

**Bluestocking Collecting, Craft and Conversation in the
Duchess of Portland's Museum, c. 1770 – 1786**

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Abstract

This thesis explores female authorship, friendship and knowledge-making within collecting practices in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. Applying methodologies from the history of collecting, gender and material culture studies, it contextualises practices of collecting, museum-making, crafting, and art criticism within Bluestocking culture and takes as its focus the vast collection of antiquities and natural history specimens assembled by Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, duchess of Portland (1715-1785) at Bulstrode Park, Buckinghamshire, and Privy Gardens, Whitehall. It answers historians' claims of the Portland Museum as a chaotic and ill-informed collection, famous only for its dispersal at auction in 1786. Uncovering evidence from a number of case studies drawn from the duchess's circle, this study returns to the museum pre-sale, revealing a rich and diverse community of female contributors whose labours there had important broader cultural, connoisseurial and authorial impact. I gather together a spectrum of individual and collective women's texts, objects and voices, showing how they sustained what I term the 'museum-salon.'

My six chapters understand the Portland Museum not only through the collected objects themselves, but also through the material and literary spaces that forged and promoted conversations, sociability, and a community that extended beyond the walls of the museum. I address a broad range of sources and materials, familiar and unfamiliar to Bluestocking scholars; these include letters, manuscripts, catalogues, paintings, prints, antiquities, natural history specimens, crafted objects and newspaper reports. Recovering these evidences of Bluestocking exchange, this study turns to objects and texts that operated across a range of registers and were regularly freighted with complex social, gendered and intimate meanings. I show ultimately how narratives of exchange and creative response shaped and fostered identities for women within the assembled whole of the Portland Museum.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Parts of this thesis have been published, or are forthcoming, in academic journals:

“Collecting the World: Female Friendship and Domestic Craft at Bulstrode Park.” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41, no. 1 (January 2018): 101 – 120.

“Crafting Friendship: Mary Delany’s Album of Decoupage and Queen Charlotte’s Pocketbook.” *Journal 18, Notes and Queries* (Autumn 2018)

“Selling the Duchess: Narratives of Celebrity in *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum* (1786).” *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2019): pp. 3 – 32.

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List of Abbreviations

In all quotations from primary sources, original spelling and punctuation has been maintained throughout this thesis. Capitalisation, italics, and underlining have been reproduced as in the original, with my own insertions made in square brackets.

HAM	Mary Hamilton Papers, John Rylands Library
LWL	Lewis Walpole Library
RA/GEO	Georgian Papers, Royal Archives
PwE	Portland Papers, University of Nottingham

Introduction

The noble collection which formed the Museum of her Grace of Portland [...] was collected at an incredible expence [sic] by herself, and increased by some valuable presents from her friends; to which were added various curiosities inherited from her family; it comprised every thing [sic] rich and rare in the vegetable, animal, and fossil kingdoms, and the articles classed under the head of Conchology were so numerous and scarce, that even the celebrated Linnaeus had not seen very many of them. Most unfortunately, this splendid collection was scattered upon her Grace's decease, whose acting Executrix ordered it to the fatal hammer of the active distributor of the goods of inheritors, Mr. Alderman Skinner, who was thirty-seven days employed in the sale at the Duchess's house in Privy-garden, commencing his labours on the 24th of April, 1786.¹

On 17 July 1785, the collector and Bluestocking Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, 2nd duchess of Portland (1715-1785) died, leaving behind a vast assembly of antiquities, natural history specimens and art works known collectively as the Portland Museum. By April of the following year, this singularly vast collection had been moved from her country residence of Bulstrode Park in Buckinghamshire and relocated to London, where it was dismantled at an auction lasting thirty-eight days.² This act of un-creation, the taking-apart of an assembled whole, has remained the enduring legacy of this important collection, canonising its existence in a temporary state of undoing, and ensuring the celebrity of its diminishing. Indeed, the emptiness of the museum, and the implied accompanying shallowness of its collector, have continually shaped its narrative. Horace Walpole (1717-1797) memorably described her as “a simple woman, but perfectly sober and intoxicated only by empty vases.”³ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*,

¹ James Granger, *Letters Between the Rev. James Granger and Many of the Most Eminent Literary Men of His Time* (London: 1805), 517-518.

² Pat Rogers, “Bentinck, Margaret Cavendish [née Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley], duchess of Portland”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40752>.

³ Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 19 Aug 1785, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937-1983), vol. 33, 489.

published in accompaniment to the sale in 1786 has, for many scholars, proved a finite (and therefore limited) resource in re-establishing the contents and scope of the Portland Museum and the tastes of its collector, with most rarely venturing beyond its 4,156 lots in order to sketch the topography of its cabinets and their cultural legacy.⁴ Its frontispiece (fig. 0.1), depicting the collection in a state of chaotic disarray, remains its enduring image.

This thesis redresses the accepted narrative of the museum's commercial and public breaking-down. It discovers a wealth of previously unexplored archival materials, unpublished manuscripts, letters, diaries and crafted works to establish a rich and diverse body of work produced in the fabrication of museum commentary. Adopting a broad and interdisciplinary methodology, this study is organised around a series of case studies chosen to demonstrate the rich and varied oeuvre of dextrous, antiquarian and literary works produced by elite women associated with the duchess of Portland. Over six chapters, I examine how a group of women from the Bluestocking circle developed practices of sociable exchange, female learning, knowledge and material acquisition. I understand the Portland Museum as an extension of the Bluestocking salon, examining the conversational, didactic and generative function of material culture within this context, as well as the historiography of collecting more broadly. I seek to reassert the duchess's agency within her museum and to readdress previous patriarchal readings of her collecting habits, instead advancing notions of her autonomy and engagement in a broad range of activities, all of which, I argue, had lasting cultural implications.

I am concerned here with the lives and productions of elite women. Whilst the rich complexities of genteel and middling women's relationships with material culture has been dealt with elsewhere, most notably in Amanda Vickery's *The Gentleman's Daughter*⁵, I focus on women who, as a direct result of their social and economic status, were able to collect and engage with objects that were rare and highly sought-after within eighteenth-century systems of valuation. As Lucy Peltz has noted of earlier surveys of female collectors, including Cynthia Lawrence's *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe* (1997) and Charlotte Grace and Maria Vaizey's *Great Women Collectors* (1999), "these studies [...] agree that the female collector is most visible among women of power and wealth – Catherine the Great being a famous example, Queen Charlotte

⁴ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum, lately the Property of the Duchess Dowager of Portland* (London: 1786).

⁵ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

another.”⁶ Indeed, Peltz suggests, “they were distinguished not just by size of purse but also for holding positions at court predicated on conspicuous consumption.”⁷ Within the umbrella term of ‘elite’, however, my study encompasses a range of women of various statuses and means. Within the circle of the Portland Museum, I examine the contributions of a consort to the monarch, the duchess herself and several women who, although certainly born into the upper classes of British society, were dependent on others at various moments in their lives for accommodation and annual income. Similarly, I look at the labours of several generations of women, examining different models of support and patronage, friendship and collaboration that were enacted within the collection. In doing so, I ask how historians of collecting might look to the material and textual products of collections commentary in order to discern the complexities and particularities of these relationships and how these, in turn, might reveal possibly gendered patterns and tastes in collecting behaviours and object interactions during this period.

The duchess’s Last Will and Testament, of which her daughter Lady Elizabeth Weymouth (1735 – 1825) was executrix, reveals a rich and vivid objectscape that goes beyond the commercially visible items that would be diligently catalogued and sold to the buying public in 1786. Instead, it details a series of material signifiers that provided cues for emotional, creative and collaborative relationships during and extending beyond her own lifetime:

I Margaret Cavendish Duchess Dowager of Portland being in good health & memory Oct^{er} 9th 1771 do make this my last Will & Testament I leave to my Son William Henry Cavendish Duke of Portland my Black Ebony Cabinet...with the Curiosities contained in it...I desire all my China Japan Shells and Prints may be sold...I leave to Mrs Mary Delany my fine Enamel Snuff Box and the small blue & black Enamel box the Picture of Petitot done by himself...The Pictures and drawings done by Mrs Delany with the Chenille Chairs I leave to Mrs Mary Port of Ilam⁸

⁶ Lucy Peltz, *Facing the Text: Extra-Illustration, Print Culture, and Society in Britain 1769 – 1840* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 2017), 309. See also Cynthia Wall ed., *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Charlotte Gere and Marina Vaizey, *Great Women Collectors* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999).

⁷ Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 309.

⁸ Last Will and Testament of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, Prob. 11/1133, Public Records Office, National Archives.

On her death, the duchess left behind a vast natural history archive, including the largest shell collection in Europe (and therefore, most likely, the world), as well as a remarkable art collection featuring works by Hollar, Van Dyck, Caravaggio and Michaelangelo. In addition, there was the landscape garden at Bulstrode, complete with grotto, menagerie and Chinese dairy. As a patron, she had facilitated the work of numerous prominent naturalists and art historians including John Lightfoot (1735-1788), Daniel Solander (1733-1782), James Bolton (1735-1799) and George Vertue (1684-1756). She was endlessly generous in her friendships and offered accommodation and materials, financial and emotional support to those in her milieu. In the last decades of her life, the duchess invited Mary Delany (1700 – 1788) to live as her companion at Bulstrode. Here, Delany would go on to create the famous “paper mosaics,” born predominantly from the duchess’s collections, that have secured her artistic legacy. During her lifetime, the duchess maintained circuits of social influence that extended to the royal court, as well as many of the salons and societies of London. She acted as a consultant in the appointment of trustees to the British Museum and was a leading (though now largely under-appreciated) member of the Bluestocking circle. It is her role in this last capacity that this study is predominantly concerned.

I am concerned here with what I term the ‘museum-salon’ - an imagined, as well as physical arena in which conversation was drawn from the assembly of objects, regularly augmented to include correspondence, albums, crafted objects, sketches and manuscript catalogues. I reconsider the location of the Bluestocking salon and the conversations that took place within it, extending its reach from the drawing rooms of the London Bluestockings such as Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800) and Elizabeth Vesey (1715-1791) to include the cabinets, library, laboratories and menagerie that housed the duchess’s collection. The museum was divided between two sites; Bulstrode Park in Buckinghamshire (fig. 0.2) and the duchess’s townhouse in Privy Gardens, Whitehall (fig. 0.3). Whilst the duchess spent the long summer months at Bulstrode, where she entertained guests and arranged the majority of her collection, the London house was used in the winter months as a base from which to engage in the city’s salons and other social events. I focus on the 1770s and 1780s, arguably the most influential and active decades of the duchess’s life as a collector. At a moment when the salons of Montagu and Vesey were at their height in London, the duchess held her own assemblies, most

often at Bulstrode.⁹ Although the nature of these gatherings was far more private than the publicly-commentated events arranged by the main London Blues, the Bulstrode circle enjoyed a rich diversity of members, each invited to contribute to and generate knowledge within the duchess's collection. Indeed, Beth Fowkes Tobin has suggested that "Bulstrode has figured as a precursor to the Bluestocking assemblies," whilst Amanda Vickery and Mark Laird have highlighted the indisputable significance of the site and the energies of its patron in advancing Enlightenment ideals.¹⁰ Here, folios, albums, manuscripts, letters, diaries, sketches and cut-paper gave material expression to the values and aspirations of the Bluestocking group, serving to define its membership and both collaborative and individual creativity in terms of the objects collected and recorded, interpreted and displayed within the Portland Museum.

Gary Kelly has rightly highlighted that "in recent decades, the bluestocking figure of that period has been examined from various perspectives, largely literary and cultural, aesthetic and social."¹¹ Here, I examine the activities of several members of this group as collectors, crafters and antiquarian scholars. I consider the museum as a salon space, one to which invitation was required, and in which conversation was crucial. Furthermore, I position it as a site central in shaping and advancing Bluestocking identities. Tobin and Maureen Daly Goggin have previously attended to women's collecting, the sharing, display and circulation of objects, as central "in the construction of particular identities, as well as serving as a value-producing material practice."¹² Indeed, in their introduction to *Material Women, 1750-1950*, Tobin and Goggin have suggested a "mutually constitutive and fluid relationship between subjects and objects," one that is simultaneously didactic and effective.¹³

Elizabeth Eger has already highlighted the centrality of the material culture to the Bluestockings, citing the now-famous origin story of the blue stockings that gave the group their name. Eger draws attention to "how a specific object can accrue different cultural resonances over time, to become an identifying label for a particular

⁹ For an overview of the Montagu and Vesey's salons, see Deborah Heller, "Bluestocking Salons and the Public Sphere," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22, no. 2 (1998): 59-82.

¹⁰ Beth Fowkes Tobin, "Bluestockings and the Cultures of Natural History Collecting," in Deborah Heller ed. *Bluestockings Now! The Evolution of a Social Role* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 68. See also Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 152, and Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts, *Mrs Delany and Her Circle*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Gary Kelly, "Bluestocking Work: Learning, Literature, and Lore in the Onset of Modernity," in *Bluestockings Now!*, 176.

¹² Beth Fowkes Tobin and Maureen Daly Goggin eds., *Material Women, 1750-1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices*, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*

type of individual or group.”¹⁴ Building in part on the 2013 volume *Bluestockings Displayed*, which proposes the three areas of portraiture, performance and patronage as “the central means by which the bluestockings created and extended their cultural and intellectual network,” my thesis turns to collecting, and subsequent processes of textual and tactile response, as specific areas of Bluestocking activity that demand further scholarly attention.¹⁵ Whilst the assembly and display of collections by Bluestocking women was widespread, such behaviours have warranted relatively little scholarship. Elizabeth Montagu, for example, cultivated the interior spaces of her London house, populating her salon with exotic feathers brought to Britain by Captain James Cook (1728-1779).¹⁶ The courtier, diarist and Bluestocking Mary Hamilton (1756-1816), niece of the antiquarian Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803), pursued and copied out ancient manuscripts, recording their contents into her journals and notebooks. Mary Delany’s paper mosaics (fig. 0.4), the only example to be the subject of intense and sustained scholarship in the last two decades, combined the practice of specimen collecting at sites including Bulstrode and Kew with domestic and skilled craftwork, marrying together scientific enquiry with artistic skill and aesthetic endeavour.¹⁷ Such activities were not wholly confined to the Bluestocking group, although their regular access to contemporary intellectual discourse, financial patronage and, of course, significant and newly discovered historical and natural world objects meant they were often at the forefront of this work. Elite women outside of or on the periphery of the group also practiced various methods of collecting. Sarah Sophia Banks (1744-1818), sister to Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), saved hundreds of visiting cards and other printed ephemera (fig. 0.5), whilst her sister-in-law Dorothea (1758-1828) worked closely with her brother’s natural history collection, even providing access to visitors at their shared London home.¹⁸ The role of collected and crafted objects in advancing Bluestocking conversation went far beyond, as Gary Kelly has identified, the “ornamental skills such

¹⁴ Elizabeth Eger, “Introduction,” in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730-1830* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See Ruth Scobie, “To dress a room for Montagu:” Pacific Cosmopolitanism and Elizabeth Montagu’s Feather Hangings,” *Lumen*, 33 (2014): 123-137.

¹⁷ For more on Delany and her paper work, Ruth Hayden, *Mrs Delany and Her Flower Collages* (London: British Museum Press, 1980); Laird and Weisberg-Roberts eds., *Mrs Delany and Her Circle*, Molly Peacock, *The Paper Garden: Mrs Delany [Begins Her Life’s Work] at 72* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

¹⁸ See Arlene Leis, “Displaying Art and Fashion: Ladies’ Pocket-Book Imagery in the Paper Collections of Sarah Sophia Banks,” *Journal of Art History* (January 2013): 1-20; “Cutting, Arranging, and Pasting: Sarah Sophia Banks as Collector,” *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9.1 (Fall 2014); “‘A Little Old-China Mad’: Lady Dorothea Banks (1758-1828) and Her Dairy at Spring Grove,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 2 (June 2017): 199-221.

as music, drawing, dancing, comportment, and conversation considered necessary for the marriage market.”¹⁹

Of course, tracing the history of a collection that no longer exists can be problematic in terms of methodological approach. To date, scholars have attempted to trace some of the paths of objects from the Portland collection following the auction. In *The Duchess's Shells*, Tobin has already identified many of the surviving natural history specimens now housed in the Natural History Museum in London and the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow. Similarly, the Royal Horticultural Society holds several art works created by the botanical artist Georg Dionysius Ehret (1708-1770) during his visits to Bulstrode, whilst the British Museum has the duchess's most famous possession, the Portland Vase. In 2013, an exhibition at the Harley Gallery displayed several items associated with the duchess, including classical carved gems and intaglios, a candelabra commissioned by the duchess of John Cafe in 1757, and a small collection of ethnographic and natural history materials including a figure of an Egyptian Pharaoh and a preserved butterfly.²⁰ As Tobin has proposed, often “the most challenging is that textual and visual representations of missing items fail to shed light on the processes by which a collection was assembled and used.”²¹ It is not my intention here to seek out, rediscover or re-catalogue the contents of the museum dismantled in 1786, but rather to reanimate the conversations and labour that surrounded it. In her examination of the duchess's shell collection, Tobin employs a framework from which this study takes its cue. Tobin emphasises “the cultural practices of collectors, placing their activities within the social, economic, and scientific contexts of the Enlightenment.”²² Indeed, as she has highlighted, “a collection is an assemblage [...] a hybrid entity, a materiality that comes into being through human interaction with it.”²³ Expanding on Tobin's work, my thesis moves beyond a study of the duchess of Portland as a natural history practitioner, instead taking a more comprehensive view of the collection and the female networks surrounding it. Here, I am interested in the previously obscured material evidences of the conversation and sociable processes of commentary and criticism that surrounded the collection in an attempt to reanimate the coterie of contributors cultivated by the duchess.

¹⁹ Kelly, “Bluestocking Work,” 179.

²⁰ See Sarah Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities: The Life of Margaret, Duchess of Portland* (Welbeck, Nottinghamshire: The Harley Gallery, 2013).

²¹ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells: Natural History Collecting in the Age of Cook's Voyages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 10.

²² *Ibid.*, vii.

²³ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 20.

Recently, historians of collecting have begun to consider the types of sources useful in reconstructing collections and the processes of sociability that surrounded them. In her study of the natural history and artificial curiosity cabinets of Pierre Pomet (1658-1699), Emma Spray has previously asserted the historian's turn to the material and visual evidences of collection assembly and use as vital in reanimating, and therefore re-reading, such formations.²⁴ Indeed, she has described such work as proof of the busy animation of early modern collections, describing "a choreography of hands moving to bring together, describe, examine, preserve, mount, and of eyes moving between and among specimens and texts."²⁵ Tobin has already discussed the vital need to return to "letters, manuscript catalogues, list of specimens, notebooks, drawings and illustrations [...] and interleaved and annotated printed catalogues" in order to discover "the social lives" of collected objects.²⁶

Studies of this kind have most regularly turned to the social practices that underpinned behaviours of acquisition. Scholarship on the Portland Museum is no different: historians have tended to mine epistolary evidence (often the most persistent survival from this period thanks in part to biographical publications in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) in order to plot the networks that supplied collections. This study, in contrast, looks beyond the initial moments of acquisition and is, instead, concerned with commentaries produced after objects had entered the duchess's collection. Previously, scholars have turned to published records of collections in order to discern possible methods of interaction and interpretation that existed within the eighteenth-century museum. Danielle Wilkens, for instance, has examined the various published guidebooks associated with the early nineteenth-century museum assembled by Sir John Soane, whilst Cynthia Wall has paid close attention to the social and commercial function of auction catalogues in reorganising and representing collections for public sale.²⁷ Certainly, guidebooks to collections including those of Horace Walpole, Sir Ashton Lever (1729 – 1788) and, eventually, the British Museum were publicly available by the mid-late eighteenth century. Similarly, sale catalogues associated with the collections of individuals such as William Beckford (1760 - 1844) and Queen

²⁴ E. C. Spray, "Pierre Pomet's Parisian Cabinet: Revisiting the Invisible and the Visible in Early Modern Collections," in Marco Beretta ed., *From Public to Private: Natural Collections and Museums* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications/Watson Publishing International, 2005), 59-80.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

²⁶ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 10. However, for Tobin, this approach was applicable only to the duchess's natural history activities, with her survey of the Portland Museum focused singularly on the shells within the collection.

