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**Title:** Men, women and the supply of luxury goods in eighteenth-century England: the purchasing patterns of Edward and Mary Leigh

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**Example citation:** Stobart, J. and Rothery, M. (2012) Men, women and the supply of luxury goods in eighteenth-century England: the purchasing patterns of Edward and Mary Leigh. Paper presented to: *European Association for Urban History (EAUH) 11th International Conference: Cities & Societies in Comparative Perspective, Charles University, Prague, 29 August - 01 September 2012.*

**Version:** Draft version

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# Men, women and the supply of luxury goods in eighteenth-century England: the purchasing patterns of Edward and Mary Leigh

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## Introduction

The pursuit of luxury has long been seen as a key element in the consumption practices of the elite: it marked their status and distinguished them from lower social groups. Indeed, the nature of the goods being consumed was central to Thorstein Veblen's notion of conspicuous consumption as a means of cementing and displaying social status. He wrote that consumption by the leisure classes 'undergoes a specialisation as regards the quality of the goods consumed. Since the consumption of these more excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific; and conversely the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit'.<sup>1</sup> Veblen had little to say about the role of gender in the consumption of these costly positional goods, but the implication is that a family's luxury consumption was largely a male domain, not least because they were responsible for the kinds of dynastic spending that defined status. Of course, women also bought luxury goods and often played an active part in shaping the material culture of the house. Indeed, for Sombart and others, it was female addiction to luxury that underpinned spending and was ultimately responsible for the emergence of capitalism – an argument that is rehearsed by McKendrick and others when emphasising the key role played by women in a fashion-led consumer revolution.<sup>2</sup> Partly in response to this, recent years have seen an abundance of research on the consumption practices of elite women which emphasises their key role in exercising restraint and care, as well as their independent agency as consumers.<sup>3</sup> A rather smaller body of work has sought

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<sup>1</sup> T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an Economic Study of Institutions* (1899; London, 1994), p.74.

<sup>2</sup> W. Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (1922; Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1967); N. McKendrick, 'The consumer revolution of eighteenth-century England', in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J.H. Plumb (eds), *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (London, 1982), 9-33. For broader discussion of the concept of luxury, see: J. Skekora, *Luxury: The concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore, 1976); C. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury. A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, 1994), 138-9; M. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2005), 21-45; L. Peck, *Consuming Splendor. Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2005), pp.1-24.

<sup>3</sup> A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England* (Newhaven, 1998), esp. pp.183-94; A. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors. At Home in Georgian England* (Newhaven, 2008), pp.106-28, 184-207; H. Berry, 'Prudent luxury: the Metropolitan tastes of Judith Baker, Durham gentlewoman', in P. Lane and R. Sweet (eds), *Out of*

to explore the distinctive character and manifestation of male consumption.<sup>4</sup> In the former especially, the distinctive gendered role of women is often seen as lying in servicing the domestic realm. The contrast is drawn most clearly by Vickery in her analysis of the account books of elite husbands and wives. She shows men indulging their tastes and passions, buying coaches and saddlery, wine and fine clothes. Their wives, meanwhile, were responsible for managing the household budget and supplying the everyday needs of their husband and children. Moreover, men enjoyed a close, even chummy relationship with suppliers, whilst women interacted with tradesmen in a more functional and transactional manner.<sup>5</sup> Others, though, have suggested a more even distribution of power and responsibilities. Greig, for example, shows Lady Strafford as an active consumer for the family home, even though she operated with and through her husband, and Bailey suggests an independent role for Mary Gibbard in dealing with tea dealers and others. Similarly, Whittle and Griffiths present Alice Le Strange as playing an important and independent role in the luxury spending of the family, undertaking urban shopping trips and organising much of the material culture of the family home.<sup>6</sup>

From this growing body of research, we know a lot about the ways in which male and female consumption was distinguished on the pages of conduct manuals and how it inter-related within the nuptial home. However, far less has been written about how gender impacted upon consumption practices if we look beyond the confines of married couples or how men and women may have interacted differently with suppliers. This paper seeks to address these two issues by exploring the spending patterns of a brother and sister – Edward, fifth Lord Leigh (1743-86) and the Honourable Mary Leigh (1736-1806) – who were successive owners of Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire. The estate was worth about £10,000 per annum in the mid eighteenth century, placing the Leighs in the highest bracket of Massie’s 1756 typology. Rental income grew steadily to £13,643 in 1786 and

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*Town: Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2005), 130-54; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, pp.234-43.

<sup>4</sup> The most notable contribution remains M. Finn, ‘Men’s things: masculine possession in the consumer revolution’, *Social History*, 25 (2000), pp.133-55. See also P. Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), pp.124-52 and, for a later period, C. Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life, 1860-1914* (Manchester, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp.114.

<sup>6</sup> H. Grieg, ‘Leading the fashion: the material culture of London’s *Beau Monde*’, in J. Styles and A. Vickery (eds), *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp.293-313; L. Bailey, ‘Maintaining status: consumption in the nineteenth-century household. The Gibbard family of Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire’, Unpublished MA thesis, University of Northampton, 2010; J. Whittle and E. Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early-Seventeenth-Century Household. The World of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford, 2012), pp.55-64, 117-55.

then more rapidly to about £19,000 in 1806, the year in which Mary died.<sup>7</sup> Their father, Thomas fourth Lord Leigh, had died when they were still in their minority and they were brought up under the care of relatives: Edward by William Craven, fifth Baron of Coombe Abbey (a neighbouring estate) and Mary by Elizabeth Verney. Neither Edward nor Mary married. He appears to have been troubled by mental problems from the age of about 25 and was declared insane in 1774, the administration of the estate passing to the hands of a Commission comprising a distant cousin, William Craven, and Mary.<sup>8</sup> She had considerable independent wealth and spent much of her time in London, yet never appears to have attracted suitors. Together, they form an interesting case against which to test some of our assumptions about gender and luxury consumption. Drawing on a large collection of receipted bills and related correspondence, we begin by mapping out the overall spending patterns of Edward and Mary, and assess the importance of gender in relation to status, life-course and the character of the individual. Building on this, we examine the nature of their relationship with suppliers – where did they look to for supplies and how far was their interaction shaped by their life-stage, status and gender? Overall, our analysis challenges easy stereotypes of gender-based consumption by highlighting the complexities of consumption practices and the layered nature of gender identities.

