Dr Johnson's Friend and Robert Adam's Client
Topham Beauclerk

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By

David Noy

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In memory of
Margaret Lydia (Peggy) Noy, née Midgley
1922–2009
matris optimae

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INTRODUCTION

James Boswell, future author of the *Life of Johnson*, found Topham Beauclerk "a man of wit, literature and fashion in a distinguished degree." He was very conscious that Topham was the great-grandson of Charles II and Nell Gwyn. Dr Johnson said he "would walk to the extent of the diameter of the earth to save Beauclerk." Johnson's friend Sir John Hawkins praised him for, among much else, "such a sunshine of chearfulness and good humour, as communicated itself to all around him," and other mid-Georgian intellectuals admired his conversation and intelligence. Yet he is now remembered, if he is remembered at all, as the malodorous man whose lice-ridden wig caused an infestation at Blenheim Palace, and whose ill-treatment of his wife made her life a misery, as I was told by the guide at Kenwood House who was explaining Lady Di Beauclerk's portrait. Topham's marriage to the former Lady Diana Spencer immediately after her divorce from her first husband created a scandal at the time and eventually left him in her shadow, but when she died in 1808 she was remembered mainly as his widow.

Lady Di's reputation has risen as Topham's has fallen. Her rejection, as divorcee and semi-professional artist, of many of the values and constraints of her time, gender and class has made her a popular figure in recent decades, and some writers (although not her biographer, Carola Hicks) have denigrated Topham to reinforce their point. One has labelled him a "wit, rake and dope-fiend," and says with considerable exaggeration in several directions that Lady Di "tolerated his constant infidelity and nursed him to his drug-induced death in 1780 with saintly devotion." There is no direct evidence for what Lady Di thought about her husband and her marriage. The hostile stories come from her partisans the Countess of Pembroke (her sister) and Horace Walpole, people with their own axes to grind, and mainly concern the last year of the marriage: according to Walpole, who professed to be his friend for nearly two decades and accepted his hospitality and literary help, Topham was "the worst tempered man he ever knew" and Lady Di "passed a most miserable life with him." They can be countered with just as many anecdotes showing Topham as a considerate husband and the marriage as a happy one, but condemnation by Walpole has outweighed praise by Johnson and his circle.

Lucy Moore, a reviewer of Hicks' biography of Lady Di, *Improper Pursuits*, commented that "Topham Beauclerk is as attractive and intriguing a figure as his wife." The brief biographical sketches which have been published do not do him justice, and a number of inaccuracies have been repeated. There was much more to his life than the supporting role to Dr Johnson or Lady Di which he has played in historical writing until now, even if present-day readers cannot empathise with the privilege and sense of entitlement on which it was based. I have tried to redress the balance by putting Topham at the centre of a non-judgmental account.

Topham did little to help his posthumous reputation, even though he once wrote to his friend Bennet Langton about a hope of becoming immortal. He left nothing which he intended to be published. The wit for which he was famous did not have its own Boswell, and little has survived to give the flavour of his celebrated conversation. His letters and recorded sayings can easily be taken out of context. The power of a personality which could persuade Johnson to go on an all-night "frisk" and held more sway over the great man than any of his other friends is not immediately apparent even in the generally favourable recollections of Boswell, who did not always understand his deadpan sense of humour. There are no paintings of him after the age of twenty-five. His collections were broken up, and his Adam-designed villa at Muswell Hill and his library in Great Russell Street have been demolished. Even his friends believed that his talents had been wasted by the time of his early but long-expected death.

Although he was more of a meteor than a star, Topham's life deserves attention (apart from its stories of love, friendship and money) because he was Enlightenment Man *par excellence*. He is not discussed in Roy Porter's defence of the existence of a British, particularly English, Enlightenment, but he exemplified "dedication to the art, science and duty of living well in the here and now," "energetic sociability," the rethinking of natural science and philosophy, and the explosion of print culture. He could have lived a comfortable gentleman's lifestyle based on the estates he inherited from both parents, but instead he rejected the values of his class to the extent of selling the unentailed property and living off the capital, exceptional behaviour at the time. He also chose not to follow the parliamentary career which was open to him. He attended a Paris salon and belonged to the most exclusive literary group in London. He built his own observatory, employed an astronomer and took a course on chemistry. He rejected Christianity but had the presentation of a Church of England living. He gambled heavily and spent his winnings on his book collection. He lived in a house designed by Robert and James Adam which has disappeared from the catalogues of their works because of a dispute over

their bill. He was able to indulge his interests without any financial limitations at first, and continued to indulge them later while ignoring the limitations.

My own interest in Topham began when (as an ancient historian with a particular interest in inscriptions) I found an unpublished Greek epitaph on a marble altar in the grounds of Wrest Park, Bedfordshire, commemorating a man from Ascalon in the second century BC, "Diogenes son of Zeno." The altar is one of a group of five which must have been brought to England from the Aegean island of Delos in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. They are of a type which was popular among members of the eighteenth-century elite as garden ornaments or plinths for sculptures, giving an authentically classical touch to a neo-Palladian building or "Grecian" landscape. Although I was able to verify the claim of their nineteenth-century owner Earl de Grey that they had been in Topham's collection before arriving at Wrest, and found that they had been displayed in his garden at Muswell Hill, I could not trace how Topham acquired them. However, I discovered that he owned a small collection of antiquities, mainly Greek and Latin inscriptions, which would have been culturally significant to him and his friends, people who quoted Horace from memory, carried pocket editions of Sallust and read Herodotus in Greek at times of personal crisis. The research led me on to much evidence of a varied and active life about which little had been written, and growing understanding of an intriguing and misrepresented character.

