Portland's Dressing Room at Bulstrode Park as a museum of sorts (discussed in chapter three), the Duchess of Northumberland's love of display, voguish *objet d'art* and technical mechanisms becomes even more apparent.

The most extraordinary aspect of this Turret Room, which reflects the Duchess of Northumberland's modish interest, is perhaps the set of interlinking doors leading into this room, allowing one, or both, doors to be shut if desired. As such, the room has two levels of access and privacy, one partial, and the other offering total privacy when both doors were closed, as well creating effective soundproofing and preventing downdrafts. The complicated, scientific locking mechanisation on these doors would have attracted curious attention themselves, while, when the outer and inner door were closed, the entire room could be camouflaged, allowing visual trickery and deception to become the ultimate function of this small boudoir.



Fig. 20. Entrance from the South East Turret Room at Syon House, designed by Robert Adam c.1775.



Fig. 21. The North East Turret Room at Syon House, designed by Robert Adam c. 1775.

It can be concluded from analysing these highly theatrical (in some cases purposely exaggerated) functions of the Long Gallery and Turret Rooms at Syon House and the Library, State Bedchamber and Etruscan Dressing Room at Osterley Park, a range of educated and purely entertaining social rituals were conducted. These sociable rituals ranged from pure performance seen on a public stage, through to rituals of meeting and greeting, educated sociability among men and activities conducted in the more intimate spatial surroundings of the Turret Rooms of Syon House. Adam's very different plans emphasise the separate interests, aims and personalities of the owner. The striking Long Gallery at Syon, in

particular, shows the physical extent of female influence and activity in an elite domestic dwelling.

While the surprising flexibility of function exhibited in more intimate, more unrestricted and more secluded first-floor spaces (to be analysed in chapter three) was not reflected as fully in the State rooms of Osterley and Syon, the extraordinary assimilation of processional routes dominating the space facilitated very separate gendered social activities. Both Library and Long Gallery provided an opportune room in which to exhibit artwork, prints, precious manuscripts and the most up-to-date literary works. The Turret Rooms at Syon and the Etruscan Dressing Room at Osterley proved an admirable stage for a range of female entertainments and educational, as well as artistic, pursuits. The State Bedchamber at Osterley provided a stage set against which visitors could both parade through or, alternatively, congregate inside. The individual interests of the strong willed Duchess of Northumberland clearly reflected in the two Turret Rooms, reveal a glimpse of her own personality.

Chapter 2

‘Communal Connections’: Norfolk House’s Music Room and Ball Room as Spaces of Processional Entertainment

The interior of Norfolk House is infinitely superior to anything in this Kingdom... and to most things built in this country before.

-William Farington, *Memories of William Farington*, 1756.⁷³

William Farington recorded his observations after visiting the refurbished interior of Norfolk House, No. 31 St. James Square, in 1756. Norfolk House was formally opened to the public at a large ball-assembly that same year. Farington’s opinion of Norfolk House’s redecoration and social use for entertaining on a grand scale is reflected in the diaries and letters of a number of London’s distinguished aristocratic and cultural figureheads.

For many wealthy members of the mid eighteenth-century English elite, a London residence, replete with a ground and first-floor circuit of rooms designed and furnished for the purposes of entertainment was an extremely important ‘formative influence’, not only on their own practises of sociability and display of taste, but upon those of their political and religious allies, friends and acquaintances.⁷⁴ As many of the elite were in residence in London from autumn to early summer, migrating from country estates for the ‘winter season’ – at least six to seven months of the year – the ‘new demand-led culture of sociability’ prompted the extensive development of the West End of London.⁷⁵ The freehold plots for the land around many West End squares were bought after the Crown’s grant of the freehold in 1665. Thereafter, a rush of rich aristocratic families competed to buy up the land in order to stake their own social and political influence in London, both at the Royal Court and amongst fellow political and cultural figureheads. In 1785, for example, the German traveller and writer J.A. Archenholz described the unique nature of such architectural shaping of London’s West End, finding ‘the houses... mostly new and elegant; the squares they constitute... superb’.⁷⁶

73 William Farington, *Memoirs of William Farington* (London, 1756), p. 5.

74 Girouard, p. 100.

75 Girouard, p. 100.

76 J.A. Archenholz, *Memories of J.A. Archenholz* (London, 1785), p. 2.

The Spectator Magazine characterised the inhabitants of St. James Square as conspicuous due to their self-imposed social segregation; owning a house around the Square was considered essential to cement any status in the Capital, demarcating them in all respects ‘a distinct people from those of Cheapside’.⁷⁷ From 1750, no less than six Dukes, including the Duke of Chandos, the Duke of Dorset, the Duke of Kent and the Duke of Portland, had houses in the square, setting the tone for the development of almost all late residential Squares in the capital. Because of its design, Norfolk House became the largest and most impressive of the four town houses owned by the ninth Duke of Norfolk, all of which were designed by the architect Matthew Brettingham the Elder.

‘The King and the Square had made St. James’s the heart of chic Restoration London’.⁷⁸ The speculative building pioneer here was Henry Jermyn, Earl of Albans, who had first envisaged St. James’s Square as a grand collection of about ten ‘palace’ houses. He petitioned the King in August 1663 thus:

Whereas the beauty of his great town and the convenience of the Court are defective in point of houses fit for the dwellings of noblemen and other persons of quality... your Majesty hath thought it fit for some remedy hereof to appoint that the place of St James’s Field should be built in great and good houses.⁷⁹

Norfolk House was the first and grandest to be erected. Christopher Christie has written that the ‘royal scale of the Howard houses was one even appreciated by Royalty’, as Frederick, Prince of Wales, ‘borrowed’ Norfolk House as his “London palace” between 1737 and

⁷⁷ Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London: Penguin Publishing, 2006), p. 131

⁷⁸ Porter, p. 118.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Porter, p. 118.

1741'.⁸⁰ The scale of the building is illustrated in 'A View of St. James Square' (Fig. 22), a large engraving that shows Norfolk House dominating the square and providing a focal point for passers-by. A contemporary map of the square (Fig. 23) further emphasises the advantageous position of Norfolk House and its close proximity to Pall Mall and London's political and cultural heart.



Fig. 22. Richard Horwood, A View of St. James Square (Norfolk House is situated to the far right of the image), engraving, 1753, Guildhall Library.

80 Christie, p. 44

Such houses were designed to be ‘public’ in conception and interior layout, and were ‘built not for domestic but for public life’.⁸¹ Owners needed to consolidate social and political bonds with colleges and relations residing in the Capital at the same time. Wealthy owners could now host social events that they saw taking place in London’s large social spaces, like Ranelagh Gardens, riverfront promenades and squares, but in an interior setting and on a smaller scale, that they could tightly control.

Moreover, this circuit of rooms needed to form an easy progression of route, flowing into one another. The number of rooms designed for entertaining was also increased, and in some instances, the state bedchamber ‘hived’ off entirely from the rest of the apartments, leaving only a sequence of reception rooms.⁸² Of course, the most attractive and convenient way of arranging this was to form a circular procession of rooms arranged around a top-lit central staircase. Such an organisation of space could allow for a variety of rituals and sociable interactions conducted in the circuit of rooms, in whole or in part, depending on ones relationship to the host and the size and nature of the occasion. This particular spatial format was first seen at the official opening of Norfolk House hosted by the ninth Duke (1686-1777) and Duchess of Norfolk (before 1712-1773).

81 Girouard, p. 194.

82 Girouard, p. 194.

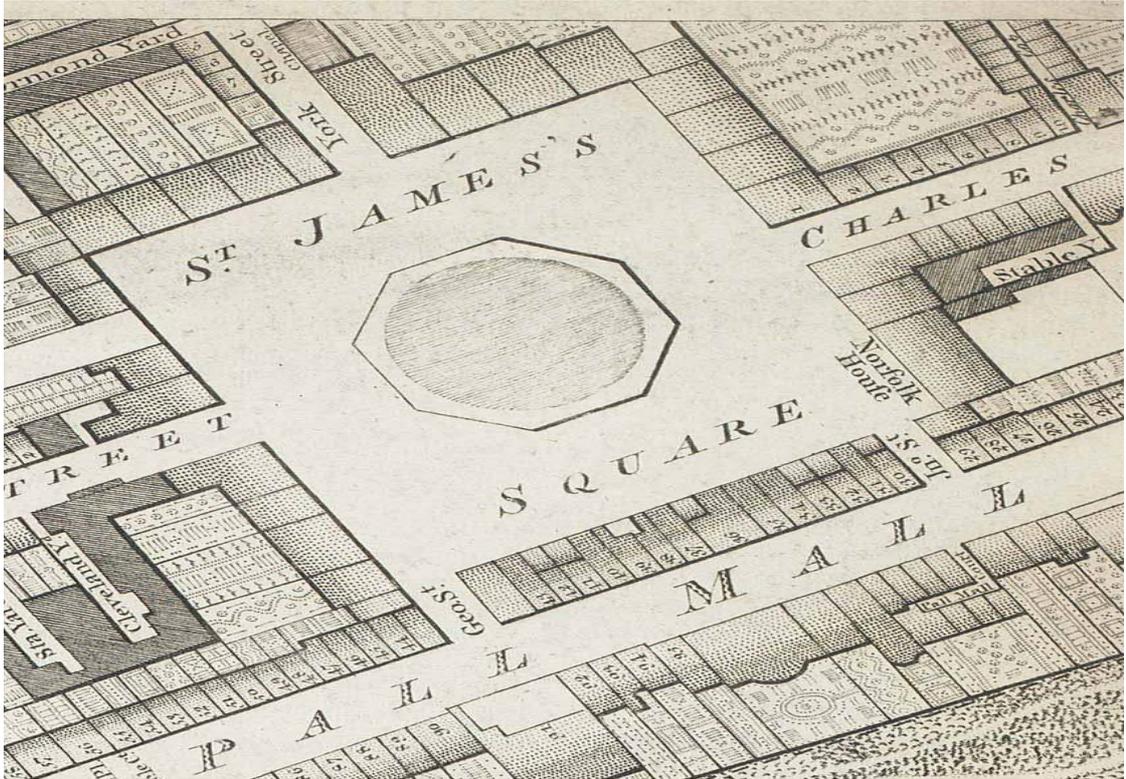


Fig. 23. J. Bowles, The Location of Norfolk House, 1799 Map, engraving, 1799, House of Commons Archives.

The use of Norfolk House by the Duke and Duchess provides an interesting case study of eighteenth-century ritualistic use, not least due to their religious faith and the sociable nature of the Duchess. The Howards were of an aristocratic dynasty circumscribed by their strong Catholic faith. The Duke was unable to pursue the expensive business of politics at Westminster or exercising any duty in office. Instead, the ducal couple concentrated on accumulating vast wealth from their estates, subsequently channelling this into the remodelling of Norfolk House.

Additionally, the strong-willed Duchess, who was the arbiter of taste and instigator of social functions at Norfolk House, represents an unusual example of feminine control within an elite marriage. This state of affairs was frequently commented upon, and documented, even in the Duchess's own time. A half-length portrait of the determined Mary Blount (Fig. 24), completed shortly after her marriage to Edward Howard in 1727, suggests a bold, clever and capable woman crafting a modish and sophisticated persona for herself. As co-heiress to her father's estate at Blagdon, East Devon, Mary Blount was also the dominant influence

behind much of the rebuilding work at the unfinished Palace at Worksop. Indeed, Tessa Murdoch has argued that the interior decoration of Norfolk House ‘owed much to the character of Mary Blount’, as well as her dowry of £6000.⁸³ The Duchess fostered the more subtle ideal of religious tolerance in elite urban circles, and deliberately playing down the Jacobite sympathies of previous Howard generations. When the ducal couple were received at Court in 1733, Lady Irwin exclaimed that they were even ‘received with great distinction’, continuing tellingly:

The Duchess who is a sensible woman, and must act the man where talking is necessary, behaved much to her credit; She assured the Queen, though she and the Duke were of different religion, they had much duty and regard for the King as any of his subjects, and should be glad of any occasion that gave ’em opportunity to show it.⁸⁴

The Duchess’s control of the interior decoration at both Worksop and Norfolk House by was perhaps furthered by the fact that she was not able to produce an heir, thus enabling her to turn all her ambition into creating magnificent interiors and, additionally, affording a full social calendar to be enjoyed when she resided in London. The Duchess insured the direction of the type and size of much of the sociable interaction that occurred within Norfolk House, and thus provides us with a useful female comparison to the first Duchess of Northumberland (discussed in chapter one), and to Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu and the second Duchess of Portland (discussed in chapter three).⁸⁵

Within this, second chapter then, the first-floor apartments of Norfolk House, and, in particular the Great Room and Music Room (Figs 25–26), shall be analysed as aesthetic vehicles serving a multitude of purposes for the Duke and Duchess, including that of self-promotion, tolerant sociability, and as an illustration of the Duchess’s own personality and identity. The material display and function of the main first-floor rooms in Norfolk House

⁸³ Tessa Murdoch, ‘The Mysterious Mr Cuenot’, *Apollo* (2006), 3-9, (p. 3).

⁸⁴ Lady Irwin, *Correspondence and Letters* (London, 1733), p. 154.

⁸⁵ Vickery, p. 132.

used to stage the performative rituals of dancing, card-playing and dining are discussed as facilitating the cultivation of communal sociabilities in the flexible use of furniture and space in the enactment of behaviour, public procession and more individual interaction. Crucially, the link between different types of ritual and the relationship between the ducal couple and their visitors will be examined as key dictators of the shifting functionality of the large, interconnecting rooms, which roughly correlated to different times. The chapter will be organised as such, with the more formal, large-scale functions of the first-floor apartments discussed before the less structured (and more secluded) rituals linked to close, trusted associates.



Fig. 24. James Lathan, *Mary Howard, ninth Duchess of Norfolk*, oil on canvas, 1727, National Portrait Gallery.