### **Spending patterns: gender, status and lifecourse**

Edward's major areas of spending show a concern with his estate and financial obligations, and with furnishing the house left incomplete by his grandfather and father. Together, these three areas accounted for almost half of the outgoings recorded in the receipted bills. A number of substantial payments were made in Edward's name to cover jointures and allowances for family members. Most notable was the £300 paid out to Ann, Edward's half-sister in the 1762, as part of the obligations placed upon the estate by his father's will.<sup>9</sup> His spending on the estate included the renewal of leases on land, and the purchase of additional land and shares in the South Sea Company, to the tune of £20,546, although the latter do not feature in the receipted bills.<sup>10</sup> But much of the heavy spending in this area took place during the period after he was declared insane and the estate was being run by a committee of trustees. For instance, between 1776 and 1778 the Committee spent £700 on the enclosure of the Stoneleigh estate.

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<sup>7</sup> P. Mathias, 'The social structure in the eighteenth century: a calculation by Joseph Massie', in idem., *The transformation of England: essays in the economic and social history of England in the Eighteenth century*. (London 1979), pp.171-89; SCLA DR18/31/16-37, Rentals of Real and Devised Estates 1762-1806.

<sup>8</sup> For details, see M. Rothery and J. Stobart, 'Inheritance events and spending patterns in the English country house: the Leigh family of Stoneleigh Abbey, 1738-1806' *Continuity and Change*, 27 (2012).

<sup>9</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3931, DR18/5/3952.

<sup>10</sup> SCLA, DR18/31/456 Auditors Account, November 1763-May 1774.

Edward's real focus was on the house itself. He had ambitious plans for enlarging and remodelling Stoneleigh Abbey, but little came to fruition. This was in part because of his insanity and early death, but it reflects a much broader tendency for the ambitions of even elite consumers to run ahead of their ability to realise them. Building may have been the ultimate expression of gentlemanly virtue, but it could easily be frustrated by demographic or economic misfortune. Some interior work was undertaken, including two fireplaces for the newly decorated hall, papering most of the upper storey rooms, and painting much of the house, which together cost £667 14s.<sup>11</sup> Edward also commissioned impressive plasterwork for the hall, staircase and chapel, for which few bills have survived, but which must have cost several hundred pounds. Yet even this is overshadowed by massive spending on furniture – necessary because much of the west wing remained unfurnished when he inherited in 1764. Much of this was consolidated in two bills: one for £818-9s from Gomm & Co, who supplied a range of high quality mahogany and oak furniture, much of it for bedrooms, but some destined for the chapel, and the other for £3383 from Thomas Burnett for a wide range of furnishing fabrics and upholstery work, including £473 10½d for fitting up the chapel with red broadcloth and velvet.<sup>12</sup>

Edward also spent handsome sums on books – an area of consumption missing from Vickery's sample of gentry families. He laid out around £1500 in just six years and purchasing hundreds of books, including a large number of luxuriously bound volumes.<sup>13</sup> Building a library conforms with gentlemanly expectations, but the speed at which Edward went about it might be seen as displaying a lack of self-control – a key attribute of masculine identity. Control and management of the self was believed to be the basis of the projection of power and authority over others, whether family members or the lower orders, and the control of finances was considered to be a particularly important component of elite masculinities throughout the early modern and modern periods. Training in the control of finances began when young gentry men first left home for boarding school and continued through to university education, the grand tour and into adulthood.<sup>14</sup> In other areas, Edward's spending was more measured and perhaps arguably more masculine, although the

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<sup>11</sup> SCLA DR18/5/4203, DR18/5/4395, DR18/5/4402.

<sup>12</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4408, DR18/3/47/52/15.

<sup>13</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*; J. Stobart, "Gentlemen and shopkeepers: supplying the country house in eighteenth-century England", *Economic History Review*, 64 (2011), pp.885-904.

<sup>14</sup> H. French and M. Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities 1660-1900* (Oxford, 2012). For studies of other social groups and specific examples see A. Sheperd, 'Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England c. 1580-1640', *Past and Present*, 167 (2000), pp. 75-106; A. Fletcher, 'Manhood, the Male Body, Courtship and Household in Early Modern England', *History*, 84 (1999), pp. 419-36; E. Foyster, 'Male Honour, Social Control and Wife-Beating in Late Stuart England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> Series, vol. 6 (1996), pp. 215-24; K. Hodgkin, 'Thomas Whythorne and the Problems of Mastery', *History Workshop Journal* (1990), pp. 20-41; H. Berry, 'Soul, Purse and Family: Middling and Lower-Class Masculinity in Eighteenth Century Manchester', *Social History*, 33 (2008), pp. 12-35.

sums could still be substantial. During this period, he bought £755 worth of silverware, much of it for the table and almost all carefully engraved with his crest, and spent almost £363 on horses and coaches, again having these emblazoned with his arms.<sup>15</sup> Clothing formed a very small part of his outgoings, with purchases largely restricted to regular orders of broadcloth suits from William Fell.<sup>16</sup> In these areas, Edward appears to have departed from the archetypal male spending outlined by Vickery: horses, clothes and wine were purchased, but they did not define his spending or his identity as a consumer. Neither did Edward conform to the stereotype of the polite gentleman so dominant in the conduct literature of this period, with its concern for appearance, sociability and manners. Edward was a different type of gentleman who sought out different methods of virtue. He was a landowner with gentlemanly scholarly interests: improving his estate and his house, and pursuing gentlemanly interests, especially in terms of books, science and classical architecture.<sup>17</sup>