²⁷ See Danielle Wilkens, "Reading Words and Images in the Description(s) of Sir John Soane's Museum," *Architectural Histories* 4, 1 (2016): 1 – 22.

Charlotte (1744 – 1818) remain important documents in retracing their contents. Whilst these textual productions provide considerable information about the contents of such assemblies and the biographies of their collectors, the strata of social, emotional, intellectual and creative lives that circulated around collected objects remain obscured by such visible public products, designed more often to propose a single and finite reading of a collection. Moreover, existing within the traditional parameters of published antiquarian practice, these works were usually employed as a mean to ventilate the intellectual and financial voracity of men. Marco Beretta notes that printed catalogues of collections were highly useful productions that were nevertheless “relatively secondary” to the collector’s “techniques of handling and preserving specimens [...], the care taken when organising [...], the ways in which the exhibit is displayed.”²⁸ Moreover, Tobin has argued that such an approach might belie the relatively invisible temporality and subjectivity at the heart of eighteenth-century collecting, and indeed collecting more generally.²⁹

The question of how to approach such forms of cultural and material production, especially in the context of collecting history and knowledge-generation, has concerned scholars across various disciplines. Luisa Calé and Adriana Craciun have proposed a diversion from the traditional methodologies in understanding the organisation of objects and knowledge put forward so famously by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*, (1966), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), and “*What is an Author?*” (1969)³⁰ Moving away from such rigid models of epistemology, Calé and Craciun focus instead on “the unfamiliar contours of objects, practices, and identities that resist or escape current disciplinary mapping, unveiling the alternative forms and conjectural shapes of knowledge in the making.”³¹ Similarly, Jan Golinski has claimed that during the eighteenth century, “techniques for inculcating and perpetuating disciplines—for disciplining their practitioners—were transformed.”³² Within the museum, I suggest, conversation can be identified across a range of forms, textual and material evidences. The collection was at once to be read, written, cut, stitched, crafted, sketched, augmented with annotation and extra-illustration, transported, exchanged, gifted, access

²⁸ Marco Beretta, “Preface,” in *From Public to Private*, viii. See also Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 12.

²⁹ Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 12.

³⁰ Luisa Calé and Adriana Craciun eds., “The Disorder of Things,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 1-13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³² Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 69.

to it granted or excluded. Within the Portland museum, conversation could be responsive, exploratory, practiced and rehearsed, else spontaneous and inspired.

Conjuring a veritable cacophony of creative female responses, this study is occupied with the previously invisible contributions of women to the Portland Museum through engagement with works representative of countless hours of unpaid dextrous and cognitive labour. Previously, Vickery has pointed to the dismissal of “women’s dealing with materials things” by historians, noting the pervasive tendency to reject the results of such interactions and labours as “an arena of female vanity, not skill” and to downgrade the results to a “category of leisure.”³³ In 2009, the exhibition and accompanying volume *Mrs Delany & Her Circle*, produced by Yale Center for British Art and the Sir John Soane Museum, offered a new framework for approaching the expansive creativity of elite groups in its study of Mary Delany, companion to the duchess, friend to George III’s consort Queen Charlotte and a talented, prolific artist. Alicia Weisberg-Roberts notes in her introduction that by “considering the full scope of Mrs Delany’s life and activities” historians are able to “re-embody her as a historical figure, not as the reflection of her times, but as a distinctive voice in the context of eighteenth-century society.”³⁴ For Delany, Weisberg-Roberts suggests, “art and natural history were disciplines that nourished one another and, indeed, could be seen to proceed in tandem.”³⁵ Taking up this critical approach, in which natural history collecting, art and literary production are understood not as discrete disciplines but instead as complimentary activities, I seek to present the duchess of Portland and her museum through a similar lens. I approach the collection’s natural history holdings alongside its corresponding art works and antiques in accordance with eighteenth-century predilections for routinely combining natural and artificial objects in order to better represent and interpret the collection in line with contemporaneous models of understanding and display.

The creation and execution of such work was, often, an explicitly gendered endeavour. Freya Gowrley has attended to the all-female community associated with A la Ronde in Devon, although she rightly cautions a reading of such organised groups as “a kind of homosocial utopia” at the expense of more complex layering of multiple and potentially conflicting identities.³⁶ Certainly, the Portland Museum was not comprised

³³ Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, 163.

³⁴ Weisberg-Roberts, “Introduction: Mrs Delany from Source to Subject,” in *Mrs Delany & Her Circle*, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Freya Gowrley, “Craft(ing) Narratives: Specimens, Souvenirs, and ‘Morsels’ in A la Ronde’s Specimen Table,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, Special issue ‘Material Fictions’ (2018): 77-98.

exclusively of female contributors. Instead, as has been the focus of much of the Portland scholarship before this, the duchess worked regularly and closely with a number of men. Eger has argued that “supportive friendship between men and women, in which female intelligence was valued and encouraged, was vital to the early development of the Bluestocking circle.”³⁷ Prolific among the duchess’s colleagues was the botanist and Bulstrode librarian John Lightfoot, who resided for several decades at the duchess’s home and worked to create substantial catalogues of her plant collections. Both Sir Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander contributed items to the collection, with the latter working on site at Bulstrode.³⁸ Similarly, Alexandra Cook has traced correspondence sent between the duchess and French philosopher and botanist Jean-Jacques Rousseau after their first meeting in 1766.³⁹ Rousseau, whose well-known derision of female intellect did not extend to the duchess (“[he] recognised the Duchess as his superior in matters that were botanical”), went on to collect plant specimens and seeds on the duchess’s commission and accompanied her on an expedition to the Peak District in 1776.⁴⁰

Even within the social and practical infrastructure of Bulstrode, the duchess and her guests were supported by male servants. In their letters, both Delany and Hamilton cite a “Mr. Levers, ye house steward” who was tasked with setting up the apparatus suitable for the duchess’s botanical and artistic work, and whose own sketches of the museum’s specimens, gathered in several folios, were displayed in the duchess’s library and shown to guests.⁴¹ Industry at Bulstrode was stratified and complex, with networks of patronage, friendship, kinship, professional and amateur study sustaining the museum’s collections and the salon it inspired. However, where the duchess’s working relationships with many of the men she patronised have been addressed elsewhere, with the duchess herself often appearing as the partial facilitator in the great endeavours of her male contemporaries, this thesis seeks to shift perspective. It turns away from the highly visible productions of these male researchers, instead focusing on the previously invisible labours of the museum’s women contributors, re-establishing elite female conversation and scholarship, craft and dexterity at the forefront of our understanding

³⁷ Eger, “The Bluestocking Circle: Friendship, Patronage and Learning,” in *Brilliant Women: 18th Century Bluestockings* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2008), 29.

³⁸ See Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 41, 134 – 35, 106 – 111, 209 – 12, 226, 254, 255.

³⁹ Alexandra Cook, “Botanical Exchanges: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Duchess of Portland,” *History of European Ideas*, 33, no. 2 (2006): 142 – 156.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴¹ See Mary Hamilton Diary, December 1783, in Lady Llandover ed., *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, 6 vols (London: Bentley, 1861-2) III, 152 – 175.

of the collection, and the cross-rank, cross-media relationships, friendships, intimacies, identities, authorships and learning it supported. In targeting a range of productions and inclusions from across the duchess's female circle, this thesis allows for the reconstruction of female collecting practices, as well as the networks and hierarchies that sustained them.

The Portland Museum: A History

From the very earliest stages of the duchess's collecting career, she sought to develop her museum as a site of learning and, in particular, of female intellectual development. In 1742, Elizabeth Robinson, later Montagu, wrote to her:

Pray do not compliment my head [...] It is not a head of great capacity, but a great part of the space is unfurnished. I only beg if you furnish it, it may be with a little more Order than your Closet; for with heads as with Drawers, too full one can never find anything when one looks for it. A head made up with the variety of your Closet must be excellent for making dictionaries, writing grammars of all the languages spoken at Babel, or a natural History of the Creatures in Noah's Ark, or for drawing plans for the Labyrinth of Dedalus. What cunning confusion, and vast variety, and surprising Universality, must the head possess that is but worthy to make an inventory of the things in that closet.⁴²

Here, Montagu presents the duchess's collection as a space of meditative process, in which the learning and "unfurnished" mind might develop patterns of thought and creativity formulated in material expression. She aligns the closets and drawers of the early Portland Museum with methods of mental organisation and knowledge construction. Captured in her letter is Montagu's aspiration in proving her intellectual worthiness and "capacity" through responding to the duchess's collection and forming "an inventory of things in that closet" as a means of articulating her own identity and value. Female learning abounded at Bulstrode from the earliest years of the duchess's life there. From the autumn of 1738, the duchess was acquainted with the Anglo-Saxon

⁴² Elizabeth Robinson to Margaret, Duchess of Portland, 27 January 1742, MO 317, Montagu Collection, Huntington Library San Marino, CA.

scholar Elizabeth Elstob (1683 - 1756), whom she engaged as a tutor to her children Elizabeth ((1735 - 1825) later Lady Weymouth following her marriage to 1st Marquess of Bath), Henrietta (1737 - 1827), William ((1738 - 1809) later 3rd Duke of Portland), Margaret (1740 - 1756), Frances (1742 – 1743) and Edward (1744 - 1819).⁴³ For Elstob, Bulstrode provided a sanctuary from the financial and societal pressures of the outside world. There, she was a success with the children, who called her “Tob,” and found time to work. On one occasion, the antiquarian Edward Rowe Mores visited Bulstrode and later described how he found Elstob “in her sleeping-room [...] surrounded with books and dirtiness the usual appendages of folk of learning.”⁴⁴

During the twentieth century, historical analysis of the Portland Museum regularly presented a landscape of chaotic and undiscerning acquisition. The duchess, has often been represented as uncivilised, rendered ugly and unfeminine through her collecting “mania”, as Horace Walpole’s biographer W. S. Lewis would describe her practice in 1936.⁴⁵ Tobin has argued that, although Lewis’s analysis of the duchess’s voracity is intended as a compliment, his approval of her practices is rooted in his predilection for the collecting processes of her male contemporaries and her supposed alignment with their connoisseurial ferocity. As Tobin suggests, Lewis’s term “mania” is “reserved for men, a displacement of libidinal energies from procreative and productive acts onto objects, which, in the case of natural history collecting, were often dead animal and plant specimens.”⁴⁶ In 1968, Geoffrey Edmonds echoed this sentiment in his local history of Gerrard’s Cross, the area just outside the Bulstrode estate: “The Duchess had the collecting mania: trees, flowers and fungi, birds, beasts and fishes, books paintings – she collected them all.”⁴⁷

Even during her own lifetime, the duchess’s story as a collector has been understood in relation to the men who surrounded her. Most notable among them was her father Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford (1689-1741) and a famed collector of manuscripts and art. Later, the duchess would be aligned with the activities and tastes of her husband, William Bentick, 2nd Duke of Portland (1709-1762) and, eventually, her son William Cavendish Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland (1738 -1809), who served as

⁴³ G. C. Edmonds and Aubrey Baker, *A History of Chalfont St. Peter & Gerrards Cross and The History of Bulstrode* (Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, Colin Smythe Ltd, 2003), 136.

⁴⁴ Edward Rowe Mores, *A Dissertation upon English Typographical Founders and Founderies (1778)* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1961).

⁴⁵ W. S. Lewis, “Introduction” in *The Duchess of Portland’s Museum by Horace Walpole* (New York: Grolier Club, 1936), v.

⁴⁶ Tobin, “Virtuoso or Naturalist? Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland,” in Line Cottagnies, Sandrine Parageau and John J. Thompson eds, *Women and Curiosity in Early Modern England and France* (Boston, MA: Brill Books, 2016), 217.

⁴⁷ Edmonds, *A History of Chalfont St. Peter & Gerrards Cross*, 61.

Prime Minister from 1807-09 and who is routinely (and wrongly) credited with purchasing the Portland Vase (fig. 0.6). Writing in his memorandum book, known as the *Book of Materials*, in 1770, Horace Walpole included the duchess's marital home of Bulstrode in an early survey of country houses he encountered whilst touring Britain:

Bulstrode in Buckinghamshire, the seat of the Duchess Dowager of Portland [...] It belongs to the Duke her son, but he lives at her seat at Welbeck, & she here at his. It was bought by Chancellor Jefferies & much added to it by him, particularly the chapel, on the ceiling of which he was represented going to Heaven, but it was burned. The Earl of Portland then purchased it & finished it. In the hall are busts of Edwards 6th & L. Elizabeth, which came from Theobolds, & a shuffleboard of plumb pudding marble of a vast size, from the same palace. In the great drawing room Two Statues by Wilton. The copy of Raphaels Holy Family at Versailles, bought at Sr Luke Schautt's Sale, & cost the Duchess 100£. The View of Antwep by Rubens & 3 other painters, from the same collection. There are a few other good painters in the House, especially two young Lions & a fawn by Rubens, very fine, given to the Dss by the Earl of Oxford her father.⁴⁸

This vision of patriarchal inheritance has dominated narratives of the duchess's early life. Certainly, her father Edward Harley was an influential figure in her formative years. His collection, consisting of books, manuscripts and art works, was stored at the young Margaret's family home of Wimpole Hall in Cambridge, as well as at the estate at Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire.⁴⁹ The duchess's grandfather, Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford (1661-1724) had also been a collector of early manuscripts which, as Sylvia Harcstark Myers has noted, were handed down to his son. While Rebecca Stott suggests the duchess of Portland may well have inherited her passion for collecting from her father and grandfather, any historian of women's collecting habits must proceed with caution.⁵⁰ Such male-centric inheritance narratives, as Myers has identified, involve the routine obscuring of women's contributions. Of the 2nd Earl of Oxford, for

⁴⁸ Horace Walpole, *Book of Materials*, LWL 49 2615 vol.1 1759, 263, Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

⁴⁹ Sylvia Harcstark Myers, "The Importance of Bulstrode," in *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 21-2. Myers study of the early friendship between Montagu and the duchess of Portland is especially important. Nicole Pohl has also examined this early relationship and its important influence on Montagu in "Cosmopolitan Bluestockings" in *Bluestockings Now!*, 75.

⁵⁰ Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 21.

example, Myers notes that “it was to collecting that [he] devoted much of his energies and a large part of his wife’s fortune.”⁵¹ The duchess’s mother Lady Henrietta Harley, nee Holles (1694-1755), was active in the management of the Harleian collection, arranging visits from guests and cataloguing ancestral portraits. To date, there has been no scholarly attention paid to her, although her role alongside her husband’s in the acquisition and management of his famous collection would make for a fascinating and important study.⁵²

The extent of female financial autonomy within elite collections certainly raises interesting questions about the duchess of Portland’s museum. Like her father before her, whose life ended in significant debt resulting from his apparent unchecked collecting habits, the duchess was liberal in the money she laid out for acquisitions. On her death, Walpole noted “latterly she went deeply into natural history, & her Collection in that Walk was supposed to have cost her fifteen thousand pounds.”⁵³ She entered her marriage with a £20,000 dowry from her mother’s inheritance, enough for her husband to acquiesce to her continuing collecting. Following the death of the 2nd Duke of Portland in 1762, the duchess inherited a further £8,000 per annum as well as the estate at Welbeck.⁵⁴ At the end of her own life, the collection was sold in order to raise cash for her son to fund his political career. Financial and familial constraints on the duchess meant her museum was not, as her father’s had been, sold to parliament at a reduced price.⁵⁵

Growing up at Wimpole, Margaret interacted with and entertained visiting guests from her father’s literary circle. Amongst the illustrious visitors were Alexander Pope and Matthew Prior, who wrote a poem about her when she was just five years old.⁵⁶ Creativity, and its role as an exchangeable and sociable cachet, was central to her early experiences.⁵⁷ Female education was similarly encouraged within the family, although always in line with traditional notions of accomplishment deemed appropriate for an elite woman. Aged seven, Margaret received a letter from her grandfather in which he expressed his anticipation at being “entertained with the pleasure of seeing the progress

⁵¹ Myers, “The Importance of Bulstrode,” 21.

⁵² For a survey of her life, see William Goulding, ‘Henrietta countess of Oxford’, *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 27 (1923): 1–41.

⁵³ Handwritten preface to Walpole’s copy of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, LWL 49 3902. This was later published by Lewis as *The Duchess of Portland’s Museum by Horace Walpole*.

⁵⁴ Stacey Sloboda, “Displaying Materials: Porcelain and Natural History in the Duchess of Portland’s Museum,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 43, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 457.

⁵⁵ This would, undoubtedly, have secured a much more pervasive legacy of the duchess and her museum in the cultural life of the nation.

⁵⁶ Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 21-30.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

you make in your Learning and in Virtue.”⁵⁸ As the only surviving child of Harley and his wife Henrietta, the duchess’s early interactions with objects of historical or artistic import were regularly marked by their significance in formulating ideas of selfhood, familial and aesthetic identities.⁵⁹

Portraiture became a means of self-expression, of controlling and purveying self-image. Several miniature portraits of the duchess survive from her youth and give some clue as to the manner in which she, and her parents, sought to portray her. A particularly striking example, created by the miniaturist Freidrich Christian Zincke (who would go on to paint the duchess multiple times throughout her life), is painted onto an enamel panel topping a small gold box (fig. 0.7). As well as its striking and colourful brilliance, this object offers insight into the strategic presentation of the relationship between father and daughter. Displayed in the accoutrements expressive of her elite femininity and clutching sheet music, Lady Margaret Harley, as she was in 1727 when this work was produced, is presented as deferential to her father, seated behind him and shown as slighter within the frame. Edward Harley, in contrast, is seated in an authoritative red velvet-backed chair. In the central background of the scene, the Harleian coat of arms is carved in stone. The eyes of both figures meet those of the viewer with confidence, framing their shared manifest heritage. Harley wears a sapphire mourning ring to mark the death of his son, emphasising Margaret’s sole legitimacy. The application of this image to the small decorative box suggests its use within the domestic environs of their own home, revealing the careful manufacture of a narrative of familial unity – Margaret was Harley’s heir. A later portrait of 1750, also by Zincke, further exposes their relationship as rooted in material items (fig. 0.8). The duchess of Portland is bedecked in an array of jewels, including a singular necklace made up of pearls, brilliant blue stones and culminating in an exquisite pearl dolphin, hung in gold on her chest and finished with a drop pearl. The pearl, Stott notes, was a gift from her father who purchased it in 1720 for £50.⁶⁰

However, as both Myers and Stott have noted, the final years of her childhood, before her marriage to William Bentinck in 1734, were increasingly difficult. As her father’s debts mounted, he sunk into alcoholism. Her relationship with her mother was complex: Myers has suggested the “daughter was aware of her domination and

⁵⁸ Robert Harley, 1st Lord Oxford to Lady Margaret Harley (later duchess of Portland), c. 1722. Quoted in Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 23.

⁵⁹ The duchess’s mother, Henrietta, also bore a son, Henry Cavendish Harley, who died within a few days of birth.

⁶⁰ Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 41.

resisted.”⁶¹ Later, the duchess would write to Elizabeth Robinson (later Montagu) of the suffocation she felt during the last months before her wedding. In a letter to her friend she recalled “I am not to Stir out of sight Least I should Break my nose or Tumble into the fire & if I was to go out I might be Stole for a Great Fortune.”⁶² Early on in this period, Margaret learned the value of female friendship as a retreat from the pressures surrounding her. This was reflected in her tastes in material culture; in 1740 she commissioned a ‘friendship box’ containing portraits by Zinke. Inside were the images of the duchess, Mary Delany, Elizabeth Montagu and Lady Andover, all of whom were voracious correspondents. Each of the women is wearing a costume: the duchess is dressed as Flora, Delany wears “a Lely-like velvet drape”, whilst Howard is in a dress trimmed with fur and Montagu in “Anne Boleyn’s dress”.⁶³ Eger has suggested “the stories behind Zinke’s miniature portraits immediately establish a sense of the multiple intersections and shared interests within networks of female friendship, providing valuable insight into a group of women who formed an important precursor to the more formal Bluestocking Circle of which the duchess and Delany were [later] part.”⁶⁴

In June 1734, the duchess was married. In the same month, her friend Ann Vernon wrote to Katherine Collingwood “I am very happy Lady Margaret is to be released out of her prison.”⁶⁵ When Harley died in 1741, his daughter and wife were left in charge of his now-vast collection. In a decision that reveals much about the value the two women placed on it, Harley’s collection was included in the same 1756 parliamentary act that saw Sir Hans Sloane’s collection gifted to the nation.⁶⁶ Sold at a price of only £10,000, it is clear that rather than being motivated by a need to recuperate the family finances, this was in fact an exercise in public access and the memorialising of a great collector.