First, it is useful to detail a little of the origins and development of Norfolk House. Norfolk House was originally known as St. Albans House in the rate-books of 1675 and 1676. The first house on the site was erected for the Earl of Belasyse in 1665. Shortly after completion, it then came into the possession of Lord Duras, the Ambassador to France until 1678, and subsequently passed to the second Earl of Faversham. The Duke of Portland then purchased the house in 1710. The deeds of 1 June 1722 indicate that the house was sold for £10, 000 to Lord Fredrick Howard in trust for the ninth Duke of Norfolk. By 1748, the Duke had over a hundred feet of frontage facing St. James' Square, and the couple occupied, and then renovated, Norfolk House between 1742 and 1754. The house was extended by Brettingham the Elder and his account books record part of the cost of this reconstruction as totalling over £18, 575.⁸⁶



Fig. 25. The Music Room at Norfolk House, finished by Giovanni Battista Borra in 1752, photographed as it now appears in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Room No. 52).

86 F.H.W Sheppard, ed., 'St. James Square-No. 31: Norfolk House', *Survey of London: Volumes 29 and 30: St James Westminster*, 1 (2010) <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid40565>>[accessed 9 September 2010] (p. 1).



Fig. 26. The Ball Room at Norfolk House, finished by Giovanni Battista Borra in 1752, photographed before demolition in 1937.

Only a small proportion of the original structure of Norfolk House remains on St. James Street, transformed into office buildings after the house was sold in 1938.⁸⁷ The house and its decoration, instantly distinguished itself to eighteenth-century visitors through the incorporation of the most extensive Rococo design completed in England in the era. As the plans of Norfolk House (Figs 27–32) indicate, the renovated interiors included a large Library and Morning Room on the ground floor; a first floor containing the Music Room (Figs 26 – 32); Green Damask Drawing Room; Crimson Drawing Room (the principle Salon) (Fig. 33); Great Room (or Ball Room); Dressing Room; Bedchamber; Closet; and, finally, Antechamber.

⁸⁷ Sheppard, ed., 'St. James Square-No. 31: Norfolk House', (p. 1).

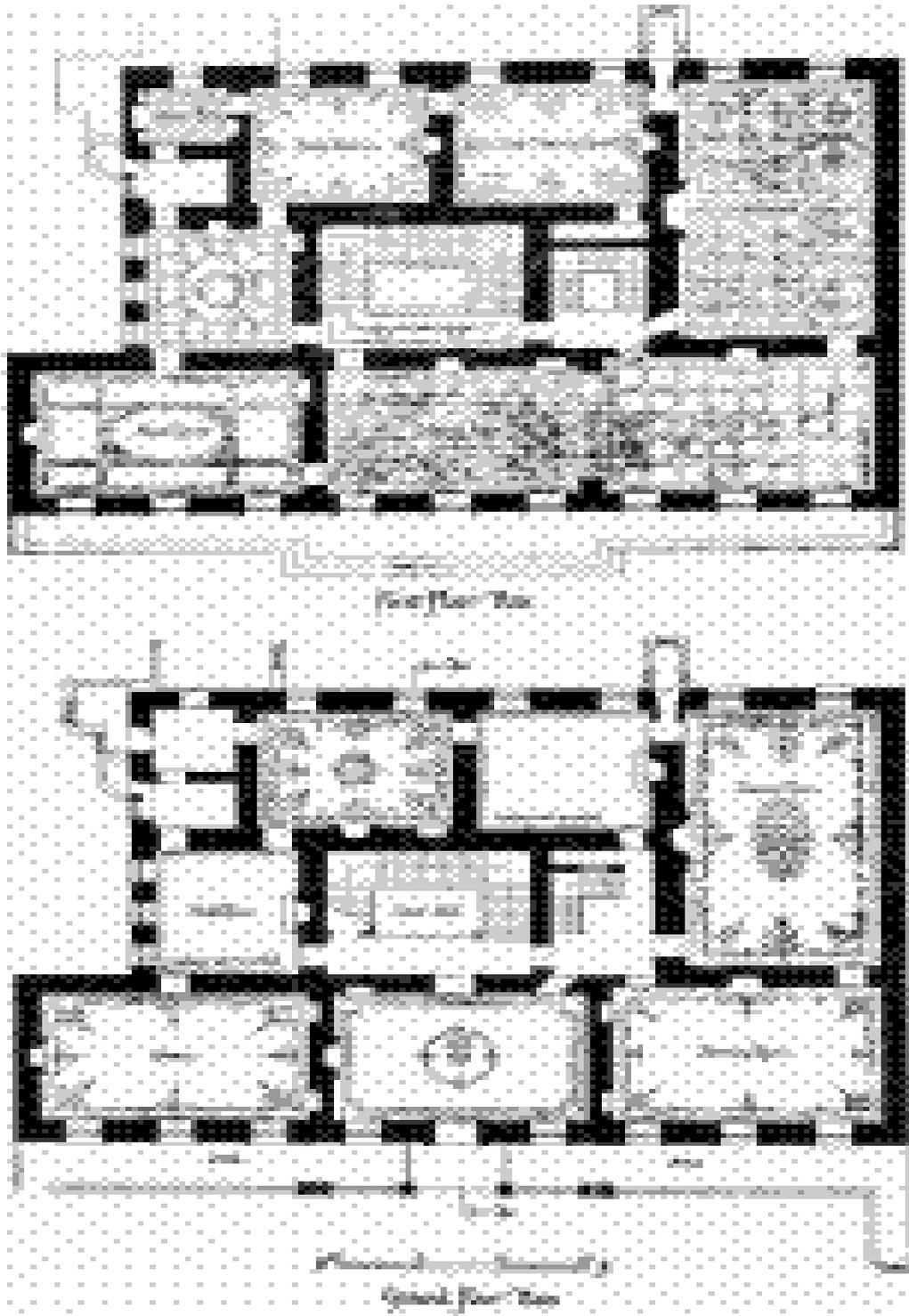


Fig. 27. Floor Plan of Norfolk House, taken from the Inventory of about 1756.

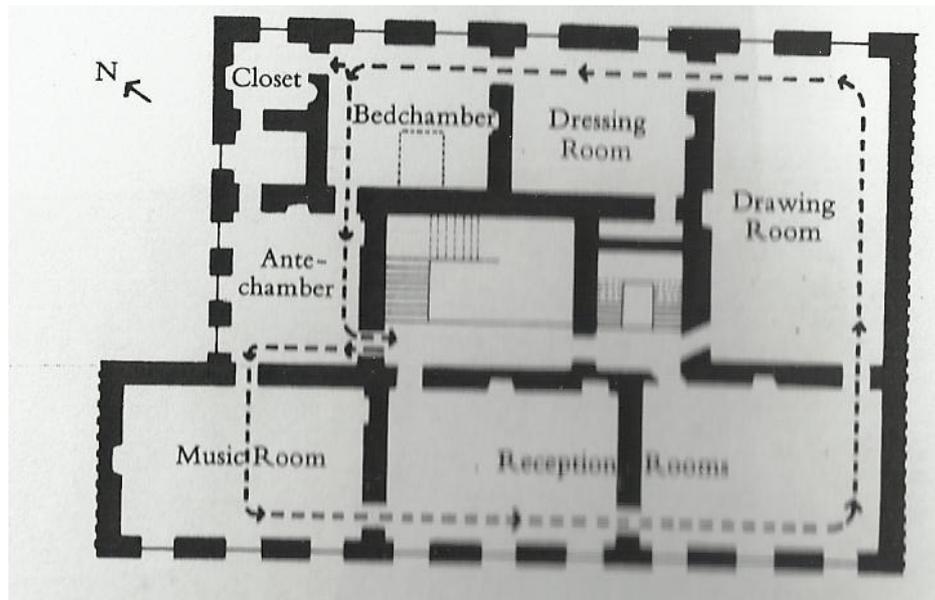


Fig. 28. Plan of the First-Floor of Norfolk House.



Fig. 29. A gilded musical frieze of instruments and attributes of the God Apollo, in the centre of one of the pierglasses of the Norfolk House Music Room.



Fig. 30. The north wall of the Norfolk House Music Room.



Fig. 31. Gilded stucco overdoor of putti, birds and flowers above the entrance to the Norfolk House Music Room.



Fig. 32. Intertwined initials of the ninth Duke and Duchess of Norfolk, displayed above a door in the interior of the Norfolk House Music Room.

Consequently, the social circuit offered by the layout of Norfolk House allowed the Duke and Duchess to consolidate influence and power most effectively through large, mixed-sex assemblies within visually sophisticated surroundings. As early as 1723 Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had remarked that assemblies ‘rage in this part of the world [London]; there is not a street in town free from them, and some spirited ladies go to seven in a night’.⁸⁸ The official opening of Norfolk House in January 1756 provided just such an occasion for a functional use of domestic space, this social event becoming the talk of all London for a few months. The ‘ball-assembly’ itself represented one of the more elaborate and most important modish forms of domestic entertainments devised in the eighteenth century, defined in 1751 as ‘a stated and general meeting of the polite persons of both sexes, for the sake of conversation, gallantry, news and play’.⁸⁹ Often assemblies were opened by way of a ball, taking place across a number of rooms and involving supper. As Lady Wentworth detailed in a letter to her father

⁸⁸ Quoted in Christopher Simon Sykes, *Private Palaces: Life in the Great London Houses* (London: Viking, 1985), p. 96

⁸⁹ Girouard, p. 195.

in March 1733, ‘we was last night at the Duke of Devonshire, it was a ball.... And we had a very handsome supper’.⁹⁰

Hence, the introduction of evening assemblies at Norfolk House, involving a variety of entertainments and interactions taking place throughout the rooms, were a novel form of function in the 1750s, reflecting the increasing desire for London society to ‘gather together in as large numbers as possible as frequently as possible’.⁹¹ For example, Mrs. Delany, a privileged member of the eighteenth-century Bluestocking Group, writing to a friend in January 1756, encapsulated the sense of excitement that the official opening of Norfolk House brought for London’s elite when she remarked, ‘The Duke of Norfolk’s fine house in St. James’s Square is finished, and opened to the *grande monde* of London; I am asked for next Tuesday’.⁹²



Fig. 33. The Salon, featuring the Green Damask and Crimson Drawing Rooms, combined in the nineteenth century when the partition wall was removed.

⁹⁰ Sykes, p. 98.

⁹¹ Sykes, p. 129.

⁹² Noted in Lady Llanover, ed., *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany (Diaries of Mrs Delany)*: 3, 1 (London, 1861), p. 409.

The glittering interior of Norfolk House was made all the more impressive for guests through the contrast provided by the inconspicuous, uniform exterior of the house facing onto St. James' Square. As the author of *Critical Observations on the Building and Improvement of London* remarked in 1771, 'would any foreigner, beholding an insipid length of wall broken into regular rows of windows, in St. James's Square, ever figure from thence the spectacular residence of the first duke of England?'.⁹³ The opening ball-assembly was a ticketed event and, although the numbers of people invited was on a suitably grand scale, invitations were sent by the Duchess to carefully chosen recipients who could provide either amusement or facilitate influential political and sociable connections. The snub inflicted by the Duchess on those she choose not to invite was clearly expressed by Lady Townsend, wife of the rising star of eighteenth-century English politics, Charles Townsend. Excluded for political reasons, Lady Townsend lamented satirically but tellingly:

For ah! To me alone no card is come,
I must not go abroad - and cannot *Be at Home!*
...I curse the Ball, the Duchess and the Pope!
Oh but could I on my waking brain impose
Or but forget at least my present woes
Forget 'em - how?
Each rattling coach suggests
The loath'd ideas of the crowding guests
To visit - were to publish my disgrace
To meet spleen in every other place
To join old maids and dowagers forlorn
And to be once their comfort and scorn...
This night the happy and the unhappy keep
Vigils alike - Norfolk hath murdered sleep!⁹⁴

Although Lady Townsend's poetic lament is somewhat exaggerated, her commentary nevertheless alerts readers to the large number of 'crowding guests' who attended this ball-assembly, as well as the trite assumption of a continued association or alliance between the Catholic communities in Europe and the Howard dynasty, on the part of some of London's

⁹³ Anon., *Critical Observations on the Buildings and Improvements of London* (London, 1771), p. 28.

⁹⁴ Richard Owen Cambridge, *Elegy Written in an Empty Assembly Room* (London: Dodsley, 1756), p. 125.

wealthy elite.⁹⁵ The large ball-assembly Mrs. Delany refers to in her correspondence was an event also attended by Horace Walpole. This inclusion in the Duchess's invitation list indicates her desire to include persons who were not only influential within London's elite social and cultural circles, but those who would inevitably record their experiences in literary form, and by word of mouth to other such companions of social and cultural standing. Indeed, in a letter to the Countess d'Orssy, Walpole humorously, and vividly, described the spectacular effect that Norfolk House's formal house warming had upon him, exclaiming:

All earth was there...You would have thought there had been a comet, everybody was gaping in the air and treading on one another's toes. In short, you never saw such a scene of magnificence and taste. The tapestry, the embroidered bed, the illumination, the glasses, the lightness and novelty ornaments, and the ceilings, are delightful. She [the Duchess] gives three Tuesdays, would you could be at one!⁹⁶

Walpole's observations confirm Lady Townsend's belief that a huge number of people attended the opening, and, moreover, that they were able to explore the full circuit of first-floor rooms in a kind of processional route, perhaps participating in the various entertainments carried out in each room, in an informal and unstructured manner. In addition, Walpole's description also draws attention to the fact that the Duchess hosted three assemblies in quick succession in order for the maximum number of guests to view the interior of the house. Entertainments conducted in each room could include card playing in the Great Room (or Ball Room as it was renamed in the nineteenth century) or parading past the State Bed that was placed in a room 'hung and Furnish'd with Blew-Velour except the bed' and 'surrounded by a brass rail to protect it from crowds'.⁹⁷ Farington mentions the Duchess's niece, Miss Clifford, who was placed in the crimson Drawing Room, ready 'to fix cards for those who chose to Play', while the inventory of 1756 indicates card-tables were placed in all the State Apartment rooms, and thus playing was not confined to a particular room.⁹⁸

95 Cambridge, p. 125.

96 Mrs. Paget Toynbee, ed., *Letters of Horace Walpole, 1791-1797*, vol 3 (London: Batsford, 1904), p. 396.

97 Cambridge, p. 125

98 Sykes, p. 133.

The embroidered bed itself attracted admiration from Farington, the needlecraft upon, as he exclaims, ‘upon a peach colour’d silk... [that] neither Baptiste or Honduotre could paint finer Birds of Flowers than... in this work’, probably embroidered by the Duchess herself with the aid of assistants.⁹⁹ Moreover, the specific reference to the lighting and furnishing of the Music Room, Great Room and State Bedchamber draws attention to the culmination in splendid material outfitting of each room along this circuit, until it reached its ‘apotheosis’ in the Great Room, and after passing through the Dressing Room, the State Bedchamber (of whose ‘tapestry’ and ‘embroidered bed’ Walpole commented).¹⁰⁰

Farington, a retired Indian army officer, described the finished rooms in the greatest of detail. His mere presence at the opening event also indicates the variety of gentry, distinguished men and women, and aristocratic socialites who the Duke and Duchess of Norfolk wished to impress and curry favour.¹⁰¹ In a letter addressed to his sisters, Dr Isabella & Mary, of 18 February 1757, Farington explained the route that people took in order to view the different colour schemes and style of decoration in each room, that confirmed it as ‘the floor of taste, expense, state and parade’.¹⁰² Farington began his letter thus:

For this Letter must be address’d to you both, as, I promised in my last Letter to my Mother you should have an account of Norfolk House. The Duchess having been so kind to send me a ticket, on opening the Grand Apartment, which was expected pro’d the finest Assembly ever known in this Kingdom, there were in all eleven rooms. Open, three below, the rest above, every room was furnished with a different colour which used to be reckon’d absurd, but this I Suppose is to be the Standard, as the immense Grandeur of the Furniture is scarce to be concei’d [sic]. Every one allow’d it infinitely superior to any thing in this Kingdom, & many to most things they had seen in Europe.¹⁰³

He then explained:

but you shall have them as we went along - the Hall is very Plain, on the left hand, you enter a large Room Hung & Furnish’d with a Green Damask, let in with a Handsome Gilt moulding, & several very Fine Paintings on the Hangings, through this into a Wainscoted Room with Pictures but not very Elegant - then to the Stairs, wch are very

99 Rosemary Baird, *Mistress of the House: Great Ladies and Grand Houses 1670-1830* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), p. 125.