Mary's spending was very different, being dominated by purchases of food and clothing. She was apparently less concerned with investment in the estate than her brother, but this is somewhat misleading as she was part of the Committee which spent significant sums on the estate during Edward's illness. Unlike the aristocratic women studied by Lewis, her interest in the fabric of Stoneleigh Abbey stretched little beyond the maintenance required for such a large house, including a substantial bill for painting the interior woodwork in 1789.<sup>18</sup> Mary spent remarkably little on furniture, although she did refurnish some rooms, most notably her 'new rooms' with which she expressed some satisfaction in a letter to the family's solicitor Joseph Hill.<sup>19</sup> But she did shape the domestic environment by reorganising the existing contents. Mary moved many items between rooms and paid particular attention to the pictures, especially in terms of the grouping and location of family paintings.<sup>20</sup> In some ways, this conforms with female gendered concerns for family and the limitation of women's influence to the private sphere. But Mary did more than simply preserve and present the marks of lineage that she inherited. She was willing to replace heirloom items such as silverware, imprinting her own taste on the family collection. Purchasing £1031 of silver from

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/4251, DR18/5/4350.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/4042, DR18/5/4390, DR18/5/4493

<sup>17</sup> On politeness see P. Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society: Britain 1660-1800* (Harlow, 2001). Also for discussions of the range of meanings attached to politeness see P. Langford, 'British Politeness and the Progress of Western Manners: An Eighteenth Century Enigma', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> series, 7 (1997), pp. 53-72 and L. Klein, 'The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 18 (1984-5), pp. 186-214. On the general dominance of the polite gentleman in this period and shifts across a long period of history see K. Harvey and A. Shepard, 'What Have Historians Done with Masculinity? Reflections on Five Centuries of British History, circa 1500-1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), pp. 274-81.

<sup>18</sup> K. Lewis, 'When a house is not a home: elite English women and the eighteenth-century country house', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009); SCLA, DR18/5/5864.

<sup>19</sup> SCLA, DR671, Letter from Mary Leigh to Joseph Hill, 22 August 1790.

<sup>20</sup> SCLA, DR18/4/69, 1786 inventory; DR18/4/59, 1806 inventory. For more details, see J. Stobart and M. Rothery, 'Rearranging the furniture: new and old in the Georgian country house' (forthcoming).

William Makepeace, Mary received £534 for unspecified but clearly unwanted items that she sold back to the silversmith.<sup>21</sup> In this way Mary augmented her gendered status as a woman with her social status as a landed gentlewoman. Her claim on her family's heritage and her place within this lineage served to cement her social status, a female concern that historians have begun to note this aspect of landed women's activities in recent years.<sup>22</sup>

Notwithstanding this, Mary's chief areas of spending were focused on the person, rather than the house. As a woman with a personal fortune of £20,000, it is unsurprising that appearances were important. Clothing formed a major area of expenditure, with numerous small bills for ribbons, lace, gloves, stockings, and so on, and occasional larger ones for fine woollens and silks being made into dresses.<sup>23</sup> Dress, of course, embodied gender identities and Mary's focus on this area of spending reinforced her identity as a woman. Again though, the finery of her clothes also communicated social distinction, her position as a wealthy member of the elite. To this we can add a number of substantial bills for servants' livery, both at Stoneleigh Abbey and Mary's house in Kensington. Feeding these two households was also a costly business, as was entertaining guests and visitors, and considerable sums were spent on groceries, provisions and wines. To an extent, these expenditure patterns conform to female stereotypes. There is a lack of dynastic spending and an emphasis on the person. If the lack of family restricted some traditional areas of female responsibility, Mary was increasingly tied into the obligations of running a large household as well as maintaining an elite lifestyle. In some ways, then, gendered patterns of consumption were being coloured by status and wealth. Moreover, it is apparent from Mary's experience that the nature of luxury consumption and its relationship with gender varied over the life course of the individual.

We know little about Edward's early life, except that he was educated at Westminster School, in London, and spent much of his time during the 1750s in the care of his guardian, William Craven, probably on his estate at Coombe Abbey, before matriculating to Oriel College, Oxford. As a consumer, Edward sparkled brilliantly, but briefly in the mid 1760s. When a young man at university in Oxford, his spending comprised mostly the costs he incurred within college, although there were outlays for buying, mending and cleaning clothes; for books, and for some luxury items

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<sup>21</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/5809.

<sup>22</sup> For example see P. Mandler, "'From Almack to Willis': Aristocratic Women and Politics, 1815-1867", in A. Vickery (ed.), *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present* (Stanford, 2005), pp. 152-67; K. Retford, 'Patrilineal portraiture? Gender and genealogy in the eighteenth-century English country house'. in J. Styles and A. Vickery (eds), *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2006), pp.315-44.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/3593, DR18/5/4308.

such as a watch and chain bought at Woodstock.<sup>24</sup> Most of his discretionary spending took place between his inheritance in 1764 and the onset of his mental illness, which appears to have occurred sometime in 1768, although he was only officially declared insane six years later. It was between 1764 and 1768 that we see around 95 per cent of bills for furniture, house decoration, silverware, and especially books and artwork. Those for work on the estate, for jointures and for building work were spread more evenly over his entire life, regardless of whether he was in a position to personally authorise the outgoings.