After Harley’s death, the widowed Henrietta moved back to her family estate at Welbeck, where she began extensive renovations to the house and its collections.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Myers, “The Importance of Bulstrode,” 25.

⁶² Margaret Cavendish Bentinck to Elizabeth Montagu, Huntington Library, MO 197, quoted in Myers, “The Importance of Bulstrode,” 25.

⁶³ Weisberg-Roberts, “Introduction,” 4-5.

⁶⁴ Eger, “The Bluestocking Circle,” 39.

⁶⁵ Anne Vernon to Katherine Collingwood, June 1734, quoted in Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 25.

⁶⁶ This was done through the British Museum Act of 1753. The Harley Manuscripts, now held at the British Library, contain the Harley Golden Gospels, Anglo-Saxon manuscripts including the Bury St Edmunds Gospels, the Harley Roman de la Rose, and the prayer book of Lady Jane Grey. For more on this archive, see Cyril Ernest Wright, *Fontes Harleiani: A study of the sources of the Harleian collection of manuscripts preserved in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: The British Museum, 1972). For more on Sloane, see James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London: Allen Lane, 2017).

⁶⁷ Her account books concerning *The Repairing Beautifying & Ornamenting the Ancient Seat of the Cavendish Family at Welbeck* survive at Nottinghamshire Archives, MS DD. P5.6.1.1.

Management of the surviving collection was now transferred to Henrietta and her daughter, with the duchess and her new husband regularly making the journey from Bulstrode to Welbeck.⁶⁸ New behaviours were developed in asserting and valuing female knowledge. In particular, Henrietta preserved many of her husband's paintings from public sale, including them alongside "the fine miniatures, Enamels, & Vases of crystal &c all which She has left Heirlooms to her daughter and Decendents [sic]."⁶⁹ A copy of a catalogue detailing many of these items appeared in an 1843 auction, billed as a "Collection of Portraits and Plates from the Harleian Collection, by Lady Henrietta Cavendish Hollis, Countess of Oxford and Mortimer, engraved by Vertue, and others, Privately Printed, folio, neat, very rare...1748-9."⁷⁰

Of the early contents of the collections at Bulstrode, relatively little record survives, although both Stott and Myers agree that as the duchess entered into the first decades of her marriage, the duke was apparently content for her collecting to continue, even accelerate. Publicly, the couple were keen to be associated with other elite intellectuals. In 1739, the duchess and her husband were pictured alongside Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689 – 1762), a close friend of the duchess's mother, in an engraving (fig. 0.9) made by George Vertue after portraits by Zinke.⁷¹ Early responses to the collection referenced the tastes of the duke, as much as the duchess. Horace Walpole was a regular visitor, writing in 1755 "We went to see the objects of the neighbourhood, Bulstrode and Latimers. The former is a melancholy monument of Dutch magnificence:⁷² however, there is a brave gallery of old pictures, and a chapel with two fine windows of modern painted glass."⁷³ Of nine portraits of the court of Louis XIV, Walpole wryly commented in 1762 "the Lord Portland brought them over, they hung in the nursery at Bulstrode, and the children amused themselves by shooting at them."⁷⁴

By 1762, the duke was dead. In the months that followed, the duchess accelerated her plans for the Portland Museum. In her widowhood, she turned to

⁶⁸ Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 25.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 25.

⁷⁰ *Manuscripts, Upon Papyrus, Vellum, and Paper, in Various Languages: A Catalogue of a Most Valuable Collection* (London: Thomas Thorpe, 1843).

⁷¹ The context of this image is now unknown, although a copy of the work in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery was originally bound in an extra-illustrated copy of *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay 1778-1840*, suggesting its public availability and circulation. The connection between the duchess of Portland and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu via the duchess's mother Henrietta was widely known. See James Archibald Stuart-Wortley-Mackenzie, Lord Wharnclyffe ed., *The letters and works of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (London: 1861) I, 93-94.

⁷² Walpole alludes here to the duke's family, who were originally Dutch.

⁷³ Walpole to Richard Bentley, 5 July 1755, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 35, 233.

⁷⁴ Walpole to George Montagu, 26 January 1762, in *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 10, 4.

The duchess later gifted the nine portraits to Walpole, revealing his earlier comments to be the possible result of snobbish posturing and humour.

female friendships, many of which had been established in her early life. Of particular import were the relationships she maintained with Elizabeth Montagu and Mary Delany, both of whom she had known since early womanhood. Montagu was a regular visitor to Bulstrode whilst Delany, who had visited regularly during the Duke's life, was invited to live at Bulstrode during the summer months. Similarly, Mary Hamilton was a regular visitor from 1780s until the duchess's death. She spent the months before her marriage to John Dickinson working in the museum, completing decoupage fire screens as well as her *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode* (the subject of chapter four of this study).

In this period, Bulstrode became a centre for female learning, drawing visitors from across the duchess's social circle to labour there. Crystal B. Lake has previously underscored the significance of the country house and its historical collections in advancing antiquarian work amongst elite women. Using Sarah Scott's novel *Millenium Hall* (1762) as a model, Lake has demonstrated that, from the middle of the century, antiquaries witnessed "the sea-change happening in British historiography: a re-evaluation of British history that first elevated archaeological artifacts, especially architectural monuments, to the plant of classical ideals and then began to assess those artifacts on their own terms."⁷⁵ This, Lake suggests, "constituted a moment [...] wherein a uniquely British history was both discovered and invented," positing antiquarianism as a form of self-exploration and expression.⁷⁶ Certainly, this new focus on domestic history allowed elite and even middle class women to access historical sites and objects with previously unknown ease. With a Grand Tour of Europe no longer a pre-requisite for an antiquarian education, women could instead rely on social and object networks as a means of encountering the histories about which they might write, recording their findings in the available forms of textual expression that sustained these circles. A rise in archaeological excavations and fieldwork in this period would begin to recover the riches of a British history previously obscured and, largely untouched within the landscape. Often, excavations were carried out at the country seats of friends and contemporaries. In this context, visiting and gaining access to these sites was vastly enabled through social networking and the maintenance of friendships; a largely, although by no means exclusively, female social system. The records of such excavations were frequently autobiographical and, often, informal texts that accompanied and augmented social interaction. Letters, diaries, commonplace and

⁷⁵ Crystal B. Lake, "Redecorating the Ruin: Women and Antiquarianism in Sarah Scott's 'Millenium Hall,'" *ELH* 76, no. 3 (Fall, 2009): 662.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

memorandum books provided the spaces in which women could expand on their intellectual and tactile confrontations with the past.

As a patron, the duchess granted access to those visiting her museum, whilst also funding expeditions across Britain, thus extending her collection and its uses into contemporary public life. In aiding the naturalist James Bolton (1735 - 1799), the duchess patronised his three-volume work *A History of Fungusses, Growing About Halifax* (1788-91), whilst Bolton's sketches of some of the birds at Bulstrode appear in his *Harmonia ruralis; or, An Essay towards a Natural History of British Song Birds* (1794).⁷⁷ In the arts, the duchess was noted for her generous patronage of the engraver George Vertue. Vertue was a regular collaborator with contemporary collectors, for whom he produced innumerable engravings of historical objects and curiosities. In 1749, he created a series of images titled *Jewells in the Possession of her Grace Margaret Duchess of Portland* (figs. 0.10 and 0.11). In 1759, Vertue published *A Description of the Works of the Ingenious Delineator and Engraver Wenceslaus Hollar*, which included many works owned by the duchess who was a prolific collector of Hollar. Indeed, in *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, printed in accompaniment to the 1786 sale, lot 2918 listed "The Works of Hollar, comprised in 13 folio volumes, of the most beautiful impressions, collected by her Grace in the most liberal manner, at an immense expense."⁷⁸ Fascinatingly, in his dedication to the duchess at the start of his *Description of the Works*, Vertue draws flattering parallels with the duchess's own artistic ability, referencing her early pencil drawings which, regrettably, no longer survive:

These Amusements (permit me to observe) are the least Part of Your Grace's Noble Genius: Your early Inclination to the Love of such Arts, guided your Pencil to the producing several surprizing Works; of which my Weakness to express, and your known Unwillingness of having published, obliges me to pass over in Silence.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ James Bolton, *A History of Fungusses, Growing About Halifax* (Huddersfield: Printed for the author, 1788-91); James Bolton, *Harmonia ruralis; or, An Essay towards a Natural History of British Song Birds* (London, 1794), 40. For more on Bolton's role at Bulstrode and within eighteenth-century naturalism more generally, see Mark Laird, *A Natural History of English Gardening 1650-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); J. Edmondson, *James Bolton of Halifax* (National Museums and Galleries of Merseyside, 1995); J Edmondson, "New insights into James Bolton of Halifax" *Mycologist* 9 (1995): 174-178.

⁷⁸ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 130.

⁷⁹ George Vertue, *A Description of the Works of the Ingenious Delineator and Engraver Wenceslaus Hollar, disposed into Classes of Different Sorts; With Some Account of His Life by George Vertue, A Member of the Society of Antiquaries* (London: Printed for William Bathoe, 1759).

The duchess's connection with Hollar's works was carefully cultivated elsewhere in the public ephemera associated with her. An engraving, possibly a frontispiece to an unknown published work of which she was patron and credited to I Baglow, shows the duchess alongside folios of Hollar's work (fig. 0.12).⁸⁰ Other aspects of her collecting tastes are represented in the items arranged around a memorial portrait of the duchess herself, copied from Zincke's 1750 portrait, below which sits the duchess's coat of arms.

Beyond her museum at Bulstrode, the duchess of Portland acted as a consultant, whose social connections, knowledge and material collections were all resources to be mined by those so inclined. In a series of correspondence between the duchess and her son William, 3rd Duke of Portland, dating from the 1770s, she advised on the appointment of a new trustee to the British Museum. In one particular letter, she discusses the merits of Sir William Hamilton as a suitable candidate, but ultimately rejects him on the grounds of his prior and ongoing royal appointment as the King's envoy in Naples.⁸¹ Of course, Sir William Hamilton would go on, along with his niece Mary Hamilton, to play a significant role in the duchess's museum. In 1784, Sir William sold to the duchess the Barberini Vase, which he had brought back from Italy the year before and which would go on to become the most iconic and valuable object in the collection. The duchess's authority within antiquarian and scholarly circles in London is similarly confirmed in a letter written in 1768 by the print collector Rev. James Granger (1723–1776), in which he writes to the duchess how he “would willingly go thence to London, chiefly for a sight of Dr. Ward's biographical MS. lodged at the British Museum: as your Grace was so good as to offer to write to Dr. Knight to procure me admission, I should most thankfully accept of that kind offer.”⁸² Granger's letters have been made little use of in the historiography of the Portland Museum and yet they offer significant information on the duchess's London networks, and the ways in which her

⁸⁰ I have been unable to identify the source of this image, although it is most likely a frontispiece to a printed book. I am grateful to Melanie Czapski at Buckinghamshire County Museum, where a copy of the image is held, who identified from a stamp on the back of the print that it was collected as part of the George Weller collection of prints of places, buildings and people associated with the county, many of which came to the museum collections in 1925.

⁸¹ Margaret Cavendish-Bentinck, duchess of Portland to William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland, 4 January 1781. Portland Papers, University of Nottingham, Pl C 14/7. The 3rd Duke of Portland and his mother were regular correspondents for the duration of the duchess's life. A rich archive of these letters, covering a broad period from the duke's school days to well into his adult life, are held at Nottingham University. Although there is not sufficient room in this thesis, these letters would make for a fascinating study of matriarchal influence on the political and social life of one of Britain's Prime Ministers.

⁸² James Granger, *Letters Between the Rev. James Granger and Many of the Most Eminent Literary Men of his Time* (London: Publisher London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1805), 11.

collections were mined by the scholars of the day. In July 1766, for example, Granger wrote to the duchess:

I have taken the libetty [sic] to remind you of a favour which your Grace was so kind as to grant me, when I had the honour of waiting on you at your house in Privy-Garden: I mean, the liberty of turning over some of the volumes of your collection of heads at Bulstrode. Though I have already seen the numerous collection of Mr. James West, for which I am greatly obliged to your grace, and those of Sir Horace Walpole and Sir William Musgrave, it is most probable, that in a cursory view of some of yours, I shall see something to take notice of which I have never seen before. I am now carrying on my Catalogue of English heads, of which you have a very imperfect specimen, upon a more extensive plan, which the inclosed [sic] paper will shew. Mr. Walpole has read a considerable part of this work in MS. and has sent me a letter, signifying his approbation of it in such terms as it does not become me to repeat.⁸³

Granger's "Catalogue of English heads" would eventually be published in 1769, under the title *Biographical History of England*. The composition of the text, which continued several years after the publication of the first edition, owed much to a group of editors that including the duchess, Horace Walpole, Sir William Musgrave, and Sir William Hamilton.⁸⁴ Although Peltz neglects the duchess's contribution in her study of Granger's text and its transformations at the hands of various extra-illustrators, she has uncovered the subsequent epistolary network that developed around the work, as amateur antiquarians wrote to him "in the belief that they were contributing to a communal project whose scope they could both refine and augment."⁸⁵ That the duchess was already in possession of a "very imperfect" version of the work indicates her early involvement in Granger's project, while his inclusion of "a more extensive plan" in the above correspondence suggests the centrality of both the duchess and her museum in contributing materials to the endeavour.

⁸³ James Granger to duchess of Portland, 31 July 1766 in *Letters Between the Rev. James Granger and Many of the Most Eminent Literary Men of His Time: Composing a Copious History and Illustration of His Biographical History of England* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1805), 9.

⁸⁴ For more on Granger's work, see Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 44, 50, 52, 62 – 66, 79 – 127.

⁸⁵ Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 63.

Bluestocking Conversation and the 'Museum-Salon'

Writing from Margate in August 1784, Elizabeth Vesey remarked to the young Mary Hamilton, “I am going to take leave of the Dss of Portland [...] happy you who will receive what I lost [...] every day I love her more & as her conversation grows every day more delightful [...] happiness abound you my sweet Friend.”⁸⁶ For those in the Bluestocking circle, conversation, in its material and literary forms, performed important functions in communicating and advancing the values of a social group. It could transmit and augment intellectual enquiry, and establish creative and social bonds. Stacey Sloboda has argued that “for Portland and other elite women and men, objects [and the conversations they provoked] were an especially important component of sociability, as they both facilitated and signified political, familial, and affectionate bonds.”⁸⁷

Ileana Baird’s *Social Networks in the Long Eighteenth Century* demonstrates the usefulness of network theory in reading the conversations and collaborations of various coteries across the period. For Baird, the study of social networks in the eighteenth century is paramount “in redefining the political and cultural spheres of the time.”⁸⁸ She asserts a new methodological lens that might “include social network analysis, assemblage and graph theory, actor-network theory, as well as social media and digital humanities scholarship.”⁸⁹ This methodology is useful in uncovering broader and complex networks of ideological and material exchanges across the eighteenth-century world, as well as more localised and specific circles within Britain and is highly applicable to the Portland Museum, where transnational, trans-geographic and trans-rank exchanges were represented in an assemblage concerned with reflecting back to its creators a localised and specific group identity. My thesis uses a series of case studies, ranging from epistolary networks, collected objects, manuscripts and crafted art works to underscore the museum-salon as a network model that shaped and sustained the duchess of Portland’s collection and various group and individual identities within it. Within the museum, conversation was led by literal and literary frameworks: rooms, cabinets, drawers and boxes, albums and folios, letters and diaries provided a range of spaces in which the collection could be encountered, related and augmented. For Bruno

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Vesey to Mary Hamilton, August 1784, HAM/1/6/2/8, Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

⁸⁷ Sloboda, “Displaying Materials,” 464.

⁸⁸ Ileana Baird, *Social Networks in the Long Eighteenth Century: Clubs, Literary Salons, Textual Coteries* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 16.

⁸⁹ Baird, *Social Networks*, 4.

Latour, the relations between nodes in a network are everything - networks are, by their very nature, formed of the associations that exist between each individual.⁹⁰ In re-considering the Portland Museum as a network, then, it is possible to recover much of its social structures, aims and achievements through study of its accompanying material formulations and literary exchange; essentially, the surviving evidences of conversations that took place within it and which characterised and defined it.

For the purposes of this study, I understand conversation (in its eighteenth-century context) to be primarily for the advancement of learning, alongside friendship and moral improvement. Conversation was central to the Bluestockings' *modus operandi*. Elizabeth Montagu famously wrote of a "blue stocking doctrine" of "rational conversation" in a letter to Elizabeth Carter, whilst Hannah More's *The Bas Bleu* eulogised its capacity for moral improvement and intellectual furtherment.⁹¹ General modes of conversation and the methods of engaging in 'public' discussion were shaped by the revolution in printed media and the new ubiquity of magazines, periodicals and novels. Conversations were engaged in and extended in more 'private' and personal forms; women's crafts and correspondence served not just as didactic exercises in idealised and performative femininity, but as extensions of public discourse. Letters between friends covered political, religious and historical subjects, dealing confidently with issues at local, national and even global levels. Maps of newly discovered lands were embroidered, paper mosaics of natural history specimens diligently cut and pasted, and manuscript and common place books detailing historiographical discourse maintained and shared. Here I am concerned with the possibilities and potential of conversation within the intermediality and adaptiveness of material culture. Specifically, I seek to uncover the ways in which the cultural implications of the Portland Museum were extended in this way beyond the bounds of its cabinets, drawers and other built environments.

At Bulstrode, botanical laboratories and flower gardens gave way to ponds filled with golden fish and a menagerie containing an Indian bull and zebra. Visiting guests would be delighted by a Chinese-fronted dairy and a grotto formed of shells collected

⁹⁰ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹¹ Montagu to Carter, 17 August 1765, Montagu Papers, Huntington Library, MO 3151, 17, quoted in Pohl and Schellenberg, "A Bluestocking Historiography," 3. For more on conversation as an intrinsic element of Bluestocking interaction, see Anni Sairi's application of social network analysis to the correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu in "Methodological and practical aspects of historical network analysis: A case study of the Bluestocking letters," in Arja Nurmi, Minna Nevala, Minna Palander-Collin, eds., *The language of daily life in England 1400-1800* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co. 2009), 108. See also Alison E. Hurley, "A Conversation of Their Own: Watering-Place Correspondence among the Bluestockings" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40, no. 1 (Fall, 2006): 1-21.

by Captain James Cook, whilst peacocks roamed freely across the grounds and parrots decorated the interior rooms. Inside, cabinets opened to drawers filled with shells from across the globe. The duchess's library held magnificent folios of prints and engraved works, whilst the walls of the gallery and dining room were hung with Renaissance paintings. In the drawing room, work tables were scattered with spools of fabric, cut papers and craft tools. This rich and plentiful environment was stocked by the duchess and cultivated by an entire community of contributors whose networks of exchange traversed the boundaries of the site to revealed broader orbits representative of both real and imagined geographies. Visitors including King George III and his consort Queen Charlotte, Banks, Solander, Montagu, Delany, Walpole and Sir William and Mary Hamilton arrived to cultivate and harvest its resources; revealing a culturally literate community, one regularly conversant with global and historical objects, and positioned at the intersection between court life and the urban culture in what I term the museum-salon.

Moyra Haslett has proposed conversation as a central concept in eighteenth-century literature, “around which there accrue associated ideas of coteries and literary groups, debates and disagreements, the public sphere and literary intertexts.”⁹² Bulstrode was connected to the Bluestocking salons in London through networks of correspondence as well as programmes of object and textual exchange. Often, works produced by those within the circle were circulated and reported on. In December 1783, for example, Mary Hamilton recorded in her diary at Bulstrode “After tea I read *Evelina*, which *I finished*, and at ten o'clock ye Dss went to her room to finish a letter to Mrs. Boscawen, and tell her we had gone through E: ye book *she had desired us to read &c.*”⁹³ Certainly, literary criticism was keenly engaged as the means of augmenting conversation between sites and different individuals within the group. Hamilton's diaries indicate the reading and intellectual programmes of study espoused by the duchess, and closely aligned with Bluestocking work, values and aspirations. Hannah More's poem *The Bas Bleu* was of great centrality to the ethos of the circle and to the women associated with Bulstrode. Hamilton, who received and annotated an early manuscript copy of the work prior to its publication, recorded in her diary how, whilst taking tea with Delany, the duchess and her daughter Lady Weymouth, “we all had our

⁹² Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, 1.