100 Toynbee, p. 294.

101 See Appendix 1 for a fuller account of Farington’s description.

102 Sykes, p. 130.

103 See Appendix 1.

large, & the Lights Beautifully Plac'd, 'Twas entirely coer'd [sic] with a French Carpet, & in the Angles stood Large China Jarrs with perfumes - the Anti-Chamber was much like the last mention'd Room, tho something Superior, the next Room is large, Wainscoted in a whimsical Taste, the Pannels fill'd with extreme fine Carvings, the Arts & Sciences all Gilt, as well the Ceiling, which was the same design, here the Duchess sat, the whole night that she might speak to every one as they came in; having paid yr regards, you then walk forwards; the next Room was Hung & Furnished with Blew-Damask, coer'd with very Fine Paintings, the Girandoles, fix'd in the Frames of the Pictures, wch had an odd effect, & I can't think will be so good for the Paint.... You now enter the Great Room... the tapestry is the finest Picture I ever saw, chiefly with Beasts... the Hangings just cost nine Hundred Pounds, the Glasses a Thousand... but throughout ye whole House the Glass is thought the most remarkable furniture, there are two crystal branches,... I don't suppose this room can be outdone in Elegance.¹⁰⁴

This ball-assembly also included a supper in the Dining Room, and then proceed up again, as part of the greater ritual proceedings. As Farington explained, in the Dining Room:

The table was Prepar'd for Desert [sic], which was a Beautiful Park, round the edge was a Plantation of Flowering Shrubs, and in the middle a Fine piece of water, with Dolphins sporting out water, & Dear [sic] dispersed Irregularity over the Lawn, on the edge of the table was all the Iced Creams, & wet and dried sweetmeats, it was such a piece of work it was all left on the table till we went for coffee.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, the 1756 inventory records a dining-table kept in the Music Room, while an inventory compiled in 1777 reports a number of tables kept on the landing, indicating late evening suppers were held in a number of the State Rooms upon desire and demand.¹⁰⁶ It is little wonder Farington ended his letter by claiming 'now don't you dream of this Fairy Land for 'tis almost like it.'¹⁰⁷ In April 1757 another ball was hosted, on this occasion for 'Duke of Cumberland's entertainment'.¹⁰⁸ This particular ball did not end until 4am, Farington describing how, 'the suppers and the desserts were the prettiest that had ever seen; the dessert, besides the candles on the table, was lighted by lamps in fine green cut glass.'¹⁰⁹ Such sentiments and descriptions echoed the opinion Elizabeth Noel expressed in 1778 when writing to her Aunt to describe another ball-assembly at Norfolk House:

104 See Appendix 1.

105 W.S. Lewis et al., (eds.), *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, vol 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 438.

106 Sykes, p. 139.

107 Sykes, p. 138.

108 Baird, *Mistress of the House: Great Ladies and Grand Houses 1670-1830*, p. 128.

109 See Appendix 1.

We went there at 9 o'clock & then been found every room brim-full... The house is superb, consisting of 8 or 9 Rooms en Enfilade; 6 of them are *immensely* large, there are some *very fine* Pictures, amazing large Glasses and one room is hung with white Sattin, & velvet flowers upon it. There is a State Bedchamber & a very large Crucifix. They danced, tho' none but vulgars, & in another room there were *Refreshments*. Every person of Quality, Fashion & the Ton were there (excepting the House of Commons members) besides a great many *Giggs*, in all about 7 or 800... It was very hot & very crowded; besides Roman Catholics in abundance, there were the Blood of all the Howards... It was dreadful getting away, I scream'd finely, several chairs were broken to pieces.¹¹⁰

The base of the grand staircase (Fig. 34), further embellished through the incorporation of the enormous double-scallop shell on the landing, would have enhanced this sense of theatricality as any visitor ascended up the grand staircase towards the Music and Ball Rooms from the downstairs Dining Room. As Farington himself commented, 'then to the Stairs, wch are very large, & the Lights Beautifully Plac'd, 'Twas entirely coer'd [sic] with a French Carpet, & in the Angles stood Large China Jars with perfumes'.¹¹¹

Moreover, in this manner, visitors, as a collective, enjoyed various diverting visual spectacles and entertainments in a sequential arrangement, the staircase seldom being used by only one individual at a time. When visitors ascended the staircase, they could also observe the magnificent carved stucco trophies of the hunt, and the various stuccos of deer, arrows and oak leaves suspended from trompe o'oeil ribbons on the walls opposite the staircase. The grand sweeping central staircase thus provided a suitably magnificent setting 'both for the first approach of guests to their host and hostess, and for the descent and ascent of the whole party to and from supper'.¹¹² As a result, guests of the Duke and Duchess wandered up the central staircase of Norfolk House, through rooms that could aesthetically reflect the international vision of the Howard family, the unparalleled dynastic pedigree of the Howard family name and, not least, Mary Howard's impressive aesthetic judgement.

110 See Appendix 2.

111 E.D. Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music* (London: Routledge and Regan Paul, 1966), p. 49.

112 Girouard, p. 198.



Fig. 34. The Grand Staircase at Norfolk House, based on Giovanni Battista Borra's design, photographed before demolition in 1937.

Farington's description also emphasises the function that the Duchess took up at the opening ball-assembly, intentionally placing herself against the splendid backdrop of the Music Room for the entirety of the evening. She adopted this position in order to visually and physically reinforce her own position as a hospitable and welcoming hostess, one completely in charge of proceedings. All guests had to pay their respects as they passed into the Music Room, and then on around the social circuit of rooms. Thus, in effect, the Duchess held a symbolic position of power at the top of the stairs by her choice of position.

The Duchess's control of proceedings from her dominant position next to the entrance to the Music Room, seated 'like a sentinel', was noticed not least by Walpole, who quipped that

at this social gathering, ‘all the company was afraid of the Duchess, and the Duke afraid of all the company’.¹¹³ The fact that the Duke waited until guests had reached the small Antechamber to receive them formally is a telling indicator of the couple’s relationship. Although a decision designed to reflect the dignity of the Howards as guests would have traditionally made their way through the state apartments before being formally received in the State Bedchamber by the King centuries before.

This specific placing of the host and hostess at the formal opening of Norfolk House also enabled them to engage on a very personal level with London’s elite power brokers, compensating for the lack of any official political influence of their own. Furthermore, hosting such an extravagant function indicated to the Norfolks’ guests their hosts’ skills in the management of ritual and a multitude of smaller entertainments, such as card-playing, *giggs* (several small groups of dances taking place at the same time) – and tea-drinking, over the space of eleven rooms at the same time, as well as demonstrating the ability to socialise effectively. The interlinking of entertainments across a number of rooms during such assemblies also emphasises the adaptable nature of the first-floor circuit of rooms. Such a large assembly also gave the Duke and Duchess a chance to place themselves in complementary, yet parallel, spatial spheres of domestic activity that reflected their different personalities and ambitions.

It is interesting to note that this kind of novel, entertainment, conducted in a great London house, is a precursor of the parties and large social occasions hosted by the Bluestocking Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu twenty years later in Hill Street, and then Portman Square. For both women, their London houses were centres of hospitable sociability, often conducted on a grand scale. Within Norfolk House’s spatial confines, the Duchess of Norfolk also displayed learning, educated taste and sophisticated design choices that set a standard followed by great London house owners. Furthermore, the Duchess displayed a female ‘mastery of the language of goods’ in the Music and Ball Rooms at Norfolk House (all the Rococo furniture is thought

113 Toynbee, ed., p. 395.

114 Vickery, p. 132.

to have been commissioned by her).¹¹⁴ The lamps displayed on the supper table in the Dining Room on the occasion of large ball-assemblies were also an innovation made by the Duchess herself, helping to highlight her innovative and creative nature to guests, especially when seen in the same domestic interior as her famous embroidered bed hangings.¹¹⁵

Large communal assemblies of invited guests also took place in the Great Room that was, by the nature of its furnishings and position in the processional circuit. As recorded in the 1777 inventory, this room contained ‘Virginia waulnuttree [sic] Elbow chairs’ and three large sofas, suggestive of its use as a place of elegant conversation, card-playing and tea drinking on a large scale.¹¹⁶ The importance placed by both Edward and Mary Howard upon the overall impression of this particular room can be partially ascertained by the fact that the initial design in a more restrained style (proposed by Brettingham) was rejected in favour of the Rococo design that could more aptly reflect a newly fashionable trend in interior design. Farington recorded that the furniture was covered in crimson velvet, the wall was also hung with four panels of Gobelins tapestry imported from France, costing the princely sum of £9 a yard. The wall-lights also provided an odd, but novel, lighting effect that cast the details of the carvings into clear visibility.¹¹⁷

It is important to note that entry into this vast space was normally achieved by moving through the white and gold Music Room, the green damask Drawing Room, and then the crimson Drawing Room. Hence, visitors would have been dazzled by the succession of strikingly different decoration and colour schemes incorporated. In particular, as Desmond

115 Cecil Aspinall-Oglander, *Admiral Widow, being the life and letters of the Hon. Mrs Edward Boscawen from 1761 to 1801* (London, 1942), p. 29.

116 Desmond Fitz-Gerald, *The Norfolk House Music Room* (London: The Victoria and Albert Museum Press, 1973), p. 5.

117 Murdoch, p. 4.

Fitz-Gerald confirms, ‘the first impression of the Music Room is one of gilded splendour that recalls the salons of the *dix-huitieme* in Paris’, reflecting Farington’s own viewpoint that the Music Room panelling was ‘wainscoted in whimsical Taste’.¹¹⁸ The large intertwining and gilded monograms of the Duke and Duchess’s names emblazoned upon the wall over one of the carved doorframes in the Music Room would have helped reinforce this concept in the minds of guests. Consequently, the interiors of the Music and Ball Rooms were the most remarkable displays of full-blown Rococo in London. Cuenot’s bill for the most expensive items carved for the Music Room, ‘nine “Heads” – including five on the three pelmet-boards on the window wall’ – also indicate a theatrical association with the continent.¹¹⁹

The extremely elaborate, reflective surfaces within the Music Room may have brought to mind the Music Room at the Palace of Versailles for some visitors. The skilful Piedmontese designer, Giovanni Battista Borra, designed both the Music and Ball Rooms in a strikingly original scheme of pure white paint, brilliant gold, carved wood and plasterwork. The magnificent gilt trophies of ‘symbolic objects [cartouches] composed with shells, scrolls and carved musical trophies’ Farington refers to as ‘extreme fine carvings, the Arts & Sciences all gilt’, further add to the theatrical feeling of this room.¹²⁰ Besides this, the elaborate overdoors, leading to the Drawing Room included exotic details like monkeys in palm trees, houses for monkeys, musical masks, festoons of fruit and other exquisitely detailed carvings. These added a definitive note of continental ambiance (Fig. 35).

118 Fitz-Gerald, p. 7.

119 See Appendix 3.

120 See Appendix 3.



Fig. 35. The Embellished Doorframes at Norfolk House, photographed before demolition in 1937.

Mrs. Lybbe Powys gives a detailed description of a more specialist entertainment enacted at Norfolk House when the full circuit of rooms was not necessary for smaller, more specialist functions and entertainments were undertaken in one or two rooms. She describes a musical affair in 1775, noting, ‘young ladies singing, while the gentlemen accompanied on their German flutes, this little concert taking up the day’.¹²¹ Although the Music Room contained no organ or harpsichord, as is evident from the 1753 inventory of furniture, the fantastical carved trophies that decorated the walls, pierglasses and ceiling of the Music Room suggest some music was played here. Images such as James Gillray’s 1795 print, *Lady Godina’s Rout* (Fig. 36) – a rout defined as ‘tumultuous or disorderly crowd of persons’ – guests indulging in card-playing and musical activities, including Lady Georgina Gordina, the Duchess of Bedford, can be imagined occurring in Norfolk House’s Music Room.¹²²

¹²¹ Emily Climenson, ed., *Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys* (London, 1899), p. 154.

¹²² Anon., *Oxford Collins English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1135.



Fig. 36. James Gillray, *Lady Gordina's Rout*, coloured mezzotint, 1795, National Portrait Gallery.

