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Rich, female and single: the changing consumption practices of Mary Leigh, 1736-1806

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Introduction

The consumption practices of the eighteenth-century elite have received a great deal of attention from historians, especially in recent years when consumption has emerged as a key meta-narrative in historical enquiry. Much of the early work focused on elites as epicureans, collectors or connoisseurs, and on the artefacts with which they filled their houses – an art-historical emphasis which persists today in many studies of British country houses.¹ Despite long-standing interest in the link between luxury and the economy, these accounts of luxury consumption rarely theorise or relate elite practices to those of other social groups. At best it is implicitly understood, either in terms of conspicuous consumption or as a display of taste or what Bourdieu calls cultural capital.² In contrast, studies of middling sort consumption were quick to identify elite groups as the leaders of an eighteenth-century consumer revolution based on fashion and social emulation. From these perspectives, elite consumption is often seen as feckless, wasteful and focused around notions of luxury and fashion.³

The last ten years or so have witnessed the construction of a more rounded and nuanced picture of elite consumers and their material culture, especially by historians focusing on women's behaviour. Vickery's analysis of genteel women has emphasised their concern with elegance, civility and virtue, their prudence and economy, and their importance in shaping domestic material culture.⁴ These arguments have been developed through many other studies: Whittle and Griffiths, for example, present Alice Le Strange as playing an important and independent role in the management of the household and in the family's luxury spending; Greig portrays Lady Strafford as an active consumer for the family home, even though she operated with and through her husband, and Lewis shows how a range of elite women made important

¹ This tradition can be traced through the work of Beard x2; others?; Cornforth.

² W. Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (1922; Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1967); J. Skekora, *Luxury: The concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore, 1976); T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an Economic Study of Institutions* (1899; London, 1994); P. Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984).

³ See especially, 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.

⁴ A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, 1998).

adjustments to their marital homes.⁵ At the same time, there is a growing body of research on the consumption practices of elite women which emphasises their key role in exercising restraint and care, rather than succumbing to the decadent pleasures of luxury and seducing their men to do the same.⁶ They are also shown to be knowledgeable and skilled shoppers, drawing on their personal mobility and social networks to acquire a wide range of goods and services, often from the metropolis.⁷

The focus of these studies is almost always on married women, the analysis often focusing on the linked role of husband and wife in acquiring goods for the household and shaping their personal and domestic material culture. For the early seventeenth century, Whittle and Griffiths show how Alice Le Strange's careful household management enabled her husband's dynastic spending on improving the estate and on building projects. More mundanely, Vickery argues that husbands were often indulging their tastes and passions – buying coaches and saddlery, wine and fine clothes – whilst their wives were responsible for managing the household budget and supplying the everyday needs of their husband and children.⁸ We know much less about the consumption practices of single men and women, and especially how these changed over the life of the individual. Vickery has written about the domestic environments, tastes and priorities of wealthy spinsters and bachelors, and Ponsonby has used probate inventories to explore more

⁵ J. Whittle and E. Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early-Seventeenth-Century Household. The World of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford, 2012), 55-64, 117-55; 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), 293-313; K. Lewis, 'When a house is not a home: elite English women and the eighteenth-century country house', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009). See also 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), 315-44; L. Bailey, 'Maintaining status: consumption in the nineteenth-century household. The Gibbard family of Sharnbrook, Bedfordshire', Unpublished MA thesis, University of Northampton, 2010.

⁶ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, esp. 183-94; A. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors. At Home in Georgian England* (Newhaven, 2008), 106-28, 184-207; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2005), 234-43.

⁷ H. Berry, 'Prudent luxury: the Metropolitan tastes of Judith Baker, Durham gentlewoman', in P. Lane and R. Sweet (eds), *Out of Town: Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2005), 130-54; 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), 151-77; Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, pp.168-9

⁸ Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, especially 26-42, 203-8; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 106-28.

mundane singleton households.⁹ Yet both tend to focus on particular moments in the lives of their subjects, rather than exploring how spending developed as individuals moved through different stages of their lives. Moreover, the emphasis of such studies is firmly on what was acquired and how it was used; we have only a hazy view of how such people shopped and in particular how their engagement with London was shaped by its retail geography. Thus, we need to understand more fully the ways in which the consumption and shopping behaviour of single people was shaped by the gender, status and family, and how might the relative importance of these different influences varied over the lifecourse of the individual.

This paper attempts to address these issues through detailed analysis of the shopping habits of the Honourable Mary Leigh (1736-1806), as revealed through an extensive set of receipted bills. Mary was the sister of Edward, fifth Lord Leigh, of Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire, an estate worth about £10,000 per annum in the mid eighteenth century, placing the family in the highest bracket of Massie's 1756 typology.¹⁰ Her parents died whilst she was in her minority and Mary was placed in the care of a relative, Elizabeth Verney.¹¹ We know little about her early years, but she appears in the Stoneleigh Abbey bills in the 1750s, apparently living in the vicinity of Hanover Square, London. Here she remained through much of the 1760s and probably the 1770s, 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, acting as a commissioner along with her cousin William Craven. It shifted to a third phase twelve years later when she inherited following Edward's death in 1786. Analysing Mary's life and spending through these various life changes allows us to explore the complex interrelationship between gender, status and lifecourse.

Patterns of spending

As a young woman, Mary's spending was dominated by bills for millinery, drapery and dressmaking (Table 1). Through the 1750s and 1760s, these accounted for an average of about

⁹ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 49-82, 188-93, 207-30; M. Ponsonby, *Stories from Home. English Domestic Interiors, 1750-1850* (Aldershot, 2007), ???.

¹⁰ 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. By the early nineteenth century, the estate's value had risen to c.£19,000 per annum; SCLA DR18/31/16-37, Rentals of Real and Devised Estates 1762-1806.

