A Treasury of Comfort: A Study of Elite Comfort in the Long Eighteenth Century

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Abstract

This study examines the significance of comfort in elite lives in the long eighteenth century. With a focus on the correspondence of six gentry families from the East Midlands and the aspects of their lives which were most frequently discussed within it, this thesis argues that comfort was an integral feature of the elite experience. By its exploration of familial and social relationships, illness and death and how they interacted with and shaped the comfort of family members, this study demonstrates the complex and diverse nature of comfort, which was comprised of emotional, spiritual, financial, social, as well as the more commonly studied, physical comfort. This examination also demonstrates the fragility of elite comfort, the effort that was often required to achieve it and how a seemingly privileged lifestyle did not imply that comfort was guaranteed. This in-depth study marks a change as it considers elite comfort from a broader perspective than has perhaps been undertaken previously. It extends beyond that of the physical comfort afforded by advances in furniture design, for instance, as well as considering the comfort of the elite family from both within but also outside of the confines of the country house. With this broader coverage of comfort and its interrelationship with the various aspects of elite life, this thesis also provides a fresh perspective from which to consider other, more established, areas of historical analysis such as the family, sociability and death.

Introduction

A 'treasury of comfort' was how Frances Stackhouse Acton described her daughter's notebook.[1] The young woman had begun to inscribe some of her favourite passages into it but had died, at the age of eighteen, before she had the chance to complete it. Frances detailed the comfort that she had found in both the handwriting of her dearly departed child as well as the sentiments of her final written words on a page; and used the remaining space in the notebook to chronicle the last three years of her daughter's short life, which was characterised by illness, hope, pain, faith and ultimately, death. In doing so, Frances not only documented the day-to-day struggles and concerns that she and her daughter shared but also appeared to place comfort at the heart of each of them. Hardly a page is turned without the importance of comfort, often her daughter's and occasionally her own, being mentioned and in just a few short pages, she demonstrated just how crucial comfort was to both of their lives. Frances' choice of the word 'treasury' to describe the notebook was also telling. In his *Dictionary of the English Language,* Samuel Johnson defined a 'treasury' as 'a place in which riches are accumulated' and its meaning appears to have changed very little since the mid-eighteenth century as more recent definitions describe it as 'a place where treasure is kept' and 'a storage place for treasure'.[2] Johnson also defined 'treasure' as 'wealth hoarded' and 'riches accumulated' and with these, alongside the definition of 'treasury', in mind it is possible to imagine just how valuable the notebook and its contents were to Frances.[3] Her daughter's annotations were the treasure and the notebook within

[1] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, Bedfordshire Archives (hereafter referred to as B.A.).
[2] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Edition 8, Volume II (London: A. Millar, W. Law and B. Cater) 1792, p. 446; *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.973; *Collins Online Dictionary,* (2024) [Accessed 02/03/2024], <TREASURY definition and meaning | Collins English Dictionary (collinsdictionary.com)>
[3] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol II, p. 446.

which they were encased, its repository. The comfort that Frances derived from this 'treasury' appeared significant, yet it prompts the question, was it the notebook itself or the comfort that it afforded that should be considered the real treasure? In an attempt to answer this question and demonstrate the significance of comfort, this thesis will explore the role that it played in the lives of elite families during the long eighteenth century. An examination of personal correspondence revealed some of the aspects of elite life that appeared to be the most significant to the correspondents themselves, particularly in terms of how much space they seemed to occupy in their letters. The themes that emerged included family relationships, sociability and the constraints that it could place on them, illness (of both family and acquaintances) and death; and what was discovered, was that comfort was intricately connected to all of those areas of their lives that the letter-writers revealed as being important to them. Consequently, these themes that emerged from the letters have each become an area of further analysis and the chapter headings in this thesis. It became apparent too that the correspondence itself played an important role as a key conveyor of comfort and as a result becomes the first area of examination in this thesis.

In more recent years there seems to have been a renewed focus on the value of comfort and its importance to physical as well as mental wellbeing. In 2021, popular author Matt Haig published *The Comfort Book*, a collection which he described as:

> Stuff learned in the bad times. Thoughts. Meditations. Lists. Examples. Things I want to remind myself of. Or things I have learned from other people or other lives.[4]

Described by booksellers Waterstones as 'a warm hug of a book,' *The Comfort Book* acknowledges the need for, and importance of, comfort and consolation 'when times

[4] Matt Haig, *The Comfort Book* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2021), p. vii.

are hard,' and Haig's hopes were that his compendium of 'comforting life lessons' would be a place in which a person could begin to look for 'a deep kind of comfort' in times of need.[5]

Simultaneously, there has also been a raft of different cookbooks produced since 2020 promoting the idea of 'comfort food', with an apparent emphasis on dishes that could conjure up nostalgic memories of childhood or happier, more care-free times. In the introduction of her 2020 publication, *Mary Berry's Simple Comforts,* in which she shares over 120 different recipes, Berry describes comfort food as being 'like a big warm hug for most of us'.[6] The use of the phrase 'warm hug' in relation to both Haig and Berry's books is interesting because fundamentally they are very distinct books. Haig hoped to bolster and encourage those experiencing depression and self-doubt whilst Berry wanted to encourage the cooking and eating of familiar and nostalgic meals. Both, however, aimed to provide comfort, albeit it in different ways, and the image of the 'warm hug' is a somewhat evocative one; is the imagined physical warmth emanating from the closeness and intimacy of another human being how comfort should be defined?

The Danish concept of 'hygge' (pronounced hoo-ga) has also been the focus of a plethora of well-being and lifestyle books with some selling over a million copies each.[7] Promoted as 'a quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being', this specifically Scandinavian form of comfort is about feeling grateful for things, however small, that bring comfort, happiness, pleasure or joy from such diverse things as spending time with family and friends, to

[5] *Waterstones*, (2023) [accessed 19 June 2023], <https://www.waterstones.com/book/the-comfort-book/matt-haig/9781786898326>; Haig, *The Comfort Book,* p. x, p. vii and p. x.
[6] Mary Berry, *Mary Berry's Simple Comforts,* (London: Ebury Publishing, 2020), p. 1.
[7] Meik Wiking, T*he Little Book of Hygge: The Danish Way to Love Well* (UK: Penguin Life, 2016); Louisa Thomsen Brits, *The Book of Hygge: The Danish Art of Contentment, Comfort, and Connection* (New York: Plume, 2017).

being wrapped up in a warm blanket or going on a bicycle ride.[8] It has been suggested that hygge is a 'defining characteristic of Danish culture', yet regardless of whether this is the case or not, what is significant is that this particular brand or culture of comfort appears to have been, and continues to be, marketed as an aspirational, almost essential, lifestyle choice by its advocates.[9] This in itself suggests that those authors, companies and retailers who participate in this seemingly global promotion of hygge, recognise that there still remains an important need for comfort in the twenty first century.

This ubiquity of comfort in the twenty-first century is reminiscent of its omnipresence in the eighteenth. Then, the word comfort (along with its many synonyms including consolation and ease) appeared regularly in elite family letters and was often 'deployed by people…to describe their emotions in relation to other people'.[10] Comfort then, as it seems now, was considered an integral aspect of life as well as an important human need. Why this new focus on comfort has developed in the way that it has is not clear; but the uncertainties, anxieties and stresses resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and crises such as climate change, wars in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as the increase in the cost of living must have influenced this desire and need for comfort in a world that can feel overwhelming, unstable and, at times, dangerous. But what all three examples outlined here demonstrate is that whichever form it takes, whether from an extract written in a book, a home cooked meal reminiscent of childhood or just spending time with family – the search and need for comfort appears to be an important feature of postmodern life. It may be a conscious decision, such as purposefully seeking out

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[8] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (2023) [Accessed 17/06/2023], < hygge - Quick search results | Oxford English Dictionary (oed.com)>; Wiking, T*he Little Book of Hygge: The Danish Way to Love Well,* p. 44.

[9] *Afar,* (2023) [Accessed 17/06/2023], < https://www.afar.com/magazine/what-is-hygge-everything-to-know-about-denmarks-cozy-lifestyle>

[10] Jon Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), p. 186.

extracts in a book from which comfort may be derived or less so, such as merely appreciating the company of a friend, but it is a key feature, nonetheless. What these examples demonstrate too is that comfort can mean different things to different people, which, as a consequence, makes it a very challenging concept to both define and categorise. This difficulty, however, does not mean that it should not be examined more closely. Despite its lack of definition, comfort is a concept that both exists and existed within different cultures and across different periods, and so remains a subject worthy of wider historical analysis.

This thesis, therefore, will demonstrate that the need and desire for comfort was just as important for elite families in the long eighteenth century as it seems to be for people today and it will also highlight that the places from which comfort was both sought and found was as discursive then as it appears to be now. The presence of comfort, and its obverse, discomfort within the differing aspects of elite life demonstrates the importance and omnipresence of comfort at this time. The more recent attention and focus on comfort suggests that to feel and be comforted, to feel and be comfortable and to offer and provide comfort is an essential part of human existence and this is something that the research undertaken as part of this thesis also suggested. Katie Barclay argues that emotional experience 'shapes the everyday' and it is this which is the crux of this thesis' argument – comfort, in all its guises, was an integral, even essential part of life.[11] To define comfort, therefore, as a 'warm hug' does not reflect its complicated, paradoxical, overarching and omnipresent qualities. It does not demonstrate that it could have an 'edge', that it was negotiated, that it might need to be compromised, or that it could be sought and found in the most harrowing of

[11] Katie Barclay *Caritas: Neighbourly Love and the Early Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 13.

circumstances or that the areas of life that it would be expected to be found may fall short at times.[12] Any simple definition of comfort could not sufficiently reveal its multifarious meanings and its central role in the elite existence. This thesis, however, will attempt to do just that.

Etymology of Comfort

An examination of the etymology of the word comfort reveals a literary presence that dates from the thirteenth century. ‘Comfort’ appeared in the *Ancrene Riwle,* a book of instruction written in about 1230 for three women, known as anchoresses, who had chosen a life of religiosity and solitude.[13] This was later adapted under the title *Ancrene Wisse* for use by others who pursued a similarly ‘anchoritic life’.[14] This guide not only provided its readers with both a list of ‘nine comforts against temptation’ it also highlighted the spiritual comfort that could be found through the contemplation of ‘the image of God’. Indeed, the anchoresses were assured that ‘this sight…will comfort you more than any worldly sight’.[15] Just these two examples suggest that the word comfort, which was being utilised as a means of finding consolation as well as gratification, could have different meanings. Comfort also appeared in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. In the Tale of Melibeus, Chaucer wrote:

> he is a fool that destourbeth the moder to wepen in the deeth of hir child,
>
> til she have wept hir fille, as for a certein tyme.

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[12] *Ibid*. p. 9.
[13] *British Library*, (2024) [Accessed 21/7/2024],<Medieval Anchoresses and the Ancrene Riwle - Medieval manuscripts blog>
[14] Cate Gunn, *Ancrene Wisse: From Pastoral Literature to Vernacular Spirituality* (Cardiff: University of Cardiff Press, 2008), p. 2.
[15] *Ibid.,* p. 170.

> and thanne shal man doon his diligence with amiable wordes hir to reconforte, and preyen hir of hir weping for to stinte.[16]

The word 'reconforte' used here is the French word for comfort; and its context within the wider narrative refers to a grief-stricken mother being consoled and supported on the death of her child.[17] This particular aspect of comfort will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis but what this example demonstrates, was that the idea of comfort, included in this literary work that would have had a much wider target audience than *Ancrene Riwle,* was familiar, recognisable and deemed necessary. The word comfort had also now started to appear in correspondence. In a letter written to English landowner John Paston in 1461, he was thanked 'hertly' for his letter and then advised that it had been a 'gret comfort to her fro you'.[18] The Paston letters in particular included the words 'comfort' and 'comfortable' somewhat frequently throughout, with this example cited here demonstrating the relief with which Paston's wife Margaret had received his letter. Yet within the Paston collection there was also evidence of comfort being used in a more physical sense. In a letter written in February 1452, John Paston was asked to visit Calais with the King where he 'shul have a stope of bere to comfort you after your travaille of the see'.[19] This was a very early indication of comfort being used to refer to physical relief or satisfaction which does not really appear in the more modern dictionaries until the mid-nineteenth century.

The word comfort could also be found throughout the writings of William Shakespeare. In *Romeo and Juliet,* for example, it appeared frequently:

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[16] Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website (2020) [Accessed 03/12/2020] <7.4 The Tale of Melibee | Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer Website>
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] University of Michigan Library, (2024), [Accessed 21/07/2024] <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/Paston?rgn=main;view=fulltext>
[19] *The Paston Letters, A.D. 1422-1509,* ed. by James Gairdner, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 257.

O God! O Nurse, how shall this be prevented?

My husband is on earth, my faith in heaven.

How shall that faith return again to earth

Unless that husband send it me from heaven

By leaving earth? Comfort me, counsel me!

Alack, alack, that heav'n should practice strategems

Upon so soft a subject as myself!

What say'st thou? Hast thou not a word of joy?

Some comfort, Nurse.[20]

In this extract, again, the meaning of comfort in both instances referred to support and consolation. However, the English word 'comfort' was being deployed here rather than the French 'reconforte' so this, along with the Paston letters, may be an indication of the increased familiarity and general use of 'comfort'. Around this time, 'comfort' appeared in Robert Cawdrey's, *Table Alphabeticall*. Published in 1604, it was a glossary of unknown or obscure words, in which 'comfort' was included as the meaning of the words 'consolation' and 'solace', which implied that it was becoming a well-known and established word that required neither definition nor explanation.[21] Yet, this publication failed to depict the multiplicity of meanings of comfort that the examples heretofore demonstrate. They have shown that comfort could mean gratification and relief as well as consolation. 'Relief' as a meaning of comfort did appear in John Kersey's 1713 *New English Dictionary,* where 'comfort' was defined both as a noun that denoted 'help, ease or relief in distress', and a verb which meant 'to afford comfort,

[20] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene IV in *The Illustrated Stratford Shakespeare* (London: Chancellor Press, 1989), p. 720.
[21] Robert Cawdrey, *Table Alphabeticall*, (London: Printed by W.I. for Edmund Weaver, 1617), p. 18 and p. 59.

to encourage' and, again, it was presented as a definition of the word 'consolation'.[22] Forty-two years later, its meaning appeared to have changed very little, when in Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, he described it in terms of '1. Support; assistance; countenance; 2. Consolation; support under calamity or danger; 3. That which gives consolation or support.'[23] It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that its definition appeared to start to evolve and as well as maintaining its traditional meanings it also started to include other, more physical and domestic aspects of comfort. In *An American Dictionary of the English Language,* which was published in 1841, Noah Webster's definition included 'that which gives security from want, and furnishes moderate enjoyment' although the emphasis, according to Jon Stobart, continued to focus primarily on 'ideas of support, strength, consolidation and cheer'.[24] However, Webster's definition also highlighted the connection between comfort and physical and mental well-being. In his definition he stated that 'to comfort' was 'to strengthen the mind when depressed or enfeebled; to console; to give new vigor to the spirits; to cheer, or relieve from depression, or trouble'.[25] 'Comfort' was also, according to Webster, 'relief from pain; ease; rest or moderate pleasure after pain, cold or distress, or uneasiness of body' and also a 'relief from distress of mind; the ease and quiet which is experienced when pain, trouble, agitation or affliction ceases'.[26] This definition suggested that the physicality of comfort was not solely confined to what Stobart describes as 'home comforts', but also referred to the idea of bodily comfort too.[27] The

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[22] Jon Stobart, 'Introduction: comfort, the home and home comforts', in *The Comforts of Home in Western Europe 1700 – 1900,* ed. by J. Stobart (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 11 – 23, p. 12; John Kersey, *A New English Dictionary; Or, A Compleat Collection of the Most Proper and Significant Words, and Terms of Art commonly used in the LANGUAGE; With a continued Short and Clear Exposition* (London: Robert Knaplock and R. and J. Bonwicke, 1713), p. 52.
[23] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol I, p. 198.
[24] Stobart, 'Introduction: comfort, the home and home comforts' p. 13.
[25] Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language (New York: White and Sheffield, 1842) p. 163.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] Stobart, 'Introduction: comfort, the home and home comforts', p. 11.

current definition of 'comfort' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, does not differ enormously from Webster's mid-nineteenth century description. It is now defined as 'relief or support in mental distress or affliction; consolation, solace, soothing', 'the feeling of consolation or mental relief; the state of being consoled', 'a person or thing that affords consolation; a source or means of comfort', 'a state of physical and material well-being, with freedom from pain and trouble, and satisfaction of bodily needs; the condition of being comfortable', 'the conditions which produce or promote such a state; the quality of being comfortable' and 'a thing that produces or ministers to enjoyment and content'.[28] What this development appears to suggest is that the definition of comfort gradually shifted and expanded from meaning consolation, relief and support to encompassing more physical and material aspects.

Indeed, physical or bodily comfort, which encompasses the notion of home comforts, did not explicitly appear in dictionaries until Webster in 1841 but despite this, it is possible to identify instances whereby this definition of comfort is alluded to in literature from at least the mid-eighteenth century. In Samuel Richardson's 1740 novel *Pamela,* the eponymous heroine, in the first letter to her impoverished parents, explains that she is sending them 'four guineas for your comfort'.[29] She continues with, 'you may pay some old debt with part; and keep the other part to comfort you both'.[30] The inference here is that this unexpected gift would help alleviate any financial distress that her parents were experiencing (affording them much needed financial comfort), but when Pamela wrote 'and keep the other part to comfort you both' this corresponds with the later definitions of comfort cited by both Webster and the *Oxford English*

[28] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (2020) [Accessed 23/11/2020], <comfort, v. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary (oed.com)>
[29] Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; Or Virtue Rewarded* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 44.
[30] *Ibid*.

Dictionary.[31] This remaining amount would give 'security from want and furnish moderate enjoyment' and be something 'that produces or ministers to enjoyment and content'.[32] And so what Richardson appeared to be describing here was at least two different forms of comfort, financial because their creditors would get paid and their financial burden could ease but also emotional or physical comfort (depending upon what they used it for) as they had the freedom to spend the remainder on whatever they chose.

The concept of home comfort was alluded to later, when Pamela informed her parents of the unwanted sexual advances that she had suffered at the hands of her late employer's son. The house that she was living in, she told them, was 'so late my comfort and delight, but now my terror and anguish'.[33] The reader already knew that Pamela had received 'no wages as yet' so there had been no financial gain, therefore the 'comfort and delight' that she had formerly experienced and enjoyed must have originated in the domesticity and comforts within the house.[34] The interesting point here is that the physicality of the house had not changed in the short time between the death of her former employer and the arrival of Mr B, Pamela's new master. Therefore, what becomes clear from this extract is that the idea of the comfort of home encompasses far more than the comfort afforded by furniture and soft furnishings, as perhaps the name suggests, it incorporates the household members and depends heavily on the types of relationships that exist within. What this example demonstrates too is that comfort cannot be neatly categorised into separate, distinct areas, it is too nuanced and multi-faceted a concept to be able to do this easily.

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[31] Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, p. 163; *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, (2020) [Accessed 23/11/2020], <comfort, v. meanings, etymology and more | Oxford English Dictionary (oed.com)>

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] Richardson, *Pamela; Or Virtue Rewarded,* p.56.

[34] *Ibid*., p. 43.

The differing meanings of comfort can also be found in novels of the early nineteenth-century. In the first paragraph of *Sense and Sensibility,* written in 1811, Jane Austen wrote about the comfort that an elderly Mr Dashwood derived from his family:

> In the society of his nephew and niece, and their children, the old Gentleman's days were comfortably spent…The constant attention of Mr and Mrs Henry Dashwood to his wishes, which proceeded not merely from interest, but from goodness of heart, gave him every degree of solid comfort which his age could receive; and the cheerfulness of the children added a relish to his existence.[35]

Later in the novel however, Austen referred to the domestic comfort that could be found in the home. Colonel Brandon's parsonage was described as 'a nice place…exactly what I call a nice old fashioned place, full of comforts and conveniences'.[36] Stobart suggests that here the author is reflecting on the ways in which material and domestic comfort were becoming increasingly important in the early 1800s.[37] What is particularly interesting here though is the way in which Austen uses this more modern meaning of comfort to describe 'a nice old fashioned place'.[38] This juxtaposition of modern with 'old-fashioned' suggests that making a home warm and comfy was not a recent phenomenon, and that actually having 'comforts and conveniences' may have been an established practice, within the elite at least.[39]

The etymology of the word comfort, therefore, struggles to depict its complex character. Its lexicographical development, which suggests a linear, almost logical progression from its initial meaning of consolation to a later one pertaining to physical comfort, appears to neglect those early references to physical or bodily comfort whilst

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35 Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (London: Penguin Classics, 1988), p. 39.
36 *Ibid*., p. 207.
37 Stobart, 'Introduction: comfort, the home and home comforts', p. 14.
38 Stobart, 'Introduction: comfort, the home and home comforts', p. 13; Austen, *Sense and Sensibility,* p. 207.
39 Austen, *Sense and Sensibility,* p. 207.

its literary presence offers a slightly different view. There was evidence of home comforts, for example, in literature from at least the mid-eighteenth century and this challenges the notion that there was a natural progression from one to another but rather that different types of comfort co-existed simultaneously.

Historiography

This study of comfort covers a wide range of differing themes and as a consequence this next section, which considers the relevant historiography, will reflect this broad spectrum. The first section will examine earlier studies of comfort, particularly those undertaken by John Crowley and Jon Stobart.[40] It will then explore the history of emotions and its relevance to comfort. Following this, the focus will be on those relationships that impacted comfort such as familial and social, with the latter prompting a discussion on the inter-connectedness between comfort, politeness and sensibility. The focus will then move on to the country house and then finally on to the historiography of the aristocracy and gentry.

Whilst the concept of comfort has been relatively neglected by historians, there have been a small number who have considered it more closely.[41] John Crowley, for instance, has attempted to trace, what he believes, is the shift in the meaning of comfort, from 'a moral term indicating personal support' to a word which infers 'satisfaction and enjoyment of immediate physical circumstances', which mirrors comfort's lexicographical journey outlined above, albeit references to physical comfort did not appear in dictionaries until the nineteenth century.[42] Crowley considers comfort, largely, from a physical perspective and questions whether the desire for comfort was

[40] John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001); Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House.*
[41] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 2.
[42] Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America*, p. x and p. 141.

a natural occurrence or whether it was a cultural construct borne out of the consumer revolution which became a 'crucial component of eighteenth-century material culture'.[43] He rejects the notion that comfort was the 'natural motive or the only motive for new consumption patterns' and asserts that other considerations, such as social status, gentility and sociability, took precedence over any thoughts of physical comfort and points to the increased purchase of 'fashionable clothing, tea ware, table knives and forks, glassware, mirrors' to demonstrate this.[44] If comfort was not the main motive however, then why and how did it become such a significant consideration in eighteenth-century economic, social and cultural thought? This is another important strand of Crowley's work, that is, his suggestion that the idea of comfort became legitimised throughout the eighteenth century; from an unfavourable association with luxury in the late seventeenth century to a connection with necessity and 'decency' by the turn of the nineteenth; it underwent quite the transformation in terms of acceptability.[45] He attributes this to the political economists and liberal commentators of the time who 'deconstructed' the notion of luxury which, in turn, minimised the distinction between the two terms and which made 'it possible for both luxury and necessity to become morally neutral terms'.[46] So, in effect, the concept of comfort was re-invented during the eighteenth century by Enlightenment writers, cultural choices and consumer consumption and this explains Crowley's use of the word 'invention' in the title of his book. The notion of comfort was manufactured and processed in such a way that by the turn of the century it had become naturalised and accepted that all were

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[43] *Ibid.,* p. ix; Molly W. Berger, 'Review of the Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America' by John E. Crowley, *Technology and Culture,* 43.4 (2002), pp. 795-796, (p. 795).

[44] Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America*, p. 143 and p. 148.

[45] *Ibid.,* p. 64.

[46] *Ibid.,* p.153.

entitled to 'certain conveniences and comfort' including light, heat, shelter and protection.[47]

In a similar fashion, Marie Odile-Bernez studies the concept of domestic comfort and traces the ways in which the term 'creature comforts' referred to physical comfort whilst 'comfort' on its own meant spiritual or emotional contentment.[48] The former, she argued, was considered a sinful indulgence whilst the latter, a positive necessity. She cites George Gillespie, a seventeenth century Presbyterian preacher whose sermon clearly distinguished between physical comfort and emotional/moral comfort:

> There is a good strong foundation of comfort, if a soul convinced of its own sinful estate, and of the vanity of creature comforts, does so far settle its thoughts upon Christ that as he is the only saviour so an all-sufficient saviour.[49]

It was this 'traditional Christian view' that may have perpetuated the disparity between the physical and the emotional aspects of comfort and why eighteenth-century lexicographers omitted it from their own definitions of comfort.[50] Similarly, during the eighteenth century and the growing culture of consumerism this disparity influenced the way in which home and material comforts were becoming viewed. Many historians, argues Odile-Bernez, associated physical and material comforts with luxuries, however she suggests that their association with the word comfort and all of its traditional connotations, meant that they were no longer considered a 'negative indulgence,' they had been converted 'into the necessaries of life'.[51]

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[47] Berger 'Review of the Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America', p. 796.
[48] Marie Odile-Bernez, 'Comfort, the Acceptable Face of Luxury: An Eighteenth-Century Cultural Etymology', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 14.2 (2014), 3 – 21, (p. 4).
[49] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[50] *Ibid*.
[51] *Ibid*., p. 4 and p. 16.

Whilst an important commentary on physical comfort, Crowley barely acknowledges any other form, with the exception of what he describes as the 'traditional' one pertaining to moral support. He uses this as a characteristic of a bipartite model of comfort, whereby it is 'synthesised' with the emerging and burgeoning physical comfort of the eighteenth century resulting in a 'culture of comfort'.[52] This approach, however, not only simplifies the idea of comfort but it also divides comfort into two, separate binary entities and by doing so negates the complexities, contradictions and idiosyncrasies that can characterise it. It also fails to allow for any similarities or meaningful overlap between the two which is interesting particularly when one of Crowley's main arguments is juxtaposed with this. Crowley suggests that other considerations took precedence over and above any personal desire for physical comfort and cites concerns such as gentility, social status and sociability as being more important. However, all of these were of significance to other forms of comfort too, particularly social comfort, so there appears to be somewhat of a contradiction here in Crowley's hypothesis. There is a definite overlap between two different forms of comfort in this instance which Crowley's argument appears to undermine. This thesis aims to demonstrate that comfort was far more than just a desire for physical comfort or the offering of moral support. It will highlight that comfort took many forms which could and did interconnect and overlap and which both influenced and shaped the lives of elite family members. Stephen Hague also points to the influence of the Enlightenment in the 'emergence' of an eighteenth-century 'idea of comfort'.[53] Describing it as 'foremost' amongst the changes that developed during this time, he largely attributes it, not to the consumer revolution, but to advances in

[52] Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America*, p. 292.
[53] Stephen Hague, 'The House', in *A Cultural History of the Home in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. by C. Edwards (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), pp. 63-84 (p. 81).

technology, architecture and design which resulted in improved 'privacy, cleanliness, warmth and light' within the home.[54] By focusing on the predominance of domestic comfort however, Hague, like Crowley, overlooks the significance and influence that other forms of comfort could have and it is this lacuna that this study will address.

Another view of comfort is offered by Jon Stobart who has paid more attention to comfort than any other scholar until now. He argues that comfort 'mattered to people' in the eighteenth century and expresses surprise at the 'limited traction' that comfort appears to have had, particularly within the history of emotions field.[55] Whilst acknowledging the importance of physical comfort, particularly in the first half of his work, Stobart opens up the discussion around comfort by addressing some of those elements that had previously been neglected and by suggesting that comfort was a 'feeling as well as a physical experience'.[56] This is an important development in the historiography of comfort and it is this part of Stobart's work which at times interacts with some aspects of this study, for instance his examination of familial and household relationships, the role of correspondence as a source of comfort and the comfort derived from objects and memories.

Despite these parallels, there are some differences between Stobart's approach and that of this thesis and a divergence too within the scope of both studies. Whereas Stobart examines comfort largely from within the framework of the country house, this thesis instead looks at comfort in terms of its inter-relationship with the major themes and events that occurred during the life cycles of the family members and which they discussed in their letters. By exploring the themes of family, sociability, illness and death, it allows for a deeper understanding of how they all interacted with the comfort

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[54] *Ibid*.
[55] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 2.
[56] *Ibid.,* p. 128.

of the elite both within and beyond the walls of the country house. Other differences in approach can be seen in the ways in which the two studies consider family and comfort. Stobart states that comfort was a 'shared emotion and experience' and as such it was necessary to fully explore 'how comfort shaped relationships between family and friends'.[57] This study, however, approaches the concept of family and comfort slightly differently by also evaluating how family relationships themselves impacted the comfort of its members as opposed to just how comfort shaped family relationships. This is an important difference because it emphasises the centrality of family on comfort and facilitates a closer analysis of significant familial bonds and their connection with comfort. As a result, the two studies also diverge with the types of relationships that are explored. Stobart largely focuses on marriage and parenthood, and whilst marriage and its impact on comfort is certainly considered in chapter two of this thesis, a significant section of that chapter is also devoted to siblinghood and how this relationship too could affect it. Similarly, a difference in approach can be seen in the analysis of letter writing. Stobart examines the significance of writing and receiving letters in creating a sense of comfort, but less focus is given to the discomfort that could be produced and why that could be the case, which the second half of chapter one of this study addresses. And whilst this study too considers the comfort afforded by material objects it does so from the perspective of personal trinkets and belongings as opposed to the furnishings and interior of the country house.

Stobart suggests that his study of comfort provides a 'different way of animating the country house' and is 'concerned with buildings and things, but above all with people', but his analysis of comfort is very much positioned within the 'spaces and practices' of the country house which limits somewhat his ability to consider comfort

[57] *Ibid*., p. 178.

in all its 'guises' which he stated was his objective.[58] However, by delving into the concerns, worries and life events of the family members, as this study does, it is possible to consider comfort from a wider perspective and gain a greater insight into the ways in which they impacted and influenced both their comfort and discomfort inside and outside the confines of a comfortable home and, as a result, fill some of the gaps left by other researchers.

The next section of this introduction will detail the various synonyms that were deployed by family members in their letters to describe their feelings of comfort/discomfort. Whilst these demonstrate the range of feelings that could be associated with comfort, it also highlights the relevance of the history of emotions in this study. The elite family or the country house household are examples of what Barbara H. Rosenwein describes as 'emotional communities'.[59] She offers a framework that argues that emotional expression was influenced, not by external social, cultural or political factors, but by the emotional norms and standards that were created, accepted and sustained within different emotional communities.[60] To Rosenwein, shared 'modes of feeling' shaped a community's 'emotional vocabulary' which in turn assisted its members to understand what it was they were feeling.[61]

This study of comfort, however, addresses what could happen when emotional norms or 'modes of feeling' within a family were not always aligned.[62] Whilst Rosenwein argues that should one emotional community 'induce suffering' then solace could be sought from another, this study describes the impact that this could have when

[58] *Ibid*., p. 15, p. 2, p. 187.
[59] Barbara H. Rosenwein*, Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600 – 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 3.
[60] *Ibid*.
[61] *Ibid*., p. 3 and p. 4.
[62] *Ibid.,* p. 3.

this could not be achieved.[63] This will be demonstrated in the final chapter of this thesis in the way that Vere Isham's own comfort was impacted by, what she considered to be, her father's extreme reaction to her mother's death which very much jarred with her own and the way in which she struggled to find comfort from her own immediate emotional community.

'Emotional communities' which were characterised by shared 'norms of emotional expression' were, according to Andrew Lynch, related to both 'emotionology', the concept promoted by Peter and Carol Stearns, and 'emotional regimes', a framework offered by William M. Reddy.[64] In 1985, the Stearns' created the idea of 'emotionology' to explain how emotional expression was shaped, influenced or controlled by 'the collective emotional standards of a society'.[65] This, they argued, was a necessary move away from using modern psychological apparatus as a means of explaining past emotional experiences and toward a focus on the cultural and social influences of the time, and which in turn would further enable closer study of the impact of gender, class and age on emotional expression.[66] An example of this, significant to this study, would be the eighteenth-century letter-writing manuals, such as *The Art of Letter-Writing,* referred to later in this introduction, which provided examples of how the scribe of a letter could appropriately offer comfort to a correspondent in need of consolation.[67] So, from the perspective of emotionology, comfort could be considered in terms of how it could be offered or provided in a letter, as stated by the manuals. However, emotionology cannot provide any detail of what type of comfort was offered

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[63] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[64] Andrew Lynch, 'Emotional Communities', in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. by S. Broomhall (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 3-6, (p. 5).
[65] Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *The American Historical Review*, 90.4 (1985), 813 – 836, (p. 813).
[66] *Ibid*., p. 820 and p. 827.
[67] *The Art of Letter Writing*, (London: T. Osborne, 1762).

or whether it was sufficient, appropriate or, in fact, successfully conveyed; indeed, it reveals very little about the character of the type of comfort either proffered or received. In addition, as the first chapter of this thesis will attest to, letters could also create discomfort for both the scribe and recipient yet emotionology does not facilitate the opportunity to explore this. This, coupled with the Stearns' focus on the middling sorts, means that it is not an ideal framework with which to examine eighteenth-century elite comfort. The approach of this thesis however, whilst acknowledging that prescriptions, such as manuals existed, attempts to reveal more about the character of the comfort and discomfort felt by family members rather than the potential controls, limitations or constraints placed upon them, a point that Linda Pollock makes when she suggests that no 'analysis of emotional culture will reveal the lived experience of emotions'.[68]

Similar criticism could be directed at the work of Reddy, which had a largely political emphasis.[69] He suggests that political regimes constructed their own 'prescriptions and counsel' in order to manage the emotional expressions ('emotives') of its communities; and the stricter the 'emotional regime' the less scope for 'emotional liberty'.[70] In turn, Reddy suggests that constricting emotional liberty could lead to 'emotional suffering' and a resulting quest for an 'emotional refuge'.[71] At the heart of Reddy's framework is the concept of emotives, emotional utterances that 'actually do things to the world'.[72] They allowed for not only the exploration and alteration of the self but also assisted with the 'navigation' from emotional suffering to emotional liberty.[73] Lynch suggests that, like Rosenwein's emotional communities, Reddy's

[68] Linda A. Pollock, 'Anger and the Negotiation of Relationships in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 47.3 (2004), 567 – 590, (p. 571).
[69] William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[70] *Ibid*., p. 55, p. 128 and p. 129.
[71] *Ibid*., p. 129.
[72] *Ibid*., p. 104.
[73] *Ibid*., p. 121 and p. 122.

emotional regimes are related to emotionology in that they required its members to 'express normative emotions' much in the same way as affiliates to an emotional community did.[74]

Whilst the concept of emotionology seems a less useful framework, those of emotional communities and emotional regimes are considered relevant tools with which to examine eighteenth-century elite comfort. Within an emotional community a variety of emotions could be expressed within a particular emotional episode and the sequence in which they were expressed could be significant, this is because it showed how emotions were felt differently depending on what other emotions existed within that same episode.[75] Despite the political focus of Reddy's theory, there are parts of it too that are relevant to this study and elements of his 'emotional regimes' in particular, that can be drawn upon.[76] This will be considered in much greater detail in chapter three, which considers comfort and sociability, when Frances Young received a shock marriage proposal and chapter five which looks at grief.

The elite family represents an example of both Rosenwein's communities and Reddy's regimes, but it also lies at the very heart of this study of comfort. The historiography surrounding the family is both substantial and contentious. Often described as the 'old master narrative' of family history, Lawrence Stone's contribution to the historiography of the family, in particular, has been subject to both criticism and challenge.[77] He argued that the eighteenth century saw both a rise in the importance of the family's 'nuclear core' and a subsequent fall in the influence of 'kinship' relations, with 'affective bonds' between spouses and parents and children becoming increasingly

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[74] Lynch, 'Emotional Communities', p. 5.
[75] Rosenwein*, Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600 – 1700,* p. 8.
[76] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions,* p. 129.
[77] Helen Metcalfe, 'The Family and Household', in *A Cultural History of the Home in the Age of Enlightenment,* ed. by C. Edwards (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), pp. 37-61, (p. 37).

significant.[78] His findings, however, have been contested by a number of scholars both at the time of publication and since. Alan Macfarlane in 1979 offered a particularly scathing review in which he questioned Stone's methodology and terminology and accused him of either ignoring or misinterpreting the evidence.[79] More recent studies offer an alternate view, which suggests that the eighteenth-century family was far more discursive and 'nuanced' than Stone described, and which challenge the 'normative status of marriage within families' that his study promotes.[80] For instance, Naomi Tadmor argues that when speaking or writing about family, it was not the 'nuclear unit' that was being referred to, rather it was the 'household' which encompassed 'diverse dependants such as servants, apprentices and co-resident relatives'.[81] Indeed, the composition of the families used in this thesis, which will be examined further in chapter two, highlights the diversity to which Tadmor refers and clearly demonstrates, what Sarah Pearsall describes as the 'fluidity' of familial composition.[82] Yet despite Pearsall's findings, and those of other scholars such as Tadmor who have questioned the framework posited by Stone, it is marriage that continues to be 'the overwhelming focus in historical and literary research of social relationships'.[83] Therefore, by highlighting the heterogenous nature of familial make up, this thesis attempts to redress the imbalance that exists in the study of the family and refocus attention away from marriage and towards other, equally significant relationships, such as siblinghood whilst also acknowledging the impact that matrimony had on comfort. The relationships between brothers Robert and Peter Rye, brothers and sisters Frances and Allen Young

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[78] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800,* (Penguin Books, London 1979), pp. 93-94.
[79] Alan MacFarlane, 'Review of Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800' by Lawrence Stone, *History and Theory*, 18.1 (1979), pp. 103-126, (p. 106).
[80] Metcalfe, 'The Family and Household', p. 37-38.
[81] Naomi Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household Family in Eighteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 151.1 (1996), pp. 111-140, (p.112).
[82] Metcalfe, 'The Family and Household', p. 37.
[83] *Ibid*., p. 39.

and Vere and Justinian Isham and sisters Constantia, Mary and Eliza Orlebar documented in this study all belie Stone's pre-occupation with marriage. This study has also identified further evidence which seems to undermine another of Stone's assertions. He argues that the decline in kinship relations meant that there was a 'very clear decline in the concept of kin responsibility for individual crimes and actions' and yet this thesis will demonstrate that 'individual' misdemeanours committed by young, male kin, in particular, greatly impacted the lives of family members and their comfort.[84] Reverend Robert Rye was enraged at the behaviour of his younger brother Peter, whilst the aunt of Richard Orlebar certainly expressed disapproval and concern at his. They both very much considered it their responsibility to help navigate their younger male relations towards a more socially acceptable lifestyle and chapter two will elaborate in further detail about this.

Familial relationships were not the only ones that impacted the comfort of family members; those that were conducted within polite society appeared to be equally as influential. The eighteenth century was characterised by the 'significance of social connection' and therefore much time was spent in the company of others.[85] For those in the upper echelons of society, a desire to join the 'beau monde', a highly privileged and fashionable subsection of the most 'elevated social ranks', meant 'hectic rounds of visits, excursions and balls' during the London season, which Hannah Greig describes as 'frenzied'.[86] These engagements were used as a means of establishing or re-affirming 'strategic political alliances and social networks' and were considered an essential element of elite life.[87] Even for those families who did not frequent the London season

[84] *Ibid*., p 95.
[85] Barclay, *Caritas: Neighbourly Love and the Early Modern Self,* p. 16.
[86]Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2-4.
[87] *Ibid*., p. 2.

or who stayed in the country, their societal obligations remained significant. Chapter three of this thesis, for instance, will discuss those of Frances Young who, whilst her father was alive and her brother remained a bachelor, assumed much of the responsibility for her family's social duties in and around Orlingbury Hall in the 1790s. A distinctive characteristic of eighteenth-century polite society such as this was politeness. Described as a 'social lubricant' by Karen Harvey, politeness was a code of behaviour which favoured 'easy and inclusive social intercourse' within elite social circles.[88] It was, according to Lawrence Klein, a significant eighteenth-century 'idiom' which was presented as an 'ideal of behaviour'.[89] This ideal was, he suggests, characterised by 'decorum', 'ease', 'reciprocity' as well as 'comfort, convenience and accessibility' with 'a generous concern for the comfort of others'.[90] Similarly, Philip Carter describes politeness as a 'concept of social refinement' and details contemporary criterion which included 'propriety or decorum', 'elegance of manners' and 'a display of generosity and accommodation to one's companions'.[91] The rhetoric surrounding politeness suggested amiable sociability characterised by both easiness and naturalness, indeed Klein describes it as a 'zone of freedom'.[92] Carter points to contemporary descriptions of politeness which also utilised words such as 'ease' and 'easiness', citing Samuel Johnson who described it as 'naturally free and unconfined'.[93]

Politeness was, however, nothing if not complex and contradictory in nature and both Klein and Carter acknowledge this oxymoron. To facilitate the expected decorous,

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[88] Karen Harvey, 'The History of Masculinity, circa 1650-1800', *Journal of British Studies,* 44.2 (2005), pp. 296-311, (p. 302); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter, Women's Lives in Georgian England,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 287.
[89] Lawrence E. Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of British Eighteenth Century', *The Historical Journal*, 45.4 (2002), pp. 869-898, (p. 870 and p. 878).
[90] *Ibid*., pp. 874-875, p. 887; Lawence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 4.
[91] Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 1 and p. 21.
[92] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 4.
[93] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 22.

easy, accommodating and generous conversations, participants were required to not only exercise 'dextrous management' of their words and actions but also perfect the art of 'pleasing' others which would later elicit accusations of 'social artifice'.[94] Klein describes the performative nature of politeness which involved a focus on 'display' and 'consciousness of form' whilst Carter cites an anonymous, late eighteenth-century commentator who emphasised the 'appearance of universal benevolence, generosity, modesty, and of making our own happiness spring from the accommodation of others', with 'appearance' being the operative word here.[95] Soile Ylivuori addresses this 'conceptual ambivalence' by juxtaposing 'inward politeness' with that of 'theatrical external politeness'.[96] Reviewing it from the perspective of gender, she suggests that the objectives of both kinds of politeness were similar; the pleasing of others with 'modest, unpretentious and obliging behaviour'.[97] Yet those advocates of the former objected to the latter seemingly due to its apparent abandonment of the main tenet of politeness – that of 'naturalness and sincerity in favour of dishonesty and affectation'.[98] For elite women, Ylivuori argues, the hypocrisy associated with internal politeness, in particular, jarred heavily with them as the concept of honesty was so closely connected to expectations of polite female conduct and as a consequence could induce much anxiety.[99]

For elite men too, politeness posed a problem. The long eighteenth century witnessed a change in what it meant to be a man with a shift from 'straightforward and

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[94] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 4; Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of British Eighteenth Century', p. 874.
[95] Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of British Eighteenth Century', p. 886 and p. 874; Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 21.
[96] Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities and Power*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 67-68.
[97] *Ibid*., p. 69.
[98] *Ibid*., p. 69.
[99] *Ibid*., p. 77.

hearty manliness' to the 'polite and refined gentleman'.[100] The former was representative of the 'classical citizen', landed gentlemen who demonstrated 'independence' and 'public mindedness' and who were, according to Klein, 'construed as the receptacle of civic virtue'.[101] The notion of the 'polite and refined gentleman', which resulted from this move from 'honour to politeness', meant that men became less concerned with ideas of civic duty and 'public reputation and more about individual conscience'.[102] The views of contemporary commentators on this change differed somewhat. Perhaps the most vociferous advocate for the polite gentleman was the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley-Cooper. Shaftesbury appeared not to consider the shift a particularly significant one, indeed his pronouncement that 'all Politeness is owing to Liberty' suggested that the 'language of politeness' and 'English civic tradition' were, in his opinion, closely connected.[103] Proponents of this civic tradition, such as Andrew Fletcher, saw no such similarities. Politeness, to them, represented the very antithesis of liberty and virtue and was characterised by 'luxury', self-indulgence, and a propensity for the 'private rather than public' which had neither place in civic tradition nor in English 'moral and cultural development'.[104] Shaftesbury disagreed, he argued that politeness and sociability were very much part of 'civic resources' and that this 'fusion' created 'much energy'.[105]

The polite gentleman that took 'centre stage' in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, still considered traditional manly virtues such as 'self-control,

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[100] Matthew McCormack, *Citizenship and Gender in Britain, 1688 – 1928,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), p. 41; Michèle Cohen, "Manners' Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750-1830', *Journal of British Studies,* 44.2 (2005), pp. 312-329, (p. 312).
[101] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 146 and p. 126.
[102] Harvey, 'The History of Masculinity, circa 1650 to 1800', p. 303.
[103] Lawrence E. Klein, 'Liberty, Manners and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal,* 32.3 (1989), pp. 583-605, (p. 584).
[104] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 146.
[105] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, p. 150; Klein, 'Liberty, Manners and Politeness in Early Eighteenth-Century England', p. 604.

moderation and independence' to be important facets of refined manliness but they were also now urged to adapt them into 'new standards of polite or sentimental manhood'.[106] These new attributes were in response to the increased sociability with women and the need to 'become softer and more refined' in their presence.[107] The result of this, Michèle Cohen argues, was that polite gentlemanliness became 'rent with anxieties' due to the accusations of effeminacy that originated from the critics of politeness.[108] Effeminacy, according to McCormack, was deemed the 'failure of the qualities associated with manliness' and was characterised by dependant, indulgent and irrational behaviour.[109] To contemporary writer, and Anglican priest, Vicesimus Knox, those gentlemen who displayed such manners were considered 'lady-like' gentlemen.[110] The embodiment of eighteenth-century 'unmanliness' was the fop, famed for his time spent in the company of women and his 'Frenchified' manners.[111] It was the fop, argues Cohen, who acted as a warning to men to remain vigilant and disciplined in company.[112] According to Carter, the essence of manly sociability was a symbiosis of 'external manners with… inner virtue', but what this need for vigilance and discipline did, along with the publication of the Earl of Chesterfield's letters in the mid-1770s, was reveal the apparent duplicitous nature of polite gentlemanliness.[113] The Earl had used the letters that he had written to his illegitimate son Philip, to educate him in how to best behave in polite society, 'impress and influence the people around him' and

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[106] Harvey, 'The History of Masculinity, circa 1650 to 1800', p. 301; Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 2.
[107] Cohen, "Manners' Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750-1830', p. 303.
[108] *Ibid.,* p. 313.
[109] McCormack, *Citizenship and Gender in Britain, 1688 – 1928,* p. 38; Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 72.
[110] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 128.
[111] Masculinity: Men Defining Men and Gentlemen, 1560-1918 [accessed 06 February 2025], <https://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/masculinity-part-1/editorial-introduction.aspx>
[112] *Ibid.*
[113] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 10.

forge his way in a world in which his illegitimate status precluded him from automatic inclusion.[114] He pressed on his son the import of elegant behaviour and perfecting the art of performance in company.[115] They, therefore, cast doubt on the virtue and integrity of the polite man and highlighted the chasm between 'external polish and morals'.[116] There was, therefore, throughout the period a tension between the notions of politeness and virtue, with the polite gentleman seemingly at its very heart. And whilst some commentators, such as David Hume, validated these 'new styles of male conduct', others were less inclined and saw them as an indication of the nation's weakening state and decline.[117]

The relationship between politeness and gender is therefore a complicated one and yet the interplay between politeness and comfort remains significant. Firstly, the widespread use of the words 'ease' and 'easiness', which were associated with the word comfort, suggested that the two concepts were closely connected. Secondly, politeness occurred within spaces of sociability, places where people came together, an area in which comfort, particularly social comfort, was fundamental; indeed, according to Sally Holloway and Lucy Worsley, 'social ease was a central tenet of politeness'.[118] And finally, politeness and comfort both possessed contradictory and dichotomous qualities – they both, at times, required effort which almost belies their definitions that relate to ease and easiness. By considering the two concepts concurrently, it allows for the further analysis of both. Prior to her 2019 study, Ylivuori suggested that 'all possible angles on eighteenth-century politeness' had heretofore been exhausted yet she offered

[114] Ann C. Dean, 'Authorship, Print, and Public in Chesterfield's 'Letters to His Son', *SEL Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 45.3 (2005), pp. 691-706, (p. 691).
[115] *Ibid.*
[116] *Ibid.,* p. 79.
[117] Ibid., p. 76
[118] Sally Holloway and Lucy Worsley, ''Every Body Took Notice of the Scene of the Drawing Room': Performing Emotions at the Early Georgian Court,1714-60', *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40.3 (2017), pp. 443-464, (p. 454).

a new approach to 'politeness as a gendered culture' and re-invigorated it as a relevant area of research.[119] In contrast to some scholars, such as Carter, who have emphasised the growing influence of sensibility on social conduct and refinement in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Ylivuori suggests that politeness continued as a significant force, co-existing alongside that of sensibility. The eighteenth century was, she said, 'distinguished by continuity rather than disruption of politeness tradition'.[120] Chapter three of this thesis will also demonstrate the relevance of politeness; in this instance in late eighteenth-century Northamptonshire. Two events in particular, a shock marriage proposal and a child's christening, will exemplify politeness in action, with all its contradictions and complexities and its impact on the comfort of those family members involved too. The latter occasion will also demonstrate another function of politeness, as a 'tool of empowerment'.[121] Both Ylivuori and Paul Langford refer to politeness as a means of empowerment with the former suggesting that it was a particularly important device for women.[122]

According to Carter, from the mid eighteenth century there was a shift towards a different type of social refinement, one that promoted 'benevolence, tenderness, generosity, moral sense and fellow feeling' and which represented a rejection of the 'potential artifice' that characterised politeness.[123] Sensibility, suggests Katrina O'Loughlin, was an 'openness or susceptibility to feeling', the display of which 'became a conspicuous social and personal value'.[124] It was, asserts Adela Pinch, of 'obsessive interest' to the upper strata of society and describes the human capacity to

[119] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities and Power*, p. 2.
[120] *Ibid*., p 22.
[121] *Ibid*., p. 42.
[122] *Ibid*.; Paul Langford, 'The Uses of Eighteenth-Century Politeness', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), pp. 311-331, (p. 312).
[123] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 29.
[124] Katrina O'Loughlin, 'Sensibility', in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. by S. Broomhall (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 78-80, (p. 78 and p.80).

be ‘invaded and divided by excesses of pathos, pity and sympathy’.[125] The origins of sensibility have been attributed to a number of different causes. G.J Barker-Benfield suggests that the origins of sensibility, or as he describes it, ‘the aggrandisement of feeling’, lay in ‘preachers and congregants, parents and children, and manufacturers and customers as well as writers and readers, all making or coming to terms with the rise of a consumer society’.[126] It was the purchase power of women, argued Barker-Benfield, coupled with their susceptibility to ‘nervous disorders’, which were key factors in this phenomenon.[127] Women’s nervous systems were considered ‘normatively distinct’ to those of men in that they were more refined and delicate, a consequence of which was ‘greater sensibility’, this however was countered by a ‘liability to certain disorders’.[128] Barker-Benfield suggests that this ‘gendered sensibility’ culminated in a rise in ‘women’s consumerism’.[129] Harvey offers a different view. She points in part to the publication of the Earl of Chesterfield’s letters, which have previously been discussed in this introduction.[130] In his instructions to his son, the Earl revealed the shallowness of politeness and how it could be ‘exploited…for personal gain’ and, as a consequence of this, sensibility, which appeared to be characterised by ‘unpolished integrity’ and ‘plainness’ offered an alternative.[131]

Sensibility, however, shared many of the contradictions of politeness. Ylivuori, for instance, highlights the correlation between female sensibility and honesty. She argues that the naturally produced ‘bodily signs of sensibility’ became ‘emblems of true

[125] Adela Pinch, ‘Emotion and History, A Review Article’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37.1 (1995), pp. 100-109, (p. 101).
[126] G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Cult of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press,1992), p. xix.
[127] *Ibid*., p. 28.
[128] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[129] *Ibid*., p. 28.
[130] Harvey, ‘The History of Masculinity, circa 1650 to 1800’, p. 304.
[131] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 211; Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities and Power*, p. 21.

womanhood' and as a consequence were often mimicked, by women, in their attempt to prove their femininity.[132] Excessive sensibility was therefore frowned upon and, according to Ylivuori, 'polite society discouraged rampant emotionality' preferring more 'controlled experiences of sentiment'.[133] Similarly, Mark Rothery argues that even though the tenets of sensibility called for demonstrable emotional expression, it did so in a more measured, and controlled way.[134] Sensibility like politeness, it seemed, also required some behavioural and emotional management from its participants and in terms of comfort, particularly social comfort, this challenged any form of ease or easiness that sensibility was meant to promote.

As it increasingly became a space of sociability, a place in which both politeness and sensibility was practised, was the country house. Much attention has been paid to the country house in terms of architecture, design, furniture and furnishings and the improvements, that were made in the eighteenth century, to heating, ventilation, sanitation and cleanliness and whilst the scope of this thesis will not concern itself with this, the country house yet remains a critical locus in a study of elite comfort.[135] The country house is key because it was one of the main spaces in which people assembled; family, friends, acquaintances, servants and strangers – it was a hub, 'a symbol of community cohesion', a place which brought people together.[136] It was, therefore, a crucial source of both comfort and discomfort for those living or visiting there.

Twentieth-century studies of the country house tend to focus on the question of land and estate ownership, with scholars such as John Habakkuk paying particular

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[132] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities and Power*, p. 91.
[133] *Ibid*., p. 93.
[134] Mark Rothery, 'Emotional Economies of Pleasure Among the Gentry of Eighteenth-Century England', *Social History,* 49.3 (2024), pp. 294-315, (p. 299).
[135] Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America*; Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House.*
[136] Jessica Gerrard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815-1914,* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 5.

attention to the economics of running a country house, whilst later studies in the 1980s and 1990s considered more closely the legal implications of marriage settlements and the country house as a symbol of political power.[137] More recent studies with a closer examination of the country house as a 'lived space', have, however, changed the orientation of its historiography.[138] Stobart and Rothery, in their study of elite consumption, acknowledge the import of emotional and social comfort alongside the quest for physical comfort. By examining the spending habits of elite families, they present a picture of both physical and emotional warmth within the country house. Judith S. Lewis asserts that 'the spaciousness and beauty of country houses and their gardens might ease life's difficulties and add to life's pleasures for their inhabitants, as no doubt, did the armies of servants' thus linking the country house to comfort.[139] Whilst the country house (and its eighteenth-century architectural, structural and interior improvements) would certainly have facilitated elements of physical comfort, it would be a misapprehension to assume that the very fabric of a country house would automatically offer sufficient comfort to those living within it, to do so negates the complex quality of comfort. The size and spaciousness of Lamport Hall, for example, afforded little comfort to Vere Isham, daughter of Justinian, fourth Baronet of Lamport, when faced with the tedium of intellectual stagnation or her father's seemingly overpowering grief. So, whilst these more recent studies do recognise the significance of comfort, few explore the impact on elite lives when the emotional or social comfort

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[137] John Habakkuk, 'English Landownership 1640-1740', *Economic History Review,* 10.1 (1940), pp. 2-7; John Habakkuk, 'Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 32 (1950), pp. 15-30; Barbara English and John Saville, 'Family Settlement and the Rise of the Great Estates, *Economic History Review, 33*.4 (1980), pp. 556-8; J.V. Beckett, 'The Pattern of Landownership in England and Wales 1660-1880', *Economic History Review,* 37.1 (1984), pp. 1-22; John Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt, and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

[138] Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 5-6.