⁹³ Mary Hamilton Diary, 5 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 157.

tables and work. I read Miss More's epistle to Mrs Vesey to Lady Weymouth."⁹⁴

Significantly, the duchess's own autographed copy of the poem still survives in the archive at Longleat House, testifying to the presence and regular circulation of such material at Bulstrode.⁹⁵

Eger, Alison E. Hurley and Nicole Pohl have all conducted studies of the role and form(s) of conversation within the Bluestocking circle. For Eger, More's poem stands as the model for the Bluestockings' mission "to improve, self-consciously advertising a belief in the possibilities offered by conversation as a means of asserting social and intellectual equality for women, of overcoming the restrictions of aristocratic decorum through a new form of sociability."⁹⁶ For Hurley, the Bluestockings appropriated conversation in the social watering-places, expanding out of the London salons to include provincial spa towns where the heterosexual conversation, in its verbal and conjugal forms, that permeated the marriage market was commandeered in favour of homosocial literary and material intercourse.⁹⁷ More broadly, Pohl has argued that the formation of an "urban public sphere outside of the court" allowed for the nurturing of transnational networks and inter-racial and inter-rank conversations within the salon, "models of association" that "made possible the intellectual and commercial mingling" of a new public and, potentially, patriotic society.⁹⁸

Eger has paid close attention to the spaces of the salon in terms of patronage and the correspondence networks that sustained it. She highlights "forms of intellectual exchange that are often considered peripheral or incidental by literary historians," drawing on a body of "relatively informal and potentially ephemeral areas of cultural production" in the surviving correspondence of Elizabeth Montagu.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Eger has argued that it is the occupation of the "space between public and private spheres of discourse" that have regularly kept the often fleeting and ephemeral conversation of the Bluestockings from the scholarly attention of traditional literary historians.¹⁰⁰ My study supplements and extends prior treatments of the Bluestockings

⁹⁴ Mary Hamilton Diary, 8 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 165. For more on Hamilton's editorial involvement in the production of *The Bas Bleu*, see Moyra Haslett, "Becoming Bluestockings: Contextualising Hannah More's 'The Bas Bleu'" *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 1 (March 2010): 99.

⁹⁵ Duchess of Portland's autographed copy of More's poem *The Bas Bleu*, Longleat House, Portland Papers, vol. 14, fols 232 – 45.

⁹⁶ Eger, "The noblest commerce of mankind: Conversation and Community in the Bluestocking Circle," in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor eds., *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 289.

⁹⁷ Hurley, "Watering-Place Correspondence," 2-3.

⁹⁸ Pohl, "Cosmopolitan Bluestockings," 73-74.

⁹⁹ Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 61.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

by examining the material and textual methodologies that animated the duchess's collection. I show how the material objects themselves and the published and manuscript texts inspired by them produced a series of ongoing and live(d) exercises that operated across multiple platforms and genres.

For Bluestocking women in contact with the Portland collection, responding to their museum encounters via the creation of textual and tactile works enabled them to signpost their position within and contribution to the conversational networks that sustained and contoured it. Such responses denoted learning and served to cultivate group and individual identities supported, and often characterised, by the material culture of the duchess's museum. The close material relationship between natural history objects, antiquities and art works is often present in the domestic labours of women, where taxonomic distinctions between types of objects, the *naturalia* and *artificialia* found across eighteenth-century collections, are regularly discarded in favour of aesthetic principles. Female agency can be read throughout the traditional collecting spaces of cabinets and drawing rooms and beyond, expanding into the parlours, bed chambers and closets of elite women. These works could be momentary, even fragmentary, in nature, the result of temporary meditation on a specific piece in the museum and so subsequently discounted from the small canon of accepted sources that have surrounded it since. They might have been composed within the physical spaces and sites of the museum before being sent away or gifted elsewhere. In my second chapter, I examine an album of coloured paper, intricately and expertly cut and sliced to depict objects and themes within the museum; created by Mary Delany at Bulstrode and directly inspired by the duchess's collection, this composite object was then gifted to Queen Charlotte and sent to Windsor, where it is still kept in the Royal Archives.

Whilst material culture studies was a field initially dominated by narratives of consumerism and its accompanying commercial practices, as set forth in Neil McKendrick and John Brewer's *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, scholars including Amanda Vickery, Jennie Batchelor, Kate Smith, Ariane Fennetaux and Chloe Wigston Smith are among those to turn to the relationship between objects and gender.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Neil McKendrick and John Brewer, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Europa Publications, 1982). For a survey of women's lives in the elite and middling classes, see Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); John Styles and Vickery, *Gender, taste, and material culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, *Women and material culture, 1660-1830* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For more on women's craft and domestic labour, see Kate Smith, "In Her Hands: Materializing Distinction in Georgian Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 11, no. 4 (2014): 489-506; Chloe Wigston Smith, *Women, Work, and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Smith, "The Empire of Home: Global

Speaking, writing about and responding to objects was widespread across the Portland collection, highlighting the significant relationship between conversation and the material in this period, especially within practices of collecting as a model for generating and exchanging knowledge. Indeed, as Amiria J. M. Henare has suggested in *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*:

The epistemological potential of artefacts has long been recognised in European intellectual life. Alongside linguistic methodologies of discussion, reading and writing, the collection, comparison and display of objects were crucial activities through which Enlightenment theorists developed their understandings.¹⁰²

The eighteenth century saw considerable development in the practices of collection organisation itself; a transformation, in many cases a professionalisation, of the seemingly disparate processes of acquisition, sorting, recording and displaying objects into discrete disciplines. Most notable among these developments was the introduction of the Linnaean system of classification to natural history collections.¹⁰³ Sloboda has suggested that the Linnaean system provided a level of order previously unseen in the *Wunderkammer* of earlier centuries, thus transforming objects from wonderful exceptions to carefully selected and categorisable examples “associated with the Enlightenment museum.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, whilst curiosity remained central to practices of collecting throughout the eighteenth-century, Sloboda argues, a newly developing “intellectual or aesthetic attitude” towards collected objects led to a diversification in the material methods of narrating them.¹⁰⁵

Such responsive and often ephemeral objects have been obscured due to problems, as Peltz has identified, with archival protocols that have caused items to previously be catalogued inaccurately, else excluded entirely.¹⁰⁶ Of the objects and texts I examine in this thesis, many are composite and hybrid creations that, until now, have languished in archives, unrecognised as art works or items of agency in their own right. Similarly, I work closely with unpublished correspondence and manuscripts which serve

Domestic Objects and The Female American (1767),” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40, no. 1 (March 2017): 67-87.

¹⁰² Amiria J. M. Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 49.

¹⁰³ The duchess herself produced a natural history catalogue, in collaboration with Daniel Solander, that closely engaged with the work of Linnaeus. Tobin has paid close attention to the use and development of the Linnaean system within the Portland Museum in *The Duchess's Shells*.

¹⁰⁴ Sloboda, “Displaying Materials,” 461.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 460.

¹⁰⁶ Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 1-50.

to reanimate the Portland circle with new voices. In recent years, there has emerged a developing practice for remapping and, crucially, reanimating specific intellectual coteries in the eighteenth-century. Such scholarly approaches have been concerned with tracing connections between individuals and institutions or societies of scientific and literary knowledge.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, Sophie Coulombeau has identified a recent turn “to evidence of more informal social interactions” in order to explore the less visible, but by no means less culturally significant, collaborations taking place across sites, institutions, social circles and even gender.¹⁰⁸ This has proved particularly pertinent in emerging surveys of women’s endeavours in the fields of scientific or antiquarian enquiry, where female contributions have tended to forgo formal record in the histories of institutions. The regularly unpublished and undisclosed work of women who narrated, organised and responded to specimens and artefacts has existed in registers that have previously not been accessible to or sought out by historians. I am interested in such subcultures of collections management and commentary outside of mainstream models of taxonomic engagement, building on studies examining the contributions and collaborations of women including Patricia Phillip’s sketches of Hester Thrale Piozzi and Maria Edgeworth’s educations in *The Scientific Lady*, and Tobin’s vital reading of the duchess of Portland’s curatorial partnership with Daniel Solander.¹⁰⁹

The material and textual productions of collection commentary required dextrous, as well as intellectual, labour. Work was contemplative: in the creation of a craft work or a manuscript, the mind of the creator could linger, concentrating simultaneously on the details of the production and the wider contextual meaning, be that scholarly, emotional, or aesthetic. Scholars have already described how female domestic craft could focus the mind in moral, as well as practical, meditation in a process designed to define and hone notions of women’s identity in the home, and society at large. Kate Smith, for instance, has argued the centrality of the hand and its potential for action in delineating individual and group identities through haptic engagement with the objectscape of elite eighteenth-century feminine experience.¹¹⁰ She argues that the purposeful display and performance of women’s hands in relation to material culture aided in the cultivation of specific gendered meaning; “The hand

¹⁰⁷ Martin Willis, *Literature and Science* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 11.

¹⁰⁸ Sophie Coulombeau, “‘A Philosophical Gossip’: Science and Sociability in Frances Burney’s Cecilia,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 42, no. 2 (April 2018): 74.

¹⁰⁹ Patricia Phillips, *The Scientific Lady: A Social History of Women’s Scientific Interests, 1520-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 155-78.

¹¹⁰ Smith, “In Her Hands,” 489-506.

existed with the card table, the teapot and the glove as a set of ‘things’ employed by genteel women keen to assert their awareness of fashion and their membership to a particular social group.”¹¹¹ Often, the hand functioned as the embodied enactor of conversation and polite sociability. Most often, labour was organised by the saloniere herself. The duchess issued her guests with specific objects from her museum and texts from her library, usually selected to suit the individual tastes and learning of each visitor. Within the Portland Museum, the hand could be acquisitive, exploratory or responsive; it could open cabinets, sort through drawers, support folios and turn the leaves of manuscripts. Work done by female hands took on a variety of forms; shell-work, embroidery, pressing and drying, decoupage, drawing all sat alongside cataloguing, manuscript copying, commonplacing, letter and journal writing. Object histories were delineated in colour-coordinated cut papers, expressed in catalogue prose and contoured through the assembly of engraved and painted images. Specimens were gathered, recorded and displayed in albums and cabinets, rearranged and exhibited, tidied away and then displayed again.

Chapter Breakdown

Part I of this thesis focuses on the materials of the Portland Museum, reanimating much of its since-disbanded contents and, with it, many of the epistolary, craft and salon conversations that were prompted by the collection. The first chapter of this thesis deals with craft work and women’s dextrous labour within the Portland Museum at Bulstrode Park. Using surviving correspondence written by contributors to the collection, including Elizabeth Montagu, Mary Delany and Mary Hamilton, this chapter examines the transformation of natural history specimens within the museum, and the practices of applying new meanings and contexts to acquisitions as a means of defining individual and group identities within the duchess’s social circle. Here, I examine with global objects, the physical evidences of international and intercontinental exchanges enabled by the expanding British empire and representative of complex colonial perspectives. I demonstrate how object narratives, previously dominated by these imperialistic and largely masculine perspectives (often intrinsically linked to military, in particular naval, presences across the globe), were adapted to reflect instead the female community at Bulstrode, and its insular and specific economies of material exchange

¹¹¹ Ibid.

and display used in expressing and confirming bonds of friendship within the museum-salon. I explore the museum in its broadest sense – including the exterior spaces of the surrounding park, stocked with live animals displayed alongside collected specimens and decorative schemes used in the performance of elite, female and Bluestocking identities.

Chapter two attends to the little-known negotiations surrounding the museum's most famous object, the Portland vase, as it entered the duchess's collection in 1783. Addressing scholarship that has positioned the duchess as an ill-informed and chaotic collector, I turn to correspondence between Sir William Hamilton and his niece Mary Hamilton to uncover the important role the Bluestocking salons and its members played in (re)valuing the vase on its arrival to Britain. I reject previous readings of the vase's history, frequently concerned with narratives of economic profit and patriarchal dynasty, and instead conduct a new assessment of its story in relation to the duchess of Portland herself, as well as the role of Mary Hamilton in securing its sale. Through close attendance to the epistolary and diary writings of the group, this chapter argues for Bluestocking women as informed antiquarians and connoisseurial assessors, and their conversation as central to the operations of the Portland Museum.

In chapter three, I focus on several of the interior sites and spaces of display and interaction across the Portland Museum at both Bulstrode Park and the duchess's house at Privy Gardens, Whitehall. I posit closets, cabinets, drawers and boxes, albums and folios as the physical and theoretical framework(s) of object and social organisation, adapted from traditional models of collecting and instrumental in shaping sensory, intellectual and emotional experiences within the collection. In particular, the chapter explores these sites as examples of homosocial collaboration and performative, though often semi-private, sociable action. I engage directly with many of the surviving spaces associated with the Portland Museum, while elsewhere reconstructing the now-lost geographies of its interior through epistolary, diary and catalogue sources. From Roman intaglios selected from museum drawers and pressed into the wax seals of Bluestocking correspondence, to archaeological artefacts placed in a deep box inviting dextrous excavation, I examine a range of diverse methodologies employed by the duchess and her circle.

Part II of this thesis looks beyond the collected objects of the museum, turning instead to a range of material and literary works created by those that came into contact with the collection and serve to augment the conversations taking place within it. Chapter four traces the intersections between the duchess of Portland's museum-salon

and the royal court, focusing on the collaborative exchanges of Mary Delany and Queen Charlotte. Here, I posit the centrality of craftwork within the museum environment, as a means of expressing emotional intimacy and artistic cooperation. Furthermore, I propose such economies of gifting and exchange as vital in the nurturing and sustaining of the female communities surrounding the museum, in which its participants shared craftwork, materials, tools, skills and labour in order to define their role within the group. Honing in on an album of decoupage created by Delany at Bulstrode in 1781, the subject of no previous scholarly work, I explore the prevalence of paper-cutting at the site as a way of responding to the collection itself, aligning this newly uncovered work with Delany's famous flower mosaics, cut from live specimens in the duchess's natural history collection. In situating the album amidst a series of material exchanges between Delany and the queen, taking place across Bulstrode and Windsor, I draw out narratives of cross-rank and cross-site collaboration. The second half of chapter four deals with the later paper-cutting of Queen Charlotte's daughters at court, revealing the influence on subsequent art practice of Delany's work at Bulstrode and, by extension, the legacy of the Portland Museum and its community.

Chapter five introduces a previously unknown text; Mary Hamilton's *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode* (1784). In providing a close reading of the text and the methods of its material and literary composition, this chapter reveals the value and priority placed on (art) historiographical writing within the Portland Museum, proposing it as an important environment in which antiquarian and connoisseurial authority was cultivated and knowledge shared. Here, I assert the significance of this previously unknown work, which represents the developed and experimental voice of a female Bluestocking writer concerned with models of historiography. Moreover, it serves as a record of much of the since-dispersed contents of the museum and the conversations that took place within its community, headed by figures including Horace Walpole and Joshua Reynolds. I aim to situate this chapter within an emerging field of enquiry concerned with women's antiquarian and historiographical writing during the period, and their literary and material models for enabling and interrogating the historical encounter.

The final chapter of this thesis moves away from the Bluestocking model of collecting, craft and conversation to explore the museum's legacy in the months following the duchess of Portland's death. Revisiting the well-established narrative of the auction, I turn to the sale catalogue as the site of alternate, commercial conversations important in shaping subsequent histories of the collection. I posit *A*

Catalogue of the Portland Museum, Lately the Property of the Duchess Dowager of Portland, Deceased as a vital tool in creating post-mortem narratives within the context of a commercial marketplace. Tracing the movement of conversation out of the museum-salon nurtured by the duchess's circle and into the public sphere, I consider how the text functioned as a point of contact between the duchess post-death and a culturally literate consumer community; one whose perceptions of celebrity and buying habits were informed by the text and other printed ephemera associated with the sale. In considering the sociability and adaptability of the *Catalogue*, which was subjected to processes of marginal annotation and extra-illustration, I reveal how, as both object and text, it enabled the creation of a fiction that proposed the duchess as both the purveyor of commodity and as commodity herself.

Chapter One

Collecting the World

In 1753, Elizabeth Montagu wrote a letter in which she described the collecting practices of her lifelong friend the duchess of Portland and her museum at Bulstrode Park:

I believe the menagerie at Bulstrode is exceedingly well worth seeing, for the Dutchess [sic] of Portland is as eager in collecting animals, as if she foresaw another deluge, and was assembling every creature after its kind, to preserve the species.¹¹²

In her epistolary account, Montagu details the global scope of the duchess's ambitions and positions her activities within broader discussions about the gendered self-fashioning of identity through objects. Situated on the periphery of the social and physical topography of London and its surrounds, Bulstrode served as a rural sanctuary for duchess of Portland and her guests. Here, the designed spaces of the landscape merged with the interior of the famed Portland museum, assembled by the duchess during a life of voracious collecting. This chapter centres on Bulstrode as a physical site, uncovering how its rooms and landscape supported a large-scale representation of an elite, British and often uniquely feminized world-view, one reflective of the duchess's own identity, and that of her circle. It does so by engaging with craft productions associated with several individuals within the duchess's social group, all of whom were visitors at Bulstrode. Ariane Fennetaux has proposed that "crafts could be appropriated by women, often allowing them to trespass into fields not traditionally associated with

¹¹² Elizabeth Montagu to Gilbert West, 25 October 1753. Matthew Montagu, ed., *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, 4 vols. (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1825), II, 269.

them.”¹¹³ Taking up this idea, I consider craft and artistic labour practices employed by elite women within the context of the sites and spaces of the duchess’s museum; positioning such works as material and narrative extensions of the broader assemblage and used in mediating the collision of the global and domestic at Bulstrode. Beth Tobin has examined the “mutability” of shells gathered from across the globe and brought to Bulstrode, revealing their role in the “social processes by which natural objects are transformed into material culture and are exchanged and circulated within social networks as commodities, gifts, decorative pieces, and scientific specimens.”¹¹⁴ Similarly, Alice Marples and Victoria Pickering have suggested that “we need to understand not only how knowledge is made in specific spaces but also how transactions occurred between them.”¹¹⁵ They suggest that “questioning how material knowledge was acquired, transported and adapted for purpose [...] allows scholars to embrace the diversity of information produced by such encounters.”¹¹⁶ In this chapter, I consider the role and function of natural history specimens and anthropological items gathered by the duchess and posited within processes of crafting and often ephemeral female production, alongside those of more systematic and traditional collecting methods.

The first half of the chapter explores how the duchess of Portland and her female guests positioned themselves within the expanding global world of the Georgian period. It reveals how they employed the multi-disciplinary practices of collecting, crafting and writing to cultivate a self-fashioned group identity deeply rooted in ideas of geographical and philosophical location. It demonstrates how Bluestocking practices of “a particular kind of virtuous yet opulent sociability” were adopted at Bulstrode.¹¹⁷ The second half engages directly with objects from the collection to reveal how global materials were gathered and transformed at Bulstrode as part of complex sociable practices centred around female friendship and substantiation of emotional bonds; essentially, how worldly specimens were reassembled to create and maintain an insular and private, feminized world in miniature.

¹¹³ Ariane Fennetaux, “Female Crafts: Women and Bricolage in Late Georgian Britain, 1750–1820” in Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin eds., *Women and Things 1750-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 100.

¹¹⁴ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 9.

¹¹⁵ Alice Marples and Victoria Pickering, “Exploring Cultures of Collecting in the Early Modern World,” *Archives of Natural History* 43, no. 1 (2016): 4.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Eger, “Introduction,” in Eger ed., *Bluestockings Displayed*, 1.