¹¹ M. MacDonald, "'Not unmarked by some eccentricities': the Leigh family of Stoneleigh Abbey", in R. Bearman (ed.) *Stoneleigh Abbey. The House, Its Owners, Its Lands* (Stratford-upon-Avon, 2004), 148, 153-5.

£50 per annum – a relatively modest sum. But there were years of particularly heavy spend, most notably in 1753, when total a of about £200 was laid out, perhaps in connection with her being brought onto the London social scene. During this time, though, Mary was also incurring bills for music and language lessons,¹² leisure and entertainment (including trips to the opera and to Ranelagh Gardens), consumables such as tea and mineral water, and for hiring and even buying coaches. Indeed, in 1761, she paid James Cope £90 for a new post coach – a sum which was subsumed in a larger bill to her brother, Edward.¹³ She also made modest contributions to London charities and bought small amounts of tableware suitable for polite entertaining. By the 1760s, she was also renewing the furnishings in her London rooms. She acquired a ‘Mahogany Chinese chair, made very light with Caned seat’ and had a canvas cushion made for it; she also had two items of furniture mended, and some silk damask curtains taken apart, cleaned, lined with yellow worsted and remade ‘to draw festoon’. The bill came to a total of just £4 6s 3d, against which she was allowed £2 2s for a marble slab and mahogany frame.¹⁴

Table 1. The spending patterns of Mary Leigh

	1750-59		1760-69		1770-74		1786-95		1796-1806	
	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
Estate & Finance	23	2	36	2	2	1	433	7	589	9
Building	3	0	4	0	3	1	585	10	478	7
Furniture	9	1	13	1	0	0	462	8	26	0
Household goods	23	2	59	4	9	3	590	10	643	9
Food & Drink	7	1	103	7	24	7	1167	19	2298	33
Clothing	543	49	468	31	95	30	964	16	1027	15
Medicine	13	1	20	1	3	1	237	4	67	1
Silver	66	6	11	1	0	0	1023	17	523	8
Coach & horses	131	12	329	22	26	8	266	4	542	8
Art, Books & Travel	277	25	286	19	155	49	193	3	442	6
Miscellaneous	20	2	160	11	1	0	216	4	280	4
Total	1115		1488		317		6135		6914	

Source: SCLA, Stoneleigh Abbey bills, series DR18/5

In all, this was fairly typical expenditure for a wealthy woman without family responsibilities. Mary spent freely, but not to excess. Dress, of course, embodied gender identities and her focus on this area of spending reinforced Mary’s identity as a woman, especially when augmented by

¹² See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/3593, DR18/5/4308.

¹³ SCLA, DR18/5/4350.

¹⁴ SCLA, DR18/5/4620.

her purchases of jewellery. But this also underlined her status: a woman, yes; but the sister of a peer of the realm, a status underlined and broadcast by marking her silverware and carriage with the family crest and arms. In this way, she made these things ‘signifiers of family and memory’, but also rendered them symbols of heritage and power.¹⁵

Mary largely disappears from the bills during the period of the Commission. The few that are contained in the collection suggests that she continued to live in London and that her overall pattern of spending remained broadly stable, although the substantial sums laid out on the hire of horses and coaches suggests a significant amount of travel, perhaps so and from the Warwickshire estate. When she re-emerges as the owner of Stoneleigh Abbey, her spending patterns were transformed. As a landowner, there were costs incurred in running the Warwickshire estate: enclosure, ditching and fencing, maintenance of farm buildings, and so on. Like Lady Irwin at Temple Newsam and Lady Boringden at Saltram, she was also engaged in impressing her own character in the house, albeit in ways that might appear modest against the building programme of her grandfather or the major refurbishment undertaken by her brother.¹⁶ In the ten years following her inheritance of Stoneleigh Abbey, Mary spent about £460 on furniture and upholstery, to which we should add a further £299 for repainting the interior of the house.¹⁷ She was billed on five occasions by David Frost, probably a Warwick craftsman, who supplied a variety of mahogany furniture and undertook a considerable amount of upholstery work, including blinds and curtains.¹⁸

This spending on furniture was modest in dynastic terms, but represented a huge increase when compared to the 1750s and 1760s (Table 1). It reflected the new possibilities opened up to her as a wealthy landowner: the ability to reshape the décor and furnishing of her newly inherited house. She was free to imprint her own character on Stoneleigh Abbey, acquiring new furniture, reorganising rooms and purchasing new sets of silverware that were more to her taste.¹⁹ The burst of spending that resulted was wholly typical of new home-owners. Vickery emphasises marriage as a key moment in the construction of domestic material culture; but, for landowners especially, inheritance was perhaps a more important point of transition.²⁰ That said, Mary’s spending also reflected a new range of responsibilities that rested on her shoulders as she took

¹⁵ Reference for silverware bill; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, p.242.

¹⁶ Lewis, ‘When a house is not a home’.

¹⁷ SCLA, DR18/5/5864.

¹⁸ SCLA, DR18/5/5822, DR18/5/5905.

¹⁹ In buying £1031 of silver from William Makepeace, Mary received £534 for unspecified but clearly unwanted items that she sold back to the silversmith: SCLA, DR18/5/5809.