[139] Judith S. Lewis, 'When a House Is Not a Home: Elite English Women and the Eighteenth-Century Country House', *Journal of British Studies,* 48.2 (2009), pp. 336-363, (p. 338).

needs could not be met, despite the warm fireplaces or well ventilated, spacious rooms and this thesis aims to do that.

The development in the historiography of the aristocracy and gentry appears to have taken a similar trajectory to that of the country house in that the earlier studies focused largely on the composition of the landed classes whilst revealing relatively little about the daily lives or experiences of those individuals who made up the groups that were being analysed and discussed. The works of T.H. Hollingworth, Harold Perkin, G.E. Mingay and F.M.L Thompson dominated the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s offering a broader more diachronic survey of the landed elites which explored fluctuations in composition, prosperity, political power and social influence.[140] In the 1980s and 1990s, David Cannadine examined the 'decline' of the aristocracy and gentry, and in doing so produced a new interpretative framework within which to approach their study.[141] However, the focus on the wider issues that these approaches adopt, means that the minutiae of the lives and experiences of individuals are often neglected and the lives of women, within the landed elites, are largely excluded. More recent studies however, with their focus on social and cultural history, 'reveal a far more nuanced picture of the landed classes as rounded people'.[142]

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[140] John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 7.
[141] David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy,* (New York: Vintage Books,1999).
[142] Stobart and Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House,* p. 6.

Families, Sources and Methodology

The six English, elite families used in this study all owned land and property in the East Midlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were the Ishams of Lamport, the Ryes of Culworth, the Thorntons of Brockhall and the Youngs of Orlingbury who all were, largely, based within the county of Northamptonshire; however, this study also includes the Orlebar family from Hinwick in Bedfordshire and the Shirley family from Leicestershire.

There are a number of reasons why these particular families were chosen for this thesis. Firstly, this study commenced, coincidentally and unfortunately, in March 2020, a time which also witnessed the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK's first lockdown. This, of course, resulted in all record offices and local archive services being closed to the public for months at a time which made it difficult to view family collections to consider if they were suitable for inclusion in this study. Consequently, two of the families that had been used in previous research were re-examined to consider if any of the records that had been retained would be appropriate for this study. Fortunately, there was sufficient information to make a start and as a result the Young family of Orlingbury and the Ryes of Culworth are two of the families that have been included in this thesis. The continuing pandemic and the subsequent uncertainty and nervousness about venturing out again into the wider world meant that it was the comfort and familiarity of the Northamptonshire Archive and Heritage Service that was turned to again in the search for other families to use. It was during this next phase that two further Northamptonshire families were identified as suitable for inclusion in this study and these were the Thorntons of Brockhall and the Ishams of Lamport. Subsequently, a more gradual and more confident foray into an increasingly open and social world meant that it was time to seek families that had resided beyond the confines

of Northamptonshire. This resulted in visits to Bedfordshire and Leicestershire where family collections for the Orlebars of Hinwick and the Shirley family of Staunton Harrold were also found.

The Covid-19 pandemic, therefore, very much influenced and informed the decision-making process when it came to selecting the families included in this study. However, there are other reasons why these families sit together neatly within this thesis. On closer inspection of the family documents, which included both letters and several wills, it became apparent that some of the family members knew each other or were aware of each other. It was to be expected that members of elite families would have knowledge of other elite families owing to their moving within the same social circles, but there was evidence that all of the families used in this study knew, or had known, at least one other family. For instance, Frances Young of Orlingbury wrote a letter to Mrs Alicia Shirley about her son Walter in December 1803 whilst Frances' father, Allen Young was cited as a 'particular friend' of Charles Isham, a younger son of the 4th Baronet of Lamport, in his will written in 1764.[143] The Isham family were connected to the Thorntons when Euseby Isham married the daughter of Mary Panting, née Thornton, in 1739, and whose son became the seventh Baronet in the 1770s. The Thorntons were also mentioned in a letter written by Mary Orlebar to her brother Richard in 1786 when she informed him that she had met Captain Thornton of Northamptonshire.[144] A correspondent of Constantia Orlebar, a Miss Jones, wrote to her in 1786 describing her visit to Orlingbury Hall where she had enjoyed dinner with Mr Allen Young and his family and where she had become re-acquainted with her

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[143] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Alicia Shirley, 29 December 1803, 22D64/1, Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (hereafter referred to as R.O.L.L.R); Prob 11/982/336, Will of Mr Charles Isham, 24 November 1772.
[144] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Mr Richard Orlebar, 3 September 1789, OR2071/362, B.A.

former neighbours Mrs and Miss Ekins.[145] The Rye family were mentioned in a letter written by Elizabeth, first wife of Richard Orlebar, in 1774 from Bath, where she informed her sister-in-law Constantia that she had been called upon by Mrs Rye whilst another letter, written by Ann Ekins to Frances Young in 1797, referred to the Jekyll family of Dallington Hall, a prominent Northamptonshire family to whom the Ryes were related.[146] And finally, in several letters written to her brother in 1712 and 1714, Vere Isham referred to Lady Ferrers, second wife of the first Earl Ferrers, Robert Shirley.[147] There was, therefore, an invisible connection that bound these families and which linked them together even before they became part of this study and which, as a consequence, made them seem suitable for inclusion.

The Isham family of Lamport are the most prominent of the four Northamptonshire families that appear in this thesis. The family, according to *Victoria County History*, had resided in the county since, at least, the twelfth century and in Lamport, in particular, since 1559 when the manor house was purchased, although this was soon demolished and replaced by the hall in 1568.[148] The wealth of the Lamport Ishams had its origins in trade, with John Isham, the hall's first proprietor, making his fortune as a mercer in London. On his monument at Lamport his successes are outlined as 'govenour of the English marchaunt adventurers in Flaunders and thrice warden of the mercers of London, twenty-two years justice of the peace, a sheriff of the shire and purchaser of the manor and parsonage of Lamport' which suggests that his wealth, influence and repute were all significant.[149] It was John's grandson, also named John,

[145] From Miss Jones to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 19 July 1786, OR2071/318, B.A.
[146] From Elizabeth Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 13 April 1797, OR2071/292, B.A; From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 22-25 February 1797, YO554(i), Northamptonshire Archives and Heritage Service (hereafter referred to as N.A.H.S).
[147] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 30 December 1712, IC1743, N.A.H.S; From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 8 March 1714, IC1790, N.A.H.S.
[148] *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: History of Northamptonshire Genealogical Volume*, ed. by Oswald Barron F.S.A, (London: Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd., 1906), p. 141.
[149] *Ibid., p. 155.*

who was made the first Baronet of Lamport in 1627 by Charles I. This study examines the family from the fourth Baronet, Sir Justinian, who was the grandson of John (the first Baronet) and the second son of another Sir Justinian (the second Baronet) who succeeded his elder brother Thomas, who died at the age of twenty-four on the eve of his wedding, in 1681. This study focuses on him, along with his wife Elizabeth and their descendants up to the seventh Baronet, yet another Sir Justinian, who succeeded his uncle, Sir Edmund in 1772. Despite the confident and somewhat ambitious claim made in *Victoria County History* that 'not only have no family documents, such as letters, deeds, etc., been destroyed, but that every incident of the least consequence in the family history has been the subject of a careful note', the family collection held at Northamptonshire Archive and Heritage Service remains an extensive one.[150] It has in excess of 3000 letters, of which 830 have been used in the research for this thesis, and the letters used for these purposes span the years 1700 to 1794.

The second Northamptonshire family are the Ryes from Culworth. Found in the south of the county, Culworth is a small village located approximately twenty-one miles southwest of Northampton and seventeen miles northeast of Banbury in Oxfordshire and situated close to the Northamptonshire/Oxfordshire border. The focus of this study is predominantly on two brothers in the late eighteenth century, the Reverend Robert Rye and Lieutenant Peter Rye, although their mother Hannah and their two sisters Anne and Jane are also referred to. Their grandfather George Rye, who was born in Culworth in 1677, had been a clergyman who rose to the position of Archdeacon of Oxford, whilst their great grandfather, also called George, had been appointed as a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber in 1672.[151] Their father William Beauchamp Rye, a physician, married

[150] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[151] *Clergy of the Church of England Database*, (2024) [Accessed 07/09/2024], <CCED: Search (theclergydatabase.org.uk)>, *History Net,* (2024) [Accessed 07/09/2024], <Two Hours of Glory (historynet.com)>

Hannah Jekyll, from Dallington in Northamptonshire, in 1751. Hannah's father John was the nephew of Sir Joseph Jekyll, a politician and judge, who became Master of the Rolls in 1717 and started the building of Dallington Hall, on the site of the former manor, in 1720.[152] Robert, Hannah and William's second son (the eldest George died in 1792 aged thirty-nine), was a clergyman in Osbournby in Lincolnshire but resided at Culworth House in Culworth. He had two surviving brothers, Joseph Jekyll Rye who became the vicar of Dallington Parish Church and Peter Jekyll Rye, who joined the Royal Navy as a captain's servant in 1778 at the age of thirteen, made First Lieutenant in 1791, Commander in 1801, Captain in 1812 and finally Rear-Admiral in 1846.[153] Anne and Jane were the two surviving daughters as another girl, Elizabeth, had died in infancy. Anne married a Captain Barwell of the Royal Navy while Jane remained unmarried. Like the Isham family discussed previously, the Rye collection is held at Northamptonshire Archive and Heritage Service. Described by the National Archives as a 'very interesting late eighteenth and nineteenth century archive of correspondence and naval papers' relating to Peter Rye, the collection includes letters from Robert and also Jane's 1820 travel journal.[154] For this study, a total of fifty-two letters from the collection have been used, which covered the period 1790 to 1845, although the focus is largely on the 1790s.

The Thorntons were another important Northamptonshire family who had resided in the village of Brockhall in the west of the county. It was Thomas Thornton of nearby Newnham, who purchased both the hall in Brockhall in 1625 and Newnham

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[152] *The History of Parliament*, (2024) [Accessed 07/09/2024], <JEKYLL, Sir Joseph (1662-1738), of Westminster | History of Parliament Online>; Marina Oliver, *Dallington Hall,* (Great Britain: Marina Oliver, 2020), p. 22,

[153] *History Net,* (2024) [Accessed 07/09/2024], <Two Hours of Glory (historynet.com)>; *Design & Art Australia Online*, (2024) [Accessed 07/09/2024], <Peter Rye :: biography at :: at Design and Art Australia Online (daao.org.au)>; *Three Decks – Warships in the Age of Sail,* (2024) [Accessed 07/09/2024], <Peter Rye (d.1851) (threedecks.org)>

[154] *The National Archives*, (2024) [Accessed 07/09/2024], <RYE (CULWORTH) COLLECTION | The National Archives>

manor in 1634. His grandfather John had, it seemed, entered into a rather advantageous marriage in 1521 with Lettice Newnham, who was described as an 'heiress' in *Burke's Landed Gentry* whilst Thomas himself was a barrister.[155] This study, however, is concerned with three of Thomas' descendants, brothers Thomas (known by his middle name, Reeve), John and Lee. Their father, Thomas, had been the fifth generation of Thornton men to inherit the hall and land at Brockhall and whilst Reeve, who was the eldest, had succeeded him in 1790 at the age of fifteen, John, a lawyer, and Lee, a merchant, both resided in London. Reeve too appeared to have made a financially beneficial match when he married Susannah Fremeaux of Kingsthorpe. Her grandfather, James Fremeaux, a Huguenot merchant, acquired land in Kingsthorpe, Northampton through his marriage to Margaret Cooke, who was daughter of John Cooke the British consul in Smyrna and his wife Gertrude Constantia de Hochepied, and Susannah inherited the hall, that James built in the mid-1770s, when he died in 1799. As a consequence, the land and property owned by the Thorntons in the west of Northamptonshire was of some significance. The Thornton family, like the Ishams and the Ryes, have a collection of personal and estate records held at the Northamptonshire Archive and Heritage Service although it is not on the scale of the Lamport family and a significant portion of it remains uncatalogued. For this study, however, 118 letters from the Thornton family collection have been considered, which span from 1755 to 1831.

The fourth and final Northamptonshire family used in this study are the Youngs from Orlingbury, a small village situated between the towns of Wellingborough and Kettering, approximately twelve and a half miles northeast of Northampton. Richard

[155] Bernard Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britian and Ireland for 1852,* (London: Colburn & Co. Publishers, 1852), Vol. II, p. 1392.

Young arrived in Orlingbury when he purchased the manor from Brook Bridges, the village Rector, in 1706. This was soon demolished and Orlingbury Hall was built in its place. Richard's grandfather, Edmund Young was, according to *Victoria County History* a 'prosperous weaver' and twice mayor of Evesham in Worcestershire, whilst his father, also called Richard, married an 'heiress of an Evesham Bathurst sprung from the great clothier family of the weald of Kent.'[156] This thesis focuses largely on the younger Richard's son, Allen, born in 1711, and his four, adult offspring; Mary, Frances, Allen and John. Mary married her second cousin, John Barton, stepson of John Hatsell, clerk of the House of Commons in 1789, whilst Frances remained at Orlingbury until their father's death in 1796 when she moved to Cranford Hall, and where she died, unmarried, in 1813 at the age of fifty-five. Allen, who inherited Orlingbury Hall on the death of their father, was a junior merchant in the East India Company and spent thirteen years away from his family, returning back to Northamptonshire in the early 1790s where he subsequently became Sheriff in 1796. Finally, younger brother John became Rector of Thorpe Malsor, a village located just six miles away from Orlingbury, and his daughter Mary became a Viscountess when she married Henry Addington, second Viscount of Sidmouth. Like the three families outlined above, the Young collection is held at the Northamptonshire Archive and Heritage Service, and 146 pieces of personal correspondence covering the years 1761 to 1835 have been used in this study.

The Orlebars had been present in the county of Bedfordshire since the reign of Edward III and had made the hamlet of Hinwick their home in 1714 when Richard Orlebar and his wife Diana finished building Hinwick House.[157] Situated in the north-west of the county, Hinwick is nine miles from Bedford and only five miles from

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[156] *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: History of Northamptonshire Genealogical Volume*' Vol. I, p. 355.

[157] *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britian and Ireland for 1852,* Vol. I, p. 973.

Wellingborough in neighbouring Northamptonshire. Richard had been able to finance the building of the extensive house at Hinwick, which was set in over thirty acres, using capital that his wife had inherited from her parents Sir Samuel and Lady Elizabeth Astry. The couple died without issue and as a consequence the house was inherited, in 1733, by Richard's cousin John Orlebar. John and his wife Mary had four children, a son, Richard, and three daughters Mary, Constantia and Elizabeth. Richard married twice, firstly to Elizabeth Cuthbert and secondly to Charlotte Willing, and had nineteen children whilst his three sisters, none of whom married, lived together in a cottage in the village of Ecton, Northamptonshire after the death of their father in 1765. It is this generation of the Orlebar family, along with several of Richard's offspring, which this thesis mainly focuses on. However, amongst the Orlebar papers held at Bedfordshire Archives are the transcribed writings of Frances Stackhouse Acton (1794 – 1881). Aunt of Richard Orlebar's great grandson's wife, Frederica St. John Rouse Boughton, she had been born in Herefordshire and on marrying had moved to Acton Scott Hall in Shropshire, which she inherited at the age of forty following the death of her husband. Along with Frances' memoirs, which relate to her early life and the illness and death of her only child in 1830, 109 letters written between 1763 and 1881 from the Orlebar collection have been reviewed as part of this study.

The final family that has been used in this thesis are the Shirleys. Staunton Harrold, their Leicestershire seat is in the north-west of the county close to the border with neighbouring Derbyshire and had been home to the family since 1423 although other houses were also owned in the Midlands including Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Northamptonshire. A Baronetcy was conferred upon George Shirley in 1611 whilst his descendant Robert Shirley, the seventh Baronet, became the first Earl Ferrers. Robert and his wife Elizabeth had seventeen children but not all survived into adulthood

and as a consequence he was succeeded by his second son Washington in 1717. He sired only daughters therefore he was succeeded by his brother, and Robert's ninth but second-surviving son Henry, who became the third Earl Ferrers. Henry was declared insane and when he died in 1745, his nephew Laurence inherited both the title and the estates. The fourth Earl Ferrers, however, notoriously killed the family steward and was subsequently hanged, for murder, in Tyburn in 1760. The Earldom was then passed down to Laurence's brother Vice-Admiral Washington Shirley but when he died without issue, the title was again passed to a brother, this time Robert, who became sixth Earl Ferrers in 1778. And it is the descendants of Robert's brother Walter Shirley which this study takes an interest in. Walter, a methodist preacher and hymn-writer settled in Ireland in 1746. His eldest son, also called Walter and a reverend too, with his wife Alicia Newenham, the daughter of an Irish politician, had one child, Walter Augustus Shirley. Like his father and grandfather before him, Walter Augustus, followed a theological path and was ordained in 1820 and his first parish was in the village of Woodford in Northamptonshire, a living his father had previously held. Later in the 1820s, Walter and his wife Maria, whom he had met whilst abroad, moved northwards into Derbyshire where he eventually took charge of the parish of Shirley in 1828, another position that his father had resigned from in favour of his son. The Shirley letters used in this study are held at The Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland in Wigston and those used here total 162.

Personal correspondence comprises most of the primary sources used in this study, indeed 1365 have been used in total and those letters that have been reproduced in this thesis, appear as they do so in the original manuscripts. Alongside the letters, a number of wills, a pocketbook, plus a transcription of a memoir have all been used too. The letters selected for inclusion in this thesis were done so by considering several

criteria – does the letter mention comfort directly, what type of comfort does it refer to, what other words are used with it and what were the main themes with which comfort was being connected? Each letter was then recorded on a spreadsheet, the details of which included the archival reference, the date (if known), the scribe, the recipient, their relationship, and the main theme to which the letter was referring. Using a method, such as this, made it much easier to manage the large number of letters that were being considered but also to ensure that few were forgotten or overlooked. Whilst this study uses a qualitative approach, managing a large corpus of letters in this way means that, should a more quantitative method be adopted, it would allow for the easier extraction of data. There are several advantages of using a larger number of letters in a study such as this. Examining a longer epistolary exchange, for example, can reveal more about the relationship of the correspondents than if considering a letter in isolation and can help the historian to reconstruct the social or familial relationship of those involved. It can assist when exploring changes or continuities in contemporaneous social, political or cultural attitudes. And furthermore, it can allow the historian to build a broader corpus of evidence on which to analyse and hypothesise.

In a study of comfort in the long eighteenth century, family correspondence is a significant source to utilise firstly, because of the prevalence of the letters themselves and secondly, they were a key facilitator of comfort. Susan Whyman has intimated that comfort was an 'important need' and that in times of 'separation, illness and death' it knew no 'regional, temporal or class boundaries' which appears to emphasise the crucial connection between comfort and correspondence.[158] In addition, in eighteenth-century letter-writing manuals, there were often whole sections included which detailed

[158] Susan E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660 – 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 226.

to the reader just how a letter of consolation should be composed, and which also acknowledged how different forms of 'misfortunes and adversities' required different 'letters of consolation'.[159] In *The Art of Letter-Writing*, published in 1762, readers were advised that 'there is not a more laudable custom than that of consoling one another in affliction' although readers were also warned against including 'moral sayings and sentiments of piety' 'when we write to persons who have greater reason to rejoice than be afflicted on account of the death we speak to them of'.[160] What is interesting here, is that the manual also demonstrated the prevalence of what it described as 'indigence' and the ways in which 'fortune makes us miserable so many different ways', highlighting the crucial need for comfort and consolation.[161] These manuals recognised, not only, the significance of comfort and its centrality to everyday elite life but also the importance of letters in 'applying some lenitive' to those needing it, and this will be discussed in greater detail in this thesis' first chapter.[162]

Despite the importance of correspondence and its particular significance in the study of comfort, caution needs to be taken when utilising them as a primary source. Miriam Dobson, for example, has described letters as a 'troublesome genre' and suggests that rather than considering them a 'true record of the writer's inner world' they should also be viewed as an 'individual's attempt to establish the meaning of their life'.[163] By citing the example of nineteenth-century French journalist Céline Renooz, Dobson demonstrates how both the writing and preserving of letters could be utilised to construct, not only, the scribe's identity whilst alive but also their reputation after

[159] *The Art of Letter Writing*, p. 31 and p. vi.
[160] *Ibid*., p. 47 and p. 48.
[161] *Ibid*., p. 48 and p. 47.
[162] *Ibid*., p. 32.
[163] Miriam Dobson, 'Letters', in *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*, ed. by M. Dobson and B. Ziemann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 57 – 73, (p. 57 and p. 60).

death. Renooz had written to many prominent figures in France throughout her life and had, according to Dobson, created her 'own personal archive' when she donated seven thousand four hundred letters to an archive collection, many of which had been copied and re-written.[164] Renooz had understood how crucial her letters would be in the construction of her 'posthumous reputation' and therefore this had been a conscious decision on her part.[165] Arnold Hunt too describes how letter writers were 'acutely conscious of the afterlife of their correspondence' and as a consequence undertook deliberate, yet invisible, processes of both the preservation and destruction of letters respectively.[166] Whilst James Daybell and Andrew Gordon discuss the ways in which the descendants of letter-writers would also take steps to select which documents should be kept and which should not, and which documents should be made available to an archive and which should not in order to preserve or enhance the reputation of their ancestral family.[167]

Susan M. Fitzmaurice, in her study of early modern familiar letters, outlines some of the other challenges when utilising them as a primary source. The genre of the familiar letter itself, she argues, is not a homogenous one; rather it is comprised of a broad range of letters many of which assume 'different guises'.[168] Fitzmaurice also identifies what she describes as the 'referential opacity and vagueness' of the familiar letter that can arise from reading it in isolation or without knowledge of the context within which it was composed.[169] This, she suggests, can pose the risk of the researcher

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[164] *Ibid*., p. 61.
[165] *Ibid*.
[166] Arnold Hunt, "Burn this Letter': Preservation and Destruction in the Early Modern Archive' in *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by J. Daybell and A. Gordon (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2016), pp. 189 - 209, (p. 191).
[167] James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, 'The Early Modern Letter Opener', in *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by J. Daybell and A. Gordon (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 2016), pp. 1-26, (p. 9).
[168] Susan M. Fitzmaurice, *Familiar Letter in Early Modern English: A Pragmatic Approach,* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), p. 5.
[169] *Ibid*., p. 9.

applying anachronistic meanings or assumptions to those documents under scrutiny.[170] To mitigate this, and to ensure that the letter remains a 'rich and robust' source, the context within which the letter was composed must be attended to.[171] If the 'epistolary eavesdropper', as Fitzmaurice describes the researcher, considers the content and intent of the letter alongside its wider 'material, cultural and historical' context then they can enjoy the 'best vantage point' from which to examine it.[172] This is because the eavesdropper may have the benefit of knowing how the epistolary exchange concluded and can, as a consequence, examine the letter 'in light of knowledge provided by history'.[173] So, whilst outlining the challenge of utilising the familiar letter as a primary source, Fitzmaurice also offers ways in which these issues can be addressed or at least lessened thus ensuring that they retain their relevance and usefulness. Indeed, whilst acknowledging the disadvantages of using correspondence, other scholars also point to its advantages. Dobson herself suggests that the study of letters 'enriches our understanding of past mentalities' because they can reveal the ways in which they were used to help shape an individual's identity or 'place in the world'.[174] Whilst Whyman, in addition, highlights how letters can reveal both 'continuities' and 'change that usually lie hidden from view'.[175]

On closer examination of the comfort described in the letters used in this particular study, it was possible to identify that they encompassed a wide range of differing types of comfort. The categories of comfort that can be identified in the letters

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[170] *Ibid*., p. 234.
[171] *Ibid*., p. 238.
[172] *Ibid*., pp. 237-238.
[173] *Ibid*., p. 238.
[174] Miriam Dobson, 'Letters', in *Reading primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century History,* ed. by Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 57-73, (p. 64).
[175] Susan E. Whyman, 'Paper Visits: the post-restoration letter as seen through the Verney family archive', in *Epistolary Selves: letters and letter-writers, 1600 – 1945*, ed. by R. Earle (Aldershot: Aldgate, 1999), pp. 15 – 36, (p. 25).

will, of course, be more closely examined throughout this thesis, but, in short, they included emotional, social, spiritual, financial and physical comfort. These subsets, much like comfort as a whole, are difficult to define because the individuals sought and found them in very personal, idiosyncratic and differing ways. For instance, Lady Mary Isham, in the mid eighteenth century sought emotional comfort in her marriage to Sir Justinian Isham, 5th Baronet of Lamport whereas, Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton found emotional comfort, not only in caring for her terminally ill daughter but also in her memories of her.

With this in mind, it is important also to consider that the letter writers were not always explicit when discussing comfort, indeed they employed a wide range of synonyms to describe it, as well as antonyms to describe its obverse, discomfort. Whilst words such as 'comfort', 'comfortable', 'consolation', 'ease' and 'support' were used in their letters, other words, synonymous or connected to comfort appeared too which not only suggested the ubiquitousness of comfort but also offered a clue about how the subjects themselves considered and defined the various forms of comfort. By examining the types of words utilised by the letter writers it is possible to categorise the words into four groups, although it is worth noting that these are not mutually exclusive. The first group consists of the words, detailed above, that are explicitly associated with comfort, for example the word 'comfort' itself but also 'consolation', 'ease', 'relief' and 'support'. These are the words that appeared in the early lexicographical definitions of comfort in the seventeenth century, and which developed later into the eighteenth, and which would be expected to be employed by the letter writers in this study. The second category includes terms that suggested thankfulness such as 'blessing', 'gratification', 'gratitude', 'satisfaction', 'satisfactory' and 'satisfied', all words that imply appreciation of one's situation. This leads into the third

category which comprises of words such as ‘agreeable’, ‘contented’, ‘informality’, ‘peaceful’ and ‘tranquillity’ which are all terms that infer calmness and equanimity. The fourth and final category contains words such as ‘cheerfulness’, ‘enjoyment’, ‘happiness’, ‘joy’, ‘pleasure’ and ‘wonderful’ which, in turn, suggests elation and gladness. Despite the disparate nature of some of these words there are also significant crossovers and similarities amongst them, yet all are associated with the concept of comfort; one could beget the other.

Similarly, the words that were used to indicate discomfort also covered a broad range of adjectives; indeed, there appeared to be more words that implied discomfort than there were for comfort in the letters examined. They also appeared to cover a broader spectrum; from displeased and low spirited on the one hand to agonising and tormenting on the other. So, whilst words such as ‘uncomfortable’ and ‘uneasiness’ were deployed to describe discomfort, there were a raft of others that seem to fit more neatly, than the words adopted for comfort, into separate categories. The first category implies despondency or sadness and includes words such as ‘anxiety’, ‘disappointment’, ‘disconsolate’, ‘displeasing’, ‘melancholy’, ‘miserable’, ‘mournful’, ‘oppressed’, ‘sorrow’ and ‘vexation’. Whilst the other, which denotes pain and suffering, is comprised of words that could be considered more impactful such as ‘afflicted’, ‘agonising’, ‘distress’, ‘fright’, ‘hurt’, ‘injury’, ‘mortifying’, ‘painful’, ‘suffering’, ‘tormented’ and ‘wretched’. What all these diverse words demonstrated was the real impact that comfort and discomfort had on the lives of the family members in this study; a lack of comfort could cause anything from indifference to agony. And it is only through a study such as this, which examines all these differing aspects of comfort and its relationship with other emotions and affects, where the centrality of comfort in the life of elite families can be seen.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of five chapters in total, four of which mirror some of the major themes highlighted in the letters written by family members. They also cover a number of differing life stages and demonstrate some of the ways in which they impacted experiences of comfort and discomfort. Chapter one is slightly different in approach to the other four, in that it considers the role of correspondence and its relationship with comfort. This is because, firstly, letters are the main primary source used in this study but also, secondly, because they were an important source of comfort. The chapter discusses just how crucial letters could be in conveying comfort between family members but also how, just as critically, the ways in which they could be a source of discomfort too. Chapter two examines the first of the significant themes discussed in the letters, that of family. It explores the inter-relationship between family and comfort and considers the ways in which differing familial relationships could impact comfort. It will also explore the diverse forms that comfort could assume and also the impact that servants had on the comfort of the elite family. The chapter itself is divided into five sections with areas of interest including marriage, sibling relationships, errant young men, money and lastly, servants. Chapter three focuses on elite sociability and how it impacted the comfort of the families examined in this study. It will argue that considerations of comfort were at the very heart of sociability and will demonstrate this by exploring some of the spaces of sociability, such as the country house and their neighbourhoods, the relationship between comfort and politeness and finally the role of clothing in both sociability and social comfort. The subject of chapter four is an area that occupied a significant portion of family correspondence, and that is illness. Whilst not seeming an obvious subject to consider when examining comfort, by viewing it alongside illness it reveals the true impact that ill health could have on elite

families and their comfort. The first half of this chapter explores the discomfort endured as a result of illness, including the financial and emotional burden of providing comfort and the discomfort that could be felt by the comforted. The second section then turns to examine how some forms of comfort could be found through one's own illness or that of a loved one. The fifth and final chapter will examine the relationship between death and comfort. It is an examination of the ways in which the death of a loved one could impact the comfort of surviving family members but also how it could be a source of comfort to them. In addition, it will question the notions of a good/bad death and demonstrate how the sharing of grief could provide consolation to the bereaved.

What the next five chapters will reveal, and what this thesis is arguing, is that considerations of comfort and discomfort penetrated the most significant and important aspects of elite life in the long eighteenth century and as such, its influence should not be underestimated. It permeated family letters so much so that they functioned as agents of comfort and provided individuals with the means to either offer or receive it, depending on their own personal circumstances and needs. From family relationships to sociability and politeness, from ill-health to death, comfort was an ever-present force shaping and being shaped by its inter-connectedness with elite life. Whilst acknowledging that elite families derived increased physical comfort from the technological and architectural improvements being made to the country house during this period, this study will argue that the centrality of comfort to these families reached far beyond that found within comfortable domestic spaces or luxury goods and that other, distinct and elite-specific forms of comfort co-existed, such as that found in correspondence, family, sociability, illness and death.

What this thesis will also argue, is that due to its omnipresence and the fact that comfort imbued so many aspects of the elite experience it is an important subject for

wider historical analysis. It is relevant not only to the history of emotions due to comfort's close interaction with many other feelings but also to scholars of the family, sociability and death as it provides an original perspective from which to consider these important areas of study.

Chapter One Comfort and Correspondence

The long eighteenth century was a 'world of extended contacts' in which correspondence played a significant role.[1] 'Empire, business, travel and separations' meant that for many of the family members in this study, letters became a 'key medium of communication'.[2] According to Susan Whyman the functions of correspondence 'varied with different families' yet 'the most important needs were common to all of them'.[3] These needs, she suggests, included both comfort and support, which, during periods of 'separation, illness and death knew no regional, temporal or class boundaries' and were 'welcomed by all correspondents'.[4] Comfort, therefore, was considered a crucial human need and one that was sought and found in correspondence when family members were separated. The aim of this chapter is to examine the ways in which letters and letter-writing created, facilitated and conveyed a sense of comfort for both the scribe of the letter and its recipient but conversely, how correspondence could have the opposite effect, how it could also produce quite distinct feelings of discomfort and unease.

The eighteenth century is considered the 'golden age' of letter-writing, yet the significance of epistolary exchange, in particular the 'familiar letter', can be found from the mid fifteenth century.[5] Gary Schneider suggests that the continued use of less formal 'epistolary rhetoric' in correspondence meant that by the end of the sixteenth century personal letters were 'firmly established' as a mode of epistolary communication.[6] The language that was adopted, Schneider asserts, ensured the reciprocity and continuity of

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[1] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 1.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers1660 – 1800,* p. 226.
[4] *Ibid*.
[5] Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern England, 1500 – 1700,* (Newark: The University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 13 and p. 41.
[6] *Ibid*., pp. 42-43.

epistolary exchanges; and that letters, as ‘transmissive mechanisms’, became key.[7] He also argues that writers used corporeal references in their letters in order to demonstrate the authenticity of their feelings and to try to replicate the orality and performative qualities of face-to-face communication.[8] Features of direct communication, for example, intonation, rhythm, emphasis and volume were absent from letters which meant that they could often be open to misinterpretation in a way that face-to-face conversation was not.[9] Despite this however, Schneider argues that letters could ‘convey genuine emotion’, and that any affective rhetoric was not just a strategy for conveying epistolary politeness.[10] Clare Brant in her study of eighteenth-century correspondence agrees, asserting that ‘there is more, much more to the cultural significance of letters than how they served politeness’.[11] Letters were ‘central’ to everyday life and letter-writing was characterised by a ‘vibrancy’ not witnessed in previous centuries.[12] Similarly, Sarah Pearsall points to the concept of familiarity and how it helped to shape eighteenth century letter-writing, which, according to Konstantin Dierks, resulted in the familiar letter becoming ‘the dominant mode of letter writing’.[13]

The eighteenth century also witnessed the publication of a plethora of letter-writing manuals all of which offered guidance on how to compose a variety of letters in a ‘polite, easy and proper manner’ and which presented the reader with examples of letters pertaining to an assortment of potential scenarios and correspondents.[14] With

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[7] *Ibid*., p. 55 and p. 111.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 113.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 32.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 144.
[11] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, p. 3.
[12] *Ibid*., pp. 1-2.
[13] Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Late Eighteenth Century,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 57; Konstantin Dierks, ‘The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750–1860’ in *Letter Writing as a Social Practice,* ed. by David Barton and Nigel Hall (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000), pp. 31-41, (p. 32).
[14] *The Complete Letter writer or New and Polite English Secretary,* (London: S. Crowder & H. Woodgate, 1756), title page.

this in mind, it might be assumed that any unease or anxiety about writing a letter would be allayed as all the correspondent would have needed to have done was refer to the manual and find the model letter that was the closest to the one that they wanted to write. This, however, does not appear to have been the case. According to Brant, eighteenth-century letter-writing manuals, whilst they offered advice on the 'correct forms of address and discourses of politeness', were not solely prescriptive and, as a consequence, 'something other than imitation' from those who consulted them was required.[15] She also suggests that it was the letter-writing conventions of fellow correspondents that were far more influential, on the letter-writer, than the manuals that were intended to offer instruction and advice were.[16] Minna Nevala suggests that early modern letter-writers did not just 'obediently' follow the instructions that were given in manuals, rather there was scope for 'personal preference'.[17] Both arguments, made by Brant and Nevala, tie in with the point made in this thesis' introduction in relation to the concept of emotionology; that just because the manuals existed, it cannot be assumed that they were used in the manner that they were intended. In addition, they do not appear to have helped to ease the uneasiness felt by the nervous letter-writer. Brant argues that the act of letter writing could elicit feelings of anxiety amongst the elites because they were fearful of displaying 'epistolary ignorance' which could, in turn, indicate that they were not suitable to 'enjoy the ideological benefits of their class'.[18] There was little evidence to suggest that the correspondents in this thesis utilised the letter models proposed in the manuals, other than those conventions which related to the salutations and valedictions. Indeed, Brant also argues that very few letters

[15] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture,* p. 33 and p. 10.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[17] Minna Nevala, 'Inside and Out: Forms of Address in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Letters' in *Letter Writing,* ed. by Terttu Nevalainen and Sanna-Kaisa Tanskanen (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 89-113, (p. 92.)
[18] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture,* p. 34.

in her comprehensive study of correspondence 'resembled those in published guides'.[19] Whilst scribes were influenced more by the style and form of the letters that they received from their correspondents, the family members in this thesis would have been educated in the art of letter-writing. Boys received a classical education at school and university and as such had an 'epistolary advantage' over girls who were schooled, predominantly, at home.[20] For elite parents, 'epistolary literacy' was essential as it was a 'measurable prerequisite for entering adult society'.[21]

Stobart describes a letter in which good news was conveyed as 'comfortable' whilst those that carried bad news were 'uncomfortable', yet the relationship between familial correspondence and comfort, as this chapter will demonstrate, was more complex than that.[22] Letters could and did evoke feelings of comfort, but these were not limited to the recipient. With a closer look at the motives for writing a letter the various ways in which composing it provided comfort will also be highlighted here. Similarly, the reasons why letters could create discomfort extended beyond the receipt of bad news regarding a family member; it could be caused by writing a letter too. This chapter will, therefore, explore many of the ways in which correspondence created feelings of comfort and discomfort for both the recipient and the scribe. This chapter will have two sections, the first will consider comfort and the impact that correspondence had, whilst the second will focus on the feelings of discomfort that could befall a correspondent.

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[19] *Ibid*., p. 28.
[20] Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800*, p. 32.
[21] *Ibid.,* p. 33.
[22] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 215.

Comfort and Letter-Writing

There were several ways in which elite family members could derive comfort from the physical act of letter writing. In March 1793, in a letter to her sister Mary, Frances Young wrote:

> My dear sister cannot doubt but I thought with many a sigh, of the comfort her dear society would have given, but yet when sorrows come, one ought to exert oneself & take them without repining for there are always consolations which one ought to think of & was it not for those, one should be unable to be of use to others, which is one of the first satisfactions you well know.[23]

The comfort that Frances yearned for here was the type that only her sister's company could truly satisfy. The two women had resided at Orlingbury Hall until Mary's marriage to John Barton in February 1789, after which Mary left Northamptonshire, yet Frances' letter indicated that her sister's absence was still keenly felt. 'With many a sigh' suggested two features about Frances at this time, firstly her longing for Mary's presence and the subsequent comfort that it would bring provoked a physical reaction in her and secondly, her use of the word 'many' intimated that this was not an uncommon occurrence, indeed it implied that it was a somewhat enduring feeling.[24] This short paragraph, therefore, highlighted, just how impactful the need for comfort could be. It also, however, demonstrated that should comfort be impossible to find in its preferred form then it would be sought in others. Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent suggest that letters could become a 'material substitute for physical proximity' and this certainly appeared to be the case in this instance, as without Mary's physical presence to console her, Frances looked for consolation from maintaining a

[23] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 20 March 1793, YO1598, N.A.H.S.
[24] *Ibid*.

regular correspondence with her.[25] It gave her a sense of usefulness and purpose which, as an unmarried woman approaching middle age, may have eluded her. Frances certainly became 'of use to others' in early 1796 when her father's physical health began to rapidly decline and her letters to Mary increased in number until she was almost sending daily updates to her.[26] In one of her letters to Mary, Frances lamented that, as their father's physical frailty increased, she was no longer able to be his caregiver, but as her usefulness in terms of what she could do for her father declined, the significance and frequency of her letter-writing to Mary and the comfort that it gave her seemingly increased. She confided that 'sharing the burden is a comfort – I hope I have not been the cause of more uneasiness to you than was necessary'.[27] This short sentence was significant as it demonstrated not only her need for comfort but also the role that letter-writing itself played in satisfying that need. The comfort that Frances found here came in three forms – first, she needed to share the weight of responsibility that came with being her father's primary caregiver, second, she wanted to share that weight specifically with her sister (their brother Allen was resident at Orlingbury Hall at this time) and third, the first two could only be achieved by writing a letter to Mary. When their father's health improved, which it did briefly and sporadically throughout the final months of his life, the comfort that Frances gained from these occasions was evident in her letters to Mary, 'I am happy and comfortable & rejoice to think that this letter will make you and dear John so' she told Mary.[28] She also gained comfort from being able to share any snippets of good news with Mary:

[25] Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections: Emotional Exchange Among Siblings in the Nassau Family', *Journal of Family History,* 34.2 (2009), pp. 143-165, (p. 152).
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 4 March 1796, YO1603, N.A.H.S.
[28] *Ibid*.

> With what pleasure I take up the pen, you when you read will judge, as I can assure you, that my dear Father's recovery is as rapid and certainly more wonderful than his sudden change to weakness was.[29]

'It is', she told Mary in a later letter 'ever a comfort to give something like a better account'.[30] These three short excerpts showed the way in which comfort was closely associated with other emotions. Frances was comforted by being able to give her sister a more favourable account of her father's state of health and her use of the words 'happy', 'comfortable', 'pleasure' and 'wonderful' revealed the full impact that feeling comforted had on her on this occasion.[31] And her depiction of this in her letter, as well as her prediction that Mary would share the same response to her 'better account', showed how correspondence enabled, not only this sense of comfort, but it also facilitated a shared experience between the separated sisters.[32] And it was this nexus of comfort and correspondence which drew the two of them together in what Broomhall and Van Gent term 'emotional intimacy' and it was this which Frances used as a substitute for Mary's physical presence.[33]

Frances also appeared to use her letters as a means of seeking emotional validation. When her sister Mary married John in 1789 Frances wrote to John's brother Newton that 'the happiness of our dear brother and sister is a constant joy to my heart'.[34] However, she also later described the wedding as a 'dismal thing' and 'a good deed over'.[35] The reason for this became clearer when she described the memories that she

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[29] *Ibid*.
[30] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 28 April 1796, YO1613, N.A.H.S.
[31] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 4 March 1796, YO1603, N.A.H.S.
[32] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 28 April 1796, YO1613, N.A.H.S.
[33] Broomhall and Van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections: Emotional Exchange Among Siblings in the Nassau Family', p. 147.
[34] From Miss Frances Young to Mr Newton Barton, 23 February 1789, YO1725, N.A.H.S.
[35] *Ibid*.

held of the 'former Orlingbury party' and how 'the very thought is such joy to me I must not indulge it for fear of bystanders may mistake it for sorrow to be sure, my way of showing my joy at present is a little ambiguous'. Frances was 'sensible of the happiness' that Mary and John's marriage afforded them, indeed, she told Newton that it 'has ensured to two dear people who are most truly deserving' yet she denigrated those who failed to 'be interested & understand' what she felt when 'every instant in the day presents something in which my dear Mary used to be engaged & I have now only to say she is gone'.[36] Frances' life would have changed almost as much as Mary's and her letter leaves no doubt that she gained little comfort from that, and those people that offered their congratulations on Mary and John's marriage to her, she thought failed to understand her feelings. 'Don't think I mean to give myself airs for indeed I do not; & I never tried half so much in my life to be cheerful' she told Newton; the happiness of Mary and John was apparently not enough to comfort Frances because 'dear old Orlingbury' was lost to her forever and that, she wrote, caused her much grief.[37] Leonore Davidoff has explored the 'painful emotions' that could be triggered by the marriage of a sibling and the subsequent termination of their 'emotional…interdependence'.[38] She suggests that the marriage of a sibling could leave those left behind feeling both rejected and abandoned.[39] Whilst not specifically using the word discomfort in her letter, Frances' use of the words 'dismal', 'sorrow' and 'grieve' to describe how she felt, resonated with those adjectives used in Johnson's definition.[40] He defined 'discomfort' as 'uneasiness; sorrow; melancholy; gloom', all

[36] *Ibid*.
[37] *Ibid*.
[38] Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations 1780 – 1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 136 – 137.
[39] *Ibid.,* p. 137.
[40] From Miss Frances Young to Mr Newton Barton, 23 February 1789, YO1725, N.A.H.S.

terms which could easily be applied to the tone of Frances' letter to Newton.[41] Sara Ahmed suggests that 'emotions *do things*, and work to align individuals with collectives' and this was what Frances seemed to be doing with this letter.[42] It seemed that she was disturbed by her sister's marriage and subsequent move from Northamptonshire whilst at the same time shamed at how she felt. She asked Newton to 'excuse the dullness & strangeness of this letter but I could not resist writing tho' I may have exposed myself by so doing; but you know me of old & I know will judge partially & remember my intention is good'.[43] As she felt that she was alone in feeling this and was also not comfortable with feeling this, she drew Newton into a collective of her own making, she told him that:

> I will not talk to you about the wedding; it was a dismal thing indeed & you my dear Newton I am sure would not have returned one bit better that any one of the party, it is a good deed over.[44]

In her attempt to align Newton's feelings with her own, Frances hoped to legitimise how the changes in Mary's life had made her feel and was perhaps more accepting of them and hence more comfortable with them after she had the opportunity to articulate them in her letter to Newton. In this letter, Frances had allowed her mask of politeness to slip, and even though by doing so she felt as if she may have exposed herself, it seemed that she used her letter-writing as a vehicle to ease the effort that politeness required (this will be explored further in chapter three). In this particular letter, she was no longer tied by the bounds of 'vernacular stoicism' that characterised politeness, rather, the 'familiarity' that marked Frances and Newton's relationship permitted her

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[41] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol I, p. 296.
[42] Sara Ahmed, 'Collective Feelings or The Impressions Left by Others', in *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21.2 (2004), pp. 25–42, (p. 26).
[43] From Miss Frances Young to Mr Newton Barton, 23 February 1789, YO1725, N.A.H.S.
[44] *Ibid*.

to enjoy 'a degree of easy informality' that required little or no effort.[45] That Frances was comforted by the easy affability that writing letters to loved ones afforded could be clearly seen in her letters to Mary. She described to her sister, how whilst she enjoyed a brief period of rest at home during a particularly busy day, she received a surprise visit from some neighbours, which she said 'made us nearly cross. However poor Mrs Gibbon was so good natured and look'd so well and I felt so much compassion for her, that I did not let her discover my ill temper'.[46] Frances' politeness precluded her from displaying the irritation that she felt towards the unexpected guests, but the intimacy of her relationship with Mary enabled her to express it in her letters and not be uncomfortable by feeling it.

Letters could also act as a means of emotional and 'cathartic release'.[47] In February 1793, when Frances received an unexpected marriage proposal from Dr Bridges the local clergyman, she wrote a letter to her sister in which she detailed the distress and anxiety that it had caused her. 'My distress you may believe was great' she informed Mary and went on to say that, 'my dear Father, of course, not to be informed of it not because it was Dr B but he would be in constant fears & fretting I know besides it would make him miserable'.[48] She urged her sister, 'for God's sake write me your sentiments freely on every particular & do not to anyone soul but John mention the circumstance I do beg & intreat'.[49] Frances had consulted her brothers on the issue, but had refrained from speaking to her father presumably, as she had stated, because it would cause him to fret. Mr Young seemingly relied significantly on Frances during

[45] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 287; Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Late Eighteenth Century,* p. 59.
[46] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 28 April 1796, YO 1613, N.A.H.S.
[47] Whyman, 'Paper Visits: the post-restoration letter as seen through the Verney family archive', p. 22.
[48] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 5 February 1793, YO1596, N.A.H.S.
[49] *Ibid*.

this period due to his increasing infirmity and ailing health. Her letters to Mary provided her with means of expressing her mortification at the circumstances surrounding the proposal and the emotional relief that afforded her. In a later section of this chapter however, it will be demonstrated that the comfort that Frances found when she wrote these letters to Mary was not complete, owing to the circumstances in which they had to be written.

The comfort that barrister John Thornton derived from writing letters to his brother Reeve differed from the comfort that Frances found. Periodically throughout his adult life John suffered with mental health problems which often resulted in either his admittance to an asylum or temporary residence with a physician or chemist. The symptoms of his mental health issues appeared to manifest themselves in an almost compulsive fixation on his own physical health and also on writing letters to his eldest brother, Reeve. John believed that he suffered from numerous physical complaints, all of which he described in great detail in a series of letters to Reeve. These included 'dying from hunger & coldness', 'dissolution & deadness' of his intestines and 'the itch (or some disease resembling the itch) internally as well as externally'.[50] He was also convinced that he was being poisoned by the physician whose care he was under, and as a result had ingested 'lead and antimony in medicines for eleven months together as well as in food'.[51] John appeared to take great comfort from detailing his imagined illnesses in his letters to Reeve. He sought to convince his elder brother that his symptoms were authentic and hoped that Reeve would believe him. He wrote that his complaints were 'universally discredited' and therefore, should Reeve believe him in the first instance, perhaps others may follow suit.[52] And by detailing all his symptoms

[50] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 19 September 1821, TH2539, N.A.H.S.
[51] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 24 August 1821, TH2532, N.A.H.S.
[52] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 24 August 1821, TH2532, N.A.H.S.

and re-iterating them in regular letters, he sought validation from Reeve that they existed, this was, according to John, crucial to his own comfort:

> I have had a conversation with Dr H___, in which I have stated to him that my friends had come to a determination to remove me, unless my complaints were attended to & redressed in certain particulars, which are essential to my health, my comfort & I may even say my life.[53]

To John, at this time, his health and his life were inextricably linked to his comfort. However, whilst his focus was on his physical health and the determination that his family would acknowledge his true condition, a report written by his physician revealed the connection between his mental health and comfort too, with letter-writing playing a particularly significant role. Dr Hill described the importance of John's letter writing in his report to Reeve in August 1821:

> In respect to his health, he is certainly in an improving state & since he seems to be more occupied in writing to you (whatever is the subject) I have always observed him more collected & altogether like himself, than when he has had nothing but himself to contemplate on.[54]

Dr Hill urged Reeve to 'interest him in writing' as it 'would keep up an employment very conducive to his mental improvement'.[55] Dr Hill appeared to recognise the comforting and soothing effect that writing letters had on John and his mental faculties. He further added that 'this observation has been particularly observable this evening as he seems to have taken more pains in writing to you' and the impact was such that John and Dr Hill 'walked in the Museum Garden, with much strength & quiet & returned

[53] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 18 October 1822, TH2553, N.A.H.S.
[54] From Dr Daniel Hill to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, August 1821, TH2524, N.A.H.S.
[55] *Ibid*.

this moment without a word about himself', which, it seemed, was not a common occurrence.[56] Dr Hill's use of the words 'collected', 'strength' and 'quiet' in his testimony to Reeve suggested an almost mental ease and contentment in John that his own letters written during this period had not conveyed.[57] This example here, therefore, demonstrated the link between correspondence and comfort and that for John, the physical act of writing to Reeve functioned as a calming mechanism which effected more composed and peaceable traits in him. Illness, which is the subject of chapter four, was a common theme in family correspondence and both good and ill health was regularly communicated. Whyman suggests that letters eased anxiety about 'death, illness and poverty' and that they 'comforted the receiver'.[58]

However, writing about illness, as we have seen above from John Thornton's letters, provided comfort to the scribe. This could also be seen in three letters written to Frances Young by her friend Ann Ekins. The two women had seemingly lost touch and it was only after the death of James Benamore, the curate of St. Mary's Church in Orlingbury and Frances' recently betrothed, in September 1796 that they reconnected through their letters. In her first, Ann offered Frances her condolences but appeared pre-occupied with describing her own physical well-being and told her friend that she must 'hasten to other material subjects'.[59] The material subjects that Ann alluded to was the state of her own ill health which included 'a terrible cough', 'short breath, - violent rheumatic complaints', 'nightly perspirations' and a 'constant hoarseness', all of which had compelled her to orchestrate a move away from Northampton and to Lyme Regis in West Dorset.[60] The descriptions of her health dominated her letters to Frances; but

[56] *Ibid*.
[57] *Ibid*.
[58] Whyman, 'Paper Visits: the post-restoration letter as seen through the Verney family archive', p. 21.
[59] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 23 October 1796, YO554(xvii), N.A.H.S.
[60] *Ibid*.

what comfort could Ann have gained from detailing it in such a manner? The answer appeared to lie in Ann's own material circumstances which differed to those of her friend. She too was unmarried but apart from a housemaid, Ann lived alone in lodgings and neither did she enjoy, as Frances appeared to have done, a close, warm relationship with her family. Her letters, therefore, were crucial to her and their importance was demonstrated when she asked Frances in March 1797, 'How d'ye like living on paper? It promises to be pretty food'.[61] Ann's letters seemed to be, to her, as vital as the sustenance derived from the food on her table. Schneider, in his study of early modern letters, also found the use of food as a metaphor for the 'physical-emotional power of letters'.[62] It was, he suggests, utilised as a method of conveying the nourishing qualities of letters which were expressions of 'epistolary communication and epistolary communion'.[63] For Ann, it was an expression of the epistolary comfort that she had found in her recently renewed correspondence with Frances in which she could discuss her health as well as feel remembered and heard.[64]

The letter-writer, in their attempt to provide comfort to a loved one, could also find it for themself. In December 1813, Frances Young died at the age of fifty-five after a long illness and in the months leading up to her death her brother Allen wrote to their sister Mary keeping her regularly updated with how Frances was faring. Mary also received letters from her sister's nurse as well as a number of her close friends too. Many of the letters that Mary received referred to the way in which Frances coped with her illness. In one letter, Allen described that he visited Frances where he 'found her with her accustomed cheerfulness and she told us that by the means of the opiate she

[61] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 8 March 1797, YO544 (iv), N.A.H.S.
[62] Gary Schneider, 'Affecting Correspondences: Body, Behavior, and the Textualisation of Emotion in Early Modern English Letters', *Prose Studies,* 23.3 (2000), pp. 31-62, (p. 44).
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*

procured nights of comfort'.[65] It appeared that Allen had found comfort himself in his sister's 'cheerfulness' and in the conveyance of that to Mary in his letter.[66] Despite Frances' 'complaint' which he described as 'insidious' and her reliance on laudanum to control the pain, Allen described how she faced it with stoicism and determination.[67] This was mirrored in another letter sent to Mary from a close friend of Frances, who wrote 'Fanny has had a quiet & easy night & is cheerful this morn'.[68] Again both the writer of this letter and Mary, as recipient, must have derived comfort from the words used in the letter to describe Frances' strength and cheerfulness. There was a sense therefore that correspondents found an 'emotional refuge' in the letters that they wrote, and the refuge that they discovered was often in the form of comfort.[69] Whyman also makes a very interesting point about the way in which the physical act of writing a letter could give the scribe the time to 'contemplate abstract ideas in a reflective manner'.[70] So Allen and Mrs Pamela Blencowe, the person who wrote the second letter, would both have had the opportunity to reflect on how Frances' condition made them feel before selecting their words for inclusion in their letter and, as a result, conveying how they felt to Mary.

In 1825, a twenty-eight-year-old Walter Augustus Shirley wrote to his parents, Walter and Alicia, about his feelings for an acquaintance to whom he referred to as 'E.W.' In his letter, in which he acknowledged that he had little time to write, he used the words 'ill at ease' to describe his mental turmoil, and demonstrated the comfort that writing to them about her afforded him:

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[65] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO553(v), N.A.H.S.
[66] *Ibid*.
[67] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1556, N.A.H.S.
[68] From Mrs Pamela Blencowe to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1488, N.A.H.S.
[69] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, p. 129.
[70] Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800,* p. 226.