Bulstrode as an Epicentre of Enlightenment

From Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), visions of a separatist female community working in craft to reflect and define their place within the rapidly expanding material world had permeated cultural production.¹¹⁸ However, far from the artisanal labours of the working poor, which Scott depicts as prevalent within the female community of *Millenium Hall*, crafting by the duchess's circle was largely leisured and amateur in its nature.¹¹⁹ Amanda Vickery has previously identified that, within the historiography of women's craft, such productions have largely been seen in a context of female subjugation and domestic confinement.¹²⁰ Indeed, she argues that "for art historians, the accomplishments of Georgian women – regarded as neither useful nor art – have generally been a source of disappointment."¹²¹ By the mid-eighteenth century, the tension between methodical specimen collecting and the artistic treatment of them afterwards was already a cause for concern. In a letter written in 1751, the botanist Peter Collinson expressed to his colleague Jacob Trew something of the problematic and growing intersectionality between natural history practice and the amateur, decorative and feminine arts:

The curious Here may deservedly admire the Elegance & Beauty of the Flowers and Fossills etc in this New Methode of Colouring them so Exactly after the Life, but it is with regret wee see the Shells so mixed together, as if intended for Pictures for Ornament For Ladies Clossetts.¹²²

More recently, Elizabeth Eger has demonstrated the function of crafted objects and works exchanged amongst the Bluestocking circle, revealing their intellectual as well as

¹¹⁸ See Katherina Boehm, "Enlightenment Fictions and Objects: 18th Century Culture and the Matter of History," in Rainer Emig and Jana Gohrlich eds., *Proceedings of the Conference of the German Association of University Teachers of English* (WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2015), 203-212, for work on Scott's *Millenium Hall* and practices of crafting within models of Bluestocking antiquarianism.

¹¹⁹ For more on the amateur craftworks and genteel pursuits of women in the eighteenth century, see Noël Riley, *The Accomplished Lady: A History of Genteel Pursuits c. 1660-1860* (Oblong Creative Ltd: 2017); Amanda Vickery, "The Theory & Practice of Female Accomplishment", in Mark Laid and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts eds., *Mrs. Delany & Her Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 94-109; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹²⁰ See Ann Bermingham, "Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs: The Commerce in Culture and Self-Image in Eighteenth Century England", in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer eds., *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London: Routledge, 1995), 509

¹²¹ Vickery, "The Theory & Practice of Female Accomplishment", 94.

¹²² Peter Collinson to Jacob Trew, 15 April 1751. Quoted in Alun W. Armstrong ed., *Forget Not Mee & My Garden: Selected Letters 1725-1768 of Peter Collinson, F.R.S* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2002), 155.

material value within Enlightenment conversation.¹²³ Similarly, Maureen Daly Goggin and Tobin studied the creative and social implications of women's domestic work, whilst Ariane Fennetaux has proposed craft as "a meaningful process whereby women not only expressed themselves as individuals but above all organized, appropriated, and made sense of the world around them."¹²⁴ At Bulstrode, objects brought back from the colonies and newly discovered lands were translated to reflect female experience: imbued with complex meaning and absorbed into an aesthetic and emotional vernacular, materials in the Portland museum were exhibited, transformed and exchanged as part of an intricate and private economy. This chapter seeks to return to the historical moment that aligned anthropological and natural history specimens with the domestic and responsive creative efforts of elite women and offers possible interpretations of the processes of translation that turned foreign objects into autobiographical narratives.

In order to understand the role of female domestic craft within the duchess's museum, it is necessary to establish her collecting practices within the seemingly disparate practices of production and consumption. Susan Stewart has proposed that "in acquiring objects, the collector replaces production with consumption: objects are naturalized into the landscape of the collection itself."¹²⁵ However, more recently Tobin has argued that collecting is "more dynamic than [the] compensatory model" offered by earlier and largely Marxist scholars. Instead, for her, objects assembled by collectors are placed "in an affective, social, or discursive realm where they are not alienable but endowed with attributes that are derived from a sense of self, family, nation, ideology, ritual, or the sacred."¹²⁶ I propose that within such practice at Bulstrode, craft as a mode of production derived from or responding to the collection served to embed the collected objects of the duchess's museum more emphatically within an elite, social, scientific and often gendered context, endowing (to borrow Tobin's term) the gathered specimens and curiosities with notions of female identity and endeavour. In the Portland Museum, crafting can be read as a way of responding to objects in the museum and of rematerializing their histories to fit new narratives concerned instead

¹²³ See Elizabeth Eger, "Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects: Bluestocking friendship and material culture", *Parergon* 26, no. 2 (2009): 109-138.

¹²⁴ Fennetaux, "Female Crafts", 91-108. See also Goggin and Tobin eds., *Material Women 1750-1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009); *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles 1750-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

¹²⁵ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), 156.

¹²⁶ Fowkes Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 61.

with the intellectual and moral improvement of its women through the practice and processes of dextrous effort and domestic labour. Certainly, as Matthew McCormack has rightly noted in his work on men's shoes, "the historiography of material culture posits that objects perform cultural work rather than just instrumental functions."¹²⁷

The Portland Museum's collection of specimens raises questions about the meanings of once living crustaceans that were removed from their original habitats and offered up to decorative and contemplative schemes. Bill Brown has proposed that *objects* that lose their original and intended function acquire the status of *things*; their physical, immediate qualities are brought into focus, as their original contexts, functions and uses are abandoned or obscured.¹²⁸ Within natural history collecting, objects, usually specimens taken from plants or animals and therefore not (initially) part of man's self-made material culture, are transformed into things through their removal from their contexts and natural environments. Sophie Thomas, in her examination of the global objects associated with the voyages of Captain Cook and gathered by Sir Ashton Lever, has suggested that "once collected and placed on display, the object suffered from a troubling conceptual emptiness."¹²⁹ Certainly, it is possible to think about natural history objects in this way. Collected and displayed in the museum, these objects were devoid of the animation that characterised them in their original environments. Indeed, collected shells, for example, were literally empty; the living body inside them removed to reveal a negative space, thus transforming both their appearance and the aesthetic and tactile experience they offered, allowing for what Thomas terms "imaginative projections."¹³⁰ Collecting was at the heart of this transformation, forcing gathered objects to be reimagined as things used in narrating an assembled story usually reflective of the collector's identity rather than the individual objects histories. Within the Portland collection, the natural history items taken from across the globe were repositioned within the museum where they could be reassessed, their physicality and aesthetic qualities observed and translated to create new objects, crafted and imbued with new social and artistic meanings particular to that context. In this way, production and consumption shared the same spaces and subjects; through female labour and craft work, disarticulated things were once again made into objects with quantifiable social

¹²⁷ Matthew McCormack, "Boots, Material Culture and Georgian Masculinities," *Social History* 42, no. 4 (2017): 464.

¹²⁸ Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, 1 (2001): 1-22. See also *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003).

¹²⁹ Sophie Thomas, "Feather Cloaks and English Collectors: Cook's Voyages and the Objects of the Museum" in Ileana Baird and Christina Ionescu eds., *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture*, 69-87 (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 85.

¹³⁰ Thomas, "Feather Cloaks and English Collectors", 85.

function, namely, the assembly and representation of a narrative of global empire and female experience within it.

Scholars have sought to read the landscape at Bulstrode as typical of the kind of pleasure grounds characteristic of the day; as an enormous cornucopia of novelty items dedicated to the entertainment of a leisured elite. However, more recently, Laird has stressed the significance of the gardens at Bulstrode in shaping artistic and scientific discourses and in cultivating environments suitable for female experimentation and education.¹³¹ Susan Groag Bell has highlighted that the role of women in such spaces has been significantly underrepresented in both garden and women's scholarship: "we are missing an aspect of eighteenth-century aesthetics which, although no longer visible, existed in profusion."¹³² In an age of botanical endeavour and plant collecting, classification and recording, the garden offered an environment in which women could learn and exhibit that learning. These were spaces in which the world could be imported, planted and cultivated. Within the garden, women would explore, converting what they found; travelling in their minds to distant places through interaction with the materials of foreign cultures. In 1775, Jael Henrietta Pye wrote "I have observed that ladies in general visit these gardens, as our young gentlemen do foreign parts [...] These little excursions being commonly the only travels permitted to our sex, and the only way we have of becoming at all acquainted with the progress of arts."¹³³

Ruth Hayden, Molly Peacock and Laird have all paid substantial attention to the prolific and famous paper collages produced by Mary Delany (1700-1788) at Bulstrode during the later years of her life, demonstrating the significance of the site in enabling her creativity.¹³⁴ Beyond this, however, there has been very little examination of the global elements of the landscape, and even less of the relationship between the gathered and cultivated objects and the women who came into contact with them. I argue that, at Bulstrode, this relationship and the complex interactions between the duchess's collection and her social circle enabled private and group expression, as well as the maintenance of an intellectual community. Here, a self-fashioned group identity drew on female handicrafts as well as foreign and peripheral art forms to subvert British

¹³¹ Mark Laird, *A Natural History of the English Garden 1650-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 265-325.

¹³² Susan Groag Bell, "Women Create Gardens in Male Landscapes: A Revisionist Approach to Eighteenth Century English Garden History," *Feminist Studies* 16, no. 3 (Autumn, 1990): 481. See also Stephen Bending, *Green retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹³³ Jael Henrietta Pye, *A Peep into the Provincial Seats and Gardens in and about Twickenham by a Lady of Distinction*, (London, 1775), xi, quoted in Groag Bell, "Women Create Gardens," 743.

¹³⁴ For more on Delany's mosaics and her life at Bulstrode, see Ruth Hayden, *Mrs Delany and her flower collages* (London: British Museum Press, 1980), Laird and Weisberg-Roberts, *Mrs Delany and her Circle* and Molly Peacock, *The Paper Garden: Mrs Delany [Begins Her Life's Work] at 72* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).

patriarchal social structure and, instead, prioritise a feminized worldview manifested in its materials. This chapter works within several interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing on the prolific correspondence, diary writings and craft works of four of the women associated with Bulstrode; the duchess of Portland, her close friend and long-term companion Mary Delany, the young diarist Mary Hamilton (1756-1816) and Elizabeth Montagu. Alongside these sources, *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, published in accompaniment to the 1786 auction that dismantled the duchess's collection, serves as a vital source in re-establishing the museum's contents and reconstructing both its indoor and outdoor spaces. I demonstrate how women at Bulstrode organised and responded to worldly objects in order to construct multi-faceted authorship. Furthermore, I consider the eighteenth-century practice of collecting as a form of craft in its own right; one that brought together a collage of objects, textures and narratives, assembled to display meaning.

Whilst the networks fostered at Bulstrode, and those by the Bluestockings more generally, were not exclusively female, it is arguably the quantity and significance of female creativity associated with the site that confirms its singularity, and that of the women who lived and worked there. The duchess and Delany resided at the site for several years and both designed elements of the landscape. Following the death of the 2nd Duke of Portland in 1762, the duchess made Bulstrode her permanent residence, leaving her ancestral home of Welbeck in Nottinghamshire to her eldest son. After the death of her second husband, Mary Delany sought sanctuary at the vast estate of her friend, and it was here that she produced her most meaningful and celebrated works, including several volumes of her famous flower mosaics, now housed at the British Museum. Her residency at Bulstrode was secured when, in May 1768, the duchess wrote to Delany's niece "she could spend every summer with her friends [at Bulstrode], who would be *so happy* to have her company."¹³⁵ Betty Rizzo and Eger have both espoused the significance of female friendship as an alternative to, or reprise from marriage within Bluestocking circles, citing the supportive and intellectual possibilities of such social relationships.¹³⁶ Mary Hamilton spent long residencies at Bulstrode between 1783 and 1784, prior to her marriage to John Dickinson. During this time she kept detailed diaries and produced an extensive manuscript catalogue of the duchess's arts and antiquities

¹³⁵ The duchess of Portland to Mary Dewes, May 1768, Lady Llandover ed., *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, 6 vols (London: Bentley, 1861-2), IV, 146.

¹³⁶ Betty Rizzo, *Companions without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994) and Eger, *Bluestockings*, 93-100.

collections.¹³⁷ Elizabeth Montagu had maintained a friendship with the duchess since adolescence, and was a similarly regular, although sometimes sceptical visitor. Her letters contain descriptions of the museum, the park and many of its exhibits.

Writing to Elizabeth Montagu (then Robinson) from Bulstrode in 1738, the duchess of Portland reported “my amusements are all of the Rural kind – working, Spinning, Knotting, Drawing, Reading, writing, walking & picking Herbs to put into a Herbal.”¹³⁸ The duchess and her female guests practiced collage, paper-cuttings, sketching, painting, spinning, embroidery, wood turning, flower drying and shell-work. At Bulstrode, objects were created and transformed and re-envisioned. They represented an innovative combination of elite female learning and, often, singularly tactile and sensory responses to the worldly objects collected, traded and displayed there. Craft works brought back from places such as New Zealand and Hawaii were displayed alongside those made by the duchess’s guests, whilst elsewhere natural history specimens from across the globe were absorbed into art works that were often experimental or exploratory.

Psychological geographies of eighteenth-century Britain regularly positioned London at the heart of wider social, economic and topographic radiuses. Depending on the priorities of the cartographer, these imagined and mapped landscapes were expanded or narrowed to include important sites, countries or landscapes reflective of shifting notions of national, individual or group identities. Included in William Palmer’s 1787 edition of *The Ambulator; or, The Stranger’s Companion in a Tour Round London*, which sets out a twenty-five mile radius around the city, Bulstrode is depicted on the very edge of Palmer’s proposed circular route.¹³⁹ But, whilst Palmer positioned Bulstrode on the edge of fashionable urban society, I propose that, for the occupants at Bulstrode, it functioned as an independent epicentre of learning, around which people, ideas, conversations and objects orbited and the trajectories of which can be accurately traced. Edward Soja has previously defined the “construction of human geographies, the social production of space” as a process of actively emplacing society “in space and time.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Mary Hamilton’s manuscript *A Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode* is held in the Special Collections of the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester.

¹³⁸ Duchess of Portland to Elizabeth (Robinson) Montagu, 30 June 1738, quoted in Elizabeth Eger, “Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects,” 128.

¹³⁹ William Palmer, *The Ambulator; or, The Stranger’s Companion in a Tour Round London*, (London, 1787). Laird has discussed Palmer’s map, using it to demonstrate Mary Delany’s networks of plant exchange between sites including Bulstrode, James’s Lee’s nursery at Hammersmith, Kenwood House, Mrs Boscawen’s at Glan Villa and Kew. See Laird, *A Natural History of English Gardening*, 309.

¹⁴⁰ Edward Soja, “History: Geography: Modernity,” in Simon During ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1993), 136.

Marples and Pickering have previously identified the “increasingly scholarly interest in where science took place and geographical methodologies have been exceptionally useful for interrogating scientific spaces in the early modern period.”¹⁴¹ Bulstrode was, in many respects, insular and separatist, functioning on the interactions of a few, private individuals. And yet, simultaneously, it was connected to a vast global network that, when convened and colonised at Bulstrode, served to materialise and define worldly experience. Indeed, David E. Allen noted, in *The Naturalist in England*, that “so far as the natural history of these islands is concerned, Bulstrode was probably more important than the British Museum.”¹⁴²

The duchess herself conducted fieldtrips around England, but the vast majority of her collection was gathered through collaboration with others. Tobin has demonstrated that the networks of plant, shell, craft and literary exchange associated with Bulstrode were far-reaching and can be characterised by both their breadth and variety.¹⁴³ The processes by which the Duchess acquired her specimens were complex and, Tobin reveals, were “beyond an exclusive concern with acquisition.”¹⁴⁴ Whilst the duchess’s own excursions in search of natural history specimens were confined mainly to Weymouth and the south coast of England in the summer months, she employed friends and acquaintances in sourcing and delivering objects from further afield.¹⁴⁵ For example, in 1751, Horace Walpole quipped in a letter to George Montagu, “My evening yesterday was employed – how wisely do you think? in what grave occupation? in bawding for the Duchess of Portland, to procure her a scarlet spider from Admiral Boscawen.”¹⁴⁶ Walpole’s tone here, and choice of language, serves to effectively distance him from Bulstrode and its feminized practices. As Tobin has noted, “Walpole, though the duchess’s friend, was dismissive of her interest in natural history since his own interests lay in the decorative arts.”¹⁴⁷ For the Portland Museum, the gathering of natural history specimens simultaneously represented broader transnational, transcontinental exchanges whilst also serving to define the small community that maintained it, positioning it in relation to other contemporary collections. As Maria

¹⁴¹ Marples and Pickering, “Cultures of Collecting,” 4. See also S. Shapin, “Placing the View from Nowhere: Historical and Sociological problems in the Location of Science,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23 (1998): 5-12; H. Schramm, L. Schwarte and J. Lazardzig eds., *Collection, Laboratory, Theatre: Scenes of Knowledge in the 17th Century* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

¹⁴² David E. Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

¹⁴³ Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 12-13, 62, 65, 80-83.

¹⁴⁴ Goggin and Tobin eds., *Material Women 1750-1950*: 249.

¹⁴⁵ Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 10-13, 62, 65, 80-83.

¹⁴⁶ Horace Walpole to George Montagu, 30 May 1751, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, vol.9, 114.

¹⁴⁷ Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 56.

Zytaruk has argued, “direct pathways and points of connection existed between Bulstrode and the major natural history and botanical institutions of the day.”¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Zytaruk in particular has identified the significance of Bulstrode within these broader sites and networks: “While this estate did not function as a ‘center of calculation’ in the model of Joseph Banks’s Soho Square and Kew Gardens, Bulstrode was certainly more than a ‘node’ in natural history networks.”¹⁴⁹

Marginal in its nature, the site and the activities of its female occupants regularly were the subjects of criticism. The duchess, particularly towards the end of her life, was often represented as uncivilized, as having been rendered ugly and unfeminine through her collecting ‘mania’, as W. S. Lewis would later describe it, and her proximity to extraordinary and yet challenging global objects.¹⁵⁰ The pursuit of education by and for women was considered problematic within wider eighteenth-century society and formed the basis of ongoing and complex debates. Whilst, in the years after the duchess’s, figures like Mary Wollstonecraft would champion the education of young girls and encourage their contribution to societal development, the duchess’s own undertakings at Bulstrode were regularly vulnerable to satire from those living outside of its immediate community.¹⁵¹ Elsewhere, ideas of elite femininity were generally caught up with polite urban society, one governed by manners and strict codes of gendered behaviour. Bulstrode existed on the edge of these civilizing forces, and so its women were open to ridicule. Their apparent investment in societal abnormalities, particularly their advocating of friendship amongst women as an alternative to marriage, as well as their enthusiastic pursuit of intellectual study, both appeared challenging to wider society as subversive forces in a broadly patriarchal society.

In her discussion of Scott’s *Millenium Hall*, Pohl reveals how within female creative communities of the eighteenth century, the women would often adapt their surroundings to support their lifestyles. She considers the fictional community in Scott’s novel (itself reflective of the author’s own experiences of women-only living outside of Bath and later on a farm near to her sister Elizabeth Montagu’s Sandleford estate), and the relationship between women and the houses they occupy. She writes that, in the text, “existing ‘male’ architecture is taken over by a female utopian community and

¹⁴⁸ Zytaruk, “Epistolary Utterances,” in *Mrs. Delany & Her Circle*, 141.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Tobin has, in *The Duchess’s Shells*, presented a thorough study of the extent of the duchess’s natural history networks, and the quantity of specimens exchanged between the duchess and her acquaintances beyond Bulstrode itself.

¹⁵⁰ W. S. Lewis, “Introduction,” in *The Duchess of Portland’s Museum by Horace Walpole* (New York, 1936), v.

¹⁵¹ See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Women and Hints*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

reconstituted as a new spatial form where women are liberated from the ‘interiorizing definitions of men’.”¹⁵² Certainly, this is true at Bulstrode, where both the landscape and the interior rooms were taken over by the industrious activities of the duchess. In 1769, Mary Delany described the indoor spaces in which polite interior and natural worlds collided:

Her Grace’s breakfast room, which is now the repository of sieves, pans, platters, and filled with all the productions of that nature, are spread on tables, windows, chairs [...] sometimes, notwithstanding twelve chairs and a couch, it is indeed a little difficult to find a seat!¹⁵³

As Marples and Pickering have previously suggested, “in these spaces, the relationship between collecting and encounter is an important aspect of understanding the hybrid nature of early modern knowledge making.”¹⁵⁴ Thomas Rowlandson’s 1811 print *Rout at the Dowager Duchess of Portland’s* (fig. 1.1) demonstrates some of the mistrust and adversity directed as these women towards the end of the Georgian period, when the term ‘bluestocking’ was beginning to be used as a pejorative one.¹⁵⁵ Here, the salon is filled with bodies, objects and conversation. Figures overwhelm the space in which porcelain, wood, gold gilt, textiles and flesh all loom large. The typically Rowlandson-esque rotund bodies speak of gluttony and decadence; the pale flesh of the ladies bursts from beneath their seams with the undignified acquisition of knowledge. The women, in particular, are become visceral and obnoxious in their proximity to the room and its contents; their industrious foray into a seemingly uncivilized and unknown world through interrogation of its materials is revealed to be ugly and distasteful. As Stacey Sloboda has suggested, “Picking up on the curious confusions of Portland’s collection, Rowlandson depicts a collision between natural and artificial worlds.”¹⁵⁶ At Bulstrode, Rowlandson suggests, women are unsexed. He transmogrifies them into beasts, showing them to exist amongst the animals that, at Bulstrode, had permeated all formal and informal, interior and exterior spaces.