Within Norfolk House's Music Room, a form of serious 'Recital' may also have taken place, associating the Duke and Duchess with a highly refined, cultured form of entertainment that could involve a variety of people. As the inventory of 1756 records, 'A Card Table covered with Velvett the frame Gilt' was situated inside the Music Room, would have also provided sociable interaction. The inventory made in 1777, itemising 'Indian Back Chairs with Cane Seats... and a dining-room table', further indicates that the Music Room 'must have been a place of parade - a grand entrance into the main suite of state apartments of the house'.¹²³ Thus, instances of large assemblies staged within Norfolk House's Music Room, involving small groups of men and women crowded around small card-tables or larger dining-table, allowed guests to observe each other's actions and engage in conversation at close quarters and in an informal manner. While guests were sitting down they could also fully appreciate the carvings and other decorative detail incorporated into the room's decoration, casting the assembly itself as one of the most influential and talked about forms of urban entertainment.

123 Fitz-Gerald, p. 39.

As there was no single ceremonial centre in Norfolk House's social circuit, unlike the State Apartment located along the traditional 'axis of honour', one or two rooms could, if so desired, be used for a slightly more secluded function. Although it is doubtful whether any of these rooms were used by the Duchess and Duke of Norfolk on their own, it is likely that the Duchess's Dressing Room, dressed 'entirely Chinese... [with] Hangings Painted... in the most beautiful India Pattern you can imagine, Curtains and Chairs the same... on a Chinese Table stood a basket of French China flowers, under which was a Room for a Lamp to Burn Perfumes to answer the Flowers', and her Closet (or 'Toilet' as Farington calls it) – 'filled with an infinite number of Curiosities' – had a secondary function of display alongside that of dressing and undressing.¹²⁴ Small groups of guests could pass through these rooms in the event of informal, daytime gatherings and discuss the array of ceramics, 'curiosities' and Oriental hangings on a more intimate level with the Duchess. As both the Dressing Room and Closet overlooked the garden, moments of sole contemplation and letter writing, as well as arranging and rearranging of artwork, furnishings and China are activities the Duchess of Norfolk may have indulged in, besides that of needlework.¹²⁵

In addition, the easy separation of rooms for those evening functions catering for communal activity that encompassed much of the first floor and those more intimate interactions, that perhaps took up only the Closet, passage through the State Bedchamber and one of the Reception Rooms, enabled a variety of rituals to be enacted. Such domestic functions allowed the Duchess of Norfolk to fashion a major part of her own identity as a welcoming and influential figure in London's social scene. Indeed, the Catholic writer Charles Butler would write after her death that the Duchess's 'life was spent in... supporting the amiable dignity of this branch of the Howard family through fearless taste', and the spectacular interior of Norfolk House aptly reflects this.¹²⁶

Norfolk House thus became a focal point and tool of social communication, religious tolerance and an alternative centre of political thinking and cultural entertainment of sorts from that held ultimately at Westminster, softening societal prejudices and fostering goodwill

124 Farington, p. 5.

125 Baird, p. 127.

126 Baird, p. 127.

towards the Howard family. This now lost palace was a unique enclave for Mary and Edward Howard in which to immerse themselves in the construction and decoration of, but, more importantly, were the ideal domestic surroundings for the Duke and Duchess to invite a variety of distinguished guests inside to encourage convivial relations.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Murdoch, p. 9.

Chapter 3

‘Intimate Engagements’: The Role of Performance and Display within the Dressing Room in Defining Rituals of Sociability and Retirement

Five Hours, and who can do it less in?
 By Haughty *Celia* spent in Dressing;
 The Goddess from her Chamber rises
 Array’d in Lace, Brocade and Tissues...
Strephon, who found the Room was void
 And Betty otherwise employ’d
 Stole in, and took a strict Survey
 of all the Litter, as it lay...

- Jonathan Swift, *The Lady’s Dressing Room*, 1732.

The catalogue of the Duchess of Portland’s collection is come out. The auction begins on the 24 [for] thirty-eight days.

- Horace Walpole, *Horace Walpole’s Guide to The Duchess of Portland’s Museum*, 1786.

As the quotes in the above extracts indicate, the adoption and evolution of a ‘Dressing Room space’ occurred during the course of the eighteenth century. The Dressing Room originated in the closeted devotional spaces used for solitary prayer up until the late seventeenth century. It became a more widespread presence in elite domestic houses built or reconfigured after the Restoration in 1660 of Charles II when the theatrically charged nature of the late seventeenth-century ‘tiring room’ gave the space of the Dressing Room associated values.¹²⁸ This development simultaneously evoked interest and concern amongst social commentators and critics alike. The Dressing Room had an increasing presence in elite houses from the mid eighteenth century. The desire on the behalf of very wealthy English couples to transform semi-private first-floor (and in a few cases ground-floor) rooms into a ‘Dressing Room’ – defined by Samuel Johnson as ‘a room in which clothes are put on’ – instilled a sense of alarm at the potential for personal indulgence that such spaces seemingly afforded women.¹²⁹ In the shifting cultural and social context of eighteenth-century Britain,

128 Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth Century Literature* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), p. 47. The ‘tiring room’ was an enclosed area located behind the main stage of most play houses in seventeenth-century England, one example being the King’s Playhouse in central London. Here both actors and actresses could change costume and invited guests could retire after a performance for a rendezvous.

129 Samuel Johnson, *The Dictionary of the English Language* (London, 1759), p. 412.

what defined domestic privacy for women in their own households was understood as embodying differing concepts of meaning by people of different genders and in different professional roles.

As Tita Chico has highlighted, eighteenth-century debates on the ‘theoretical *connotations* of privacy and its relation to subjectively, issues at the heart of the dressing room’ do not easily illuminate a single definition of privacy.¹³⁰ However, the ‘domestication of secrecy’ and mystery afforded by the architectural shape, and often complicated route from the main entrance of the house to the Dressing Room, coupled with the power of the lady to restrict access at certain times of day, was understood in the eighteenth century as claiming some sense of ‘privacy from the start’, and so shall be used to outline the eighteenth-century definition of privacy in this chapter.¹³¹

The eighteenth-century English Dressing Room may have functioned as a means of separating, both visually and physically, a lady from many of her household and of locking away objects from general view. Hence, a woman’s pursuits in her own Dressing Room and the effective separation of the mind that were resulted were thought by some male cultural commentators and writers to be threateningly imitative of her male counterpart’s ‘paternalistic order’, actions and thinking.¹³² Interestingly, although there were a small number of Dressing Rooms built for wealthy eighteenth-century men (as is made evident by cases such as that of the fourth Earl of Chesterfield’s Dressing Room and Mr. Child’s Dressing Room at Osterley) the manifest difference of both aesthetic nature and performative rituals enacted in the Dressing Room and the Library (or male closet) naturally pitted them against each other as

130 Chico, p. 39. Tita Chico’s book provides a key reference point for any academic study of ladies’ Dressing Rooms in the eighteenth century.

131 Chico, (2005), p. 39.

132 Tita Chico, ‘Privacy and Speculation in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Critical Critique*, 52 (Autumn, 2002), 40-60, (p. 42).

domestic counterparts, functionally and spatially, but ones that also complemented and paralleled each other as spheres of masculine and feminine sociability. The location of a number of Dressing Rooms built in the latter half of the eighteenth century, like the Etruscan Dressing Room of Osterley House, were deliberately designed to counterbalance the study or library normally on the other side of the house, with ‘wings leading from each side of the entrance hall, one ‘masculine,’ the other ‘feminine’’.¹³³ This fact is highlighted when the ground floor plan of Osterley, referred to in chapter one, is analysed again.

By the mid eighteenth century, the ‘Dressing Room’ was interchangeable with the ‘closet’, while the ‘Lady’s Cabinet’ also came to refer to this space, itself becoming interchangeable, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, with the more salaciously named ‘Boudoir’, as a number of ladies’ Dressing Rooms increasingly reflected French material taste.¹³⁴ As Simon Thurley confirms, the practice of appropriating and adapting French customs enacted within the ‘Levée’ – a space wherein a reception was held by the head of household upon rising from bed – onto English Royal traditions, were eagerly adopted and assimilated by English aristocratic ladies.¹³⁵

133 Gervase Jackson-Stops and James Pipkin, *The English Country House: A Grand Tour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 232.

134 Chico, (2005), p. 47.

135 Quoted in Chico, (2005), p. 47.



Fig. 37. William Hogarth, 'The Countess's Morning Levée', plate four in the series *Marriage-a-La-Mode*, Oil on Canvas, 1743, The National Gallery.

The fourth scene, entitled 'The Countess's Levée' (Fig. 37) of William Hogarth's *Marriage a-la-Mode* series (1743) is defined almost entirely by its flirtatious possibilities and as a place of salacious mixed sex interaction and affected furnishings. The inappropriately flirtatious nature of Countess Squanderfield's exotic companions at a Levée taking place in her Dressing Room epitomised the satirical viewpoint of eighteenth-century male critics as to the essentially unfamiliar nature of English ladies' Dressing Rooms.

Indeed, Chico has stated that:

the dressing room captured the collective imagination of eighteenth century England because it represented the idea that women could act independently and selfishly... the disparity between the imagined prevalence of the dressing room and its limited availability to upper-class women indicates the magnitude of this concern about the privileges and independence that women could assert in their dressing-rooms...¹³⁶

The eighteenth-century literary and pictorial engagement with stock tropes and particular activities intrinsically associated with the lady's Dressing Room was, in part, due to the multi-

¹³⁶ Chico, (2005), p. 9.

functional use of this spatial environment that could shift from an area of public procession to semi-privacy or even isolation within the space of a day. Thus, the Dressing Room could simultaneously house all the ‘materials for self-construction, sex, and contemplation’ and gave rise to what Chico calls ‘a triumvirate of connotations potentially at odds with one another... heralding a legacy of doubled, even contradictory significance’.¹³⁷

This is perhaps most brilliantly illustrated within the Dressing Rooms of two of the eighteenth century’s most educated and philanthropic female patrons of the arts, Mary Cavendish Bentinck, second Duchess of Portland (1715-1785), and her close friend, Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu (née Robinson) (1720-1800) (Fig. 38). Both women were members of the ‘Bluestocking Group’, a literary club formed in the 1750s by a group of intellectually minded men and women who aimed to encourage cultural and intellectual discourse on contemporary events and ideologies.¹³⁸ The Bluestocking movement also included aristocratic learned women such as the Duchess of Portland’s close friends, Mrs. Delany (who spent half of the year with the Duchess at Bulstrode Park) and Lady Shelburne, who were intent on gaining a level of intellectual independence by presiding over salons of art and curio collections. The strength of such ties between the Duchess of Portland and the other Bluestocking members (and their high-minded aesthetic aims) is illustrated in a gold and enamel portrait box (Fig. 39) painted in the 1750s by Christian Frederick Zinke. This contains four interlinking miniatures, including that of the second Duchess of Portland in a russet gown and, on the base, a portrait of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu dressed as Anne Boleyn, both women facing three quarter profile to the right.

137 Chico, (2005), p. 26.

138 Michele Cohen, *‘A Circle of Conversation’: Sociability and Intellect in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Richmond American International University London, 2008), p. 1.



Fig. 38. Christian Fredrick Zinke, *Margaret Cavendish Bentinck*, oil on canvas, 1738, The National Portrait Gallery.



Fig. 39. Christian Frederick Zinke, Gold and Enamel Portrait Box-Set, featuring Mrs. Montagu and the Second Duchess of Portland, enamel, gold and oils, 1750s, Private Collection.

These two outstanding examples of the adaptability of performative function of the eighteenth-century English Dressing Room have been chosen as case studies because, unusually for the times, the Duchess of Portland and Mrs. Montagu were able to retain autonomous control of their Dressing Rooms and the rituals enacted within. Moreover, they were credited with overseeing the interior design and decoration, as is well documented in letters, diary extracts and recorded observations by relatives, friends and noted social and cultural figureheads of the day. Furthermore, although Bulstrode Park was located in Gerrard's Cross, while No. 23 Hill Street was built in the centre of London, the comparison of

the Dressing Rooms of these two particular women allows a consideration of the similar uses to which Dressing Rooms were put, as well as the manipulability of space Dressing Rooms provided to facilitate subtly different performative rituals.

Within this final chapter then, the Duchess of Portland's Dressing Room at Bulstrode Park, Bucks., (almost wholly demolished) (Figs 40–41) and the two Dressing Rooms belonging to Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, the first situated in Hill Street and the second in Portman Square (destroyed), will be analysed as flexible domestic spaces that could play host to 'any number of activities, ranging from tea parties and card games to reading and writing in solitude'.¹³⁹ This flexible space operated on sometimes overlapping shades of what was understood to constitute domestic privacy, subject to the needs and desires of its female hostess, that were similar for the most part, but differed in some interesting ways that were reflective of both women's individual characters, interests and ambitions.



Fig. 40. Bulstrode Park, Gerrard's Cross, London. The house was remodelled by Stiff Leadbetter in the 1740s, and again in the nineteenth century by James Wyatt.