> I asked Edward to write for me to write for me to acknowledge the receipt of £15 thinking that I would not find time to write to you but my mind is so ill at ease that I must tell my dearest parents what I feel.[71]

The repetition in the first line may have indicated Walter's haste (he confessed to asking somebody else to write on his behalf as he was short of time), or it could have been a sign of his agitation at the need to share with his parents what it was that he was feeling. He told them that he had seen 'E.W very frequently' and that he could not be 'satisfied to relinquish her'.[72] Walter Augustus was not fearful of his parents' reaction to his possible intentions towards E.W. In fact, he appeared confident that, should their acquaintance progress further, they would approve of his choice. His confidence was demonstrated when he wrote that 'I know that if I take this step it would meet with your approbation, or I should wait to hear from you again'.[73] He told Walter and Alicia that the reason that he wrote to them was that he wanted to avoid startling them with news of a possible engagement, 'I write now that you might not be quite taken by surprise in case I should act upon my present feelings, but I scarce know yet what turn events may take'.[74] Closer inspection of the letter, however, revealed that Walter Augustus appeared to use it for a different purpose, it was less about how his relationship with E.W. would make his parents feel and more about him determining how he felt. He described her as follows:

> She may have some faults, but who is without them and I certainly much prefer her to <u>anyone</u> I have seen. She is a very amiable, tender-hearted and I

[71] From Mr Walter Augustus Shirley to Reverend Walter and Mrs Alicia Shirely, 12 May 1825, 22D64/33, R.O.L.L.R.
[72] *Ibid*.
[73] *Ibid*.
[74] *Ibid*.

> confidently believe, pious girl and I am sure we might be very happy together with God's blessing.[75]

This extract seemed to show that he used his letter to catalogue the reasons why E.W. would have made a suitable wife, yet it was almost as if Walter Augustus was trying to convince himself that she would be a suitable wife for him as it was clear that he had some doubts. In a further letter to his parents, written just two days later, he explained, in greater detail, the circumstances surrounding the cause of his ill-ease:

> I dare say you will be surprised at the letter I wrote on Thursday, but I thought the W____s appeared offended at me, and several considerations pressed so heavy on my mind that I determined to satisfy my own feelings and other people's expectations at once. I found however, that they had not taken any such offence & Wm W received me in so frank a manner, that I determined not to act in the precipitate manner I contemplated, and I am thankful to find myself in my present circumstances.[76]

Regardless of the cause, Walter Augustus' unease was, in part, soothed by the writing of a letter to his parents and in this second letter, in which he described his thankfulness, he certainly appeared to be more composed. This letter would likely have afforded Walter and Alicia some comfort too after their only child had informed them that his mind had been ill at ease just two days prior.

The final chapter of this thesis will explore the relationship between comfort and death, yet it is pertinent to mention here how Vere Isham of Lamport found comfort in assuming her father's epistolary obligations, who, after the death of his wife in 1713,

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[75] *Ibid*.

[76] From Mr Walter Augustus Shirley to Reverend Walter and Mrs Alicia Shirely, 14 May 1825, 22D64/33, R.O.L.L.R.

was so debilitated by grief he felt unable to carry them out himself. In a series of letters to her brother Justinian in the months between September 1713 to January 1714 it was evident that their father used Vere as his scribe. In a letter dated 12 September 1713 she told her brother how their father 'desires you wou'd let the coach-maker know that he won't hire a coach but put his own into mourning' and that he also 'thinks it proper that you shou'd acquaint my Uncle Harrison with my mother's death'.[77] The younger man received a number of several similar instructions, from the elder, via Vere's letters. In another she wrote:

> My father asks me if you knew whether my Br Tom design'd to go out again when the ships went next; I told him that you cou'd not tell, he bid me desire you to speak to him about it.[78]

And somewhat apologetically three days later she wrote that 'I believe you will think that I trouble you very often, but I write now by the commands of my Father'.[79] It was not just her eldest brother that she wrote to on her father's behalf, it seemed that she was also occupied writing to her other siblings. In early October 1713 she told her brother Justinian that 'the same day that I writ last to you I writ to my Br. Tom; by my father's order'.[80] And whilst Sir Justinian's correspondence to his eldest son appears to have resumed by January 1714, he continued to use Vere, as shown in a letter from August 1714 in which she told her brother:

[77] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 12 September 1713, IC/1769, N.A.H.S.
[78] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 23 September 1713, IC/1770, N.A.H.S.
[79] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 26 September 1713, IC/1771, N.A.H.S.
[80] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 5 October 1713, IC/1773, N.A.H.S.

> My father orders me to let you know yt he desires you'd pay at the lodgings you have took for him, for his ague return'd yesterday & he says he does not know when he shall be able to go to town.[81]

Thus, her father's grief and apparent inability to function because of it enabled Vere to find comfort, not in him, but in writing his letters for him and there was nothing, she told Justinian in December 1713 that gave her more pleasure than writing to him (other than receiving a letter from him of course). She was also kept busy by other members of the family, explaining in the same letter that 'I have been writing all day' for their brother 'whose secretary I am at present'.[82] In Vere's case, letter writing really had become, what Whyman refers to as, a 'lifeline' during this enforced period of isolation in Lamport, a period of isolation that had been foisted upon her by the death of her mother and her father's subsequent response to it.[83] Vere may also have found comfort in the idea that she had been able to help her father during his grief. Her and her siblings' apparent failure to provide comfort to their father following their mother's death and the frustration that resulted from this will be discussed in chapter five, yet it is relevant to mention here that being able to provide practical support to Sir Justinian may have afforded her with a secondary form of comfort separate to that found in her letter-writing.

Whilst the relationship between comfort and correspondence has been documented previously by historians, it has largely been in relation to that afforded by receiving good news.[84] However, this study's closer examination of letters and the motives behind the writing of them has revealed several other ways in which comfort

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[81] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 28 August 1714, IC/1802, N.A.H.S.
[82] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 26 December 1713, IC/1783, N.A.H.S.
[83] Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660 - 1800*, p. 224.
[84] Whyman, 'Paper Visits: the post-restoration letter as seen through the Verney family archive', p. 21; Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 210.

was gained from composing a letter. It gave the scribe a sense of purpose and usefulness which in turn yielded comfort, it provided them with a place in which emotional validation or catharsis was sought and in John Thornton's experience it helped to soothe and calm an often troubled and tortured mind. Correspondence was also a space in which comfort could be found in the very act of providing comfort to the letter's intended recipient as well as, in Ann Ekins' case, by the sharing of news about one's own ill-health. And finally, for Walter Augustus Shirley it provided a forum in which he made sense of his own feelings by sharing them with his parents and for Vere Isham who found comfort in the distraction that writing a letter could afford.

If the writing of a letter could create a sense of comfort for the scribe, the receipt of a letter often provided the same for its intended recipient. Whyman describes how when 'letters brought news of safe journeys and relief about sickness' they 'comforted the receiver'.[85] This could be seen in the letters of all the families in this study. In 1797, in her letter to Frances Young, Ann Ekins described not only the impact that the hiatus in their correspondence exchange had on her but also the feelings she experienced when she received a letter from her:

> I will not attempt to tell you the pleasure I experienced at sight of your handwriting; you shall better judge by knowing what I felt at your silence having long been completely worried with conjectures not only in waking but sleeping hours- at last I've finally persuaded myself you had resolv'd to blot me evermore from your memory, and there was one point I cou'd not reconcile, - how terribly alter'd my friend Fanny must be, that she cou'd so easily forsake an old & sick friend, at a time when there scarce appear'd a chance they might ever meet again

[85] Whyman, 'Paper Visits: the post-restoration letter as seen through the Verney family archive', p. 21.

> in this world!...Judge then the pleasure I felt when you dispell'd my gloomy castles in so dear a manner, that not a doubt remained of FY's retaining the same affectionate heart as ever![86]

Ann's use of 'gloomy' indicated her discomfort at Frances' apparent lack of contact (Johnson's 1792 definition of 'discomfort' includes the word 'gloom' and both discomfort and gloomy are also defined as 'melancholy'), the extent of which, Ann confessed, had disturbed her sleep.[87] This demonstrated the physical impact that Ann's own discomfort had on her. Schneider suggests that the inclusion of 'recreations of orality and physicality in letters' such as Ann describing her disturbed sleep in this instance, or Frances detailing her sighs in her letter to her sister Mary, were meant to demonstrate and reiterate the authenticity of their feelings.[88] However, what it also did in this case was reveal an example of what Schneider describes as 'epistolary anxieties'.[89] To Ann, it was more than a lost or delayed letter, Frances' apparent 'epistolary silence' seemed to suggest to Ann that her old friend had either forgotten her or had decided not to correspond with her, and it was these fears that had caused her to lose sleep.[90] At the same time however, the repetition of the word 'pleasure' in Ann's letter detailed the impact that receiving Frances' letters had on her; what its use appeared to depict here was the emotional response that receiving a yearned-for letter could have and in Ann's case her 'gloom' regarding Frances was immediately 'dispelled'.[91] Schneider suggests that the expression of 'pleasure, satisfaction and contentment' (all words shown to be connected to comfort) in letters revealed the

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[86] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 22–25 February 1797, YO554(i). N.A.H.S.
[87] *Ibid.*; Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol I, p. 297.
[88] Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern England, 1500–1700,* p. 113.
[89] *Ibid.,* p. 75.
[90] *Ibid.,* p. 89.
[91] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 22–25 February 1797, YO554(i). N.A.H.S.

psychological benefits of correspondence.[92] Again, it demonstrated the shift from mere communication between two people to a communion between two people and comfort seemed to be, in Ann's case, at the heart of this.

The miscarriage or delay of post was another cause of epistolary anxiety so the receipt of a response to a letter previously sent signified its safe transition.[93] For John Thornton, this meant that Reeve had received the many missives that he had sent him detailing his illnesses:

> It would be a great comfort to me to know that you had received this statement as it may be the means of preserving my family from injury if it cannot be the means of preserving my life.[94]

Comfort, to John in this instance, meant a number of different things. Firstly, when he received Reeve's letter in response to this one it signified that his brother was well, but his brother's letter also demonstrated that he remembered and acknowledged him. Stobart suggests that the materiality of a letter itself, notwithstanding its contents, could offer a recipient comfort whilst Schneider states that 'materialisms' of a letter could be considered as evidence of 'affect and favor'.[95] For John, both of these would have been a significant source of comfort. His ill-health impacted his relationship with, and the comfort of, his family (and this is an area that will be explored in greater detail in chapter four), and it was something that his own letters acknowledged. Therefore, Reeve's letter would have had much significance to John at this time. Coupled with this

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[92] Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern England, 1500 – 1700,* p. 141; Whyman*, The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660 - 1800*, p. 62.
[93] *Ibid.,* p. 75.
[94] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 8 August 1821, TH2527, N.A.H.S.
[95] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 217; Schneider, 'Affecting Correspondences: Body, Behavior, and the Textualisation of Emotion in Early Modern English Letters', p. 44.

was that John would have had firstly, the consolation of knowing that the report into his health had safely arrived at Brockhall but secondly, as a result of its safe arrival, Reeve may acknowledge John's medical problems and take steps to remove him from his current situation (which is what he wanted). So, whilst it was important that Reeve received his letter, it was just as important that he acted upon it – both would give John the comfort that he desired. Although John's fears were heightened by his mental ill-health, similar anxieties were evident in the other families' letters. Robert Rye discovered that his brother Peter had failed to receive several letters that he had written to him, and told him that 'it is with vexation I find that the multitude of letters I dispatch to you are never received'.[96] 'Vexation' was defined by Johnson as 'a state of being troubled' or 'uneasiness' so this letter clearly depicted Robert's discomfort at the failed delivery of his letters to Peter.[97] For Robert, his anxiety was amplified by the fact that Peter was often on board ship so he either had to address his letters to the ship or somewhere in the town in which it was docked. In a similar way to John, if Robert had received a response to his letters to Peter his fears for his brother's life would have been somewhat allayed.

But when letters were both expected and received regularly, it created a sense of routine that all family members were able to enjoy. In 1793, following the death of their elderly aunt who had resided at Orlingbury Hall, Frances Young explained to her sister Mary that she 'talked of you on Monday & said Wednesday is the letter day from Sunning'.[98] So even in her final days, the elderly aunt appeared to find comfort from the regularity, as well as the expectation, of her niece's letters. They were, as Broomhall

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[96] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye, 10 December 1795, X7244(53), N.A.H.S.
[97] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol II, p. 469.
[98] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 20 March 1793, YO1598, N.A.H.S.

and Van Gent suggest, a valuable mechanism for bringing the separated family members closer together.[99]

Schneider argues that even when a letter appeared to convey nothing of any importance or significance, it 'nevertheless communicated alliance, fidelity and homage'.[100] This thesis argues that the receipt of such a letter could also result in the recipient finding comfort from it too. Reeve Thornton received many letters during John's episodes of mental instability. However, when John did enjoy more stable periods, he continued to write letters to his elder brother albeit less frequently. The letters that John wrote when his health improved differed greatly to those that he inundated Reeve with when unwell. Firstly, the tone seemed more measured and much calmer and the letter itself was better organised and presented in a much more orderly manner. John no longer repeated himself, nor deemed it necessary to fill every part of the page. He did not, as he was inclined to do during his manic periods, apologise for offering his elder brother legal advice or for seeming to influence or dictate to him. He appeared to be more at ease with writing to Reeve and offered him advice regarding their younger brother Lee and his precarious finances. John's illnesses appeared to have had a significant impact on Reeve and his family and this was highlighted in a letter written to him by Sir John Eardley Wilmot in September 1822:

> The question is not whether all the treatment he has received up to this time has been right or not; or whether you & your family have or have not been harassed to death about your Brother; & that if any change should take place in your

[99] Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections: Emotional Exchange Among Siblings in the Nassau Family', p. 152.
[100] Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern England, 1500 – 1700,* p. 27.

> Brother's treatment under Mr Hill, by altering such treatment, or even by removing him to another, <u>you will or will not be harassed again.</u>[101]

So, when Reeve received letters from John that were not repeated descriptions of his physical health, that were not calls to be moved from whichever medical man he was residing with at the time or that were not demanding that his treatment be fully investigated, it must have been an enormous relief. In early December 1823 John wrote to Reeve of his intention to take lodgings, by himself, later that month 'at No 41 Marchmont Street, Russell Square, from Christmas day next, which I think will suit my purpose very well'.[102] He also discussed his finances and updated Reeve on his social activities:

> I dined yesterday with Mrs Reeve, who has just taken General Bullen's house, No. 3 Gloucester Place, for three years. I believe she is to go into it at Christmas. Lady Susan and her infant are both doing well. Mrs Reeve found great difficulty in getting a house, & they are in general dear. She is to give 430 guineas a year for hers on a lease of three years, & I believe it is not better than the one she is in. Lady Pepys came to town for the winter last week, & Mrs Otway Cave is with her family in Grosvenor Street.

This extract has been reproduced in full in order to demonstrate the difference between this letter and others previously written by John to Reeve. There was no fixation on his, or anyone else's health, there were no accusations of cruelty, John did not recount endless physical problems or predict his impending painful death. In fact, it demonstrated not only his engagement with other people, but an interest in their lives

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[101] From Sir John Eardley Wilmot to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 17 September 1822, TH2551, N.A.H.S.
[102] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 8 December 1823, TH2558, N.A.H.S.

and families. Broomhall, Van Gent and Catherine Mann have all discussed the significance of the structure of a letter, and the placement of text on the page, as a form of 'emotional expression' and what it reveals about the scribe's relationship with the intended recipient as well as their emotional state when they composed it.[103] This was an example of a letter that said 'nothing' yet to Reeve it would have afforded much relief and comfort to both him and the rest of the family.[104]

So, whilst the recipient of a letter could find comfort in the receipt of good news, this chapter has revealed several other ways in which letters could also do this. To Ann Ekins the receipt of Frances Young's letter after a prolonged period in which the two women had lost touch signified that she had been thought of and acknowledged by her friend and the comfort that she derived from that knowledge was quite explicit in her letter. To John Thornton and Robert Rye receiving a reply to a letter also indicated its successful delivery and this too afforded a sense of comfort. For John Thornton in particular, in light of his mental health issues, the fact that his brother Reeve had received his letter was of enormous relief to him. And finally, the content of a letter, not necessarily conveying good or positive news, could also be a source of comfort for the recipient of a letter. It was the participation in a routine or the sharing in the experience of a family member which created a sense of comfort.

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[103] Broomhall and Van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections: Emotional Exchange Among Siblings in the Nassau Family', p. 148; Catherine Mann, "Whether your Ladiship will or ne': Displeasure, Duty and Devotion in *The Lisle Letters',* in *Emotions in the Household, 1200-1900,* ed. by Susan Broomhall (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 119-134.
[104] Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern England, 1500 – 1700,* p. 27.

Discomfort and Letter-Writing

The ways in which comfort could be found in correspondence was, therefore, varied and, as has been demonstrated in this chapter, not limited solely to the receipt of positive news. However, as stated previously, the relationship between comfort and correspondence was a complicated one and as such letters also had the potential to be a significant source of discomfort – for both the scribe and the recipient. Elizabeth, the first wife of Richard Orlebar, appeared to be known within the family for her unease at letter-writing. Her sister-in-law Constantia, in a letter written to Elizabeth in 1767, had remarked that 'we all know your great dislike to writing we are ready with excuses to ourselves when your longer silent than we could wish'.[105] Elizabeth, herself, conceded that the writing of letters was not her favourite past time and often made excuses for her inability to write clearly and regularly:

> I believe I need not give you an account of our journey as you have heard of it by a more able pen than mine...I realy am so often interrupted that I hardly know what I have wrote & am sensible that I never spelt so ill in my life but I am in such a spaffle that I cannot help it.[106]

In another, also to Constantia, she wrote:

> I do suppose you will be surprised at receiving another letter from me but indeed it is in some measure to make amends for what I thought a very stupid letter, not that I believe this will be a better.[107]

Elizabeth's use of words such as 'stupid' to describe her letter and 'spaffle' to describe her state of mind suggested an uneasiness with letter-writing. Her apparent discomfort

[105] From Miss Constantia Orlebar to Mrs Elizabeth Orlebar, 14 July 1767, OR2071/285, B.A.
[106] From Mrs Elizabeth Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 12 March 1773, OR2071/291, B.A.
[107] From Mrs Elizabeth Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 13 April 1774, OR2071/292, B.A.

could perhaps be attributed, in part, to the intended recipient of the letter. All three of the elder Orlebar sisters were accomplished women, Mary had several of her travel journals published whilst Constantia's weather book was posthumously published in 1955 and all, including Eliza, had taken a keen interest in the education of their nieces and nephews. A letter written to Anne from her Aunt Constantia hinted at the exacting requirements expected from her correspondents,

> I am really quite vex'd my Dear Anne, and wish to know who told you yesterday that I was not satisfied with your performance, in the writing way – for much so indeed I was; and am hurt to seem in your opinion so difficult to be pleased; as far as it went if I did not in my haste say it outwardly did with in, that it was prettily wrote and spelt if you had not added the e at the end of sheet – so do not be discouraged by this wrong report of my words only at present avoid writing very hastily, till your hand is more settled for I would not have your scrawls taken for a Mrs Abigail's performance.[108]

Elizabeth was not alone in her apparent epistolic nervousness. Another of Constantia's correspondents, Mary Isted, despite her informality in her greeting to her friend, appeared to show a little hesitation too:

> My dear Conscy will not take it kindly if I've not write to her besides I could not excuse myself as she is always so good to me in the writing way therefore here I am at the top of a great sheet of paper how I shall get to the bottom without a tumble cannot say but hope the scribble will fall upon the paper rather than myself upon the ground for I am so lame at present that I can hardly move.[109]

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[108] Miss Constantia Orlebar to Miss Anne Orlebar, Date Not Known, OR2071/408, B.A.
[109] Miss Mary Isted to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 3 August 1780, OR2071/311, B.A.

Mary Isted too, like Elizabeth Orlebar, appeared to be making excuses for her lacklustre letter-writing skills even before she had started her letter to Constantia. So, despite the prevalence of letter-writing in the eighteenth century and the presence of manuals, not all letter-writers felt wholly at ease with the practice. The subject of epistolary nervousness was briefly discussed in the introduction of this thesis, and for these two elite women it certainly appeared to impact them. Elizabeth's use of 'spaffle' to describe the content of one letter and 'stupid' for another and Mary's deployment of the word 'scribble' does not suggest these were women who were at ease with putting pen to paper. Letter-writing was a 'domain in which women excelled' and yet when they did not, it could cause unease.[110] Brant argues that the 'skills' of letter-writing were 'symbolic' and were 'social as well as practical,' so a deficit could represent a lack in education or in perceived femininity.[111] This may not have created too much anxiety if letters had remained in the hands of the person to which they were addressed but this rarely happened, especially with familiar letters.[112] Men in particular were known to disparage the female letter if they contained any spelling or grammatical errors and while Elizabeth and Mary's letters were addressed to Constantia, they were certainly shared with her sisters Mary and Eliza and all three women were seemingly well-educated, articulate and erudite and so it is not difficult to imagine how an unconfident Elizabeth felt when she wrote her letters.[113]

At least Elizabeth and Mary had the courage to start their letters. In September 1755, a twenty-seven-year-old William Thornton urged his cousin Lucy to write to his

[110] Clare Monagle, Carolyn James, David Garrioch and Barbara Caine, *European Women's Letter-Writing from the Eleventh to the Twentieth Centuries,* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), p. 129.
[111] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture,* p. 34.
[112] Hunt, "Burn this Letter': Preservation and Destruction in the Early Modern Archive', p. 193.
[113] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture,* p. 46.

parents, Thomas and Frances, on the subject of him marrying his cousin Mary. They seemingly disapproved of the match, which made William reluctant to broach it with them himself. Lucy wrote to her Aunt Frances:

> It is late yet at yr most earnest request of Cou. Billy I trouble you with this to tell you what he himself went down to Astrop to have told my Uncle & you himself & this day has try'd to write it but his ink will not come out of his pen. But as I am not in love as he is I can tel you in few words that he earnestly begs both your consents to marry his Cousin Trimnal. [114]

What is interesting to note here is the disparity between the behaviour of William and that of Walter Augustus Shirley. Walter Augustus was explicit in his letter to his parents that his mind was ill at ease, and he used his letter to them to decipher his feelings for E.W and, as a consequence, he (and ultimately, they) found comfort in his letter. William however found no comfort in the prospect of composing a letter to his parents, in fact it had quite the opposite effect on him. Lucy revealed in her letter to William's mother that he had appeared 'drunk' but once he had revealed his wish to marry Mary and his aborted plan to seek consent from his parents, she understood the cause of his behaviour.[115] Lucy told her aunt that 'he took me into a dark hole and told me this & would not part with me till I promised him to write tonight'.[116] 'His happiness' she continued, 'depends on this so he will be glad to know his fate as soon as he can ye answer pray let come to him & I hope by that time ye ink will fall out of his pen'.[117] This letter revealed the physical impact on William that writing that letter to his parents had on him. Whilst this was very much tied up in his wish to marry Mary, in this

[114] From Miss Lucy Sherard to Mrs Frances Thornton, 4 September 1755, TH2082, N.A.H.S.
[115] *Ibid*.
[116] *Ibid*.
[117] *Ibid*.

instance he failed to find comfort in the composition of a letter, preferring to seek it through his cousin Lucy.

The failure to deliver good news could also cause discomfort for the letter writer. In 1831, John Thornton was residing in a private asylum in Hillingdon, Middlesex run by a Dr James Stilwell. On the 19 July, Lee Thornton, Reeve and John's younger brother, revealed in a letter to Reeve that John had managed to escape. Lee described the incident as a matter of 'most distressing anxiety' and assured his eldest brother that 'as soon as I hear anything further on the distressing subject I will write again to you'.[118] The connection with comfort (and discomfort) here could be seen through Lee's employment of the words 'distressing' and 'anxiety'. 'Distressing' was defined by Johnson as a 'calamity' whilst the definition of 'anxiety' was 'trouble of mind' and 'lowness of spirits'.[119] The latter two were very similar to the meanings offered, by Johnson, for discomfort which were 'uneasiness; sorrow; melancholy; gloom' whilst French and Rothery also highlight the connection between anxiety and unease, suggesting that unease was a psychological manifestation of anxiety.[120] Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Lee was discomforted by both the experience and the need to detail it all in a letter to Reeve. Lee's concern for John's welfare was apparent in this letter and it was very likely a difficult one to write. Lee lived in London and therefore shouldered much of the responsibility for John, and he regularly updated Reeve about him. The source of Lee's discomfort may have been two-fold – his anxiety caused by John's disappearance but also the confession to Reeve that he had failed to keep John safe. The relationship between the three Thornton

[118] *Ibid*.
[119] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 309.
[120] Henry French and Mark Rothery, 'Male Anxiety Among Younger Sons of the English Landed Gentry, 1700 – 1900', *The Historical Journal*, 62.4 (2018), pp. 1 – 29, (p. 12).

brothers will be explored in greater detail in chapter two but this example demonstrated the often difficult position of younger sons. Lee had found the asylum in which John had been placed, indeed his letters revealed that he had spent many days trying to locate a suitable institution for his brother and the news that John had disappeared (from the place which Lee had chosen for him) clearly caused him some anguish. French and Rothery discuss the struggle that younger brothers had in asserting their 'identities within the patriarchal order' as well as their 'dominance over other men and women' and for Lee, who acted as Reeve's proxy for John in London, this must have been an anxious time.[121] John however, during a period of stable mental health two years earlier had advocated for his younger brother when he approached Reeve, on Lee's behalf, for financial support and so the anxiety and distress that Lee experienced here may have been an acknowledgement of his unstable position within the Thornton male hierarchy.

The inability to alleviate the distress or disappointment of one's correspondent was another way in which writing a letter could cause discomfort for the scribe. In February 1790, Peter Rye was impatient with the speed of his progression upwards through the ranks of the Navy and his older brother Robert, at that time, encouraged his eagerness for advancement, he told him that, 'I always deemed laudable your anxiety for promotion, as tending to independence'.[122] By November 1795 however, Robert's letters to Peter assumed a different tone, one that seemed to emit a weary acceptance of both his brother's, and his own, lack of advancement. He wrote, 'when you pour forth your uneasiness to me, you judge with reason that I sympathise therein & most earnestly desire to alleviate the causes of vexation'.[123] There were four significant words in this short sentence which connected Peter and Robert's frustration with the notion of

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[121] *Ibid.*
[122] From Reverend Robert Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 9 February 1790, X7244/9, N.A.H.S.
[123] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye, 20 November 1795, X7244/52, N.A.H.S.

comfort. Firstly, Robert referred to Peter's 'uneasiness' and 'vexation', two words that have been shown to be connected to comfort in the introduction of this thesis. 'Sympathise' and 'alleviate' however, were also linked as 'sympathy' was a synonym for 'pity' which meant 'tenderness for…uneasiness' whilst 'alleviate' was 'to ease'.[124] Robert tried to offer comfort to his brother, he told him he should, 'aim at some tranquilising idea' but conceded that 'we are too quickly a prey to despondency and discontent'.[125] His next letter to Peter indicated that he had failed in his attempt to 'alleviate' his brother's 'vexation' as he wrote, 'I have indeed the mortification of finding you have causes of uneasiness'.[126] Robert's use of 'mortification' to describe how he felt at his failure to help Peter demonstrated the impact that this could have on letter-writers. He also described these 'various sorrows' as 'impediments' to his and Peter's 'present happiness' so, for Robert, this impacted more than just his correspondence with his younger brother.[127] French and Rothery have noted that 'family connections gave seniors and siblings a responsibility to assist each other' and in the Rye brothers' case, the responsibility fell to Robert as their father had died in 1780 when Robert was twenty nine years old and Peter fifteen.[128] Robert's 'duty of care' to his much younger brother was an integral part of his 'masculine duties' as the senior male in the family and a failure to provide this impacted both ideas of masculinity and comfort.[129]

Another way a letter writer may not derive comfort from the physical act of writing a letter was by the circumstances in which it was written. Following the

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[124] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol II p. 167; vol I, p. 60.
[125] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye, 20 November 1795, X7244/52, N.A.H.S.
[126] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye, 10 December 1795, X7244/53, N.A.H.S.
[127] *Ibid.*
[128] French and Rothery, 'Male Anxiety Among Younger Sons of the English Landed Gentry, 1700 – 1900', p. 18.
[129] *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

unexpected marriage proposal in February 1793, Frances Young and her sister Mary exchanged a number of letters in which Frances described how she was 'distressed beyond measure' and although she had been able to use her letter to describe the episode, which she had kept from her father, her distress did not appear to have been completely allayed.[130] Just over a week later, Frances wrote another letter to Mary – the condition of which suggested that her feelings of upset were still present. The letter consisted of seven and a half pages, with almost every page completely covered with writing, with a number of crossings out, ink blots and frequent under linings. Frances' letters to Mary were often of a somewhat informal and relaxed nature but this one in particular appeared to show the impact that the incident had on her. Like John Thornton's letters discussed earlier in this chapter, this letter symbolised Frances' emotional state when she composed the letter.[131] This feeling was exacerbated by the intrusion of a house guest when Frances attempted to write her letter. She told Mary that, 'I really have written this in haste for Ekins is ever more coming in & I am sure I look as if something was the matter' although she also hoped that 'Ekins discovered nothing in my manner'.[132] Letter-writing was 'often a public affair', indeed Frances made several references throughout her letters about how Mary's letters were shared amongst the household, but she had also mentioned on this occasion that it must only be Mary and her husband, as well as her two brothers, who should know of the proposal.[133] This was, therefore, not only a sensitive subject for Frances to write about, it was one she wished to keep within the confines of her correspondence but also she

[130] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 5 February 1793, YO1596, N.A.H.S.
[131] Broomhall and Van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections: Emotional Exchange Among Siblings in the Nassau Family', p. 148
[132] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 13 February 1793, YO1597, N.A.H.S.
[133] Broomhall and Van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections: Emotional Exchange Among Siblings in the Nassau Family', p. 147.

was not permitted the freedom to address it as she wished, that is, not in company. 'You will excuse anything that is not right' she asked her sister.[134]

The broaching of difficult or contentious subjects, the conveyance of bad news or the knowledge that the contents of a letter would fail to comfort its recipient were all reasons why a letter's scribe may not be comforted by the physical act of writing it. But there could also be a negotiation between both comfort and discomfort for the letter-writer in that they could be conflicted between the two. For Frances Young, as outlined in an earlier section, when she wrote to Mary about their father's health throughout his illness it gave her a sense of purpose and yet she was often the bearer of bad news. Frances never shied away from giving Mary an honest account of his decline, an account that must have been uncomfortable for Frances to write and for Mary to read:

> Tho you would have some comfort from my last letter I can not but write by the first post after receiving your last to inform you of our dear Father as I will know what your dear and tender anxiety must be but to remove that is not possible as I can only give you the same account, he has had three fits this day but thank God they cause no suffering to him and indeed his state is so easy that for any of us to repine would be discontent at a most merciful providence.[135]

What was striking about this letter was how different it appeared from those written by Allen Young about Frances when she was ill which were discussed previously. He described her cheerfulness and her means of finding comfort and by doing so conveyed his own comfort that he had found in that at the same time as providing it to Mary. Frances, in this instance, did not do this. She wrote that their father's condition was 'easy' and apparently pain-free, but she also acknowledged that it was not enough to

[134] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 13 February 1793, YO1597, N.A.H.S.
[135] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, circa June/July 1796, YO543 (iv), N.A.H.S.

comfort Mary's anxiety. Indeed, further on in her letter she may have perpetuated it. She wrote:

> What you say my dearest sister as to coming to Orlingbury I perfectly understand…as to the visiting my dear father again by way of comfort to him or you; it is out of the question as I am well convinced he could not receive the smallest satisfaction from seeing you which I know would be a grievous thing to you to behold.[136]

To have told her sister not to visit their dying father must have been a difficult task for Frances but she did so, it seemed, in order to safeguard Mary and her memories of their father. There was almost a compromise in writing this letter for Frances, that of finding a balance between finding comfort for herself and dealing with the discomfort that her honesty created for her and her sister. This conflict can be seen in the following passage:

> You may depend on hearing of every particular and was I not convinced you could receive no comfort from seeing my dear father as he is I should have advised you to come but I really judge as I would with any one would have done by me in the same circumstances that we should have a natural pleasure in watching to the last together, there can be no doubt but there are other considerations as you justly say besides mere inclination.[137]

Frances appeared confident that what she thought would bring comfort to Mary was in tune with what Mary herself believed would bring her comfort. The differences between the two siblings' approach in the ways in which they offered comfort to Mary was therefore significant. Patricia Crawford suggests that there was an expectation that

[136] *Ibid*.
[137] *Ibid*.

siblings would 'love and support each other in life crises' but also that these 'expectations were gendered'.[138] Brothers, argues Crawford, were more inclined to offer or provide 'material aid' whereas sisters provided 'services'.[139] In terms of the comfort that the two siblings offered Mary, it reflected both these gendered expectations but also their individual relationships with their sister. Allen wrote to Mary after he had made his visits to Frances in Cranford, they detailed both practical information as well as the comfort previously discussed. Yet, the tone and length of his letters differed to those written by Frances. She composed long letters, ostensibly with updates about their father's health, yet she included much more detail about her life at Orlingbury which included information about shared acquaintances and family events as well as more personal news. This apparent openness reflected the closeness that existed between the two sisters and goes some way to explain Frances' decision to advise Mary not to visit their dying father. She was confident that she knew the best way to comfort her sister.

What happened however when there was no such alignment in ideas of comfort, when one person's comfort is another's discomfort? In January 1835, on a visit to Mary Barton's home in Maidwell, Northamptonshire, Allen Young died suddenly at the age of seventy-six. His sister received several letters from friends and family members offering their condolences, most of which celebrated Allen's seemingly long, healthy and contented life. One of Mary's lifelong friends wrote, 'But dear Mary I cannot grieve for him who is now taken by his maker without much previous suffering' while Allen's son emphasised his father's 'cheerful countenance, his peaceful contented and affectionate mind' in his letter to his aunt. Two of the condolence letters that Mary received however referred specifically to the manner of Allen's death at her home and

[138] Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 218.
[139] *Ibid.*

offered two very different opinions. The first suggested that Mary's distress at her brother's sudden death would be heightened by the fact it happened at her home, whilst another proposed that she 'must look back with feelings of comfort to the circumstances which enabled you to minister to the end towards the ease of the dear relative you have lately lost'.[140] Letters of condolence were the 'first step in the consolatory process'.[141] They were an attempt by the letter-writer to convey their sympathy and often included 'an effort to ease the sorrow and relieve the grief' of the mourner, and by doing so it urged them to 'reframe their loss in a new perspective'.[142] Mary's two correspondents offered two very different ways in which to 'reframe' her loss and also demonstrated how differently comfort could be considered and conveyed.[143] Whilst it is not known if Mary gained any comfort from the knowledge that she eased her brother's last moments or that either of these letters reflected her true feelings on the matter, it is, however, suggested that a misalignment in what one considered comfort could mean that any comfort offered may fall short and instead have the opposite effect that it ultimately intended.

Another way in which correspondence could prompt feelings of unease or discomfort was if it was used it as means of discipline or punishment. In a letter written in December 1790 by Robert Rye to Peter he admonished his younger brother for his conduct:

> Such behaviour, suffice it to say is more than capricious, it is false, base and contemptible. Your friends, as if the shame on them redounded, are vexed, are

[140] From Miss Susan Ekins to Mrs Mary Barton, 10 January 1835, YO554(iii), N.A.H.S; From Mrs Emma Robinson to Mrs Mary Barton, January 1835, YO554(iv), N.A.H.S.
[141] Thomas Carr Jr., 'Sharing Grief/Initiating Consolation: Voltaire's Letters of Condolence', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 25 (1996), pp. 131-146, (p. 131).
[142] *Ibid.,* pp. 131-132.
[143] *Ibid.,* p. 132.

> tortured by it. Your mother and myself who hoped the bitterness of boyhood past, are by these recent frolics rendered almost desperate of your reformation. What cares we undeservedly feel! Her anger is blended with her sorrow, and she resents your unfeeling, irrational prodigality which can so unkindly restrict her in the decline of life and by your expenses diminish even those few comforts her circumstances might have permitted her to have indulged in.[144]

Robert's letter was closely followed by one from Hannah his mother, and although she did not explicitly express the same anger as her eldest son, her letter shares his exasperation with Peter:

> Can you suppose I who have ever been attentive to the welfare of my children can ever be at ease in my old age to find so little regard paid to all the parental advice that has been bestowed upon you.[145]

Explicit in both these letters was the impact that Peter's 'contemptible' behaviour had on Hannah's comfort and Robert, in particular, used her comfort within an emotional economy.[146] This was when 'emotion words' were employed as a means to influence or control the behaviour of family members.[147] In this instance, Robert described how Peter's actions had caused him and his mother shame, vexation, anger, sorrow and resentment but he also included how it had affected her comfort. The suggestion seemed to be that Hannah was entitled to expect some form of comfort in her later years, but that Peter had undermined this by his errant behaviour. This tactic was designed to trigger an emotional response in the younger son which would effect a change in his

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[144] From Reverend Robert Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 28 December 1790, X7244/5, N.A.H.S.
[145] From Mrs Hannah Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 23 January 1791, X7244/7, N.A.H.S.
[146] From Reverend Robert Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 28 December 1790, X7244/5, N.A.H.S.
[147] Ruth Barton, ''Dearly Beloved Relations'? A Study of Elite Family Emotions in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Northamptonshire', *Family and Community History,* 23.1 (2020), pp. 55-73, (p. 56).

behaviour and his mother's comfort could be restored. This demonstrated the importance of comfort within this elite family because they used it almost as a bargaining tool. Indeed, Hannah herself also re-iterated this importance when she asked if she would 'ever be at ease' in her old age.[148] The notion of comfort underpinned the emotional economy deployed here.

The discomfort that correspondence could induce was, like comfort, multifaceted. The very thought of picking up a pen to ask for permission to propose to his cousin was too much for William Thornton, whilst writing a letter to her learned sister-in-law caused much anxiety for Elizabeth Orlebar. The knowledge that the recipient would take delivery of bad news or the not knowing what the recipient's reaction could be prompted the letter writer to be discomforted when composing a letter, whilst being on the end of a seeming onslaught of letters also caused uneasiness for the recipient.

Despite this, correspondence was a key facilitator of comfort. The act of writing a letter could catalyse a feeling of comfort by providing the scribe with a sense of purpose or by enabling the conveyance of good news and, as a consequence, perpetuating and transferring their own sense of comfort. Letters were also a mechanism for cathartic release which permitted the writer to be relieved from the bounds of politeness and to more freely express, to their loved ones, thoughts that may have remained hidden from outsiders. They could also be a means of seeking out a sense of collective comfort, a way for the writer to articulate uncomfortable feelings with the hope of aligning themselves with like-minded people and thereby finding comfort in numbers. Letter-writers could also derive comfort from the act of seeking to

[148] From Mrs Hannah Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 23 January 1791, X7244/7, N.A.H.S.

provide comfort to a relative; comfort begot comfort as it were. The correspondence examined in this study has demonstrated that comfort was an important consideration for family members, it was not just an expected or formulaic element of a letter. If a correspondent could provide comfort to the receiver of their letter, it was not something that they shied away from. However, what was also identified from the correspondence was that the scribe could derive both comfort and discomfort from writing the same letter, there was not necessarily a distinct separation of the two. Similarly, it seemed that there could also be a negotiation between finding comfort for oneself whilst simultaneously generating discomfort for others. Frances Young was confident that her knowledge of her sister justified the short-term discomfort that her choices would produce, compared with the long-term comfort that Mary would ultimately gain.

The receipt of a letter, despite the intention of the writer, therefore, did not automatically produce a sense of comfort for the recipient. Receipt often confirmed the health and wellbeing of the writer and an acknowledgement that one's own letter had successfully arrived at its intended destination, but the contents of the letter were key in what comfort could be derived. Reeve Thornton received countless letters from John, and it is likely that few afforded him much comfort. It would have been the apparent insignificant or mundane letters that detailed his social engagements or his legal matters, for example, which Reeve was likely to have been more comforted by rather than those in which John obsessively described his medical complaints. The receipt of bad news or a rebuke from a family member in a letter was also unlikely to produce any form of comfort for the recipient and in these instances fail to produce much comfort for either the writer or their correspondent.

The first aim of this chapter was to show that a 'comfortable' letter was much more than a letter that delivered good news.[149] A letter, from which comfort was received, as has been described above came in many different forms for both its recipient and its scribe and by examining the motives behind the writing of a letter it was possible to see what comfort was found and why it was needed. Similarly, an 'uncomfortable' letter, one that caused discomfort, was far more nuanced than one that just conveyed bad news; it too impacted both correspondents in a number of different ways.[150] The second objective was to demonstrate the significance of comfort in elite life – that it was an important consideration, a conscious goal and a major influence and the letters discussed here attested to this. By analysing the reasons for the letter, the relationship between the correspondents and the language that they used, it was possible to gauge what comfort meant to people and how they shared that with others.

[149] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 215.
[150] *Ibid*.

Chapter Two Family Relationships

The focus of this chapter is the elite family and its relationship with comfort. This has been selected as an area of further examination for two main reasons; firstly, somewhat unsurprisingly the subject of family was one of the most prominent themes that emerged from the letters used in this study, and as the previous chapter demonstrated, concern about or news of family members was a significant priority for these families. Secondly, the letters also provided a rich and detailed insight into the differing familial bonds that existed and so it was a wonderful opportunity to examine both those and the ways in which they enabled (or disturbed) the comfort of its members a bit closer. As the introduction of this thesis highlighted, the composition of the elite family in the long eighteenth century was diverse and often included apprentices and servants, 'co-resident' and multi-generational relatives as well as close friends and it showed little evidence of a shift towards a more nuclear family unit.[1] The families used in this study certainly attested to this. Within the Young family, for example, an elderly aunt resided with her brother Allen Young Snr. and his adult offspring, whilst Frances moved from Orlingbury after her father's death in 1796 to reside at Cranford Hall with her friends, the Robinson family. Their affection for her is documented in a letter written by Pamela Blencowe, one of her childhood friends, during Frances' terminal illness in 1813:

> It is a subject of sincere satisfaction to me to have my dear friend here, for she is in possession of every comfort her situation admits of – strange would it be were it otherwise – but still it will ever be a source of thankfulness to me that she should have derived comfort under a roof where she has bestowed so much.

[1] Naomi Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household Family in Eighteenth-Century England', p. 112.

> Indeed my dear Mrs Barton there is not an individual of the family who does not feel this.[2]

This short extract depicted the strength of feeling that existed between the Robinsons and Frances and whilst Pamela did not explicitly refer to Frances as family, the suggestion that she was considered as such was certainly implied. This letter also inferred that comfort was very much an important part of this relationship. When she wrote of her 'thankfulness' that Frances had found comfort within the family after she had 'bestowed so much', it suggested a type of comfort that was characterised by mutuality.[3] And despite her acknowledgement of Frances' 'situation' (her illness) this did not seem to be the sole catalyst that drove the Robinson's desire to comfort their friend. In addition, Pamela's use of the word 'satisfaction' demonstrated a further connection to comfort.[4] Satisfaction, according to Johnson, was the 'release from suspense, uncertainty or uneasiness' and this letter appeared to show that by releasing Frances' uneasiness, she was also releasing her own.[5] This example alone highlighted not only the way in which the family unit could be diverse but also that comfort could also be a significant characteristic regardless of its composition.

The other families in this study also seemingly defy Lawrence Stone's focus on conjugality and the significance that he placed on the nuclear family. Miss Jane Rye, for instance, lived with her unmarried brother Robert in Culworth, whilst Edmund Isham welcomed his sister Vere to Doctors' Commons after the death of their father and prior to her settling in Twickenham and the three Orlebar sisters, referred to as the

[2] From Mrs Pamela Blencowe to Mrs Mary Barton, 22 November 1813, YO1491, N.A.H.S.
[3] *Ibid*.
[4] *Ibid*.
[5] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol II, p. 285.

sisterhood, resided together in their small cottage in the village of Ecton which they called ‘The Cot’.

The main argument of this chapter is that the notion of comfort was an intrinsic aspect of everyday life and everyday relationships, and that whilst family could often provide its members with the balm with which to soothe and smooth out life’s edges, it could also be a source of considerable disruption and discord. The impact of these relationships on an individual’s comfort could be seen in the variety of different adjectives employed by the family members in their letters. These will be analysed in closer detail throughout the chapter but the list of words, both synonymous and antonymous with comfort, but which were used to demonstrate the effect of familial relationships, were wide-ranging yet were employed reasonably consistently throughout the period of this study. There are letters included in this chapter that were written between 1704 to 1820 and the word ‘happy’ and its derivatives ‘happily’ and ‘happiness’ were used throughout. Similarly, ‘pleasure’, ‘pleasing’ and ‘pleas’d’ were others that were employed to describe a more positive effect, in fact it appeared fourteen times in the letters used in this chapter over the period 1705 to 1796. Other adjectives that were also used were ‘easier’ (which was closely linked to an early lexicographical definition of comfort), ‘relieved’, ‘agreeable’ and ‘gratified’ and it was these types of words that conveyed the sense that comfort had been found in or derived from a familial bond. Likewise, the more negative impacts of family relationships were described, at times, as causing ‘anxiety’, or being ‘uneasy’, ‘mortifying’, ‘degrading’ or ‘melancholy’. What this miscellany of adjectives demonstrated was that firstly, comfort was often clustered with other feelings and affects (and this is something that is further explored in the chapter on illness and comfort) but secondly, that it made it possible to consider the impact on comfort even when it was not explicitly cited. For example,

when in 1789 Frances Young described her 'greatest pleasure' as being her ability to recollect 'former times' despite giving the appearance that she was 'satisfied with new things and new ways', it is possible to conclude that she took great comfort from the memory of her former circumstances yet little from her current.[6]

So, what did comfort, within the context of elite family relationships, look like? As discussed in the introduction, comfort assumed many guises and encompassed a wide range of elements and within the family it was no different. To one father it meant ensuring the financial security of his family and to a wife it was found in the maintenance of an affectionate, yet long-distance, relationship with her husband. For one sister it was the relief from an intellectually stagnant and lonely country house and for a brother it was the memory of his family from whom he was separated – these were just a few examples of what comfort could mean to elite family members. It was as diverse as it was complicated as this chapter will demonstrate, because the same familial relationships could also create discomfort and anxiety. A brother both dismayed and exasperated at his sibling's prodigality, an aunt's concern at her nephew's behaviour and a brother-in-law's desire for pecuniary relief. All these examples, and others too, will demonstrate just how significant the impact family relationships could have on comfort. There will also be a focus on one of the most critical domestic relationships that elite families could have; the one that they had with their servants who, according to Tadmor, were considered part of the family composition.[7] A family's comfort was very much reliant on the smooth running of the house and the litany of tasks that servants were expected to undertake and so a closer analysis will be undertaken in order to explore the ways in which the employer/servant relationship impacted it. The first

[6] From Miss Frances Young to Mr Newton Barton, 23 February 1789, YO1725, NA.H.S.
[7] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 19.

area of examination in this chapter will be marriage and whilst the marital relationship has been explored by others, the focus of the second section, that of adult siblings, has been to a lesser degree.[8] The third part will focus on the behaviour of young male relatives and how these were addressed which will then lead into how discussions about finances and financial comfort could disturb family relations. The final section of the chapter will then explore the often-complicated relationship between the elite family and those people that they employed, these include female servants, male attendants and medics.

Marriage

Marriage, according to Henry French and Mark Rothery in *Man's Estate*, offered elite men with 'the opportunity for long term emotional security and support,' whilst wives, Vickery suggests, were 'equal souls' within marriage and often 'fond bedfellows and domestic allies' while Joanne Begiato describes the 'deep affection spouses felt for each other'.[9] Whilst marriage could and sometimes did provide all of these, these descriptions belie the nuanced and complicated ways in which marriage and the marriage process itself impacted the various forms of comfort. In May 1718 when Sir Justinian Isham, 4th Baronet of Lamport received word that his eldest son had been seen 'once or twice' in the company of a young lady, he assured his first born that 'I shall endeavour to do everything for you that may tend to your present and future happiness'.[10] However, despite Sir Justinian's assurances at the close of his letter to his

[8] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 262.
[9] Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities 1660-1900,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 197; Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 9; Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England 1660* -1800, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 28.
[10] From Sir Justinian Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 7 May 1718, IC/2414, N.A.H.S.

son, they had in fact, been preceded by quite the discussion surrounding the unnamed woman and her reputed 'considerable fortune':

> But I thought it had been more than he reports, and that it had been in money, and not in land, wch makes it uncertain, and pretty difficult to know the real value of it, being in a different country. If you have any inclination that way, I will endeavour to make the best enquiry I can, as to the true value of the lady's fortune & will make as good a settlement at present as my circumstances will permit, having so great a charge of children, and other incumbrances upon my estate.[11]

So, whilst he assured him that he would do 'everything' to ensure his son's 'present and future happiness' this did not quite extend to the younger man's emotional comfort and any feelings of regard that he may have had for the young woman in question. 'Happiness' in this context meant financial security and it appeared to take precedence, at least for Sir Justinian, over and above any emotional considerations.[12] The prioritisation of financial over emotional comfort was a repeated theme in Sir Justinian's correspondence with his unmarried, eldest son during this period. A mere five days later, he wrote again to Justinian on the subject, which demonstrated just how crucial financial comfort was to him. In his letter he questioned the true value of the lady's supposed fortune, and shared his doubts that it was as great as they had initially been told. He also feared that any potential settlement would be insufficient to pay Justinian's 'brs and sisters portion with some other incumbrances'.[13] He did, however, end his letter with an assurance that he would be 'very inclinable to contribute' all he

[11] *Ibid*.
[12] *Ibid*.
[13] From Sir Justinian Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 12 May 1718, IC/2415, N.A.H.S.

could to make his son's 'condition easier and happy'.[14] This statement on its own would suggest Justinian's emotional comfort was a priority for him, particularly with the use of the word 'happy' and 'easier' which are closely connected to the notion of comfort.[15] However, juxtaposed against the backdrop of the ongoing discussion surrounding the lady's finances as well those of his own family, with its many incumbrances, this did not appear to be the case. Indeed, it called into question Sir Justinian's pledge to his son that he would 'do everything' and was 'very inclinable' to ensure his son's future happiness.[16]

A year later, Sir Justinian was more explicit in his suggestion that happiness equated to both financial security and financial comfort. In a letter to his eldest son, in which it remained unclear if the lady to whom he referred was the same one as the previous year, he explained that enquiries were due to be made to the young lady's mother and a proposal would be made if a favourable account of 'hr fortune both in present and expectancy' was received.[17] Whilst Sir Justinian wrote that he hoped this would make his son 'easier and happy', he also hoped that details of her fortune 'may suit with my circumstances'.[18] He explained that should they fail to, he would be forced to make a 'great charge upon the estate', which he told Justinian would 'prove very inconvenient' for him and his 'future expectations'.[19] It would seem from this extract that Sir Justinian had, in effect, forced his son to make the decision between marrying someone who could make him happy (but which would financially cripple the Lamport estate and his own future fiscal stability) or subordinate his own future emotional

[14] *Ibid*.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] From Sir Justinian Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 7 May 1718, IC/2414, N.A.H.S; from Sir Justinian Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 12 May 1718, IC/2415, N.A.H.S.
[17] From Sir Justinian Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 11 May 1719, IC/2414, N.A.H.S.
[18] *Ibid*.
[19] *Ibid*.

happiness and comfort by not marrying this particular person (but retaining the prospect of ensuring his own and his sibling's financial security). This example here clearly demonstrated the conflict that could occur between the differing forms of comfort and the necessity of having to negotiate between them. The younger Justinian did not marry until 1725, therefore, it seemed in this instance, he prioritised his and his family's financial ease above all other considerations of comfort.

Justinian was not the only son to have been subjected to his father's focus on financial comfort. Edmund Isham, who later became the sixth Baronet in 1737 when his elder brother died, received similar advice, although in his case, he had already made the decision to marry, and it was this which provoked an outburst from his father:

> To marry a woman upon making equal terms with a father; who will undoubtedly insist upon an equivalent for what he gives his Daughter – is not certainly all that a younger Brother shou'd aim at, nor is it what I can pretend to do, having so many children to provide for.[20]

Whilst he made similar assurances to Edmund about hoping to make him 'happy & easier in this world,' Sir Justinian derided his apparent disregard of his (and Justinian's) financial circumstances when he became betrothed to his first wife whose fortune Sir Justinian thought 'not Ample enough for a Younger Br with a family to live upon'.[21] He repeated the words 'happy' and 'easier', which he had used in his letters to Justinian, to describe Edmund's comfort, and again equated it to fiscal concerns and financial security.[22]

[20] From Sir Justinian Isham to Mr Edmund Isham, 2 August 1729, IC/2141, N.A.H.S.
[21] *Ibid*.
[22] *Ibid*.

It is worth noting the context within which this letter was written. Sir Justinian's eldest son had, by this time, been married for three years but had no children, although it is known that Justinian's wife Mary had miscarried a child in 1726. He may have already been concerned that no heir was forthcoming and that potentially the Baronetcy and the Lamport estate could be inherited by Edmund who was the second son. Therefore, he may have been keen to ensure that the family and estate would be in safe and secure hands. Sir Justinian had himself been a second son, inheriting the estate after the sudden death of his elder brother Thomas in 1681, allegedly of smallpox, following his return from his grand tour at the age of twenty-four. Thomas Isham, the third Baronet, had succeeded at the age of nineteen in 1675 but had not been known for his frugality during his short life. Rather, he was famed for his profligacy and, in fact, many of the artefacts and paintings that remain at Lamport Hall today, can be attributed to the extravagance that he displayed whilst abroad. It has also been suggested that the Isham name and Lamport estate had suffered both reputationally and financially during Sir Thomas' brief Baronetcy which perhaps explained the younger brother's fears of both familial embarrassment and financial ruin.[23]

The prioritisation, by Sir Justinian, of the financial comfort that could be found in marriage over that of the emotional comfort is still somewhat of a surprise when his own marriage, and the comfort that it brought him, is considered. He married Elizabeth Turnor in 1683 and despite the initial match most likely being a financial rather than an affectionate one, their correspondence suggested that their thirty-year marriage was a warm and companionable one. Indeed, in the final chapter of this thesis, the impact that Elizabeth's death had on both her husband and the comfort of the rest of their family

[23] Miriam Grice, "Steer a Safer Course' Sir Justinian Isham: Family Life at Lamport Hall (1681–1730)', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 63 (2010), p. 47–57, (p. 47).

will be examined, and this will demonstrate the closeness of their relationship. So, Sir Justinian was neither averse to, nor ignorant of, the benefits of the emotional comfort that having an affectionate and loving spouse could bring, he just appeared to prefer to subordinate them to the financial advantages of a wealthy one.

There are, however, several examples within the families explored in this thesis whereby the comfort afforded by a marriage was far more than merely financial. One example is the marriage of Mary and John Barton. When Frances Young wrote to her brother-in-law John following the death of her father in July 1796, she was confident that he could be relied on to comfort and console his wife Mary:

> I must thank you for your very kind & most tenderly affectionate letter; which gave me much comfort from the assurance of my dearest sister being as well as the first hearing of an event, which can not but be most affecting to us all could admit I well know the kind attention and affection she would receive from you.[24]

What is interesting to note from this letter was that the comfort Mary found in the affectionate and kind attentions of her husband, also provided comfort to her sister. Mary was not the only Young sibling to have enjoyed a close, warm and loving relationship within their marriage, it appeared that her brother John had too. In a letter written in 1792 to his sister Mary, he described his feelings on being parted from his wife whilst she visited family in Hertfordshire. He wrote that their parting was 'so much more miserable to me than I expected' and described the way in which it had affected his mood.[25] A coach ride to Wellingborough, John said, 'proceeded melancholy enough' and a trip to the village of Loddington cut short because 'the place was so melancholy

[24] From Miss Frances Young to Reverend John Barton, 9 July 1796, YO543(i), N.A.H.S.
[25] From Reverend John Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 29 November 1792, YO550(x), N.A.H.S.

that I could not suffer the weather'.[26] The connection between Mary's absence and John's comfort could be identified by his choice of the words 'miserable' and 'melancholy' to describe how her absence affected him.[27] Both were used in Johnson's definition of 'uncomfortable', which also included 'gloomy; dismal' and 'receiving no comfort'.[28] So, in this instance, a melancholic or low mood represented an uncomfortable situation.