Johnson and Boswell left voluminous writings on which vivid studies of their lives and personalities have been based, and as a result they loom very large in the field of eighteenth-century biography. Some of their contemporaries have also proved tractable to modern scholars: Horace Walpole wrote thousands of letters; Hester Thrale kept a private diary; Oliver Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds and David Garrick were written about extensively by people who knew them, as well as being letter-writers themselves. Sir William Jones, a member of the same circle before he left for India, has been the object of a recent biography based on his publications and letters. Autobiographical or personal material is also at the heart of entertaining studies of eighteenth-century marriages by Helen Berry, Wendy Moore and Hallie Rubenhold.

People who did not provide such plentiful sources have been studied less, and a reviewer of Hicks' book on Lady Di lamented the lack of personal material to bring the character to life. In fact, there is much more evidence for Topham's opinions, feelings and beliefs than there is for Lady Di's. There have been a number of articles about him based on published sources and heavily influenced by Boswell, beginning with one

written by the Johnsonian scholar G. B. Hill in 1874–75, and extending their scope as more material was published: Frederick M. Smith in 1926, A. M. Montague in 1973, Lyle Larsen in 2003, and James McLaverty in the current *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. They present him as a difficult and intelligent man of fashion (before the lice) and wit whose real personality is concealed in the surviving records, whose conversation is irretrievably lost, and whose later years were dominated by illness and ill-temper. Larsen's summary that he "chose to squander his life in excess" represents the tendency to pass moral judgment on him which began as soon as he died, if not earlier. In contrast, Donald Adamson and Peter Beauclerk Dewar's history of the Beauclerk family (1974) provides a particularly enthusiastic view of him but still perpetuates some mistaken ideas. The most imaginative recent studies, works on Johnson by W. Jackson Bate and John B. Radner, have tried to understand his friendship with Johnson, but consequently treat him as a subsidiary of Johnson. They also pay little attention to what I shall argue was the real reason for Johnson's initial attraction to him. There is a wealth of source material, much of it unpublished, which sometimes enables Topham's voice to speak directly, and offers great insight into his life and the world in which he lived. Johnson's *Life of Richard Savage* provides an eighteenth-century example and defence of writing a biography of someone whose lasting achievements were negligible but whose life in itself was significant, and Johnson's description of the poet Savage would also be applicable to Topham: "a man equally distinguished by his virtues and vices; and at once remarkable for his weaknesses and abilities."

The source material which I have used for the biography includes:

1. His own letters. A small number of these have been preserved haphazardly in various collections. They are not necessarily representative of what he wrote or received. Most have already been published, and the unpublished ones are included in full here. They were mainly written to his friends Bennet Langton, the Earl of Charlemont and David Garrick, and cover the period 1765–79. They range from short notes asking Langton to call to lengthy dispatches to Charlemont and Garrick with news of theatrical and literary interest. They were not intended for publication, and many of them are dominated by Topham's health problems. He often wrote in a facetious tone which means that the letters should not always be taken at face value.

2. Material from the Johnsonian circle and members of The Club formed by Johnson's admirers. Boswell first met Topham in 1772, and then visited him regularly on his annual trips to London. These meetings were recorded in his journals, and many of them also appear in the *Life of*

Johnson. Hawkins and Mrs Thrale also refer to Topham in their writings about Johnson, and Johnson's letters mention him several times.

3. Other diaries and letters. Topham was a fashionable and well-connected man who knew most of the leading figures in society and literature, so he is often referred to by his contemporaries, usually in passing, for example in the writings of Garrick, Countess Spencer, Lady Mary Coke and George Selwyn. He features prominently in the letters of Horace Walpole, whose spiteful attitude did more than anything to harm Topham's posthumous reputation.

4. Sale catalogues and associated records. The catalogue of the sale of Topham's books in 1781 and the accounts of his bookseller Peter Elmsley are the main sources for him as a book-collector. The catalogue of the sale of his other goods in 1780 provides insight into him as an astronomer and collector of antiquities, but there is no complete copy in the public domain. One copy bound with twenty-two other catalogues was sold for £5,500 at Bloomsbury Auctions in 2011 and is now presumably in private hands; I was only able to make brief notes on it. Some items from the sale are documented in other collections where they arrived later, including the British Museum.

5. Newspapers and court and taxation records. These range from the published proceedings of the adultery trial of Topham and Lady Di to adverts for the sale of his house at Muswell Hill. Topham's London residences can be traced through his payments of various taxes.

6. Legal and business papers. Much unpublished material has survived relating to Topham's accounts with Hoare's, Drummond's and Child's Banks, his dealings with the Adams and with his lawyer Fysh Coppinger, and the sale of his properties in Windsor and Lancashire. Coppinger emerges as a significant figure in Topham's financial decline, although his impact was less than that of the gaming table.

Together, these sources make it possible to build a full picture of Topham's life, from his birth as the result of an unlikely-sounding marriage to his death at the age of forty, which was mourned by some and celebrated by others. I have arranged the material chronologically, but alternate chapters take a more thematic approach. References are given in short forms in the footnotes, and full details can be found in the bibliography, which is divided into primary and secondary sections. The index gives the full names and titles of all people who are mentioned in the text.