²⁰ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 8-10, 193-202; 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*, 27:4 (2012).

on the management and operation of a large country seat. These can be seen most clearly in the growth in spending on household goods and especially on food and drink, including a wide variety of groceries as well as the more mundane provisions needed to sustain a substantial household. These responsibilities were added to around 1790 when Mary acquired a house in Kensington Gore, at the western edge of London. This property, Grove House, occupied much of her attention in the early 1790s, with a series of bills paid to builders, carpenters, plumbers, painters, glaziers and plasterers.²¹ Much of the work they undertook was described in terms of ‘making good’ or ‘repairing’. For instance, a plasterer named Fisher charged £5 13s 5d for removing old plaster and replacing with fresh roughcast – a job which took a total of 11¾ days.²² Following on from this were bills from the upholsterers Bradshaw and Smith, who supplied small pieces of mahogany furniture and undertook a range of work including removing and repairing curtains, and rejapanning chairs.²³

This was the period in which expenditure on building and furniture reached a maximum as Mary endeavoured to improve her country and town houses. Thereafter, her spending patterns shifted again, with a growing emphasis on food and drink, and a shift in the composition of her outlays on clothing. The former accounted for around one-third of the expenditure recorded in the bills, and represented a combination of regular payments to a variety of retailers. There were bills from grocers for anything from £2 to £60; butchers bills for up to £125 and two substantial bills from wine merchants: one for £148 and the other for £142.²⁴ These reflect the need to provision her household, but also to entertain guests at Grove House but more particularly at Stoneleigh Abbey.²⁵ The relative importance of town and country was sharply reversed in Mary’s spending on livery, which became the dominant element of clothing expenditure in the late 1790s. Various servants at Stoneleigh were provided with new livery each year, including 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 postilion’s jacket and waistcoat for the coachman.²⁶ 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. Six servants each received four sets of clothes, apparently each year: one in scarlet or claret, trimmed with lace; the others in drab, though sometimes with

²¹ See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/6122-6130.

²² SCLA, DR18/5/6126.

²³ SCLA, DR18/5/5980, 6023. See Beard, *Upholsterers*, pp.160-161

²⁴ SCLA, DR18/5/6342 DR18/5/6351; DR18/5/6396; DR18/5/6661.

²⁵ Macdonald, ‘Leigh family’, 154.

²⁶ SCLA, DR18/5/6051, DR18/5/6099.

striped waistcoats. They were also supplied with hats.²⁷ All this cost Mary about £25 per servant – a sum which underlines the importance of this public display of wealth and status to Mary's self-image. She clearly felt the need to make a good show when out and about in London. It was a mark of her own rank and dignity, but also that of her family.²⁸

Overall, then, the pattern of Mary's spending shifted considerably over the course of her lifetime. The personal spending of a young woman, much of it centred on the body and gendered in nature, was overlain with other priorities after she inherited the estate. Maintaining and improving her domestic environment, feeding and watering her household and guests, and presenting an appropriate public face were priorities driven by her status and rank more than her gender. These changes were not unusual in the landowning class, although their impact was felt more often by men than women. We might expect that such a transformation in consumption patterns would bring about a corresponding shift in the patterns and processes of shopping. Was this the case for Mary?

Geographies of shopping

Over the course of her life, Mary patronised over 500 suppliers, of which 241 can be definitively located in space. In the 1750s and 1760s, London dominated both in terms of the number of suppliers and the total value of goods and services provided (Table 2). This reliance on London suppliers is remarkable, but unsurprising since Mary appears to have spent little time outside London during these years. The occasional purchases made in the Warwickshire towns of Coventry and Warwick were for small amounts of cloth, haberdashery and gloves, often from retailers who also supplied other family members. In short, Mary shopped locally. In the later period, when she had inherited the Stoneleigh estate, the geography of supply was more complex. London accounted for fewer than half of the suppliers and around two-thirds of goods by value; Coventry and Warwick were now more important points of supply, as was the village of Stoneleigh and Kenilworth, a small town situated just two miles to the west of the estate. From these places came groceries, haberdashery, upholstery, stationery, medicines, earthenware and livery, plus painters, braziers and farriers. More striking, perhaps, is the emergence of Kensington tradesmen supplying meat, bread, coal, fish and candles, amongst other things. Again, these shifts are readily explained by Mary's new role as a Warwickshire landowner and her winter residence in Kensington Gore. She was still shopping locally, but now

²⁷ SCLA, DR18/5/6098.

²⁸ J. Styles, *The Dress of the People. Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 2007), 295-301.

this meant a number of different locations. London was readily accessible from Kensington, adding convenience to the advantages of prestige, choice and often price.²⁹ Indeed, Mary's continued preference for London shopping matches that of other wealthy provincial women: Elizabeth Shackleton had goods sent up to rural Lancashire, Elizabeth Purefoy transacted with London tradesmen, often via agents, from her home in Bedfordshire, and Judith Baker made annual shopping trips to London from north-east England.³⁰ If we dig deeper, however, we find that Mary's relationship with London retailers changed markedly as she moved from young metropolitan woman to wealthy provincial landowner.

Table 2. The distribution of retailers supplying Mary Leigh, 1750-1806

	1750-1769				1786-1806			
	Suppliers		Total value		Suppliers		Total value	
	No.	%	(£ s d)	%	No.	%	(£ s d)	%
Birmingham	0	0	0	0	1	0	25-17-0	0.0
Coventry	7	7.1	35-11-0	1.9	28	19.6	824-11-5	7.9
Kenilworth	0	0	0	0	2	1.4	419-1-2	4.0
Kensington	0	0	0	0	18	12.6	1217-14-5	11.7
London	88	89.8	1819-9-2	95.9	69	48.3	6880-15-1	66.1
Oxford	1	1.0	14-6-11	0.8	0	0	0	0
Stoneleigh	0	0	0	0	13	9.1	229-18-4	2.2
Warwick	2	2.0	27-4-4	1.4	12	8.4	812-14-4	7.8

Source: SCLA, Stoneleigh Abbey bills, series DR18/5

In assessing Mary Leigh's metropolitan shopping behaviour, we need to consider how the spatial distribution of suppliers reflected London's broader retail geography and in particular the extent to which she looked to suppliers in fashionable shopping streets. From this, it should be possible to assess the extent to which she was motivated by convenience, reputation or prestige; did she shop locally or was she influenced by the pull of prestigious or specialist retail locations?