The material display of each Dressing Room, used to stage many of these performative rituals will be discussed as facilitating cultivation of novel display, utilisation of space and enactment of behaviour, comparable in some cases to that normally linked to a man's domain

139 Chico, (2005), p. 27.

in the house, as explored in chapter one. Crucially, the link between different types of ritual enacted in this space and the relationship between both women and the various visitors to their Dressing Rooms will be posited as key to the type of shifting functionality of this particular space, which roughly correlated to different times of day. The chapter will be organised with the more formal functions of the Dressing Rooms discussed first and the less structured rituals linked to close associates explored thereafter. Finally, it will also be proposed that the Dressing Room was used by Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu and the Duchess of Portland to cultivate specific rituals associated with the Bluestocking Group, of which Mrs. Montagu was regarded as ‘the Queen’ by her friend, Dr. Samuel Johnson.¹⁴⁰

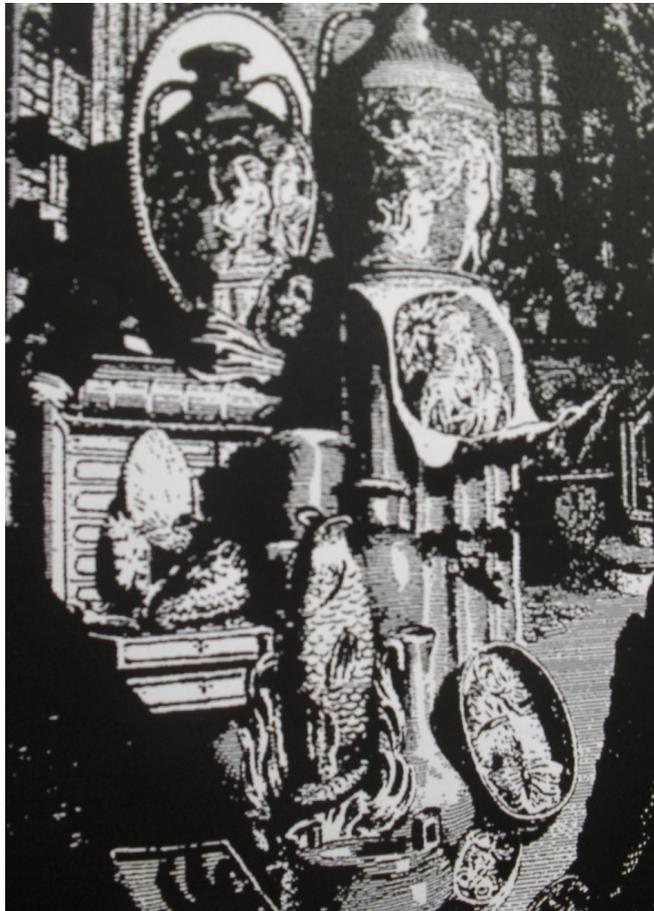


Fig. 41. ‘The Dressing Room at Bulstrode Park’, as depicted in the engraved frontispiece of the sale catalogue of the second Duchess of Portland’s collections in 1786, The British Museum.

140 Emily Climenson, the great-great niece of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, first gave the name ‘Queen of the Bluestockings’ to her relation, in *Elizabeth Montagu: The Queen of the Bluestockings, Her Correspondence from 1720–1761* (London, 1906).

For the Duchess of Portland, in particular, the effective control of Bulstrode Park after her husband's death allowed her to develop rituals of friendship and methodologies of display inside her domestic residence that was much remarked on in her own lifetime. As W. S. Lewis later noted:

few men have equalled Margaret Cavendish Holles Harley, Duchess of Portland, in the mania of collecting, and perhaps no woman. In the age of great collectors she rivalled the greatest. She is best known for having supplanted her own name for the famous Barberini-Hamilton vase.¹⁴¹

Bulstrode Park was top amongst the elite Enlightened seats in England; transformed by the 'scholarly' Margaret Cavendish, with her immense inherited wealth and intelligence shaping Bulstrode Park's Dressing Room and grounds 'into something between a museum and a university on her estate'.¹⁴² While the political motivations for such an unusual development were entirely marginal, the social interaction, influence and communal female friendship among elite educated friends, that such a decision brought within her Dressing Room (and its highly unusual aesthetic display and function), provides an interesting case study of a gendered domestic space of display. In this instance, the Dressing Room was also one that defied and transcended distinctions between the public and private dichotomy of eighteenth-century interiors and traditionally defined male and female educative boundaries.

Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu's Dressing Room at No. 23 Hill Street provides a useful counterpart to the Duchess's own Dressing Room for discussion of materiality and ritual practises. The interior decoration of No. 23 Hill Street is only now partly visible in its original condition through the surviving first-floor ceiling painted in a Zephyr decoration (Fig. 42) by James 'Athenian' Stuart, and described by Mrs. Delany in May 1773 as 'Mrs M's room of Cupidons', after it had recently been opened as 'an assembly for all the foreigners, the literati,

¹⁴¹ W.S. Lewis, ed., *Horace Walpole's Guide to The Duchess of Portland's Museum* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1936), p. 5.

¹⁴² Vickery, p. 152

and the macaronis of the present age’, adding that the ‘ceiling was painted with bowers of roses and jessamines inhabited by little cupids in all their wanton ways’.¹⁴³



Fig. 42. ‘The First-Floor Ceiling at No. 23 Hill Street’, painted by Robert Adam in 1767.

Building work was first started on No. 23 Hill St in 1744, with Mrs. Montagu acting as ‘project manager’ based at her first marital home in nearby Dover Square.¹⁴⁴ She explained that ‘we [Mrs. Montagu and her husband] shall stay in London about a week getting a plan for finishing a house which we are to have in a street near Berkeley Square, in a street not yet built...’, adding tellingly, ‘it will be better to stay for a year for the finishing than to take what one does not like...’¹⁴⁵

As can be ascertained by observing the plan of No. 23 Hill Street (Fig. 43), the resulting building was four bays wide, containing a small entrance hall from which the main staircase led to a suite of rooms including a Great Room (finished with an ornate rococo ceiling overlooking the front of the house), a Bedchamber and Dressing Room, both overlooking the

143 Lady Llanover, ed., *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany (Diaries of Mrs. Delany)* (London, 1861), p. 154.

144 Emily Climenson, *Elizabeth Montagu: The Queen of the Bluestockings, Her Correspondence from 1720 – 1761*, 1 (London, 1906), p. 229.

145 Climenson, p. 229.

garden to the back of the residence.¹⁴⁶ This Dressing Room, completed at the end of the 1740s, illustrated a striking display of Chinoiserie furniture, artefacts, artwork and wallpaper, although, at the request of Mrs. Montagu in 1765, the Scottish architect Robert Adam was commissioned to alter the Dressing Room by reducing the amount of Chinoiserie previously incorporated into the overall decorative scheme. The Dressing Room ceiling was also painted in a classical pattern to Adam's direction, green chairs and a marble chimneypiece ordered and the doors into the room painted by the Italian painter Giovanni Cipriani, so as to display a modish 'sweet attractive grace [and] a winning softness', and harmonisation with 'all the other elements in the room'.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, at No. 22 Portman Square (Fig. 44), comprising seven bays – replete with a 'Feather Room', placed at the front of the house under a square coffered coving on the plan (also used as a Dressing Room) – for which plans were drawn up in 1775, instigated by Elizabeth Montagu's need for space, gave rise for another opportunity to utilise the Dressing Room for a variety of social ends. The Feather Room was hung with hung tapestries on canvas, made at Sandlesford Priory by Betty Tull, to an idea first proposed by Mrs. Montagu, who requested from friends and relatives, 'brown tail feathers of partridges, stubble goose, peacock, pheasants', and even a 'handsome cockerel'.¹⁴⁸ The *St. James Chronicle* commented upon the room's opening that it was 'wholly covered with feathers, artfully sewed together, and forming beautiful festoons of flowers and other fanciful decoration. The most brilliant colours, the product of all climates, have wonderful effects on a feather ground of dazzling whiteness'.¹⁴⁹ The poet William Cowper sang an ode to the room, echoing the opinion of the *St. James Chronicle*, as he describes:

The birds put off their hue
To dress a room for Montagu
The peacock sends his heavenly dyes,
His rainbows and his starry eyes;

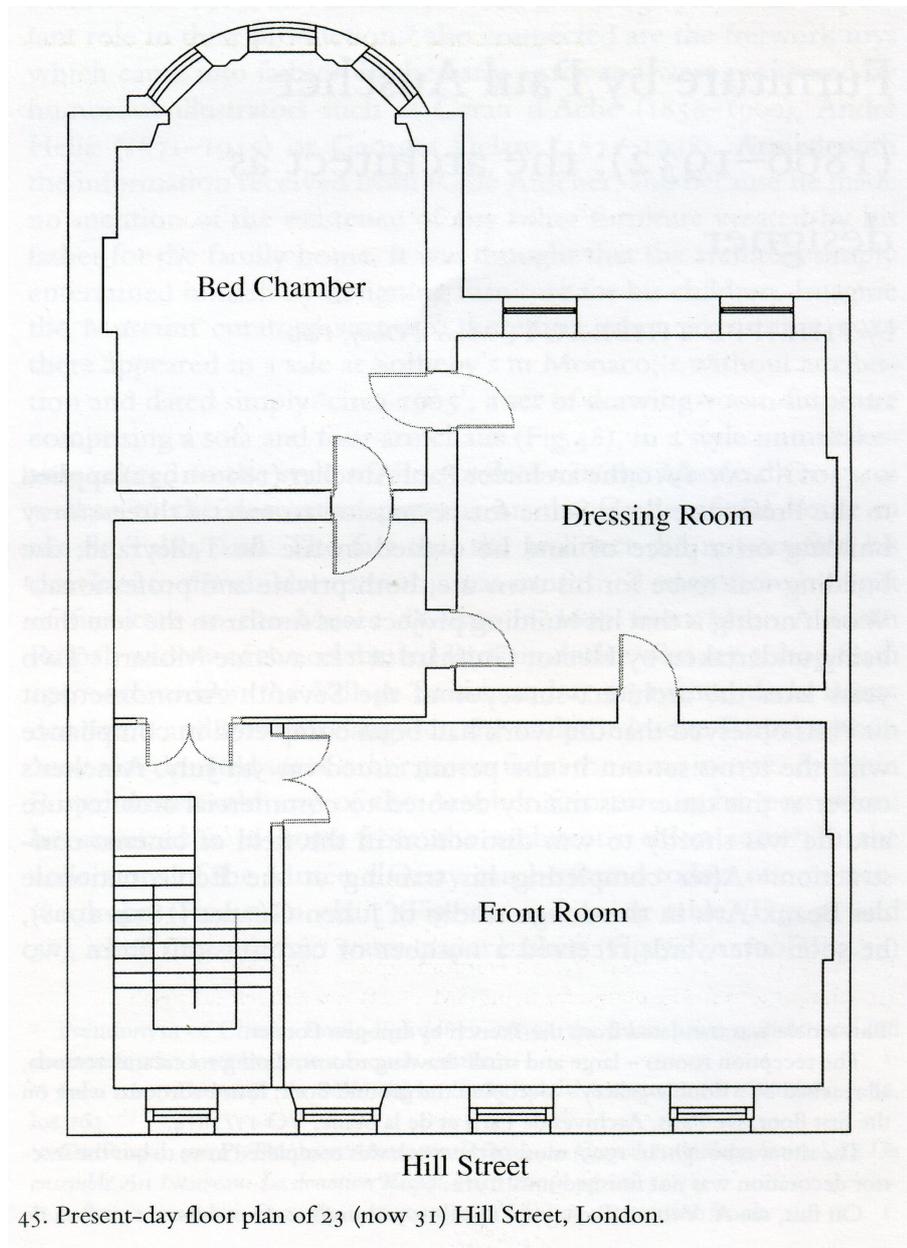
146 Baird, p. 177.

147 Rosemary Baird, 'The Queen of the Bluestockings': Mrs Montagu's house at 23 Hill Street rediscovered', *Apollo* (August, 2003), 15-20, (p. 15).

148 Quoted in Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 189.

149 Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 189.

The pheasant plumes, which round enfold
 The cock his arch'd tail's azure show;...¹⁵⁰



45. Present-day floor plan of 23 (now 31) Hill Street, London.

Fig. 43. Floor Plan of No. 23 Hill St, English Heritage, 2001.

150 William Cowper, *On Mrs. Montagu's Feather-Hangings* (London, 1800), p. 1.

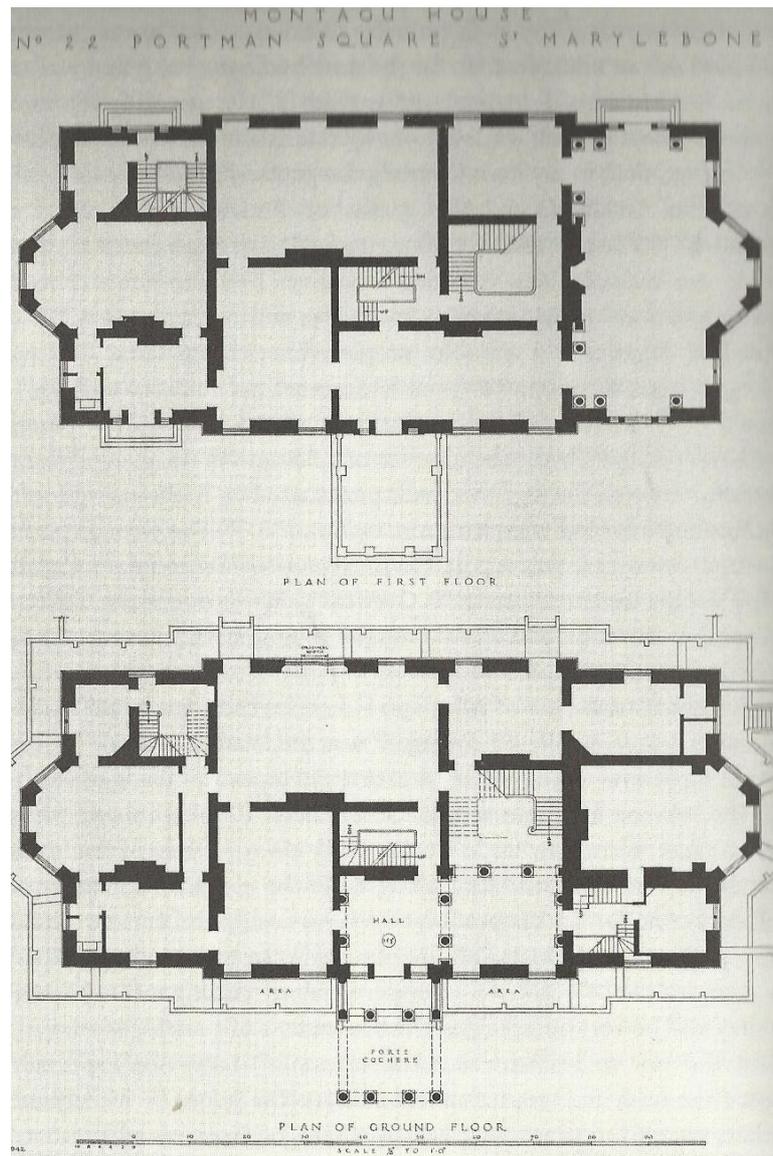


Fig. 44. Plans of No. 22 Portman Square, English Heritage, 1930s.