Whilst this was just a short and temporary separation for John and Mary Young, the letters written during periods of prolonged absence, such as those experienced by Mary Isham and her husband Sir Justinian, 5th Baronet of Lamport, revealed not only the nature of their relationship but also the interplay between marriage and comfort. Sir Justinian, like his father before him, spent a significant amount of time away in London while executing his duty as Member of Parliament for Northamptonshire whilst Mary was a frequent visitor to Bath, where she liked to take the waters, and Warwick, where her mother resided, so they endured extended periods of separation throughout their twelve-year marriage. Mary's letters to her husband offered an insight into the nature of their relationship and the impact that the absences had on both her and her comfort. Mary often wrote parts of her letters to Justinian in French and coupled with her use of their pet names which she would frequently add to a postscript at the end of her letters, it was in these short excerpts where she appeared to reveal her real feelings for him. In June 1731, six years after their nuptials she wrote, 'La pauvre petite Madame T____ (the names that she used in her letters for herself and Justinian were Mr and Mrs Trub) as touchee cette letter, & elle envoye une baise à son petit mari'.[29] And again in March

[26] *Ibid*.
[27] *Ibid*.
[28] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol II, p. 479.
[29] From Lady Mary Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 12 June 1731, IC1997, N.A.H.S. (*Poor little Madame T___ touched the letter, & she sends a kiss to her husband).*

1732, ‘Madame T un petite baiser à son cher’.[30] The sending of a kiss from Mrs Trub showed that Mary wanted to demonstrate her affection to her husband, but she shied away from openly declaring it in a letter that may have been intercepted or read by somebody else. This showed that she seemed more at ease in her relationship with her husband than she was with the carriage of her letters.

In the main body of her letters, and when written in English, Mary appeared to be more reverent towards her husband; but, despite being veiled in more formal language her letters indicated that she considered her husband’s comfort, even when they were not together. In September 1728 Mary wrote that:

> Mrs Trub will do her utmost to make everything as agreeable as she can & will rejoice to see you but in case you stay Northampton Races, yn you’ll oblige me in writing a line to me, for I assure you (next to seeing you) nothing will be a greater pleasure.[31]

‘Agreeable’ was connected to comfort by its association with the word ‘pleasing’ (a derivative of ‘pleasure’ which, itself, was synonymous with comfort) and also by the link between the words ‘pleasing’ and ‘satisfy’ (which as detailed previously was defined as a ‘release from uneasiness’).[32] ‘Agreeable’, therefore, appeared to be doing a lot of heavy lifting in this letter. Mary’s pledge to make ‘everything as agreeable’ as she could, intimated that she would make Justinian’s time spent with her as easy, for him, as possible and she even seemed to use the promise of this comfort and ease as an incentive for him to make a swifter return to her than he may have initially proposed.[33]

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[30] From Lady Mary Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 25 March 1732, IC2009, N.A.H.S. (*Madame T a little kiss to her dear).*
[31] From Mrs Mary Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 18 September 1728, IC1929, N.A.H.S.
[32] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol I, p. 55.
[33] From Mrs Mary Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 18 September 1728, IC1929, N.A.H.S.

Karen Harvey suggests that early eighteenth-century homes, driven by 'material changes,' were 'transformed' into 'places of sociability and comfort' and that by the second half of the century, the 'home' was considered an 'emotional and psychological category'.[34] Yet Mary's letters written in the 1720s suggested a comfort predicated not on material consumerism or 'domestic interiors' but rather on affection and amity.[35] She did not elaborate further in her letter but Mary made no mention of material goods or furniture, indeed the clear suggestion was that it would be she (or Mrs Trub) who would do 'her utmost' for Justinian.[36] What this and similar letters demonstrated was that Justinian, despite his geographical separation from Mary, was very much drawn into their shared domestic space and, as a consequence, their domestic comfort. Similarly, letters written by Lady Elizabeth and Sir Justinian Isham, Justinian's parents, in the early 1700s also showed an engagement with the home on Sir Justinian's part despite, like his son, spending months away at a time in London. Whilst Elizabeth's letters had a different tone to that of Mary's, in that at times she appeared to enjoy the occasional period of solitude and reflection, they also indicated the role that her husband had in their domestic space. Elizabeth, known as Bess, used her correspondence with her husband to ask him to send foodstuffs and household items such as candles and she even provided their daughter's measurements in order for Justinian to arrange the purchase of stays for them. This, it appeared, he undertook quite willingly:

> I thank you so kindly offering to assist me if I wanted anything but at present I shall not trouble you...for those few things that's wanting in the house I think

[34] Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 212), p. 10.
[35] *Ibid*.
[36] From Mrs Mary Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 18 September 1728, IC1929, N.A.H.S.

> they may be had at Northampton as well besides at this time it may be your advantage to lay out some money with them.[37]

As well as undertaking all the errands for Bess, Justinian ensured that he wrote to his wife three times a week and in his letters, he too, revealed the importance of the couple's shared domestic space:

> My thoughts are all now upon Lamport and I am preparing for my journey next week. I shall be so happy as to be with my dear Bess again…..I hope never to be so long from you again.[38]

'Lamport' in this letter meant Bess, the evidence could be seen in the final sentence when he told her that it was she that he hoped never to be too long away from. Vickery suggests that elite gentlemen longed for 'female companionship' and a 'centred domestic life'; that a man on his own 'had no domesticity worth the title' and both Mary's and Bess' letters revealed the nature of their own particular forms of domesticity that they shared with their husbands.[39] They depicted the warmth of conjugal companionship and what Vickery describes as 'homeliness'.[40] Stobart suggests that 'objects, spaces and memories came together to offer comfort and to underscore a feeling of a shared home' which was, he asserts 'especially important during a period of absence'.[41] And the letters of Mary and Bess highlighted how their letters facilitated this sense of a shared domestic spatiality and the comfort that it afforded. Their letters, as well as Sir Justinian's to Bess, also showed that elite men were present and interested in the domestic sphere. The domestic sphere, John Tosh suggests, was integral to

[37] From Lady Elizabeth Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 24 February 1705, IC1668, N.A.H.S.
[38] From Sir Justinian Isham to Lady Elizabeth Isham, 22 February 1705, IC1667, N.A.H.S.
[39] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*, p. 82.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 53.
[41] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 238.

nineteenth-century middle class masculinity in that it was men who established, protected, provided for and controlled the home but they also had the 'privileged freedom to pass at will between the public and the private' divide.[42] The letters outlined above indicated that, for elite married men in the early eighteenth century, that they too enjoyed an ease with which they could move between the public and the private. Jane Hamlett suggests that there was a 'patriarchal expectation' that a wife would undertake the role of 'domestic manager' within the home in order to 'deliver comfort largely for the benefit of her husband' yet Sir Justinian's and Bess' letters, in particular, suggested that he also participated in domestic management even when he was not physically present.[43]

Absence could certainly impact the comfort of a wife when parted from her husband, as Mary's case has demonstrated. However, on occasion it was the absence itself that provided comfort. In a letter to Mary Barton, estimated to have been written in 1813, her brother Allen Young wrote that 'my family is reduced by the departure this morning of Mrs Young, Martha Neate, little Amelia, Allen and Charlotte for Worthing with a man and maid servant'.[44] This followed advice given to Allen's wife the previous day that 'warm sea bathing and sea air' would be beneficial to her.[45] Allen told Mary that he hoped that the 'change of scene' would 'do her good' but he appeared to relish the idea of the separation when he confessed that:

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[42] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class home in Victorian England,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 4.
[43] Jane Hamlett, 'Home Making: Women, Marriage and Comfort in Victorian Middle-Class Drawing Rooms', in *The Comforts of Home in Western Europe, 1700-1900,* ed. by Jon Stobart (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 127-145, (p. 130).
[44] From Mr Allen Edward Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1558, N.A.H.S.
[45] *Ibid.*

> The parting and the prelude to it produced a degree of harmony which had not subsisted for some time before and if it shou'd continue I shall be relieved from no small degree of oppression.[46]

Allen's choice of words in this letter suggested that his relationship with his wife Amelia, whom he married in 1804, was not an easy one. Both the words 'harmony' and 'oppression' used by Allen in his letter were connected to the concept of comfort.[47] 'Harmony' according to Johnson meant 'concord', which in turn was defined by the words 'agreeable' and 'agreement', whilst 'oppression' (defined as a 'state of being oppressed; misery; dullness of spirits') was associated with being 'uncomfortable' by its connection to the word 'misery'. This extract therefore suggested that neither Allen nor Amelia derived much comfort from their marriage; indeed, Allen's employment of 'oppression' to describe it was somewhat telling. Hamlett points to the importance of female 'emotional investment' in the creation of comfort within the domestic space, suggesting that 'creating comfort was about producing the right kind of marriage as much as a material space' and Allen's letter seemed to demonstrate the result when perhaps that 'feminine' investment was lacking.[48] The comfort that Allen appeared to derive from the prospect of Amelia's absence was also an exemplar of what Reddy describes as an 'emotional refuge'.[49] The oppressive nature of his relationship with his wife was an indication of the 'emotional effort' that was required in their marriage and therefore the subsequent harmony, which Allen hoped would continue, represented a 'relaxation' of effort that Allen expended in order to maintain some level of emotional

[46] *Ibid.*
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Hamlett, 'Home Making: Women, Marriage and Comfort in Victorian Middle-Class Drawing Rooms', p. 131.
[49] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, p. 129.

equilibrium within it.[50] There does not appear to be any further mention of their marriage in his letters but the difference between Allen and Amelia's relationship compared to that of his brother's and his wife was quite stark. John was melancholy without Mary, whereas Allen's relief at Amelia's absence was almost palpable.

Allen's apparent relief at Amelia's departure for Worthing was not the only example where comfort was found in family members being separated. The fourth chapter of this thesis in which the relationship between comfort and illness is examined will highlight in greater detail the ways in which Frances Young coped with her terminal illness but it is pertinent to mention here that whilst she spent her final days in the home of the Robinson family at Cranford, she requested that her sister Mary did not visit. Her friend, Pamela Blencowe wrote to Mary and told her that Frances 'begs you will not come as agitation is what she prays to God to be comforted from'.[51] 'Agitation' was defined as 'perturbation' which in turn was described as the 'disquiet of the mind; deprivation of tranquillity' and 'a cause of disquiet' whilst 'disquiet' was 'uneasiness; restlessness; vexation; anxiety'.[52] Pamela's words demonstrated not only the discomfort that a visit from Mary could cause for an increasingly weak Frances but also the importance that absence could have in maintaining her comfort.

Siblinghood

Whilst Frances, on that occasion, chose the comfort that the absence from Mary brought her, this certainly had not been the case throughout their lives, and she had keenly felt their separation when, in 1789, Mary married John Barton and left Orlingbury. Frances described the impact of this in a letter to Newton Barton, John's

[50] *Ibid*.
[51] From Mrs Pamela Blencowe to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1488, N.A.H.S.
[52] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol I, p. 55; vol II, p. 157; vol I, p. 305.

brother, composed shortly after the wedding in the February of that year, when she wrote that 'you will not wonder at my feelings & know that every instant in the day presents something in which my dear Mary used to be engaged & I have now only to say she is gone'.[53] Mary had been the mainstay of her younger sister's life, which had witnessed their mother's death in 1761 when the girls were aged six and three and the prolonged absence of their younger brother Allen who left for India at the age of seventeen in 1796, so when Mary departed Orlingbury, Frances was left bereft. She told Newton that 'the dear old Orlingbury is lost for ever; which thought does grieve me'.[54] By using the word 'grieve' Frances clearly conveyed the sense of loss that she felt following Mary's departure, but its use also demonstrated the impact that it had on her comfort. 'Grievous' (derived from 'grieve') meant 'expressing a great degree of uneasiness' whilst 'to grieve' itself appeared as a meaning of the word discomfort in Johnson's dictionary so the connection between Mary's presence and Frances' comfort becomes clear.[55]

The only means that Frances had to comfort herself, she advised her cousin, was the recollection of 'former times' and this became the 'greatest pleasure' that she could find.[56] As previously detailed, there was a strong link between the words 'pleasure' and 'comfort', thus Frances' use of 'pleasure' to describe how the recollection of 'former' and happier times made her feel, demonstrated the comfort that she had been able to find in them. Allen, Frances and Mary's brother, employed a similar method of finding comfort whilst in India and separated from his family. A series of twenty-one letters written from Allen to Frances over a period of nine years survive in the Young family

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[53] From Miss Frances Young to Mr Newton Barton, 23 February 1789, YO1725, N.A.H.S.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol I, p 403; vol I, p. 196.
[56] From Miss Frances Young to Mr Newton Barton, 23 February 1789, YO1725, N.A.H.S.

collection at Northamptonshire Archives Service, although it is understood that Allen remained in India for a total of thirteen years. In one such letter, believed to have been written in January 1778 from Bengal he told Frances that 'I have hit upon the very thing. What a delightful acquisition to the human mind is the endearment of recollection'.[57] Thus, it appeared that the two siblings, eleven years and almost five thousand miles apart, used the comfort of memory to relieve, what Allen described as, the 'pangs of absence'.[58] This was a method that Allen had used since his early days in India. In 1777 he had asked Frances to 'tell me all these things & as many more of the like nature as your memory will assist you, they are pleasing & call to recollection former happy times'.[59] The impact on Allen of his absence from his family was evident from his letters and whilst he acknowledged that periodically he had enjoyed 'a continued scene of gaiety, by the exhibition of masquerades, plays, harmonies, balls,' he also confessed that in order to find true contentment, he would need to return to Northamptonshire:

> I am much better pleased with the country that I have hitherto been and enjoy a tolerable good state of health but amidst all the gay times I still retain the most current desire to return home and shall never consider myself completely happy until that period arrives when I shall make me of the party at the Orlingbury fireside.[60]

This short extract here was significant in that it clearly highlighted the strong connection between happiness and comfort which was discussed in this study's introduction. The image of the 'party at the Orlingbury fireside' in Allen's letter was a

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[57] From Mr Allen Edward Young to Miss Frances Young, 25 January 1778, YO709(xv), N.A.H.S.
[58] From Mr Allen Young to Miss Frances Young, 15 October 1781, YO709(xviii), N.A.H.S.
[59] From Mr Allen Edward Young to Miss Frances Young, 19 December 1777, YO709(xvi), N.A.H.S.
[60] From Mr Allen Edward Young to Miss Frances Young, 15 October 1778, YO709(xviii), N.A.H.S; from Mr Allen Edward Young to Miss Frances Young, 7 December 1781, YO709(xxi), N.A.H.S.

powerful one.[61] It conveyed not only the physical warmth afforded by the fire but also the emotional warmth provided by the loved ones sitting around it. It was the comfort that would be found in both that would make Allen 'completely happy' thus demonstrating the centrality of comfort in elite Georgian life.[62]

Allen's letters to Frances also revealed a closeness between the two siblings during this period in their lives; indeed, Allen himself described it as an 'intimate tenderness which subsisted between us in our earliest days and which absence has served to confirm rather than to diminish'.[63] His use of 'tenderness' to describe their relationship indicated that it was characterised by both gentleness and kindness. Gentleness itself suggested a soothing quality ('soothe' being defined as to gratify and please) and as a consequence had links to the notion of comfort.[64] Vere and her brother Justinian Isham, who later became the fifth Baronet of Lamport, shared a similar relationship in their youth. Vere, the eldest surviving child, was born in 1685 and Justinian followed shortly after in 1686 therefore their closeness in age may have contributed to the closeness in their relationship. The impression that Vere's letters gave is that theirs was a friendship that went beyond mere siblinghood. They enjoyed each other's company and when apart, sought ways to maintain their closeness and this continued from the early 1700s through to the mid-1730s, ending only with Justinian's death in 1737. In May 1704, at the age of seventeen, Justinian left Lamport with his cousin Edmund Turnor and embarked on a three-and-a-half-year educational trip to Europe. Accompanied by a tutor, Mr Masson, the two young men spent a year in Holland and then travelled to the Ducal Academy Wolfenbüttel in Germany in June

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[61] From Mr Allen Edward Young to Miss Frances Young, 7 December 1781, YO709(xxi), N.A.H.S.
[62] *Ibid*.
[63] From Mr Allen Edward Young to Miss Frances Young, 3 April 1785, YO709(x), N.A.H.S.
[64] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol II, p. 417; vol I, p. 443; vol II, p. 347.

1705 where they remained until June 1707 at which point, they embarked on their slow journey home.[65] Vere's early letters to her brother, mostly written in French at their father's insistence, revealed an ease between the two siblings with references to shared experiences and good humour. However, in a letter written seven months after her brother's departure, in December 1704, she lamented her brother's absence when she wrote 'if we spent our time happily last summer it is quite another thing at this time, and we are only going to be able to do so now rarely'.[66] This short extract appeared to show an almost wistful Vere reminiscing about the happier times that she had spent with her brother in the summer of the previous year, but it also revealed the impact that her brother's continued absence had on her life at Lamport. She did not expect to experience the same type of happiness that she had formerly, and this letter seemed to attribute this to the siblings' separation. This was a theme that persisted throughout Vere's correspondence with Justinian. Her letters portrayed both a life of tedium and of intellectual stagnation at Lamport without him and she appeared to relish reading about his exploits and enjoyed his experiences vicariously through him:

> I would be very grateful to you, if you would take the trouble when you see me again to tell me a little story of what you would have seen remarkable in your travels.[67]

In another letter Vere described her gratitude at Justinian taking the time to describe to her, in great detail, his exploits as her letters indicated that he too was a regular and willing correspondent:

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[65] H. Isham Longden, 'The Diaries (Home and Foreign) of Sir Justinian Isham, 1704-1736', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society,* 1 (1907), pp. 181-203, (pp. 186-188).
[66] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 4 December 1704, IC/2334, N.A.H.S.
[67] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 28 April 1705, IC/2340, N.A.H.S.

> I owe you infinite thanks, my dear brother, for the story you gave me in your last letter of your travels. I assure you that I read it with perfect pleasure, and what made it even more agreeable to me was the assurances you gave me there that you did it willingly, and that it would cause you no pain.[68]

As detailed previously, there were links between the words 'pleasure' and 'agreeable' and the concept of comfort and therefore, Vere's usage of them both in this extract showed the importance that her relationship with her brother had on her comfort. The impact of Justinian's letters on Vere's comfort was threefold. By including her in both his physical and intellectual journey he ensured that she became part of it with him, and the comfort that she received from this is clear. She wrote of her 'infinite thanks' and of her gratitude for him 'willingly' sharing his experiences with her. She was, she told him in October 1704, 'delighted' that neither 'time and absence' had changed their relationship and that he retained 'the same kindness' for her.[69]

Another effect of the sibling's correspondence was that it also stimulated Vere intellectually. Her younger brothers and sisters appeared not to provide Vere with the level of intellectual stimulus that Justinian did. Indeed, in June 1714, when her brother was one of the Commissioners of the Leather Tax in St. Martin's Lane, London she expressed her impatience at how her other brothers had overstayed their welcome at Lamport:

> I think your Brothers will never go to Town. I begin to be a little uneasy at their remissness, unless you'll follow their example, & w:n you are got in the country

[68] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 9 July 1705, IC/2343, N.A.H.S.
[69] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 11 October 1704, IC/2333, N.A.H.S.

> stay as long, but that I think wou'd bite you in good earnest & I must learn to be more disinterested that to desire a pleasure which wou'd cost you so dear.[70]

What was interesting here was that Vere was clearly surrounded by brothers (and most likely her three sisters too) at this time but confessed to being 'uneasy' at their remaining at Lamport yet her letter also made it evident that had Justinian undertaken a similar, protracted, visit she would not have felt the same uneasiness. Vere's use of 'uneasy' indicated that the prolonged presence of her brothers impacted her comfort at Lamport. 'Painful', 'giving disturbance' and 'not at ease' were all examples of definitions of 'uneasy' in Johnson's dictionary, whilst 'uneasy' (a derivative of 'uneasiness') was a definition of discomfort. In addition, by describing a similar visit by Justinian as a 'pleasure' also tied that into the notion of comfort, because of the link between the terms 'pleasure' and 'comfort'. The conclusion from this therefore was that it was not a lack of company that Vere endured at Lamport, it was the lack of Justinian's company in particular. Vere's want of control over the composition of her immediate domestic environment supported Edwards' argument that there was an 'emerging comfort infrastructure' characterised by 'control of one's surroundings', but this appeared to have nothing to do with any aspect of consumerism or the acquisition of prestigious or luxury goods.[71] Rather, it very much depended on who made up her inner circle, and in this case, it was Justinian very much at the expense of the company of her other siblings.

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[70] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 23 June 1714, IC/1798, N.A.H.S.

[71] Clive Edwards, 'Introduction', in *A Cultural history of the Home in the Age of Enlightenment,* ed. by Clive Edwards (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), pp. 1-18, (p. 13).

There were many examples from Vere's letters that demonstrated how much she sought the comfort of her brother's company. In 1712, when Justinian was in London, Vere wrote:

> We have been in expectation of seeing you & I begin to be a little uneasy at hearing nothing of it, I hope you don't forget us, for your company is infinitely desir'd by dear brother your most affect: sister.[72]

Vere's choice of the word 'uneasy' to describe how she felt about her brother's failure to appear at Lamport was significant. It was the same word that she had used to describe the impact of her other brothers remaining too long at home in June 1714, thus highlighting again the particularity of her relationship with Justinian and the impact that his absence had on her at Lamport. This is further evidenced in two letters written by Vere in August 1714 in which, again, her brother's appearance in Northamptonshire seemed unlikely much to her disappointment. In the first she reprimanded her brother for his continued absence but also expressed her own feelings on the matter:

> I can't forbear sometimes wishing you a little mortification for not coming into the country which I almost now begin to despair of & am grown weary with expecting you.[73]

The second letter, in which Vere finally conceded that Justinian would not return at this time, revealed further the effect that their separation had on her and her daily life:

> I am extreamly concern'd Dear Br that this unhappy change of affairs prevents you from coming into the country where I have long impatiently expected &

[72] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 19 May 1712, IC/2154, N.A.H.S.
[73] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 2 August 1714, IC/1800, N.A.H.S.

> propos'd in your conversation to find amends for a thousand disagreeable hours wch have pass'd but mortification is I believe to be my employment.[74]

The emotive words that Vere used in these two letters to describe her sense of expectation at the prospect of her brother's return and her subsequent dismay at his non-appearance, could also be employed to describe her life at home in Lamport. 'Despair', increasing weariness and impatience as well as 'mortification' are not words that suggested a contented or easy life. Indeed, 'mortification' was defined as vexation, which in turn meant uneasiness – so her use of this one word confirmed this.[75] When Vere described her imagined, future conversations with Justinian, she had done so in reference to the 'thousand disagreeable hours' that she had endured during his absence which, again, portrayed a daily life that lacked enjoyment and interest.

The final impact of the siblings' relationship and resulting correspondence was the relief that it afforded Vere from the mundanity of her time spent at Lamport. Her letters to Justinian (and her brother Edmund too) contained adjectives such as 'disagreeable' and 'dull' to describe Lamport itself and words such as dullness and weariness to describe her life there and how that made her feel. 'Disagreeable' meant unpleasing whilst 'dull' meant sad or melancholy, therefore both were connected to discomfort. Unpleasing as an antonym of pleasing was connected to comfort and melancholy linked to 'uncomfortable' so it can, therefore, be suggested that Vere's life at Lamport impacted her comfort. 'Dullness' rather than meaning uninteresting was actually defined as sad and melancholy so when, in 1726, she told Justinian that, 'my

[74] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 23 August 1714, IC/1801, N.A.H.S.
[75] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol II, p. 78.

own dullness join'd to that of this place giving me just cause to apprehend that my letters cou'd only be troublesome to you' she clearly detailed its impact.[76]

The sadness that seemingly pervaded Vere's life at Lamport was compounded by the absence of Justinian and when presented with the prospect of seeing him, the tone of her letters was much altered. In June 1716 she wrote that she was 'extreamly pleas'd dear Brother to hear that I shall be quickly happy in your good company'.[77] There was obvious excitement and joy in Vere's letter here, in the use of the words 'pleas'd' and 'happy' which were not present in the extracts detailed above. However, this letter also alluded to the fact that she would be 'quickly happy', suggesting that this was not a state that she was currently enjoying. In addition, the reference to his 'good company' and that it was this that would alter her condition, suggested that the company of no other person could do this.

Vere was described by H. Isham Longden as her brother's 'special companion' and after examining her letters it is not difficult to see why.[78] They evidently enjoyed a close, easy and companionable sibling bond within which Vere felt comfortable to ask Justinian to run errands for her, to tease him and also to discuss their shared literary interests. It was a relationship characterised by pleasure, happiness and ease and one that was very dear to Vere, probably more so after he departed Lamport in 1704. It was to Justinian she had looked to for emotional comfort, for example, when she found little forthcoming from their father. In a letter written in 1717, she shed some light on how she viewed that filial relationship:

[76] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 31 July 1726, IC/2158, N.A.H.S.
[77] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Edmund Isham, 15 June 1716, IC/1818, N.A.H.S.
[78] Longden, 'The Diaries (Home and Foreign) of Sir Justinian Isham, 1704-1736', p. 184.

> I have heard that my Father intends to keep dogs for his son's recreation; but that his Daughter is to share in it, is news to me, I suppose 'tis his younger daughters that he means, whose pleasure I have reason to believe, he studys much more than mine.[79]

And just a month earlier, when describing their father's intention to erect a memorial at Lamport following the death of their brother John, she told Justinian:

> I receiv'd last post a letter from my Br: Mun: who says that my father designs to put up a Monument for my poor Br: John, with a Latin Inscription on it; the Dead are, always I find, ye objects of his kindness, but I'll make no reflections on his proceedings.[80]

These two extracts illustrated that Vere perhaps felt overlooked or excluded when at home in Lamport whereas the bond she shared with Justinian made her feel included, heard and valued and this showed through her letters to him. The Isham family, in this instance, was a microcosm of what Reddy describes as 'an emotional regime'.[81] Reddy's work has a largely political bent, yet it remains relevant and applicable to the intricate nature of elite families. Political regimes, according to Reddy, constructed their own 'prescriptions and counsel' in order to manage the emotional expressions ('emotives') of its communities; and the stricter the 'emotional regime', the less scope for 'emotional liberty'.[82] It was that constriction of emotional liberty, asserts Reddy, that could lead to 'emotional suffering' and a resulting quest for 'emotional refuge'.[83] Vere used her relationship and her correspondence with her brother to navigate the

[79] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 15 April 1717, IC/1819, N.A.H.S.
[80] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 6 March 1717, IC/2157, N.A.H.S.
[81] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions,* p. 129.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 55; p. 128 and p. 129.
[83] *Ibid*., p. 129.

regime imposed by their father and the societal and familial expectations of the time. The constraints of life in Lamport stymied her, both intellectually and emotionally, and she found comfort in the refuge of her sibling.

It was apparent that both Allen Young and Vere Isham derived comfort from their sibling relationships and once they were separated from their respective relatives, they also found it in their correspondence, Vere whilst at home in Lamport and Allen when he was in India. And whilst we only have one side of both the epistolary exchanges, and the letters were written several years apart (Vere's between 1704 and 1737 and Allen's from 1776 to 1789), it is possible to draw comparisons between their experiences and those of their brother and sister, Justinian and Frances. Vere appeared to relish reading about Justinian's travels and his experiences abroad, it included her in his life, and it allowed her to imagine a life outside the country house which, has been demonstrated, she found dull and disagreeable. She, in turn, kept him up to date with news of local events and society gossip which would have strengthened, not only his connection to home but also to her as well, which would have helped consolidate their long-distance relationship. Allen's letters revealed that Frances too included reports of family, mutual acquaintances and the Orlingbury news that he had missed while overseas and this was something that, his letters showed, he enjoyed and looked forward to reading about. His letters also demonstrated that Frances was a prolific letter writer, she wrote to him even when she had not received anything back from him. His letters often started with an acknowledgement of several letters that he had received from her. In December 1777 he wrote:

> I have received your kind letters of the 3rd October 76, 16th November 76, 10 January 77, 16 February, 18th March & 11th April 77 and am now setting down

to return you my thanks for them and the kind wishes they every where abounded with.[84]

Nine years after his departure for India, Allen's letters continued to demonstrate that Frances sustained her correspondence with her brother. In April 1785 Allen told her that he wanted to make 'amends' for all her 'kindnesses' but recognised that he would fall short:

> I would give you letter for letter if my business would permit but that it will not; and was I ever to do that how unequal should I appear in the attempt to gratify you by my writing in the manner you do me.[85]

It appeared that both men enjoyed their sisters' epistles during their absences whilst the two women were comforted by the continued attentions that their respective sibling relationships afforded them. Vere, in particular, demonstrated that she appreciated the mental stimulation that the bond she had with Justinian gave her.

Some male siblings recognised the impact that the monotony of country life had on their sisters' comfort. In October 1795, almost seventy years after Vere described the dullness of Lamport Hall, Robert Rye wrote about his sister Jane's life at Culworth, Northamptonshire. In a letter to their brother Peter, Robert acknowledged firstly, that Jane was not happy in Culworth and secondly, that as a female she could not be expected to find happiness and contentment as easily as if she had been male:

> The dull life she leads for a town-bred lady is not very conducive to elevate her spirits…The solitude which she must in this country perpetually experience suggests no exalted hope of perfect bliss, as she can not make excursions into

[84] From Mr Allen Young to Miss Frances Young, December 1777, YO709(xvi), N.A.H.S.
[85] From Mr Allen Young to Miss Frances Young, 3 April 1785, YO709(x), N.A.H.S.

> the fields to vary her amusements. But we will hope for the best, since I cannot desert this much-loved spot, tho' another without the same concerns, must I own, find it frequently irksome.[86]

What was interesting to note from Robert's letter was that he suggested that having too much time on her hands, without the same concerns of house and land that he had, would be 'irksome' for Jane.[87] It is not unreasonable to assume that not having these concerns should have actually led to an easier life for his sister, but this is not what Robert appeared to be saying in this extract. His sister, he suggested, needed more mental stimulation than the life at Culworth offered her. This was demonstrated when, in 1820, twenty-five years after her brother Robert wrote this letter, she embarked on a five-month tour of Europe. Travelling with her niece Elinor, her sister-in-law and Elinor's Swiss governess Miss Gaullieur, Jane apparently went to great efforts to fully arrange the trip and ensure value for money for her and her cohort. It is not surprising, therefore, that she had seemed stifled by the 'dull life' she shared with her bachelor, clergyman, older brother.[88]

As well as providing comfort, siblings also had the power to disturb it. In a scathing letter to his brother Peter, written in December 1790, Robert Rye angrily berated his younger sibling and demonstrated the ways in which his comfort was impacted in a number of different of ways:

> Your conduct…is of a most unpromising nature and consequently most distressing to all those who are interested in your welfare…but to find you incapable of proper conduct without some such perpetual restraint, produces in

[86] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye, 7 October 1795, X7422(48), N.A.H.S.
[87] *Ibid*.
[88] *Ibid*.

> my mind those doubts and uneasinesses that, I fear are vainly lavished on an unworthy subject.[89]

Robert's use of the word 'uneasiness' to describe how Peter's behaviour made him feel confirmed the effect that it had on his comfort (uneasiness was, of course a definition of discomfort), but coupled with the word 'distressing' it conveyed its fuller impact. The discomfort that Peter's indiscretions had created for Robert was twofold - both his social and emotional comfort was impacted. His brother's poor behaviour reflected badly on Robert and his social status (one theme that stands out from the letters that Robert wrote to Peter was the use of their family's connections, which were somewhat limited, to improve and hasten Peter's progression through the rank and file of the Royal Navy) but also Robert's emotional comfort was impacted. In a number of the letters that he wrote to his younger sibling he revealed the depth and strength of the love he had for his brother but also his own disappointment that all that appeared to have been 'vainly lavished' on Peter, and this seemed evident in this epistle.[90] Robert's letter outlined a number of details relating to Peter's 'unpromising' activities but the main one pertained to his 'extravagance in expenses or in action'.[91] Their father's death had, according to Robert, left them in an 'extremely impoverished state' yet despite this Peter had 'purged' the family into 'the most abject poverty'.[92] This had, Robert wrote, caused him to be 'anxious', distressed and distrustful.[93]Anxious, defined as a 'lowness of spirits' was reminiscent of 'melancholy' (which has previously been discussed as associated with the word 'uncomfortable') whilst 'distrust' or suspicion (the imagining of something ill) certainly did not convey a perfect state of easiness ('tranquility' or

[89] From Reverend Robert Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 28 December 1790, X7244(5), N.A.H.S.
[90] *Ibid*.
[91] *Ibid*.
[92] *Ibid*.
[93] *Ibid*.

‘freedom from difficulty’) for Robert.[94] These words along with ‘distresses’ (which was defined as ‘misery’) point to Peter contributing to Robert’s discomfort in a significant manner. This part of the letter highlighted too the impact on Robert’s own financial comfort. Despite his small estate at Culworth and the family connection with the Jekyll’s of Dallington Hall, pecuniary matters were of great concern to Robert and his frustration at Peter’s flagrant disregard of that and his anxiety at his spendthrift ways caused him much anger and distress. His letter also revealed the emotional effort that he required in order to try to curb his brother’s wayward habits. He wrote ‘how fruitlessly we laboured to reform you will thus alone recur to us: what earnestness we exercised to stop your ruinous career’.[95] Robert described how he ‘laboured’ to change Peter’s behaviour (‘labour’ is defined as ‘painful effort’, whilst an antonym of ‘labour’ is ‘ease’) thus whilst he reprimanded his brother for his financial indiscretions he also revealed the effort involved in attempting to reform him and the emotional burden that being Peter’s sibling incurred.[96] This was further confirmed when he wrote, ‘To no other should I so much have written and to you, I doubt not, it is unacceptable. But, affection has drawn from me, what also appears the effort of duty’.[97] The effort that Robert spent in his attempt to steer Peter on the right course, and the subsequent anxiety and distress that accompanied it, did not appear to be conducive to either an easy life or an easy sibling relationship. Indeed, Robert’s use of the word ‘laboured’ confirmed this.

Young Men

Behaviour that was considered shameful, embarrassing or merely disappointing, as Robert’s experience with Peter demonstrated, could have ramifications for the rest

[94] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 73; vol II, p. 479; vol I, p. 309; vol I p. 330.
[95] From Reverend Robert Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 28 December 1790, X7244(5), N.A.H.S.
[96] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol II, p. 2; vol I, p. 330.
[97] From Reverend Robert Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 28 December 1790, X7244(5), N.A.H.S.

of the family. Richard Orlebar was, like Peter Rye, a military man. Unlike Peter he did not have an older brother who worked to keep him on a decorous and gentlemanly course. Instead, Richard, only son of Richard and his first wife Elizabeth (neé Cuthbert) had five older sisters and three aunts (he also had thirteen half siblings from his father's second marriage to Charlotte Willing following the death of his mother in 1780). In 1794, when young Richard was nineteen years old a letter that he addressed to his Aunt Mary, but which was for the attention of all three of his aunts, highlighted the concerns that they had for him prior to his joining the militia. His father, aghast at the costs of his son's university education, had decided that his son should join the militia, specifically the Bedfordshire Regiment like he had done:

> I know my dear aunts think that I shall be more exposed to temptation there than here; but, may ye be assured, that, young and inexperienced as I am, and (sorry am I to say it) may be rather addicted to certain frailties which young men are prone to.[98]

Even as a young man Richard had already acquired a reputation, amongst his three aunts at least, for what appeared to be ungentlemanly behaviour. His letter revealed that the expenses that he had incurred whilst at University were 'very great, and at the same time unnecessary' which may suggest that not all of them, perhaps, had been acquired in the pursuit of his studies.[99] His other temptations, which he acknowledged they had been concerned about, he was less clear, other than to refer to them as the 'frailties' of 'young men'.[100] Perhaps he had hoped to assuage their concerns if he explained them

[98] From Mr Richard Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 1 April 1794, OR2071/387, B.A.
[99] *Ibid*.
[100] *Ibid*.

in terms of male and youthful high jinks. Richard's honesty in his letter to his Aunt Mary was not surprising when in the next paragraph he wrote:

> A conversation with you at Hinwick makes me mention the above, and also the kind and obliging manner in which you did it, makes me tender you my most sincere thanks; indeed from yr behaviour to me from my infancy, I not only regard you as an affectionate aunt, but also as my best of friends, to whom I could unbosom my greatest secrets, and whom, on any emergency, I could always look up to for advice.[101]

That Richard felt comfortable in his relationship with his aunts, and with his Aunt Mary in particular, was made clear in this letter by his use of the word 'unbosom'. Its usage conveyed a sense of relief that he was able to unburden himself to them. Four years later Richard received a letter from his aunt in which she expressed her disappointment at his failure to call upon his grandfather, Mr. Cuthbert. Whilst Mary's affection for her nephew remained apparent, his obvious neglect of his familial duties appeared to be a source of disappointment to her:

> I am sorry my Dr nephew that you have not been able to make a visit to your Grandfather, but hope that the next leave of absence you can obtain may be devoted in the first few days, to Upminster…my very affectionate Regard for you suggests this hint, because I should be very sorry that our old friend should deem you negligent of him.[102]

Mary's repetition of the word 'sorry' was telling in this instance and indicative that Richard's behaviour had impacted her comfort. 'Sorry' is defined as 'vexatious' which,

[101] *Ibid*.
[102] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Captain Richard Orlebar, 22 August 1798, OR2071/400, B.A.

in turn, is synonymous with 'uneasiness' thus there was a connection between the two.[103] Mary's letter also demonstrated how she acted almost as a mediator between Richard and his grandfather in her attempts to ease their somewhat awkward relationship. By emphasising her 'affectionate regard' for Richard she hoped that he would take kindly to the hints that she had made about his tardy and inconsiderate attitude.[104] Her letter also showed that she did not want Mr. Cuthbert to think badly of Richard, again revealing her affection for her nephew. The most interesting aspect of Mary's letter was the way in which she employed an emotional economy to persuade Richard to carry out his filial duties. Her use of the phrase 'I should be very sorry' exploited the closeness of their relationship and highlighted that she recognised that he would unlikely want his actions to make his beloved aunt feel 'sorry'.[105]

Richard's financial difficulties did not end when his father made the decision to remove him from university and seek a position for him in the Bedfordshire Regiment. Like Peter Rye, he too incurred debts that his family feared would impact him in later life. On one occasion, it was his brother-in-law William Skynner, Mary's husband, who addressed Richard's 'indulgences':

> I am very glad to find that your debts do not amount to so much as I expected they were and hope it will caution you in future to be more careful, and now once set clear to keep so ---- because your future comfort in life depends very much upon it…therefore let me beg of you…bar yourself of some little indulgences, which I know young men in your line are apt to do, both to the injury of their health & morals.[106]

[103] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol II, p. 348; vol II, p. 469.
[104] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Captain Richard Orlebar, 22 August 1798, OR2071/400, B.A.
[105] *Ibid*.
[106] From Mr William Skynner to Captain Richard Orlebar, 17 February 1797, OR2071/396, B.A.

William's cautionary letter to Richard, who was still only twenty-two years of age, appeared, ostensibly, to concern the young man's current financial situation and his future financial comfort. Indeed, he spoke of Richard's 'future comfort' in the same breath as his hope that he would remain debt-free. Perhaps as a husband and father of three daughters, William appreciated the impact that youthful indulgences could have on future financial comfort and felt duty bound to issue a warning to his brother-in-law to curb his spendthrift ways. This letter, however, also appeared to suggest that the 'certain frailties' that Richard confessed to being addicted to in his letter to his aunt in 1794, and which he attributed to the 'impetuosity of youth', may have hitherto remained unchecked.[107] Was William's seemingly incidental observation regarding Richard's 'little indulgences', which were injurious to both his 'health & morals', a sign of the family's continuing disapproval at his conduct?

Family Finance

Financial comfort underpinned the elite experience. It influenced decisions pertaining to marriage, inheritance, the maintenance of the country house, the payment of employees and it shaped the social lives as well as the social status of family members. Defined as 'financial well-being' by Stobart, for those privileged enough to have it, it offered them financial security and as a result peace of mind; or as Hannah Rye described it in the previous chapter, 'ease' of mind.[108] A more modern phrase to describe financial comfort would be that of 'financially comfortable' or 'comfortably off', and whilst this phrase was not identified in the letters used here it is the one that now most closely resonates with this concept of financial comfort. The connection

[107] From Mr Richard Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 1 April 1794, OR2071/387, B.A.
[108] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 2; From Mrs Hannah Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 23 January 1791, X7244/7, N.A.H.S.

between comfort and finance/money appears throughout this thesis. In chapter one, both Robert and Hannah Rye associated her comfort, in part, with her financial stability whilst the next chapter will discuss the ways in which Lee Thornton's social status could be bolstered by his brother's financial support. However, a lack of financial comfort could cause discord and discomfort amongst elite families. The warnings issued by Robert Rye to his younger brother in the 1790s certainly appeared prophetic as Peter never really attained an appropriate level of financial comfort for his or his family's needs. Even by 1842 when Peter was in his seventies, he was still having to rely on family members for financial support, in this case it was his unmarried sister Jane, who sold £700 worth of stock for his use. Peter's financial constraints appeared to impact the comfort of his wider familial network as well as that of his immediate family members. In the early 1820s, Peter was embroiled in an unfortunate financial wrangle with his sister-in-law Mary Lord. Mary had spent several years living with Elinor, Peter's wife, and their children whilst he had been away at sea. During this time, the two sisters had been bequeathed two thousand pounds following the death of their grandmother. According to Peter, Mary 'voluntarily gave up' her share 'to be sold for what it would produce…which was fourteen hundred and eighty pounds'.[109] Once the transaction had taken place, Mary received fifty pounds and the remaining sum wrote Peter, 'went to the payments of debts incurred during the many years' that Mary resided with her sister's family.[110] The issue that arose several years later, was that Mary, who in a letter to Elinor had revealed her 'smallness of fortune' now sought recompense for her share.[111] Peter's letters to Mary revealed both his astonishment and anger at the temerity of her request. He reminded his sister-in-law that:

[109] From Captain Peter Rye to Miss Mary Lord, Date Not Known, X7244/111, N.A.H.S.
[110] From Captain Peter Rye to Miss Mary Lord, 11 February 1823, X7244/112, N.A.H.S.
[111] From Miss Mary Lord to Mrs Elinor Rye, Date Not Known, X7244/94, N.A.H.S.

> When you had no where to lay your head, my house was your asylum, my arms, my heart were open to receive you with the affection of a brother, upward of eight years you dwelt with the protection of my roof and greatly increased the expenses of house-keeping.[112]

This one sentence appeared to demonstrate one type of comfort that had been offered to Mary. Both 'asylum' and 'protection' suggested a place of safety, sanctuary and refuge, whilst his phrase 'my arms, my heart were open to receive you' implied a welcoming and affectionate home awaited her. Comfort, however, could often come at a price and Mary's demands for payment prompted Peter to reveal that he held Mary's prolonged stay responsible for his current financial situation. It had meant, he suggested, that he had been obliged to rent a larger house and employ another servant and had this not been necessary he 'should never been in debt'.[113] This letter revealed the impact that an unexpected and additional member of the household could have on a family's financial comfort. Peter was, he asserted, compelled to employ another servant to assist Mary and to find a house large enough to accommodate his expanded family. The additional financial burden, he told Mary, was her responsibility:

> Our household expenses were upward of five hundred a year, the management left solely to your sister & yourself, my children were little and of little expense, my returns from sea only occasionally for a few days.[114]

This example demonstrated the complicated nature of comfort. For Peter, knowing that his wife was not shouldering the burden alone whilst he was away at sea must have

[112] From Captain Peter Rye to Miss Mary Lord, Date Not Known, X7244/111, N.A.H.S
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] *Ibid*.

been some relief to him. However, Mary's presence in his home impacted, Peter argued, the family's financial comfort and had been the sole cause of their indebtedness.

Peter's reference to the additional cost of a servant for Mary in one of his letters highlighted the complexity of the employer/servant relationship and comfort. For Peter he employed a servant for his sister-in-law, it is assumed, to enable and facilitate her comfort within his home and yet it was seemingly at the expense of his own financial comfort. This next section of the chapter will, therefore, explore the role of servants and the impact that this important component of the elite household had on its comfort.

Servants, Attendants and Medics

In a letter to her niece Frederica Orlebar, Frances Stackhouse Acton revealed the importance of servants in the elite household. In relation to Frederica's own house and continuing financial problems she wrote that 'it would be miserable to live in it, with an income that would not allow to have servants enough to be comfortable'.[115] 'Comfortable' was defined as 'receiving comfort', thus her letter suggested that to Frances a house without servants was a house without comfort.[116] Servants, according to Stobart, 'eased the lives of their employers by fetching and carrying, cooking and cleaning', and Frances' letter to Frederica appeared to highlight the crucial role that servants had in the country house.[117] Jessica Gerard suggests that the elite family 'relied on its servants' for comfort and it was the 'labour of servants' that, Stobart argues, made 'the country house more convenient and more comfortable as a place in which to live'.[118] Gerard, however, also suggests that the very presence of servants in the home

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[115] From Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton to Mrs Frederica Orlebar, 1879, OR2318/22 B.A.
[116] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 198.
[117] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 6.
[118] Jessica Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815 – 1914* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 3; Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 6.

could adversely impact the comfort of the family too. The family conducted many aspects of their lives within the presence of their servants which meant that they often had to limit or alter their behaviour accordingly.[119] Gerard has also described the litany of tasks that the servants were expected to undertake for their employers, citing that 'adults were woken by maids, dressed and undressed by a servant, and ate their meals with servants in attendance. Servants washing clothes, making beds and tidying rooms discovered evidence of their employers most intimate affairs'.[120] The presence of servants in nearly all aspects of their lives, therefore, meant that it was of the upmost importance that the 'right' people were employed.

The comfort that having reliable servants could bring was evident in a letter written by Frances Young to her sister Mary Barton during the course of their father's ailing health. His decline meant that Frances had to relinquish the care of him to a trusted servant and she described to Mary how this had made her feel:

> It is not possible to be of any <u>use</u> to our dear father, he does not <u>care</u> who is about him & Williams is most handy & tender which is the greatest comfort to me. I have some times almost regretted I could not be the attendant as formerly but tho it has deprived me of a pleasure, I am well convinced it has prevented me from many a pang, which would have been severely felt by me from seeing the <u>change</u> of feeling in my dear father, which <u>one</u> <u>ought</u> to consider as a <u>blessing</u> instead of a regret.[121]

Having a trustworthy man like Williams to attend to their father was, she told Mary, 'the greatest comfort' and this demonstrated that the 'ease' that the work of servants

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[119] Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815 – 1914,* p. 8.
[120] *Ibid*.
[121] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 7 March (YNK), YO1604, N.A.H.S.

facilitated within the country house far exceeded just that enabled by their 'fetching and carrying, cooking and cleaning'.[122] Whilst comfort, to Frances, here meant both practical support and assistance, it also meant consolation.[123] Consolation, which was a definition of comfort, was itself defined by Johnson as the 'alleviation of misery' this, coupled with her use of 'pang' (defined as 'extreme pain; sudden paroxysm of torment') demonstrated that the work of Williams also significantly contributed to Frances' own emotional comfort.[124] Frances acknowledged that their father's state of mind was such that he did not care who assisted him, but it was evident from her letter that she did. Williams was both 'handy and tender', qualities that Frances appeared to consider important for the duties that he was required to undertake.[125] In previous correspondence to her sister, in describing her father's health, it was possible to glean information about the nature of those duties:

> He sleeps as much as usual but looks ill & is so very weak & helpless yesterday & today that he is not able to assist himself….he is brought down every day… He raised himself in bed without assistance yesterday which he has not done this fortnight & his legs are now not put upon a stool, he is carried up & down & does not go to bed till his usual time.[126]

Just from these descriptions it was possible to see that Mr Young required help from servants in almost every aspect of his life. Not being able to 'assist himself' at all meant that he had, at times, been assisted to sit up in bed and was also carried up and down the stairs each day and although not explicit in the letter it is reasonable to assume that

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[122] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 6.
[123] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 198.
[124] *Ibid.,* vol I, p. 220.
[125] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 7 March (Year Not Known), YO1604, N.A.H.S.
[126] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1599, N.A.H.S; From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1603, N.A.H.S.

the servants at Orlingbury Hall attended to more intimate needs.[127] It was unsurprising therefore that Frances told Mary that she was 'as comfortable as it is possible to be by seeing my dear father has every attention & having assured nothing is omitted which can be of use'.[128] When Frances wrote that she was 'as comfortable as it is possible to be' she highlighted that she too received comfort from the care and attention that Williams, and the other servants, had given to Mr Young.[129] This not only demonstrated the importance of servants and the impact that they could have on physical and emotional comfort, but also the importance of having servants that could be trusted and relied upon.

The regard in which John Thornton held his former medical attendant Daniel Hill was demonstrated in a letter written to his brother Reeve, in which he notified him of Dr Hill's death, in 1825. The two men had a chequered history owing to John's unpredictable mental health whilst he resided with Hill and his family in the early 1820s, with the former frequently accusing members of the household, including servants, of attempting to poison him. However, in what appeared to be a period of clarity, John described his relationship with Hill and his subsequent feelings about him following the news of his death:

> He had latterly shewn so great a regard for me, that he was hardly ever satisfied when I was absent from him…Our intercourse since I left his house has been of the most friendly kind, & I don't know that I ever felt greater sorrow for any man in the world. It is a gratification to me to think that I contribute a good deal to his enjoyment during his widowhood, & I must say in return that the

[127] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, DNK, YO1599, N.A.H.S.
[128] *Ibid*.
[129] *Ibid*.

confidence & kindness with which he treated me contributed a great deal to mine.[130]

In John's final sentence there are two words of significance, both of which were connected to comfort in some way. 'Gratification' was defined as an 'act of pleasing; delight' but it was also a definition of the word 'contentment', and one of the definitions of 'content' was 'easy' (and a meaning of 'contentless' was 'uneasy') therefore when he wrote about his own 'gratification' at having contributed to Hill's 'enjoyment,' John demonstrated the comfort that he had derived from it.[131] 'Enjoyment', in turn, was linked to 'happiness' which was defined as a 'state in which desires are satisfied', whilst 'satisfied' was linked to comfort through 'satisfaction' which was defined, in part, as the 'release from suspense, uncertainty or uneasiness,' therefore John's usage of 'enjoyment' to describe both his and Hill's latter years and their shared relationship demonstrated that both had found some element of comfort from it.[132]

Dr Hill was not a servant, but he was someone whom John, with other members of the Thornton family, had paid in return for medical supervision and it was important to all involved that the person selected by the family to undertake this role was considered not just suitably qualified medically but also had the right sort of manners and characteristics. This could be seen in the relief demonstrated by Lee Thornton in his letter to Reeve about Mr Sherwin of Greenwich, who had agreed to care for John in 1831. Mr Sherwin had been found after a protracted search of both potential people and institutions and in his letter, Lee outlined his hopes for John under Mr Sherwin's care:

[130] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 2 November 1825, TH2564, N.A.H.S.
[131] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 460; vol I, p. 223; vol I, p. 224.
[132] *Ibid.,* vol I, p. 348; vol I, p. 475; vol II, p. 285.

> Nothing so apparently advantageous has occurred before. This is the place I have always wished: but on former occasions did not succeed in finding any thing so suitable. He certainly offers the best of all chances for the restoration of his health and I do expect results from it that never could have been hoped for without his present change of residence & plan.[133]

The hope that Mr Sherwin would be the person to finally help John and the relief that Lee would feel if this was the case was evident in this letter, which demonstrated just how crucial it was, to the whole family and not just to John, to have found a trustworthy and qualified medical professional to care for him. This letter exuded an almost desperate tone that hopefully, finally there may be some permanent improvement in John's mental state which would benefit both him, of course, but which would also ease the lives of his brothers, particularly Lee who appeared to shoulder much of the burden of responsibility for his older brother.