²⁹ J. Stobart, 'Gentlemen and shopkeepers: supplying the country house in eighteenth-century England', *Economic History Review* 64:3 (2011), 885-904

³⁰ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 168-72 G. Eland (ed.) *Purefoy Letters, 1735-53* (London, 1931), passim; Berry, 'Prudent luxury'. On the general importance of London as a shopping centre, see: N. Cox and K. Dannehl, *Perceptions of Retailing in Early-Modern England* (Aldershot, 2007), 127-44.

In 1803, a guidebook entitled *The Picture of London* informed its readers that the capital's key shopping streets were arranged in two lengthy east-west axes (Figure 1).³¹ One ran from Leadenhall Street, Cornhill and Cheapside in the City, along Fleet Street and the Strand to Charing Cross. The other went from Shoreditch through Bishopsgate, Threadneedle Street, Newgate Street and then out along Holborn, St Giles and Oxford Street. Intersecting these ran a number of important cross streets including Gracechurch Street (leading down to London Bridge), Covent Garden, St James Street, Piccadilly and New Bond Street. What is notable here is the continued importance of older shopping streets within the City of London alongside the growth of newer centres further west. It is interesting, therefore, to note that the shops patronised by Judith Baker in her trips to London in the third quarter of the eighteenth century reflect only part of this broader distribution.³² Lodging with family near Grosvenor Square, she shopped in nearby New Bond Street, Hanover Square and Berkeley Square; slightly further afield in Jermyn Street and Coventry Street, and about two miles distant on Strand and Holborn. Although Berry does not present a comprehensive geographical analysis of Baker's shopping, it seems that she eschewed shops in the City, despite their continued importance in supplying the needs of wealthy Londoners.

Mary's shopping in the 1750s and 1760s appears to show a similar preference for the west-end (Figure 2). Of the 42 retailers patronised, only four were on streets in the city or around Holborn. There was a strong cluster around Covent Garden and on the Strand, from whom Mary bought textiles, groceries and coaches, and looser concentrations around Piccadilly, and another around Grosvenor Square and Hanover Square, who supplied a wide range of goods. What we have, then, is a distribution which suggests that Mary shopped most often in the immediate vicinity of her home or went to the fashionable shopping streets around Covent Garden – just what we might expect of a young and well-to-do London resident. But this simple distribution tells only part of the story. If we examine the number of bills presented and their value, a much more complex and interesting set of behaviours begin to emerge (Table 3). Suppliers in the West-End were not only most numerous; they also enjoyed the greatest number of transactions with Mary. However, the amount spent and the size of the bills presented was generally very modest, on average just £2 or £3. Mary Budd, a haberdasher and milliner of Bruton Street near Berkeley Square, was exceptional. She presented eight bills with a total value over £55, including one for Brussels lace which came to £22 3s.³³ More typical were the china dealer, Edward Fogg of New Bond Street, and Samuel Brunt, whose Water Warehouse was on Saville

³¹ *The Picture of London*, 1803; quoted in A. Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping 1800-1914* (second edition, London, 1989), 5.

³² Berry, 'Prudent luxury', 143-52.

³³ SCLA, DR18/5/4331.

Street in Burlington Gardens, who between them presented nine bills to a total value of £3 17s 4d.³⁴ The impression that these were not Mary's main suppliers is reinforced by the type of goods being bought: gloves, lace and millinery; small quantities of cloth; perfumed soap, tea cups, mineral water and toys. Indeed, it is possible that some of the transactions recorded in these bills were made casually or as part of Mary's social round. The regular purchases of mineral water from Samuel Brunt in the winter of 1765 and the knife cases, earrings, buckles, snuff boxes, garter buckles and patch boxes had from Peter Russell at Charing Cross in the early 1750s might both fall into this category.³⁵

Table 3. The distribution of London retailers supplying Mary Leigh, 1750-1806

	1750-1769			1786-1806		
	No. of bills	Total (£ s d)	Mean (£ s d)	No. of bills	Total (£ s d)	Mean (£ s)
Holborn / City	18	267-12-11	14-17-0	60	2502-10-11	41-14-0
Strand / Covent Garden	47	466-18-5	9-18-0	18	506-3-0	28-2-0
Piccadilly	33	53-0-11	1-12-0	20	206-2-5	10-6-0
Grosvenor / Hanover Square	34	94-17-10	2-16-0	42	590-16-4	14-1-0
Charing Cross / Soho	88	17-15-8	1-8-0	36	1460-2-8	40-11-0

Source: SCLA, Stoneleigh Abbey bills, series DR18/5

This 'local' shopping was important in reflecting and shaping Mary's identity as a wealthy and titled young woman, not least in terms of the amount of her time that it occupied. It is unlikely that she visited all of these shops in person, but Mary would still need to bespeak and approve the wide range of goods supplied.³⁶ However, if we judge the importance of a retailer and the goods supplied by their monetary value, then it is clear that the real centre of gravity of Mary's shopping lay further east.

Strand and the streets around Covent Garden stand out in terms of the number of bills presented and the total value of goods purchased. This area contained some of Mary's key suppliers, including the mercers, Croft and Hinchcliff of Henrietta Street, and the coach makers, Thomas and James Cope, on Long Acre. Between them, these retailers sold Mary over £365 of goods and were patronised over a number of years. They supplied major items, amongst them a

³⁴ See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/3986, DR18/5/4252.