In contrast, after her marriage at just nineteen years of age to William Bentinck, second Duke of Portland, Margaret Cavendish did not oversee the building of any entirely new houses. However, she was able to transform both the parkland surrounding Bulstrode House and her own large Dressing Room next to the main bedchamber into what Horace Walpole

called a ‘hive’ of a rudimentary museological collection.¹⁵¹ The display included books, pictures, busts, medals, jewels and rare zoological and botanical specimens collected from places as diverse as Lapland and the South Seas (the Duchess was a patron of Captain James Cook). Unlike her friend Mrs. Montagu, Margaret Cavendish was born into an extremely wealthy and educated aristocratic family, the only child of the second Earl of Oxford and Mortimer. Surrounded by enlightened writers such as Jonathan Swift, plus books and natural history specimens, while growing up at Wimpole Hall (Cambridgeshire), Margaret was actively encouraged by her father to collect artefacts and animal specimens. These attributes of wealth and education were graphically reflected when the Duchess began to outfit her own Dressing Room with artefacts and utilise its space for the specific public and more intimate functions that she instigated.

Moreover, the effective utilisation of the Dressing Room for the display and cataloguing of natural artefacts at Bulstrode Park proved one of the most striking and unusual functions of this flexible space, allowing for very particular public performative rituals to be conducted within it. A visit to Bulstrode by King George III and Queen Charlotte on 12 August 1778 was recorded by Mrs. Delany, who remembered the royal couple as parading through the Dressing Room in a ‘train... with wondering and enquiring eyes admir[ing] all her magnificent curiosities’, and viewing her ‘fine old china’.¹⁵² Sally Festing has asserted that ‘a constant stream of cognoscenti visited Bulstrode Park to inspect her art collection and extensive natural history collection’.¹⁵³ The Rev. John Lightfoot, who acted as both chaplain and sometime keeper of Bulstrode Park’s Dressing Room ‘museum’, was also a fixture within the room during certain points of the day, giving guided tours to foreign and local visitors and discussing the various curios on display, normally in the absence of the Duchess herself.

151 ‘Bulstrode Park’, *The Database of Houses* (2010) <<http://www.dicamillocompanion.com>> [accessed 13 December 2010] (p. 1).

152 Charlette Gere and Marina Vaizey, *Great Women Collectors* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1999), p. 2.

153 Sally Festing, ‘The Second Duchess of Portland and Her Rose’, *Garden History*, 14, 2 (1986), 194-200, (p.195).

Mrs. Lybbe Powys, a frequent visitor to Bulstrode in the mid eighteenth century, recorded that, even in the garden surrounding the house itself, ‘the Duchess has every English plant in a separate garden’.¹⁵⁴ Such an observation illuminates the scope of the Duchess’s vision to collect, research, categorise and cultivate botanical specimens on her property. When her collection were put up for auction over thirty-seven consecutive days after her death in 1786, Rev. Lightfoot recorded over 400 lots auctioned, ‘many items were fossils, shells, ores, birds eggs and natural history... many [also given] to ugly snuff boxes that had belonged to her mother’.¹⁵⁵ Indeed Dr. Solander, who provided a preface to the auction catalogue, eulogised:

How diligent have been her Enquiries into Natural Knowledge and the Polite Arts, as well as successful her Endeavours to increase the Stores of them, the following Catalogue will demonstrate... in *Natural History* every Subject... she had so much Pains... to accumulate... all Three Kingdoms [are] Nature, the *Animal, Vegetable, Fossil*, were comprehended in her Researches... No Collection in *Europe* can equal that of her Grace’s in Number and Variety.¹⁵⁶

Even a cursory glance at the objects featured in this catalogue, hints at the extraordinary variety and size of the collection amassed over the Duchess’s lifetime, as well as the detailed system of classification that the Duchess used to catalogue her collection for precise and correct identification purposes. The catalogue lists such matter as:

‘51 A purple Echinus with white spines, from the *Mediterranean*, and Echinus rosaceus, L. or Fleur-de-lis Echinus,
52 The Orange Turbo, *Knorr. Part 1. tab. 3. fig. 1*: and ditto uncoated... [listed under *Shells, Petrifications, Corals, &.*]
65 Rhinoceros

154 Festing, p. 194.

155 ‘Bulstrode Park’, *The Database of Houses* (2010) <<http://www.dicamillocompanion.com>>](p. 1).

156 London, British Museum, Prints and Drawing Department, Sale Catalogue of the 2nd Duchess of Portland’s Dressing Room Collection, Sunday, 5 June 1786, p. 5

- 66 Seven rare Grylli from *Africa and Cayenne*
 67 A pair of Hectors [listed under *Exotic Insects*].¹⁵⁷

The eclectic nature of the collection is also partially revealed if the engraved frontispiece of the auction catalogue of the Duchess of Portland's collection examined. Pictured on top of a dressing table and in front of a mirror that reflects it is one of the jewels of the collection, the Portland Vase. Below it, a large ceramic fish is nestled amongst a selection of vases and works on paper arranged to hang in front of a pedestal.

In this manner, the second Duchess of Portland was similar other such notable eighteenth-century female figures as Lady Exeter and Dorothy Noel, Countess of Gainsborough, who both created cabinets of curiosities, decorative furnishings and works of art within their own Dressing Rooms. Furthermore, these Dressing Rooms could be opened up to a more public scrutiny by way of small tours of visitors received in the rooms, that included a 'wascoate of the best Jappan... fine Glassess and a Glass full of all Sorts of Curiosityes of Amber stone Currall and a world of fine things' in the case of the former, and 'a pheasant and other Birds' in the case of the Countess of Gainsborough.¹⁵⁸

This individual approach to the design and more irregular use of an interior space assimilated the Renaissance concept of 'a cabinet of curiosities' into a genteel, albeit rudimentary, museological display, introducing a curious note of the 'raffish variety of Empire'.¹⁵⁹ Samuel Alberti has confirmed that from the mid-Renaissance onwards, very wealthy Italian individuals collected minerals, artefacts and curios as emblems of their cultural and social status, as well as a rare display of individual interest and symbolism, particularly

¹⁵⁷ Sale Catalogue of the 2nd Duchess of Portland's Dressing Room Collection, Sunday, 5 June 1786, p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ Celia Fiennes, *Through England on a Side Saddle on the time of William and Mary* (London: Field and Turner, 1888), p. 82.

¹⁵⁹ Festing, p. 194.

for women.¹⁶⁰ As the Duchess of Portland herself explained, ‘I am going to make a very comfortable Dressing Room – to have a dresser, and all manner of working tools, to keep all my stores... and my collection of fossils, petrifications, and minerals’.¹⁶¹ Items such as the dresser were specifically commissioned by the Duchess for their own merit as this semi-private display became an area to invest with public meaning. However, the Duchess’s explicit desire for comfort highlights the informal and intimate function of this room compared to the more formal domestic spaces in the house, where issues of comfort were not always of key concern or need.

Similarly, the semi-private nature of the display accounted for the quality of the furniture within the Duchess of Portland’s Dressing Room, namely the dressing-table and sofa-bed. The furniture, including toilet tables, was purposefully and ingeniously elegant so that it could, in the words of the cabinetmaker Thomas Sheraton, ‘stand in genteel style without giving displeasure... in a way elevated above their use so as not to as offend the eye’.¹⁶² After first seeing the Duchess’s Dressing Room, Maria Edgeworth commented in a letter penned in 1731, ‘it is quite an elegant sitting room dressing room with a canopy sofa bed... there was writing desk and table with everything that could be needed for writing too...’.¹⁶³

The use of the Linnaean system of botanical classification, based on the separation of plants by their sexual taxonomy, stands as testament to the knowledge of botanical advancements and the seriousness with which the Duchess took her interest in botany and natural sciences. She used the newly established Linnaean principles to inform her own system of separating artefacts and objects in her Dressing Room, as well as in her garden. The Linnaean system was invented by the Swiss born naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778). Such

160 Samuel Alberti, ‘Placing Nature: Natural History Collections and Their Owners in Nineteenth-Century Provincial England’, *The British Society for the History of Science*, 35: 3 (2002), 291-311, (p. 293).

161 Christopher Christie, *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 258.

162 Quoted in Cornforth and Fowler, p. 79.

163 Quoted in Vickery, p. 152.

was the importance of the Duchess's own botanical collection, that two cultivated botanical specimens from her garden at Bulstrode Park were gifted to the Linnaean Society, one in 1791 and another in 1804.¹⁶⁴

Thus, upon entering Bulstrode Park's Dressing Room, both guided visitors and close acquaintances of the Duchess would have been confronted by the incorporation of a number of novel objects, such as the wonderfully diverse collection of botanical specimens and sea-shells displayed inside the specially made display cabinets. As Mrs. Delany recorded in her diary in the 1740s, 'Surely an application to natural beauties must enlarge the mind? This room [Bulstrode Park Dressing Room] with all belongings to it is a noble school for contemplation'.¹⁶⁵ Kim Sloan has argued that any shell collection semi-publicly displayed by elite women in an eighteenth-century household cast the owner as an intrinsic part of an enlightened, 'distinctive culture' of women who were able to promote the serious pursuit of its study.¹⁶⁶ This display would have at once aligned the Duchess's own Dressing Room with the exclusively 'male privileges associated with the male closet... and the traditional values normally linked to a man's rule over a household', such as those values illustrated by Osterley House's own library.¹⁶⁷

Bulstrode Park's Dressing Room could be identified closely with 'a figure for thinking, writing, and masculinity', intimating the gentleman's closet, already established for three centuries, and creating a social tool of powerful and visible female control.¹⁶⁸ As Susan Pearce has concluded, this kind of personal, 'individual' collecting practice conveys and 'makes manifest a collector's individual personality', while also transcending the boundaries

164 John Edmondson and Claire Smith, 'The Linnaean Society's Smith Herbarium: A Resource for Eighteenth-Century Garden History Research', *Garden History*, 27, 2 (1999), 244-252, (p. 244).

165 Quoted in Vickery, p. 152.

166 Quoted in Gere and Vaizey, p. 77.

167 Chico, (2002), p. 42.

168 Chico, (2002), p. 51.

of gender.¹⁶⁹ The Duchess of Portland's landmark acquisition of the Barberini-Hamilton-Portland Vase further cemented her reputation of a collector and enabled her to achieve an almost immortal stance amongst contemporary, and subsequent, patrons of the arts.

Sir William Hamilton first acquired the Portland Vase, originally named the Barberini Vase, during his tenure as British Ambassador to the two Scillies, along with an enormous collection of Roman antiquities and artwork.¹⁷⁰ Sir William first displayed the Barberini Vase to a select group of eminent friends in London, after which he sold it to the Duchess of Portland in 1784. The Portland Vase was then bought by the Duchess's son, the second Duke of Portland, after it was put up for auction in the 1786 sale, and passed onto successive generations of the family. In 1943, the seventh Duke decided to sell the Vase, by which time it had come to be viewed as a national treasure, so the British Museum managed to purchase it for permanence by the end of the Second World War.¹⁷¹

Not only did the collection reflect the Duchess of Portland's unique personality, but the large amounts of porcelain and thousands of natural history specimens that comprised its material and geographic plurality, mirrored its claims to be a comprehensive display of the most aesthetically beautiful and rare collection of natural and artificial materials. Through even a casual observation of this collection of curios, any visitor would have gleaned an impression of the Duchess as an unusually intelligent woman, embodying cultural ideals, equipped with a forward thinking mentality and cultural understanding of Britain's expanding overseas explorations and colonial possessions.

In this way the Bulstrode Park Dressing Room could be seen by visitors as a site reflective of global trade and a repository of exotic 'loot', as well as intrinsically linking the Englishwoman's body with material consumerism in an activity still considered a man's pleasurable preserve. Dana Arnold has pointed up the establishment, from 1700, in villa and

169 Susan Pearce, *Systems of Collecting Practises* (Leicester: University of Leicester Press, 1992), p. 81.

170 Marie-Lan Nguyen, 'History of the Barberini Vase, or Portland Vase, in England', *Suite101.com* (2010) <suite101.com/article/history-of-the-barerini-vase-in-england> (p.1).>[Accessed 09 April 2012].

171 Nguyen, (p.1).

country house visiting, from the occasional ‘antiquarian or virtuosi travellers being admitted as unexpected guests [to] routine opening times and income-earning guided tours by housekeepers and butlers’ around areas of the domestic residence, developed in response to a growing desire to view grand eighteenth-century houses.¹⁷² Hence, the formalised type of guided tour organised for Bulstrode Park’s Dressing Room can be seen as representative of the late eighteenth-century growth in tourism associated with stately houses and villas around England. As Katherine Sharpe has argued recently:

Enlightenment ideals and the fashionable spread of polite science added another layer of meaning to the ornamental arts... expressing three crucial Georgian ideals: a lightly borne but pervasive... appreciation of classical myth and symbol; the Georgian mid-century vogue for Rococo; and the enthusiasm for a polite natural science.¹⁷³

Collecting shells fascinated viewers in the eighteenth century, simultaneously displaying the ingenious symmetry inside each structure, and the irregular, often beautiful, character of the exterior. This ‘philosophical cabinet’, displayed in the Duchess’s Dressing Room, additionally mirrored those displayed in some of the Italian Royal courts, in contrast to Mrs. Montagu who was ‘a creator of settings rather than a collector *per se*’.¹⁷⁴

Moreover, such a combination of aesthetic and scientific objects displayed in a domestic setting could help signify the individual character of an educated woman and the well-informed botanical and zoological patronage that was normally made manifest in a small menagerie or aviary in the gardens of great houses. Importantly, the Royal commitment to the development of botanical collections at the newly established Kew Gardens in Surrey in 1761, founded by Queen Charlotte, brought a certain credibility and modish fashionably to the practice of collecting botanical specimens.¹⁷⁵ In the 1730s, the Queen spent a large amount of money on landscaping the gardens around Richmond Lodge, while Princess Augusta, wife of Frederick, the Prince of Wales, had the gardens at William Kent’s White House, expanded and improved, with exotic plants and buildings added.¹⁷⁶ For elite English women, the amateur practise of botany, as an extension of interest in the sciences, was an important outlet of

172 Arnold, ed., p.12.

173 Quoted in Vickery, p. 241.

174 Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 60.

175 Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 48.

176 Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 48.

education, interest and imagination, developed, in the hands of the Duchess of Portland, into a serious and ambitious study.

Thus, the Dressing Room at Bulstrode bestowed benefits upon the Duchess and her aristocratic female friends that were traditionally associated with those of the gentleman's closet and study, assimilating the customs of the French *Levée* and to incorporate learned discussion of the Duchess's wide-ranging collection.¹⁷⁷ This forceful and intelligent nature shaped the Dressing Room space and organisation, developing it into a highly specialised and evolving arena.