Acknowledgments

Researching Topham Beauclerk has taken me into academic areas which were completely new to me. My biggest debt is to Professor Paul Goring who has discussed many of the issues, commented on some of the chapters, and steered me through previously unknown aspects of the eighteenth century. Dr Nicholas Cambridge helped me with the medical aspects of Topham's life. In preparation for writing the book I took the University of Buckingham MA in Biography, and Professor Jane Ridley provided very helpful guidance and criticism; I also enjoyed discussion with and encouragement from fellow students, particularly Dr Denis Pepper. Suzanne Lindsey and Peter and Rose Scott accompanied me on many Topham-related trips.

The availability of so much eighteenth-century material online has enabled me to use a variety of sources not readily accessible to people who have written about Topham before, but much of my research has still been done in libraries and archives. I am particularly grateful to the Royal Bank of Scotland Archives in Edinburgh, whose extensive holding of relevant documents (originally deposited with Drummond's Bank) has added to nearly every chapter and has been the basis of my most interesting discoveries. Hoare's Bank Archives proved very informative about Topham's early life, and Pamela Hunter responded generously to enquiries over several years. The staff and volunteers at Speke Hall and the Johnson Birthplace Museum went out of their way to help me, in person and by email. I am also very grateful for help and advice from Adriano Aymonino, Silvia Davoli, Susan Fern, Andrew Hann, Mandy Marvin, Jill Mitchell and the following institutions: Bedfordshire and Luton Archives, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Berkshire Record Office, British Library, British Museum, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies, Chatsworth Archives, City of Westminster Archives, English Heritage, Essex Record Office, Eton College Library, Folger Shakespeare Library, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, John Rylands Library, Lancashire Record Office, Lewis Walpole Library, Liverpool Archives, London Metropolitan Archives, Lord Rayleigh's Archives, National Archives, National Portrait Gallery, National Trust, Nottingham University Archives, Southampton University Archives, Wellcome Library, Windsor Library, Yale University Center for British Art.

CHAPTER ONE

PARENTS, CHILDHOOD, YOUTH (1739–1760)

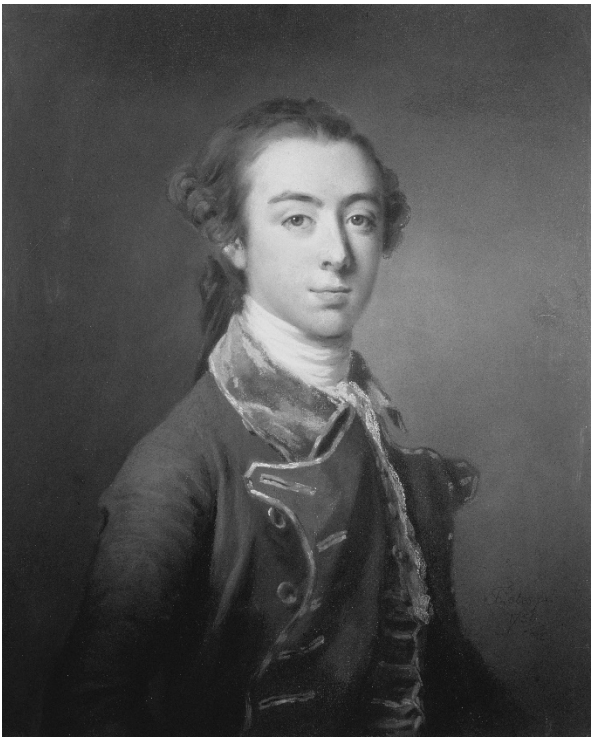

Fig. 1-1. Francis Coates (1726–70), *Topham Beauclerk*. Pastel on paper. Private Collection / Bridgeman Images. This portrait was painted in 1756, when Topham was sixteen, by one of the foremost artists of the time. It seems to be the only individual portrait for which he ever sat.

After a series of mild winters, 1739 turned exceptionally cold and by the end of the year roads were blocked with snow and the Thames froze over.

Dr Richard Mead, London's best-known doctor, must have found conditions difficult as he travelled from his house in Great Ormond Street to the more aristocratic St James's district to attend a patient he had treated after a miscarriage the previous year.[1] This time the outcome was much happier:[2]

> Last Friday Night [December 22] the Lady Beauclerk, Wife to Lord Sidney Beauclerk, Member of Parliament for Windsor, and Brother to his Grace the Duke of St. Alban's, was safely delivered of a Son and Heir, at his House in Pall-mall, to the great Joy of that Noble Family.

The baby was baptised at St James, Westminster, the parish church for Pall Mall, on January 19, 1740. He was called Topham in honour of his father's benefactor, a man whose property he later inherited himself, along with his name. Topham Beauclerk was the product of an unlikely-sounding marriage between a grandson of Charles II and a member of a Lancashire gentry family:[3]

> Tuesday Morning [November 9, 1736] the Rt. Hon. the Lord Sidney Beauclerck, second Brother to his Grace the Duke of St Alban's, was married at St. James's Chapel to Miss Norris of Pall-Mall; the Ceremony was performed by the Right Hon and Rev. the Ld. Charles Beauclerck, Prebendary of Windsor and fifth Brother to his Grace the Duke of St. Alban's. The same Day the new-married Couple went to the Lord Vere Beauclerk's House at Hanworth-Park in Middlesex.