Mary lived much longer. Like Edward, little is known of her childhood spent in the care of Elizabeth Verney.<sup>25</sup> She emerges in the Stoneleigh Abbey bills in the early 1750s, apparently living in the vicinity of Hanover Square, London. Here she remained through much of the 1760s, although she also had a room at Stoneleigh Abbey. When her brother was declared insane in 1774, her life moved into a different phase as she took on joint responsibility for the estate. It shifted to a third phase when she inherited twelve years later. Unsurprisingly, these changes brought about considerable shifts in Mary's spending as revealed through the receipted bills. When a young woman, she was billed for music and language lessons, millinery and dressmaking, leisure and entertainment, consumables such as tea and mineral water, and later for hiring and buying coaches. She made modest contributions to London charities and bought small amounts of tableware suitable for polite entertaining. In all, this was fairly typical expenditure for a wealthy woman without family responsibilities: spending freely, but not to excess. She disappears from the bills during the period of the Commission and, when she re-emerges as the owner of Stoneleigh Abbey, her spending patterns were transformed. Mary's established female patterns of spending were now overlain with much larger sums relating to the maintenance of the estate, the family's status in the county, and her own position in London society. Whereas her spending up to the point of her inheritance on drapery, music and education, food, coaches, jewellery and leisure had made up 70 per cent of her overall spending, after 1786 it dropped to 57 per cent. Conversely, spending on the estate, the house, its gardens and charity increased from one per cent of her spending to over 16 per cent across the same period. So this change in Mary's life and status led to a broadening of her spending patterns into the more 'male domains' of the estate owner. Although her purchases, when compared with Edward, still reflected female priorities, the concerns and responsibilities of a landowner are clearly visible by this time in her spending patterns. Yet these new responsibilities were tempered by her earlier life experiences, as a young woman in London society and, as we shall

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<sup>24</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4017. This type of spending was fairly typical of young men at Oxford although, as mentioned earlier, young men were expected to control their finances whilst at University. See the several examples of parental advice on this matter in French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, pp. 85-137

<sup>25</sup> M. MacDonald, "'Not unmarked by some eccentricities': the Leigh family of Stoneleigh Abbey", in Robert Bearman (ed.) *Stoneleigh Abbey. The House, Its Owners, Its Lands* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2004), pp.148, 153-5.



see, this continued to exert an important influence on her consumer choices.

Edward and Mary spent their money in very different ways: they bought different things for different reasons, reflecting and constructing their gender identity through their choices. Edward's particular uses of politeness were scholarly rather than sociable, a characteristic that determined his specific masculine consumer choices. We have seen that both Edward's and Mary's gender identities were tempered by aristocratic status, which brought with it a set of common responsibilities, not least in servicing a substantial country house and a leisured lifestyle underpinned by luxury consumption. Lifecourse changes brought these responsibilities to the fore at particular times and shifted the balance between gendered and status-led consumption, complicating otherwise standard definitions found in conduct books. But spending also reflected and constructed the individual.<sup>26</sup> The personal character traits and preferences of Edward and Mary were important in shaping their consumption priorities and practices. This relationship is best explored by assessing spending on particular 'gendered' areas of spending: building and furnishing the home, books and collections, and coaches and livery.

### **Priorities and practices: gender and individuality**

Building, decorating and furnishing an impressive residence was an important aspect of elite male spending. It served to define their status within society, the elite and the family.<sup>27</sup> Edward certainly made an important impact in this area and patronised a wide range of artists and craftsmen. However, his ultimate ambitions were unfulfilled. In addition to several sketched designs in his own hand, he commissioned plans for a large and impressive library; a new set of service buildings, including a large brew house and laundry, and a huge new north wing – no doubt with an eye to complementing and perhaps upstaging his grandfather's monumental west wing.<sup>28</sup> That few of these plans came to fruition might be said to reflect a curtailment of Edward's masculinity in terms of dynastic impact, but it might also demonstrate appropriate manly restraint. His income was considerable, but Edward spent within his means – even during the period of highest expenditure immediately following his inheritance. His interiors and furnishings were rich and ornate, but were far from lavish or ruinously expensive. Most of the furniture was plain mahogany and the

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<sup>26</sup> This is an idea discussed surprisingly little in the literature, but see C. Campbell, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century England: a character-action approach', in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.40-58.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, R. Wilson and A. Mackley, *The Building of the English Country House* (London, 2000); C. Christie, *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester, 2000). Women played a key role when it came to interior decoration, a point discussed in detail by Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp.129-65.

<sup>28</sup> SCLA, DR671/33 Designs for Stoneleigh Abbey by Edward Leigh and Timothy Lightholer, N.D.; DR18/5/4291 Architectural designs by Giovanibattista Cipriani, 1 April 1765.

upholstery was done in velvet and broadcloth rather than silks.<sup>29</sup> The large sums reflect the volume rather than the opulence of the pieces. Moreover, his suppliers were a notch or two down from the best and most expensive: he went to Timothy Lightholer, William Gomm and John Burnett rather than men like Robert Adam and Thomas Chippendale.

The apparent restraint shown by Edward was, in part at least, down to his guardian, William Craven, who must have played an important part in shaping the character of his ward. Moreover, Craven continued to look after the young man as he planned his new home, corresponding with the steward at Stoneleigh Abbey about the need to manage outgoings in order to avoid financial embarrassment.<sup>30</sup> It appears that cash flow, rather than shortage of capital was the main concern. Craven's correspondence reflects the tension in masculine consumption between the imperatives of restraint and display. Equally though, Edward's general restraint in spending reflects his successful absorption of masculine values probably learnt under Craven's guidance.

We have already noted that Mary had remarkably little lasting impact on the material culture of Stoneleigh Abbey, apparently viewing the house as part of an estate which she should pass on untouched as part of the family inheritance. Given that neither she nor Edward had married it was inevitable that the estate would pass out of the direct family line.<sup>31</sup> This may have contributed to Mary's lack of investment in the house, although her benign neglect probably reflected the fact that Mary's priorities lay elsewhere: in making improvements to her London home, Grove house in Kensington. In the mid 1790s, she paid a series of bills from builders, carpenters, plumbers, painters, glaziers and plasterers.<sup>32</sup> Much of the work was described in terms of 'making good' or 'repairing', perhaps reflecting her willingness to sink capital into a property which she had recently purchased. What does this tell us about Mary's character as a consumer? It underlines the fact that she was an independent woman, both in terms of financial wherewithal and in her desire to shape her own environment. She took advice from Joseph Hill, who remained a confidant and friend throughout her years at Stoneleigh Abbey and Grove House. They corresponded regularly and both Hill and his wife stayed at Stoneleigh on a number of occasions, visits that were apparently reciprocated.<sup>33</sup> For the most part, however, Mary sought advice on matters of business rather than taste. In August 1791, for instance, she asked for advice concerning the insurance of Grove House,

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<sup>29</sup> DR18/3/47/52/15.