¹⁵² Nicole Pohl, “Sweet place, where virtue then did rest:’ The Appropriation of the Country –house Ethos in Sarah Scott’s Millenium Hall,” *Utopian Studies*, 7 (1996): 51. For more on the alteration of interiors by their female occupants, see Tita Chico, *Designing Women: The Dressing Room in Eighteenth-Century English Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005).

¹⁵³ Mary Delany to her niece, September 1769, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, IV, 282.

¹⁵⁴ Marples and Pickering, “Cultures of Collecting,” 4.

¹⁵⁵ Rowlandson’s depiction of the women at Bulstrode is extremely close in both composition and subject to his 1815 *Breaking Up of the Blue Stocking Club*, revealing a broader suspicion of female intellectuals and thus aligning the activities of the duchess and her guests with those of the Bluestockings in London.

¹⁵⁶ Sloboda, ‘Displaying Materials,’ 466.

Bulstrode generated models of knowledge and learning specific to the insular and private experiences of a circle of women residing and working there. In this way, the global networks represented by the collected objects at Bulstrode represented far more complex systems of exchange and acquisition than a simple narrative of colonial and imperial British expansion would suggest. Within this period, the collection of natural and anthropological artefacts from around the world was deeply anchored in practices of repatriation and reinterpretation within a British, and often domestic context, with collectors rarely venturing beyond the boundaries of their own habitats. On explorers and their interactions across the Atlantic, for instance, Nicholas Dew and James Delbourgo write that “the history of science [and by extension, the collecting practices it provoked] in the Atlantic world cannot be understood simply as a history of scientific travel from center to periphery and back again, because many who made knowledge in this world never made any such journey.”¹⁵⁷ In this way, aristocratic estates provided vital spaces in which to exhibit this knowledge and to evoke travel.

Bulstrode’s very infrastructure supported the crafting and domestic works on its female occupants, with hosts of largely forgotten and unseen servants serving the creative and collecting needs of their employer. Mary Hamilton reported in her diary that, when a barrel of “West India shells” was delivered to the duchess, she “pronounced the shells to be ‘good for nothing,’ afterwards was so good to look out some fossils and shells for me out of her own drawers; Mr. Agnew [the gardener] came and assisted to sort them out.”¹⁵⁸ Similarly, in December 1783, Hamilton recalled in her diary something of the collaborative relationship between servants and guests; “Mr. Levers, y^e house steward, came to me and brought y^e chimney-board he made for y^e library, w^{ch} I had promised y^e Dss to cover wth prints: had some talk wth him, he promised to shew me his drawings some morn^g”¹⁵⁹ Several days later, she recorded in the same diary how “Mr. Levers, y^e house steward, came and brought me a large portfolio of his drawings. Mrs. Delany came and we look’d them over, and he was so obliging to leave them with me.”¹⁶⁰ Both Levers and Agnew seem to have contributed significantly to the study of natural history at Bulstrode, producing art works that recorded the specimens collected there: “The Dss was then so good as to give me a book of drawings to look at of Mr. Levers, her Grace’s house stewards, and of Mr. Agnew, y^e gardener, of shells,

¹⁵⁷ Nicholas Dew and James Delbourgo, *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 5.

¹⁵⁸ Mary Hamilton Diary, 17 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 182.

¹⁵⁹ Mary Hamilton Diary, 9 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 166.

¹⁶⁰ Mary Hamilton Diary, 14 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 175.

birds, &c., &c.”¹⁶¹ As Tobin has previously noted of such systems of knowledge and object management “this is a convivial scene where young and old, men and women, servants and peers are gathered around talking, reading, and doing various collecting and sorting activities.”¹⁶²

One of the most effective ways the duchess was able to express both her knowledge of world geography, and her place within it, was through her collection of maps. Included in *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, which accompanied its dismantling at auction in 1786, lot 2914 contained “a large coloured Map of the British and French Dominions in North America, by John Mitchell, on canvas in a case...three ditto of Hudson’s Bay.”¹⁶³ Mitchell’s map, which was instrumental in the negotiation of the Treaty of Paris in 1783 when the borders of the new United States of America were defined, has been called the most important in American history.¹⁶⁴ Its presence in the duchess’s collection reveals her awareness of global events and an eagerness to demonstrate that knowledge. Maps of Nottinghamshire and “a large Map of London, one ditto with the Environs” were included in the same lot.¹⁶⁵ To place these objects in parallel with those relating to wider global and foreign landscapes was, perhaps, to emphasise the importance of these domestic and familiar landscapes in the duchess’s life and her imagined world geography. Her ancestral home of Welbeck was in Nottinghamshire, whilst Bulstrode sat within the environs of London; both served as small and private kingdoms for the duchess and reflected the geographical boundaries of her life, whilst Mitchell’s map and others in the collection revealed those of her mind and imagination. As Chloe Wigston Smith has previously identified, maps were an important tool in demonstrating women’s knowledge of the world. She highlights that young girls were often tasked with reproducing world maps in embroidery and samplers, thus turning global exploration into a domestic and tactile experience.¹⁶⁶ This allowed for a heightened level of agency and authorship – craft in this context became an act of colonialization, a kingdom made and contained, experienced and displayed in the home. At Bulstrode, the landscape functioned as a canvas on to which the world

¹⁶¹ Mary Hamilton Diary, 3 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 175.

¹⁶² Tobin, “Bluestockings and the Cultures of Natural History,” 65. For more on the role of servants in natural history and domestic practice, see also Stephen Shapin, “Invisible Technicians,” in *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 255-408.

¹⁶³ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 130.

¹⁶⁴ For more on the significance and circulation of Mitchell’s map see Matthew H. Edney, “John Mitchell’s Map of North America (1755): A Study of the Use and Publication of Official Maps in Eighteenth-Century Britain” *Imago Mundi*, 60 (2008): 63-85.

¹⁶⁵ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 130.

¹⁶⁶ Chloe Wigston Smith, “The Empire of Home: Global Domestic Objects and The Female American (1767),” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40, 1, (2017): 70-73.

could be mapped and traced through object interaction and was at once insular, and outward looking.

In 1781, the topographical artist Samuel Hieronymous Grimm visited Bulstrode, producing a series of watercolour and ink sketches of the landscape he discovered there. Grimm's *Bulstrode, the Seat of the Dowager Duchess of Portland* (Fig. 0.2), taken from across the parkland, shows the approach to the main house. It is one of the few surviving images of the landscape as it appeared during the duchess of Portland's lifetime. Visible is the complex of buildings and enclosures associated with the main house and which functioned as exhibition and storage spaces for the duchess's collection. In the foreground, three figures, possibly the duchess and her guests, are walking a path towards the house, passing through a cultivated landscape populated with deer. In October of 1768, Mary Delany revealed the potential at Bulstrode for producing knowledge of the natural world through its cultivated environments:

Surely an application to natural beauties must enlarge the mind? Can we view the wonderful texture of every leaf and flower, the dazzling and varied plumage of birds, the glowing colours of flies &C., &C., and their infinite variety, without saying, 'wonderful and marvellous art thou in all thy works!' And this house, with all belonging to it, is a noble school for such contemplations¹⁶⁷

But, if Bulstrode was indeed a "noble school," who were its intended pupils, what knowledge was prioritised there and what were the materials used to inform and instruct? Unlike the gardens of the early eighteenth century, which were characterised by inward-looking vistas and formal, closed compartments, Bulstrode was typical in its championing of later eighteenth-century tastes for more naturalistic spaces. And yet, unlike many of its contemporaries, such as Stowe where the garden was designed as a finite and specifically structured art-work, Bulstrode served as an experimental landscape; it was essentially a living museum, constantly evolving and rigorously organic. Known in court circles as "The Hive,"¹⁶⁸ Bulstrode was an industrious sanctuary for the creatively minded; a real, geographically specific site and yet also an imagined location, one understood in terms of the intellectual and experimental opportunities it afforded its guests. In a letter written in December 1757, Mary Delany described

¹⁶⁷ Mary Delany to Mary Dewes, 4 October 1768, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, IV, 173.

¹⁶⁸ Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 8.

engagement with the natural elements of the museum at Bulstrode and their evocation of the landscape beyond:

I have now in hand two frames of shells in their natural colours [...] The Duchess has just finished a bunch of barberries turned in amber, that are beautiful, and she is finishing an ear of barley, the corns amber, the stalk ivory, the beards tortoiseshell [sic]. At candlelight, cross- stitch and reading gather us together.¹⁶⁹

Similarly, over a period of several months in 1783 and 1784, Mary Hamilton's visits were marked by her engagement in the natural environments of the site, and the studious and artistic attempts of its inhabitants to understand and reflect them. Hamilton's interest in the natural world, and her enthusiasm for its study were already instilled in her before her visits to Bulstrode, but it was at this site that her desires for study and engagement were satisfied. Several months before her first invitation to Bulstrode, Hamilton wrote from Windsor to her friend Charlotte Margaret Gunning, asking "Pray what are your Studies this summer, & what book's [sic] of amusement have you [...] have just begged some books on Natural History & hope I shall acquire some knowledge in my favourite studies of this kind."¹⁷⁰ By the early 1780s Hamilton had developed a specific interest in shells that no doubt drew her to spend extended periods of time at Bulstrode, home to the largest shell collection in Europe (and therefore possibly the world).¹⁷¹ In 1781, Delany knew of her efforts to engage in the study of shells, writing in a letter "I long to see you, my dear Miss Hamilton, to congratulate you on being initiated into the science of "*conchyliology*" which I am sure you will do honour to."¹⁷² At Bulstrode, Hamilton's interest was met with a programme of education devised in accordance with the museum's collection. She records in her diary, "the duchess was then so good as to give me a book of drawings [...] of shells, birds &c., &c."¹⁷³

As Rebecca Stott has defined, Bulstrode "was a working environment [...] not just an elaborate display case of rare and curious things."¹⁷⁴ It is perhaps significant that

¹⁶⁹ Mrs. Delany to Mary Dewes, 29 December 1757, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 473.

¹⁷⁰ Mary Hamilton to Charlotte Margaret Gunning, 14 July 1782. HAM1/15/2/23.

¹⁷¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the extent of the duchess of Portland's shell collecting, see Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*.

¹⁷² Mary Delany to Mary Hamilton, 2 February 1781, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, VI, 4

¹⁷³ Mary Hamilton Diary, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, VI, 152.

¹⁷⁴ Stott, *Duchess of Curiosities*, 8.

Bulstrode is referred to in such obliquely Christian terms in the correspondence of both Delany and Montagu. Whilst Delany marvels at the various curiosities of the natural world, as created by God, Montagu casts the duchess of Portland as a Noah-figure, collecting animals two-by-two for preservation (and exhibition) in her land-locked ark. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg have argued of her correspondence, the religious connotations of Montagu's language indicate “the ideals of learning and virtue was part of a conservative, Anglican ideological project that distinguished the Bluestockings from both courtly and plebeian cultural ideologies and practices.”¹⁷⁵ The processes of ordering and understanding the world at Bulstrode were firmly rooted in overtly Western and specifically Biblical rhetoric, with Christian worship a significant aspect of daily life. In her diary of 1783, for instance, Mary Hamilton devotes large portions of her writing to her religious activities whilst visiting the house: “Staid in my room till Mr. Keys call’d me for chapel: met y^e Dss and Mrs. Delany in y^e gallery [...] When y^e prayers were over we went down y^e stairs to y^e body of y^e chapel, went into y^e pew next y^e altar, and received y^e Communion.”¹⁷⁶ As Betty Schellenberg has proposed of the all-female community in Scott’s *Millenium Hall*, and equally applicable to Bulstrode, female autonomy at such a site was regularly endorsed through the apparent possession by its female inhabitants of qualities “particularly legible in mid-eighteenth-century English culture: conversational skill [...] power of action [...] rational control [...] and moral purity, grounded in the Christian tradition.”¹⁷⁷

Within this period of rapid trade and exploratory expansion across the Pacific and Atlantic, there was a keen anxiety born from the close interrogation of materials from newly discovered or little-known parts of the world. At Bulstrode, the duchess and her guests lived amongst exotic animals, studying foreign shells and plants and repatriating them into British soil. In 1742, Elizabeth Montagu expressed the sometimes uneasy fusion of nature and art, prompting questions about representation and mimesis at Bulstrode when she wrote in a letter:

So many things there made by art and nature, so many stranger still, and very curious, hit off by chance and casualty. Shells so big and so little, some things so antique, and some so new fashioned, some excellent for being much use, others

¹⁷⁵ Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, “Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2002): 3.

¹⁷⁶ Mary Hamilton Diary, 14 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 175.

¹⁷⁷ Betty Schellenberg, *The Conversational Circle: Rereading the English Novel, 1740-1775* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 97.

so exquisite for being of no use at all; accidental shapes that seemed formed on purpose; contrivances of art that appear as if done by accident.¹⁷⁸

Here, Montagu stresses the ambiguity that permeated Bulstrode, and which saw the “accidental shapes” of nature masquerade as “contrivances of art” and vice versa. She highlights the careful processes of assessment that each specimen was submitted to by the duchess and visitors to her museum, chronicling the collective preferences for those items that were “excellent for being much use.” The criteria are aesthetic, tending towards visual and tactile variety as well as an interchangeability between nature and art that saw the boundaries between the two blurred significantly at the hands of the collection’s contributors.

Collecting the World, Crafting Friendship

In *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, a number of examples of craftworks from the colonial world are recorded. The duchess and her circle of friends would have conversed about the world surrounded by the objects of empire. From the “lady’s head-dress and [...] elegant silk hand fire-screen, worked in embroidery [...] all from *China*” to a “curious feather ornament from *New Zealand*” and “various necklaces and other ornaments made from shells, bones, seeds, grass, &c. by the *Natives* of the *Friendly* and *Sandwich Islands*” it is clear that the duchess’s collection was filled with fashionable and unique curiosities that engaged with elements of the natural world and native landscapes.¹⁷⁹ At Bulstrode, the collection disarticulated animals and objects from their native contexts, reorganised their movement across time and space, keeping them static in the museum. It was in this final environment that they were then translated through curation and craft to become embodiments of new and female narratives. Resituated within the landscape, these objects served as technologies of gender, deployed within the arena of the garden spaces to confirm and enact femininity as defined and prioritised by the duchess’s circle. As Stacey Sloboda has highlighted in her study of the duchess’s alignment of Chinese and Japanese porcelain with natural history specimens,

¹⁷⁸ Montagu to the duchess of Portland. Matthew Montagu, ed., *The Letters of Elizabeth Montagu*, 4 vols. (1809-13; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1974), II, 134-135.

¹⁷⁹ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 58.

“femininity - and the desire to perform it - presented a different set of interests and challenges for Portland as a collector,” compared to her male contemporaries.¹⁸⁰ In the taking up of such marginalised practices of art, rejected from the British and largely masculine canon, the duchess and her friends entered the space between the known and ‘civilized’ world of eighteenth-century Britain, and the newly discovered and rapidly expanding places beyond. Ideas of nationhood were regularly expressed through colonial collecting and repatriation of objects into British homes. Geographically and philosophically separate from the urban and masculinised, systematic forms of collecting seen in the private cabinets of collectors like Sloane, Lever and Hamilton, the museum at Bulstrode connected, instead, to the wider globe through a sharing and augmentation of craft made by non-British peoples.

In this way, a colonial aesthetic had infiltrated the elite, feminine domestic space, where ideals of female virtue and housewifery collided with alien objects imbued with an agency that demanded creative response. In her discussion of the 1767 novel *The Female American*, Chloe Wigston Smith has termed these creations “global domestic objects,” defining them as “handmade artefacts created by women that make references to the world, scientific expeditions and colonies” and that “reframe the geographic scope of domestic material culture.”¹⁸¹ Smith aligns these crafts, in particular needlework, with the schooling of women “in conventional accomplishments,” and suggests they “functioned as pedagogical tools and inculcated Christian principles and ideals of marriage.”¹⁸² However, at Bulstrode, it was the ideals of female friendship, deeply rooted in Bluestocking rhetoric, and not marriage that drove creativity. Indeed, Bulstrode served as a sanctuary from widowhood for the duchess of Portland and her companion Mary Delany, whilst Mary Hamilton’s residency in the early 1780s coincided with the period prior to her marriage to John Dickinson. Friendship at Bulstrode was both driven and confirmed by material exchanges; an engagement in craft that regularly relied on ‘exotic’ or luxuriant objects, and which came to reflect the complex global experiences of the unmarried or widowed women who lived there. Often, such items would reflect the emotional ties amongst the residents, which, as Lisa Moore has proposed in her essay ‘Queer Gardens’ can be read as potentially Sapphic in their nature.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Sloboda, “Displaying Materials,” 457.

¹⁸¹ Smith, “The Empire of Home,” 67.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 68

¹⁸³ Lisa Moore, “Queer Gardens: Mary Delany’s Flowers and Friendship,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, 1 (Fall 2005): 49-70. Moore explores the relationship between Mary Delany and the duchess of Portland, and Delany’s participation

Certainly, Bulstrode operated within an economy of friendship, affection and intellectual respect, supported by a quantifiable material currency. Guests were selected for their intellectual and emotional value to the community. When Mary Hamilton arrived at Bulstrode on 5 December 1783, she recorded in her diary a conversation with Mary Delany, who explained that Hamilton's presence in the house was due to "y^e affection y^e DP. [duchess of Portland] had taken for me &c; how much they both loved me, & how certain they both were that I did & ever should merit ye affection of every one who knew me."¹⁸⁴ Friendship was regularly confirmed through immersion in the museum itself and performed as part of elite female routines and behaviours associated with an aristocratic estate. As Laird has recorded, "at Bulstrode, the rhythms of daily excursions after breakfast or dinner involved interactions with birds and other creatures," signifying a unification of the domestic and exterior areas of the site and its contents.¹⁸⁵ Living and dead animals populated the site; the menagerie housed a zebra and an Indian bull, whilst birds roamed freely both indoors and outside. It is possible that the zebra was one of only four in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century. One was kept at the famous menagerie the Exeter Change in The Strand, whilst the other two belonged to George III's consort, Queen Charlotte. George Stubbs's famous painting of the queen's animal (fig. 1.2) depicts it somewhat awkwardly within a dark, lustrous and emphatically British landscape, an alien specimen of colonial collecting repatriated to reflect the identity and curiosity of a female patron. Of the animal at Bulstrode, little record remains although a letter written by Lady Stormont to Mary Hamilton in October 1784, records an "accident that deprived [the duchess] of her pretty zebra."¹⁸⁶ Recording interactions with the museum's contents was paramount to the duchess and her guests. Visitors to Bulstrode used epistolary accounts, sketching, diary-writing and collage to depict the contents of the landscape and incorporate them into female handicraft. For example, a sketch of an Indian bull, produced by Mary Delany in the summer of 1755 and "drawn from the life" reveals the absorption of the collection into the vernacular language of female experience, often marginalised and expressed in cross-disciplinary media rooted simultaneously in the performance of femininity and the private advancement of social bonds. Such processes of

in a "self-conscious community of intimate women friends," 50. See also Susan Lanser, "Bluestocking Sapphism and the Economies of Desire," in Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg eds., *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 2003), 257-76.

¹⁸⁴ Mary Hamilton Diary, 5 December 1783. HAM/2/6.

¹⁸⁵ Laird, *A Natural History of English Gardening*, 284.