The bride was variously described as "A young Lady of great beauty and fortune" and "Niece to the late Lord Crew, a beautiful young Lady with a fortune of 60,000 l."[4] Any young woman with a good fortune at the time was inevitably described as "beautiful", and whether she was a match in that respect for her husband, described as the handsomest man in England, is unknown. No identifiable portrait of her has survived, but he is depicted in a portrait by Rosalba Carriera, rather similar in style to the

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[1] Lady Mary suffered a miscarriage at Windsor in June 1738 (*Daily Gazetteer*, June 9, 1738). She went to Tunbridge Wells to recover, but was still dangerously ill at the house in Pall Mall at the end of August, attended by Dr Mead and Dr Hollings (*London Evening Post*, August 19, 1738; *Stamford Mercury*, August 24, 1738).
[2] *General Evening Post*, December 25, 1739.
[3] *Read's Weekly Journal*, November 13, 1736.
[4] *Grub Street Journal*, November 11, 1736.

portrait of his son above (fig. 1-1).[5] "The Ceremony was performed at her House in Pall Mall" according to another newspaper,[6] and her property made her a good catch for a man known disparagingly as "Syd the beggar" after a supposedly decade-long search for a rich bride. It appears that there was a lengthy courtship, as the imminent marriage was reported four years earlier:[7]

> We hear that a Marriage is treating between the Lord Sydney Beauclerck, fourth Brother to his Grace the Duke of St Alban's, and Miss Norris of Pall-Mall, a rich Heiress.

Lord Sidney was ill with smallpox in November 1734,[8] which may have delayed marriage negotiations and perhaps left him looking less handsome than before. If Miss Norris was waiting for him to come into his own inheritance her patience ran out, as that did not happen until 1737, but at the age of thirty-six biology was probably more important than financial prudence.

Miss Norris

"Miss Norris of Pall-Mall" had re-invented herself from someone whose earlier life had been more like Sophia Western's in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* than an heiress marrying into the aristocracy. Mary Norris was born on March 22, 1700.[9] Her father was Thomas Norris of Speke Hall near Liverpool (1653–1700), who was MP for Liverpool 1689–95 and Sheriff of Lancashire in 1696.[10] The Norris family were lords of Speke from the fourteenth century[11] and also owned the neighbouring manor of Garston

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[5] Sidney's portrait was sold by Christie's in 2012; accessed January 21, 2016, http://www.christies.com/lotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=5582140.
[6] *Daily Gazetteer*, November 10, 1736.
[7] *Daily Post*, May 23, 1732.
[8] *Stamford Mercury,* November 21, 1734.
[9] Aleyn Lyell Reade, *Johnsonian Gleanings*, vol. 5, *The Doctor's Life 1728–1735*, 243–44. Childwall Parish Registers, 1700, Liverpool Archives; she was baptised at Childwall on March 26. The surname was often written Norres or Norreys but she always seems to have used Norris.
[10] History of Parliament Online, "Norris, Thomas (1653–1700)," accessed December 31, 2015, http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1690-1715/member/norris-thomas-1653-1700.
[11] "Townships: Speke," in *A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 3*, ed. William Farrer and J. Brownbill (London: Victoria County History, 1907), 131–40, accessed December 21, 2015, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/lancs/vol3/

from the sixteenth. Thomas died in June 1700, having declared at the time of his marriage:[12]

> that it was always his Design if he should Die without Issue Male of his Body that the said Estate should continue in the Heirs Male of his Family & not Descend to Daughters.

He therefore left the Speke estate to his younger brothers with reversion to his daughter only if they had no male heirs. The house was occupied by his mother Katherine until her death in 1707. Of the three younger brothers, two had no children and Edward (d. 1726[13]) left only daughters (his son having predeceased him), so when the last survivor Richard (MP for Liverpool 1708–10, also Mayor of Liverpool and Sheriff of Lancashire) died in 1730 the estate reverted to Mary. It seems to have been encumbered previously by annuities and disputes between the brothers but by this stage it would have been wholly hers. However, at the time of her parents' marriage it was only worth £700 p.a. in total according to her father.[14] That would surely not have been enough in itself to make Mary a suitable bride for Lord Sidney, but the value was reported as being nearly £3,000 p.a. when she died and it passed to Topham in 1766, and what remained after much had been sold was still producing £2,800 in 1795.[15]

Mary's mother was Magdalen Aston of Aston by Sutton near Runcorn in Cheshire, one of the twenty-one children of Sir Willoughby Aston (d. 1702) and Lady Mary (d. 1712), a family of similar wealth and status to the Norrises. This connection with the Aston family was, it will be suggested later (Chapter Five), crucial to Topham's relationship with Dr Johnson. After Thomas' death, Magdalen took Mary back to Aston, and died in 1709 when, according to the burial register of Childwall, the parish church of Speke (she was buried there with her husband), she was living at Bath.[16] There was some friction between Magdalen (or rather her father) and her in-laws, and after her mother died the young Mary seems to have stayed at Aston with her uncle Sir Thomas (1666–1725), his wife

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pp131–140.

[12] Abstract of title to Garston, extract from Thomas Norris' will of January 7, 1696, The Royal Bank of Scotland Archives, DR/428/4 f. 10. It has not been possible to trace the original will.

[13] According to his epitaph he "lived in tranquillity at Speke" with his family; R. Saunders Jones, *A Few Interesting Details about Garston and District*, 21.

[14] Thomas Heywood, ed., *The Norris Papers*, xii.

[15] *Letters and Journals of Lady Mary Coke*, 1:95, November 9, 1766; Heywood, *Norris Papers*, xii.

[16] Heywood, *Norris Papers*, 135–36; National Archives, PROB 11/512/79.