<sup>30</sup> SCLA, DR18/17/27/97, Letter from Samuel Butler (Estate Steward) to William Craven re: costs of house and garden alterations, 11 February 1764.

<sup>31</sup> After Mary died in 1806 the estate passed to a collateral branch of the family, the Leighs of Adlestrop, who went on to make their own lasting impression on the interiors of Stoneleigh Abbey.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/6122-6130.

<sup>33</sup> SCLA, DR671, Mary Leigh to Joseph Hill re: arrangements for staying at Stoneleigh, 5 September 1790; SCLA DR671, Mary Leigh to Joseph Hill thanking him for hospitality at Wargrave, 22 August 1791.

deferring to Hill's judgement stating that she 'would have it insured for whatever sum you see proper' since she did not 'understand business'.<sup>34</sup> Like her brother, Mary showed restraint in her spending, the improvements being relatively modest and the bills trifling in comparison with her considerable wealth. The repairs to Grove House, for example, amounted to around £350 in total.

Books were another typical area of elite male spending, which communicated taste, discernment and learning. Some aimed at an assembling impressive collection, characterised by the quality, rarity and completeness of its contents; other sought to build a library that would be useful and used.<sup>35</sup> Edward appears to have been able to bridge this divide. His books were visually impressive and he was clearly concerned with their physical appearance. For example, in October 1766 he paid a bill from James Robson which included 'Baskets great imperial Bible, 2 vols richly bound in blue turkey with purple ribbons & Gold Fringe' and 'Marsigli Cours du Danube, 6 vols, impls folio', which he had bound in 'Russia Leather Gilt with a border of Gold, double headbands' at a cost of 9 guineas.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, he sought out particular books and declined some on account of their condition – a practice which marked his discernment and knowledge as a collector [examples]. Yet he also appears to have been interested in the content of the books. This is less apparent from his actual reading habits (about which we know very little), than his time at university in Oxford. He was praised for his diligence and his 'literary qualifications', and was later appointed High Steward of the University and made a Doctor of Civil Law.<sup>37</sup>

It was reinforced by his interest in science and mathematics, and his collection of scientific instruments, including the usual globes and barometers, but also an air pump, syringes, receivers, cylinder glasses, and so on.<sup>38</sup> Edward's decision to bequeath both his library and his scientific instruments to his alma mater might be seen as further evidence that he wanted these things to be used – a point underlined by his gift of £1000 to the Vice Chancellor of Oxford University and the Provost of Oriel College to purchase equipment to illustrate 'mathematical lectures and experiments formerly read and explained in the museum by Doctor Bradley and Mr Bliss.'<sup>39</sup> Edward was thus both typical of elite male practices of collecting and exceptional in his erudition and intellectual abilities. This same paradox was also seen in his plans for remodelling the west front of Stoneleigh Abbey: they reflected a wider tradition of the gentleman architect, but revealed an individual with extraordinary vision and either a playful or eccentric willingness to experiment with different styles.

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<sup>34</sup> SCLA, DR671, Mary Leigh to Joseph Hill, 14 August 1791.

<sup>35</sup> Mitchell; Macarthur, thesis; others.

<sup>36</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4529.

<sup>37</sup> SCLA, DR18/17/27/52; M. Purcell, "'A lunatic of unsound mind": Edward, Lord Leigh (1742-86) and the refounding of Oriel College library', *Bodleian Library Record*, 17 (2001), p.249.

<sup>38</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4515, DR18/5/4385.

<sup>39</sup> SCLA, DR18/13/7/13-4, Will of Edward Lord Leigh, proved 22 July 1786.

These characteristics also tie into his masculine identity as a virtuous scholar.

Edward's esoteric character is perhaps also seen in his modest spending on clothing and other forms of personal display such as coaches and liveried servants. Vickery makes much of elite male spending in these areas, yet Edward appears to have had limited interest in horses and the paraphernalia that went with them. He certainly bought these things, but they formed a smaller proportion of his outgoings than was the case for many aristocrats. In August 1765 he paid John Cope's bill for a 'new crane neck chariot ... painted with a glaz'd ruby colour and the arms and dignity in very large mantles', and a further £64 1s on three riding horses.<sup>40</sup> Yet this was the high point of his spending, the only other major outlay in this area coming in 1771 when he was billed £130 4s 10d for a coach and a variety of equipage by John Hatchett & Co.<sup>41</sup> Significantly, this came in a period where Edward had already been withdrawn from effective control over the estate, suggesting that this public display of wealth and status was sanctioned by others, most probably Mary and his cousin, William Craven. Even more pronounced was the modest outlay on livery, for which Edward was billed on just a handful of occasions, mostly either before or after he had control of the estate. It is possible that some bills have gone missing, but such public shows of status appear to have been secondary concerns for Edward, perhaps because he was not much in the public sphere. Later reports of a reclusive lifestyle are certainly exaggerated. He subscribed to the Catch Club in London; attended the House of Lords on occasions, and incurred a number of bills for 'London expenses'.<sup>42</sup> But Edward does not appear to have entertained many guests at Stoneleigh, nor did he visit London with any great frequency. His membership of the Catch Club is also instructive. This was a musical society formed in 1761 of gentlemen, musicians and scholars of music dedicated to the promotion of catch singing.<sup>43</sup> Although it was partly aimed at sociability, the more erudite concerns of the original constitution would have suited Edward's particular understanding of politeness and masculinity.

This behaviour is not only at odds with the stereotypical gender and status norms associated with the landed aristocracy; it also contrasts sharply with the priorities and tastes of his sister. In the 1790s, Mary laid out £161 8s 2d on hiring a coach, horses, coachmen and postilions in London; £148 15s 6d on a range of horse feed, and £106 1s on repairs to her own carriage, including the 'arms, lozenge and mantles proper on the doors'.<sup>44</sup> Importantly these bills also included the range of harnesses, whips, combs, etc. – what Vickery refers to as 'an utterly masculine, dark brown territory

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<sup>40</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4350, DR18/5/4352.