People such as Williams, employed by the Young family, and Hill and Sherwin, by the Thorntons, undertook tasks that were much more than the 'fetching and carrying, cooking and cleaning' that Stobart discusses, and the above examples demonstrated just how vital it was that such tasks were carried out by trustworthy and suitably qualified people.[134] However, those servants who undertook tasks such as housekeeping or cooking also played a pivotal role in maintaining the comfort of the household, as a series of letters written in the 1830s by Maria Shirley to her mother-in-law demonstrated. In July 1832, Maria informed Alicia that her cook had expressed her intention to leave her employ in order to 'to keep house for her brother'.[135] Nine months

[133] From Mr Lee Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 7 August 1831, TH2571, N.A.H.S.
[134] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 6.
[135] From Mrs Maria Shirley to Mrs Alicia Shirley, 23 July 1832, 22D64/78, R.O.L.L.R.

later she then sought further advice from her mother-in-law about the wages that a cook expected to be paid. She apologised for having to 'trouble you again on the subject of the cook, as your answer about wages is not sufficiently explicit'.[136] This appeared to suggest that Maria was inexperienced in dealing with staff and negotiating levels of expected pay, but she had married Alicia's son Walter in 1827, so rather than inexperience, it could more likely suggest a lack of confidence. The issue surrounding wages appeared to be an ongoing problem, demonstrated here by Maria's use of the word 'again' in this letter. Maria not only recognised the import of retaining reliable servants she also acknowledged the impact that their presence could have in the day to day running of the household. This was demonstrated when she described her servant Mary as her 'right hand person' and confessed that it was Mary who 'knows anything about the house'.[137] Three months after she wrote this letter to Alicia, Maria sent several others to her mother-in-law in which she revealed a troublesome domestic situation. She told her that she was seeking a new cook and revealed the reason why:

> Our present cook has treated me with such gross and uncalled for impertinence I may say abuse this morning that I gave her warning immediately…..Such a temper & such imperious & uncivil conduct both towards masters & servants I never witnessed before in any servant but, her rigid honesty I may possibly nay probably never find again.[138]

The contents of this letter demonstrated the oft dichotomous and contradictory experience that people had when employing staff. On the one hand they could be rude or assertive yet on the other they could be honest and trustworthy, and the benefits of

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[136] *Ibid*.
[137] *Ibid*.
[138] From Mrs Maria Shirley to Mrs Alicia Shirley, 12 July 1833, 22D64/84, Leics. R.O.L.L.R.

the latter had to be weighed up against the impact of the former. Stobart suggests that the 'tolerating of poor behaviour and occasional absence was a price sometimes worth paying in order to retain staff who were otherwise reliable and honest' and this certainly seemed to be the case for Maria.[139] She was, however, compelled to retain her cook albeit reluctantly, as she and Walter were due to be away from home and Maria did not appear to trust those servants that would remain:

> Sooner I could not part with her as there is a great deal to be done in the house during our absence & Hannah is too giddy & too much of a goose to be left in the house alone with Elizabeth, otherwise I should have been much tempted to have dispatched her at once.[140]

Maria's absence from home was prolonged after Walter fell ill and was too ill to travel but her domestic arrangements appeared to continue to worry her:

> I am going to write now to our cook to desire she will stay until over our return, for I do not like to leave the house without her, not to say that she has all the preserves to make during my absence & has to account for many things to me.[141]

Maria appeared here to be making the best of a bad situation and as Stobart argues, an impertinent and abusive cook was perhaps, on balance, better that no cook at all.[142] Gerard suggests that the elites enjoyed 'an inimitable style of effortless, confident command in their dealings with subordinates', but Maria's experience with Mary, her cook, suggested otherwise.[143] 'Effortless' implies easy and unproblematic but the letters

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[139] Jon Stobart, 'Housekeeper, Correspondent and Confidante: The Under-Told Story of Mrs Hayes of Charlecote Park*, 1744 – 1773',* in *Family and Community History,* 21.2 (2018), p. 96-111, (p. 100).
[140] From Mrs Maria Shirley to Mrs Alicia Shirley, 12 July 1833, 22D64/84, R.O.L.L.R.
[141] From Mrs Maria Shirley to Mrs Alicia Shirley, 3 August 1833, 22D64/87, R.O.L.L.R.
[142] Stobart, 'Housekeeper, Correspondent and Confidante: The Under-Told Story of Mrs Hayes of Charlecote Park, 1744–1773', p. 100.
[143] Gerard, *Country House Life: Family and Servants, 1815–1914,* p. 240.

to Alicia from her daughter-in-law demonstrated that the domestic arrangements at home were creating a situation that was causing continued anxiety for Maria. The problems with her cook appeared to have been resolved by June 1836 because in a further letter she told Alicia that 'Mary is come back and we are now a comfortable household'.[144] This one sentence was an interesting one as it linked Maria's domestic situation with her cook directly to her and her household's comfort. The suggestion from Maria's letter was that Mary's return signified that the household was 'now' comfortable, which implied that without her it had lacked comfort.[145] 'Comfortable', as previously discussed, meant 'receiving comfort' so Mary's presence within the household was such that others found comfort in it whilst Maria's use of 'we' when she wrote 'we are now a comfortable household' also seemed to indicate that she included herself within the aegis of the comfortable household to which she referred. [146] Vickery suggests that the 'government of servants was a full-time job' for the mistress of the house.[147] They were not only tasked with the 'acquisition and retention' of staff; once employed they undertook 'constant surveillance of their property' as well as the monitoring of their servants' 'work and behaviour', and Maria's attempts to secure and retain the services of her cook certainly demonstrated the work required for these tasks.[148] Vickery also discusses the 'mistress-servant relationship', which she describes as often being characterised by 'nurtured antagonism', and which, as a result, could undermine the authority of the employer.[149] Maria's letters highlighted that she experienced all of these features detailed by Vickery, but they also revealed just how significant an impact they had on her comfort. So, whilst servants could and did make

[144] From Mrs Maria Shirley to Mrs Alicia Shirley, 14 June 1836, 22D64/94, R.O.L.L.R.
[145] *Ibid*
[146] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 198.
[147] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*: *Women's Lives in Georgian England*, p. 135.
[148] *Ibid*.
[149] *Ibid*.

the country house 'a more comfortable' place in which to live, ensuring they did so required both 'energy and vigilance', particularly on the part of the mistress of the house and Maria's own experience certainly revealed this, as well as the complex nature of comfort too.[150]

This final section has shown that servants were crucial to the comfort of the country house and its household, demonstrated here not only by the efforts of Williams, Hill and Sherwin in their service to the elderly Mr Young and John Thornton but also by the servants employed by Maria Shirley. It was because of this integral role however that employees could also be the cause of unease within the domestic space. This was demonstrated in Maria's unfortunate reliance on the insubordinate Mary Wheeldon, whose challenging behaviour appeared to have caused Maria much discomfort and anxiety. The letters used in this section only detailed the comfort (or otherwise) that the employers found in their relationship with their employees and their work, whilst little was revealed about the comfort, if any, of those people that they employed. When John Thornton discussed Dr Hill's death, he revealed that the two men had discovered a mutual regard and respect and that the medic 'was hardly ever satisfied' when absent from John.[151] This was, of course, after John had left Hill's care and when John's mental health had stabilised. The relationship was also being described from John's perspective, and so care must be taken when considering what Hill actually derived from it. In his study of Mrs Philippa Hayes, housekeeper of Charlecote Park, and her employer Mr George Lucy, Stobart details a relationship which he describes as 'unusual'. [152] Mrs Hayes was a senior servant, engaged primarily as a housekeeper yet

[150] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 6; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*: *Women's Lives in Georgian England,* p. 141.
[151] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 2 November 1825, TH2564, N.A.H.S.
[152] Stobart, 'Housekeeper, Correspondent and Confidante: The Under-Told Story of Mrs Hayes of Charlecote Park, 1744–1773', p. 96.

the correspondence that she shared with her employer revealed a relationship characterised by 'mutual trust' and which resembled, Stobart suggests, that of 'husbands and wives in the middling household'.[153] Their correspondence covers a multitude of subjects from George Lucy's travels, the Charlecote estate, concern for each other's health, news of shared acquaintances and social tittle-tattle yet when Stobart refers to comfort he only does so in terms of Lucy's. It was Mrs Hayes who 'offered comfort and pleasure to her employer', there appears to be little mention of the comfort that she found. Therefore, even in the more nuanced studies of the employer/employee relationship it proves difficult to gain much insight into the comfort that the employee was able to find.

The aim of this chapter was to reveal the centrality of comfort within the context of familial and domestic relationships. Whether consciously or unconsciously, comfort shaped and marked all the different relationships described above in diverse and complex ways. Sir Justinian Isham, the 4th Baronet of Lamport, prioritised his and his family's financial (and ultimately their social comfort) over that of his eldest son's emotional comfort when he considered Justinian's future matrimonial arrangements. This deliberate decision, demonstrated in the letters that he wrote to Justinian and his second son, Edmund, highlighted not only the significance of comfort in his decision-making process but also the necessity of having to give precedence to one form of comfort over another. Comfort, however, assumed a different shape when considered from within marriage itself. To Mary and Justinian Isham, Mary and John Barton and Mary and John Young comfort appeared to lay at the heart of their warm and affectionate relationships; absences were uncomfortable, and reunions keenly anticipated. Comfort, both emotional and domestic, was found within these conjugal

[153] *Ibid.,* p. 100.

relationships. Like comfort, marriage too was complex and Allen Young's experience demonstrated how he sought comfort in absence in a response to the discomfort and disharmony that his relationship with Amelia created at Orlingbury Hall. This example not only revealed that comfort could be found in unlikely and unexpected places (and this is a theme that will be further examined in the final two chapters of this thesis) but also that relationships could be the cause of discomfort and not necessarily the salve. This again showed that the concepts of comfort, and consequently discomfort, were intricately interwoven throughout the different familial relationships examined here. Robert Rye powerfully described the effort that it took to be Peter's brother, and as the next chapter will reveal, effort and hard work certainly did not imply ease or comfort. Vere Isham sought and found enormous comfort in her close relationship with Justinian, as did Frances Young and her brother Allen. From contrasting vantage points, Vere at Lamport and Allen in India, they used the comfort of happier times spent with their respective siblings to ease the pangs of separation. The comfort of memory will be more closely analysed in the fifth and final chapter but within the paradigm of these sibling relations, it provided much needed solace and relief. This section of the chapter also revealed the importance of the sibling relationship in elite families (a relationship that is often neglected by historians) and its impact on the comfort of those individuals within it. The final domestic relationship that was explored, that of the family and servant, was a complicated one. Intended to bolster the domestic and everyday comfort of the family, it too uncovered the intricacies and complexities of elite comfort. Whilst servants did undertake tasks that facilitated and enabled physical comfort, such as 'fetching and carrying, cooking and cleaning', the impact that they had on their employer's comfort as a whole was much more widespread than that list suggests.[154]

[154] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 6.

Both Frances Young and John Thornton found enormous emotional comfort from the care and attention given by their staff to Frances' father and to John himself but all of the examples showed that comfort was at the core of that employer/servant relationship too. Servants were invaluable to the families' continued comfort; physical, domestic, social and emotional, but this reliance meant that it could be very easily and quickly disturbed and threatened.

Chapter Three Sociability

Sociability was the 'quality of being sociable' and according to Katharine Glover, 'a key preoccupation of the polite', which explains why, like family in the preceding chapter, it occasioned significant comment and discussion within the family correspondence heretofore examined.[1] Contemporary definitions of 'social', 'sociably' and 'sociableness' included descriptions such as 'easy', 'friendly', 'inclination to company' and 'freedom of conversation' which suggested that social interaction within polite society was characterised by an easy and friendly amiability.[2] This could, indeed, be the case and when found to be so could afford its participants with a number of different forms of comfort. However, when it was not, when it was unexpected, forced or even hostile it could have the opposite effect, and it could create feelings of discomfort and unease. This chapter will explore then how the participation in polite society impacted the comfort of elite family members. It will do this by exploring firstly, some of the spaces in which sociability occurred, for example the country house and its garden, neighbourhoods and clubs, secondly, the complex relationship between comfort and politeness, thirdly, the controlled sociability of unmarried women and fourthly, the role of women's clothing and its significance to politeness and social comfort. This chapter will demonstrate that comfort, as well as being a fundamental aspect of elite life, was an important part of their social life too. By examining it alongside their social interactions it will reveal not only how comfort was affected but

[1] Oxford English Dictionary Online, (2024) [Accessed 05.05.2024], <sociability - Quick search results | Oxford English Dictionary (oed.com)>; Katharine Glover, *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge: The Baydell Press, 2011), p. 79.

[2] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol II, pp. 342-343. The nineteenth century then saw a shift away from this meaning of 'social' and 'society' towards that of a 'sphere of human relations' that was more reminiscent of society today - (McCormack, *Citizenship and Gender in Britain, 1688 – 1928*, p. 153).

also provide further insights into the minutiae of elite social life and how it was conducted.

The Country House

In early February 1793, in the garden of Orlingbury Hall, Frances Young received an unexpected marriage proposal from the local clergyman, Nathaniel Bridges. It was, she confessed to her sister Mary, an event that left her 'more wretched than you can imagine'.[3] The impact of both Bridges' newly declared admiration for her and his proposal, left Frances shaken, so much so that when she encountered her father shortly afterwards, she had struggled to assist him in her usual manner. She wrote:

> As I came out of the garden I was not in a situation to attend to him but he wanted me & to him I was oblig'd to go. Heaven knows what I did but he did not discover my anxiety.[4]

Frances' anxiety was not allayed as the dread that she would encounter Bridges again came to fruition. She told Mary that:

> I would not walk so far as the terrace for fear of seeing the poor Doctor but when I left my father, to go to my aunt, there was he sitting. I really was distressed beyond measure.[5]

The impact on Frances' comfort was significant and can be seen in three of the words that she used in her letter - 'anxiety', 'wretched' and 'distressed' were all words that were related in some way to discomfort.[6] Yet, it was her next letter, in which she described how despite her best efforts she had failed to avoid the determined clergyman, where she revealed the real effect of the proposal:

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[3] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 5 February 1793, YO1596, N.A.H.S.
[4] *Ibid*.
[5] *Ibid*.
[6] *Ibid*.

> Thursday morning I walked in the garden not on the terrace for fear of seeing anyone but my one caution avail'd not, for Dr B came to the garden door & asked permission for ten minutes conversation.[7]

This showed that the simple act of taking a walk in the garden of her home was now characterised by a feeling of 'fear' and this fear that she would encounter Bridges clearly played on her mind as she came up with ways in which to avoid him.[8]

It was not solely the garden at Orlingbury Hall that played a pivotal role in Bridges' proposal to Frances, he had also utilised the interior space of the house itself in his pursuit of her. Her letters revealed that he had made several visits every week, the purpose of which, Frances believed, was to call upon her father. However, it soon transpired that it was she who had drawn Bridges to the house next door:

> He said he had no right to say a word more only that if I treated him with reserve or appeared to be displeased with him it would be what he could not support that his being at Orlingbury would depend on that. I said that I had no reason to do either from my own feelings but that I found if my behaviour was not altered that he would take my ease in my manner for encouragement of his hopes & that thought would give me reserve for his sake.[9]

The way in which Frances behaved following this contretemps with Bridges was interesting. She had, with neither knowledge nor permission, been courted by Bridges and had no desire to alter her future conduct. Indeed she hoped to continue to act with 'ease' in his society, yet she feared that to do so could be misconstrued and consequently considered, by him, as 'encouragement'.[10] She was compelled, therefore, to not only analyse her past behaviour but also manage it in the future, she told Mary

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[7] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 13 February 1793, YO1597, N.A.H.S.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] *Ibid*.
[10] *Ibid*.

that she was concerned 'how much he must have raised any little goodness I may possess in his mind' and how that may have engendered a hope of reciprocal affection.[11]

It was also evident from her letters that Frances and her brothers spent much time discussing Bridges and his offer before she finally eschewed his proposal. Their discussions included their father's declining health, Bridges' Methodism, and his popularity (or otherwise) within the neighbourhood and, particularly, within her own circle of friends and acquaintances. She told Mary that, 'I know he is not respected in this neighbourhood. I know I should have the cry against me, of most of my friends & I could not give them up for Dr Bridges'.[12] Frances' experience with Bridges was almost a metaphor for polite sociability and the many challenges, negotiations and conflicts that it fashioned. The unexpected declaration of affectionate sentiment and Bridges' subsequent proposal induced her to question not only her past behaviour but also to manage her future conduct. She was forced to decide between acting with 'ease' or 'reserve' in his company which led to an uncomfortable, internal conflict for her; to be authentic or not. She too had to navigate and consider the machinations of the local social hierarchy and her place and reputation within it – could she marry an unpopular man even if her family considered him 'sensible', 'good natured' and 'pleasant'?[13] And finally, she had to negotiate and discuss with her brothers her current familial responsibilities, expectations and also her potential, future prospects.

What Frances' experience also highlighted was the significance of the spaces within which these events took place, that is Orlingbury Hall and its garden. Her letters referred several times to her fear of encountering Bridges in the garden that adjoined that of the Rectory, and she wrote of her dismay when she finally realised that she had

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[11] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 5 February 1793, YO1596, N.A.H.S.
[12] *Ibid*.
[13] *Ibid*.

been the reason for his regular visits to the Hall and not her father as she had previously assumed. The elite home was a 'semi-public sphere' into which, according to Ylivuori, women were expected to 'politely receive whoever happened to pass through their door' and Orlingbury Hall would have been no different.[14] Whilst her father was alive, and her brother unmarried, much of the responsibility for accommodating both expected and unexpected guests would have fallen to Frances. In a letter, written in 1796 to her sister, Frances revealed how this had made her feel. On a day in which she had hoped to spend some time alone with her sister-in-law Mary, their plans were scuppered by a number of sudden visitors. She explained:

> We had intended to have spent a snug morning but the arrival of the Booths disturb'd that plan…just as they left us came Will'm Lockwood…Mary & I intended to have one hour to ourselves when old Mrs Jones & Mrs Gibbon, made their appearance which made us nearly cross. However poor Mrs Gibbon was so good natured & look'd so well & I felt so much compassion for her that I did not let her discover my ill-temper.[15]

Her use of the word 'disturb'd' revealed the impact that the surprise visitors had on her comfort, it was, as previously discussed, associated with the word anxiety and for some, comfort came from 'the ability to choose the company with whom one mixed'.[16] Frances enjoyed spending time with her sister-in-law, indeed she described Mary Young as 'so kind & good natured always, that it is a joy to be with her' and so these disturbances to their day were a source of frustration and displeasure to her.[17] Frances' manners, however, were such that she was at pains from revealing this to the catalogue

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[14] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities and Power,* p. 109.
[15] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 28 April 1796, YO1613, N.A.H.S.
[16] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 73; Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 129.
[17] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 28 April 1796, YO1613, N.A.H.S.

of visitors to Orlingbury Hall. She recognised that she should not 'grumble' and nor should her 'ill-temper' be discovered but this required effort on her part.[18]

Sudden visitors could have much more of an effect on comfort than just prompting an effort to conceal a bad temper. In August 1794 in a protracted visit to see her grandparents in Aveley in Essex, Harriet Orlebar described the impact that an unexpected visit that she and her grandmother had made on an unsuspecting hostess:

> She…has such a dreadful nervous disorder that the rather unexpected sight of Mrs Cuthbert quite overpowered her, she trembled to such a degree that she could not stand a minute, & the Physician that attended her, can do no good.[19]

Stobart argues that 'social discomfort could arise from being forced into unwanted sociability' but it appeared from Harriet's description that the physical and emotional comfort of Mrs Woodgate of Billericay were also compromised by the unforeseen visit made by Harriet and her grandmother.[20] What these examples demonstrated was both the effort that polite sociability could often demand, and also the impact that it could have on comfort within the domestic space. Stobart suggests that 'a comfortable atmosphere and a sense of ease could be hard to create and sustain' when unexpected or unwanted guests arrived, and Frances' letters emitted a sense of both unease and effort whilst Harriet's outlined a more extreme reaction.[21] Even when visitors were expected, their presence could still disturb the comfort of their hosts. Frances described to Mary the feeling of 'dread' that she had at the impending visit of their acquaintance she called 'Ekins', and this was before she had even arrived.[22] In a further letter written to Mary following the christening of their brother John's son, also called John, she

[18] *Ibid*.
[19] From Miss Harriet Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 24 August 1794, OR2071/374, B.A.
[20] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House,* p. 129.
[21] *Ibid.,* p. 132.
[22] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 5 February 1793, YO1596, N.A.H.S.

detailed the frustration that she felt at Ekins' presence and the relief when she finally left. The source of Frances' irritation with her cousin, on this particular occasion, was her criticism of the brother of Frances' sister-in-law, John Wood:

> Ekins thinks John Wood not improved his style not fun his person dreadfully alterd & countenance betrays a weak mind these observations were taken up & down by me you may believe, & I gave her my sentiments upon her judgement & penetration. She has been very friendly & I was really glad to see her but to be sure she is a sad bore & I was angry with my self for feeling rather relieved when she departed on Monday but so it was.[23]

The impact on Frances' comfort can be seen in her choice of word 'relieved' to describe how Ann's departure made her feel. This word has strong associations with comfort as 'relieve' was the easing of pain or sorrow.[24] On this occasion it seemed that Frances' ability to hide her impatience may have failed her as she strongly defended her sister-in-law's brother from what she considered unfair and undue criticism.

Frances was not alone in her struggle. In a letter written to her mother-in-law in July 1833 Maria Shirley, who with her husband had planned a visit to his parents' home, requested that no arrangements be made for her and Walter on the day of their arrival:

> We rather hope you may not have made any engagement with the Barfords to meet us, as there is nothing more unpleasant than arriving tired as we probably should & having to play the agreeable all the evening.[25]

The concept of 'having to play the agreeable' was a characteristic of eighteenth-century politeness.[26] Defining politeness has proved challenging for historians; with both Klein and Philip Carter detailing its nebulous nature, with the former explaining that

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[23] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO550(v), N.A.H.S.
[24] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol II, p. 247.
[25] From Mrs Maria Shirley to Mrs Amelia Shirley, 27 July 1833, 22D64/86, R.O.L.L.R.
[26] *Ibid*.

politeness 'was expressed differently by – and had different meanings for - different people in different circumstances' and the latter arguing that the protean quality of politeness rendered its 'simple categorisation' meaningless.[27] Despite this, common themes are revealed in contemporary accounts of politeness which detailed the range of social and cultural practices, expectations and characteristics contained within its paradigm. In 1702, Abel Boyer presented politeness as the 'dextrous management' of 'words and actions' in order to facilitate the good opinion of others, in 1751 Samuel Johnson highlighted its purpose as being 'rather ease than pleasure' and in 1792 the anonymous writer of *Farrago* described it as 'those qualities that form the most refined pleasures of social intercourse, the appearance of universal benevolence, generosity, modesty, and of making our own happiness spring from the accommodation of others'.[28]

Carter identifies the three 'essential principles' of politeness that contemporaries highlighted: decorum, elegant manners and a concern for, and accommodation of, others.[29] He also reveals, however, a focus on 'ease' and 'easiness' and cites a 1724 work which described it as 'the pleasure of knowing ourselves' and actions that are 'naturally free and unconfined'.[30] Johnson too discussed politeness in terms of easiness, defining it as 'freedom from harshness, formality, forced behaviour or conceits' and behaviour in which 'no man should give preference to himself'.[31] Klein also examines the use of 'ease' and 'easiness' as significant features of the vocabulary of politeness, describing them as 'key words' and explaining that politeness was often

[27] Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of British Eighteenth Century', p. 873; Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society 1660 – 1800* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 18.
[28] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society 1660 – 1800,* p. 20–21.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 21.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 22
[31] *Ibid*.

described as a 'zone of freedom, ease and naturalness'.[32] If ease was a significant feature of politeness, then it is not unreasonable to suggest that comfort was too as the two words have had lexicographical connections since at least the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and their use was often interchangeable. In Edward Phillips' 1700 publication of *The New World of Words* for example 'to comfort' was defined as 'to be assisting to any one, to ease him of some part of his pain, said also of the ease that Friends afford to the maladies both of body and mind'.[33] In 1713, John Kersey in his *New English Dictionary* defined comfort as a noun that meant 'help, ease, or relief in distress' and in the same volume specified ease as 'rest, pleasure, comfort'.[34] Consequently, in a study of elite comfort, its role in and contribution to politeness requires examination.

Both Klein and Carter when describing the two overriding features of politeness, discuss the increased freedom, ease and naturalness of eighteenth century social and cultural life and its growing 'generous concern for the comfort of others'.[35] However, they also emphasise the constraints of politeness, those elements that appeared antonymous to the polite world of 'naturally free and unconfined' actions outlined above.[36] Both cite the requirement for 'dextrous management' of both words and actions and emphasise the performative, decorous and conscious 'art of pleasing' that politeness demanded, and which the letters written by Frances Young and Maria

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[32] Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of British Eighteenth Century', p. 879; Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 4.
[33] Edward Phillips, *The New World of Words, or, A Universal English Dictionary* (London: J. Phillips, at the King's-Arms in S. Paul's Church-yard; and H. Rhodes, at the Star, the corner of Bride-Lane, in Fleet-Street, 1700).
[34] John Kersey, *A New English Dictionary; or, a compleat collection of the most proper and significant words, and terms of art commonly used in the language,* p. 52.
[35] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness,* p. 4.
[36] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society 1660 – 1800,* p. 22.

Shirley attest to.[37] What Klein and Carter do not do however is demonstrate the impact that these constraints of politeness had on comfort, despite the strong connection between the two concepts. The examples above described the effort and work that was often needed in polite society and thus revealed the impact that this could have on comfort. Frances was mindful of the need to alter her behaviour to ensure Bridges did not take her amiability for admiration whilst Maria complained of the unpleasantness of having to 'play' at being agreeable. And without looking at politeness from the perspective of comfort this effort would not have been revealed.

The country house was considered to be 'a place of physical and psychological comfort: a haven from the outside world' and so there was, within the spatiality of the home, this dichotomy whereby it represented both a refuge for comfort and yet, at the same time, it posed a threat to it.[38] This contradiction was demonstrated in one of Frances' letters to Mary when she described the day that Bridges first revealed his feelings to her. She wrote of her distress, wretchedness and anxiety and yet in the same letter she described how the following day, one in which she did not see him, was a 'fine cheerful day spent most comfortably' thus highlighting the different levels of comfort and also discomfort that could be experienced within the country house.[39] In his study of comfort within the country house, Stobart does consider the relationship between comfort and sociability, but it is largely by looking at how furniture became more comfortable and how its arrangement within the room facilitated easier and more informal social interaction (although he does briefly touch upon the social discomfort that could occur within more informal sociability, as well as that caused by the arrival

[37] Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness,* p. 4; Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society 1660 – 1800,* p. 20; Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of British Eighteenth Century', p. 874.
[38] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 7.
[39] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 5 February 1793, YO1596, N.A.H.S.

of unwanted guests).[40] What this chapter does differently however, is to look at how sociability itself impacted comfort, and by doing so it allows for an in depth examination of all forms of comfort and discomfort that could be present within the spaces of sociability. Social comfort, of course, had a significant presence but the examples outlined above revealed that other forms, such as emotional (Frances' fear of venturing into her garden) and physical (Mrs Woodgate's physical reaction to unexpected callers) were also at play.

Neighbourhoods

The household space was just one enclave of sociability in which comfort played a significant role, others included the local neighbourhood, spa towns, seaside resorts, assembly rooms, church, the theatre, outdoor pursuits such as hunting and horseracing and gentleman's clubs. And in some of these, the families in this study experienced similar conflicts and dichotomies in relation to comfort as described above. Stobart defines social comfort as 'a general sense of material well-being – a comfortable living – but, more specifically, it involved house owners matching expected norms and feeling at one with their situation'; yet achieving this level of comfort was often difficult and could be fraught with risk.[41] Reeve Thornton of Brockhall, elder brother of John and Lee, had to consider his own social and financial comfort when faced with his sibling's precarious finances. In December 1823, in a period of mental clarity, John wrote to his elder brother about Lee:

> He says another year will decide his fate: that is, whether he is to sink into hopeless obscurity & irremediable poverty, or whether he is to be enabled to hold up his head in society…..He sometimes apologises for his scale of

[40] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*.
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

expenditure: but declares that he does nothing more than that is necessary to keep up his health & the powers of his mind, and preserve such a decent appearance in society as may keep him in a situation which may enable him to accept anything advantageous which may offer itself.[42]

This extract described more than Lee's finances, which appeared to be dire, it also revealed the importance of social comfort; of what Stobart describes as 'feeling at one' with one's place in the world.[43] Lee's desire to 'hold his head up' and portray 'a decent appearance' in society was indicative of his need for social comfort, even if that was detrimental to his finances. John explained to Reeve that it would be both financially and socially beneficial to Lee if he could become 'a member of the Union club in Cockspur Street'.[44] This was a gentleman's club founded in 1799 which attracted politicians, lawyers and merchants alike and whose first members included the Dukes of Bedford and Norfolk. The sociability that Lee could derive from membership of the Union Club, in John's opinion, would enable both an improvement in his brother's 'material well-being' and facilitate a sense of 'being at one' with his place in the world.[45] Despite these obvious benefits to his social comfort, membership came at a financial cost. It was six guineas a year to join, a fee which Lee could not afford on his own. John explained to Reeve that their brother keenly felt that his own financial woes and inadequate social connections not only impacted his own comfort, but could influence that of his family:

He feels excessively the burden he is likely to become to the family, & particularly some reproaches which have been indirectly cast upon him on that account. I cannot help thinking that the best light to view it in is that of a

[42] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 16 December 1823, TH2559, N.A.H.S.
[43] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 261.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] *Ibid.*

> temporary sacrifice, which sometime may, & probably will, be repaired; and that it would be better to make him feel comfortable till his own resources enable him to stand on higher ground.[46]

The use of 'comfortable' in this extract had three meanings. The first, which related to the financial comfort that Lee would have gained if his brother paid the club subscription for him, resonates with the more modern view of being 'comfortably off' or 'prosperous'.[47] As a consequence of receiving this pecuniary relief however, Lee would have also received a boost to his sense of social comfort. John's letter referred several times to Lee being able to 'stand on a higher ground', 'hold his head up' and maintain a 'decent appearance in society' and therefore 'comfortable' in this instance reflected not only its importance to Lee but it also revealed the significance of social comfort to the family as a whole.[48] The final meaning of 'comfortable' referred to what John described as Lee's 'health and power of his mind'.[49] Whilst it is important to acknowledge that John had quite the fixation on the notions of health (his own and that of family members) by highlighting it in this letter he demonstrated not only the connection between illness and comfort (and this will, of course, be explored in greater detail in the next chapter) but also the impact that being 'uncomfortable' could have on physical health. Equally as important however, was the emotional comfort that Lee would have gained from receiving assistance from his brothers. John had confessed to Reeve that Lee felt he would be a burden on his family if his situation did not change (this was something that John felt too when he experienced periods of mental instability) and this would have caused much emotional discomfort (indeed, Johnson

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[46] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton,16 December 1823, TH2559, N.A.H.S.
[47] Oxford English Dictionary Online, (2024) [Accessed 10.05.2024] <comfortably off - Quick search results | Oxford English Dictionary (oed.com)>
[48] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton,16 December 1823, TH2559, N.A.H.S.
[49] *Ibid.*

defined the word 'burdensomeness' as uneasiness) so a simple act of being offered comfort and knowing that he had the support of his brothers must have alleviated this feeling for Lee and provided some peace of mind. This letter also demonstrated again the challenges that could be encountered when striving for comfort. Often conflicts could occur and there could be elements of inward negotiation for individuals, for example, for Lee to achieve some semblance of social comfort, Reeve would be expected to incur some expense; that is, Reeve's financial comfort would be disadvantaged for Lee's social comfort to be advanced. Reeve's 'temporary sacrifice' (how temporary this was, was very much dependant on the outcomes of Lee's membership of the club and the impact his newly established connections had) was essential to ensure Lee's visibility within, what John termed, 'the most respectable classes of society'.[50]

The gentleman's club was a space of sociability outside of the home which, on this occasion would hopefully improve Lee's comfort; but external localities could also be a place of derision and conflict, which, as a consequence, could threaten an individual's social, financial and even emotional comfort. For Robert Rye, this external space was the neighbourhood of Culworth in Northamptonshire. In the mid-1790s, Robert faced the impropriety of being falsely accused of assault by the village clergyman, the Reverend Byker. The two men were embroiled in a dispute over land with Byker's actions being described by Robert as 'inimical to the tranquillity of their neighbours'.[51] Robert used the word 'tranquillity' (which was synonymous with 'ease') to describe the general feeling of neighbourliness within the village and this portrayed the small community as one characterised by easiness and consensus until it was

[50] *Ibid*.
[51] From Reverend Robert Rye to Mr Peter Rye, 11 August 1794, X7244/29, N.A.H.S.

fractured by the 'inimical' actions of Byker and his family.[52] Robert's description of Culworth resonates with Keith Wrightson's view of 'neighbourliness'.[53] Wrightson suggests that it was characterised by mutual 'reciprocity' and a 'consensus as to the proper behaviour between neighbours'.[54] Byker's actions, therefore, meant that both he, and by association, Robert, had defied the accepted standards of behaviour within the neighbourhood. Indeed, Robert's next letter to Peter detailed the full impact of Byker's conduct on both him and the wider community:

> For myself I have not been very well, as I have been so perpetually harassed by our worthless Priest…He opened & read a letter of Sister B's & when it was demanded, proceeded to violent outrages and accuses me of assault & battery…In a word, the whole neighbourhood is now occupied by the affair.[55]

So, the once good-natured community that had been typified by 'moral rectitude' and easiness was now 'occupied' by a catalogue of incidents which witnessed the harassment of Robert, the illegal interception of his sister Anne's letter and an accusation of assault and battery. Personally, as he stated in his letter, this had made Robert physically unwell, however the impact on his emotional and social comfort, was significant too. If, once again, Stobart's definition is used as the measurement of social comfort it becomes evident that Robert's would have been threatened by both Byker's actions directly and also by the effect that it was having on the wider community.[56] Firstly, his 'material well-being' was at risk with parts of his land being threatened and engaging the services of his cousin, a barrister. Secondly, the wider conversation that took place within the neighbourhood, about Robert, would likely have questioned the

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[52] *Ibid.*; Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol II, p. 441; vol I, p. 330.
[53] Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 59.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye, 23 August 1794, X7244/30, N.A.H.S.
[56] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 261.

'expected norms' held about him by his neighbours. In his letter, Robert described himself as 'peaceable', which indicated that he had seemingly played an active part in the previously tranquil Culworth. Therefore, an enforced change in this dynamic would have made it unlikely that Robert could feel 'at one' in his situation. His discomfort at this imposed position was revealed in another letter sent to Peter in September 1795, when he wrote:

> Thus you see men who are desirous of nothing but tranquillity, are not indulged with its enjoyments: & uneasiness is not alone confirmed to you, who are competitors for rank and promotion.[57]

This extract was interesting in that it demonstrated that a tranquil life characterised by ease and, as a consequence of that, comfort had been an achievable and conscious goal for Robert until this disagreement with Byker. He had been 'desirous of nothing but tranquillity' which showed just how integral a part of elite life comfort was, but also how fragile it could be. Another aspect of disruption to Robert's social comfort however was the impact that it had on his sociability. He explained to Peter how his disagreement with Byker meant 'we are now with no acquaintance but at Thenford'.[58] The fact that this disagreement with Byker was played out primarily within the local neighbourhood and before his neighbours was significant. Prior to this, Robert appeared comfortable with his place within the amiable and peaceful village of Culworth but once the argument occurred and then developed publicly the impact on Robert's comfort became increasingly evident. This seemingly quiet man, aware of his position and status in the community suddenly became less assured of it. Robert's experience appeared to demonstrate aspects of what Wrightson terms the 'moral dimension' of

[57] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye, 16 September 1795, X7244/17, N.A.H.S.
[58] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye, 7 October 1795, X7244/48, N.A.H.S.

neighbourliness.[59] He suggests that neighbours were expected to 'promote harmonious relations' among neighbourhoods and should they fail to do so, or their behaviour did not meet the standard of the local community, they risked the loss of 'local goodwill'.[60] The environs of Culworth and Robert's friends and acquaintances within it, was another example of what Rosenwein terms an 'emotional community'.[61] Before Robert's dispute with Byker, the village appeared to share similar emotional norms and behaviours but following it, when it became apparent that not everyone within the community shared or expected the same standards, an unease appeared to penetrate it. And by using Robert's experience in Culworth, this thesis further highlights how the comfort of an emotional community could be threatened by the fragmentation of the community itself.

Barclay in her examination of eighteenth-century Scottish 'caritas', describes how this 'form of love' and 'ethical practice', characterised by 'avoiding violence, peace-making, charitable giving, monitoring each other's spiritual progress and morality, as well as fulfilling the obligations of one's role in society', encouraged and shaped close-knit community relationships in towns and villages.[62] And Culworth, prior to Robert's disagreement with Byker appeared to reflect such a neighbourhood. However, as Barclay also suggests, 'harmonious relations' could be fractured or destroyed by 'disturbances to peace', and this seemed to be the case in Robert's village.[63] Barclay also described how a sense of 'belonging' to a community was an important feature of caritas and how that, in itself, was a 'form of comfort'.[64] There is a correlation, she argues, between comfort, with its roots in the notions of support,

[59] Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680,* p. 61.
[60] Ibid., p. 62 and p. 61.
[61] Rosenwein*, Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600 – 1700,* p. 3.
[62] Barclay, *Caritas: Neighbourly Love and the Early Modern Self*, p. 3–4.
[63] *Ibid*., p. 52 and p. 45.
[64] *Ibid*., p. 42.

consolation and solace, and the concept of community which suggests that comfort was at the centre of caritas.[65] In Barclay's words, 'the loving community was comfortable'.[66] And whilst Barclay highlights the close connection between comfort and community, this thesis has shown, using Robert's experience in Culworth, the real impact on elite comfort when the community was neither 'loving' nor 'comfortable'.[67] It could result in reduced physical health, harassment, social isolation and unease – all of which Robert's letters attested to.

Whilst Robert's letters showed how his neighbourhood caused him much discomfort, Mary Orlebar's experience demonstrated how she found comfort in a small French community in 1785. Aged just seventeen she accompanied her father, stepmother, two of her sisters and two younger half-siblings to Lille. It appeared from the letters written to her aunts back in Northamptonshire during her year there that she found much solace in the society of others outside of her family. Her sisters Harriet and Anne were day scholars at a local school and attended lessons there from eight o'clock in the morning until five in the afternoon and her stepmother Charlotte was largely concerned with both her young children and her own seemingly fragile health. This meant that Mary was deprived of many of the pleasures and entertainments of Lille unless in company. She wrote about the 'several pleasant walks' that could be found in Lille and described her particular favourite, 'the most fashionable one…call'd the Esplanade, where people of all sorts walk of an evening'[68] Unfortunately, the opportunity for her to take a walk there was rare as her father did not care for it and her stepmother was, in Mary's words, 'so long indifferent' and as a consequence this

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[65] *Ibid*., p. 43.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 108.
[67] *Ibid*.
[68] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 26 April 1785, OR2071/348, B.A.

activity, as well as other social pursuits, was significantly curtailed.[69] Mary was young and became increasingly isolated in Lille and appeared to relish the company of those outside of her immediate family, which included Mademoiselle de Sombreuil, the daughter of the Governor of Lille. Mary told her aunts that she was 'much pleas'd & flatter'd' by her new acquaintance who she proceeded to spend much time with.[70] The relationship that Mary enjoyed with the young French woman was such that when her father Richard proposed moving away from the house in which they were lodged, which was located close to the home of the Governor of Lille, to one in 'Rue Royale…the most handsome and cheerful street in Lile', she wrote of her regret at being removed from her friend 'Mlle de Sombreuil, for whom I have a sincere friendship'.[71] Whilst appreciating the improvements in the family's collective social comfort that would likely result from the move to Rue Royale, Mary's own capacity for sociability, something that she had come to rely on during her time in France, had narrowed. No longer could she visit her friend with the ease of a close neighbour that she had enjoyed prior to the move; instead, it was now less convenient. It was, she told her aunt in December 1785, 'too dirty' to 'go often to see my favourite Mlle de Sombreuil'.[72] As a young woman, Mary was reliant on the whims and wishes of her elder family members, such as her father and stepmother, and her removal from her neighbours and neighbourhood impacted her comfort, both emotional and social, during this period of residence in France.

Whilst Barclay reflects largely on the consolatory and supportive aspect of comfort within neighbourhoods, the social comfort that could be derived from residing in what was considered the right kind of neighbourhood should not be underestimated.

[69] *Ibid*.
[70] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 29/30 May 1785, OR2071/350, B.A.
[71] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 16 August 1785, OR2071/349, B.A.
[72] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 9 December 1785, OR2071/352, B.A.

In 1773, when visiting Bath with his first wife Elizabeth, Richard Orlebar appeared intent on securing lodgings in the most fashionable part of town. In a letter to her sister-in-law Constantia, Elizabeth told her, ‘Bar set out in search of lodgings but I should tell you he was fully determined to live in the Circus whither the lodgings were commodious or not’.[73] This clearly showed the importance, to Richard, of residing in what was considered to be the best neighbourhood in Bath, in the hope that it would consolidate both his reputation and social standing there. This also was a consideration for him when he sojourned with his family to Lille in the mid-1780s, this time with his second wife Charlotte. They travelled to France with the sole aim of reducing the family outgoings and improving their finances, yet Richard eventually settled on lodgings in ‘Rue Royale’ which were described by his daughter Mary as ‘the best street in Lille’.[74] When she told her aunts in her letter that the move to Rue Royale would be ‘very much to advantage to be sure’ she was not just referring to the improvements in the lodgings’ features, such as ‘a garden’, ‘a good yard with a porte cocherre & a place to put the carriage in & a stable’, she also meant the social advantage that having a prestigious address could effect.[75]

When, during a period of improved health in 1831, John Thornton and his brother Lee searched for lodgings, they decided that Greenwich would be the ideal district for John. Granted, the primary reason for settling on this area was the willingness of Mr Sherwin, the chemist, to permit John to stay with him and his family but the neighbourhood was also a significant factor in the decision. Greenwich was,

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[73] From Mrs Elizabeth Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 12 March 1773, OR2071/291, B.A.
[74] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 8 September 1785, OR2071/351, B.A.
[75] *Ibid*. A ‘porte cochère’ was a covered area at the entrance to a building into which vehicles could be driven – Oxford English Dictionary Online, (2024) [Accessed 10.02.2024] <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=porte-coch%C3%A8re>

Lee told his elder brother Reeve, 'materially to be preferred for the liveliness of the place, shopping, tide, scenery &c'.[76] He continued to explain to Reeve why it was so:

> John is very much pleased both with him and the place…Mr Sherwin has had several long conversations both with him and me about his dispositions, wants, health &c: and seems to be returning to get all the knowledge he can in order to administer in every way possible to John's comfort and health. Nothing so apparently advantageous has occurred before.[77]

Interestingly, Lee used the word 'advantageous' in his letter to Reeve. The potential combination of Sherwin's care coupled with the thriving neighbourhood of Greenwich seemed, to Lee, ideal in ensuring John's future comfort, both physical and emotional. Lee repeated the notion of 'advantage' when he informed Reeve that Sherwin wanted to alter the terms of the original agreement by increasing the cost from £150 to £180 per year.[78] The advantage that Lee was so keen to portray to Reeve would certainly have been of benefit to John, but it would be naïve to ignore the advantages that John's residence in Greenwich would also have had on his two brothers and that was likely one of the reasons why Lee appeared so keen for Reeve to pay the extra £30 per year which John's own finances would be unable to cover. If John was settled with the right family within a comfortable neighbourhood, where his 'comfort and health' could be attended to, his two brothers would also be able to enjoy a period, hopefully, where their own comfort was not compromised despite the additional financial burden that the new situation would incur.[79] What is interesting to note here too is the parallel between this letter written by Lee and the one that John wrote to Reeve when he asked him to pay Lee's subscription fees which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Both letters

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[76] From Mr Lee Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 7 August 1831, TH2571, N.A.H.S.
[77] *Ibid*.
[78] *Ibid*.
[79] *Ibid*.

were characterised by quite a distinct emphasis on comfort. Lee's letter included the word 'comfort' itself whilst John used 'comfortable' and both men utilised the word 'advantageous' to describe the impact that Reeve's financing both schemes would have.[80] 'Advantageous' was defined as 'convenience, favourable circumstances' and the meaning of 'convenience' included 'ease', 'commodiousness' and 'causes of ease' thus its connection to comfort at this time was strong.[81] By using the language of comfort both men placed it at the forefront of their letters which suggested that they recognised its importance. However, they both also used the promise of future comfort as an inducement to Reeve to bear the expense, which suggested that he did too.

The letters of the three Orlebar sisters of Ecton examined in this study also demonstrated the features of neighbourly sociability and the social comfort, in particular, that could be derived from it. In 1786, Constantia Orlebar who had temporarily left the village to attend to her brother's family in Charlotte Street, London, received two letters, one from her sister Mary, the other from her sister Eliza. Both sisters described the minutiae of Ecton society and its expected societal behaviours and manners. The first letter, from Mary, described a visit that the two sisters had paid to a recent addition to the neighbourhood, a Mrs Whitworth. They had found her behaviour, according to Mary, 'pleasing' which had 'made amends for her plain features'.[82] Whilst becoming acquainted with their new neighbour another visitor arrived, a 'lady' known as Mrs Jones of Mears Ashby, and her entrance was thus detailed:

> In she came with…the finest <u>little</u> little hat, very small steel buckles all round the edge with pointed ends of ribbon drawn through them; her gown likewise

[80] *Ibid.*; From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton,16 December 1823, TH2559, N.A.H.S.

[81] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 49; vol I, p. 228.

[82] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 1–3 October 1786, OR2071/366, B.A.

> trim'd in a style that was very elegant some years ago: and to complete the tout en semble her cheeks abundantly, but not well rouged.[83]

From her somewhat derogatory description, it seemed that Mary was not keen to pursue a more intimate acquaintance with Mrs Jones, despite her superiority in status. And this seemed to be confirmed by Eliza in her letter when she told Constantia about the Whitworth's return visit where Mrs Whitworth was 'gentealy dress'd all in white & look'd to advantage' and that she thought that 'they will be comfortable neighbours to us'.[84] What was interesting from Eliza's letter was the difference with which Mrs Whitworth was described compared to how Mary described Mrs Jones. Mrs Whitworth's simplicity and her genteel nature were elevated above the seemingly elaborate and adorned Mrs Jones, and it was the former that prompted Eliza to describe the Whitworths as 'comfortable neighbours' rather than 'the Lady' of Mears Ashby.[85] This example could be a metaphor for what Carter sees as the shift from politeness, represented by the ornamented and exaggerated Mrs Jones, to sensibility signified by the simple gentility of Mrs Whitworth.

As a newly married woman who had recently arrived in the neighbourhood, Mrs Whitworth would have been expected to welcome a flurry of visitors to her home, but this was an undertaking that could often produce feelings of anxiety or nervousness. In January 1797, Eliza Orlebar received a letter from her close friend Charlotte Nicholls who was due to get married just a few days later to Mr George Hayward. In the course of her letter Charlotte revealed that despite being 'fond of social intercourse' she did not relish the idea of receiving guests once she and her husband had married because of the financial costs, particularly for newly-weds, that welcoming guests into your

[83] *Ibid*.
[84] From Miss Elizabeth Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 21 October 1786, OR2071/367, B.A.
[85] *Ibid*.; From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 1-3 October 1786, OR2071/366, B.A

home could incur.[86] It was not however just the financial cost of entertaining that caused Charlotte's reluctance. Her and her future husband's new home was in a neighbourhood which she described as 'not very fashionable' but one that was 'remarkable for its sociability' but it also, at that time, had no furniture.[87] Indeed, she confessed to Eliza that she had 'no idea of the variety of articles necessary to make an empty house barely comfortable.'[88] There appeared to be two areas of concern for Charlotte in terms of the comfort of her new home. Firstly, she was tasked with furnishing it and ensuring that it was 'comfortable'. This was made easier, she told her friend, by the financial assistance proffered by her father-in-law. Secondly, however, there was a feeling that she wanted to ensure that both her and her new home met the expectations of her soon to be neighbours, most of whom she was unfamiliar with. It was important for Charlotte to ensure that her home was far more than 'barely comfortable' but that it also provided her with a space in which she was able to feel socially comfortable. An appropriately furnished room in which to welcome guests was an important objective for the newlywed Charlotte. 'Domestic sociability' as this thesis has demonstrated was an important aspect of elite social life and 'appropriate to gender and status for women of the upper and (later) middling sort'.[89] Her social status and that of her husband, therefore, relied upon a suitable and comfortable home.[90]

Whilst Charlotte appeared untroubled by the fact that her new neighbourhood was not considered fashionable the same, it seemed, could not be said for Mary Orlebar, the niece of Eliza, Mary and Constantia. On her marriage to Mr Skynner, she resided

[86] From Miss Charlotte Nicholls to Miss Elizabeth Orlebar, 7 January 1797, OR1035, B.A.
[87] *Ibid*.
[88] *Ibid*.
[89] Helen Berry, 'Women, Consumption and Taste', in *Women's History: Britain, 1700 – 1850, An Introduction,* ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 194 – 216, (p. 200).
[90] *Ibid.,* p. 201.

for a time at Goulds Green and a letter, written by her sister Harriet to their sister Anne, suggested that it was not the neighbourhood that Mary would have chosen, 'being chiefly what you may call half gentry'.[91] Harriet offered little insight into what she may have meant by 'half gentry', other than her description, in the same letter, of two women with whom she had recently become acquainted.[92] Mrs Pope, who wore an identical 'bonnet and deep veil' to Mary and who seemed to gain Harriet's approval was described as 'genteel', whilst another was somewhat disapprovingly called 'unpolished'.[93] Vickery suggests that the word 'genteel' was utilised by Georgian women to 'convey their social prestige' and therefore Harriet's description of Mrs Pope coupled with the observation that she shared her sister's taste in bonnets was a comment on both her and her acquaintance's social status.[94] 'Half gentry' therefore, may refer to those members of the neighbourhood not genteel or polished enough to be considered part of polite society. It appeared therefore that the comfort that Mary sought from a neighbourhood at this time was different to that which she had so keenly pursued as a younger woman in France just five years earlier. Seemingly deprived of any familial attention she looked for comfort from her new acquaintances and their society, yet as a married woman this appeared, no longer, to be such a necessity.

Unmarried Women

Whereas Mary had found comfort in society during her stay in Lille, her younger sister Harriet, a few years later in 1794 at the age of twenty-two, appeared to tire of it and yearn for the tranquillity of the company of her three aunts. She spent the last five months of her life residing at her grandparent's home in Aveley, Essex, from where she, with her grandmother Mrs Cuthbert, made countless calls and visits on

[91] From Miss Harriet Orlebar to Miss Anne Orlebar, 25 June 1790, OR2071/371, B.A.
[92] *Ibid.*
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England,* p. 13.

neighbouring families before her premature death in the October of that year. In the preceding months, in her letters to her beloved aunts, she documented her comings and goings within Essex and yet her desire to see them and their home again always remained evident. In a letter written in August 1794, three months after her sojourn into Essex began and two months before her death, she mourned the separation from Ecton:

> Often are all my dear Aunts in my thoughts & often do I lament the distance that separates us; but I must look forward to the pleasure of meeting after a long absence; which is a happiness nothing in this world can equal & I flatter myself in store for me (though many months must first elapse) & that I shall see my dearest friends again, in as good health as when I left them; this hope is my consolation during a voluntary exile.[95]

Describing it as an 'exile', albeit 'voluntary', suggested that this trip was something that Harriet may have preferred not to have undertaken and her use of the words 'pleasure', 'happiness' and 'consolation', all words associated with comfort, clearly demonstrated that she was already seeking it from the thought of seeing and being with her aunts in Ecton. Harriet's letters to her aunts outlined a litany of social engagements with her grandparents that she had been obliged to undertake but she also revealed that it had left little time for her to pursue any activities of her own choosing. A preferred trip to see her 'charming friend' Mrs James was curtailed as she was obliged to make a visit to Purfleet instead, for instance, whilst an eagerly anticipated visit to Hemmingfield was postponed at short notice due to the unexpected arrival of her stepmother's mother.[96] This demonstrated the ways in which Harriet's sociality, as an

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[95] From Miss Harriet Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 24 August 1794, OR2071/374, B.A.

[96] From Miss Harriet Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 7–9 June 1794, OR2071/373, B.A.

unmarried and younger woman, was controlled and influenced by her elders, and this is an area that will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

An interesting feature of Harriet's letters during this period was that they were not just a list of the activities that she had undertaken. Interspersed between the details about these events were seemingly unrelated questions about her aunts' health and the well-being of their neighbours, general observations about the weather and her gratitude for being kept up to date with all the news from Ecton:

> I suppose your Rectorial Neighbours returned home on Thursday…I hope Mr Whalley has left all his ills at Bath; you are I daresay rejoiced to see him again…I am very sorry to find rain is still so much wanted in Bedfordshire….my Aunt O was very good in giving me an account of all home occurrences knowing what an indulgence it is to me….I am much obliged to my Aunt O: for the pattern she sent me….I suppose your trusty Martha has not left you, as Anne does not mention it: pray remember me kindly to her with all good wishes: likewise to my friend Betty Penny; who I often think of.[97]

The 'consolation' that Harriet said that she would find during her 'exile' in Essex, appeared to come from the familiarity of her family in Ecton and the knowledge that she had of their lives and undertakings.[98] So whilst her sister Mary, as a younger woman, had found comfort in Lille's sociability, Harriet appeared to seek solace, from the obligations that sociability placed upon her and its resulting unease, in the intimacy that she had enjoyed with her aunts and their lives.

Harriet enjoyed her much anticipated visit to Hemmingfield, but thoughts of home (both Ecton and Hinwick) were not far away:

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[97] *Ibid*.

[98] Miss Harriet Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 2 May 1794, OR2071/372, B.A.

> Hemmingfield is a pretty retired situation, Mr Howes house the only gentleman's in the village, which is small & the cottages do not join so neighbourly as Ecton & Puddington, I continue partial to them, no other place looks so comfortable.[99]

Harriet did not dislike undertaking what she described as 'excursions' and 'adventures', indeed she assured her aunts that she 'liked my visit exceedingly' but her use of the word 'comfortable' (which meant 'receiving comfort') in relation to the two villages in which her family resided seemed to suggest that here, with her family, was where she felt more comfortable.[100]

It was not just the younger, unmarried women of the Orlebar family whose comfort was subordinated to that of others. Several letters demonstrated that the older aunts, so beloved by Mary and Harriet, were often called upon to undertake caring roles outside of their own home, contrary to their own wishes, desires and comfort. Summoned by family members or compelled by familial obligation, these three women, Mary, Constantia and Eliza Orlebar had an oft itinerant aspect to their lives. Constantia often joined her brother's family in London following their permanent return from Lille despite an apparent dislike for the city as well as carrying an injury to her leg. Whilst Mary was called upon to attend to her sister-in-law, Charlotte when she gave birth and given that she bore thirteen children over a period of twenty years her attendance was often required. That she provided Charlotte with much needed comfort was evident from a letter written by Harriet, Mary's niece, in 1794:

> Mrs O…is extremely obliged to my dear Aunts E & C for submitting to part so soon from my Aunt O as her company, will be such a great comfort in her

[99] *Ibid*.
[100] *Ibid*.; Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 198.

present expectant state: she is, as she informed you, very uneasy & cumbersome.[101]

That Mary would provide Charlotte with both help and comfort during her confinements was certainly assumed, but interestingly, it seemed that the impact that Mary's absence from Ecton would have on her and her sisters was also acknowledged. That they were prepared to submit 'to part so soon' from her company indicated that it was a wrench for all three of them.[102] In a letter written by Mary to her nephew Richard in 1798, she described to him how these visits to support and nurse Charlotte had made her feel:

> On the subject of my stationary situation at Ecton; I am going to quit it, in about a fortnight on a call from my Sister Orlebar, in an attendance which cannot but cause me much anxiety.[103]

The implications of responding to family emergencies in order to provide support and the impact that travel had on the comfort of the potential comforter were also outlined by Frances Young in a letter written to her sister. From Frances' letter it was possible to ascertain that Mary Barton and her husband were in Wales seeking a curative remedy for John, which thus far had been unsuccessful. Mary's letter that preceded Frances' had failed to provide the Young family with any promising news regarding any improvement in John's health and therefore Frances pondered how she could be of service to her sister:

[101] Miss Harriet Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 2 May 1794, OR2071/372, B.A.
[102] *Ibid*.
[103] Miss Mary Orlebar to Mr Richard Orlebar, 22 August 1798, OR2071/400, B.A.

> I have been thinking how it was possible for me to get to you; as I am sure if I could manage that I should prefer it to all other schemes I have now plan'd as I think I should be a comfort my dearest sister.[104]

Frances had clearly been thinking of how she could console her sister and settled upon the use of 'coaches and males <u>mixed</u> up with a share of resolution & a strong desire to be <u>with</u> you'.[105] It would be interesting to know what other plans Frances thought up before resolving that travelling from Northamptonshire to South-West Wales was the preferred option, but regrettably, she did not elucidate further. Frances, like the Orlebar sisters, was prepared to subordinate her own comfort in order to be able to provide it to her loved ones. There is no record that suggests that Frances undertook the long journey to Tenby, but this letter demonstrated that she had considered it and had been prepared to do it, regardless of the toll that it could have taken on her.

The toll that undertaking such visits took can be seen in the letter written by Mary Orlebar to her nephew Richard in 1798 and yet when the cause of her leaving Ecton was her choice and for her own pleasure, she took much comfort from travelling and making visits to and with her friends and family:

> I you know am in general the happiest when I am stationary in our own quiet cottage because my calls from thence, have too often been of a painful kind but yet had I the requisites to render voluntary travelling for amusement within in my power, I could even now, enjoy a tour to visit you at your barracks or camp or quarters, whatever they be.[106]

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[104] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 18 March (Year Not known), YO1622, N.A.H.S.
[105] *Ibid*.
[106] Miss Mary Orlebar to Mr Richard Orlebar, 22 August 1798, OR2071/400, B.A.