Katherine (1676–1752) and their children. There is no evidence of any relationship with the Norrises, who all left everything they could in their wills to people other than Mary; her uncle Richard was even advised by another sister-in-law to get married and have children so that the Astons would not get the estate.[17]

Mary Norris' move from Cheshire to London was connected to her mother's sister Mary Aston, who was married first to Sir John Crewe of Utkinton Hall, Cheshire (d. 1711) and then (as third wife) to Dr Hugh Chamberlen of London (d. 1728). His will made in 1723 refers to "my wife commonly called the Lady Crew"[18]—hence the newspaper mistake about Mary Norris' uncle being Lord Crew(e). Chamberlen was a well-known man-midwife and the lover of the Duchess of Buckingham.[19] His widow Mary made her will in 1728, when she was living in St Paul's Covent Garden, leaving everything to another niece Elizabeth Aston (daughter of her brother Willoughby), who lived with her. She stated that she was in debt to Mary Norris, and left her £50 "and if it were fifty times so much it were nott sufficient to express my gratitude to her for all her kind behaviour to me."[20] In a codicil dated December 14, 1731 she states, "I have bought the house which I now live in Pall Mall lately inhabited by Mr Dodington by which means I have putt my selfe in debt". She died suddenly on April 6, 1734.[21] Mary Norris' introduction to London high society therefore happened through her aunt Mary, and the Pall Mall address was her aunt's house. Mary seems to have lent her aunt the money to buy it after coming into her inheritance in 1730, and she acquired ownership of it from her cousin Elizabeth in 1734.[22] It was on the south side of Pall Mall, in the area now occupied by private clubs built in the nineteenth century; the neighbours were Edward Walpole (son of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert) and the Countess of Burlington.[23] It is not clear exactly when Mary went to live in London, but from the age of thirty

[17] Elizabeth Norris to Richard Norris, London, April 19, 1701, Liverpool Archives, NOR 1/47

[18] National Archives, PROB 11/623/74. The will also refers to a law suit with Mr Crewe and others contesting John Crewe's will. Dr Chamberlen said he had given £1,000 to his wife's niece Betty at his wife's importunity.

[19] Helen King, "Chamberlen family (*per. c.*1600–*c.*1730)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter cited as *ODNB*), accessed April 6, 2014, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/58754.

[20] National Archives, PROB 11/664/429.

[21] Reade, *Johnsonian Gleanings*, 5:243.

[22] Middlesex Deeds Register (hereafter cited as MDR) 1734, 2.200–01, also recited in MDR 1745, 1.390, London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA).

[23] Westminster Rate Books 1733–45, City of Westminster Archives.

she was an heiress with an entré into elite society through her aunt and a fashionable address; the next step was to find a fashionable husband.

Lord Sidney Beauclerk

Lord Sidney Beauclerk (normally pronounced "boh-clair") came from a totally different social world, and was probably able to trade birth for wealth in the marriage negotiations. He was the fifth son of the first Duke of St Albans, Charles II's son by Nell Gwyn. Born in 1703, he was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Oxford, where (unusually for someone of his background) he achieved the degrees of MA in 1727 and Doctor of Civil Law in 1733; he may have had the intellectual interests which Topham later developed, even though the author and gothic trend-setter Horace Walpole claimed to regard him as "illiterate".[24] The Duke had a maximum income of £10,000 p.a. and not much property to distribute among his twelve children when he died in 1726.[25] His widow continued to live at Burford House, Windsor, but Sidney had various London addresses before he was married.[26]

Sidney was much derided for his legacy-hunting activities, but the younger Beauclerks had to make their own living: one of his brothers became an admiral, another a bishop and another had an army career. Sidney opted for politics, something for which property would have been a distinct advantage. He stood unsuccessfully for Great Marlow in April 1732,[27] but he and his brother Lord Vere Beauclerk were returned unopposed for New Windsor in 1733. He retained his seat until his death without needing to contest an election. He was a strong supporter of Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister throughout his parliamentary career.[28]

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[24] In a note on the poem by Charles Hanbury Williams; see below.
[25] Adamson and Dewar, *The House of Nell Gwyn*, 21.
[26] Westminster Rate Book 1730 (Nowell Street, probably Noel Street, south of Oxford Street); Lord Sidney Beauclerk to Dr J. Stephens(?), September 30, 1732, British Library (hereafter BL), Add. MS 61477, dated from Burlington Street; "Cork Street and Savile Row Area: Table of notable inhabitants on the Burlington Estate," in *Survey of London: Volumes 31 and 32, St James Westminster, Part 2*, ed. F. H. W. Sheppard (London: London County Council, 1963), 566–72, accessed December 31, 2015, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols31-2/pt2/pp566-572, referring to Boyle Street.
[27] *Country Journal*, April 8 and 15, 1732.
[28] History of Parliament Online, "Beauclerk, Sidney (1715–1754)," accessed December 10, 2015, http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1715-1754/member/beauclerk-sidney-1703-44.

He was also a courtier who acquired the posts of Master of His Majesty's Harriers and Lord of the Bedchamber to George II.[29] He was Vice-Chamberlain of His Majesty's Household 1740–42, which gave him membership of the Privy Council.[30] All these posts would have provided salaries, although he only obtained them after he had come into money by marriage and inheritance: he received £600 p.a. as Vice-Chamberlain.[31] He is listed as a governor of St George's Hospital and the Foundlings Hospital, and he was active on the common council of the Georgia Society in 1739–40. He was a man on the rise, but may not have been on good terms with his brothers. The letters of his eldest brother the second Duke mention the other brothers regularly, especially Vere, but Sidney only once, and not at all after 1727.[32]

According to the traveller and letter-writer Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the Duchess of Cleveland (Anne Pulteney, 1663–1746) was in love with Sidney in 1727:[33]

> The Man in England that gives the greatest pleasure and the greatest pain is a Youth of Royal blood, with all his Grandmother's beauty, Wit, and good Qualitys; in short, he is Nell Guin in person with the Sex alter'd, and occasions such fracas among the Ladys of Galantry, that it passes [belief]. You'l stare to hear of her Grace of Cleveland at the Head of them … In good earnest, she has turned Lady Grace [her daughter] and Family out o'doors to make room for him, and there he lies like leafe Gold upon a pill. There never was so violent and so indiscreet a passion.