<sup>41</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4893.

<sup>42</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4554, DR18/5/4563

<sup>43</sup> Viscount Gladstone, G. Boas and H. Christopherson, *Noblemen and Gentlemen's Catch Club: Three Essays towards its History* (London, 1996).

<sup>44</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/6317, DR18/5/6454, DR18/5/6054.

of goods'.<sup>45</sup> There is no evidence that Mary herself went to the coach makers to finger or commission these things; but she clearly prioritised them as part of her material culture, incurring a total of 32 separate bills for coach repairs and a wide range of saddlery. This behaviour might be seen as making Mary a masculine consumer, but it more likely reflects her desire to mark her status as an independent gentlewoman in a public manner.

The latter comes out still more strongly in her spending on livery. As a young woman in London, she made occasional purchases of livery and other clothes for her servants. After she inherited the estate, Mary's spending grew enormously and she appears to have purchased new livery every other year in the 1790s. At Stoneleigh Abbey, there were green frock coats and scarlet waistcoats for the park keepers; corduroy suits for the gamekeepers; a shooting jacket for the underkeeper; a broadcloth suit for the usher of the servants' hall, and four suits each for the five liveried house servants, plus a scarlet postilions jacket and waistcoat for the coachman.<sup>46</sup> The average outlay per servant was about £7 5s – a considerable sum, but one that was significantly outweighed by the provision that Mary made for her London servants. They too received four suits each – one in scarlet or claret, trimmed with lace; the others in drab, though sometimes with striped waistcoats – and were also supplied with hats.<sup>47</sup> All this cost Mary about £25 per servant. Combined with the outlay on her coach and horses, this shows a desire for a public display of status and dignity which was not defined by gender in a straightforward sense, revealing as it did a different set of personal priorities from her brother. Just like the family portraits and silverware in Stoneleigh Abbey, servants' livery and the coaches emblazoned with the family arms were a means of maximising the status that Mary could achieve, whether in London or in the country, the status of a wealthy gentlewoman, part of a long line of honourable landowners. All of this illustrates just how complex the relationship between gender and consumption could be. Personal preference overlaid structural forces such as class, gender and age, all serving to produce the seemingly contradictory identities of Edward and Mary. Similarly surprising results arise from an analysis of their relationships with suppliers.

### **Dealing with tradesmen: gender and the relationships of supply**

Given that Mary was in ownership of the Leigh estates for a far longer period than her elder brother had been, and lived longer, it is not surprising that she made use of a larger number of suppliers than Edward: 656 in comparison to 508. During their periods of ownership, assuming that Edward's

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<sup>45</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p.124.

<sup>46</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/6051, DR18/5/6099.

<sup>47</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/6098.

discretionary spending was more limited after it was first noted that he may have a mental illness, in 1768, Mary made use of 421 suppliers whilst Edward used only 340. However, whilst Edward was supplied by an average of forty-three tradesmen each year, Mary drew on just thirty-four. This was largely due to the enormous amount of goods and services needed during Edward's refurbishment of the family home between 1763 and 1766. During this four year period alone Edward purchased items from 270 suppliers, almost 80 per cent of the total number supplying to him across his eight year reign. The only two years in which Mary used anywhere near this number of suppliers was in 1792 and 1796, times when she herself was engaged in making improvements to Grove House.

Although both Mary and Edward showed a significant level of loyalty to many of their suppliers, Mary tended to return to the same suppliers more often than her brother. She made two or more purchases from 35 per cent of her suppliers, compared with Edward's 28 per cent, and made 137 purchases from her ten most frequently used suppliers, whilst Edward made 116 from his. It is hard to assess the extent to which these patterns reflect their relative longevity rather than a different mind-set. In any case, they both switched suppliers with remarkable frequency, even for goods that were particularly important in Mary and Edward's spending patterns. Over her lifetime, Mary used 101 different shopkeepers to supply cloth and clothing, thirty-nine of which were patronised more than once. In 1753, for instance, she used four different suppliers of drapery and only returned to one of these, Jane Gretton, of London. Edward's book buying was also spread across different dealers. He used eleven different suppliers, three of them on just one occasion – a reflection of the need to cast a wide net in order to secure the quality and quantity of books he desired.<sup>48</sup> This pattern was even more accentuated for purchases of less favoured products: Edward returned to only three of the eleven suppliers he used for groceries, whilst Mary made repeat purchases from only three of the thirteen tradesmen that supplied her with books, stationery and art.

As this suggests the particular trades of the most prominent suppliers to Edward and Mary are instructive. The patterns of supply generally tracked the patterns of discretionary spending discussed earlier, both in terms of product and the location of the supplier. Edward's most prominent suppliers in terms of the number of times he was billed included Michael Clarke, a mason probably of local provenance; Thomas Howlett, a blacksmith based at Stoneleigh, and Thomas Payne, a London bookseller – a trio which reflect his role as a landed gentleman with scholarly tastes who spent much of his time on his estate.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to this Mary showed the

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<sup>48</sup> See J. Stobart, 'The luxury of learning: books, knowledge and display in the English country house, c.1730-1800' (forthcoming, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> For examples see DR18/5/3964 (Clarke), 4195 (Howlett) and 4389 (Payne). He also made twelve purchases from a local Grocer, Hugh Jones of Coventry, although these were concentrated across two years between 1763 and 1765 - see, for example, SCLA DR18/5/4133

most loyalty to London dealers, the majority of whom supplied food. She made twenty purchases across thirty-three years from Thomas Ballard, a grocer, and nineteen purchases across eight years from North, Hoare and Hanson, also grocers. But she also enjoyed long-term relationships with some local suppliers, including the fishmonger, John Loader, and the baker, William Simpson, both of Kensington, and William Butler, a Kenilworth draper to whom she went for her servants' livery.<sup>50</sup> Edward's loyalty, therefore, was mainly to local suppliers of products and services for the house and estate, whilst his long-term relationship with London tradesmen was focussed on his interest in literature and book collecting. Mary, by contrast, focussed her loyalty on suppliers of food, although her relationship with Butler illustrates again the importance she attached to displays of her family's rank and dignity.