Importantly, the novel and fashionable practise of shell collecting, which the Duchess engaged in, visually associated her with other such forward-thinking woman as Lady Fane, who decorated the entirety of the inside of her house almost entirely out of shell work at Basildon Park, Berkshire. Henrietta Howard, writing to Lord Herbert in 1763, even exclaimed that she was 'head over heels in shell work' at her grotto at Marble Hill House.¹⁷⁸ The acquisition of a shell collection could 'sit easily with scientific classification and cabinets of curiosity, a domestic performance that signalled modern intellectual horizons, an expression of natural polite science'.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, collecting such an organic object symbolised an engagement on the part of the Duchess with comprised industrious, virtuous pastimes and thus offered an alternative version of gentlemanly, or virtuoso, worthiness.¹⁸⁰

177 Chico, (2002), p. 42.

178 Quoted in Vickery, p. 242.

179 Vickery, p. 243.

180 Vickery, p. 243.

The eighteenth-century concept of exotic ‘novelty’, defined by Joseph Addison as that intrinsically linked to ‘uncommonness, an object possessing a flexibility that is constantly changing and unfamiliar to the eye’, played an important part in defining the ambience of the Duchess of Portland’s Dressing Room for her guests.¹⁸¹ As Amanda Vickery states, ‘versatile ingenuity was an ornament of gentility’, and the concept of curiosity constituted a keystone of Georgian ‘good taste’.¹⁸² Consequently, any visitors’ puzzlement at the Bulstrode Dressing Room collection could be seen as ‘a conversation piece in itself designed to raise the wonder, admiration and comment of visitors’.¹⁸³ The overt novelty and strangeness afforded by the display would also have introduced a note of alien strangeness that *The Spectator Magazine* of 1759 disparagingly aligned with:

an *Original*; that is a perfect stranger, and all who throng to learn what news from a foreign land; And tho’ it comes, like an *Indian* prince, adorned with feathers only, having little of weight, yet of our attention it will rob the more solid, if not equally new.¹⁸⁴

The concept of displaying a collection of unusual and eclectic objects, incorporating often bizarre curios, in a Dressing Room, was imitative in conception of the ‘Cabinet of Curiosity’ developed from the turn of the seventeenth century in Britain. The Duchess of Portland’s own notion of scientific display and knowledge of what her culture most valued in its *own* history, rather than the often obscure, idiosyncratic taste of sixteenth and seventeenth-century owners of cabinets, would have enabled a more enlightening visit to her Dressing Room by both close companions and guests accompanied by the Rev. Lightfoot. Comments made by women such as the Duchess of Northumberland, who visited on 29 May 1760 and was intrigued by the ‘thousand curiosities’ of the Dressing Room – accessed through ‘another Bedchamber’ and leading into a separate Toilet and then small Closet ‘containing a number of pretty things’ –

181 Robin Dix, ‘Addison and the Concept of ‘Novelty’ as a Basic Aesthetic Category’, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 26, 4 (1986), 383-390, (p. 385).

182 Vickery, p. 243.

183 Vickery, p. 243.

184 Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition* (London: R. Dodsley, 1759), p. 13.

seem to confirm the translation of this tradition of display into an elegant, sociable eighteenth-century interior.¹⁸⁵ Walpole himself described the Duchess's taste first 'chiefly confined to Shells, Japan & Old China, particularly of the blue & white with a brown Edge, contenting herself with one specimen of each pattern she could get, it was a collection of odd pieces', illustrating an eclectic but systematic style of collecting.¹⁸⁶

If Mrs. Montagu's own furnishing and decoration of her Dressing Room at Hill Street are analysed, they reflect something of the exotic nature exhibited by objects, such 'a curious species of Mantis from *Africa*' displayed in the Duchess's Dressing Room. Although Mrs. Montagu's Dressing Room had no organised public guided tours, its unusual decoration attracted attraction and comment from guests invited for its most public functions, when opened out to become part of a larger suite of the three principal first-floor rooms for entertaining. Mrs. Montagu herself commented upon the Dressing Room's completion in 1767, that:

My Dressing Room is really wonderfully pretty. Mr Adam has done his best, he has exerted much genius on the doors in emulation of his rival Steward. I assure you the dressing room is now just the female of the great room, for sweet attractive grace, for winning softness, for le je ne sais quoi it is quite incomparable.¹⁸⁷

Upon visiting Elizabeth Montagu in 1778, the young Bluestocking Hannah More commented to one of her sisters that 'she lives in the highest style of magnificence; her apartments and table are in the most splendid taste'.¹⁸⁸ The Dressing Room ceiling decoration incorporates an interesting painting of the Signs of the Zodiac, designed in eight sets of roundels with two

185 Madame du Bocage, *Letters by Madame du Bocage* (London, 1770), p. 7.

186 Quoted in Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 177.

187 Quoted in Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 177.

188 Mrs. Montagu, *Letter to Sarah Scott dated 8 January 1767* (London, 1767), p. 1.

figures represented in eight sets of the composition, resulting in a clear iconographic programme.¹⁸⁹ Mrs. Montagu was also one of the first notable English hostesses to incorporate a full Chinese scheme, alongside the ceiling ornamentation, for her Hill Street Dressing Room, a very rare exercise by Adam in ‘the Chinese Manner’.¹⁹⁰ The room not only incorporated walls hung with Oriental wallpaper also included a number of Chinese porcelain, as Mrs. Montagu remarked, ‘furnished with the choicest movables of China’.¹⁹¹

In an undated letter to one of her more retiring Bluestocking friends, Elizabeth Carter, Elizabeth Montagu self-deprecatingly remarked that she was ‘sick of Grecian elegance and symmetry, or Gothick grandeur and magnificence, we must all seek the barbarious gaudy gout of the Chinese; and fat-head pagodas and shaking mandarins bear the prize from the finest works of antiquity’.¹⁹² Novel interest could be found in this, in Mrs. Montagu’s words, ‘Temple of some India God [with] Chinese pictures on gauze... and the chairs Indian fan-sticks with cushions of Japan satin painted: as to the beauty of colouring, it is carried as high as possible’.¹⁹³

Moreover, the door panels of the Dressing Room could be viewed by visitors before passing through into the room of *Cupidons*, on occasion of a public gathering, such as when a large assembly was arranged to celebrate the official opening of the house.¹⁹⁴ Crucially, as Gervase Jackson-Stops argues, the cultivation of ‘novelty was the key to the decoration in these Dressing Room interiors and – if chinoiserie had become somewhat hackneyed as a style

189 William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Hannah More*, 1 (London, 1767), p. 53.

190 David Pullen, ‘Elizabeth Montagu’s Architectural Patronage at 23 Hill Street, London’, *The Burlington Magazine* (June, 2008), 400-402, (p. 401).

191 Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 177.

192 Quoted in Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 177.

193 Mrs. Montagu, *Mrs. Montagu, 1720-1800*; an essay proposed as a thesis to the Faculty of Letters (London, 1800), p. 263.

194 Richard Bentley, *A Lady of the Last Century* (London, 1863), p. 273.

– there were other equally exotic paths to tread'.¹⁹⁵ Mrs. Montagu's Feather Room served a similar function, drawing the curious attention of invited guests when attending semi-public and more private engagements.

As Elizabeth Montagu recorded on Christmas Eve 1752, 'the Chinese-Room was filled with a succession of people from eleven in the morning till eleven at night'.¹⁹⁶ A more detailed account emerges of one of Mrs. Montagu's assemblies located in her Dressing Room in 1777 as recorded by Mme d'Arblay, who describes the 'Bas-Blue Societies' and the 'semi-circle that faced the fire retained during the whole evening its unbroken form', sarcastically adding that this formation 'made it seem described by a Brobdignagian compass'.¹⁹⁷ 'The lady of the castle [could] then', as Mme d'Arblay confirms:

commonly place[d] herself at the upper end of the room, near the commencement of the cure, so as to be courteously visible to all her guests; having the person of the highest rank, or consequence, properly on one side, and the person most eminent for talent sanginously on the other... her conversational powers were of a truly superior order: strong, just, clear, and often eloquent.¹⁹⁸

Likewise, as Sir Nathaniel Wraxall commented in December 1776, 'Mrs. Montagu was accustomed to open her house to a large company of both sexes'.¹⁹⁹ Such public rituals, played out in her Hill Street Dressing Room, also helped establish the reputation of Elizabeth Montagu as an intellectual and entertaining woman who, in the words of Dr. Johnson, 'exacts more mind in conversation than any person I ever met with'.²⁰⁰ Dr. Johnson considered Mrs.

195 Jackson-Stops and Pipkin, p. 77.

196 Quoted in Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 178.

197 Madame d'Arblay, *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay* (Paris, 1780), vol 2, p. 307.

198 Mme d'Arblay, p. 307.

199 Norma Clarke, *Dr Johnson's Women* (Hamledon and London, 2001), p. 64, quoting *Letters from Mrs. Montagu between the Years 1755 and 1800* (London, 1817), vol 1, p. 257.

Montagu to be ‘the first woman for literary knowledge in England, and, if in England, in the world, leading the conversation and ‘claiming leadership in the semi-circle of her guests’.²⁰¹ Consequently, Mrs. Montagu cultivated a reputation for conducting sophisticated discussion in her Hill Street Dressing Room, which involved intellectual discourse and cultural debate, recorded by Miss More in 1775 as including such intellectual and literary figures as ‘Mrs Carter, Dr Johnson, Mrs Boescawen [sic], Miss Reynolds and Sir Joshua [Reynolds], the idol of every company’.²⁰² Such hosting of regular sociable assembles in the confines of the relatively small space of No. 23 Hill Street also helped to prompt Mrs. Montagu to seek a new house with more domestic space in which to conduct such rituals, found in the eventual building of Montagu House in Portman Square.

Elizabeth Montagu presided over regular mixed-sex soirées of close friends and colleagues in her Chinese Dressing Room in an environment of seclusion, and, due to the confines of space, numbers were necessarily limited to those guests she found most entertaining and interesting. As Hannah More testifies too, Mrs. Montagu’s Room of Cupidons, situated next to the Chinese Room, also played host to a number of staged intellectual and literary discussions, involving guests such as ‘Miss Burney, Richard Owen Cambridge, Mrs Carter’, partly for the instruction and education of the sexes to improve their minds and refine manners.²⁰³ Individuals engaged in the discussion could perform as ‘orators’ of a sort for an engaged audience, serving a social need for ‘giving the best of... time to the enjoyment of conversation on their favourite subjects: criticism and poetry’, that may well filtered into the Chinese Room and into the Room of Cupidons next door.²⁰⁴ A year later, in

200 Clarke, p. 257.

201 Clarke, p. 257.

202 William Roberts, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Hannah More* (London, 1775), 1, p. 53.

203 Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 180.

204 Roberts, p. 52.

1776, Hannah More would describe how she had enjoyed a day of female Bluestocking company in the Chinese Room, regarding it as ‘one of the most agreeable days of my life, with the female Maecenas of Hill Street’, highlighting Elizabeth Montagu’s incorporation of exclusively female company in the ritual of cultural conversation within her own Dressing Room.²⁰⁵

Mrs. Montagu was also able to use her Dressing Room for more intimate meetings, receiving the more retiring members of the Bluestocking group, including the reclusive Elizabeth Carter, in privacy if so chosen. She commented in a letter addressed to her friend on 31 December 1765, that, ‘I rejoice that we may so soon meet in the Chinese Room when the elements are much mitigated, as befits the winter season’.²⁰⁶ This illustrates the continued use of the Chinese Room throughout the different seasons of the year and of the various ‘seasons’ of London events. Mrs. Carter was also directed, as she herself describes in a letter dated 4 October 1768, to wait in, or at least be free to explore, her Dressing Room when she called upon unannounced, explaining that she had taken:

the liberty of calling at your house, one day last week, for about five minutes, to wait for an answer to a note. I was in your dressing-room, which I hope, will soon animate, and recover from its present unnatural state of solitude and silence. Indeed, I shall be heartily glad to hear you fixed there.²⁰⁷

In another letter, Mrs. Montagu records that within her own Chinese Dressing Room that ‘after myrars, I drink tea, then make to my dressing room for two or three hours with companions’.²⁰⁸

Likewise, the Duchess of Portland’s notably progressive principles of re-organisation that naturalised all eclectic elements of her collection into the ‘landscape of the collection itself’,

205 Roberts, p. 52.

206 Roberts, p. 52.

207 Mrs. Carter, *Letters from Mrs. Elizabeth Carter to Mrs. Montagu, Volume 11* (London: R. Gilbert, 1817), p. 9.

208 Quoted in Festing, p. 194.

as Stewart terms it, could also aesthetically connect her with high-minded social and cultural ideas that may encourage polite sociability within the public context of an assembly ritual.²⁰⁹

The inclusion of a large fireplace in the Dressing Room of the Duchess of Portland added a sense of warmth and relaxation to the domestic atmosphere in the room. This is reflected in Mrs. Delany's diary entries written when at Bulstrode Park detailing days spent in the Dressing Room reading the newspapers in a very relaxed atmosphere.²¹⁰ Artistic friends like Mrs. Delany and Mrs. Montagu also joined in much of the Duchess's enthusiasms in her Dressing Room, Mrs. Montagu describing how 'Mrs Delany made cut-out flowers and shell decorations, while the Duchess arranged and classified her collection'.²¹¹

A name for this much vaunted sense of partially-secluded space was coined by Hester Hoare, the wife of Richard Hoare of Stourhead (who himself created a small but exquisite Cabinet Room of artwork and 'The Pope's Cabinet of Curiosities inherited from his grandfather), as 'snugitude', defined as creating a happy state of living in a comfortable home with close family.²¹² It is important to note that parallel to this specific concept was the association between the 'rise' of the Dressing Room and an increasing desire on the part of elite families to create a comfortable environment for their closest associates within a large house.²¹³ The closet or dressing area could offer an alternative 'elegant relaxation' to the uncomfortable 'stiff-backed awfulness of staterooms... overcharged with ceremony'.²¹⁴

One example of the desire on the part of the Duchess of Portland to create an enjoyable and restful domestic ritual for the benefit of a few close female companions in a more private context is pointed up in Mrs. Delany's correspondence. When visiting the Duchess at

209 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University, 1984), p. 156.