There is evidence that all the sisters travelled for pleasure. In 1785, Mary wrote a letter to her brother's family in Lille, from Bath where she had travelled with a Mrs Isted, in which she described her daily engagements and the enjoyable society of her friend:

> I am sure my good friends at Lille, will rejoice with me on my being enabled to say that I have for the last fortnight been entirely free from the inflammation in my eyes, which so long debard me from the use of pen, ink & needle, so that I am truly thankful to be again able to take my share in reading, as well as other gratifications which I enjoy in the society of my valuable friend Mrs Isted.[107]

With her use of the word 'gratifications' this extract suggests that Mary found ease and comfort in the company and sociability of her close friend and there was evidence of this in the letters of some of the other family members in this study. The constraints that politeness, good manners and gentility implied could sometimes be removed when in the presence of close friends and family. At the previously mentioned christening of Frances Young's nephew John, it seemed that it was a somewhat less formal occasion than might be expected. In her letter to Mary (where she had bemoaned the presence of Ann Ekins), Frances detailed an almost relaxed attitude to the proceedings:

> We were at Loddington by one o'clock thinking the christening was to be before dinner, John Wood we were all happy to see….it was rather a joy to see him again….I told you Allen was to come from Brixworth, Mr Raynsford rode with him & the two Johns seized the latter & would not let him return to Brixworth.[108]

This already suggested a rather chaotic aspect to the occasion, whereby guests were not sure about the order of the proceedings, or, in fact, how many guests would be in

[107] Miss Mary Orlebar to Mr Richard Orlebar, 10 September 1795, OR2071/343, B.A.
[108] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO550(v), N.A.H.S.

attendance. Frances' letter however did not betray any unease, for either guests or hosts, at this prospect. She told her sister that:

> We dined at four….& a nice & jolly dinner we had, the dear Mary [Mary Young] looking as elegant & nice as ever I beheld her….she had her usual ease & cheerfulness; his old worship [John Young] in unusual good spirits.[109]

Frances described the ease with which her sister-in-law Mary behaved and as a consequence, it seemed, enabled her husband John to do the same. Frances also went on to describe to her sister how some members of the party, who had enjoyed a 'few glasses of wine', made their way across the village green to the Church, whilst impersonating other family members.[110] This description depicted an occasion characterised by informality, fun and even mischievousness. There appeared to be no evidence, certainly amongst these guests in particular, of the limitations that polite society could impose, and the relaxed informality seemingly continued after the ceremony:

> We returnd home & the bumpers were drank in proper attendance on the occasion…..we drank tea at eight, the gentlemen returned to us in good spirits & gay, John Wood you know can be a little riotous & he chose to talk to Ekins to make us laugh, she can see through anything of the kind in an instant & I am sure did that…..Mr Raynsford is really a most pleasant man & added much to the agreeableness of the party. We did not depart till past nine but then I thought prudence for bid our staying longer.[111]

The adjectives used by Frances in this part of the letter continued to depict an easy and comfortable social scene; 'good natured', 'pleasant', 'gay' and 'agreeable' all suggest

[109] *Ibid*.
[110] *Ibid*.
[111] *Ibid*.

affability and warmth and her description of John Wood, who was the brother of Frances' sister-in-law Mary and uncle to the newly christened child, as 'riotous' implied an easiness amongst those gathered that facilitated his being so. Her 'prudence' at the end related only to her father's wellbeing, as she confessed to her sister in a later section of her letter that following the proceedings he had been 'rather low all day & restless owing to exerting himself'.[112]

Not all participants, it seemed, were able to fully enjoy the jovial and 'agreeable' aspect of the event and instead Frances' letters revealed some of the more formal expectations that such an occasion could induce.[113] Frances was somewhat scathing in her description of Ann Ekins' behaviour and as revealed earlier, considered her a 'sad bore,' so her opinion of her friend cannot be deemed to be altogether objective.[114] Nevertheless, the details of Ann's manner and dress, given by Frances, demonstrated that the tenets of politeness were still evident in 1790s Northamptonshire. Frances described her as:

> So deck'd out that I felt for the uneasiness she appeared to sustain, under a happy ease which she was all the day attempting to put on as a new white Canterbury muslin was put on for the first time, made she assured us by a supreme mantua maker & a black bonnet by the first milliner for taste & finery in town. Thus ornamented who could help looking with wonder on A___ E___.[115]

From this short passage, it was possible to see the complexities and the inconsistencies of politeness in action, heretofore argued by Klein and Carter.[116] When Frances detailed

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[112] *Ibid*.
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] *Ibid*.
[115] *Ibid*.
[116] Lawence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*; Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800.*

the 'uneasiness' that Ann 'appeared to sustain' whilst 'all the day attempting to put on' a 'happy ease' she demonstrated the contradictory nature of politeness; in this instance the attempt to create a patina of outward ease whilst simultaneously dealing with the unease that it caused.[117] Despite Frances' own prejudices being evident, it is difficult to imagine from this description, that Ann felt anything other than uncomfortable or ill at ease in these circumstances.

Ann's choice of clothing may have been deliberate for another reason. Ylivuori talks about how women employed the tenets of politeness as a means of empowering themselves.[118] So when Ann chose to wear her 'new white Canterbury muslin' and 'black bonnet', she may have hoped that it would embolden her whilst in the company of John Wood. In a letter, written by Frances following the event, she described Ann's scathing opinion of John where she had described his 'style' as 'not fun'.[119] Frances condemned Ann for her derision of John, and yet perhaps Ann had anticipated his 'riotous' behaviour, as she had been acquainted with him before, and as a consequence had used both politeness and her choice of clothing as a defence mechanism whilst in his company.[120] This example highlights the dichotomous nature of sociability and its relationship with comfort. This single occasion caused both comfort and discomfort for its participants. For Frances, Allen and John Wood the occasion elicited warmth, fun and felicity where they could impersonate family members and acquaintances and make mischief. Yet for Ann, the ease enjoyed by the others gave way to a more formal, performative air, whereby to feel more socially comfortable she 'put on' the impression of ease, which in fact, had the opposite effect and, according to Frances, made her

[117] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known., YO550(v), N.A.H.S.
[118] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities and Power*, p. 42.
[119] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO550(v), N.A.H.S.
[120] *Ibid*.

appear inauthentic.[121] Ann's behaviour was a demonstration of what Ylivuori terms 'external politeness', a concept which some scholars suggest became increasingly less influential in the second half of the eighteenth century.[122] Yet this example, which took place in the 1790s, showed that it was, at least for some, an important element of polite behaviour. When the expectations surrounding behaviour differed, as in this case, social discord and unease could often result, which again reveals the impact of sociability on comfort.

Clothing and Social Comfort

Despite Frances' derision, what this example particularly demonstrated was the significance that clothing had in a social setting and the effect that it could have on comfort. Ann's choice of clothing to wear to the christening appeared deliberate as were the words she chose to describe it. She had made it known to Frances that her 'white Canterbury Muslin' was newly purchased and made by a 'supreme mantua maker' and that her hat had been created by a milliner renowned for 'taste and finery'.[123] Clothing was, according to Amanda Vickery, the 'most constant and visible manifestation of rank and wealth' and whilst Ann had neither she had used her outfit to make a statement, a prop as it were, to try to prove her social credentials and attain social comfort within the setting of this particular family event.[124] 'Social exclusion' on account of poor clothing choices was a real risk, argues Vickery, therefore Ann's motives were understandable.[125] The problem, of course, was that Frances saw straight through the artifice and condemned her friend for it. Ann's choice of attire in this instance appeared

[121] *Ibid*.
[122] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities and Power*, p. 69.
[123] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO550(v), N.A.H.S.
[124] Amanda Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England' in *Journal of British Studies,* 52.4 (2013), pp. 858-886, (p. 868).
[125] *Ibid*., p. 869.

to have the opposite of its desired effect. In her attempt to feel socially comfortable, Ann appeared detached and aloof from the rest of the party and Frances' observation that the 'happy ease which she was all the day attempting to put on' demonstrated this.[126] Attempting to convey easiness and naturalness conversely took effort. There appeared to be nothing easy or natural about it; it was, as in Ann's case, a performance and as John Styles asserts 'performances could be demanding'.[127] This example highlighted the complexities and inconsistencies of eighteenth-century politeness and by looking at them, through comfort, it is possible to gain an insight into the impact that they had on members of polite society, particularly women. Clothing mattered and much attention was paid to what people, particularly women, chose to wear in social settings. When Mary Orlebar, newly arrived in Lille, wrote to her aunts in 1785 she conveyed to them her relief that the French fashions were not dissimilar to those that she had recently left in England:

> The French ladies dress a good deal in the same manner as the English, which is lucky for us, the cloaks which they wear are extremely long before, I have a handsome new one which looks before like a long black silk apron.[128]

Similarly, in 1790 when Harriet Orlebar wrote to her sister Anne from Goulds Green when she visited her married sister Mary, she described some of the people that they had encountered on a visit to church:

> We made our appearance at Church last Sunday as you may suppose, & had a peak as we came away; some genteel people were there. Mrs Pope a new married lady, in exactly the bonnet & deep veil my Sister has.[129]

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[126] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO550(v), N.A.H.S.
[127] John Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in 18th-century England*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 182.
[128] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 26 April 1785, OR2071/348, B.A.
[129] From Miss Harriet Orlebar to Miss Anne Orlebar, 25 June 1790, OR2071/371, B.A.

Both Mary in Lille and Harriet in Goulds Green revealed the important role that clothing had in facilitating a sense of social comfort. They did, at times, enable a feeling of fitting in, looking the part or of sharing an affinity with others. This could, however, come at a financial cost. Richard Orlebar bemoaned the price of getting both his wife's and his eldest daughter's hair dressed prior to a social engagement that they all attended in Lille. In a letter to his sisters in Ecton he wrote how 'last night Mrs O and Mary went with me to the playhouse, their locks cost half a crown each'.[130] Richard also revealed that he had employed a 'man servant for 14 guineas a year, who is the best cook & who is to dress Mrs O & Mary's locks: I believe that I shall like him very well.'[131] He did, however, also ask 'how does a family save money by coming to France?'[132] Richard had to weigh the financial cost with the social cost, and chose to subordinate his financial comfort for the social comfort of his family. Richard appeared to recognise the importance of his wife and eldest daughter, as well as himself, being at ease in company by looking the part.

Making the wrong choice and being seen in society wearing outdated clothes or an outfit deemed unsuitable did not go unnoticed and could often be subject to both criticism and ridicule. In the letter from Mary Orlebar to her sister Constantia referenced earlier in this chapter regarding Mrs Jones of Mears Ashby who arrived at the home of newly married Mrs Whitworth, Mary pointedly remarked to her sister that the gown that she was wearing was 'trim'd in a style that was very elegant <u>some years ago</u>'.[133] Mary's emphasis of the words 'some years ago' appeared to demonstrate that perhaps Mrs Jones was past her best or not as fashionable or as influential on the social scene as she had been. Wearing age-appropriate clothing was also an important

[130] From Mr Richard Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, 22 April 1786, OR2071/334A, B.A.
[131] *Ibid*.
[132] *Ibid*.
[133] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 1 – 3 October 1786, OR2071/366, B.A.

consideration for elite women. Vickery suggests that older women had to negotiate the 'hazards of dressing past one's prime'.[134] It meant 'charting a perilous course between indignity and scorn, on the one hand, and unfashionability and invisibility on the other' both of which do not appear to encourage comfort in any form. In a letter written by Mary Orlebar (later Skynner) in London to her Aunt Eliza back in Ecton in 1788 she demonstrated the types of obstacles that women had when selecting their choice of attire for a social event. In this instance, the women referred to in the letter appeared to have committed two social faux pas, they had 'sadly mistaken their becomings as they were adorned Cloud Cap'd Towers, which…was not pretty for old ladies!'[135] Not only was their clothing considered too ostentatious for this particular occasion, but neither was it suitable for 'old ladies' to wear. And what this instance highlighted was that people got it wrong, and that if they did it was noticed and commented upon and could have re-percussions. As well as 'social exclusion', Vickery also suggests that women could risk 'chronic isolation' if their choices of clothing were not deemed suitable.[136] Sometimes events occurred that meant that the usual and expected societal regimens could not take place. In 1714 Vere Isham wrote a number of letters to her brother Justinian in which she described the betrothal and marriage of a mutual acquaintance, Mr Robinson. He was expected to bring his new wife back home and acquaint her with the society in which he moved and there would have been much expectation and anticipation for all involved. For Mrs Robinson, it may have been a somewhat daunting prospect, being subject to the gaze and attention of strangers but it is likely that she would have been fitted out with all the appropriate clothes and accessories in order to make the best impression upon her husband's peers. Unfortunately, Mrs Robinson was unable to rely

[134] Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England', p. 862.
[135] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Elizabeth Orlebar, 16 February 1788, OR2071/375, B.A.
[136] Vickery, 'Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian, England', p. 869.

on the ‘prop’ of her clothing to ensure a smooth and comfortable transition into a new home, neighbourhood and circle of acquaintances.[137] In June 1714, before Mr Robinson had the opportunity to introduce his wife, his sister died. Vere reported this in a letter to Justinian and observed that ‘this will prevent his lady from shewing her fine clothes which I fancy will be some mortification to her’.[138] Despite Vere’s almost scornful dismissal of Mrs Robinson’s ‘mortification’, it was not to be underestimated. The death of her sister-in-law would have meant that she, along with the rest of her new family, would have been obliged to go into mourning and that would have precluded her from wearing, what Vere described as, ‘her fine clothes’ for her introductions to the expectant strangers. This sudden removal of what Styles calls a ‘material prop’ would have been disappointing at best, humiliating at worst.[139]

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which comfort was impacted by the social lives of elite families. It has also highlighted that comfort was an important consideration, whether physical, emotional, financial or social and that at times there was an interplay between all of them and often one type of comfort could be subordinated in favour of another. Comfort could indeed be found in sociability, shown by young Mary Orlebar in Lille and Lee Thornton in his gentleman’s club and also in close neighbourhoods such as Orlingbury, Ecton and Greenwich. Conversely, sociability had the potential to damage, disturb or upset the comfort of the families, shown by Robert Rye in his village of Culworth, Frances Young at Orlingbury Hall and Harriet Orlebar who was subjected to the social whims of her grandmother in Essex. The country house too has been shown to be a site for discomfort, anxiety, social nervousness and hesitation despite the domestic innovations in heating, ventilation and

[137] Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in 18th Century England,* p. 182.
[138] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 23 June 1714, IC/1798, N.A.H.S.
[139] Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in 18th Century England,* p. 182.

furniture which were taking place during this period, whilst the choice of clothing, for women, was often made in order to propagate feelings of social rather than physical comfort. Finally, by viewing politeness through the perspective of comfort this chapter reveals how its contradictory nature influenced and impacted elite behaviour. Despite Samuel Johnson's description of ease as the 'freedom from….forced behaviour or conceits', participation in polite company involved both work and pretence.[140] Despite contemporary accounts using ease and easiness to describe politeness, it became apparent, just from the letters detailed in this paper, that participation in politeness and polite society was far from easy. The need to display oneself, to control one's posture, to remain disciplined in word and deed and to surrender oneself to the needs and comfort of others in society required both the suppression of feelings and conscious effort.

[140] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society 1660–1800,* p. 22.

Chapter Four Illness

Chapter one of this thesis demonstrated the prevalence of illness as a theme in the families' correspondence as well as the pivotal role that the letters themselves had in delivering news regarding the health of family members, loved ones and acquaintances. Despite this, the relationship between illness and comfort may not appear, at first glance, an obvious or a natural one. Certainly, a favourable account of health could afford much emotional comfort to the recipient of a letter whilst physical comfort could be adversely affected by feeling unwell, but the letters in this study also revealed a much more complicated and nuanced relationship between the two.[1] The aim of this chapter therefore is to highlight the importance of this connection and describe the various ways in which illness impacted the different forms of comfort and by doing so reveal the significance of comfort to elite lives. The closer examination of this relationship will also reveal how illness itself could be a source of comfort which supports the argument that the relationship between comfort and illness was both an important, yet paradoxical one.

As detailed in the introduction of this thesis, earlier studies of comfort focused on the growing importance of physical comfort in the eighteenth century.[2] Latterly, health and comfort has been examined primarily through the framework of the country house and in terms of how technology and improved domestic comforts, such as fresh air, warm rooms and clean bed linen, facilitated good physical health and wellbeing; with the home seemingly the focal point for comfort.[3] Comfort, viewed from the perspective of illness, however, provides a different approach to its study. It allows one to explore more closely the impact of illness on physical, emotional, social and financial

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[1] Whyman, 'Paper Visits: the post-restoration letter as seen through the Verney family archive', p. 21.
[2] Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in early modern Britain and early America*.
[3] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House.*

comfort as well as how comfort was sought from illness itself. The first part of this chapter examines the discomfort suffered by elite families as a result of illness. It looks at the contemporary view of social and medical commentators such as Bath physician George Cheyne, who suggested that it was their privileged, and as a consequence, luxurious lifestyles that pre-disposed the elites towards nervous disorders and examines the contradiction that exists in this view that goods and possessions intended to encourage ease and comfort, in fact, created discomfort and illness. It also looks at how physical pain impacted the comfort of the sufferer and their families and demonstrates that close link between illness and comfort.

Other ways in which illness impacted different forms of comfort are also considered in this study, for example, John Thornton's mental illness disturbed the hierarchy within the three brothers' relationship, and the Orlebar's social comfort was threatened by the illnesses of Charlotte, Richard Orlebar's second wife. This section will also examine how the financial burden of providing comfort to a sick loved one could threaten financial comfort and familial obligations, how domestic comfort could be disturbed by the need to seek out treatments or cures and the feelings of anxiety and indebtedness felt by the comforted prompted by a loved one's attempts to offer them comfort.

The second section of this chapter focuses on how comfort could be found in illness itself, for example in the availability of and proximity to medical care and assistance. Comfort was found too in the act of comforting a sick relative or in the sharing of information about symptoms with fellow suffers in order to feel less alone or isolated. Revealing one's illnesses to others could also produce 'secondary gains' such as sympathy, which could provide much needed personal support, but it could also add to one's own social kudos if the illness suffered was considered fashionable enough

or a characteristic of the 'refined members of society'.[4] Physical pain could be a source of great 'spiritual fulfilment or joy' for both the sufferer and their carer and was often considered a spiritual, as well as physical, experience, providing spiritual comfort albeit during an uncomfortable or painful illness.[5] Comfort, particularly for family members, could also be found in the way that the sufferer dealt with their illness. If stoicism or cheerfulness was displayed, even if the disease was terminal, it often appeared to provide much needed solace to the relatives of those suffering, both during their illness and following the death of their loved one.

The notion that an easy or luxurious lifestyle could produce an adverse effect on health could be seen as early as 1690 when, in his *Discourse of Trade*, Nicholas Barbon expressed the widespread conviction that the 'Ease and Luxury' generated by the increase in trade had created softened 'bodies unfit to endure the Labour and Hardships of War'.[6] The prevailing moralist view was that luxury was a 'source of social and individual corruption' and despite Barbon's own rejection of this and his advocacy of commerce and its resultant effects, his pamphlet suggested that it was the ''richer sort' who were furnished with all things to promote 'ease, pleasure and pomp''.[7] In 1733 Cheyne in *The English Malady: or a Treatise of Nervous Disorders of all Kinds* perpetuated this idea that the excesses of 'the Rich and Great (and indeed of all Ranks who can afford it)' coupled with their 'sedentary occupations' adversely effected their physical health and meant that they had a proclivity to suffer from certain

[4] Jonathan Andrews and James Kennaway, 'Experiencing, Exploiting and Evaluating Bile: Framing Fashionable Biliousness from the Sufferer's Perspective', *Literature and Medicine*, 35.2 (2017), pp. 292–333, (p.293) and Heather R. Beatty, *Nervous Disease in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Reality of a Fashionable Disorder* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), p. 19.
[5] Hannah Newton, 'Very Sore Nights and Days: The Child's Experience of Illness in Early Modern England, c.–1720' *Medical History,* 55.2 (2011), pp. 153–182, (p. 153).
[6] Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 109.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 138 and p. 124–125.

nervous disorders.[8] The symptoms of the English Malady, according to Cheyne, were as follows:

> Lowness of Spirits, Swelling of the Stomach, frequent Eructation, Noise in the Bowels or Ears, frequent Yawning…Restlessness, Inquietude, Fidgeting, Anxiety, Peevishness, Discontent, Melancholy, Grief, Vexation, Ill Humour, Inconstancy, lethargick or watchful Disorders.[9]

And whilst promoting this 'nationally significant disorder' which was caused by 'vices only the wealthy could afford', he did so with what Heather R. Beatty describes as 'conspicuous pride'.[10] To Cheyne, the English Malady was indicative of an increasingly refined, civilised and progressive society. Cheyne's work, however, produces an interesting dichotomy when considered alongside Barbon's. The goods and luxuries that Barbon suggested promoted 'ease' for those who were able to afford and enjoy them, in Cheyne's view, had a very different impact in that they aggravated the symptoms of their nervous disorders. More interestingly, however, the symptoms that Cheyne suggested characterised the English Malady, bore a striking resemblance to Samuel Johnson's definitions of discomfort. As outlined previously in this thesis, discomfort was defined as 'gloom', 'melancholy, 'sorrow' and 'uneasiness' whilst 'to discomfort' meant 'to grieve'.[11] When juxtaposed against some of the features of Cheyne's English Malady, for example 'anxiety', 'discontent', 'grief', 'inquietude', 'melancholy', 'peevishness', and 'vexation' there was, indeed, significant commonality between the two.[12] There was already, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, a close

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[8] George Cheyne, *The English Malady: or a Treatise of Nervous Disorders of all Kinds* (London: G. Strahan and J. Leake, 1734), p. 49 and p. ii.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 194.
[10] Beatty, *Nervous Disease in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Reality of a Fashionable Disorder*, p. 2.
[11] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 296.
[12] Cheyne, *The English Malady: or a Treatise of Nervous Disorders of all Kinds*, p. 194.

link between illness and comfort. For example Webster's mid eighteenth-century definition sees comfort defined as 'relief from pain; ease; rest or moderate pleasure after pain, cold or distress, or uneasiness of body' and also the 'relief from distress of mind; the ease and quiet which is experienced when pain, trouble, agitation or affliction ceases'; the iteration of the word 'pain' and the use of the word 'body' illustrates this somatic association with comfort.[13] Notwithstanding, that John Thornton also described at great length of the connection between his health and his comfort. On one occasion he wrote about 'my health, my comfort & I may even say my life' and his grouping together of these words illustrated the importance of one on the others.[14] Therefore, if a luxurious, excessive or easy lifestyle effected health as Cheyne argued, it is also reasonable to argue that it effected comfort too. So, when examining how illness adversely impacted the comfort of elite family members, it might be questioned if it was their own privileged and comfortable way of life putting it at risk and this is one of the questions that this chapter will attempt to resolve. By considering comfort and illness together it also allows, firstly, the closer examination of how illness impacted the comfort of the sufferer and secondly, the wider effects that illness could have on the lives of family members and care givers.

Illness and Discomfort

Experiencing physical pain was just one way in which illness impacted the comfort of these elite families, and numerous examples can be found in their correspondence in which the pain they suffered was described. In 1795, in a letter to Frances Young, Newton Barton wrote of his gout and the agonising pain that it caused him:

[13] Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language,* p. 163.
[14] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 18 October 1822, TH2553, N.A.H.S.

> My gout came on on Monday last, but so slightly & favourable that I walked out to dinner till Weds, & so it wd, I verily believe, have gone off but that evening I chose to go into a warm bath & a sweet pretty night was yr consequence of it. Thursday night was as bad, & it took possession of both my feet; at last, after having amused itself with changing from one to yr other for a long time – all yesterday I was in a good deal of pain, but I scrambled thro' last night better than I thought I shd considering that I had two swelled ankles to deal with. & today, I may venture to pronounce myself better, but I can scarcely move; shd not, however, the disorder return, a few hours, I trust will make a great deal of difference – My mother knows only of my gout down to Wednesday, I did not like to tell her how bad I was, as I am fond of being left to my own management.[15]

This extract, first and foremost, highlighted the physical impact of Newton's gout – not only did it cause him considerable pain, but it also severely limited his mobility, so much so that he could 'scarcely move'.[16] However, the final sentence here was particularly interesting in that it revealed Newton's desire to manage his own condition. This may have been primarily to prevent his mother's interference yet often gout sufferers were forced to rely on their servants to undertake intimate tasks during periods of illness which, as Matthew McCormack argues, could undermine the hierarchical characteristic of the employer/servant relationship.[17] This was discussed in the second chapter in reference to Mr Allen Young Senior, but his reliance on his servant Williams occurred when he was an elderly, frail and infirm eighty-five year old. He, as his

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[15] From Mr Charles William Newton Barton to Miss Frances Young, 11 May 1797, YO542(viii), N.A.H.S.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] Matthew McCormack, *Shoes and the Georgian Man* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2025), p. 103.

daughter described, was unaware of his surroundings. This enforced ‘dependence’ on servants could obscure and disturb what was often a difficult or strained relationship.[18] In this letter Newton also revealed the curbs on his social life that his gout had imposed when he instructed Frances to ‘pray tell Mr & Mrs Best that I was really sorry to miss their pleasant party’ and informed her that ‘I have no chance of dining in Cotton Gardens tomorrow’.[19] This demonstrated how Newton’s own social obligations, and as a consequence, his social comfort was curtailed by his illness. However, as Rousseau and Porter argue, the image of the ‘gouty male was…..riddled with ambiguities’ and the concept of comfort was no different.[20] Whilst his gout curtailed his social activities it may have benefitted him socially in other ways. The prevailing opinion surrounding gout was that it was viewed as ‘the distemper of the gentleman’ and therefore, to be afflicted was considered a sign of good breeding and rank.[21] So, whilst Newton’s presence and visibility on the social scene was limited by his illness, his gout would have acted as social currency and may have elevated his status within it.

In the last few months of Frances Young’s life, the impact of both a painful and terminal disorder on her own comfort was detailed by her brother Allen in a series of letters to their sister Mary. In one he wrote that Frances ‘says she does not suffer a great deal of pain but when up she becomes oppressed with weight and is not able to support herself with ease more than two hours’.[22] In another he explained that ‘poor dear Fanny had passed a comfortable night and was free from pain this morng’.[23] And in a third he told Mary:

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[18] *Ibid*.
[19] From Mr Charles William Newton Barton to Miss Frances Young, 11 May 1797, YO542(viii), N.A.H.S.
[20] Roy Porter and G. S. Rousseau, *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 83.
[21] David Roberts, *Philip Dormer Stanhope*, *Earl of Chesterfield, Letters to His Son*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 341.
[22] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO553(v), N.A.H.S.
[23] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1556, N.A.H.S.

> She finds herself so much more comfortable in a recumbent posture than in any other…..if she had the ability she would not feel inclined under these circumstances to make the effort. She was very cheerful and conversed with me and with more ease to herself than she has done of late.[24]

The language of both comfort and discomfort influenced all three of these letters. On describing the impact of Frances' illness, Allen utilised words such as 'pain', 'oppressed' and 'effort' which were all associated with the notions of discomfort and unease. Yet comfort too made a significant appearance in the letters, almost as a counterbalance to this, demonstrated in his use of words like 'support', 'ease' and 'comfortable'. This seemed to suggest firstly that the impact of illness on comfort was significant, secondly that the language of comfort was often adopted when illness was discussed in letters and thirdly, that comfort was a need which was yearned, strove and prayed for. Indeed, Allen wrote 'let us indulge the best hopes and pray for ease'.[25]

These examples primarily related to Frances' physical being and the impact that pain had on her comfort, however illness impacted other forms of comfort too. The effort involved in appearing cheerful, which was how Allen repeatedly described Frances, must have placed an element of emotional as well as physical pressure onto her. In a letter to Mary, written by Frances' friend Pamela Blencowe, in whose family home Frances lived, Pamela gave a hint at the toll that this placed on her sick friend:

> Fanny has had a quiet & easy night & is cheerful this morn. She begs me to say to you – that she feels assured that there is no effort of affection that you would not make for her that she knows your heart is with her – that she begs you will not come as agitation is what she prays to God to be comforted from.[26]

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[24] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1557, N.A.H.S.
[25] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO553(v), N.A.H.S.
[26] From Mrs Pamela Blencowe to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1488, N.A.H.S.

The prospect of seeing her beloved sister and the effort that it would require, it seemed, was too much for the invalid. Coupled with this however, would have been Frances' concern for Mary. The letters between the two sisters used in this thesis demonstrated their closeness and their interest in each other's welfare, particularly Frances' desire to protect and comfort Mary. Aware of her failing health, Frances may have considered the impact that a visit to Cranford would have had on Mary's own comfort and her discouragement would ultimately have been for her sister's benefit. Another letter to Mary, this time written by Pamela's sister Frances Hoare, also revealed more about Frances' conduct throughout her illness. She asked Mary, 'how many days of suffering must she silently have endured?' which suggested that Frances had withheld, from her loved ones, the full and true extent of her illnesses effects.[27] Frances' apparent stoicism and the fortitude that she exhibited when dealing with her terminal illness must have been exhausting and extremely emotionally disturbing and it was unlikely to have afforded her much physical or emotional comfort.

The effort expended in trying to maintain a cheerful and stoic attitude and the impact that could have, was revealed in two letters received by Harriet Orlebar in 1793 and 1794. Her friend Elizabeth James, known as Betsy, had suffered a 'severe stroke' which had left her both weak and despondent:

> Tho' every power of exertion is used to acquire those trying virtues fortitude and firmness – 'tis a difficult task – and notwithstanding my resolution too often I find I am not sufficient mistress of either to drive away melancholy reflections.[28]

[27] From Mrs Frances Hoare to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1490, N.A.H.S.
[28] From Miss Elizabeth James to Miss Harriet Orlebar, 8 December 1793, OR2071/437, B.A.

Betsy's unfortunate circumstances were, she admitted to her friend, compounded by the effort required to appear composed and cheerful in the presence of her family:

> For when I reflect on the goodness of my dear father and mother who strive how they may contribute to my comfort my heart accuses me of ingratitude and as the only atonement I can offer immediately assumes the appearance of tranquillity.[29]

In their determination to offer Betsy comfort in the aftermath of her stroke, her family seemed, however, to disturb it even further:

> Oh my dear Miss Orlebar may you never experience the difficulty of wearing a face of cheerfulness to cancel an aching heart. But it is a trial due to the peace of the best, the tenderest the most indulgent parents and the most affectionate brothers who cannot bear to see the least cloud of unhappiness or decline in health in your friend – and in making them easy am I not sufficiently rewarded for whatever I may suffer in endeavouring to appear with a mind at ease also?[30]

Betsy's first letter to Harriet demonstrated just how closely connected comfort and illness could be. In their attempts to offer their daughter and sister comfort, the James family appeared to merely succeed in forcing her to appear easy and comforted, in order that they too could be easy and comforted. Betsy, instead of feeling comforted however seemed only to feel guilt and unease. In the second letter, written in March 1794, she elucidated further:

> The desire of making my dear parents easy has been the most persuasive argument to reason down my grief and 'tis this that my mind has imperceptibly gain'd relief but whatever may be the inward feelings of my heart I have so far

[29] *Ibid*.
[30] *Ibid*.

the command of myself that before my family I carry a face of cheerfulness and tranquillity.[31]

By assuming a 'face of cheerfulness and tranquillity' Betsy had hoped to ensure the comfort of her parents in the face of her illness but by doing so she had compromised her own comfort. She revealed that the 'concealment' of the real effects of her illness and the 'exertion' that it required had 'already materially injured' her health.[32]

It could also be discomforting if one's own attitude to illness appeared to compare unfavourably to that of a fellow sufferer. In 1790, eighteen-year-old Harriet Orlebar wrote to her younger sister Anne about the current state of their heath. Her letter indicated that it had been Anne who had been gravely ill, but that it was now Harriet who suffered (in fact, Harriet died at the age of twenty-two in October 1794):

> I am very sorry to say for myself that I am very indifferent indeed; wish I could possess your stoicism & reconcile myself as well to the serious reflection of quitting this world as you do, but I am sorry to confess; I cannot avoid, being often very low spirited at the painful idea.[33]

In a manner similar to that of Allen Young, Harriet used language shrouded in words associated with discomfort such as 'indifferent', 'low spirited' and 'unwell' to describe her illness and was apologetic for not having displayed the same level of stoicism that her sister had. She appeared almost ashamed of her own inability to 'reconcile' herself to her potential fate at the hands of her illness and found little or no comfort in Anne's strength because it reminded her of what she thought she had lacked.[34]

In the memoirs relating to her daughter's illness, Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton, who was the aunt of Frederica Orlebar, also illustrated the ways in which pain

[31] From Miss Elizabeth James to Miss Harriet Orlebar, 12 March 1794, OR2071/439, B.A.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] From Miss Harriet Orlebar to Miss Anne Orlebar, 25 June 1790, O2071/371, B.A.
[34] *Ibid*.

and sickness both impacted, and was also connected to, comfort. Frances nursed her daughter, also called Frances, for three years until her untimely death in 1830 at the age of eighteen, and her memoir included the following accounts:

> She said "I feel more exhausted today: but I am very comfortable"...When I wakened at five o'clock, she was again irritable and uncomfortable… which was very distressing to her…..After breakfast…she was altogether so restless and uncomfortable…that before Mr. Baines went away…we laid her on a sopha while her own bed was being made of softer materials – we were glad to find from the little uneasiness that her hip experienced from being lifted that that, at least, had essentially improved. The alteration in her bed did not add so much to her comfort as we had hoped for, & the spasms continued.[35]

What was striking about this extract was the ubiquity of words within it that were related to either comfort or discomfort. Frances used 'uncomfortable', 'distressing', 'restless' and 'uneasiness' to describe her daughter's illness and its impact and left little doubt of the connection between illness and comfort in this instance. It also demonstrated, that despite her and the physician's best efforts, the physical comfort of the young woman remained unattainable.

Pain from illness was not the only way in which illness or disease threatened the comfort of the elite families in this study. The Thorntons, for example, had seemingly faced 'harassment' as a direct result of John's ill-health. In a letter to Reeve from their mutual friend Sir John Eardley Wilmot, he urged Reeve to remove his brother from Mr. Hill's care which Sir John believed was only exacerbating John's condition, 'it stands to reason, that if you can reduce the irritation & fever of mind of a person

[35] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.

whose mind is under aberration, you must, if not advance in a cure, at least advance his happiness'.[36] First and foremost, Sir John was concerned with John's comfort - this could be seen in two particular phrases in this short extract. Firstly, when he referred to an advancement in John's 'happiness', happiness, of course, was included in the fourth category of comfort synonyms detailed in the introduction of this thesis and secondly, when he referred to the reduction in the 'irritation' and 'fever' of John's mind.[37] This suggested an easing and a soothing of a troubled and overactive mind which was a direct lexicographical definition of comfort; Sir John, however, was also concerned about Reeve's comfort. John's illness had, according to Sir John's letter, provoked much interest and as a result Reeve and his family had 'been harassed to death'.[38] In Sir John's opinion, therefore, a change in John's treatment by his removal from Hill's care would, he told his friend, improve life for both John and Reeve, 'I do beseech you therefore for John's sake as well as your future comfort, to do what I understood you have long intended to do, enquire what amelioration in his treatment can be admitted safely'.[39] Sir John directly linked John's illness with not only John's comfort but also that of Reeve's and again utilised the language of comfort in order to appeal to his friend to take action. To use comfort to 'beseech' Reeve to re-consider John's treatment showed the enormity and importance of comfort as a mechanism to persuade and influence within an emotional economy.[40] The nature of the harassment that Reeve endured was not explicit in Sir John's letter, he may have alluded to the harassment by letter at John's hands during his manic periods or it could be in reference to the

[36] From Sir John Eardley Wilmot to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 17 September 1822, TH2551 N.A.H.S.
[37] *Ibid*.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] Barton, "Dearly Beloved Relations'? A Study of Elite Family Emotions in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Northamptonshire', p. 56.

harassment received from others in response to John's illness, but it does make it clear that the family as a whole had been blighted by John's mental illness.

Another consequence of John's illness was that it disturbed the natural order within the sibling hierarchy and seemed to undermine the brothers' traditional roles. When unwell, as the first chapter detailed, John compulsively wrote to Reeve. Most of the letters were fixated on his health but in others John appeared keen to offer Reeve help and advice, much in the manner that a supportive younger brother would do. In some, he offered his elder brother legal advice, he was a barrister after all, in others he made suggestions for medical treatments for Reeve's ill son, who was also called John. However, despite this there was an almost apologetic and deferential tone to these letters which suggested an unease on John's part. He used phrases such as 'I merely suggest' and 'excuse the liberty' when he offered advice which were just not present in the letters that he composed when well.[41] He too was reluctant to appear dictatorial or arrogant indicated by his repetitious assurances that he would not presume or wish to dictate to his brother. As both a brother and a barrister, John would have been well versed in the family's financial and legal arrangements, yet his discomfort and reluctance were almost palpable. However, when John was well, and his mental faculties were stable, he slipped comfortably back into the Thornton male hierarchy and assumed again the role of unapologetic advisor to his elder brother, as well as advocate for younger brother Lee, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. When John wrote to Reeve on that occasion regarding Lee's precarious financial situation he acted as a buffer between the two of them and was compelled to discuss his affairs because as he told Reeve, Lee was 'not desirous of expressing his opinions upon them very freely

[41] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 6 July 1821, TH2514, N.A.H.S; From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 13 July 1821, TH2516, N.A.H.S.

himself'.[42] The roles of the two younger brothers here have therefore changed. Lee, who had previously been responsible for providing updates to Reeve on John was now the subject of discussion between his two older brothers. And whilst John appeared to have been more able to adapt to different positions within the hierarchy, his two brothers may have found it less easy. It was likely that Reeve, mindful of John's mental frailties and history of unpredictable behaviour, may not have been open to, or accepting of, John's well-intentioned advice. Likewise, with John seemingly resuming his role as Reeve's advisor, it was reasonable to assume that Lee may not have been comfortable nor happy with this shift in power within the brothers' relationship.

Illness, as demonstrated by the Thorntons in the previous chapter, also placed a financial burden on families. Frances Stackhouse Acton, in a letter to her niece Frederica Orlebar, described the impact that her daughter's illness had on her own financial comfort:

> For sure I know all the wretchedness of not having money to pay bills, & yet to be obliged to spend great sums for Doctors, & to keep the house in anyway habitable; for our predecessors has let the house go to ruin, & has sold furniture, plates so we had everything to do with £1000 a year.[43]

This extract was telling because it revealed a type of financial discomfort specific to elite families. Whilst wanting and needing to spend money on her daughter's medical care she had also been fully aware of her familial and ancestral obligations surrounding the maintenance of the house and estate. According to the note made by Frederica on this letter, her aunt wrote this in early 1879 which was forty-nine years after the death of her daughter and yet the memory of those financial struggles appeared undiminished.

[42] From Mr John Thornton to Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton, 16 December 1823, TH2559, N.A.H.S.
[43] From Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton to Mrs Frederica Orlebar, 1879, OR2318/22, B.A.

Further impacts of her financial discomfort were also revealed when she described to Frederica how she had been 'afraid' to talk about her 'difficulties' and that 'it bought us such fits of nervousness'.[44] This illustrated the bearing that this experience had on Frances' own wellbeing and comfort; 'fits of nervousness' are not usually conducive to a carefree or easy existence. Providing essential comfort to a loved one, alongside attempts to maintain other aspects of comfort, such as financial, domestic or social, took emotional labour.

Even without the added burden of financial difficulties, providing comfort to a loved one during bouts of illness and disease could impact the carer's own comfort and physical wellbeing. In a letter to her sister Eliza, in which she described administering 'with a Tea-Spoon (as she lies on her pillow) Broths, Jellies and other comfortable things' Mary Orlebar described the physical toll that caring for their dying niece Harriet was taking on her. She wrote that, 'I have I assure ye no other complaint than a return of those uncomfortable flutterings which agitation of mind always bring on me'.[45] Whilst seemingly underplaying them, Mary directly attributed these 'uncomfortable flutterings' to the anxiety that came from caring for Harriet. And whilst both Mary's and Frances Stackhouse Acton's experiences were particular in that they both cared for terminally ill relatives, they both demonstrated just how impactful caring for a loved one could have on emotional comfort.

Illness could also affect a sufferer's ability to function in a manner that would have been expected of a member of an elite family. In April 1785, Richard Orlebar, along with some of his family, travelled from England to Lille where shortly afterwards his wife Charlotte wrote a letter to her three sisters-in-law in which she revealed that

[44] *Ibid*.
[45] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Eliza Orlebar, 4 October 1794, OR2071/417, B.A.

the state of her health had meant that she was not able to attend ‘any amusements’.[46] This, however, did not appear to have been an isolated incident as in February 1786 Charlotte confessed, again in a letter to her sisters-in-law, that she had not accompanied her husband and step-daughters to the ‘constant round’ of social activities taking place. Indeed, there had never, she wrote, been ‘any time of my life been less gay to me, as I have wanted for that inward comfort, without which nothing can give any degree of pleasure’.[47] Her ill-health, she said, had prevented her from being a ‘proper companion’ to her eldest step-daughter Mary who had been left to attend the Lille social gatherings with ‘married Ladies French or English’.[48] Charlotte acknowledged that she had not done her duty by her stepdaughter. As her stepmother, she would have been expected to accompany Mary to her social engagements, but Charlotte did not do that. It seemed that she was prepared to risk compromising her and her family’s social comfort within French society by seemingly prioritising her own ‘inward comfort’ above that of her family’s.[49] Charlotte’s lack of inward comfort, caused by her perceived illnesses, also meant that she felt unable to participate in activities that the rest of the family found pleasure in. Pleasure, according to Rothery, was key in ‘shaping normative notions of family affection’, ‘vital to good order’ and a means by which ‘family relationships were formed’ so Charlotte’s search for inward comfort and her subsequent reluctance and refusal to fully immerse herself into family life and events had much wider implications.[50] It impacted the ways in which not only relationships within the family were formed, nurtured and brokered but also those with extended family and friends.[51]

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[46] From Mrs Charlotte Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar, and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 5 May 1785, OR2071/339, B.A.
[47] From Mrs Charlotte Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar, and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 27 February 1786, OR2071/340, B.A.
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] Rothery ‘Emotional Economies of Pleasure Among the Gentry of 18th Century England’, p. 297, p. 294 and p. 299.
[51] *Ibid*., p. 299.

Thus, something seemingly individual and personal, such as illness, was actually of great familial and social significance. Whilst Charlotte's 'low spirits' often meant that she neglected her societal and familial duties, she was mindful, however, of the importance of appearances and therefore stopped short of a complete withdrawal despite an apparent desire to leave her family and return to England.[52] In January 1786, she wrote:

> My father was entirely of your opinion concerning the impropriety of my leaving your nieces here & likewise how strange it would appear in the eyes of the world for Mr Orlebar to be here and I in England; accordingly I comply'd to remain at Lille till the time of this house is out.[53]

When in January 1786 the decision was made to return to England, it was as a direct result of Charlotte's ill-health. However, if the rest of the family thought that once home Charlotte would again resume her familial and social obligations they were mistaken. In another letter she had written, 'I have no desire for any of the gaieties of London, "Far from the heart such gifts remove, that <u>sighs</u> for <u>peace</u> and <u>ease</u>"'.[54] Charlotte's illnesses had not just impacted her physical and emotional comfort, they had effected the social comfort of the rest of the family too, particularly that of her eldest step-daughter Mary whose social activities were severely curtailed firstly by Charlotte's refusal to accompany her to events but also by the return to England. Richard had hoped that the sojourn to Lille would have afforded many opportunities for his daughters and feared that these would be considerably stymied in 'poor Old England'.[55]

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[52] From Mr Richard Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar, and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 15 November 1783 , OR2071/313b, B.A.
[53] From Mrs Charlotte Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar, and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 6 January 1786, OR2071/341a, B.A.
[54] From Mrs Charlotte Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar, and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 27 February 1786, OR2071/340, B.A.
[55] From Mr Richard Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar, and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 23 January 1786, OR2071/336, B.A.

The state of Charlotte's health was a source of irritation and impatience within the family but there was much concern too surrounding it. Richard wrote how he was 'secretly uneasy, to see any one, for whom I sincerely have so great a regard, apparently unhappy' and Charlotte herself conceded that he was 'the most indulgent of husbands'.[56] And yet Charlotte's letters do not give the impression that her husband's attentions or indulgences actually helped or comforted her in any way, in fact there appeared to be a sense of guilt that she was unable to 'regain' her spirits.[57] The following extract demonstrated this:

> I do with the greatest truth assure you that I strive all in my power to regain my spirit and may I not reasonably be believ'd as it can hardly be suppos'd that to awake every morning with an aching heart can be very desirable…..if I have been discontented with my situation formerly I am now sufficiently punish'd for my ingratitude.[58]

So rather than being comforted by her husband and family, it appeared that Charlotte was actually made to feel worse. She used the word 'punish'd' but there appeared to be a sense of guilt too. She, like Betsy James and Frances Young earlier in the chapter, alluded to the effort involved in trying to appear well and as these examples and those in the previous chapter attested to, effort implied neither ease nor comfort.

Similarly, Frances Stackhouse Acton described her daughter's sense of indebtedness and her anxiety that she would never be able to fully repay her for all that she had done to help her during her illness. In her memoir Frances wrote that 'she often said she was afraid she should be spoiled by kindness…and she repeatedly told me that

[56] From Mr Richard Orlebar to Mrs Charlotte Orlebar, 15 November 1783, OR2071/313B, B.A; From Mrs Charlotte Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar, and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 27 February 1786, OR2071/340, B.A.
[57] From Mrs Charlotte Orlebar to Miss Mary Orlebar, Miss Constantia Orlebar, and Miss Eliza Orlebar, 6 January 1786, OR2071/341a, B.A.
[58] *Ibid*.

she should never be able to do enough for me in return for all I was doing for her.[59] There was, therefore, an interesting correlation between comfort and emotional indebtedness at play here. Both women were offered comfort and yet this idea that being too comforted or too indulged, and being powerless to reciprocate, meant that neither found it in this instance. In fact, it led to feelings of anxiety for Frances' daughter and an aching heart for Charlotte Orlebar.

Home, according to Stobart, was 'where a person felt most comfortable' and yet it could be swiftly eschewed in the search for medical advice, treatments or cures often for a short period of time but in some instances, permanently.[60] In a letter to his sister Mary, Allen Young demonstrated the speed with which a decision to remove oneself from home could be made:

> My family is reduced by the departure this morning of Mrs Young, Martha Neate, little Amelia, Allen & Charlotte for Worthing with a man and maid servant. Roughton was here yesterday & recommended warm sea bathing and weather to my wife. Change of scene I hope may do her good.[61]

From being told the previous day by Roughton, a local doctor, that her health would benefit from a visit to Worthing in West Sussex, Amelia Young, along with her sister Martha, three of her children and two servants, was ready to depart, although as the second chapter demonstrated there may have also been other factors involved which accelerated the decision-making process in this case. Whilst Amelia's visit to the south coast of England was temporary, Ann Ekins made the decision to make her removal to the coast permanent. In 1796, in a letter to Frances Young, Ann outlined her plans,

[59] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.
[60] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 219.
[61] From Mr Allen Edward Young to Mrs Mary Barton, estimated 1813, YO1558, N.A.H.S.

which were prompted by what she described as the 'state of my health'.[62] It was 'so bad' that she had 'resolv'd on taking lodgings at Lyme'.[63] Home, for Ann, was in the Hardingstone area of Northampton, a place she considered a 'stupid town' with an 'odious set', yet a move from her modest lodgings remained a significant undertaking. She was compelled to sell many of her possessions and items of furniture in order to finance both the move but also any future medical treatments. Ann's relocation to Lyme, the auctioning of her possessions and the journey itself from Northamptonshire to Dorset was not without inconvenience nor discomfort, and yet she was prepared to endure it all for the sake of her health.

Similarly, Robert Rye demonstrated the frequency and speed with which people gave up the comfort of their own homes in their search for good or, at least, improved health. In 1795 he informed his brother Peter that his neighbour, and their shared acquaintance, Mr Fox 'had so dangerous a fit of illness' that he was 'order'd to take a journey to the West of England'.[64] Like Ann, Mr Fox was advised by a doctor to leave his home in the hope of finding comfort in a different part of the country. Unlike Ann however, his illness appeared much more serious, yet his weakened state did not prevent him from leaving his Northamptonshire home and undertaking the long journey. The experiences of Amelia Young, Ann Ekins and Robert Rye's neighbour demonstrated that in the search for comfort, homes were packed up and vacated, businesses were sold, and families dispersed and that in times of illness 'home' was not necessarily the place that afforded a sufferer and their loved ones the most comfort. A move, however, did not necessarily have the anticipated effect. For Ann Ekins, her relocation to Lyme, alongside a number of painful treatments, had not given her the much hoped-for cure

[62] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 23 October 1796, YO554(xvii), N.A.H.S.
[63] *Ibid*.
[64] From Reverend Robert Rye to Lieutenant Peter Rye,16 September 1795, X7244/47, N.A.H.S.

nor the comfort of good health, in fact she told Frances that, 'the Emetics I have kept constant to but the blisters I thought only tortured and weaken'd me'.[65] As a consequence of this failure, Ann planned to make a further move, this time to Bristol, in the search for the comfort of good health.

Whilst this chapter explores the relationship between comfort and illness in a more general sense, there was one specific disease and its impact on comfort that requires some closer attention. By the eighteenth century, smallpox was 'endemic in the major cities of Europe and the British Isles'.[66] It was, according to Sheldon Watts, an indiscriminate disease that did not distinguish between 'aristocratic holders of great estates' and 'sons and heirs of street sweepers'.[67] Immunisation against smallpox did not arrive until the late eighteenth century so until then one of the main methods of preventing infection altogether was avoidance. Isolation, as a means of avoiding contraction and transmission of smallpox, was specifically discussed in a number of the letters used in this study. In 1713 Vere Isham wrote to her brother Justinian and informed him that their brother Tom had 'fallen ill of the small pox'.[68] It was thought that Tom would 'have a good sort' but a week later Vere wrote that he had 'been worse than expected & is prodigiously full of a very bad sort of small pox'.[69] She also outlined the precautions that the family and their acquaintances had taken; her friend Jenny Benson avoided Lamport Hall during Tom's illness while her sisters were 'all at Betty Rickards for fear of catching the small pox'.[70] In February 1732, nineteen years later, letters from Vere and Mary Isham to Justinian revealed that the threat of small pox

[65] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 22 – 25 February 1797, YO554(i), N.A.H.S.
[66] Michael B.A Oldstone *Viruses, Plagues and History: Past, Present and Future,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 35.
[67] Sheldon Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 114.
[68] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 14 November 1713, IC1779, N.A.H.S.
[69] *Ibid*., and From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 21 November 1713, IC1780, N.A.H.S.
[70] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 21 November 1713, IC1780, N.A.H.S; From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 5 December 1713, IC1781, N.A.H.S.

continued to be a matter of great concern. Mary asked her husband about the prevalence of smallpox in London as her sister-in-law Edmunda had made plans to visit:

> I've heard yt ye smallpox are now more yn usual in town & if so, I desire you'll let me know because I think it proper she should be acquainted with it, for in case she goes, I believe she will be a good deal in Publick Places wch will be ye most liable for her to catch yt distemper.[71]

Edmunda appeared to have escaped smallpox on that occasion but by the following year had contracted it. Luckily for her she had, according to Vere, 'been indeed very fortunate in escaping the small pox so well.'[72] The Shirley family too were affected by smallpox. In 1763, Countess Ferrers wrote to her husband Lord Ferrers about 'Miss Nanny Winstanley' who had 'got the small pox & tho not very thick they are but an indifferent sort'.[73] She advised that Nanny's father should not visit his daughter at Staunton Harrold as 'he has not had it' but she requested that her husband, who must have had, return home as 'it would be a great satisfaction to me that you was here'.[74]

There are several ways in which smallpox, in particular, impacted the comfort of the families used in this study. Firstly, there was the fear surrounding its contraction, transmission and potency. Most of the examples used here pertain to a 'good sort' yet its virulence could be, and often was, fatal and the fervour with which isolation and quarantine was carried out was an indication of the anxiety that its presence could induce. Isolation, however, had its own constraints, particularly socially. It prevented the execution of societal obligations and duties whilst often forcing family members to remain separated within, or outside of, the home. Smallpox was also a 'very visible disease' which could often leave survivors blind or with 'characteristic pockmarks' on

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[71] Lady Mary Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 21 February 1732, IC2007, N.A.H.S.
[72] From Miss Vere Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 19 June 1733, IC2031, N.A.H.S.
[73] From Countess Ferrers to Lord Ferrers, 12 February 1763, 26D53, R.O.L.L.R.
[74] *Ibid*.

their face which meant that they were left with a permanent and physical reminder of the disease.[75] What is striking however, are the parallels between some of the impacts of smallpox in the eighteenth-century and those experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic and also the language that was adopted when discussing them. Terms more recently used such as social distancing, isolation and quarantine were reminiscent of some of those utilised in relation to smallpox. One of the consequences of the recent pandemic, as discussed in the introduction, appears to be a renewed focus on, and quest for, comfort and this does not seem surprising now that this close connection between illness and comfort has been established.

Illness and Comfort

Illness therefore affected many forms of comfort from physical to social and from domestic to financial and not just for the sufferer but for their care giver and their loved ones too. The failure to alleviate one's own discomfort or that of a family member often led to quite drastic measures being taken which involved undertaking long and uncomfortable journeys, leaving one's home often temporarily but occasionally permanently, procuring expensive, and sometimes unaffordable, medical advice, the separation of families and the failure to perform important societal obligations. And without this particular focus on illness, the connection with comfort may have been missed. As well as highlighting that, this study has also identified a number of ways in which comfort itself could be found in ill-health, despite the apparent oxymoronic aspect of this.

Ann Ekins in her letter to Frances Young described how torturous some of her treatments were, but they, along with 'assistive objects' often had the effect of

[75] John Aberth, *Plagues in World History* (Lanham and Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), p. 75.

providing physical comfort, if not a cure.[76] Suggested treatments for gout sufferers, for example, included Dr James's Powder, the application of poultices and flannels and a basic diet of 'milk, porridge and vegetables' but these were by no means a permanent cure for gout and symptoms often reoccurred.[77] To ease their pain and find some physical relief, immobile patients used objects such as 'cushions, footstools and easy chairs', whilst those who were able to walk used objects such as walking sticks, crutches and gout shoes to assist them.[78] In the case of Frances Young, in the final few months of her life she found physical comfort through the taking of laudanum, albeit reluctantly. Her brother Allen documented her reluctance in a letter to their sister Mary. He told her that he had previously found Frances 'considering all circumstances very comfortable' but on 'medicine day' when she was expected to take laudanum to reduce her pain, she had refused for 'fear of disturbing her head'.[79] However, in a further letter he noted how she must have relented, as on his most recent visit he 'found her with her accustomed cheerfulness' which he attributed to laudanum. Frances had, she told Allen, 'procured nights of comfort' by 'means of the opiate'.[80] This example demonstrated how comfort, in the form of pain relief, was found in the use of laudanum. However, these two extracts here have also demonstrated the complex quality of comfort in relation to illness. Yes, Frances' pain was eased, the second letter attested to this and in that instance the relief from pain was the form of comfort that she chose. Yet, the first letter indicated that, for Frances, this was not always her priority, that on occasion she preferred to maintain a clear and undisturbed mind. Frances therefore made a conscious decision as to which type of comfort she would prioritise, aware that neither choice

[76] McCormack, *Shoes and the Georgian Man,* p. 105.
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO1558, N.A.H.S.
[80] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Date Not Known, YO553(v), N.A.H.S.

would generate complete comfort for her. This is another example, which has been highlighted in both the first and third chapters of this thesis, whereby individuals often needed to compromise between one form of comfort and another.