These distinctions show that the use of suppliers as well as the types of product purchased followed the gendered patterns we found in the first section. However, Edward and Mary also patronised the same retailers and craftsmen for some important aspects of their consumption. These shared suppliers are significant because they show a level of familial loyalty and a cross-fertilisation of consumption patterns – Mary and Edward appear to have shared their knowledge of suppliers. Of the most prominent twenty suppliers discussed earlier, four dealt with both Edward and Mary. At one level, we see Butler twice supplying livery to Edward before Mary began using him in 1787.<sup>51</sup> More telling, perhaps, Thomas Burnett of the Strand in London, was the major supplier to Edward during his refurbishment of Stoneleigh Abbey, presenting a consolidated bill for £3383 3s 5¼d in 1765.<sup>52</sup> Three years later, Mary went to Burnett for a small purchase of furnishing material, to the value of £2 4s 3d.<sup>53</sup> Whilst the magnitude of this purchase could not compare to Edward's, one can imagine the importance the company may have attached to Mary, the sister of what must have been one of their main customers in the 1760s. Much the same appears true of Mary's purchases of coaches: she followed her brother's lead in going to the same coach maker, John Hatchett of Long Acre, that Edward had used in 1771, first to purchase a new coach (1794) and later to have it repaired (1799).<sup>54</sup> As we have seen Edward spent a lot of money on books in his quest to amass a library befitting a gentleman. Mary, it appears, was far less of a bibliophile. She read, of course, and noted in a letter to the family solicitor, Joseph Hill, that she had been 'very much pleased' with

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<sup>50</sup> For examples see DR18/5/6094 (Ballard), DR18/5/6513 (North, Hoare and Hanson), DR18/5/6547 (Loader), DR18/5/6537 (Simpson) and DR18/5/6051 (Butler).

<sup>51</sup> SCLA DR18/5/4657, DR18/5/5062.

<sup>52</sup> SCLA, DR18/3/47/52/15.

<sup>53</sup> SCLA DR18/5/4620.

<sup>54</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/6054, DR18/5/6446.

Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.<sup>55</sup> Equally though she appears to have had little time for classical learning, a distinctly masculine interest inculcated at school and university and, for some, on the Grand Tour. She remarked in the same letter that Hill could take his time sending William Cowper's 'translation of Homer' to Stoneleigh since she was 'very sure I shall not read it, it will only be here as a library book.' She did though seem to follow Edward's judgement on booksellers on occasion. She made a small purchase from James Robson, of London, in 1772.<sup>56</sup> Robson had sold over £400 worth of books to Edward between 1766 and 1768.<sup>57</sup>

On other occasions, Mary took the lead, especially when it came to buying textiles and clothing. We have already seen that she patronised a great variety of London drapers, haberdashers and milliners. Several of her favoured suppliers were later patronised by Edward. For example, Edward made two purchases of material from the drapers, Carr, Ibetson and Bigge in 1763 and 1768.<sup>58</sup> Mary had begun using this supplier in 1754 as a young woman and continued this relationship through to the early 1770s. Similarly he made four purchases from Budd and Devall, milliners in Bruton Street, London, following Mary's initial purchase of ribbons and muslin in 1760.<sup>59</sup> In the 1760s they both used Jordan, Heyland and Bigger, a drapers in Leadenhall Street, London. Again, Mary had made the first contact, in 1762 when she was billed for linen to the value of £1 1s 8d. Quite likely on her recommendation, Edward looked to these suppliers when placing a much larger order (worth over £128) for a variety of table and furnishing linens the following year.<sup>60</sup> More surprising, perhaps, is the way that Mary apparently initiated contact with the London wine merchant, Richard Kilsha, from whom she bought around £17 worth of Port and Sherry in 1761, returning for similar orders over the succeeding years. Despite wine-buying being seen as a particularly masculine domain, Edward followed his sister, buying £30 of wine from Kilsha in 1763 and a further £269 in 1765.<sup>61</sup> The lines of communication in operation here are familiar enough. Walsh and others have demonstrated the importance of calling on knowledgeable friends in convenient locations (often London or Paris) to provide information about goods and suppliers, and sometimes to acquire specific items.<sup>62</sup> The continuity of suppliers between Mary and Edward form a logical extension of this, Edward drawing on Mary's experience as a metropolitan consumer of textiles and food, and

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<sup>55</sup> SCLA, DR671, letter from Mary Leigh to Joseph Hill, 30 July 1791. The book Mary refers to was James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1787)

<sup>56</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/5000.

<sup>57</sup> For example see DR18/5/4529.

<sup>58</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4035, DR18/5/4661.

<sup>59</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3970, DR18/5/4126, DR18/5/4139, DR18/5/4511.

<sup>60</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3960, DR18/5/4028.

<sup>61</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3910, 4055 and 4295.

<sup>62</sup> C. Walsh, 'Shops, shopping and the art of decision making in eighteenth-century England', in J. Styles and A. Vickery (eds) *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp.151-77. See also Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, pp.168-9.



Mary benefitting from her brother's purchasing power and perhaps accepting his lead in areas of masculine spending such as coaches and books.