210 Vickery, p. 150.

211 Quoted in Cornforth and Fowler, p. 79.

212 Chico, (2005), p. 9.

213 Cornforth and Fowler, p. 79.

214 Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 177.

Bulstrode in 1751, she describes how, ‘after dinner our Duchess and I hold a *tete-a-tete* in the dear dressing room till five; then all hands to work till between six and seven, then tea, and we return to the dressing room, and I read while the rest work on’.²¹⁵ Thus, the concourse of visitors that passed through the ground-floor level of the house could be selectively filtered through to this room by virtue of the strength of friendship for a more intimate *tête-a-tête*.

The ritual of tea drinking taken within the Duchess of Portland or Mrs. Montagu’s Dressing Room often provided during an intimate *tête-a-tête*, would also have provided a domestic ritual that could have been enacted within, or as part of, another such aforementioned ceremony. Such an event is well illustrated by Gawen Hamilton’s *Tea Party at Lord Harrington’s House* (Fig. 45), painted in the 1730s, the polite ritual of tea drinking depicted centring on sociability. A similar, sometime semi-private and sometime public ritual, involving social ‘breakfasting’, is confirmed if letters of a Madame du Bocage, collectively entitled *Sur L’Angleterre* and published in 1750, are analysed. She details one such breakfast as part of an intricate visiting ritual conducted in semi-privacy within Mrs. Montagu’s snug Chinese Dressing Room as follows:

We thus breakfasted today at Mrs Montagu’s in a closet decorated with painted paper... and adorned with the prettiest Chinese furniture: a long table; covered with patterned leaves, and a thousand glittering vases presented to view coffee, chocolate, biscuits, cream, butter, buttered toast in many ways, and exquisite tea... The mistress of the house, though waiting to be served at the table of the goods, poured it out herself.²¹⁶

Thus Mrs. Montagu could preside over a sociable, semi-intimate ritual that gave her opportune moments to present herself as a perfect hostess in close view of all her guests, as well as allowing her to display her best tea ware, highest quality and most fashionable hot drinks and food. Similarly, the official opening of the Feather Room at Portman Square in 1791 was inaugurated by Mrs. Montagu’s hosting a breakfast, though, this time, for 700 people on a

²¹⁵ Chico, (2005), p. 9.

²¹⁶ Quoted in Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 177.

much greater public degree as the scale of many of the rooms at Montagu House allowed for.²¹⁷



Fig. 45. Gawen Hamilton, *Tea Party at Lord Harrington's House*, oil on canvas, 1730s, Yale Center for British Art.

The inclusion of the Duchess of Portland's children (and heir, the future second Duke of Portland) within such an environment, chosen at times when the head of the household was away, leaving only the Duchess, her children and close female companions at home, could give rise for the pleasing display of childish youth and playfulness in the Dressing Room. Additionally, such childish activity could also highlight the dynastic good fortune and fertility of the Duchess in a secluded domestic environment. As Mrs. Delany explained in 1764, when the Duchess was at home without her husband, her children were allowed 'to play and romp in the dressing room, as I sit in the drawing room so I have them or not just as I like', again

217 Baird, *Mistress of the House*, p. 179.

illustrating this flexible functional use of space.²¹⁸ A small silhouette cut-out of the Countess of Ashburnham's Dressing Room in Kent (Fig. 46), executed in 1799, is illustrative of the variety of entertainment and leisurely study in the Dressing Rooms of the elite class by all ages. The family is depicted here bound by familial affection, as one small girl plays with her doll, one of her brothers fusses over a little dog, and another sits at her mother's writing desk.



Fig. 46. Countess of Ashburnham, Countess of Ashburnham's Dressing Room, ink and paper-cut out, 1799, Ashburnham House.

This industrious and novel use of space is the subject of many eighteenth-century images. For example, Johann Zoffany's idealised depiction of *Queen Charlotte with her two Eldest Sons* (Fig. 47), depicts, not only the functional use of the Dressing Room, emphasising the Queen's heir and future successor to the throne, but also, in an exaggerated manner, the

218 Mrs. Delany, *The Diaries of Mrs Delany's* (London, 1792), p. 5.

intrinsic aesthetic ‘prettiness’ demonstrated within the grandest English eighteenth-century dressing rooms by virtue of the large ornate dresser adorned with lace and ribbons.



Fig. 47. Johann Zoffany, *Queen Charlotte with her Two Eldest Sons*, oil on canvas, 1765, The Royal Collection.

Perhaps one of most radical and private functions of both the Duchess of Portland and Mrs. Montagu’s Dressing Rooms was their use as a private study, linked to the more solitary activities of a woman’s production of knowledge, like the educational activity of academic reading. The practise of letter writing, normally conducted at the dresser, in which Mrs. Montagu indulged as part of her effort to maintain her many social relationships and record entertaining events, could aid self-reflection.

Both the Duchess of Portland and Mrs. Montagu would have sought the relative novelty of comfort alone in their Dressing Rooms, transforming them into places of solitary reflection. The female right to privacy was itself aligned to fashionable female modernity and, as Samuel Richardson’s eighteenth-century fictional heroine Clarissa Harlowe exclaimed, ‘the defence of

the boundaries of the self... a workshop of the mind, a laboratory of the soul'.²¹⁹ Henry Meister, a Swiss traveller, writer and commentator, recorded in his 1799 *Letters During Residence in England*, that 'The lady's dressing-room chamber... can be an interesting sanctuary which no unknown stranger is permitted to enter. It would be an act of the greatest possible indecorum to go into it, unless the visitor was upon a familiar footing'.²²⁰ Meister's comment also highlights the sociable, and unusual, ends to which Mrs. Montagu and the Duchess of Portland utilised their Dressing Rooms for some functions.

After an examination of the unusual, remarkable decorative schemes and ritualistic entertainments incorporated into the Dressing Rooms of both the Duchess of Portland and Mrs. Montagu, it becomes apparent that both women utilised the space in their Dressing Rooms to take full advantage of its novel, flexible functionality of space and adaptability of access. Under these two women's direction, traditional boundaries between publicly and privately demarcated domestic interiors were effectively blurred, often by way of sociable rituals that could shift from semi-private to almost complete private engagements in intriguing ways, albeit ones that also reflected differing personalities.

Moreover, it appears that shared friends and interests of these two women cultivated specific sociable rituals in their Dressing Rooms suitable to facilitate conversation, such as the elaborate breakfast setting Mrs. Montagu displayed, and over which she presided, when guests visited during the early to midday hours. The incidence of an extremely wealthy, strong and well-educated female agency at Bulstrode Park proved crucial in shaping such a unique Dressing Room, reflective as much of the Duchess's personality and enlightened upbringing as the sociabilities enacted within it. Mrs. Montagu, too, it appears, was able to use the flexible nature of both her Dressing Rooms to fulfil a twofold social and display function that she tightly controlled, centred on the performance of sociable interactions, directed by herself.

²¹⁹ Quoted in Vickery, p. 233.

²²⁰ Henry Meister, *Letters Written During a Residence in England* (London: T. Longman and O. Rees, 1799), p. 283.

Conclusion

As examined in the preceding chapters, it has become apparent that the rituals and social entertainments enacted in certain private residences in eighteenth-century England conveyed a multitude of highly contrived messages to visitors and family members alike, in addition to defining the head of house and their family members' own roles and lives. These ritual practises carried intentional and unintentional signifiers. A number of eighteenth-century English politicians, aristocrats and City merchants effectively reinvented and modernised the internal space of their ancestral, newly acquired or recently built homes to enable an emerging variety of sociable functions, each intrinsically linked to the individual or dual heads of house.

The types of sociability enacted inside areas of the house were dependant upon the relationship between the head of house and visitor, incorporating factors such as gender, cultural interests and personal aims and ambitions. The home became one of the most important stages on which to perform ritualistic acts of sociability, educative pursuits, meditation and scientific collection for the most part for the benefit of the householder themselves, and their guests, in order to highlight newly fashionable and valued qualities of character and mannerism. As new centres of sociability, the decoration, lay-out and function of each room came the focus as never before. The focus upon manners and decorous sociability of aristocratic and newly-moneyed hosts, specifically within their own sphere of daily ritual, made heads of households and their spouses think carefully as never before about their choice of furniture and artwork and which activities would reflect most favourably upon them inside such spaces.²²¹

Moreover, the modes of polite sociability and entertainments enacted within, and reflective of, settings played a crucial role in shaping the public and private persona of a householder and close familial connections. Indeed, due to the novel functional use of constructed rooms in upper-class eighteenth-century English houses, like the Dressing Room, boundaries of public and private were either dissolved or blurred within the context of the elite eighteenth-century home. Consequently, new graduations of privacy were added to certain

221 Vickery, p. 291.

areas of the house, dependant on subtle differences in relationship between the family unit living in the house and their own guests and, occasionally, the strength of character and vision of the owner of the house themselves.

Furthermore, the internal rituals conducted inside an elite household could often give subtle clues as to the nature of the relationship between a homeowner and his family. It becomes apparent, too, that the absence or presence of female agency proved fundamental in determining the overall environment of an eighteenth-century residence. The role of gender, particularly in the case of women widowed at a young age or passionate about pursuing a particular pastime, is revealed as crucial to retaining some sense of autonomy, expression of the self and individual interest, perhaps most notable in the cases of the second Duchess of Portland and Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu.

The presence of a female agency in determining the overall schema of a house could, far from being inert in the organisation of entertainment and ritual within the household, itself introduce a level of informality and comfort. The expression of female character, dominance and taste is conveyed most clearly and powerfully through the more novel and elaborate forms of entertainments and rituals orchestrated in these houses, as the aims and ambitions of the owner are made manifest. Hence, the inclusion of a multitude of differing rituals conducted in both semi-privacy and public in a single domestic residence conveyed complicated messages of communal enjoyments and individual interest, interwoven throughout the entirety of a house.

To conclude, the ritualistic entertainments enacted within English elite and upper middle-class eighteenth-century interiors often played very differing roles in shaping and defining the lives, activities and visual legacy of the characters who owned them. Equally so, it has become clear that the eighteenth-century house was central to daily life and provides a window on to the cultural values (both established and alien) and sociable rituals that the eighteenth-century elite held dear, and how these were used to create separate identities and reputations.

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List of Abbreviations

All dates are New Style, with the year beginning 1 January.

All names are in original form and all spellings in quotations are in original capitalisation and spelling.

Ed.	Editor
ff.	Footnote
Fig.	Figure
Figs.	Figures
Eds	Editors
No.	Number
Vol.	Volume

Appendix 1

Appendix A.1. Extract of William Farington's letter, reproduced here with its Original Spelling and Capitalisation (1757).

Surrey Street Strand, Feb ye 18 1757

Dr Isabella & Mary

...Open, three below, the rest above, every room was furnished with a different colour which used to be reckon'd absurd, but this I Suppose is to be the Standard, as the immense Grandeur of the Furniture is scarce to be concei'd. Every one allow'd it infinitely superior to any think in this Kingdom, & many to most things they had seen in Europe,-but you shall have them as we went along-the Hall is very Plain, on the left hand, you enter a large Room Hung & Furnish'd with a Green Damask, let in with a Handsome Gilt moulding, & several very Fine Painting on the Hangings, through this into a Wainscoted Room with Pictures but not very Elegant-then to the Stairs, wch are very large, & the Lights Beautifully Plac'd , 'Twas entirely coer'd with a French Carpet, & in the Angles stood Large China Jarrs with perfumes-the Anti-Chamber was much like the last mention'd Room, tho something Superior, the next Room is large, Wainscoted in a whimsical Taste, the Pannels fill'd with extreme fine Carvings, the Arts & Sciences all Gilt, as well the Ceiling, which was the same design, here the Duchess sat, the whole night that she might speak to every one as they came in; having paid yr regards, you then walk forwards; the next Room was Hung & Furnished with Blew-Damask, coer'd with very Fine Paintings, the Girandoles, fix'd in the Frames of the Pictures, wch had an odd effect...

Appendix 2

Appendix B.1. A List of the Contents of the Music Room are Extracted from Two Complete Inventories of Norfolk House. The Cover of the Earlier One is labelled: 'Inventory of Furniture in St. James Square when Rebuilt and Refurnished' (1753).

No 21 Musick Room.

3 Green and Silk Damask W d Curtains Carved & Gilt Cornices

2 Large pier Glasses

A Large Glass over Chymney

A Card Table covered with Velvett the frame Gilt

2 Mahogany Carved Compass from Card tables

14 Stools Different Sizes, Green & Gold frames covered with damask & Checque cases

A 2 leaved Canvas Sliding screen

A Steel stove, Shovell, tongs, poker, fender & brush, Steel

Coving & Chimney boards

4 Bronze Busts

A Mahog Dining table

Elizabeth Noel wrote to her aunt in 1778 describing another ball at Norfolk House: '... The house is superb, consisting or 8 or 9 Rooms en Enfilade; 6 of them are *immensely* large, there are some *very fine* Pictures, amazing large Glasses and one room is hung with white Sattin, & velvet flowers upon it. There is a State Bedchamber & a very large Crucifix. They danced, tho' none but vulgars, & in another room there were *Refreshments*. *Every* person of Quality, Fashion & the Ton were there (excepting the House of Commons members) besides a great many *Giggs*, in all about 7 or 800...It was very hot & very crowded; besides Roman Catholics in abundance, there were the Blood of all the Howards ...It was dreadful getting away, I scream'd finely, several chairs were broken to pieces'.

Appendix 3

Appendix C.1. Extract from Mr. Cuenot's Bill for 'Sundry Articles of Work Done and Goods Delivered, from March 5 1753 to Feb 24 1756', relating to the Music Room.

<i>Musick Room</i>	£	s	d
To carving 9 heads with various Ornaments to fold over mouldings with Flowers & 4 modillions	21	3	0
To carving the Ornaments over 3 Doors	30	10	0
To carving 6 Trophies to go in the panels with laurels & oak branches	60	5	0
To carving 8 Ears for D	8	18	0
To 8 Branches of flowers for D not design'd in the Drawing	4	2	0
To carving the Ornaments of 6 less panels with foldridge & flowers	39	12	0