³⁵ Respectively, SCLA, DR18/5/4252, DR18/5/4263, DR18/5/4264; and SCLA, DR18/5/3180, DR18/5/3334, DR18/5/3402, DR18/5/3565, DR18/5/3620.

³⁶ Walsh, 'Shops, shopping'.

post chaise, ‘neatly run and carv’d, painted stone colour with ornaments on the panels of China figures, coats of arms and cyphers’, and dress lengths of superfine black bombazine, richest double damask, striped lustring and so on.³⁷ It was suppliers such as these that allowed Mary to present herself in a manner befitting her wealth and status. In this, they were joined by a second set of retailers located further towards the City of London. Most important in this respect were the partnership of Carr, Ibbetson, Bigge, Packard & Gibson, at the Queen’s Head in Ludgate Hill, near St Paul’s cathedral. They billed Mary on ten occasions, to a total value of £195 7s supplying the highest quality dress materials, including ‘blue ground brocade’ at 13s per yard, ‘white flower’d and water’d tabby’ at 12s per yard.³⁸ The impressive public appearance created by dresses made from these textiles was augmented by the jewellery bought from Thomas Gilpin of Serle Street, near Lincoln’s Inn Fields – another of Mary’s major suppliers.³⁹

The geography of Mary’s London shopping in the 1750s and 1760s was complex. As a young woman, she blended major purchases from key suppliers around Covent Garden, Holborn and St Paul’s with a larger number of smaller purchases from shops closer to her West-End home. This was particularly apparent with clothing textiles – her major area of expenditure. Two decades later, when she had inherited Stoneleigh Abbey and was setting up home in Kensington, Mary’s London shopping habits had changed considerably. The larger number of food retailers is unsurprising, given the overall shift in her spending patterns, but the marked shift to the east is perhaps more remarkable, especially in the context of a general drift westwards of fashionable shopping, towards Oxford Street and later Regent Street.⁴⁰

As noted earlier, Mary’s local shopping increasingly took place around Kensington; her London suppliers were arranged more loosely (Figure 3). The broad groupings in the West-End, around Grosvenor Square and Piccadilly, had effectively merged and continued to supply a wide range of goods, including groceries, china, furniture and clothing. There were far fewer suppliers around Covent Garden, perhaps reflecting its slow decline downmarket, and an increased number along St Martin’s Lane and north into Soho. Again these provided a range of goods. Most striking is the growing importance of Holborn and the City, especially in the provision of groceries. How we best understand this distribution is again nuanced by the frequency and size of transactions (Table 3). Bills from West-End retailers had grown in absolute terms, but

³⁷ SCLA, DR18/5/3738, DR18/5/3062.

³⁸ SCLA, DR18/5/4303, DR18/5/4441. Importantly, these textiles were bought in 21 and 23 yard lengths; those from Croft and Hinchcliff were in 12 and 16 yard lengths, suggesting more complex and elaborate dresses. See A. Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1979).

³⁹ SCLA, DR/15/5/3136a. For a fuller discussion of the importance of jewellery, see M. Pointon, ‘Jewellery in eighteenth-century England’, in M. Berg and H. Clifford (eds), *Consumers and Luxury. Consumer Culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester, 1999).

⁴⁰ Adburghan, *Shops and Shopping*, 12-18.

declined in relative terms. Most suppliers were patronised on a number of occasions, but supplied relatively small quantities of goods: William Clarke presented five bills for stationery amounting to just £21 8s 8d, whilst J Patterson sold Mary a total of £10 11s 1d of turnery goods, split across five bills.⁴¹ Such purchases form a continuation of Mary's earlier use of shops in this area. However, some West-End retailers became more significant suppliers, most notably Thomas Ballard, who sold her tea, coffee and chocolate on twenty-three occasions between 1789 and 1800. These purchases were both regular and involved high quality goods including fine hyson and souchong tea, finest plain chocolate and best mocha coffee.⁴²

In another change from her earlier practice, it is unlikely that Mary visited any of these shops in person, preferring to send out to trusted and reputable dealers. This was also true of her other major suppliers of groceries, most of whom were located in the City or on Holborn. This area now formed by far the most important in terms of both volume and value of transactions, despite including just nine suppliers. Two grocers stood out: Frances Field (later Field and Lewis) on Holborn and North, Hoare & Hanson on New Bridge Street, just west of St Paul's. Between them, these two businesses billed Mary on twenty-seven occasions and for a total of £736 11s 8d. Most bills were consolidated accounts, itemising a wide range of groceries ordered over a number of months, and they included a variety of high quality and novel items. That from Frances Field settled on 23 November 1789 was fairly typical. It covered the period February to November and included superfine mustard, japan soy, mushroom ketchup, truffles and best wax candles.⁴³ We cannot be certain of the precise reasons why Mary turned to these grocers to supply her needs in Kensington and at Stoneleigh Abbey. However, but one point is clear: their spatial location relative to home was unimportant as the goods were clearly dispatched by carrier, in much the same way as Elizabeth Purefoy ordered groceries from her Bedfordshire home.⁴⁴

These grocers were important in allowing Mary to dine and entertain in an appropriate manner. The other key supplier in this geographical area was also closely involved in the presentation of her table, but in a very different way. Robert and Thomas Makepeace supplied a total of £1518 11s 11d of silverware to Mary, spread across nine bills. Much of this was for engraved tableware including waiters, tureens, beef dishes, toast trays, tea vases, coffee pots and candle sticks.⁴⁵

⁴¹ See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/6044, DR18/5/6315, DR18/5/6312, DR18/5/6554.

⁴² SCLA, DR18/5/5851, DR18/5/5998.