¹⁸⁶ Lady Stormont to Mary Hamilton, 19 October 1784. HAM/1/18/105.

representation involved sociable performance and were products of collaboration and discussion. After arriving at Bulstrode in 1768, Delany wrote to her niece:

We breakfasted, and the little Jonquil parrot with us; it is the prettiest good-humoured little creature I ever saw [...] I am just returned from our circuit: it would take up a quire of paper to tell you what I have seen this morning only in a cursory way: but nothing pleased me more than the gold and silver fish I have seen in shoals, thousands I am sure, all swimming up in a body to the Duchess, who fed them with bread.¹⁸⁷

These cycles of behaviour gave structure and entertainments to the daily existence of the women at Bulstrode, and in many respects were performed as self-reflective and inward-looking routines; the landscape, gardens, menagerie, aviary and house all provided emotional succour as much as intellectual stimulation, and often functioned as an extended set of apparatus employed in building a singularly feminine world view. Delany's letters are peppered with lavish utopian descriptions of how, at Bulstrode, "the sun shines, the birds sing, the lambs bleat."¹⁸⁸ Multi-sensory immersion evoked tactile and sensual emotional responses; the landscape became a site of extended and evolving processes of craft used to articulate a performed group identity.

Whilst shells, animals and plants were metonymic of global travel and the dialogues between cultures, their absorption into the museum rendered them tokens of a collected, and therefore cultivated worldview. Objects were selected not for their original histories, but rather their potential to express specific British and ultimately feminine narratives. Contributors brought to the landscape the material embodiments of their worldly encounters. Several dried and preserved specimens of plants, which were sold in 1786 when the Portland museum was dismantled at auction, give an indication of the global scope of the collection. Lot 1378, for example, comprised of "various specimens of the inner bark of the Lagetto Tree (similar to the bark of the Cloth Tree of the *South-Sea Islands*); some of the bark of the American birch tree, used as paper, some white silky flax from *New Zealand*."¹⁸⁹ Perhaps the most comprehensive account of the landscape at Bulstrode, as viewed through the eyes of a tourist, is Richard Pococke's early account, written in 1751 and published in his *Travels through*

¹⁸⁷ Mary Delany to Mary Dewes, 7 September 1768, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, IV, 163.

¹⁸⁸ Mary Delany to Viscountess Andover, 3 May 1771, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, IV, 337.

¹⁸⁹ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 59.

England. Pococke records the duchess's passion for chinoiserie, and reveals the ways in which the designed elements of the landscape served to house and exhibit the living aspects of the museum:

[T]he ground and plantations of the park are very fine [...] At the further end of it is a canal covered with wild ducks; from this there is a descent to the left of the dairy and menagerie, in which several sorts of birds and fowls are kept and bred, particularly Chinese pheasants of both kinds. The dairy is adorn'd with a Chinese front, as a sort of open summer-house, and about it are some pieces of water for the different water poultry.¹⁹⁰

By the 1770s, the duchess's enthusiasm for foreign and exotic animals, plants and design coincided with the first successful voyages of Captain Cook, and the material legacies of these journeys were present at Bulstrode and throughout its gardens. Tobin has identified that Captain Cook sourced a large number of shells from countries including New Zealand, Hawaii and the Caribbean islands for the duchess, many of which were used to decorate elements of the garden¹⁹¹. Similarly, Joseph Banks, who accompanied Cook on his *Endeavour* voyage, contributed plants and flowers to the gardens at Bulstrode after his return to England in 1771.¹⁹² Lisa Ford has revealed the important exchanges between the duchess and Banks, demonstrating the ongoing interest of the duchess in the voyages shared by Cook and Banks, as well as her keen collection of many of the artefacts brought back from these trips.¹⁹³ On 17 December 1771, for example, Delany wrote to her brother, Bernard Granville, of a visit she and the duchess had paid to Banks's home in London:

We were yesterday together at Mr. Banks's to see some of the fruits of his travels, and were delighted with the paintings of the Otaheitie plants [...] They have brought the seeds of some of them which they think will do here, several of them are blossoms of trees as big as the largest oak, and so covered with flowers that their beauty can hardly be imagined...petals that are like threads,

¹⁹⁰ Richard Pococke, *The Travels through England of Dr Richard Pococke, Successively Bishop of Meath and of Ossory during 1750, 1751, and later years*, ed. James Joel Cartwright, I, 259-260.

¹⁹¹ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 74, 115-16, 135-38, 147.

¹⁹² For discussion of the radiuses of plant collecting beyond Bulstrode, both indigenous and foreign, see Laird, *A Natural History of English Gardening*, 300 – 23.

¹⁹³ Lisa Ford, "A Progress in Plants: Mrs. Delany's Botanical Sources," in Laird and Weisberg-Roberts eds., *Mrs. Delany & Her Circle*, 204. See *Autobiography and Correspondence*, I, 284.

are at the calyx white, by degrees shaded with purple, ending with crimson [...] I wish my tedious description has not tired you, but I was so pleased with the flower, &c., I could not help communicating it.¹⁹⁴

Such visits by the duchess and her companion served the dual functions of a social call and a meeting with Banks that served to keep the duchess up to date with the newest conversations in terms of global exploration and natural history collecting. Revealed in Delany's letter is her keen interest in the "paintings of the Otaheitie plants," demonstrating her fascination with translating specimens into art works designed to depict and record their real-life counterparts. Whilst Delany notes Banks's efforts to grow the same plants from seeds brought back to Britain, her letter touches on one of the main difficulties of botanical collecting in this period; namely, the struggle by many collectors to preserve these living and, therefore, rapidly decaying objects, marking the vital importance of botanical art work in capturing each specimen prior to its demise. Her minute attention to the smallest physical details of the plants she encountered in Banks's collection, and her relaying them to her brother in similar focus, indicate Delany's serious devotion to botanical representation, showing her eye to be that of an educated and engaged botanist as much as a practitioner of domestic craft.

By the late 1770s, the duchess was an expert in conchology and at the time of her death in 1785 was working on an extensive and accurate catalogue of her shell collection with the help of Daniel Solander (who had also travelled on Cook's *Endeavour* voyage in 1771).¹⁹⁵ At the auction that dismantled her museum following her death, of the thirty-eight days of the sale, thirty were devoted entirely to her shells. Tobin has revealed that "approximately 50 percent of the 4,263 lots consisted of shells, with each lot containing anything from one to dozens of shells."¹⁹⁶ These specimens represented a wide global view as well as vast networks of trans-continental and trans-oceanic trade. At the auction, lot 520, for example, contained "a large pair of *Murex ramofus* [...] from *Madagascar*."¹⁹⁷ Meanwhile, lot 624 offered "three varieties of *spondylus gaederopus*, L. from *Barbados*, *Martinique*, & *China*,"¹⁹⁸ whilst lot 608 boasted "a fine *Cardium spinosum*, S. or rake Cockle, from *the Mediterranean*."¹⁹⁹ In the preface to the sale

¹⁹⁴ Mary Delany to Bernard Granville, 17 December 1771, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, IV, 384 – 85.

¹⁹⁵ See John Lightfoot, "Preface," in *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, iii.

¹⁹⁶ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 5.

¹⁹⁷ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 23.

¹⁹⁸ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 27.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 26.

catalogue, John Lightfoot remarked on the priority given to precision and nomenclature within the duchess's collection, writing "it was indeed the intention of the enlightened Possessor to have every *unknown* Species described and published to the world."²⁰⁰

Alongside the traditional and rigidly scientific working methodology employed at Bulstrode, the duchess also indulged in a less ordered, aesthetically-orientated craft-work that sought to celebrate these new and exciting materials by completing shell-collages in the interior rooms of the house and erecting a shell-coated grotto in the grounds. Within the auction catalogue, a description for a large and ornate cabinet, together with descriptions of the contents of its twenty drawers, reveals the physical alignment of specimens alongside craft work produced at Bulstrode that incorporated the same or similar materials:

- Lot. *A neat walnut-tree Cabinet, on four eagle clawed feet, containing twenty drawers, curiously divided*
 1719 *into a variety of figures, eighteen of them with deal, and two with glass covers; including a most*
 beautiful assortment of Marine Shells from the Island of Minorca, elegantly arranged; the
 particulars of which are as follows, viz.
- i. The Arms of his late Royal Highness William Duke of Cumberland, curiously done in Shell-work – *a most elaborate performance, by a private Soldier*
 - ii. A variety of Dentalia, Tellinae, Ostieae Pectines, Neritae, Turbos, Haliotis, and other genera
 - iii. Various species of Ostreae Pectines, of the most beautiful colours
 - iv. Ditto
 - v. Ditto
 - vi. Ditto
 - vii. Whole-length Portraits of the late and present Viscount Mount-Edgecombe, represented coming our of the Gate of St. Phillip's Castle, at Minorca, with two Grenadiers saluting them – *the whole finely done in Shell-work*
 - viii. A great variety of beautiful species of Arca, Tellina, and Venus
 - ix. Various species of Ostreae Pectines, rich in colour
 - x. Ditto, chiefly of Opercularis, L. all chosen specimens, exhibiting beautiful and elegantly figured varieties
 - xi. Ditto, principally of the thin yellow, and other Butterflies Wing Pectens, extremely beautiful
 - xii. Ditto, all of the great Butterflies Wings, shewing the most elegant varieties of the species
 - xiii. Ditto, all the rough Butterflies Wings, and contain the most beautiful varieties of the species
 - xiv. Ditto, all of Varia, L. chiefly the Orange, scarlet, yellow, and beautifully variegated specimens of that kind
 - xv. Ditto, all of that most beautiful species, the lesser Butterflies Wing, and contains the rich yellow, brown, pink, and variegated varieties, with six cases of the *Clio. L.* or Venus's Chariots, *a new genus of shells*

²⁰⁰ Ibid, iii.

- xvi. Various shells of different genera, some specimens of Coral, Byssus of the Pinna, &c.
- xvii. Ditto, with some Hippocampi of different sizes
- xviii. Ditto, chiefly Dentalia, Helix, Janthina, Bulla citrina, Helix viridis, Buccinum neretoideum, Turno pullus, Patella sissura, some red Coral, &c.
- xix. Ditto, with some Antipathes, red Coral, &c.
- xx. Two Murex Tritonis, two Murex Olearium; Echinus spatagus; the skeleton of a fish, perhaps the Muraena Helena of the Ancients, &c.

In the cabinet, “The Arms of his late Royal Highness William Duke of Cumberland, curiously done in Shell-work” and “Whole-length Portraits” of the “late and present Viscount Mount-Edgcombe” emerging from “St Phillip’s Castle at Minorca [...] *the whole finely done in Shell-work*” were displayed alongside shells, coral and butterfly wings. The duchess contextualised and aligned her own craft works with the materials and visual cues of the British empire. In doing so, she formed a powerful arrangement; one that adapted military imagery as well as notions of traditional forms of elite portraiture to defend domestic and, crucially, female craft practice in the creation and display of such narratives. In doing so, the duchess demonstrates an awareness and adherence to nationalism and the advancement of empire, with references to specific individuals, locations and military events.²⁰¹ And yet, such productions point to a physical and determined translation of these ideas into her own domestic space and aesthetic taste.

Within the park, the duchess and Delany similarly employed shells gathered from around the world to create a grotto. Although its location is now obscured to us, Laird has proposed it was positioned close to the menagerie, suggestive of an ongoing dialogue between living and dead specimens and their unification under the aesthetically-minded gaze of a group of elites who delighted in visual singularity and exotic luxury.²⁰² Evocative of far-off landscapes, these shells brought to Bulstrode’s newly developed spaces a sense of the ancient, of the conflicting intricacies and vastness of nature. These aesthetically and geographically foreign, decorative and tactile tokens of global travel were incorporated into the duchess’s displayed scheme of friendship and collaboration. Each hollow, delicate shell reflected space, time, people and travel on a truly global scale and yet, in the hands of the women at Bulstrode, transitioned to

²⁰¹ George Edgcumbe, 1st Earl of Mount Edgcumbe, (1720 – 1795) was the son of Richard Edgcumbe, 1st Baron Edgcumbe, (1680 – 1758) and served as a British naval officer, fighting in the Seven Years War. He was involved in the Battle of Minorca in May 1756. Although the two portraits rendered in shell work by the duchess have no obvious surviving painted counterparts, there is a three-quarter length portrait of George Edgcumbe, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1748 and now in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

²⁰² Laird, *A Natural History of English Gardening*, 282.

become elements of an ongoing and gendered dialogue between the landscape and the women shaping it.

Work on the grotto at Bulstrode started as early as 1743, when Mary Delany began her second-marriage to Patrick Delany and visited the park of her friend. Later, as recorded in a sketch by Grimm during his visit to Bulstrode in 1781 (Fig. 1.3), the grotto would transform into one of the most richly ornate features within the garden. After showing her new husband around Bulstrode in 1743, Delany wrote in a letter “I am to design the plan for it.”²⁰³ Grimm’s image shows two chairs at the entrance of the grotto, which position it as a possible site of sociability, conversation and contemplation. Visitors could sit, looking out at the vistas and optical delights of the duchess’s outdoor museum or else immerse themselves in the experience of the grotto itself, sitting inside the structure and surrounded by its textures and other sensory offerings.

The grotto was one of several collaborative projects between Delany and the duchess and is demonstrative of the intimate friendship and trust they shared. Delany’s letters reveal that, by the spring of 1758, she was a knowledgeable buyer of shells, of which she had purchased specimens from Naples and Gibraltar, where they were collected by British army officers.²⁰⁴ Indeed, interwoven with the domestic and feminine works at Bulstrode is evidence of British military and colonial expansion during the period; both Delany and the duchess infiltrated trading networks amongst officers posted overseas. As Eger has noted, “in her youth, [the duchess] satisfied her desire for collecting feathers and shells by asking her naval brothers to bring back specimens from their travels.”²⁰⁵ Significantly, upon arrival at Bulstrode, and through the ownership of the duchess and the transformation by Delany, the shells were translated from masculine to feminine. Their histories of British naval, and therefore patriarchal, institutionalised power were subverted in a similarly colonial act to that which saw them taken from their native landscapes.

The progress of the grotto, sometime referred to as “the Cave,” is keenly reported in her letters during the summer of 1770. By 22 July, the grotto project was almost complete. Writing to her niece, Delany reported “The cave goes on briskly, and

²⁰³ Mary Delany to Mary Dewes, 9 December 1743, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, II, 238.

²⁰⁴ See Mary Delany to Mrs. Dewes, 11 February 1758, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 480-81.

²⁰⁵ Eger, “Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects,” 117. Pohl has similarly noted the role of familial and military ties in Bluestocking models of acquisition, citing Elizabeth Montagu’s brother Robert Robinson (1717 – 1756), a captain in the East India Company who “brought back artifacts, gifts, and many accounts, which his sisters, Elizabeth and Sarah, enjoyed very much.” See “Cosmopolitan Bluestockings,” 76.

now it draws near a conclusion my zeal to get it finished increases.” In the same letter, she notes “the black bird of the grott [sic] that comes to feed its young,” thus revealing something of the densely populated habitats of the park and, in particular, the prevalence of birds throughout its designed spaces.²⁰⁶ Also present here is the idea of “the cave” as a nurturing, womb-like space, echoing the themes of feminine experience and organic growth within the site.²⁰⁷ Writing in her diary in 1783, the young Mary Hamilton made a similar connection between the grotto and the living exhibits at Bulstrode:

I went to the Grotto, which was made by Mrs Delany. I sat in it for some time and enjoy'd the calm serenity of the scene around me here; and I thought of all those whom I loved, of every one whose friendship I was so happy to enjoy! When I return'd I fed the peacocks and guinea fowls, who follow'd me – every bird and animal in this place, of which there are a great variety, are tame and sociable.²⁰⁸

Hamilton represents Bulstrode as a taming force, through which harmony in nature is achieved and as a location where the artificial environments of the garden function as sanctuary within this Eden-esque account of the natural world, semi-fictionalised and exhibited in miniature.

If shells served to manifest female friendships at Bulstrode, then feathers acted to give voice to them. Across the site, birds living and dead, whole and partial were exchanged and gifted, where they contributed to the ongoing intellectual endeavours of the inhabitants. Here, the innocuous and apparently commonplace feather became a tradeable and giftable tool for facilitating communication and confirming female authority both within and without the garden. Birds were absorbed into the duchess's aviary or, elsewhere, were taxidermied and added to the indoor cabinets where they represented the far-reaching orbital trajectories of the museum and its contents. The sale catalogue of 1786 unlocks a rich and diverse collection; lot 1650 contained “Alcedo Galbuda, or King's-fisher, from the *Brazils*,” lot 1651 “Two green birds, with blue heads, from *South America*,” and lot 1666 “two fine red birds...from the *Sandwich Islands*

²⁰⁶ Mary Delany to Mary Dewes, 22 July 1770, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, IV, 289-290

²⁰⁷ In her article “Queer Gardens,” Lisa Moore discussed the grotto at Bulstrode in terms of a “vaginal opening” and makes connections with the Venus Temple and Venus Mound at West Wycombe in Oxfordshire (a garden Delany was familiar with). Moore, “Queer Gardens,” 57-58.

²⁰⁸ Mary Hamilton Diary, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, VI, 158.

– a new species.”²⁰⁹ In his *Harmonia ruralis; or, an essay towards a natural history of British song birds* (1794) the naturalist James Bolton recalled how, “in the year 1782, I sent a pair of [Goldfinch] birds, very neatly shot, together with their nest and eggs, to her Grace the late Duchess Dowager of Portland. Her Grace expressed a particular satisfaction and pleasure on receipt of them, and afforded them a place in her valuable and extensive museum.”²¹⁰ Feathers were used to evoke other elements of the garden and signify different aspects of nature. In the sale catalogue, lot 2925 included “Tulips, composed of peacock feathers, and a flower-pot, composed of seeds,” indicating a layering of different textures harvested from the landscape and formed into a collage reflective of that environment.²¹¹ The peacock feather was particularly versatile and often a preferred material within the duchess’s circle. The aviary at Bulstrode was vast, with birds allowed to roam the estate. In a letter of 1774, Delany recorded “I have now not only the hares, the sheep, and the peacocks &., and their usual companions, but a thousand little pheasants running upon the lawn.”²¹² Within the museum, the peacock feather featured in both exotic and anthropological items, as well as in domestic craft, with the former often influencing the design and content of the latter. At the sale of 1786, lot 1374 featured these two separate disciplines side by side; “A curious Indian fly-flap...made of peacock feathers” was sold along with “another made of the feathers of the common domestic fowl.”²¹³

At Bulstrode, feathers underwent a complex transformation from objects often associated in wider contemporary culture with violence both at home and abroad, into those expressive of private sociability. Beyond the bounds of the site, feathers brought back from the voyages of Cook had, by the 1780s, taken on the narrative of his death at the hands of the Hawaiians. Amongst the highlights of the Portland museum were, as the sale catalogue records, “A curious helmet-shaped cap, and 2 cloaks made of beautiful feathers, from O-why-hee!”²¹⁴ During Cook’s third and fateful voyage in 1778, he had been gifted the capes and accompanying helmet by the Hawaiian chieftain Kalani’opu’u.²¹⁵ Following his death, these objects would become publicly associated

²⁰⁹ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 74-75.

²¹⁰ James Bolton, *Harmonia ruralis; or, an essay towards a natural history of British song birds* (London: 1794), 40.

²¹¹ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 131.

²¹² Mary Delany to Mary Port, 4 July 1774, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, V, 11.

²¹³ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 59.

²¹⁴ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 59.