Frances Stackhouse Acton also documented the use of laudanum as pain relief during her teenage daughter's terminal illness and illustrated a similar reluctance, on her daughter's part, to take it. In her memoirs she wrote:

> When she was in severe pain from a spasm a form of taking laudanum was proposed, which she had then an objection to, and I had some difficulty in persuading her to try it: but in a few minutes she said; "I won't refuse you anything now, poor Mutty so I will have it". When it had succeeded in procuring her some temporary relief, she said "How very good God is! I don't deserve this relief, because I was so foolish just now – if I have not given way, I should so have reproached myself".[81]

Whilst both terminally ill patients displayed a reluctance to take the laudanum, it was interesting to note that both Allen Young and Frances Stackhouse Acton shared a keenness for their ill relative to take it. To them, it seemed, comfort came in seeing their relative physically relieved from pain and perhaps this was one of the reasons why the invalids complied with their wishes – that they could see the comfort that it gave them.

Whilst John Thornton also had a reluctance to take the medicines he was advised to (he believed he was being poisoned) he found comfort from suggesting treatments to his brother Reeve in relation to the illness of his son. John believed that his nephew suffered from similar complaints to himself and therefore, in two letters written in July 1821, suggested both his own diagnosis and proposed potential curatives in the hope

[81] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.

that they would alleviate his nephew's symptoms. What was interesting from these two letters was that John could be seen seeking comfort on several fronts. Firstly, and this is an area that will be examined in greater detail in a later section, there was the comfort that being useful brought. He used words such as 'service' and 'serviceable' which demonstrated John's keenness to be of assistance to his family members by recommending remedies that he thought would help his nephew. However, in light of his mental illness, it was unlikely that by identifying the similarities in his and his nephew's symptoms, that his family would have derived any comfort from receiving his recommendations. His eagerness to be of use to Reeve and the rest of his family, may have had its roots in the masculine ideals that would have been instilled in John, as an elite male, from an early age. These included values such as 'self-control and self-management, industry and hard work, independence and autonomy and truth and honesty', most of which John would have struggled to achieve or maintain whilst he was experiencing periods of mental frailty.[82] However, John's emphasis of the word 'service' and its links to the masculine concept of 'industry' demonstrated that he remained influenced by these principles and he may have gained comfort from the fact that this was one tenet of masculinity that had remained within his control. Secondly, with the repetition of the word 'family' in the final two sentences of his letter, John seemed to be re-iterating the importance of family and his desire to be part of it and the pleasure and comfort that it would bring him. This, coupled with a reference to their boyhood days, a time perhaps in which the young brothers enjoyed a more equitable relationship which had yet to be impacted by John's ill health, points to the comfort of the memory of bygone, yet carefree childhood days.

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[82] Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Making Men: The Formation of Elite Male Identities in England, 1660–1900: A Sourcebook* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) pp. 6–7.

John's letters here demonstrated just how important being of use to one's family was during periods of illness, and the comfort that was derived from that was significant. The first chapter has already illustrated how for Frances Young, regularly writing to her sister Mary about their father's illness provided her with much comfort especially when she had to cease caring for her father herself, but Frances Stackhouse Acton's memoirs also illustrated the comfort that caring for a loved one could bring. She devoted herself to looking after her daughter and her memoirs are peppered with examples of how she did this:

> I never left her room, & I only slept a little in my cloaths whenever she was easy: but it was a period of such torturing anxiety that my faculties were almost paralysed…..often I stood for many hours supporting her during the long continuance of the fits of sickness…..I sat by her pillow constantly.[83]

Frances described the support that she gave her child, but she also alluded to the comfort, following her daughter's untimely death, that her constancy afforded her,

> She frequently urged me to go out: but I now think with satisfaction that, except on this occasion, I never left her moment during this last month except when I went to Mr Stackhouse once during the twenty four hours and when I went into the next room to dress: but I was then within hearing.[84]

Frances' own steadfastness and devotion and the comfort that it brought could be seen in a transcription of the letter that she sent her mother on the day of her daughter's death. She wrote, 'I am so thankful to God for giving me strength to do all I have done for my poor kind child'.[85]

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[83] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.
[84] *Ibid*.
[85] *Ibid*.

Frances Stackhouse Acton provided her daughter, with what ultimately became, palliative care and the comfort that they both derived from that, despite the personal and financial sacrifices and the obvious pain of watching a loved one slowly deteriorate, was almost tangible from her memoirs. That comfort could be found, even when the life of a beloved family member appeared to be gradually and visibly ebbing away, was conceivable.

In 1796, Frances Young's father became increasingly frail and infirm, and she documented his decline in her letters to her sister Mary throughout the final months of his life. Whilst acknowledging the pain that this caused, she also found comfort in some of the cruellest aspects of her father's illness. Following one of her sister's visits to Orlingbury, Frances wrote:

> It is ever the most satisfactory thing to me when you have left me to take up the pen to let you know how we are going on, & to talk in the only way left with you. I am sure it will be a comfort to you to be assur'd our dear father felt no uneasiness at your having left us, indeed it is the greatest blessing considering his present state, that his recollection is so gone as to prevent his feeling uneasy.[86]

Following her visit, Mary's departure did not cause her father any undue uneasiness or discomfort because he had no recollection of it. Frances unashamedly admitted that his lack of distress at their parting was the 'greatest blessing'.[87] That she took comfort from the fact that her father remained easy and undisturbed could be seen in her use of the words 'satisfactory', 'comfort' and 'blessing' despite his illness and infirmity.

[86] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Friday evening (1796), YO1607, N.A.H.S.
[87] *Ibid*.

Comfort could also be found in the medical care that was procured for a loved one during periods of illness. Often the proximity of remedial help and guidance, despite the financial implications of taking such a measure, was a comfort to both the sufferer and their carer. Almost immediately in her memoirs, Frances Stackhouse Acton referred to Mr Baines, who in 1827, after her daughter exhibited 'listlessness and indisposition to exertion' for a number of months, diagnosed her with 'a spine complaint'.[88] By February 1830 young Frances was bed-ridden and by the August of that year, Mr Baines appears to have been in almost daily attendance:

> Mr Baines slept here every night, and she used to look forward with great anxiety to his arrival between 9 and 10 o'clock: for that was usually the part of the 24 hours in which she had most uneasiness and he was often able to suggest something for her relief.[89]

The comfort that Frances' daughter gained from Mr Baines in these instances was relief from her pain, however, both mother and daughter were also comforted merely by his physical presence. Frances noted this in her memoir when her daughter suffered a seizure:

> The poor child was seized with a painful convulsion – I had never seen anything of the sort before and I thought all was over but Mr Baines fortunately was in the room at the moment and he assured me it would soon go off which was the case.[90]

The following day, her daughter apologised for monopolising Frances' time but confessed to her that 'I am rather afraid to be left; for only you and Mr Baines know

[88] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.
[89] *Ibid*.
[90] *Ibid*.

what to do'.[91] His proximity, coupled with his medical knowledge and his attention, meant that Mr Baines provided not just medical care but also comfort and assurance to the two women. Both Frances and her daughter trusted Mr Baines and that contributed to the comfort that they found in his presence and his care, and this was an important factor. John Thornton spent much of his time in the presence of medical practitioners, often residing with them and yet he did not derive comfort from all of them. Indeed, in 1831, he escaped from a private asylum in Hillingdon, Middlesex when the commissioners there told him he was insane. In the early 1820s he lived with Mr Hill, and as previously discussed, despite John's repeated accusations that Hill and his household were attempting to poison him, on Hill's death in 1825, he spoke mostly kindly of him. The warmth with which he discussed his former medic seemed to depict a comfortable relationship between the two, one of trust, confidence and mutual regard; and one in which both men found comfort and solace. Perhaps John had Hill in mind, when in 1831, following his escape from Stilwell's asylum, he sought out Mr Sherwin with whom to live, more comfortable with the idea that he was happier to reside with the Chemist rather than in an institution.

Another source of comfort through illness was the discovery that somebody else had suffered the same illness or experienced the same symptoms. In one of her letters to Frances Young from Lyme, Ann Ekins explained how a new acquaintance experienced symptoms very similar to her own:

> Mrs Leer...who gives me the pleasure of a call described to me a very long illness...so exactly similar to mine, in the violence of the cough, with every other complaint, & suffering, that I profess if I had spoken of myself I cou'd not have done it with more exactness…But to return to my pretty acquaintance a skilful

[91] *Ibid*.

physician discover'd the whole of her case to be Nervous he order'd riding on horseback , wh she pursued a whole twelve month & perfectly recovered.[92]

For Ann, the knowledge that she was not alone in her suffering appears to be a comfort to her. She talked of the 'pleasure' that she felt with her new acquaintance calling upon her and this may have been from the sociability that she derived from the visits but also from their discussions of their shared experience of illness.[93] What also gave Ann comfort however, was the promise of recovery. In this same letter she told Frances that she has never 'entertain'd many hopes of recovery' throughout her illness and yet she also informed her friend that she had enjoyed the 'air & motion of a Double Horse', the same leisure pursuit that her new acquaintance claimed assisted her recovery.[94]

What this letter of Ann's also illustrated were the 'secondary gains' that talking and writing about illness produced and how these could impact comfort, social comfort in particular.[95] In their article, Jonathan Andrews and James Kennaway suggest that sufferers of biliousness used their illness to 'render their bile social, serviceable, satirical, and edgily critical, deriving certain compensatory and "secondary gains"'.[96] The second half of the eighteenth century saw biliousness become, according to Andrews and Kennaway, a 'leading fashionable disease', firstly because it was being diagnosed at an increasing rate but secondly because of its association with the 'leisured classes' and their privileged lifestyles.[97] The secondary gains of which the scholars speak, therefore, not only included 'garnering sympathy and fellowship' (which can be seen from Ann's latest letter to Frances) but also benefiting one's social standing and

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[92] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 22–25 February 1797, YO554(i), N.A.H.S.
[93] *Ibid*.
[94] *Ibid*.
[95] Andrews and Kennaway, 'Experiencing, Exploiting and Evaluating Bile: Framing Fashionable Biliousness from the Sufferer's Perspective', p.293.
[96] *Ibid*.
[97] *Ibid*., p. 294.

as a result, facilitating or enhancing social comfort.[98] In describing her new acquaintance to Frances, Ann appeared keen to impart some important details relating to her. She was, according to Ann 'a sweet pretty elegant woman, Mrs Leer (her name was Jekel & they once liv'd at Dallington)'.[99] Frances as a resident of Northamptonshire would most likely have been familiar with the Jekyll family of Dallington Hall and their social position in the south of the county. Ann seemed keen to share the details of what she described as this 'most singular circumstance' but also begged Frances that 'it may not transpire out of your own family'.[100] Ann used her shared experiences and connection with Mrs Leer as a social lubricant within the network that she shared with the Young family, but she did not want to risk the connection with Mrs Leer being severed, should she hear that Ann had been discussing her health with someone she herself was not acquainted with. Conversation, 'good breeding' and 'discreet charm' were, according to Roy Porter, a means of overcoming 'social friction', that is, it made it more socially comfortable, and this is what seemed to have occurred here between Ann and Mrs Leer.[101] The difference in social standing between the two women may have seemed less disparate once they had shared the details of their illness with each other and their acquaintance became more widely known.

In the eighteenth century, sympathy emerged as a significant aspect of enlightened social expression. Porter suggests that along with 'ease', 'good humour', 'restraint and moderation', it facilitated 'the new felicific formulae' of the enlightened age and Beatty has also identified sympathy as one of the secondary gains of illness.[102]

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[98] *Ibid*., p. 304.
[99] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 22–25 February 1797, YO554(i), N.A.H.S.
[100] *Ibid*.
[101] Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), p. 22.
[102] *Ibid*.; Beatty, *Nervous Disease in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Reality of a Fashionable Disorder*, p. 153.

The 'sick role' she suggests, 'had long promised invalids, comfort, sympathy and exemption from social responsibilities' and the comfort that was derived from receiving sympathy in times of illness, for Ann in particular, appeared to be important.[103] In October 1796 she wrote to Frances and told her that she had 'grown much thinner but not in the face – so that I gain no pity by my looks'.[104] Despite her protracted list of symptoms and ailments, Ann's appearance remained unchanged and as a result she felt that she did not receive the same level of sympathy as someone who had undergone a drastic physical change. Therefore, the sympathy that she received from Frances and from her new acquaintance Mrs Leer, was significant to her. It validated her, her illnesses, and her continued quest for good health.

As well as social comfort, illness could create and enable spiritual comfort. Hannah Newton suggests that physical pain could be a source of great 'spiritual fulfilment or joy' for the sufferer and therefore pain could be considered very much a spiritual, as well as, physical experience.[105] Beatty cites the example of Lady Maxwell of Pollock, an elite, Scottish Methodist who considered her nervous condition in terms of a 'divine challenge, or a test of faith', and an opportunity to emphasise her credentials as a Christian.[106] Frances Stackhouse Acton viewed her daughter's illness in a similar vein and there were several references throughout her memoir to how they both clung to the notion that the illness was God's will. Frances wrote:

> In the night when she was restless & uneasy I told her that we would do all we could to make her comfortable: but that if we could not succeed, she must take

[103] Beatty, *Nervous Disease in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Reality of a Fashionable Disorder*, p. 153.
[104] From Miss Ann Ekins to Miss Frances Young, 23 October 1796, YO554(xvii), N.A.H.S.
[105] Newton, 'Very Sore Nights and Days: The Child's Experience of Illness in Early Modern England, c.1580–1720', p. 153.
[106] Beatty, *Nervous Disease in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Reality of a Fashionable Disorder*, pp. 70-71.

> it as a trial from God and try to bear it patiently for his sake…I felt that it was my duty to tell her of her danger, and I broke it to her in the gentlest manner I could – she said "I felt so ill, that I thought before I must be in danger" and after a little pause, "God will do what is best for me…the only thing that distresses me is thinking what will become of you, without your poor little comfort". [107]

This extract emphasised how her faith enabled her child to bear the suffering of her own illness, however, there were also other excerpts that were more explicit about the connection between the impact of her daughter's illness and the comfort that could be found in that. One evening, Frances detailed at length, how she sensed a change in both her daughter's physical but also, her spiritual, condition:

> There was something which I cannot describe in her state of mind this evening – she seemed to me as if she were enjoying a foretaste of heaven, and I shall never forget the impression it made on my mind. Till then though I had not doubted that God was just and merciful in taking my child, I had never felt the same comforting assurance of it before…But this evening I felt only joy in thinking that she was entering into Glory, and that, if God saw fit, I could cheerfully resign any of my remaining blessings into his hands. I hope it is not presumptuous to believe that this was comfort sent from heaven in answer to our prayers – I earnestly asked for a continuance of this all supporting sense of God's mercy and presence and I bless him that from this time I felt the conviction that it was well for my child, & that to the present moment I have never had a wish to stay her progress to the realms of bliss.[108]

[107] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.
[108] *Ibid*.

Frances wrote about 'comforting assurance', a 'comfort sent from heaven' and the 'supporting sense of God's mercy' that she felt during one of the final evenings that she spent with her daughter, and it is difficult to see how she could have found this type of comfort through anything other than the illness of her beloved child alongside her Christian faith. It represented an acceptance of her daughter's illness, impending death and her apparent submission to God's will and the comfort that she was able to draw from that.

Frances also wrote in great detail about the strength with which her daughter dealt with her illness, and this is a theme that was touched upon previously in relation to Frances Young and the effort that it must have taken for her to maintain a stoic and cheerful demeanour in the face of her suffering and impending death and Harriet Orlebar's comparison of her own stoicism with that of her sister's. The impact of a sufferer's strength, patience, stoicism or kindness on the comfort felt by a carer or loved one can be seen in the following extract from Frances Stackhouse Acton's memoir. She wrote:

> Her behaviour was uniformly marked by the most beautiful patience and chearfulness…The confusion of my head was such that I have not retained any of the words she made use of but I determined, for the future, to write down some of her kind little expressions as she uttered them: as I felt the happiness that such proofs of the poor little soul's patience & affection might give me for the future.[109]

Her daughter's 'patience and chearfulness' during her illness gave Frances some comfort at the time but it would also produce enormous comfort in the days, months and years after her death. She recognised that the memory of her daughter's 'patience

[109] *Ibid.*

& affection' and 'her kind little expressions' would provide her with comfort in the future.[110]

Other than the impact of illness and pain such as Newton Barton's gout and Ann Ekins rheumatism, illness and comfort may seem surprising bedfellows. Yet this chapter has demonstrated that the connection between the two was more subtle and nuanced than those physical effects suggest, with the impact of illness on comfort extending to social, emotional and financial comfort too. It was illness that forced Charlotte Orlebar to neglect her familial and social duties as chaperone to her stepdaughters in Lille, it was illness that caused financial discomfort for Frances Stackhouse Acton, and it was illness that compelled Frances Young to put on a brave and cheerful face so much so that the thought of it exhausted her. This chapter has also highlighted the complex, yet often integral, relationship between comfort and other emotions, such as pleasure and sympathy. Comfort was not a solitary emotion or feeling, it was often coupled or clustered with others. Charlotte Orlebar's desire for inner comfort threatened both her own sense of pleasure, but also that of her family, so there was an interesting interplay and negotiation here between the two. The seemingly convivial acquaintance between Ann Ekins and Mrs Leer, which generated both pleasure and sympathy, allowed for more social comfort and less 'social friction' for Ann in her relationship with her new friend and this was bolstered by this nexus of comfort, pleasure and sympathy.[111] Comfort, therefore, influenced and mediated power relationships and this can also be seen in the fluid hierarchy that existed between the three Thornton brothers. When John's mental health improved, his position within it

[110] *Ibid*.
[111] Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*, p. 22.

was able to shift and he became comfortable, once again resuming his position as second brother and advisor to Reeve.

This closer examination of the relationship between illness and comfort also revealed how discussions around illness were often shrouded in the language of comfort and discomfort. This was shown to be evident in the letters but also in the renowned and famous contemporary medical publication Cheyne's *English Malady.* His description of this very specific illness, triggered by, in his opinion, the excesses and sedentarism of elite life, included a whole raft of words synonymous with that of discomfort which further cemented the inter-connectedness between comfort and illness. Cheyne's work however, also prompted the question of whether the elite lifestyle itself could be a cause of illness. Indeed, Newton Barton's gout could likely be attributed, in part, to his privileged life whilst the 'fits of nervousness' experienced by Frances Stackhouse Acton when she was forced to make a choice between paying for her daughter's medical treatment as well as the upkeep of her husband's ancestral home were very specific, elite-related conditions that those of lower social ranks would unlikely have needed to face. Smallpox, however, was an indiscriminate disease yet the elite lifestyle may have afforded more opportunities than most to practice the recommended avoidance techniques required to escape infection. By paying close attention to illness and comfort it has been possible to identify, somewhat surprisingly, the ways in which comfort could be garnered from being ill or from caring for someone who was. The social comfort found in discovering a fellow sufferer with identical symptoms, the emotional relief of being useful to an ill family member or the spiritual comfort found in the assurances of one's faith were all significant comforters. And even in the bleakest of moments, solace could be found in the words and deeds of a sick

loved one; words and deeds which provided not only immediate support, but which also provided much needed comfort in the days, months and years ahead.

Chapter Five Death

This thesis has demonstrated the ways in which comfort was a fundamental and significant aspect of elite life. This final chapter, however, also aims to highlight the ways in which it was strongly linked to death. Like illness in the previous chapter the inter-connectedness between comfort and death may not, at first, seem an obvious one and yet, as this chapter will reveal, the influence and impact that they had on each other was particularly significant. This will be shown by firstly, examining the different ways in which the comfort of the families used in this study was impacted by death and secondly by also exploring the instances when comfort could be found in death itself. It will also consider the notion of a 'good death' and its connection to spiritual and emotional comfort, the attitudes towards 'bad death' and how they appeared to shift during this period and finally, it will explore how shared grief in correspondence helped form a basis of comfort amongst the bereaved.

The commentary surrounding cultural attitudes towards death has, according to Julie-Marie Strange, been 'shaped overwhelmingly by an assumption that a spiritual-centred definition of death, prevalent in the medieval Christian world, gave way by the modern period to a medicine-centred conception'.[1] Posited by Ralph Houlbrooke, Philippe Ariès and Roy Porter, this narrative traces the diminishing dominance of religion and the increasing significance of medicine at the death bed.[2] This narrative also appears to mirror the wider cultural shift, discussed by both Keith Thomas and Pieter Spierenburg, in which magic was replaced by religious belief which in turn was

[1] Julie-Marie Strange, 'Death' in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Medicine,* ed. by Mark Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 355–372, (p. 356).
[2] Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974), Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Allen Lane, 2003).

superseded, in the eighteenth century, by scientific knowledge.[3] Houlbrooke suggests that the best sort of death 'was one which heralded the coming of death some time in advance', thus allowing the dying sufficient time to ensure the successful 'settlement of worldly concerns, spiritual preparation and full acceptance of God's will'.[4] Another component crucial to achieving a good death was, according to Houlbrooke, garnering the support of other people. A 'sympathetic and supportive' network of family and friends enabled the impending deceased 'to play their part in achieving a 'comfortable' death' through prayer, reading of the bible and 'comforting advice'.[5] If all these elements, that is time, the settlement of personal or business affairs, spiritual preparedness and a caring audience occurred, death, according to Houlbrooke, shifted from a 'tragedy into a triumph'.[6] Conversely, a 'bad death' was one in which the death was sudden or where the deceased was given neither warning nor time to spiritually or materially prepare.[7] Suicide, according to Houlbrooke, was considered the 'worst sort of bad death'.[8] This was because 'self-murder' was considered by the Church to be a most egregious sin and often meant that the goods and possessions of convicted suicides were forfeited.[9]

Houlbrooke asserts that the concepts of good and bad deaths had more or less disintegrated by the mid eighteenth century and there have been a number of reasons posited for this decline.[10] Porter points to the ways in which death became increasingly medicalised and argues that the combination of inoculations, first aid and the growth in

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[3] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin Books, 1971); Pieter Spirenburg, *The Broken Spell* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education Ltd. 1991).
[4] Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750,* p. 195.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 188 and p. 192.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 188.
[7] Allan Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 92.
[8] Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750,* p. 210.
[9] *Ibid*.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 219.

hospitals meant that 'death was beginning to be taken out of the hands of God'.[11] It was, he suggests, the 'medical management' of death that now superseded the former spiritual method of managing death.[12] Both he and Houlbrooke also cite the early nineteenth-century physician Henry Halford who was famed for his commitment to the 'management of pain' in the time leading up to death. It was, according to Porter, Halford's 'true task' to 'undertake the management of pain, thereby overcoming fear and restoring tranquillity, orchestrating an end which would be serene and blissful'.[13] Porter's use of the words 'tranquillity' and 'serene' are particularly significant here as they certainly implied a relationship between comfort and death.[14] 'Tranquillity' was defined by Johnson as 'quiet, peace of mind, peace of condition, freedom from perturbation' whilst the definition of 'serene' was offered as 'calm, placid, quiet, unruffled, undisturbed, even of temper'.[15] So, when juxtaposed with words that were used to define comfort such as 'ease' then this relationship is cemented further because the word 'ease' itself was defined as 'quiet, rest, undisturbed tranquillity'.[16] Ariès suggests that it was a change in family relationships, particularly that between the dying and the rest of the family, that also contributed to this shift away from a 'spiritual-centred' attitude to death.[17] From the mid-eighteenth century, wills no longer included the decedent's religious wishes that they had previously such as the 'pious clauses, the choice of tomb, the finding of masses and religious services and the giving of alms'. All this was removed so that all that remained was the legal details relating to the distribution of goods and possessions. Family relationships, according to Ariès, were

[11] Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 214.
[12] *Ibid*., p 222.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 223; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750,* p. 204.
[14] Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason,* p. 223.
[15] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol II, p. 441; vol II, p. 307.
[16] *Ibid.,* vol I, p. 330.
[17] Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, p. 65.

now bound together by feelings of love and affection and so the dying were able to express their spiritual or religious wishes orally to their loved ones without the necessity of including them in their will, although as the introduction and second chapter of this thesis attest to, this argument regarding the composition of the family is now considered controversial. Suicide too was thought to have been secularised with Porter suggesting that the rise of print culture led to the humanisation of suicide, this in turn transforming its status from that of 'pariah, malefactor or sinner' to that of victim or 'object of pity'.[18]

Attitudes towards death, according to Houlbrooke, Porter and Ariès, therefore shifted from a Christian focused narrative, in which religious and material preparedness were key, to a secular one that increasingly saw medical involvement in the final moments of life. Strange, however, questions this narrative, describing the concept of a good death as a 'problematic tool'.[19] She argues that 'understandings of a good death' were dominant until at least the Victorian period, which is certainly much later than that posited by Houlbrooke, and she suggests that the presence of medicine did not necessarily mean that religion was excluded from the scene of the death bed.[20] Rather, she suggests, the two could work hand-in-hand, particularly for those who could afford medical care it meant that at the moment of death they had a 'man of science as well as the man of God'.[21] In terms of suicide, Strange also differs with Houlbrooke and Porter, when she suggests that it remained the very 'worst death' until the nineteenth century.[22] To suggest that suicide too had become secularised by the early nineteenth century is to overlook the influence of evangelicalism, particularly, in the Victorian period she asserts.[23]

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[18] Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason,* p. 226.
[19] Strange, 'Death', p. 358.
[20] *Ibid*., p.356.
[21] *Ibid.,* p. 360.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 358.
[23] *Ibid.*

The idea that death had become secularised during the eighteenth century, as suggested by Houlbrooke, Porter and Ariès, represents part of what Jeremy Gregory, describes as the 'secularisation thesis' in English religious history.[24] This narrative argues that religion became increasingly less significant and more marginalised during this period.[25] Robert G. Ingram suggests that both the enactment of the Toleration Act in 1689 and the cessation of the Licensing Act in 1695 played a role in the weakening of the established Church with the former permitting 'a measure of religious pluralism' whilst the latter facilitated a plethora of anti-religious literature.[26] Despite this, however, Ingram suggests that by 1730, the Church of England had largely 'regained the full measure of its former standing'.[27] Enlightenment ideologies also contributed to an increasing secular world with Porter suggesting that they confronted 'custom with reason and the spiritual with the secular' whilst Ingram describes 'reason' as the 'Enlightenment's epistemological touchstone' which resulted in the 'rejection of a providential God'.[28] Some enlightened thinkers, according to S.J. Barnett, held a 'deistic view', which was the belief in an original creator but rejected the notion of a God that 'intervened in worldly affairs'.[29] However, some scholars challenge the notion that the eighteenth-century witnessed the secularisation of British society. Gregory refers to the 'varieties of religion' on offer in the eighteenth century arguing that it is important to acknowledge the 'extraordinary number' of versions of eighteenth-century

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[24] Jeremy Gregory, 'Introduction: Transforming 'the Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 32.3 (2009), pp. 287-305, (p. 290).
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] Robert G. Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Secker and the Church of England,* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012), p. 286.
[27] *Ibid.*
[28] Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment,* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 2000), p. 209; *Ibid.,* p. 5.
[29] S.J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 2.

Christianity.[30] Ingram too questions the extent of secularisation, suggesting that by the start of the nineteenth century, ninety percent of the English population held a 'nominal allegiance' to the Church.[31] He also challenges the influence of the Enlightenment movement in England on the Church, suggesting that some of its proponents were 'decidedly clerical and intellectually conservative'.[32] Barnett too downplays the concept of secularisation, suggesting that 'most of the enlightened still retained a belief in God', and argues too that the deism movement had limited influence.[33] Indeed, he goes as far as to describe Enlightenment deism as a 'myth'.[34]

Notwithstanding these arguments, it is clear that the Anglican Church was going through a period of flux in the eighteenth century; but how did this impact its members? Indeed, Gregory has suggested that more is known of the 'functioning of the churches as institutions' than of the impact of religion on 'the hearts and minds of its adherents'.[35] In chapter three of *The Gentleman's Daughter*, in which she chronicles the (mis)fortunes of grieving daughters, wives and mothers, Vickery describes the 'unenthusiastic spirituality' and 'Christian resignation' displayed by these women following the deaths of their fathers, husbands and children.[36] She goes on to argue that the bereaved had little choice but to seek comfort in their faith, suggesting that they had little alternative but to invoke 'God's providence as the arch determinant' and 'submit like proper Christians'.[37]

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[30] Gregory, 'Introduction: Transforming 'the Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century', p. 287.
[31] Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity in the Eighteenth Century: Thomas Secker and the Church of England,* p. 9.
[32] *Ibid.,* p. 74.
[33] Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity,* p. 2.
[34] *Ibid.* p. 11.
[35] Gregory, 'Introduction: Transforming 'the Age of Reason' into 'an Age of Faiths': or, Putting Religions and Beliefs (Back) into the Eighteenth Century', p. 295.
[36] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter,* p. 90
[37] *Ibid.,* p. 90 and p. 124.

An examination of death through the perspective of comfort can make significant contributions to these debates. This chapter will question the suggestion that death became increasingly secularised by demonstrating that, despite the improvements in medicine and treatments, the comfort derived from religious faith remained a significant and powerful force. It will also, by considering the reaction to a sudden and unexpected death, reveal that the concepts of good and bad deaths were more nebulous and flexible and less prescribed and fixed as traditional narratives pertaining to death may have previously suggested. However, this chapter will also further augment this study's main hypothesis that comfort was not only a fundamental part of elite life that was impacted by both significant events and daily, more routine occurrences but also that it shaped and influenced life choices.

Death and Discomfort

This first part of the chapter will examine the ways in which death impacted the differing types of comfort experienced by the families: for example, the effect of losing a loved one on emotional comfort or the consequence of a sudden or bad death on spiritual comfort. It will also explore how social comfort and social status could be affected by the death of a relative, particularly in the case of wives and daughters who could also see their domestic comfort compromised following the death of a husband or father. This section will also look at how uncomfortable memories of a deceased family member could influence how they were remembered by subsequent generations. One of the most significant impacts of death was the sense of loss and grief that it could generate, and it was these feelings that could cause significant discomfort for those family members left behind. In August 1713, after thirty years of marriage and the birth of fourteen children, the wife of Sir Justinian Isham II, the fourth Baronet of Lamport,

died.[38] Elizabeth had endured several months of declining health up to the time of her death, during which Sir Justinian confided in his first-born son Justinian, that ‘I can scarce tell you for tears that your Poor Mother grows weaker and weaker every day and…I doubt she can hold out long…I am, with the greatest concern that I ever had in my life, your Most Disconsolate Father’.[39] Sir Justinian’s anguish at the prospect of losing his wife was apparent from this extract, but the full extent of his grief following her death was such that ‘a cloud of grief descended upon Lamport Hall’ and the letters, written during this period, revealed that this had an enormous and deleterious effect on the comfort of his closest family members.[40] In a letter to Sir Justinian, his son Euseby pleaded with him to temper, what he described as, his ‘immoderate grief’, which ‘offer’d so much violence to your nature’ because of its impact on both him and his siblings.[41] Whilst he acknowledged his own apparent inability to comfort his father, he also revealed his own need for comfort following the death of his mother when he wrote, ‘I may seem very incapable to administer to you that comfort which I myself want’.[42] In his letter Euseby continued to remind Sir Justinian of both his duty to his children as well as the impact that his grief had on them. He also, however, reminded him that they could be called upon to give him much-needed comfort too:

> I am very certain yt you have lost the best of wives and we the best of mothers, but as we receive no small comfort from the happiness of so good a father, so I hope you’ll admit of some consolation from us your children and will endeavour as much to keep us from being afflicted orphans, as you did yourself from being a mournful widower.[43]

[38] Grice, ‘‘Steer a Safe Course’: Sir Justinian Isham: Family Life at Lamport Hall (1681–1730)’, p. 55.
[39] From Sir Justinian Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 27 June 1713, IC/2138, N.A.H.S.
[40] Grice, ‘‘Steer a Safe Course’: Sir Justinian Isham: Family Life at Lamport Hall (1681–1730)’, p. 55.
[41] From Mr Euseby Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 22 September 1713, IC/2180, N.A.H.S.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] *Ibid*.

This was another example of how comfort was used as a means of persuasion or appeal. In this instance Euseby attempted to use his and his sibling's comfort as a negotiating tool in the hope that his father could be persuaded to alter his behaviour. That his attempt had no immediate impact on his father's behaviour, could be seen in the letters that Vere Isham wrote to her brother Justinian in the months following their mother's death, which she told him, 'placed me in the most uneasy, uncomfortable condition in the whole world without any prospect of a remedy & instead of its mending I find it grows every day worse & worse.'[44] Her use of words like 'uneasy' and 'uncomfortable', which were so closely connected to discomfort, directly linked her mother's death with her own comfort.[45] Life for Vere was now characterised by pain, disturbance, difficulty and constraint which were all definitions of 'uneasy' and gloom, misery and melancholia which were contemporary meanings of 'uncomfortable'.[46] Her mother's death was also linked to comfort in a different way, demonstrated when Vere revealed her 'mortification' at her own inability to console her father. She told her brother that Sir Justinian continued 'in ye same temper still uneasy at everything & I have the mortification to find 'tis not in my power to give him any consolation'.[47] Vere portrayed her father's discomfort at his wife's death (by her use of uneasy to describe him) but also her own by the use of 'mortification'. To be mortified was to feel vexation and this, in turn, meant troubling, sorrow or uneasiness.[48] There was, therefore, a situation in which Vere's failure to provide comfort to her father was in fact causing her discomfort. In another letter she informed Justinian that the only person seemingly able to provide their father with any form of comfort was their brother Eusby, a clergyman,

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[44] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 23 September 1713, IC/1770, N.A.H.S.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol II, p. 485; vol II, p. 479.
[47] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 5 December 1713, IC/1781, N.A.H.S.
[48] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol II, p. 78; vol II, p. 469.

who afforded him 'great consolation'.[49] This letter was written three months after Euseby's own in which he outlined his father's 'immoderate grief' and violent nature, so it seemed by the time that Vere wrote to Justinian, he had derived some 'consolation' from Euseby.[50] Despite this, it appeared that the Baronet gleaned little spiritual comfort from his son's counsel and Vere's views on it seemed particularly scathing. When she wrote to her brother six months after their mother's death she advised him, somewhat impatiently, that:

> Indeed he is the most alter'd man that ever was, is grown extreamly devout, reads in the Bible or some good book almost all day long but I think 'tis a great deal of pity that religion has not its proper effect on him, which is doubtless to make people contented & resign'd; & bear with courage the misfortunes that happen to 'em; but alas instead of this never any man's mind was so weaken'd as my Father's, for he crys like a child almost perpetually.[51]

These extracts demonstrated Vere's frustration at the extent to which her father's grief seemed to preclude any form of comfort, either his or her own. Firstly, she wrote of her own mortification at being unable to console him, secondly, that he appeared to be so inconsolable that nothing or nobody could comfort him other than his clergyman son and that barely sufficed because thirdly, religion itself was falling short in its capacity to comfort him. Religion, the very purpose of which, according to Vere, was to 'make people contented' and 'bear with courage' the worldly misfortunes that affected them failed to afford Sir Justinian any form of comfort. These two final phrases offered important clues as to how Vere defined comfort. 'Content' was being 'satisfied so as not to repine' as well as 'easy' and with 'satisfied' and 'easy' being so closely

[49] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 26 December 1713, IC/1783, N.A.H.S.
[50] From Mr Euseby Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 22 September 1713, IC/2180, N.A.H.S.
[51] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, February 1714, IC/1787, N.A.H.S.

connected to comfort it indicated that Vere considered it a role of religion to provide comfort.[52] To 'bear with courage' was also interesting in that to be courageous was to act with 'bravery' and demonstrate 'active fortitude' neither of which, it seemed, her father displayed.[53] There seemed therefore a subtle criticism of her father in this letter in that he appeared weak.

Vere's 'most uneasy, uncomfortable condition' discussed above also extended to her own sociability and social obligations. Her father's grief significantly curtailed both the number of visitors to Lamport Hall and Vere's own excursions beyond its walls. She remarked several times to her brother, in the months following her mother's death, how their father kept to his chamber and 'sees no company' and when he finally relented and allowed a visitor, he 'cry'd all the while & spoke not a word'.[54] Yet it was Vere's social comfort that particularly suffered as a result of her father's grief and if, as in chapter three, Stobart's definition of social comfort is applied it is possible to gain an insight into how. He suggests that social comfort could be found by following 'correct behaviour and manners' and by 'doing one's duty' and Vere's letters showed that she was prevented from doing this.[55] She had, she told her brother, been called upon by several ladies but had been unable to return their visits and described herself as a 'perfect recluse'.[56] Vere was the eldest surviving daughter and on her mother's death would have assumed the mantle of lady of the house and would have been fully aware of her social duties and expected social protocols. Stobart also states that social comfort meant 'matching expected norms' but Vere would not have been able to do

[52] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 223.
[53] *Ibid.,* vol I, p. 241.
[54] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 24 October 1713, IC/1774, N.A.H.S; From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 14 November 1713, IC/1779, N.A.H.S.
[55] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 128 and p. 165.
[56] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 26 December 1713, IC/1783, N.A.H.S.

this.[57] Indeed, this was clearly demonstrated when she wrote that 'Ld Griffin designs to come to see my father next Wednesday, Mrs Griffin said you ought in charity to let us see you at Lamport but Jenny pertly answer'd that charity began at home'.[58] From this Vere showed the social inertia that characterised both her life and Lamport Hall in the weeks and months following her mother's death. Luckily for Vere, in this instance, she had her close friend Jenny Benson to deflect the veiled criticism that was directed towards her, but the pressure had already taken its toll, when six months previously she had written, 'today Lady Hatton did me the favour to come to dinner but did not send before which surprise has given me a hurry of the spirits which I han'd yet recover'd'.[59] There was little doubt from her letters that Vere felt increasingly desperate during this period, indeed they were replete with words such as 'unpleasant', 'uneasy' and 'melancholy'.[60]

Her mother's death and her father's resultant grief occurred at a crucial period in both Vere's life and those of her younger sisters. Vere was twenty-six years old when her mother died in 1713 whilst Hester, Susannah and Edmunda were seventeen, sixteen and fourteen respectively. Though Hester married a Brixworth man called Francis Raynsford in 1722, there was scant mention of any potential suitors for the other Isham women and none of them, in fact, married. And whilst the reason for this cannot categorically be attributed to their father's prolonged and overwhelming period of grief and incapacitation, it was likely to have impacted any potential relationships they may have had. According to Will Coster 'courtships could take several years' and often involved a 'lengthy process of careful negotiation' which would have proved

[57] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 261.
[58] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 8 March 1714, IC/1790, N.A.H.S.
[59] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 23 September 1713, IC/1770, N.A.H.S.
[60] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 24 October 1713, IC/1774, N.A.H.S; From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 27 February 1714, IC/1789, N.A.H.S; From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Justinian Isham, 17 February 1714, IC/1787, N.A.H.S.

problematic for Sir Justinian with his refusal to entertain visitors to Lamport Hall.[61] And the rituals and formalities of courtship itself would have been difficult for these women to engage in if their social lives were curtailed in the ways that Vere's letters implied they were.

The example of Lady Isham demonstrated how the death of the lady of the house could affect the comfort of the household but what of the impact of the death of the male head of the household and family? The death of Vere's father, Sir Justinian Isham, in May 1730 affected the comfort of several of his closest relations. His eldest son Justinian and his wife Mary suddenly became Sir and Lady Isham and would have been expected to relocate from their home, New House, near Coventry in Warwickshire to Lamport Hall. Mary, on hearing the news about her father-in-law appeared more disturbed by the expected social etiquette surrounding the Baronet's demise and impending funeral than she was about his death. She was, she told her husband, in 'such a fright' and queried with him what it was she was expected to do. Her letters also revealed a reluctance to leave her home for Lamport Hall, she considered it 'not…at all proper' to travel and preferred her spouse to return to her at New House.[62] In fact, a year after Sir Justinian's death the couple had still to settle in Lamport. Mary's letters depicted a woman beset by nervousness and uncertainty at the prospect of making Lamport Hall her home.

It was not only Mary's comfort that was impacted by Sir Justinian's death in May 1730, that of his two surviving unmarried daughters, Vere and Edmunda, were also affected. Amy M. Froide asserts that 'the only acceptable role for the never-married woman was as a household dependant not as an independent female head of

[61] Will Coster, *Family and Kinship in England, 1450 – 1800* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p. 64.
[62] From Lady Mary Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 13 May 1730, IC/1968, N.A.H.S; From Lady Mary Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 17 May 1730, IC/1969, N.A.H.S.

household'.[63] The two sisters, as 'never-married women,' therefore would have been expected to remain at Lamport Hall as dependants of their brother Justinian, who inherited the Baronetcy on their father's death.[64] Edmunda stayed at Lamport but much of her time was spent with her sister Hester in Brixworth where she enjoyed the Northamptonshire society and excursions to Bath, Oxford and London.[65] Vere had remained at the family home in Lamport following her mother's death in 1713, but barely two months after the death of her father she left Lamport Hall for good, after which she stayed with friends at Fawsley, visited her married sister Hester in Brixworth and her brother Edmund in Doctors' Commons, London before finally settling in Montpelier Row in Twickenham in June 1733. She did, however, find this itinerant lifestyle tiresome, confessing to her brother Edmund, just a month after their father's death and almost three years before her permanent relocation to Twickenham, that 'I begin to wish I was settled somewhere, & am almost tir'd of the moving way I am in'.[66] Frustratingly for Vere she was now reliant on Justinian to arrange the annuity bequeathed to her in her father's will. She told Edmund that 'my annuity is not yet settled, my Br. promises it shall be done, but I find I must be content to wait his leisure for it'.[67] Vere's tone in this extract revealed her impatience at the new Baronet's delay in finalising it. Fiscal concerns troubled Vere during this unsettled period. In November 1730 in arranging her move to Edmund's she wrote, 'I am very glad that I did not go to town with you, for being in lodgings is both inconvenient and expensive'.[68] Similarly, on writing to her brother Justinian in June 1733 she described how she had fared

[63] Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in early modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 17.
[64] *Ibid*.
[65] Frances Redpath, 'The Ladies of Lamport', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 55 (2002), pp. 7-17, (p. 8).
[66] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Edmund Isham, 1 August 1730, IC/2474, N.A.H.S.
[67] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Edmund Isham, 21 July 1730, IC/1973, N.A.H.S.
[68] From Miss Vere Isham to Mr Edmund Isham, 2 November 1730, IC/1981, N.A.H.S.

following her move to Twickenham. It was, she wrote, ‘a very pleasant place, but not a very cheap one, for everything is as dear or dearer than in London, but to make amends it is much more agreeable to my inclination: there is a very good neighbourhood in the row’.[69] It seemed that Vere had now to find a balance between her financial comfort and social comfort and in the following excerpt from her next letter to Justinian just a week later, it seemed to have tipped in favour of social comfort in this instance, when she told him that ‘I think it is a pretty place, & very quiet & retir’d – which suits very well with my inclinations’.[70]

Vickery examines why some unmarried, elite women who achieved financial independence, like Vere Isham, left their lifelong, family home on the death of their parents.[71] She points to the ‘chaos’ and ‘saga of power, labour, inequality and struggle’ that could often ensue, and this could be exacerbated when an established dynamic or routine within that was undermined when a different family member joined the household. Since her mother’s death in 1713 to her father’s in 1730, Vere had been the senior female at Lamport Hall and that would have been expected to change with the arrival of her brother and sister-in-law. Vickery suggests that dependant unmarried women often struggled to maintain ‘some measure of control over space and time’ within the household and consequently, ‘all too readily, a house lost the warmth of home, generating old cold discomfort’.[72] The haste with which Vere vacated Lamport Hall in 1730 appeared to indicate that she was not prepared to concede any control over her own space and time or be subordinate to her brother’s wife as, according to Vickery, ‘the spinster and wife were divided by a chasm of status’.[73]

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[69] From Miss Vere Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 12 June 1733, IC/2030, N.A.H.S.
[70] From Miss Vere Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 19 June 1733, IC/2031, N.A.H.S.
[71] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*.
[72] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[73] *Ibid*., p. 193.

Unmarried women, financially independent or not, often faced derision and antipathy.[74] Froide has traced the changing conception of never-married women throughout the early modern period, from their portrayal as young, chaste virgins in the pursuit of marriage in the sixteenth century to charity cases in the seventeenth century and finally as old-maids deserving of contempt and ridicule by the early to mid-eighteenth century.[75] Even when the unmarried woman adhered to the expected role of servile, inferior dependant they were still represented as old-maids to be 'satirized, scorned, and even derided as a menace to English society'.[76] But when they refused to adopt that mantle and sought to create their own, financially independent households, they were deemed a 'problem'.[77] As Vickery states, 'virgins were not expected to enjoy independence' and 'the life of the spinster could be one long tour of kin' whereby they were expected to assume various roles such as 'surrogate wife to a bereaved brother-in-law, foster mother to nieces and nephews, live-in nurse to an aged-parent, housekeeper to a bachelor brother or uncle'.[78] It was little surprise then that Vere settled in Twickenham, a distance of sixty seven miles from Lamport Hall.

Both Vickery and Froide suggest that widows fared better than unmarried women when it came to the 'residential options available to them' following the death of a loved one.[79] Froide argues that the death of a husband allowed a widow to assume 'authority over the house' whilst Vickery suggests that 'widows were fully expected to head their own households' with elite families 'better able to sustain a discrete existence for their widows'.[80] A widow kept her late husband's legal and economic status and as

[74] Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, p. 13.
[75] *Ibid*., p. 181.
[76] *Ibid*., p. 155.
[77] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*, p. 208.
[78] *Ibid*., p. 210.
[79] Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, p. 17.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 18; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England*, p. 208 and p. 219.

such widows were considered to be the most empowered group of women in this period.[81] This study, however, has found that the experiences of two women, both left widowed and childless, belie this argument.

Mary Isham, the wife of Sir Justinian Isham III, whose reluctance to move into Lamport Hall following the death of her father-in-law in 1730 was outlined previously, showed a similar reluctance to leave Lamport when her husband, the fifth Baronet, died suddenly in March 1737 at the age of forty-nine. The Baronetcy was inherited by her brother-in-law Edmund, who moved into Lamport Hall, from London, with his first wife Elizabeth, and became the sixth Baronet. The letters exchanged between the couple at this time revealed that there had been a suspicion that newly widowed Mary could have been pregnant. This however turned out not to be the case, but Sir Edmund had been quick to seek the assurances from Mary's physician. In fact, Sir Justinian had died on the 5 March 1736 and Sir Edmund wrote to Elizabeth on 9 March informing her that 'having met Dr Kimberley on the road coming from my sister, he assured me he did not think there was any reason to imagine that she was with child'.[82] Their correspondence barely mentioned Mary's feelings other than her 'disappointment' at having to leave Lamport. But leave she did, and on 20 March 1736, a mere fifteen days after the sudden death of her husband she left Lamport for the final time. Even Sir Edmund acknowledged the impropriety of her hasty removal when he ensured that his wife's arrival would not coincide with it, he told Elizabeth that 'I wish you would set out on Thursday of that week, for I don't think it proper you should meet my lady on the road'.[83]

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[81] McCormack, *Citizenship and Gender in Britian, 1688-1928,* p. 55.
[82] From Sir Edmund Isham to Lady Elizabeth Isham, 9 March 1736, IC/2548, N.A.H.S.
[83] *Ibid*.

Edmund remained at Lamport until his death in December 1772 at the age of eighty-one. His wife Elizabeth had died in 1748, and whilst the Baronet had remarried, the couple remained childless. On his death, his nephew Justinian, the son of his younger brother Euseby, succeeded the Baronetcy and seat at Lamport. Edmund's second wife Philippa, both widowed and childless, experienced something similar to Mary Isham in that she was expected to vacate her home following her husband's death. There was, however, one main difference between the two women's experiences. Possibly recognising the unseemly speed with which Mary had to leave Lamport after Justinian's death and to prevent something similar happening to his own wife, Edmund made the provision in his will for Philippa to remain at Lamport for a period of three years after his death. She was, he ensured, to 'have the use and occupation of my Capital Mansion House at Lamport together with all the stables, outhouses, farmyard, cowyard' for three years as well as the profits, interests and dividends of 'five thousand pounds capital stock of the Bank of England' for the rest of her life and many items from their home.[84] This was in stark contrast to his brother's will in which Justinian bequeathed Mary the sum of £500 to be paid within six calendar months of his death, the furniture that 'she shall say belonged purely to her', his coach, a set of horses, two saddle horses and 'all the plate that has his or her arms upon it, & wt has his crest & has been exchang'd for new'.[85]

Philippa Isham did remain at Lamport for three years after Edmund's death, but when it came to leaving Lamport she exhibited a similar reluctance to Mary. There was an exchange of correspondence between herself and her late husband's nephew

[84] Prob 11/985/26, Will of Sir Edmund Isham, 3 February 1773.
[85] From Sir Edmund Isham to Lady Elizabeth Isham, 4 March 1737, IC/2550, N.A.H.S.

Justinian, which appeared both business-like and tense. It is not clear whether Philippa wrote it herself as it was written in the third person but it read:

> Lady Isham desires to know if Sr Just^{n} will chuse to reside at the Mansion House at Lamport next Summer & if so, if it will be agreeable to him to rent the land she has, for the remainder of her term.[86]

Sir Justinian, or someone on his behalf, wrote on the reverse:

> As S^{r} J resolved on taking some place in the country next Summer, as thinking it so conducive to the health of his little family, it would certainly be more preferable & convenient to him to reside at Lamport if Ldy Isham chuses, & he would willingly pay the rent of the land for ye remainder of her term & be much obliged to her.[87]

Philippa informed the Baronet that she would leave Lamport and was quick to highlight what she expected to receive from him in terms of rent and recompense for other items:

> As Lady Isham finds Sr Just^{n} desirous of residence in the house at Lamport next Summer she will relinquish it to him, expects he will allow her £120 for the land of wh^{ch} there are 134 acres…and as when she leaves the house there will be several things to be disposed of such as ricks of hay, livestock, some hogsheads of strong beer & wine when Sir Jus^{tn} has consider'd of it desires he will let her know if he will treat with her for it or any part of it.[88]

This did not indicate a particularly warm or close relationship between the two parties, rather it appeared to demonstrate Philippa's expectation for financial recompense on leaving. Her use of the word 'relinquish' in relation to her leaving was also significant, it seemed to imply that Lamport Hall was hers to renounce rather than Justinian's right,

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[86] From Lady Philippa Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 18 September 1774, IC/2109, N.A.H.S.
[87] From Sir Justinian Isham to Lady Philippa Isham, 21 September 1774, IC/2109, N.A.H.S.
[88] From Lady Philippa Isham to Sir Justinian Isham, 29 September 1774, IC/2110, N.A.H.S.

in accordance with his uncle's will, to inherit. This exchange was indicative of another way in which the death of a loved one could create discomfort amongst family members - the sometimes tense and fraught conversations that had to take place following a relative's death.

The Isham family have demonstrated the significant nexus that existed between death, comfort and social status. By viewing the impact of death on different forms of comfort it was possible to view the fragility of sociability, status and rank within elite families. Sir Justinian's infamous and semi-public display of grief impacted his own, and his family's, social comfort, reputation and standing within the community. Vere's sociability and ease within society, in particular, was impacted by the resultant criticism at her failure to undertake expected societal obligations and activities. Yet, death had a wider impact in that it could force the removal of childless widows from the home, seen here in the examples of Mary and Philippa Isham. Indeed, Mary's expulsion from Lamport Hall just fifteen days after her husband's death demonstrated the instability of female rank and status within elite families in particular. Similarly, unmarried daughters, following the death of their fathers, often faced the ignominy of finding themselves without a permanent home and passed around whichever family member required them. Conversely however, an unexpected or sudden elevation of rank, as in the case of Mary Isham when her father-in-law died, caused significant social and emotional discomfort displayed in her nervousness and reluctance to relocate to Lamport.

The ways in which family members lived and died impacted how they were remembered and memorialised after their deaths. This is an area that will be more closely examined later in this chapter when the ways in which death could provide comfort for the bereaved are explored, but embarrassing relatives could create

embarrassing memories for those that they left behind. Sarah Tarlow argues that the late eighteenth century witnessed a change in 'attitudes towards the connection between the living and the dead', changes that meant 'the relationship after death corresponded to the kind of relationship in life'.[89] And Henry French suggests that, although 'ancestry remained very significant', it was those 'remembered, relatively immediate, 'flesh and blood' relatives'' that were the most important to elite families.[90] Memories of recently deceased family members could, therefore, be a source of discomfort. As Stobart suggests, whilst 'reminiscing offered comfort', memories of late relatives did not 'always bring comfort'.[91] The previous two chapters have already highlighted the problems that John Thornton endured throughout his life and the impact that these all had on his family, particularly his brothers. When John died in 1856, the same year as his younger brother Henry, the memories that he stimulated amongst the next generation of Thorntons were not at all fond. In the postscript of a letter written by Reeve Thornton's third son, the Reverend William Thornton, to his cousin Henry Australia Thornton on the death of Henry's father also called Henry, he commented on how their uncle John has been described after his death:

> In poor Uncle John's case, by some misapprehension, as I thought, he was described as brother of T.R.T Esq. instead of second son of the late T. Lee Thornton Esq. It is manifest that a man derives no rank or condition from his brother, under any ordinary circumstances: his position comes from his father. In dear Uncle Henry's case, who had precedence over his elder brother, the matter is still more obvious, that he gains nothing of designation by reference

[89] Sarah Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality,* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999), p. 127.
[90] Henry French, 'The 'remembered family' and dynastic senses of identity among the English gentry c.1600 – 1800, *Historical Research,* 92.257 (2019), pp. 529–546, (p. 530).
[91] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 168.

to him. I trust you will permit me to accompany Edward when he joins you for the purpose of paying the last tribute to our dear relative's memory.[92]

It was interesting that John was referred to as 'poor Uncle John' whereas the recently deceased Henry was 'dear uncle Henry' and despite being younger, Henry had 'precedence' over his elder brother. In his letter William appeared uneasy with the close association that had been made between John and his father Reeve, and his use of the word 'condition' could suggest that he wanted to ensure that John's 'condition' was not attributed to his father and remained disparate from William's immediate family. Henry himself had been ill before his death, indeed William had referred to his uncle's 'state of sorrow & infirmity, in which he had so long and painfully been burdened' in his letter so it wasn't illness itself that was the issue, it was the nature of the illness, which in John's case had often been referred to as insanity.[93] French describes the 'remembered family' as 'figures whose actions continued to resonate within the family' and the embodiment of 'a much more relevant, intrusive, even unavoidable past,' so for William it appeared that his Uncle John represented the worst element of a 'remembered family', one that he preferred to distance himself from.[94] One method that the Isham family appeared to use to assuage their uneasy memories of 'remembered family' members was to place their portraits in rooms that were barely used. According to Francis Redpath in her 2002 article entitled *The Ladies of Lamport* the portrait of Mary Isham, whose reluctance to reside in Lamport Hall with her husband Justinian was discussed earlier in this chapter and who Redpath describes as someone 'who did

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[92] From Reverend William Thornton to Mr Henry Australia Thornton, 28 February 1856, TH1684, N.A.H.S.