Horace Walpole, the Prime Minister's son who wrote maliciously about both Sidney and Topham, claimed that he then pursued another rich widow, Lady Betty Germaine (1680–1769), who gave him £1,000 not to

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[29] *Derby Mercury*, June 22, 1738; *London Daily Post*, April 16, 1740.

[30] *London Gazette*, nos. 7904 (April, 1740), 7906 (May, 1740), 8135 (July, 1742).

[31] "Warrants for the Payment of Money: 1740, April-June," in *Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers, Volume 4, 1739–1741*, ed. William A. Shaw (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1901), 373–90, accessed December 29, 2015; "Warrants, Letters, etc.: 1743, January-March," in *Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers, Volume 5, 1742–1745*, ed. William A. Shaw (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1903), 341–54, accessed December 30, 2015, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-treasury-books-papers/vol5/pp341-354.

[32] Letters of the second Duke of St Albans to John Clavering, 1725–50, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, D/EP/F225. There are a number of letters from 1736, but no reference to Sidney's marriage.

[33] *Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, 2:74–75: Lady Mary to Lady Mar, April 1727.

marry her.[34] He was a central figure in Charles Hanbury Williams' poem "Peter and Lord Quidam" (1743), a satire on fortune-hunters in the style of the Roman poet Juvenal:[35]

> Ev'n worthless Sidney's praise, I must not grudge,
> The assiduous dry-nurse of a wealthy judge;
> His tea he made, his meat at table carv'd,
> His words he echo'd, and his looks observ'd;
> With him he went the circuit, to take care
> His supper to bespeak, his sheets to air;
> And tho' at last his hopes were here dismay'd,
> He'd been before a gainer by the trade;
> The sweets he'd tasted once he could not leave:
> He got by Topham tho' he lost by Reeve.

Hanbury Williams was referring to his success in becoming heir to Richard Topham of Windsor, and failure to achieve the same with Topham's brother-in-law, Lord Chief Justice Sir Thomas Reeve. This was not the sort of blatant fortune-hunting which people imagined, however, as their relationship began long before Sidney was old enough to be interested in such things. Richard Topham (1671–1730) was MP for New Windsor (1698–1713) and Keeper of the Records of the Tower of London (1708–30). He was a minor Whig politician and a major figure at Windsor, where he inherited and purchased substantial property. He was mainly distinguished as a connoisseur: apart from his 4,000 books, his drawings, watercolours and prints of ancient sculptures, paintings and buildings in Rome and Italy numbered about 3,000 items, the largest such "paper museum" in England at the time.[36]

Richard Topham knew the Beauclerk family through their Windsor connections. The most revealing insight into his relationship with Sidney comes in a letter which he wrote to the Duchess of Marlborough in 1729 when Sidney was caught poaching in Windsor Great Park. He told her that "I have a kindness for Ld Sidney, who hath lived with me the greatest part of eleven Yeares," and he was led into trouble by "the heat of youth" (he was twenty-six at the time).[37] This would mean that Sidney went to live with him when he was about fifteen, around the time when he went to Eton.[38] Richard's mother Joan Topham died in 1721, probably in her late

[34] *Walpole Correspondence*, 34:258–59: Walpole's note on Lady Mary's letter.
[35] *The Works of the Right Honourable Sir Chas. Hanbury Williams, K.B.*, 1:46–47.
[36] On Richard Topham's property, see Chapter Two.
[37] Topham to Duchess of Marlborough, July 15, 1729, BL, Add. MS 61471 f. 24.
[38] 1718 according to Paul Quarrie, "Richard Topham of Windsor," 12.

eighties (she was married in 1656), and her will shows that she lived with her son in Peascod Street, Windsor[39] so the three of them must have shared the house for a time. Sidney was clearly a man of many attractions, and there is no reason to assume that his admirers were all female. Under Richard Topham's will, Sidney got some income immediately on his death in 1730, and he was apparently able to remain in occupation of the house at Windsor, but he had to wait until Reeve's death in 1737 before he came into possession of the rest of the estate.

An unlikely marriage (1736–1744)

The wedding of Lord Sidney Beauclerk and Mary Norris took place in London, but there were celebrations at Windsor too:[40]

> the late Mr. Topham's House in Prescott-street [*sic*] being fitting up [*sic*], and other great Preparations making there for that Purpose; we hear that his Lordship designs to treat the Corporation of New Windsor at the Town-Hall, and to give a Ball to the Ladies.

The newly married couple thus had a town house in Pall Mall and a constituency residence in Windsor, as well as a country estate at Speke; the ideal basis for a successful launch into politics and society, and an enviable inheritance for their future son. Presumably they both got what they wanted: money for Sidney and admission to the aristocracy for Mary.