⁴³ SCLA, Dr18/5/5865. For fuller discussion of these groceries, see J. Stobart, *Sugar and Spice. Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1650-1830* (Oxford, 2013), 50-55. On the importance of wax candles, see Greig, 'Beau Monde', 298-99.

⁴⁴ Frances Field's bill includes regular charges for hampers into which the goods would be packed. See also Eland, *Purefoy Letters*, nos 103, 104, 105, 106, 107.

⁴⁵ SCLA, DR18/5/5809.

Such goods would have been central to her self-image as a wealthy land owner, especially when they were engraved with the family crest and arms. It is unsurprising, then, that she patronised one of the foremost silversmiths in London, located in an area traditionally associated with such trades.⁴⁶

This willingness to send out to high status suppliers helps to explain the dispersed nature of Mary's shopping in the late eighteenth century. A similar process can be seen in the growing importance of suppliers around Soho Square and along St Martin's Lane. The former included Josiah Wedgwood, who was at the height of his reputation at this time. Mary acquired from him a large quantity of tableware in 'Green Greek Border' and a smaller amount of Queensware – fashionable chinaware that would have added extra lustre to the dining and tea table.⁴⁷ Much more important in terms of financial outlay and public image was the livery acquired from the Fells of St Martin's Lane. Their nine bills amounted to over £1110, making them second only to Makepeace in their importance to Mary's material culture. In part, this growth helps to explain the marked decline in importance of Covent Garden retailers – London's retailing was moving inexorably westwards. Also important, though, was the marked shift in Mary's spending away from clothing for herself. In the 1760s, Covent Garden stood out in terms of bills for drapery and haberdashery; by the 1790s and 1800s, there was only one retailer in the area serving this need: the laceman, R Bentley & Sons of Bedford Street.⁴⁸

Mary's London shopping thus changed in geography as its character shifted from the preoccupations of a young and wealthy woman to those of a major and extremely rich landowner. In part, she followed the tide of shopping as it shifted westwards, but she also sought out suppliers in more traditional retail streets further east, as well as drawing on local suppliers around her Kensington home. Whilst it is impossible to know for certain, it is possible that another important factor was the relative mobility of Mary and the goods she was acquiring. In the earlier period, it seems likely that she was visiting at least some of the shops in person; by the 1790s, it is apparent that most goods were ordered and dispatched remotely. Her skills as a shopper and experience of shopping would have changed accordingly, as would the expectations she placed on the shopkeeper.⁴⁹ Berry argues that that Judith Baker used a small set of suppliers, her choice being 'predicated upon a system of patronage, personal acquaintance

⁴⁶ H. Clifford, *Silver in London: The Parker and Wakelin Partnership 1760-1776* (New Haven, 2004).

⁴⁷ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 145-53. SCLA, DR18/5/5684, DR18/5/5724.

⁴⁸ See, for example: SCLA, DR18/5/6040, DR18/5/6181.

⁴⁹ Walsh, *Shops, shopping*'.

and credit'.⁵⁰ How far was this also true of Mary and to what extent did her choices and loyalties change over the course of her life?

Loyalty and choice: the relationship with suppliers

Most studies which attempt to explore the relationship between buyers and sellers focus on relatively short periods of time and often encompass single episodes in the lives of consumers.⁵¹ The bills presented to Mary over the course of her long life allow us to at least partly address this lacuna. They can be used to assess the longevity of suppliers; the extent to which Mary relied on particular suppliers or spread her spending more widely, and some of the factors influencing her choices.

Running a retail business in eighteenth-century England was a notoriously risky undertaking. Bankruptcy was an ever-present threat for many shopkeepers and even the most assiduous shopkeeper was vulnerable to suppliers or customers defaulting on their debts. The upshot of this was that relatively few retail businesses lasted for more than a single generation.⁵² In this context, we might expect the period of her brother's madness, when Mary was acting as a Commissioner for the family estate, to form a major break in the continuity of supply. Quite apart from the long time period involved, the nadir in spending which this episode ushered in would have broken links with previously important suppliers. Moreover, the spending patterns of the young Mary were very different from those of her older self, and would have necessitated a certain refocusing of supply. It is unsurprising then, that no retailers supplying Mary in the 1750s and 1760s continued to do so once she had inherited the estate in 1786.

Some continuity was afforded by her engagement of tradesmen and craftsmen previously employed by Edward, her brother. Michael Clarke, for instance, carried out masonry work at Stoneleigh in the 1760s and continued to do so through the period of the Commission and into the 1780s. Similarly William Butler of Kenilworth supplied livery from the 1760s to the 1790s, whilst Mary bought livery from the London tailors who had formerly supplied her brother's clothing.⁵³ More telling in terms of Mary's shopping practices was her loyalty to certain suppliers over the years either side of this divide. Through the 1750s and 1760s, she patronised

⁵⁰ Berry, 'Prudent luxury', 146.

⁵¹ See, for example: Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, esp 113-28, 166-83, 207-30; Walsh, 'Shops, shopping'; Berry, 'Prudent luxury'; Finn, 'Men's things'.

⁵² N. Cox, *The Complete Tradesman. A Study of Retailing, 1550-1820* (Aldershot, 2000), ???; D. Alexander, *Retailing in England during the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1970), ???; Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, 154-7.