Some suppliers held a different and perhaps even stronger relationship with the family. Michael Clarke had undertaken work various masonry work on the estate and house for the Trustees of the estate whilst Edward was in his minority in the 1750s. He was used by Edward during the 1760s; by the Committee during the 1770s, and then by Mary after Edward had died.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Thomas Gilpin, a London silversmith and engraver, first supplied the Leigh family back in 1737 when Edward, third Lord Leigh, paid a bill for some engraving work.<sup>64</sup> His grandson, Edward, fifth Lord Leigh, made two purchases of jewellery and silver, amounting to just over £20 as a young boy in 1751 and, when in charge of the estate, made more substantial purchases as well as selling around £700 of unwanted silver to Gilpin in 1765.<sup>65</sup> Over a similar period, Gilpin also supplied Mary with silverware and jewellery on three occasions, in 1751, 1753 and 1765.<sup>66</sup> The use of such tradesmen over such a long period illustrates how both Edward's and Mary's consumer choices were embedded in more enduring familial cultures of consumption and longer-term relationships with suppliers. This comes out stronger still in the family's relationship with the draper Robert Hughes, of Coventry. Their father, Thomas 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Leigh, had made five purchases of clothing and material from Hughes during his period of ownership.<sup>67</sup> Edward, or more probably his guardians, then went to Hughes for livery in 1753 and Mary 'followed suit' with two purchases in 1753 and 1756.<sup>68</sup> Here again in both cases there appears to be a shared culture of consumption that both inherited from earlier in the family history. Since both of them were very young when their father died we can assume that this information on reliable suppliers of quality must have been transferred through their guardians, who were both related to the Leighs, or through the Stewards of the house, which adds another possible layer to the relationship of the family with their suppliers.

In some cases the consumer choices of Edward and Mary continued across several generations of the suppliers' families – continuity being provided by the customer rather than the tradesman. Two generations of the Fell family, of St. Martin's Lane, London, supplied drapery and livery for Edward and Mary from the 1760s through to the early nineteenth century. William Fell began providing tailoring services for Edward in 1763, presenting bills of between £10 and £90.<sup>69</sup> Another William

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<sup>63</sup> For examples see SCLA, DR18/5/3369 (Trustees, 1753), DR18/5/3964 (Edward, 1762), DR18/5/5104 (Committee, 1774), DR18/5/6427 (Mary, 1798).

<sup>64</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/1989.

<sup>65</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3121, DR18/5/4574, DR18/5/3121.

<sup>66</sup> SCLA DR18/5/3136, 3194 and 4333.

<sup>67</sup> For example see SCLA DR18/5/2129.

<sup>68</sup> SCLA DR18/5/3331 (Edward), and DR18/5/3349, DR18/5/3638 (Mary)

<sup>69</sup> For examples, see SCLA DR18/5/4042, DR18/5/4483.

Fell, probably his son, is then named in the bills in 1790 when he supplied livery, more precisely ‘a claret colour cloth frock & scarlet cloth waistcoat...for one of the servants at Stoneleigh, Thomas Wagstaff.’ The other bill for this period refers to Edward Fell, probably William junior’s brother, who in 1791 billed Mary for £143 of livery for her servants at Grove House in London.<sup>70</sup> One other Fell is mentioned later, in 1804, when Sophia (probably the wife of William or Thomas) billed Mary for £228 of servants livery, again to clothe her staff at Grove House.<sup>71</sup> Similar relationships can be found with provincial suppliers. Most notable are the three generations of the Pollard family of Coventry who supplied several generations of the Leighs with gloves, probably in the form of servants’ livery although this is not specified on the bills. This began when the third Lord purchased from Dorothy Pollard in 1737, continued through to the 1750s when Mary was supplied by Joseph Pollard, and up to Mary’s period of ownership when she purchased the same items from Stephen Pollard.<sup>72</sup> These common suppliers confirm that Edward and Mary shared information, probably both in terms of quality and reliability, and thus defined *together* the relationships of the Leigh family with their suppliers. Such choices were personal and individual, and to some extent gendered along conventional lines, but they were also embedded in family relationships.

## Conclusion

The geography of Edward’s and Mary’s spending flowed, to some extent, from the goods they purchased, both in terms of value and type but they were also defined by their lifestyles and different courses their lives took. Mary’s penchant for London residence and sociability was reflected in her purchases of fine clothing and food from the Metropolitan market. Edward’s love of literature and architecture and his life spent mainly on his estate were similarly reflected in his purchases in Warwickshire and his engagement with the luxury market in London, partly transferred through his sister and her knowledge of that complex city. Their upbringing was, of course, defined in part by gender. Edward, with his natural assumption of the role of a country landowner after a young life formerly educated in the classics and Mary with her life of a sociable young lady amid the social circles of London. But they shared information on suppliers. They inherited information on suppliers from their family and, as landowners, their personal and gendered preferences were, to some extent, subsumed within their more significant social status as landowners. They interpreted this role in different, and sometimes surprising ways. Mary was far more concerned with the display of her wealth and heritage than her brother. Edward seemed to have been far more focussed on

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<sup>70</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/5894, DR18/5/6098.

<sup>71</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/6817.

<sup>72</sup> For examples SCLA, DR18/5/2204 (Dorothy), DR18/58/3652 (Mary 1750s), DR18/5/5845 (Mary 1789).

inner virtue and the interiority of his gender identity, not perhaps what we might expect from a rich landowner. But gender, again, cut across these expressions of social worth. Mary, as an unmarried woman, depended more on her family's status in her sociable life in London and, indeed, on the family estates in Warwickshire. Equally, Edward's interpretation of manliness eschewed the stereotype of the sociable and mannered gentleman because he opted for the scholarly educated (and to some extent more serious and earnest) politeness that made sense to him as an individual.

All of this illustrates how closely and complexly gender and social status interacted and how such identities could shift across the life-course. Edward's consumption choices may not have been 'utterly masculine', to use Vickery's phrase,<sup>73</sup> but they were masculine none the less. Mary's concerns may have strayed beyond the enduring female concerns centred on the private domestic sphere, but as the owner of almost twenty-thousand acres, one of a long line of wealthy powerful landowners, it was inevitable that her purchases became more 'masculine' than we might anticipate. Of course, the classic patriarchal relationship of a married couple with its attendant systems of power and subjugation is not represented here. To some extent Edward and Mary were unusual in that they both died unmarried and experienced a more subtle form of gender relationship as brother and sister. These findings do, however, inform our understandings of gender, status and consumption precisely because of the way in which they isolate elite consumption practices from those more rigid familial and domestic spheres.

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<sup>73</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p.124.