The marriage settlement provided that all Mary's property in Lancashire and Cheshire should be held in trust for her "free from any Claim of her said intended husband & so as not to be Subject to any Controul Debts or Engagements,"[41] so that Sidney could benefit only from the income and not the capital. It was expected to provide for the younger children of the marriage, on the assumption that the eldest would inherit Sidney's future property in Windsor. This meant that it was only Mary's house in Pall Mall on to which he could load his debts. He lost no time in doing so, and used it to secure an annuity of £100 which he owed in payment of a debt totalling £1,450.[42] Annuities of this sort were often gambling debts (see Chapter Thirteen). In February 1738, he mortgaged the house; this mortgage was discharged in May 1742 but there seems to

[39] National Archives, PROB 11/580/115.
[40] *London Evening Post*, October 30, 1736.
[41] Abstract of title to Garston, indentures of lease and release, November 4–5, 1736, The Royal Bank of Scotland Archives, DR/428/4 f. 11.
[42] MDR 1737, 2.434, June 6, 1737, payable to Thomas Kinsey of Chilton, Bucks.

have been another one on it in 1745.[43] In May 1741 there was a judgment against him in the Court of King's Bench for £3,000 owed to Jones Raymond esq.[44] There is no other information about Sidney and Mary's married life, and her feelings at what happened to her London house can only be imagined. There is an oral tradition at Speke that she threw herself out of a window in despair at her husband's indebtedness.[45] The action is clearly fantasy but the feelings are not. Twenty-two years later she took her revenge when she made her will (see Chapter Seven).

Their son was named after Sidney's benefactor. The name was not a condition of Richard Topham's will, and suggests genuine affection on Sidney's part. The young Topham Beauclerk did not, strictly speaking, inherit any title from his father, but he was usually known throughout his adult life as the Honourable Topham Beauclerk (although he never referred to himself in that way, preferring plain "Mr"), probably because he was so much part of the aristocratic beau monde that people thought he should have an honorific of some sort.

Sidney fell ill in 1744. He was reported as returning to Pall Mall from Bath, then being dangerously ill at Windsor,[46] and he died on November 22. He was buried at Windsor on November 28. He died intestate. His no doubt numerous creditors were rapidly asked to send their accounts to "Mr. Coppinger, at his House in Cook's Court, near Lincoln's Inn."[47] His early death probably predisposed Topham not to expect a long life.

The Coppingers, father and son, remained heavily involved in Beauclerk finances for the next three decades. John Coppinger of Lincoln's Inn died in 1758. Fysh his son (1732–1800) later took the surname of de Burgh and bought the estate of West Drayton. He had dealings with Horace Walpole, and was a member of the Society of Antiquaries. He took over Topham Beauclerk's affairs from his father and must have been left in sole charge while Topham was on his Grand Tour in 1763–64. He will recur frequently in the following chapters, and it is likely that Topham unwittingly contributed to turning him into a landed gentleman.

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[43] MDR 1737, 5.123–24, Feb. 9 and 10, 1737/8. The transactions are also mentioned in the arrangements which Mary made to sell the house in 1744–45; see below.
[44] MDR 1742, 2.424. Presumably it was secured on the house.
[45] *Speke Hall*, 20.
[46] *Daily Advertiser,* September 11, 1744; *Penny London Post*, November 19, 1744.
[47] *Daily Advertiser,* December 5, 1744.

Mother and son

The widowed Mary, or Lady Sidney as she was usually known, was left with full control of her own property and de facto control of her husband's on behalf of her four-year-old son. She rapidly arranged to redeem the mortgage on the house in Pall Mall, and in 1745 she sold it to Lady Charlotte Scott for £2,400.[48] Mary and Topham then became the first occupants of 28 Upper Brook Street in 1745, and lived there until 1753,[49] when they moved to Charles Street near Berkeley Square (fig. 1-2). Some details of this property emerge from a mortgage which Mary took out in 1766: the plot was on the north side of Charles Street, 24 feet wide and 101 feet deep.[50] Analysis of the Land Tax records shows that it was number 7, but there is an Edwardian house there now. The original house would have been built in 1753 (when this part of the street was created) like its surviving neighbour at number 8, so Mary again moved into a new property.

Near neighbours included Sir James Lowther and the Earl of Abergavenny, but socially it was a step down from Pall Mall, and perhaps from Brook Street where the Duke of Chandos and Earl of Marchmont lived nearby. It was probably a larger house, however: the Land Tax valuation was £35 compared to £20 for Brook Street. This part of London was increasingly exclusive but could still be dangerous: during the time Topham lived in Charles Street, a sedan chair porter was shot dead by footpads, and the caretaker of the Earl of Shelburne's house (later Lansdowne House) in Berkeley Square was found murdered.[51]

It seems that Mary was left in financial distress on Sidney's death, as in January 1745 she mortgaged Speke Hall and the manors of Speke and Garston to Admiral Richard Lestock of Chigwell for £4,000 at four per cent interest.[52] Private individuals lending money on mortgages was a

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[48] MDR 1745, 1.390, June 12, 1745. Associated transactions involving Elizabeth Aston: MDR 1744, 3.639; MDR 1745, 3.343.

[49] "Upper Brook Street: North Side," in *Survey of London: Volume 40, the Grosvenor Estate in Mayfair, Part 2 (The Buildings)*, ed. F. H. W. Sheppard (London: London County Council, 1980), 200–10, accessed December 21, 2015, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol40/pt2/pp200-210. Demolished in 1867; now part of the site of Brook House.

[50] MDR 1766, 5.105.

[51] Johnson, *Berkeley Square to Bond Street*, 185–87.