⁵³ See, respectively: SCLA, DR18/5/3964, DR18/5/6427; DR18/5/4657, DR18/5/6051; and DR18/5/4575, DR18/5/5894.

eight retailers for a period of ten years or more: two glove makers, two drapers, a dress maker, a coach maker, a grocer and a silversmith. With the last of these, Thomas Gilpin of Serle Street in London, only three purchases were made over a fifteen year period, but she nonetheless returned him. Such infrequency was extreme, but not exceptional; only the coach makers James and Thomas Cope, and the drapers Carr, Ibbetson, Bigge, Packard & Gibson presented bills on more than ten occasions. Whilst many bills reflected cumulative accounts, long-term relationships with retailers clearly did not depend on frequent visits or purchases. Much the same was true in the later period when the number of long-term retailers rose to eleven. These comprised three grocers, two stationers, two livery drapers, a silversmith, a draper, a laceman and an apothecary, of whom only the grocer, Thomas Ballard, and the livery draper, William Butler, presented more than ten bills. Mary, like Judith Baker, was loyal to a core set of suppliers, but the locus of this loyalty had been transformed in accordance with her changing consumption priorities. The earlier emphasis was on those supplying her with personal clothing and adornments; later on it was centred more on providing for her bodily needs, her table and her public displays of status. Her trusted suppliers were thus central to her shifting status and identity.

Loyalty did not mean monopoly and Mary was rarely reliant upon a single supplier to provide particular goods. Indeed, we can see a variety of arrangements through which Mary acquired the goods she wanted. For high value and high status items, she usually went to a specific favoured London tradesman: James and Thomas Cope, and later John Hatchett for coaches; Thomas Gilpin and then Robert and Thomas Makepeace for silverware. However, even for these goods, she occasionally went elsewhere: George Wright rented her horses and coaches in the 1760s; and both Thomas Chesson of Ludgate Hill and Peter Russel of Charing Cross supplied small amounts of jewellery in the 1750s.⁵⁴ For other goods, we can see Mary splitting her custom for geographical convenience. Livery for her London servants came first from Mayne and Thom and later from the Fells, hats being provided by Davies and Lee of Conduit Street, 'Hatters to her Majesty'. That for her Stoneleigh servants was provided by William Butler.⁵⁵ A third arrangement was to split her requirements according to the specific nature of the goods required. This is most obvious in the case of clothing, where the services of drapers, mercers, haberdashers, lacemen and dress makers would all be required to create a gown; glovers and jewellers and perfumers might then be needed to complete the ensemble.⁵⁶ Indeed, the nuances could go further because, as we have already noted, Mary appears to have used different drapers for different qualities of cloth. However, specialisation can also be seen in groceries:

⁵⁴ See, for example: SCLA, DR18/5/4153a, DR18/5/4512, DR18/5/3214, DR18/5/3565, DR18/5/3334.

⁵⁵ SCLA, DR18/5/5705, DR18/5/6097,

⁵⁶ On the complexities of supply for dress, see Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England*.

Ballard being preferred for tea and coffee; Field for Italian goods, and North, Hoare & Hanson for sugar, dried fruit and spices.⁵⁷

We should be cautious of pushing too far the argument for this kind of differentiation. Taking groceries as an example, Mary patronised six different retailers in the early 1790s, five of them in London. Of these, only Thomas Ballard was used for a narrow range of goods – tea, coffee and chocolate – and these were not his exclusive domain, also being purchased from William Leaper in Coventry and North, Hoare & Hanson in London. Sugar was purchased from all the grocers except Ballard, and a range of spices and fruit from four different shops. In short, whilst Mary may not have been actively shopping around, she certainly spread her custom around, perhaps responding to differences in quality or availability. As Walsh argues, ‘early-modern housewives were not shopping for standardized quality, but the best quality they could lay their hands on at a given time’.⁵⁸ In this, Mary may have resembled Elizabeth Purefoy, who wrote to her grocers complaining, amongst other things, about the quality of tea (‘pray don’t let your Bohea tea be so full of dust as your last was’) or the price of sugar (‘let me have a better pennyworth than the last, for my neighbour had a better sugar at that price’).⁵⁹ That said, Elizabeth was also aware of the benefits of sticking with the same supplier, especially when shopping remotely: they would be ‘better used’, especially if payments were promptly made.⁶⁰

It is impossible to know with certainty the reasons behind Mary’s choice of supplier. We can be pretty sure that she, like other shoppers, would have been influenced by considerations of convenience and price, although her wealth would have shielded her from these to a great extent, especially later in life. More important, then, were the quality of goods and the reputation of the shopkeeper. Quality could be judged in person, most readily by visiting the shop, but also by having samples sent to one’s home.⁶¹ This was standard practice amongst drapers and mercers dealing with the aristocracy and we know that Mary gained first-hand knowledge of the cloth in this way because one bill, from Thomas Gladhill of Cheapside, included a small sample of black and grey striped velveteen, probably intended for a servants’ waistcoat.⁶² Other goods were less amenable to this kind of treatment; although samples of tea and coffee could certainly be tasted ahead of purchase, this generally had to be done in the shop.⁶³ Instead, the quality of products was often emphasised post-purchase through their

⁵⁷ See also Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, 192-4, 208-9.

⁵⁸ Walsh, ‘Shopping at first hand’, 14.

⁵⁹ *Purefoy Letters*, nos 103, 105.

⁶⁰ *Purefoy Letters*, no. 104.

⁶¹ Walsh, ‘Shops, shopping’; J. Stobart, A. Hann and V. Morgan, *Spaces of Consumption. Leisure and Shopping in the English Town, c.1680-1830* (London, 2007), 157.

⁶² SCLA, DR18/5/5776.