[93] *Ibid*.

[94] French, 'The 'remembered family' and dynastic senses of identity among the English gentry c.1600–1800, p. 540 and p. 546.

not fit into the close-knit family circle', was apparently 'marooned in an upstairs dressing room'.[95]

Death, therefore, significantly impacted the comfort of not only bereaved survivors but also their loved ones and the subsequent generations who were still able to recall their 'remembered family'.[96] The death of a loved one could create a deep sense of shock and grief and the fallout from it reverberated widely and could lead to swift changes in domestic and household arrangements, social status and financial security for family members. It could also create shame and embarrassment and effect social obligations, rituals and expectations.

Death and Comfort

The impact of death on family members was considerable and yet it also provided an opportunity for the bereaved to find comfort or be offered it, by others, in the form of consolation. Since at least the thirteenth century the words comfort and consolation have been closely connected, with one used as the definition of the other.[97] Crowley suggests that the eighteenth century saw comfort and 'its centuries-old reference' to moral and emotional support (he does not use the word consolation) assume 'a new physical emphasis' yet this study has found that consolation continued to be a significant aspect of death and dying at this time.[98] Stobart, who does use the term consolation, also describes it as the 'older-established' meaning of comfort which again undermines its importance to those who sought or offered it during times of distress.[99] The next section will demonstrate how the families found comfort even

[95] Redpath 'The Ladies of Lamport', p. 8.
[96] French 'The 'remembered family' and dynastic senses of identity among the English gentry c.1600–1800, p. 529.
[97] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language,* vol I, p. 198; vol I, p. 220.
[98] Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America*, p. 142.
[99] Stobart, *Comfort in the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, p. 262.

during some of their darkest moments. In 1830, when Frances Stackhouse Acton's daughter died, her sister Charlotte, on hearing the sad news, wrote, 'as for attempting to offer you comfort, I will not do it for it must be worse than useless'.[100] Yet Frances did find comfort. In a letter to her parents informing them of the death of their granddaughter she wrote that, 'I am sure she will be happy, and I think I love her too well, not to think more of her blessed exchange (for she has suffered much) than of my own loss'.[101] Her daughter's death marked the termination of her suffering and pain, and Frances found comfort in that, even when the expectation was that finding comfort was 'worse than useless'.[102]

The end of a loved one's suffering was a significant comforter to bereaved family members. In June 1808, Newton Barton's sudden death from drowning in the sea at Worthing, aged forty-seven, prompted an outpouring of feeling in a series of letters sent to Mary Barton. Mary, along with Newton's stepfather, was the closest living relative he had after the deaths of his brother John in 1802 and his mother in 1804 so it was unsurprising that Mary was the focus for it. But, whilst they acknowledged their own grief at the loss of 'poor dear Newton' and being 'deeply affected' by his passing, the scribes of the letters in every instance reflected on the fact that they considered his death a blessing.[103] Frances told Mary that Newton's 'friendship, affection & most pleasant society' was 'uppermost' in her mind and that she could 'feel the loss of a brother in dear Newton', but she also wrote that the 'poor fellow' was 'never happy. God almighty grant the leaving this world may have been a blessed

[100] Copy of a letter from Lady Charlotte Rouse Boughton to Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton, September 1830, OR2318/3d, B.A.
[101] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827 – 1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.
[102] Copy of a letter from Lady Charlotte Rouse Boughton to Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton, September 1830, OR2318/3d, B.A.
[103] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 08 June 1808, YO552(xiii), N.A.H.S.

exchange to him'.[104] Similarly, both of Mary's brothers implied that Newton had enjoyed a less than easy life, Allen described it as 'painful' whilst John, wrote that they had 'little reason to be sorry on Newton's own accounts'.[105] These letters may have been the siblings' own way of comforting their sister but the state of Newtons' life, at its conclusion, had also been acknowledged by another of his cousin's and a relative of the Youngs, so it seemed that there were other members of the wider kin group who were also aware of it and who also considered 'dear Newton's death' 'a blessing'.[106] In another of Frances' letters it was apparent that Newton had struggled with his physical and mental health for a while. She recognised that Mary 'grieved' but reminded her sister that 'we must think poor Newton's state, was such that he never could have been happy & his want of bodily health & his nervous mind would have made him daily more wretched & to have seen him would have been grievous sorrow'.[107] Whilst all the family members lamented and grieved at Newton's demise, they all, without exception, despite the suddenness of it and the apparent accidental nature of it, appeared comforted by the fact that his pain and his suffering was now at an end. Kellehear asserts that 'all sudden death without warning was 'bad'' but there seemed to have been little or no concern amongst his closest friends and relatives that Newton had experienced a 'bad death'.[108] Rather, it appeared that the comfort they drew from knowing he was no longer suffering may have superseded any concern that his drowning had 'breached notions of good death'.[109]

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[104] *Ibid*.
[105] Mr Allen Edward Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 23 June 1808, YO552(ii), N.A.H.S; From Mr John Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 13 June 1808, YO552(xi), N.A.H.S.
[106] From Mr J.S. Ekins to Mrs Mary Barton, 19 June 1808, YO552(i), N.A.H.S.
[107] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Sunday June 1808, YO552(vi), N.A.H.S.
[108] Kellehear, *A Social History of Dying*, p. 92.
[109] Strange, 'Death', p. 358.

This is not to suggest that the concept of a 'good death' was not important to the Young family. In 1791, in a letter to Mary, Frances Young described how their brother Allen had become gravely ill and 'thought himself very near his end'.[110] Frances, who was 'half distracted' during this episode explained how she found comfort in Allen's composed behaviour at what they both thought was his impending death. She told Mary that 'to think of this scene now is a comfort to me & I am sure all who were with him ought to be better for such an example'.[111] Allen's 'example' allayed any fears surrounding death that Frances had, for when she reflected on the traumatic night, which saw an eventual improvement in her brother's condition, she wrote that she was now 'easy, happy & quite well'.[112] Frances described how on entering his bed chamber, her brother 'beg'd I would send for John & for Gibbon'.[113] Gibbon was a physician, who later 'cuped him & put a blister on his back in a few hours after he assur'd me there was not the danger there appear'd'.[114] John Young was Allen's only brother so it was not surprising that he asked Frances to send for him when he thought he was close to death but John was also a clergyman so was it important for Allen to have him there in that capacity too? Allen was certainly keen to ensure that both his material and spiritual concerns were addressed. This was revealed when Frances told Mary that Allen begged for his 'prayer book' so that they could 'read the prayers together' but would then 'think of some necessary thing to direct about as to his affairs'.[115] Allen appeared to exhibit the characteristics of a person seeking a good death, something which Strange describes as 'a desire to save one's soul but, also, to place financial and

[110] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 22 June 1791, YO550(ii), N.A.H.S.
[111] *Ibid*.
[112] *Ibid*.
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] *Ibid*.
[115] *Ibid*.

domestic affairs in order'.[116] Allen asked Frances for his prayer book in order for them to read it together, he requested that his brother be sent for, most likely to ensure that his business arrangements were dealt with but also to ensure spiritual preparedness at the time of death. This supports Strange's argument that the notions of good and bad deaths continued beyond the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth rather than Houlbrooke's who suggested that they had 'largely broken down' by 1750 and demonstrates how studies of comfort can contribute to the existing debates surrounding death.[117]

Faith, therefore, seemed to still have a place at the death bed but its significance can be seen to continue well after the decease of a loved one, with spiritual and religious comfort playing a crucial role in the aftermath. Offering spiritual comfort to a bereaved relative was an important undertaking. Charlotte Rouse Broughton, Frances Stackhouse Acton's sister who conceded that she would be unable to comfort her sister on the death of her daughter, nevertheless closed her letter with 'God bless and comfort you', the expectation being that Frances would yet be able to find religious comfort if nothing else.[118] Indeed, there was a widespread expectation amongst the families examined in this study, that a significant source of comfort following the death of a loved one would be their faith and that 'earthly consolations' would be subordinate to that.[119] In September 1796, two months after the death of her father, Frances Young suffered a further loss when her betrothed, the Reverend James Benamore, died following a short illness. In a letter written by one of Frances' oldest friends it was acknowledged that offering her comfort was futile, 'how very sincerely do I feel for you! in your present

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[116] Strange, 'Death', p. 357.
[117] *Ibid*., p. 356; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750,* p. 219.
[118] Copy of a letter from Lady Charlotte Rouse Boughton to Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton, September 1830, OR2318/3d, B.A.
[119] From Mrs Gage to Miss Frances Young, 18 December 1796, YO544(xiv), N.A.H.S.

distress, whose consolation can I give? Too well I know, I can give you none![120] And yet several letters written to Frances in the weeks and months following his death all attempted to comfort her with the reason for her loss. In one, she was told that she had suffered 'such particular tryals' because she was a 'particular favourite of heaven'; that the 'perfect happiness' that she had found with the Reverend had come to an end to prevent her from 'being too much attached to the creature' and that she 'may wholly give yourself up to the creator'.[121] In another, a friend advised that it 'certainly is all intended for the best', although she did acknowledge Benamore's death as 'a dark providence'.[122] The message in these two letters, and the mechanism for comforting Frances, was that James' death was providential. However, the first letter almost assured Frances that she was favoured by God, that she suffered because she was a good Christian and because of that she was more able to bear the trials and tribulations that frequently afflicted her. There was also the intimation that one should not expect to find perfect earthly happiness, as Frances appeared to have done albeit briefly, rather it would be found in the reward of 'eternal peace and tranquillity in heaven'.[123] Frances was also offered religious comfort in the form of suggested texts or hymns. On one occasion she was asked if she was 'acquainted with Doddridge's hymns? They are to me one of the finest collections we have particularly to an afflicted mind'.[124] The Doddridge to whom the scribe referred was the 'well-known, non-conformist minister, Philip Doddridge'.[125] The work and influence of this prolific hymn writer, who set up

[120] From Mrs F.D. Hoare to Miss Frances Young, 7 September 1796, YO544(viii), N.A.H.S.
[121] From Mrs Stevens to Miss Frances Young, 10 September 1796, YO544(ix), N.A.H.S.
[122] From Mrs E. Best to Miss Frances Young, 26 September 1796, YO544(xi), N.A.H.S.
[123] Alexandra Walsham, 'The Happiness of Suffering Adversity, Providence and Agency in Early Modern England', in *Suffering and Happiness in England 1550 – 1850: Narratives and Representations: A Collection to honour Paul Slack*, ed. by Michael J. Braddick and Joanna Innes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 45-64, (p. 45).
[124] From Mrs Stevens to Miss Frances Young, 10 September 1796, YO544(ix), N.A.H.S.
[125] Katie Barclay, 'Grief, Faith and Eighteenth-Century Childhood: The Doddridges of Northampton' in *Death, Emotion and Childhood in Premodern Europe* ed. by Katie Barclay, Kimberley Reynolds and Ciara Rawnsley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 173 – 9, (p. 174).

a ministry in Northampton in the mid eighteenth-century, is examined by Katie Barclay who highlights his attitude towards grief and the significance of providing spiritual comfort to those affected by death.[126] The form that this type of comfort took, was that the initial feelings of loss and grief experienced at the time of death of a loved one was soon transformed into the joy at the prospect of their spiritual 'salvation'.[127] In a letter written to his friend and fellow minister David Some in October 1723 on the death of Some's brother, Doddridge wrote:

> *I sincerely condole with you upon that melancholy providence…consider, my dear brother, that you have an interest in an Almighty friend. A friend whom you can never lose, and support you when all earthly comforts forsake you…Let us learn not to amuse ourselves with the fond expectation of any certain happiness in this lower world, since God can so suddenly remove the dearest of our enjoyments and send us away.*[128]

The tone of the letters written to Frances echo that of Doddridge's to Some and the way that comfort was offered to the grieving appeared very similar. Frances once wrote to her sister Mary of the spiritual comfort that she found following the death of their elderly aunt in 1793. She described her aunt's final 'sad scenes' with the following caveat:

> Indeed my dearest sister the best were most consolatory & we have only to bless God for so mercilessly taking our dear and beloved Aunt from pain & sorrow to perfect happiness…..Dear John came to us & was the greatest possible comfort you may believe.[129]

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[126] *Ibid*.
[127] *Ibid*.
[128] John Doddridge Humphreys, ed., The Correspondence and Diary of Philip Doddridge, D.D. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829), 1: 282-283, Philip Doddridge to David Some, 22 October 1723.
[129] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 20 March 1793, YO1598, N.A.H.S.

John, of course, was both a brother and a clergyman therefore unsurprising that he returned to Orlingbury to administer comfort to the rest of family. Frances described her aunt's final few hours in which she said she was 'so sweet & quiet in her countenance so does me good to behold' but continued to outline how she herself was able to find comfort:

> Saturday is to be the funeral I now go into her room three or four times a day, I shall feel strange indeed when I must see her no more, but by God's blessing we shall all meet again. One never knows the just force of that so forcibly as when one beholds such scenes.[130]

Frances was comforted by her faith and assured both by the knowledge that God had ended her aunt's suffering and by her own expectation that she would, one day, be reunited with her. The tone of these letters and the words employed within them do not suggest there was a reluctance, amongst these family members at least, to believe in the providential power of God. Indeed, Frances referred to it as a 'force' in her letter to Mary.

Frances embraced the Christian narrative, but when her grief was juxtaposed with that of Sir Justinian Isham, there was a stark contrast. When Eusby Isham described his father's reaction as 'immoderate', he perhaps meant that his father's outwardly and publicly displayed grief had not adhered to the emotional tenets that Christianity promoted and prescribed. Was this another reason why both Eusby and Vere both appeared uncomfortable with their father's reaction?

Frances had described how her aunt's 'sweet & quiet' 'countenance' in her final hours afforded her much comfort in the ensuing days following her death.[131] The ways

[130] *Ibid*.
[131] *Ibid*.

in which the dying conducted themselves provided much comfort to loved ones, not just at the time of their death, but in the following days, months and years they also helped to shape the memory of the deceased, which in turn was able to provide comfort. During Frances' own terminal illness in 1813 there were many letters which detailed her cheerful and stoic manner in the last few months of her life, indeed some of them have been touched upon in the previous chapters, but those grieving seemed to bestow an almost angelic quality upon her. In a letter written to Frances' sister a month before her death, her lifelong friend Pamela wrote:

> Yesterday William Robinson administered the sacrament to Fanny, my father & mother Blencowe & myself - you may figure yourself more easily than I can describe all we felt – the saint-like consolation it seemed to bring to your sister will I trust be present to me to the latest hour of my life. I fear I distress you but still what am I to do – I cannot suppress all these circumstances that if they distress on the first relation of them will I trust bring comfort to those who love her as you do, on the further contemplation of them.[132]

Here, Pamela implied that recollecting Frances' 'saint-like' experience would provide comfort to both her and Mary in the days following her inevitable and untimely death.[133] Frances was not the only dying or deceased family member to be portrayed as a saintly figure. In the autumn of 1794, when young Harriet Orlebar died at the age of twenty-two, her Aunt Mary, who spent her final days with her, described how she too had received the sacrament. She did so, according to Mary, 'with the perfect composure and devotion of a mind superior to Humanity'.[134] Following her death, the grieving aunt also described Harriet as 'repleat with every virtue that could adorn Human nature'.[135]

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[132] From Mrs Pamela Blencowe to Mrs Mary Barton, 22 November 1813, YO1491, N.A.H.S.
[133] *Ibid*.
[134] Journal of Miss Mary Orlebar, September to October 1794, OR2071/413, B.A.
[135] *Ibid*.

These two descriptions, which seemed to canonise Harriet, portrayed her in such a virtuous, almost perfect way in order for her aunt to find some comfort from her death. In the days leading up to her niece's funeral, Mary continued to find comfort, not just in the memory of Harriet's goodness and virtue but in viewing her corpse. She wrote how she, along with Harriet's grandmother Mrs Cuthbert, viewed Harriet 'laid in an handsome coffin, her countenance still pleasing; as it was in life'.[136] They visited the young woman's body 'two or three times every day' and found 'melancholy satisfaction' in these visits.[137] Mary's use of the word 'satisfaction' demonstrated how they found comfort from sitting with Harriet in the days following her death, as this word, as discussed in the introduction of this thesis, was a synonym for comfort.[138] Paradoxically, however, when she paired it with the word 'melancholy', she showed the underlying discomfort that she also felt at her niece's passing. Again, as discussed previously, 'melancholy' was closely associated with discomfort and so her 'melancholy satisfaction' revealed this oft complex relationship between comfort and discomfort, and the discord that could characterise the connection between the two.[139] Despite Mary describing this period that she spent with Harriet, both alive and dead, as 'painful' she did manage to find comfort in the days and months following her death. She found 'melancholy pleasure', she wrote in a letter to her sister Constantia, from the memories that she had of this time, enabled by both her memorialising of Harriet and spending time with her corpse, which she described as 'so truly placid and pleasing'.[140] Frances Stackhouse Acton remembered her daughter in a similar fashion. Following her death in 1830 at the age of eighteen, Frances documented the last three years of her

[136] *Ibid*.
[137] *Ibid*.
[138] *Ibid*.
[139] *Ibid*.
[140] From Miss Mary Orlebar to Miss Constantia Orlebar, 19 October 1794, OR2071/418, B.A.

daughter's life, and her memoir of this period is full of her own memories of her daughter's virtues. Her 'greatest earthly delight' as she described Fanny was 'kind & affectionate' who delighted everyone with her 'chearfulness, patience and thankfulness'.[141] Frances, however, also almost eulogised Fanny when she wrote that 'her simple, unaffected manners were so evidently the index of a mind "pure from all stains save that of earthly clay", that no one saw her without feeling kindly towards her'.[142] All three women, Frances Young, Harriet Orlebar and Fanny Stackhouse Acton were all remembered in such a way by their grieving loved ones, that the memories of their qualities themselves provided comfort, not just in the immediate aftermath of their deaths but in the months and years after. Indeed, Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton even recognised that the comfort of memory would be crucial for her going forwards. In August 1830, two months before her daughter's death she started to keep a record of some of the phrases and words that her daughter said to her, from which she would take comfort after her death. She felt sure, she wrote, that 'such proofs of the poor little soul's patience and affection' would afford her much 'happiness…for the future'.[143]

Such an act of remembrance after her death would, according to Joanne Begiato, help to revivify the memory of her daughter and provide Frances with much needed consolation.[144] The comfort of the memory of a loved one was often further consolidated by keeping close the objects that had previously belonged to the deceased. Such souvenirs 'personalised memory and recuperated the past' and acted as a 'vehicle

[141] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.
[142] *Ibid*.
[143] *Ibid*.
[144] Joanne Begiato, 'Selfhood and 'Nostalgia': Sensory and Material Memories of the Childhood Home in Late Georgian Britain', *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42.2 (2019), 229-246, (p. 230).

for remembrance'[145] Freya Gowrley describes such objects as 'superadded'.[146] These were tokens that had 'come to be imbued with emotive associations and functions at some point during its biography'. Following the death of a loved one, their function was to enable the bereaved to seek comfort in them something which Gowrley suggests they had the capacity to do.[147] In Frances Stackhouse Acton's case, one such 'superadded' object was a collection of her daughter's writings. At the start of her memoir, she described how she had been 'very fond of' and had 'several books filled with selections of her favourite passages most of which were made during her tedious confinement' which Frances found to be a great source of comfort. She wrote that 'it's now touching, though consoling to me, to know that many of her extracts have reference to the bliss of the "early dead"'.[148] These collections were a great source of solace for Frances who described them as a 'treasury of comfort'.[149] It also appeared that Frances retained a number of items that had belonged, not only to her daughter but also to her husband who had died in 1835. When Frances herself died in 1881 her niece Frederica Orlebar, along with her sisters Catty, Frances and May, visited Acton Hall in order to clear the house. On a single sheet of paper she documented how her sisters Catty and Frances 'found so many little sacred treasures, the sheets her husband had died on, little things of all kinds, so carefully packed up, the daughter's (I think) bassinette sheets - all sacred treasures felt to be very precious – things in that cupd were all the little girls baby clothes, such dear old fashioned little things'.[150] Retaining 'a box or a room of treasures' was, according to Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, Laura King and Anna Woodham,

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[145] Susan M. Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America,* (London: Ithaca, 2004), p. 14 and p. 6.
[146] Freya Gowrley, *Domestic Space in Britain, 1750 – 1840: Materiality, Sociability and Emotion,* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), p. 6.
[147] *Ibid*.
[148] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.
[149] *Ibid*.
[150] Single sheet by Mrs Frederica Orlebar, 1881, OR2318/3e, B.A.

an important mechanism for finding 'a sense of contentment or ease in later life'.[151] Whilst we cannot know if Frances was able to find this in her advanced years, the very existence of this small, locked cupboard of 'sacred treasures', the contents of which had been kept for decades, suggests that they provoked some kind of emotional response in her.[152] Nigel Llewellyn suggests that artefacts of mourning were 'designed to release a palliative emotional response', and even though these everyday items were not specifically mourning artefacts, to have been kept for so long they must have elicited some feelings in Frances; hopefully soothing and consolatory ones.[153]

These tokens kept by the bereaved would provide a level of comfort in the ensuing weeks, months and years ahead. However, comfort could also be found when a loved one bequeathed a possession in their will. Newton Barton's will, made just six days before he drowned on 29 May 1808, stated the following:

> I now not therefore nominate the family of John Young except leave him the copy of my brother's picture. I beg that Mrs Barton will give Allen Young of Orlingbury some of my best books & Amelia his wife yr two large landscape vistas in Italy…… I appoint Mr Hatsell and Mrs Barton my Exors I desire they will make different presents of the pictures and books to my friend.[154]

The significance of what Newton bequeathed to them was apparent in the letters written by the Young siblings to their sister Mary, an executor of his will. What was common in all three was that they appreciated being remembered by him. In Allen's letter he described his and his wife's response:

[151] Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, Laura King and Anna Woodham, 'The Ties that Bind: Materiality, Identity, and the Life Course in the 'Things' Families Keep', *Journal of Family History*, 43.2 (2018), pp. 157-176, (p. 169).
[152] Single sheet by Mrs Frederica Orlebar, 1881, OR2318/3e, B.A.
[153] Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual C. 1500–1800,* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), p. 85.
[154] Prob 11/1480/258, Will of Charles William Newton Barton, 22 June 1808.

> Amelia will not fail duly to appreciate the elegant remembrance made to her and I shall be at no loss to value mine. How much of character is discovered in the latest act of his painful life.[155]

Whilst John wrote:

> I am much obliged to you for the copy of poor Newton's will, which is so decisive of love & regard for you & full of consideration & kindness for myself & my children which he always professed & has proved…..The picture intended for me I shall have a great value for & will beg you to send it as soon as it can be properly packed & forwarded to Thorpe – Newton's remembrance of John and Mary is most gratifying to me.[156]

Similarly, Frances said:

> What expressions can I use, to give you the least idea of my feelings when I read that wonderful last letter of dearest Newton's love, affection and kindness for all his friends. Surely, no one but himself could have expres'd by words & actions so fully his great kindness affection delicacy & judgement for my own I have of his bounty I am most grateful & feel the being noticed in the manner he has noticed me as the greatest possible proof of his sincere regard…..his remembrance of all his friends might gratify all.[157]

Frances was left £200 of stock in Newton's will, a gesture that was much appreciated by Frances, but it was his generosity to all his family and friends that pleased Frances the most. It was, she said, proof of his regard for them all and it was that which appeared to be of the greatest consolation to her. The comfort that was found in the contents of Newton's will was demonstrated by the Young family's use of words such as

[155] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 23 June 1808, YO552(ii), N.A.H.S.
[156] From Reverend John Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 20 June 1808, YO552(viii), N.A.H.S.
[157] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Sunday June 1808, YO552(vi), N.A.H.S.

‘appreciate’, ‘value’, ‘gratify’ and ‘grateful’ to describe how they felt at being remembered by Newton.

Of course, fiscal bequeathments not only prompted emotional comfort for those who inherited them, but they could also provide financial comfort. As well as Frances, Newton also left £200 worth of stock to two other unmarried cousins, Ann and Susan Ekins, which would have provided both with much needed financial security. The annuity that Sir Justinian Isham left to his daughter Vere, on his death, gave her financial independence which meant that she was able to live independently from the Isham family, away from Lamport and set up her own household in Twickenham. The death of a wealthy relative, however, did not always produce an emotional response as it did in the case of the Young family. Often financial considerations were uppermost in the minds of those who were most likely to inherit and the comfort that death in these instances engendered was largely monetary. When his maternal grandfather Joseph Cuthbert died in 1799, Richard Orlebar wrote to his father and detailed the impact that the gentleman’s death would have on him and his own circumstances:

> Considering his age & infirmities you must think me insincere were I to declare much great grief and condolement. I will only say that as I firmly believe he wished me happiness in this world so I will most sincerely pray requescat in pace & inveriat felicitude in the other. I answered my cousin’s letter by the next post. He merely gave me the outlines of the will or rather what concerned me and my sisters. I am very happy that they are so well provided for. The interest of £3000 to a batchelor is a very handsome legacy.[158]

The only comfort that Richard appeared to derive from his grandfather’s death was that which would benefit him both monetarily and socially. Indeed, Mr Cuthbert’s last will

[158] Mr Richard Orlebar to Mr Richard Orlebar, 17 March 1799, OR2071/399, B.A.

and testament, written in August 1798, seven months before he died, indicated that Richard was indebted to his grandfather for the sum of £2000 therefore his conduct towards him, and in general, may have been questionable. Interestingly, towards the end of the will, which was particularly generous to Mr Cuthbert's other grandson Edward, it stated that should any of the children of his late daughter, Elizabeth Orlebar, undertake to prevent or deprive Edward Cuthbert from receiving the Rectory of Bulvan they would 'forfeit and be cut off from the benefit of any legacy' outlined in his will.[159] It seemed, therefore, that there was an expectation by Joseph Cuthbert that one of his other grandchildren may have been tempted to contest the will. As the only three surviving Orlebar grandchildren were Richard and his sister's Anne and Charlotte, it was most likely that his grandfather had referred to his grandson. The nature of this relationship therefore was the likely reason for the almost mercenary way in which Richard wrote about his grandfather following his death.

Even when there was no evidence of divided familial relationships, the potential fiscal benefits of death were often pre-emptively discussed. In March 1825, Walter Shirley detailed in a letter to his father the Reverend Walter Shirley the prospects of their family's future financial comfort:

> You will by this time have received my account of the family settlements, which are still more satisfactory than I mentioned, for though Ld Ferrers did not mention the circumstances, and we had therefore not talk of it at present, I discovered from Mr Shirley that the next presentation to both the family livings is settled upon us, so that we shall be perfectly independent of whoever may be at the head of the family.[160]

[159] Prob 11/1320/120, Will of Reverend Joseph Cuthbert, 11 March 1799.
[160] Mr Walter Augustus Shirley to Reverend Walter Shirley, 1 March 1825, 22D64\29, R.O.L.L.R.

The relief at their future financial independence was almost tangible in Walter's letter, seen here in the phrase 'more satisfactory' so it was important not to understate the import of financial comfort.

On occasion, both social and financial comfort could be the primary drivers for how bequeathments were distributed between family members. Mrs Hannah Rye was compelled to consider which of her offspring needed pecuniary assistance the most. Her will revealed that she left the majority of her limited assets to her son Peter and her unmarried daughter Jane. Anne was left a case of cutlery, bed quilts and a hundred pounds of stock, Joseph was bequeathed seventy pounds and for Robert, the will released him of 'all arrears that shall be owed to him or from him' at the time of her death and a forbiddance that her executors 'make on him any demands' on her account.[161] A letter sent to all her children explained the reasons for her decision:

> Had I been possessed of a largess than what I have, and more of my younger children better provided for one than the other, I should then have given everything in equal division amongst them. To those that want most, I think justice demands I should do what I have done.[162]

Hannah seemed to recognise the importance of both financial and social comfort. She acknowledged the unstable economic and social position of her unmarried daughter Jane and the volatility of her youngest son Peter's financial condition. Anne was married so Hannah would have assumed she would have been supported by her husband whilst Joseph and Robert, who were both clergymen, were both more financially stable than their siblings. Hannah, therefore, did her utmost to improve the financial comfort of those children who were most financially and socially precarious after her death.

[161] Prob 11/1262/212, Will of Mrs Hannah Rye, 19 June 1795.
[162] From Mrs Hannah Rye to Mr. Robert Rye, Mr. Joseph Rye, Mrs Anne Barwell, Miss Jane Rye and Lieutenant Peter Rye, October 1792, X7246\111, N.A.H.S.

To describe the comfort that could be derived from death is not to minimise the grief itself that could accompany it, however, Katie Barclay suggests that the 'emotional and spiritual struggle' of the bereaved could be mitigated by their sharing of it with each other in an exchange of letters.[163] This she asserts acts as a 'mechanism to perform and console their grief'. The first chapter of this thesis details the ways in which letters could provide comfort for both the recipient and the scribe but Barclay goes further, suggesting that writing about grief and shared experiences 'provided an opportunity for sympathetic engagement' which resulted in 'consolation to both writer and reader, tying both together in the process of grief work'.[164] This 'sympathetic model of communication' that Barclay describes was very much in evidence when the Young family discussed the death of Newton Barton.[165] The tone of each letter, written separately by each of the siblings to their eldest sister Mary was very similar. They all expressed their own intimate feelings of the loss to her but also recognised her sorrow and reflected on this in their correspondence. Frances acknowledged Mary's grief when she wrote that 'our own affection for him was great & sincere but when we think my loved sister of your feelings our own ought not to be remembered'.[166] John too considered Newton's death a 'great misfortune' but like his sister recognised 'the irreparable loss of Newton's society and friendship' to Mary.[167] And finally Allen wrote, 'I have most sincerely shared in your grief my dear sister'.[168] This 'collective grieving', as termed by Barclay, facilitated 'consolatory responses' within the letter

[163] Barclay, 'Grief, Faith and Eighteenth-Century Childhood: The Doddridges of Northampton', p. 174.
[164] *Ibid*., pp 180-181.
[165] *Ibid*., p. 180.
[166] From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 8 June 1808, YO552(xiii), N.A.H.S.
[167] From Mr John Young and Mrs Mary Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 13 June 1808, YO552(xi), N.A.H.S.
[168] From Mr Allen Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 23 June 1808, YO552(ii), N.A.H.S.

exchanges, which in turn, provided some comfort to the grieving siblings after the death of their beloved cousin and friend. [169]

Another way in which family and friends tried to comfort the grieving was to create what this study calls a scale of grief, which was a mechanism by which differing levels and types of grief could be compared. If someone had already dealt with unimaginable grief, any subsequent that they should encounter would be easier to bear. Following Newton's death, both Frances and her sister-in-law compared the grief that Mary felt at losing Newton to the grief that she had endured following the death of her husband John just six years earlier. Both letters offered comfort by suggesting to Mary that she had been through much worse grief previously and so, this time, she would undoubtedly deal with her current feelings much easier. Mary Young wrote 'I trust my dear Sister that you will be supported thru your present trials. You have been on former more afflicting circumstances' whilst Frances reminded her sister that 'you had a more severe affliction to encounter'.[170] Mary's response to these offerings of comfort is unknown, however, Frances Stackhouse Acton, in her memoir, referred to the impact that her brother's death had compared to that of her daughter's. In November 1827 at the age of thirty-one, Thomas Knight was killed in a shooting accident at the family home near Ludlow, Shropshire. Frances described this as follows:

> In November of that year my poor brother's death was an overwhelming blow to us all: and to me I doubt whether it did not equal in intensity of suffering that which has deprived me of my child: because it was without some of the consolations that have so signally attended this bereavement.[171]

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[169] Barclay, 'Grief, Faith and Eighteenth-Century Childhood: The Doddridges of Northampton in Death, Emotion and Childhood in Premodern Europe', p. 176.

[170] From Mrs Mary Young to Mrs Mary Barton, 14 June 1808, YO552(xi), N.A.H.S; From Miss Frances Young to Mrs Mary Barton, Sunday June 1808, YO552(vi), N.A.H.S.

[171] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.

Frances described that the grief and suffering that she experienced following Thomas' death, almost equalled that after her daughter's. Frances derived much comfort from knowing that she had done her utmost to alleviate her daughter's pain and discomfort and the suddenness and nature of her brother's death meant that this had been impossible. And whilst not identical to Mary Barton's circumstances, Frances' demonstrated that death could create differing levels of grief, a scale as it were, dependant on previous experience with death and grief and the level of comfort that could be derived from it.

This chapter does not intend to diminish, in any way, the grief and sorrow that family members could feel at the death of a loved one; it merely hopes to highlight the impact that it had on their comfort and to demonstrate that glimpses of solace and consolation could be found even in the darkest and most desperate of moments that followed it. As the first half of the chapter highlighted, the impact of death on comfort was overarching. It not only created grief and sorrow for the bereaved but the sense of loss that it engendered affected the comfort of family members, as we saw in the case of the death of Elizabeth Isham in 1713 and its effects on her daughter Vere. The death of a husband or brother could mean the loss of a home for a childless widow or an unmarried daughter or sister. In 1737, Mary Isham had just fifteen days between her husband dying and her vacating Lamport Hall and Vere Isham left Lamport for Twickenham soon after her father's death in 1730. And conversely, inheriting a new home could also lead to a disturbance in domestic and social comfort as in the example of Mary Isham in 1730 and her reluctance to make Lamport her home. All these examples also demonstrated, however, the fragility and instability of comfort, particularly for the women of these elite families and how it was threatened by death.

It was possible, however, to find comfort in the aftermath of the death of a loved one as the latter section of this chapter has demonstrated. Witnessing the end of a loved one's terminal illness or the cessation of pain and suffering was a powerful comforter for bereaved family members, as was their unwavering faith that they would one day soon meet their beloved again. Indeed, in the letters of the bereaved examined there appeared to be little evidence of the increasing secularisation of death. The comfort that memories and possessions also provided was not insignificant, with Frances Stackhouse Acton describing her daughter's notebooks as a 'treasury of comfort'; this showed the value of seemingly unremarkable tokens as sources of great consolation.[172] The relationship between comfort and death was, therefore, a complicated one. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, it was a crucial one too. The impact of death on comfort was considerable and yet even during the darkest of moments there often appeared a longing and a need for comfort. It was, therefore, not only an intrinsic part of elite life but of death too.

[172] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.

Conclusion

According to Matt Haig, 'history can be a comfort', that by uncovering 'human stories of the past…a kind of strength' can be found.[1] He suggests that if people engaged with the experiences of those from the past and discovered what they had endured or accomplished then, as a consequence, they could be bolstered to face their own. And whilst the purpose of Haig's book is to provide or suggest ways of finding comfort, his observation interestingly shares some parallels with this study. Haig highlights the connection between comfort and experience and the positive impact that engaging with different people and their different life experiences can have. And whilst this thesis considers how life events interacted with the comfort of family members, it also demonstrates the crucial connection between the two. Comfort and life experiences were and are inextricably linked.

The main objective of this thesis was to demonstrate that comfort was a fundamental feature of elite lives in the long eighteenth century. It aimed to show that comfort, in its many different guises, permeated and penetrated some of the most important aspects of family and social life as well as highlighting how comfort itself was shaped by these life events. Just as importantly this study hoped to reveal that an elite life did not necessarily or inevitably mean that comfort was assured. It was fragile and vulnerable to the impact of everyday occurrences as well as familial and societal relationships and often it required effort, compromise and negotiation. It was, therefore, precious and valued by those who found it and desired and sought by those who did not. So, when Frances Stackhouse Acton described the small notebook, into which her late daughter had inscribed a few of her favourite passages, as a 'treasury of comfort'

[1] Haig, *The Comfort Book,* p. 161.

she had not just referred to its value to her, she also revealed the wider significance and importance of comfort overall.[2]

This significance of comfort was demonstrated throughout this thesis in a number of ways. The family correspondence revealed regular use of both the word comfort and its synonyms. Whilst letter-writing manuals included instructions on how to compose a letter of comfort, those letters examined as part of this study did not suggest that the inclusion of comfort was either a formulaic prescription or an epistolic expectation. Rather, letter writers offered comfort to family members where they could because they wanted to and not because they were obliged to, thus demonstrating a recognition that comfort was considered both a fundamental and important element in their lives. Yet, the language of comfort could also be deployed as a means of appealing to family members, to incentivise them as it were, to behave or act in a particular manner. This study argues that by using it as an emotional economy, family members displayed just how important comfort, as a concept, was to them. For an emotional economy to be successfully utilised within a community, all members must have a collective understanding and appreciation for what was being negotiated or influenced and so comfort must have seemed an attractive or desired option for it to have been employed so frequently as a means of persuasion or method of inducement.[3]

Another way in which this study has demonstrated the importance of comfort is in the breadth of subjects that are covered. The areas of family, sociability, illness and death, a broad scope for analysis, represented some of the key aspects of elite life most frequently discussed within the family letters. All were, in turn, associated with comfort, and as a consequence make up four out of the five chapters in this thesis. This

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[2] Loose stitched volume of Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the last illness and death of her daughter, 1827–1830, OR2318/3c, B.A.R.S.

[3] Barton, "Dearly Beloved Relations'? A Study of Elite Family Emotions in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Northamptonshire', p. 57.

itself demonstrates the way in which comfort (and its obverse, discomfort) pervaded and predominated elite life, but what these four chapters do is to highlight the myriad of ways in which it did so. What this approach did, and the wider significance of this will be discussed in a later section of this conclusion, is demonstrate that the comfort that the elites found was not solely limited to that afforded by the country house becoming warmer, cleaner or more ventilated. Rather, comfort was sought, found (and lost) in a much broader arena, signified by the chapter headings. By shifting the analysis of comfort away from its physical qualities within the country house, this study has also highlighted the discomfort that could be created there. A warm, clean house with comfortable chairs, for instance, could not and did not preclude the unease or discomfort that anxiety, irritation or loneliness that life in a country house could instigate. And what this thesis also successfully demonstrates is that, despite an apparent privileged or even aspirational lifestyle, for the elite family members in this study, comfort was not guaranteed. All of the chapters included examples where the fragility and vulnerability of comfort was highlighted. From the mundane to the important, everyday occurrences could impact the comfort of these elite families. The separation from a loved one, an unexpected social obligation, a downturn in financial circumstances, a sudden illness or the death of loved one – all could significantly impact comfort. Women, in particular, seemed susceptible to the precariousness of comfort, often driven into emotional, social and financial instability, following the death of a husband or father, with childless widows or unmarried spinsters seemingly faring the worst. Whilst illness and death were two areas which could significantly impact comfort, they were also two areas in which comfort could, perhaps surprisingly, be sought and found. Both chapters demonstrated how consolation could be discovered even in the most hopeless or darkest of moments. Yet comfort, as all chapters allude to,

required effort. Comfort had to be worked at – in letters, within the home, in family relationships, within the wider social sphere and during times of illness and bereavement. Finally, all chapters demonstrated how personal comfort had sometimes to be relegated to ensure the comfort of another or considerations of comfort influenced the ways in which family members offered advice or guidance. And even its use within an emotional economy implied effort and negotiation.

So, whilst the main objective of this thesis was to demonstrate the predominance and prevalence of comfort within elite lives, the second, equally important aim, was to show what comfort meant and looked like in the long eighteenth century. Lexicographical, literary and even historiographical definitions of comfort all attempted to highlight the intricate and complex qualities of comfort, yet none provided one that fully encompassed the concept of comfort as a whole and what it meant and looked like to those people at the time. This is what this study does – it reveals those differing forms of comfort but, more importantly, it shows the different ways in which different people interacted with them and how it was influenced and impacted by their lives.

If one aspect of comfort, for example, is considered, it is possible to demonstrate this. Johnson suggested that comfort was 'that which gives consolation or support' – in this thesis that is referred to throughout as personal support or emotional comfort.[4] Johnson's definition, in isolation, is insufficient because it reveals little about the nature of this 'consolation or support', what form it took or from where, what or whom it originated.[5] For the family members examined in this study, just this one seemingly simple type of comfort assumed numerous different forms. Frances Young, for

[4] Stobart, 'Introduction: comfort, the home and home comforts', p. 12.
[5] *Ibid.*

instance, found consolation in her being of use to her father during his illness and in providing regular updates to her sister Mary on his condition in the mid-1790s, whilst Vere Isham, in 1704 derived emotional comfort from the intellectual discussions she had with her brother Justinian. John Thornton in the 1820s felt emotionally supported by the actions of his brothers during his illness and Frances Stackhouse Acton wrote about the consolation that she found in the medical attentions of her daughter's physician. To further complicate matters one form of comfort could lead to another, for example the financial comfort that Lee Thornton enjoyed when his brother Reeve paid his club subscriptions would, in turn, have led to feelings of 'consolation or support'; he would have felt emotionally supported by his brother's financial generosity.[6] Similarly, John Thornton's emotional, financial and social comfort would all have been impacted by Reeve's generously meeting the cost of his residence in Greenwich. Social comfort, what Stobart referred to as 'the feeling at one' with a situation, was to Ann Ekins in the 1790s different to that of Frances Young despite their presence at the same social event, the christening of Frances' nephew. Frances described the almost rambunctious nature of the occasion and portrayed it as an arena of social ease in which she felt able to participate in the 'riotous' company. However, when Frances described Ann's presence, in which she was 'deck'd out' and 'ornamented' and where she emitted a sense of 'uneasiness' it was possible to conclude that for Ann 'feeling at one' in that situation involved something starkly different. In order to feel at ease in that social circle Ann attempted to fortify herself with the use of her clothing. It is almost impossible, therefore, to succinctly describe each aspect of comfort per se in the long eighteenth century. However, what this thesis has shown is that despite its multifarious and often contradictory and complex nature, comfort, in its various forms, remained

[6] *Ibid*.

significant and predominant. Its characteristics remained as nebulous and changeable at the start of the period as they did at the end. What is interesting, of course, is that this description very much resonates with the one offered at the start of this thesis in relation to more modern ideas of comfort – that the notions of comfort offered by writers, chefs, lifestyle coaches for instance encompass a broad range of differing solutions for different people seeking or needing comfort. Any attempt to define twenty-first-century comfort would involve similar problems with that of the long eighteenth century – it is too broad a concept to force into narrow definitions. This is because comfort was having a sense of purpose. It was being of service. It was acknowledging and being acknowledged by others. It was having the freedom to inhabit one's own space with ease and confidence. It was receiving and offering consolation at times of trouble. It was financial stability. It was emotional and intellectual intimacy. It was amiable social relationships. It was all these and more. Of course, it was also the relief afforded by laudanum, crutches, cushions and footstools. Comfort was a physical experience and yet also a 'state of mind' that was reliant on the connectivity and communion with other people.[7]

The omnipresence of comfort and its inter-connectedness with so many aspects of elite life means that the wider significance of this thesis covers a somewhat discursive historical spectrum. Chapter one revealed the interplay between comfort and correspondence and examined how letters themselves became key conveyors of comfort. Yet despite this, they were also used, by letter writers, as a means of creating discomfort or unease for the recipient. The question of why such a method would be used becomes clear when it is considered from within the context of the letter itself. In two of the examples cited in chapter one of this thesis elder family members, fearful of

[7] Stobart, 'Introduction: comfort, the home and home comforts', p. 21.

or shamed by the behaviour of their younger, male relatives, used their letters to highlight the waywardness and inappropriateness of their actions. It was hoped, therefore that the potential discomfort that a disapproving letter could induce may have been enough to persuade or influence them to amend it. However, there were also instances in which a letter that would intentionally cause discomfort did not come from a wish to curb errant or unacceptable conduct, it came from, conversely, the desire to facilitate and enable long-term comfort. The sacrificing of immediate comfort was a tactic deployed by Frances Young, for example, in her hope of shielding her sister Mary from the stark realities of their father's infirmity and decline – a short-term sacrifice for a long-term benefit. These examples too demonstrate the instability of comfort and the effort that was often required to find and maintain it.

As chapter one demonstrated, writing to family members could often allow correspondents to express themselves more honestly and openly due to the nature of that relationship and yet, as chapter two demonstrated there was also a complicated and interesting relationship between the notions of family and comfort. The letters in this study revealed that the composition of family throughout this period had not shifted towards one merely characterised by conjugality, but rather that the households examined encompassed multi-generations, relatives as well as servants. One of the significant sections of this particular chapter was the focus on siblinghood, an often-neglected family relationship. It revealed the strength and resilience of sibling relationships and the impact or otherwise that they could have on comfort. Separation was a key cause of discomfort, and both letters and shared memories enabled the siblings to find comfort in both. But similarly, the actions of siblings could cause huge upset and disturb the comfort of fellow family members and therefore, this focus on comfort also demonstrated the complexities of family relationships.

The relationships that family members had with friends and acquaintances and the impact that they had on comfort was also discussed in chapter three. Whilst this section analysed the relationship between sociability and comfort, it also provided a new perspective from which to study politeness, an area of research that had been considered less relevant until more recently.[8] Whilst former studies had acknowledged the oxymoronic qualities of politeness, this study revealed the real impact of following a code of social behaviour that promoted ease, naturalness, reciprocity and inclusivity whilst it simultaneously advocated the need for the management of language and behaviour. Indeed, this thesis has clearly shown the effort that was required in order to conduct oneself in a way that was considered appropriate in eighteenth-century polite society, and this certainly contradicts this sense of easiness and informality that was described by contemporary commentators such as Johnson.[9]

Within the historiography of comfort itself, this study has a wider significance still as it offers a different approach to those undertaken previously. Presenting comfort as a hydra-headed concept it represents a shift away from those earlier studies which focused on what they considered to be the predominance of physical comfort. In suggesting that the eighteenth century witnessed a significant shift in the meaning of comfort, from one of personal support to the physical comfort found in technological or architectural improvements, Crowley seemingly undermines the significance of the other types of comfort which have been explored throughout this study. Indeed, although acknowledging the comfort that improved furniture and domestic advances could afford, this thesis did not see the decline of personal support throughout the period under review. Rather, both the need for and desire to offer emotional comfort remained

[8] Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities and Power,* p. 2.
[9] Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800,* p. 22.

a significant aspect of elite comfort and showed little evidence of decline or subordination to physical comfort as described by Crowley. There was no 'invention of comfort' in the eighteenth century, its presence had always been there.[10] Previous studies of comfort also focused their attentions predominantly on the country house, and yet whilst this thesis acknowledges its import as a space in which comfort (and discomfort) was found, this study extends beyond the confines of its walls and explores the impact of the wider elite world on comfort. As a consequence, the significance of communities such as neighbourhoods and their impact on emotional and social comfort could be discussed. This in particular, allowed this thesis to explore the concept of emotional communities and how they could be undermined when the shared social norms that characterised it were threatened by an internal conflict, and as a consequence the normally cohesive community was infiltrated by a sense of unease and disquiet. This would not have been possible if the scope of this study had been limited to the immediate environs of the country house. Similarly, a broader survey of comfort revealed a number of ways in which the different forms of comfort of young and unmarried women were particularly impacted. Certainly, as demonstrated by chapter one and chapter two, the country house and their obligations within it had a significant impact on their comfort but a focus on their wider societal obligations revealed the ways in which their comfort was expected to be subordinated to that of others within their family or social circle.

The association between gender and comfort was also addressed throughout this thesis. Female comfort, as mentioned above, appeared more fragile and yielding to the impact of elite life than its male counterpart. The comfort of young or unmarried women

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[10] Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities & Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America*.

was often compromised by the whims and social demands of other family members whilst that of childless widows was threatened by the rules that dictated inheritance and family settlements. Indeed, the Isham women in particular provided excellent examples of the differing ways in which female comfort was threatened by the impact of elite life occurrences. The death of her mother, and her father's subsequent reaction, meant that Vere's emotional and social comfort were all put at risk. Whilst Mary Isham, who on the death of her father-in-law, was forced to locate to an unfamiliar home and neighbourhood, found her domestic, social and financial comfort all destroyed with the sudden death of her husband.

The examination of comfort and death within the final chapter of this thesis also has a wider significance. Not only did it reveal the inter-connectedness between comfort and death, whilst doing so it also addressed the concepts of good and bad deaths and provided evidence to suggest that perhaps the eighteenth century may not have witnessed the complete secularisation of death. The examples cited in this thesis suggested that the ideas of good or bad deaths were not as sharply defined as previously suggested. The hope for a good death, it seemed, remained prevalent, and was still something to strive, aim and prepare for – demonstrated in the way that Allen Young, when convinced of his imminent demise, called for his brother's presence to attend to his material and then his spiritual concerns in advance of his death. Conversely, the unexpected death of their friend and second cousin, Newton Barton seemed to attract neither shock nor condemnation. Indeed, the family letters written to his sister-in-law Mary following his death indicated quite the reverse with all, without exception, referring to the sudden death as a blessing for Newton. Despite this apparent relaxation surrounding bad deaths, religion still played an important role immediately before and following the death of a loved one. There are several examples cited in this thesis but

Frances Stackhouse Acton's account of the circumstances surrounding her daughter's death best shows the importance of her religious faith which belies the suggestion that death had become increasingly secularised. Indeed, Frances despite her hopeful reliance on her daughter's medical treatment remained true to the doctrines of her religious faith throughout.

The themes that appear in this thesis cover such a wide scope because that was the nature of comfort – it was impacted by, was part of and was also vulnerable to a broad range of differing life events and experiences. That is one of the reasons why comfort was (and remains) such a difficult concept to define, and yet this study has, despite this challenge, revealed its nuanced, complex and often contradictory qualities. Elite comfort in the long eighteenth century did indeed shape and was shaped by 'the everyday'.[11]

[11] Katie Barclay *Caritas: Neighbourly Love and the Early Modern Self,* p. 13.

Appendix One

Biography of Family Members

Isham Family of Lamport:

Sir Justinian Isham, 4th Baronet of Lamport (1658 – 1730), married Miss Elizabeth Turnor (1666 – 1713) in 1683.

Sir Justinian Isham, 5th Baronet of Lamport (1687 – 1737), married Miss Mary Hackett (1698 – 1744) in 1725.

Miss Vere Isham (1686 – 1760), moved to Twickenham in 1733.

Sir Edmund Isham, 6th Baronet of Lamport (1690 – 1772), married Elizabeth Wood (1699 - 1748) in 1734 and Phillipa Gee (1707 – 1786) in 1751. Succeeded to the Baronetcy in 1737 on the death of his elder brother Justinian.

Mrs Hester Raynsford, née Isham (1695 – 1763), married Mr Francis Raynsford (1695 – 1727) in 1722 and lived in Brixworth, Northamptonshire.

Miss Edmunda Isham (1698 – 1766).

Sir Justinian Isham, 7th Baronet (1740 – 1818), married Miss Susannah Barrett (1744 – 1823) in 1766.

Rye Family of Culworth:

Dr William Beauchamp Rye (1723 – 1780), married Miss Hannah Jekyll (d. 1795) in 1751.

Reverend Robert Drury Rye (1751 – 1796).

Mr Joseph Jekyll Rye (1759 – 1819), married Miss Dorothea Clavering in 1797.

Rear Admiral Peter Rye (1765 – 1851), married Miss Eleanora Lord (1772 – 1845) in 1803.

Mrs Anne Barwell, née Rye, married Captain Barwell (R.N).

Miss Jane Rye (1764 – 1848).

Thornton Family of Brockhall:

Mr Thomas Reeve Thornton (1775 – 1862), married Miss Susannah Fremeaux (1776 – 1846) in 1799.

Mr John Thornton (1776 – 1856), barrister and lived in London.

Mr Lee Thornton (1778 – 1862), married Miss Susannah Fellowes (1782 – 1870) in 1833. Merchant and lived in London.

Young Family of Orlingbury:

Mr Allen Young (1711 – 1796), married Miss Mary Boddam (1730 – 1761) in 1754.

Mrs Mary Barton, née Young (1755 – 1847), married Reverend John Barton (1760 – 1803) in 1789. Left Orlingbury following her marriage in 1789 to second cousin John Barton, Vicar of Sunning, Berkshire 1792 - 1803, Chaplain to the House of Commons in 1801 and Prebendary of Canterbury Cathedral 1802 - 1803.

Miss Frances Young (1758 – 1813), betrothed to Reverend James Benamore (1768 – 1796) in 1796. Left Orlingbury Hall, following the death of her father, for Cranford Hall in 1796.

Mr Allen Edward Young (1759 – 1835), married Miss Amelia Neate (1776 – 1826) in 1804.

Reverend John Young (1760 – 1841), married Miss Mary Wood (1769 - 1828) in 1791. Ordained in 1787 and Rector of Thorpe Malsor, Northamptonshire from 1793.

Mr Charles William Newton Barton (known as Newton) (1762 – 1808), private secretary to Henry Addington, 1st Viscount Sidmouth and Speaker of the House of Commons and later Prime Minister.

Orlebar Family of Hinwick:

Mr Richard Orlebar (1736 – 1803), married Miss Elizabeth Cuthbert (1745 – 1779) in 1767 and Miss Charlotte Willing (1758 – 1855) in 1780.

Miss Mary Orlebar (1730 – 1828). Lived with sisters Eliza and Constantia in Ecton, Northamptonshire.

Miss Elizabeth (Eliza) Orlebar (1732 – 1830). Lived with sisters Mary and Contantia in Ecton, Northamptonshire.

Miss Constantia Orlebar (1739 – 1808). Lived with sisters Mary and Eliza in Ecton, Northamptonshire.

Mrs Mary Skynner, née Orlebar (1768 – 1797), married Mr William Skynner (1748 – 1833) in 1790.

Miss Harriet Orlebar (1772 – 1794).

Miss Anne Orlebar (1773 – 1833).

Mr Richard Orlebar (1775 – 1833), married Miss Maria Longuet (1787 – 1863) in 1804.

Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton, née Knight (1794 – 1881), married Mr Thomas Stackhouse (1778 – 1835) in 1812. They had one daughter, Miss Frances Stackhouse Acton (1812 – 1830).

Mrs Frederica Orlebar, née St. John Rouse Boughton (1839 – 1928), niece of Mrs Frances Stackhouse Acton. Married Mr Richard Orlebar (1833 – 1920) in 1861.

Shirley Family of Staunton Harrold:

Robert Shirely, 6th Earl Ferrers (1723 – 1787).

Robert Shirley, 7th Earl Ferrers (1756 – 1827), son of Robert Shirley, 6th Earl Ferrers, married Miss Elizabeth Prentiss (1755 – 1799) in 1778 and Miss Elizabeth Mundy (1753 – 1827) in 1799.

Reverend Walter Shirley (1768 – 1859), married Miss Alicia Newenham (1774 – 1855) in 1796. Reverend Shirley was the nephew of Robert Shirely, 6th Earl Ferrers.

The Right Reverend Walter Augustus Shirely (1797 – 1847), married Miss Maria Waddington (1798 – 1859) in 1827. Became Bishop of Sodor and Main in 1846.

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