[52] Abstract of title to Garston, indentures of lease and release, The Royal Bank of Scotland Archives, DR/428/4, f. 14; also recited in the 1775 deeds, RBS Archives, DR/428/3.

normal practice at the time, as it produced a regular income with good security, and he was probably brought in by John Coppinger.[53] The sum involved seems to have been very small, because thirty years later Topham mortgaged Garston alone for £12,000. The mortgage was transferred to Coppinger six months later, and inherited by his widow and then his son Fysh in 1763. It was not discharged until 1775, as part of a new mortgage.

Fig. 1-2. 8 and 7 Charles Street. Number 7 (right) is on the site of Topham's house, which probably looked more like number 8. Photo: author, 2015.

[53] They had other dealings together, involving a loan to Mrs Letitia Barnston of Shropshire: Shropshire Archives online catalogue, XD3651/B/3/1/5/3–4.

Little information survives about Mary's life as a widow or Topham's childhood. There is no way of knowing if she considered remarriage, but her first marriage had given her social status and left her much better off than she might have been if Sidney had lived longer. As Amanda Vickery states, "A well-endowed widow with minor sons might emerge as a managing matriarch."[54] In 1749 Mary and Topham exchanged visits with connections from Speke: Isaac Greene was a very rich Liverpool lawyer who was a close associate of Richard Norris and purchased the manor of Childwall among much other property around Liverpool.[55] He brought his two daughters (and heiresses) to London in 1748 and 1749, and his daughter Ireland kept a diary, showing a lifestyle which was probably similar to Mary's when she first came to London: a constant exchange of visits with existing friends and acquaintances (mainly of a similar social level), regular outings to the theatre and the pleasure gardens at Vauxhall and Ranelagh, trips to auctions, dances, and various churches on Sundays. Mary paid them three visits between March and May 1749, two of which they returned; on the third occasion it was "Lady Sidney Beauclerk and her son."[56] This connection may have been significant later: in 1757 Mary Greene married Bamber Gascoyne of Bifrons, Essex (1725–91), son of a Lord Mayor of London but after his marriage the first of many Bamber Gascoynes of Childwall Abbey,[57] and he sponsored Topham's short-lived attempt to stand for Parliament in Liverpool in 1765 (see p. 53).

James Boswell recorded one anecdote about Mary which Dr Johnson told him while they were together in Scotland.[58]

> He and Beauclerk and [Bennet] Langton, and Lady Sydney Beauclerk, mother to our friend, were one day driving in a coach by Cuper's Gardens [unsuccessful pleasure gardens on the south bank of the Thames], which were then let to nobody. Mr. Johnson for a joke proposed he and Beauclerk and Langton should take them; and they amused themselves scheming how they would all do. Lady Sydney grew angry, and said an old man should not put such things in young people's heads. Mr. Johnson said she had no

[54] Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 218.
[55] Stewart-Browne, *Isaac Greene*, 9, 12.
[56] Ibid., 51, 53, 56, 58, 61.
[57] History of Parliament Online, "Gascoyne, Bamber (1754–1790)," accessed December 15, 2015, http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1754-1790/member/gascoyne-bamber-1725-91.
[58] *Boswell's Tour of the Hebrides*, in *Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. Lawrence F. Powell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 5:295–96. Powell has no notes on her, only on Cupar's Gardens.

> notion of a joke; had come late into life, and had a mighty unpliable understanding.

This is the only comment by an outsider on Mary, and as such it would be unfair to take it as a reliable assessment of her. By "coming into life" Johnson meant entering fashionable society. It is undated, and could have occurred any time between c.1759 and 1766; 1759–61 seems most likely. Johnson knew her well enough to have a clear opinion about her. Perhaps she knew her son well enough to think that he did not need to be encouraged in potentially expensive new schemes.

Topham appears to have attended Eton from January 1753 to 1757.[59] The register only gives the surname, "Beauclerk", but the Windsor and Eton connections make it very likely that this was Topham, and he seems to have been interested in Eton later. In 1753, he had a servant, a Swiss man called Fréderic Guyaz who kept a rudimentary diary. He regarded "Monsieur Taupeam Beauclerrk" rather than Mary as his employer.[60] Guyaz went to work for him on May 30, 1753, was re-engaged in 1756 at £18 p.a., and left on September 12, 1756. The wages were in the normal range of fifteen to twenty guineas for a gentleman's personal attendant;[61] they would be supplemented in the case of an adult employer, but perhaps not for Guyaz, by tips and perks such as the employer's unwanted clothes. As he worked for Topham while he was at Eton, it is likely that Topham was a day-boarder there, living at home in Windsor. His Eton "dame" was Mrs Bland; day-boarders were allocated to a dame at whose house they took their meals.[62] Mary probably used the Windsor house at least during Eton terms. For the purposes of paying carriage duty (see p. 62) on her four-wheeled coach, she was registered at Windsor from 1759 to 1764, and in London only from the year ending April 5, 1765, but she always paid duty on silver plate in London.[63]

Among Topham's contemporaries at Eton were his first cousin Henry Beauclerk, later a clergyman;[64] his second cousins George (who eventually became his executor) and Hugh Leycester; Joseph Banks the future

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[59] Austen-Leigh, *The Eton College Register 1753–1790*, 38. The identification is proposed by the editor.
[60] Pocket book of Fréderic Guyaz, Wellcome Library, MS 2657.
[61] Peter Quennell, introduction to John Macdonald, *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-century Footman*, x–xi.
[62] Austen-Leigh, *Eton College Register*, xxvi–xxvii.
[63] Duty on carriages, 1757–66, National Archives, T47/3 and T47/4. Duty on silver plate: T47/5 and T47/4. She did not pay any carriage duty in 1757 or 1758.
[64] Austen-Leigh, *Eton College Register*, 37–38 (identification not certain).