⁶³ Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, ????.

description on bills. Thus we see tea and coffee labelled as ‘finest’ or bombazine as ‘superfine’, whilst furniture and silverware are described in a manner that underlines their quality and the craftsmanship involved in their manufacture; for example, ‘a set of Dressing Boxes with Elegant painted Landscapes and Gold Borders’ supplied by Henry Clay, latterly of King Street, Covent Garden.⁶⁴

The reputation of the retailer was also important when making choices as a shopper.⁶⁵ To some extent, this could be borrowed from the previous proprietor of a shop or from the employer or partnership from which a newly established retailer had come. Thus we see Pache and Davis, whose bill head declared that they were, respectively, the ‘Successor to Mr Roubelou’ and ‘From Mr Wilmot, the corner of Norfolk Street’.⁶⁶ More often, however, reputation was enhanced through association, often in terms of links with the aristocracy or royalty. Wedgwood famously styled himself ‘Potter to Her Majesty’, but we can see similar claims being made by Davies and Lee (‘Hatters to her Majesty’) and by Samuel Crowther of Swallow Street, St James’ (‘Whip Maker to their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York’), amongst many others.⁶⁷ This kind of association operated in the public sphere, drawing on well-known figures to add lustre to the retailer or craftsman and the goods they had for sale, effectively stamping them with a mark of quality. It also assured current and potential customers that the tradesman was trustworthy.

Trust was central to the relationship between retailer and customer, but was particularly problematic in a metropolitan context where the number of shops and consumers made the establishment of personal and trusting relationships difficult to establish and maintain. One solution was to stick with known retailers, as Judith Baker did through the 1760s and 1770s; another was to draw on the knowledge of metropolitan friends and family to advise not only on matters of taste and fashion, but also which supplier to use.⁶⁸ The extent to which this took place within families has yet to be fully explored, especially beyond the marital home. For Mary, it appears to have been an important influence on her choice of retailer, despite the fact that her scope for inheriting suppliers was limited by the early death of her parents.⁶⁹ Indeed, she drew on several retailers and craftsmen who had previously been patronised by her father and even her grandfather. Thomas Gilpin had supplied Edward, third Lord Leigh, with engraved casters,

⁶⁴ SCLA, DR18/5/5890. For fuller discussion of this practice, see J. Stobart, ‘The language of luxury goods. Consumption and the English country house, c.1760-1830’, *Virtus*, 18 (2011), 89-104.

⁶⁵ Cox, *Complete Tradesman*, ???; J. Stobart, ‘Selling (through) politeness: advertising provincial shops in eighteenth-century England’, *Cultural and Social History*, 5:2 (2008), 309-328.

⁶⁶ SCLA, DR18/5/3927.

⁶⁷ SCLA, DR18/5/6097, DR18/5/5886.

⁶⁸ Berry, ‘Prudent luxury’; Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, 168-72, 180-2, 191-2; Walsh, ‘Shops, shopping’.

⁶⁹ In their absence, it is possible that her guardian, Elizabeth Verney, had an important influence, but we have no information on her purchasing patterns.

spoons and in 1737; Thomas, fourth Lord Leigh, with a range of silverware and jewellery in the 1740s, and Edward, fifth Lord Leigh with over £750 of jewellery and silverware in a consolidated bill running from September 1763 to May 1764.⁷⁰ More mundanely, the locksmith Thomas Blockley carried out work for Thomas in 1747, billed his executors for work in 1753, Edward's guardians in the 1750s, and Mary in 1768.⁷¹ There were many more suppliers used initially by Edward and then taken up by Mary. These included a number of London tradesmen: the coach makers James and Thomas Cope and John Hatchett, the upholsterer Thomas Burnett, the draper William Fell, the livery draper Joseph Kenn, and the bookseller James Robson. In some ways, these introductions are unsurprising, especially given the ostensibly masculine or dynastic nature of many of these goods. However, their significance is heightened if we remember that Mary was resident in London, whilst her brother appears to have visited the capital only occasionally. The normal direction of information flow was restored for other retailers, Mary seemingly introducing Edward to a range of retailers, many of them selling textiles or food. Her willingness to follow her brother's lead in these important areas perhaps reflected a need to be guided to trustworthy suppliers of goods about which she otherwise had little knowledge.

Conclusions

This paper has offered important new insights into the ways in which spending and shopping practices changes over the lifecourse of the individual. By focusing on the life of a wealthy and titled woman as she moved from youthful freedom to the responsibilities of older age, it is apparent that single status brought with it considerable freedom to act. Mary was not constrained by the presence of a husband or even parents, although we must presume that her guardian exercised considerable influence over her spending and behaviour, at least before she came of age. More important than this, however, were the parameters laid down by her family role – not as wife or daughter, but as a wealthy heiress and later a substantial landowner with obligations to those who bequeathed her the estate, those who lived and worked there, and those who would inherit it in the future. The key factors shaping what, where and how she acquired goods were thus her gender and marital status, more increasingly her social status, rank and dignity. Her marked attachment to London retailers is a feature noted for many members of the elite, not least because they spent at least some of their time in the capital. This meant that, for many, these were local suppliers. However, it would be a mistake to see Mary's

⁷⁰ SCLA, DR18/5/1989, Dr18/5/2100, DR48/5/2395, DR18/5/4251.

⁷¹ SCLA, DR18/5/2869, DR18/5/3670, DR18/5/4601.

shopping behaviour purely as a product of residential location – she did not simply shop locally. Nor was it a straightforward reflection of the overarching logic of London’s retail geography – she swam against the tide that drew shops inexorably to the West-End. Rather, it was a combination of these factors and others: her changing needs and personal preferences; the reputation of retailers, and their ability to meet the needs of a peripatetic consumer. Particularly striking is the way in which suppliers changed as her needs shifted, although the importance of London remained. The implications of this for provincial retailers have yet to fully explored. Absentee landlords were seen as a problem, but even their presence might not bring the benefits often assumed to flow from the great house. This problem was especially severe when the owner was single and mobile, as was the case with Mary Leigh. Her relationship with town and country was complex and changed as her lifecourse infolded and her links to other places ebbed and flowed.