²¹⁵ For more on the feathered cloaks associated with Cook and their movements within English collections, see Thomas, “Feather Cloaks and English Collectors,” 69-88. See also Adrienne L. Kaeppler, “Artificial Curiosities:” *Being An Exposition of Native Manufactures Collected on the Three Pacific Voyages of Captain James Cook*, R. N. (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1978), 7 – 12.

with his killing and were often placed at the centre of images of his demise in circulation during the early 1780s. An engraving of Cook's death (fig. 1.4) produced in 1784, shows a number of Hawaiian warriors, their limbs and torsos bedecked in feathers. In the midst of the action a chieftain, identifiable by his feathered helmet, wears a cloak similar to that in the duchess's museum. Such images were ubiquitous and familiar to those in the duchess's circle. In 1784, Mary Hamilton noted the public curiosity and demand for such works, as well as the material value of their production, when she wrote in her diary:

Mrs and Mr Pepys & I look'd over some prints done from Drawings taken by Webber w^{ch} are published wth Cook's Voyages [...] in 4 vol! Quarto – Government have granted £8000 towards this publication & y^e price of y^e Work is 4 Guineas & ½ 2000 copies w^{ch} were printed are already sold. The Prints are bound up in a separate Vol. & are very well executed & the subjects curious.²¹⁶

At Bulstrode the domestication of birds and feathers, through their repatriation into the British landscape, allowed for their employment elsewhere, and overruled their histories that, outside of the park boundaries, had become synonymous with a violence that threatened both the individual body and that of the nation. It was exactly the domestication and dismantling of birds across the site that allowed for the control and reversal of such narratives; through collection and ownership, termination and harvesting, the duchess was able to impose her own identity onto the birds which were, in turn, translated into tools to express and formulate that of the group at Bulstrode. In 1783, Mary Hamilton recorded in her diary how “[The duchess] gave me flowers, and a peacock's feather to keep and use as a mark in a book to remember her by.”²¹⁷ Certainly, feathers were regularly enclosed within the folded down paper of women's letters, revealing the close relationship between feather and text in Bluestocking culture as central to sociability.²¹⁸

As Eger has previously identified, such gifts were characteristic of the materiality of Bluestocking friendships, in which feathers, locks of hair, ribbons and other craft works acted as a currency expressive of intellectual and emotional exchange. At Bulstrode, these gifts, wrapped in transportable correspondence were inextricably linked

²¹⁶ Mary Hamilton, 10 June 1784. HAM/2/10.

²¹⁷ Mary Hamilton, December 1783. HAM/2/4.

²¹⁸ Eger, “Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects,” 127.

to the processes of writing and communication and orbited the site; connecting the physicality of Bulstrode with that of other homes and landscapes. Arguably, no aspect of eighteenth-century intellectual life was more aided by the feather than letter writing, with the correspondence associated with Bulstrode offering a precise, eloquent and often uniquely private forum in which women could explore their voices. In order to quantify the widespread commonality and indeed fecundity of women's letter writing in this period, Caroline Franklin has suggested that it was the dextrous and everyday experiences of house and account keeping, combined with a lack of formal education in the arts of oratory that facilitated writing as a regularly female media.²¹⁹ The material culture of women's writing, then, was deeply rooted in a sense of the domestic, of sociability and of the house and its contents. At Bulstrode, it seemed only natural for the duchess and her friends to look to the landscape, and specifically her aviary, for the appropriate tools. Eger suggests that friendship amongst women was "fostered through dialogue, correspondence, and exchange and developed through the shared pleasures of occupation, reading and employment."²²⁰ Certainly, letters held particular resonance within the female communities at Bulstrode and served to extend the sisterhood of intellectual endeavour beyond the geographical bounds of the house and park; serving as tokens of the place and conjuring an 'idea' of Bulstrode as an intellectual and artistic oasis.

Bulstrode Park created a space in which the duchess and her circle could feminize objects of global travel, displacing artefacts from masculinised, often violent contexts into personal and private confirmations of friendship and emotional bonds amongst women. Elements of the natural world were absorbed into the Portland Museum, where they were employed in supporting female learning and craft work. The interior and exterior environments of the museum allowed for the creation of semi-fictionalised accounts of the world shaped not so much by fact, but by the priorities of those occupying them. Here, plants and animals from across the continents were embedded within four-dimensional, immersive spaces that were at once both powerful and all-

²¹⁹ Franklin records that "even Mary Wollstonecraft, pioneering editor of an anthology for girl's recitation, hid behind a male pseudonym and emphasized that, while *The Female Reader* (1789) would improve their diction and taste, "females are not educated to become public speakers of players", specifically discouraging recitation of the extracts to an audience." Caroline Franklin, "The Material Culture of Eighteenth-Century Women's Writing," *Women's Writing* 23, no.3 (2014): 286.

²²⁰ Eger, "Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects," 110.

encompassing. Materials exhibited performed to confirm and legitimise new, tactile ways of experience and recording the world.

The female inhabitants of Bulstrode used craft work, letters and diaries born out of the museum to establish and expand individual and group identities. Visitors to the collection could live and embody the imagined fictions and geographies it represented, whilst participating in a collective endeavour that defined the aspirations and values of the group. Through objects in the garden and outdoor spaces, the museum offered entertainment, discovery and the opportunity for authorship. The landscape formed a vast gallery for living exhibits that complemented the indoor museum and reflected the close relationship between the two seemingly separate environments. In many ways, practices of collecting and crafting can be read as conceptual, material and performative representations of global expansion and travel. In aligning the community at Bulstrode with alternate, foreign and peripheral cultures, the duchess acted to demonstrate knowledge of contemporary events and ideas, but also to cultivate group identity and maintain an economy built on friendship and sentimental sociability.

Chapter Two

Negotiating the Portland Vase

Whilst, as shown in chapter one, the duchess of Portland's museum-salon at Bulstrode provided a fertile environment for discussion and artistic experiment, her connections with the Bluestocking salons in London provided further opportunity for conversation and female collaboration. On 31 January 1784, Mary Hamilton, who had spent the preceding weeks as a guest at Bulstrode, attended an evening gathering at Mary Delany's London home. Among the guests were the duchess of Portland and Hamilton's uncle, Sir William Hamilton, who had returned to the city just months earlier following the death of his first wife Catherine (1738-1783) in Naples. Writing afterwards in her diary, Hamilton reported:

Went to Mrs. Delany, met there y^e D^{ss} of Portland (who comes every Eve^s to Mrs. Delany unless she is ill), Mr. Dewes & my Uncle Sr Wi – an agreeable Eve^s. My Uncle is lively clever & entertaining & always offers agreeable topics of discourse. The Duchess went out of the room, & sent for me & in y^e most handsome manner made me a very beautiful & fine present, a “gage d’amitie” she stiled it, this was a Watch & Chains of y^e newest fashion, y^e Chain of Silk, decorated wth Tassels & other ornaments of Steel, Gold & Pearl Beads, with a Seal & other Trinkets suitable in elegance [...] My Uncle set me down at Mr. Glover's, my good friend was delighted & pleased with my fine present.²²¹

This extraordinary gift from the duchess was in fact meant as a commemorative token of Hamilton's services in negotiating the sale of the Barberini, subsequently Portland, vase from Sir William to her patron. Despite its already well-established fame in Britain,

²²¹ Elizabeth and Florence Anson eds., *Mary Hamilton, Afterwards Mrs. John Dickenson at Court and at Home from Letters and Diaries 1756 to 1816* (London: John Murray, 1925), 163.

the transfer of the vase was executed in secret, and the watch given to Hamilton was no doubt a reward for her discretion and skill in manoeuvring negotiations between both parties. Days later, on 5 February, Hamilton wrote again in her journal:

With y^c Duchess till past 4 o'clock. My Uncle W^m came some time after I had been there, we look'd over some Antique Medals. My Uncle & y^c D^{ss} settled about the Vase [...] *entirely*. The D^{ss} made him give her an impression of his Arms, to have a Seal cut for me for ye Watch she had given me.²²²

This physical conjoining of the duchess's gift with Sir William's arms provides compelling evidence of Hamilton's role in bringing the two parties together. As the embodiment of their collaboration, the watch would be visible to all, medal-like, and yet remain the private expression of intimate and discrete thanks. Hamilton's role in the negotiations between her uncle and the duchess has been largely neglected by scholars, although in their 1925 selected edition of her letters and diaries, Elizabeth and Florence Anson note that as "friend and confidant of both," Hamilton was central in "negotiating the sale of [Sir William's] vase, and other treasures, to the Duchess."²²³ Similarly, in her 2004 history of the vase Susan Walker acknowledges "a deal was brokered in 1784 by [Sir William's] niece [...] in conditions of great secrecy."²²⁴ In her biography of Sir William's second wife, Emma Hamilton, Flora Fraser notes that it was Hamilton "who did almost all the hard work, which resulted in the Duchess buying [the vase], together with four lesser pieces for eighteen hundred guineas."²²⁵ This chapter seeks to re-establish Hamilton's significance in negotiating the sale, turning to her diaries and letters to recover her role.

The duchess of Portland's association with the vase has been routinely dismissed and discredited by those interested in its history.²²⁶ Instead an oft-rehearsed and factually incorrect narrative that it was "named after the Dukes of Portland who

²²² Ibid, 163.

²²³ Ibid, 154.

²²⁴ Susan Walker, *The Portland Vase* (London: British Museum Press, 2004), 22.

²²⁵ Flora Fraser, *Beloved Emma: The Life of Emma, Lady Hamilton* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

²²⁶ See Milo Keynes, "The Portland Vase: Sir William Hamilton, Josiah Wedgwood and the Darwins," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 52, no. 2 (Jul., 1998): 237-259; Denys Eyre Haynes, *The Portland Vase* (London: British Museum Press, 1964); Kenneth Painter and David Whitehouse, "The Portland Vase," in Martine Newby and Kenneth Painter eds., *Roman Glass: Two Centuries of Art and Invention* (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1991). Though not exhaustive, for an overview of studies concerned with developing interpretations of the vase's decorative schemes, see Bernard Ashmole, "A New Interpretation of the Portland Vase," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 87 (1967): 1-17; J. D. Smart, "The Portland Vase Again," *The Journal for Hellenic Studies* 104 (1984): 186; John Hind, "The Portland Vase: New Clues Towards Old Solutions," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995): 153.

owned it from 1786 to 1945” has taken hold.²²⁷ Even today, the display text that accompanies the vase exhibited in the Roman gallery at the British Museum continues to perpetuate this myth.²²⁸ The historiography of the vase has been concerned with its male patrons, specifically with its treatment at the hands of Sir William, the 3rd Duke and, later, Josiah Wedgwood. One possible reason for the early removal of the duchess from the vase’s story is the secrecy that surrounded its sale. As Wedgwood noted in his 1788 *Account of the Barberini, now Portland, Vase*, “By Sir William Hamilton it was disposed of to the late duchess of Portland, but with so much secrecy, at her grace’s request, that she was never known, even by her own family, to be the possessor of it.”²²⁹ Even in the period immediately after the duchess’s purchase of the vase, details of its mode of entry into her museum were obscured, leading to a subsequent absence of this important moment in the history of both the vase and the Portland collection.

This chapter explores the moment in which the vase entered the Portland Museum, and seeks to re-establish its significance and use within the Bluestocking circle. In particular, I aim to expand the duchess’s acquisition beyond the established narrative of the virtuosic and uninformed collector, instead reading her motives as deeply rooted in a collective Bluestocking identity that advanced understanding of the artefact’s history, materiality and cultural potential. The interactions traced in this chapter between the Bluestocking women and Sir William’s circle of predominantly male antiquarians and collectors can be contextualised within the group’s broader connections to France, Italy and Germany, so often cemented in material and literary exchanges, and explored by Nicole Pohl in her essay “Cosmopolitan Bluestockings.”²³⁰ At the moment the vase arrived in London in the early 1780s, its discrete assimilation into the duchess’s circle indicates what Pohl has termed the “cross-fertilization” of literature, philosophy and historiography implemented through “cultural exchanges” born of the Grand Tour.²³¹ Certainly, Roman history and the Italian Renaissance were areas of particular interest for the Bluestockings. Pohl, for instance, has noted that

²²⁷ Keynes, “The Portland Vase,” 237.

²²⁸ The display text reads “The Portland Vase is one of the finest surviving pieces of Roman glass and is named after the Dukes of Portland who owned it from 1785 to 1945.” The 3rd Duke of Portland (the duchess’s son) purchased the vase from the auction that dismantled his mother’s museum in 1786, the duchess having purchased it the year before. It is worth noting, however, that the British Museum’s online catalogue entry for the vase is much more thorough and does not contain the same inaccuracies.

²²⁹ Josiah Wedgwood, *Account of the Barberini, now Portland, vase with the various explication[sic] of its bas reliefs that have been given by different authors* (London: 1788), 2.

²³⁰ Pohl, “Cosmopolitan Bluestockings,” 78-84. See also Marianna D’Ezio, “Literary and Cultural Intersections between British and Italian Women Writers and Salonieres during the Eighteenth Century,” in Hilary Brown and Gillian Dow eds., *Readers, Writers, Salonieres: Female Networks in Europe, 1700 – 1900* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 11-30.

²³¹ Pohl, “Cosmopolitan Bluestockings,” 78.

Elizabeth Montagu “ordered copies of historical books from Italy” when her brother and sister visited the country in the 1760s, while Sarah Scott “contemplated translating Italian histories into English.”²³² As we shall see, this tendency to absorb European (art) history, whether linguistically or through the literal movement of historical materials from the continent and into British collections, is identifiable across the vase’s biography in this period.

This chapter takes up the duality of the vase’s public life in Britain – its valuation through seemingly disparate financial and artistic terms – and examines its exhibition at the male-dominated Society of Antiquaries as well as the discrete discussion and secret sale that took place in the Bluestocking salons. For the majority of scholars, that the duchess owned the vase for just a year before her death in 1785 has long been the only point of interest, with many assuming that, in those few months, she did little to engage with or understand it. Certainly, the duchess of Portland has been described as a virtuosi, rather than a connoisseur. Historians have returned countless times to Walpole’s assessment of her as “a simple woman, but perfectly sober, and intoxicated only by *empty* vases” in order to represent her want of seriousness or knowledge.²³³ Although in practice the distinction between these two apparently disparate models of collecting and engagement in the arts was not as rigorous in the eighteenth century as modern historians would like to believe, there were clear divides expressed across published texts and printed images that suggest a broad cultural discrimination.²³⁴ Harry Mount addresses this history to demonstrate that, even by the early-eighteenth century, it was believed the “approach of the connoisseur replaced an older, more indiscriminate attitude to collecting usually referred to as ‘curiosity.’”²³⁵ Certainly, in the subsequent retelling of the sale of the vase from Sir William to the duchess, it is consistently Sir William’s role as the informed and experienced assessor of antiquity that has been given priority, whilst the duchess’s actions have been assigned as ignorant and chaotic. However, as Mount demonstrates “the notion that there was a decisive move from one set of priorities personified by the ‘virtuoso’ to another personified by the ‘connoisseur’ is [...] somewhat overdrawn.”²³⁶ I seek to reassess the duchess’s credentials as a connoisseur and examine her methods of selecting and

²³² Ibid, 79.

²³³ Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 19 August 1785, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, vol. 33, 489. See Keynes, “The Portland Vase,” 239.

²³⁴ See Harry Mount, “The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass: Constructions of the Connoisseur in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (2006): 167-183.

²³⁵ Mount, “The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass,” 169.

²³⁶ Ibid.

acquiring the vase in specifically connoisseurial terms. In particular, I turn to the duchess's discriminatory knowledge and understanding of the status of the vase and its value as a cultural and material treasure, and her practical and intellectual approaches to making these assessments. Equally, I demonstrate the centrality of female friendship to Bluestocking models of collecting, positing the duchess's relationship with Hamilton and, by extension, her uncle as vital in navigating the process of acquisition.

The first part of this chapter concerns the vase's starring role in British, specifically London, society as it entered the country in 1783. As variations of neoclassical forms of social, conversational and spatial organisation, the Bluestocking salons and the Society of Antiquaries provided different models useful in disseminating images of the vase, driving discussion and debating its value. Beginning with an examination of Sir William's efforts to establish the vase at the forefront of a new British school of art history and practice, I then turn to Hamilton's role in introducing her uncle into the Bluestocking circle, comparing the different priorities and ambitions envisioned for the vase in each institution. The second half of the chapter focuses on the pragmatic roles of Bluestocking women in shaping the narrative and cultural perception of the vase in the moments surrounding the duchess of Portland's purchase, as strikingly exemplified in the surviving correspondence and journals of Mary Hamilton. It examines the models of financial, practical and conversational negotiations that surrounded the vase, noting in particular the expression of antiquarian and connoisseurial behaviours within the circle, as well as the vase's perceived potential for advancing Bluestocking learning and identities. As I shall show, the duchess's secret purchase of the vase from Sir William worked to cover his increasing debts and allowed the vase's continuing circulation and study amongst her circle in London. Indeed, there was a considerable crossover period, in which the duchess technically owned the vase and yet, outwardly, it appeared to still be in the possession of its previous owner as it was exhibited, discussed and reproduced. During this time, Hamilton acted as its keeper, controlling access to it on her uncle's (and the duchess's) behalf, as well as organising its display and transportation when necessary.

(Re) Valuing the Vase: The Society of Antiquaries and the Bluestocking Salons

Upon Sir William's return in 1783, Mary Hamilton was uniquely positioned within an influential group of people whose expertise and tastes her uncle fully intended to

harvest in order to promote and ultimately sell the vase. Her friendship with the duchess and others including Horace Walpole and Joshua Reynolds meant she was perfectly placed to comment and advise on the state of the city's private market, at the same time as facilitating her uncle's reintroduction to society. Once the duchess had been identified as the preferred buyer, the forms and modes of Hamilton's social and financial negotiations were various, and spanned across epistolary, salon and domestic spaces. Her efforts gained Sir William access to the semi-private sites occupied by the duchess and her circle: Bulstrode, the duchess's house at Whitehall, and the salons of Elizabeth Vesey and Mary Delany provided the settings for the sale.

Hamilton's relationship with Sir William was rooted in material culture, particularly in the exchange of antiquities. Writing from Naples in November 1782, after the death of his first wife, Sir William declared "I have set aside for you an antique ring which was constantly worn by poor Lady H., & will send it to you by the first opportunity. It is on a Turnkey stone & the subject is a Perseus."²³⁷ Later, he would also send his niece "the bracelet with my hair, which poor Lady H. wore from the moment we married. I wou'd not deposit it but in the hands of one whom I know to have loved & respected her."²³⁸ These objects, simultaneously antique and personal, ancient and immediate, bodily and scholarly, served to transcend and revise the boundaries between uncle and niece. Hamilton was invited to take up the responsibilities that had previously been her aunt's, in attending to Sir William's social needs. The gifts conveyed genuine emotional investment, even hopefulness, in a relationship that, due to Sir William's posting in Naples, had never before been explored or prioritised until now. Indeed, before travelling to London in 1783, Sir William admitted to Hamilton "I really am ignorant of your circumstances after the death of your Mother, but I have long known that you are prudent & a good economist" adding afterwards "I hope it is needless to assure you My Dear Niece that you are in possession of my sincere affection & that you will ever find me a true friend."²³⁹ When Sir William's visit to Britain was concluded in the late summer of 1784, he bestowed on his niece, as a parting gift, his portrait painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds.²⁴⁰ His reliance of familial networking as a means to integrate both himself and the vase into Britain after his long absence in Naples has already been noted by Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan in their important study *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir*

²³⁷ Sir William Hamilton to Mary Hamilton, 5 November 1782, HAM/1/4/4/3.

²³⁸ Sir William Hamilton to Mary Hamilton, 15 March 1784, HAM/1/4/4/14.

²³⁹ Anson eds., *Mary Hamilton*, 152-53.

²⁴⁰ Mary Hamilton Diary, 5 September 1784, HAM/2/14.

William Hamilton and His Collection. Although they touch only briefly on Hamilton's role in her uncle's career, Jenkins and Sloan note how "previous accounts of his involvement with the Vase have overlooked the importance of the correspondence passed between him and his nephew Charles Greville."²⁴¹ Greville, who was invited several times to Bulstrode and who moved in similar circles to Hamilton, was tasked by Sir William with engaging the engraver Francesco Bartolozzi (1727 – 1815) to produce works after Giovanni Battista Cipriani (1727 – 1785), whose sketches of the vase Sir William had already commissioned.²⁴²

The arrival of the vase into Britain caused much excitement and discussion in a number of circles. For some, its value lay in its material singularity and the opportunity it provided for art historical debate. For others, including Sir William and, later, Wedgwood, the vase represented an exciting intervention in British art, and promised to change both its aesthetics and its practices. In February 1784, the sculptor and draughtsman John Flaxman (1755 – 1826) wrote to Wedgwood "I wish you may soon come to town to see William Hamilton's Vase, it is the finest production of Art that has been brought to England and seems to be the very apex of perfection."²⁴³ Laurence Machet has described the appeal of the vase on its arrival in London:

In March 1784, before selling it to the Duchess of Portland, [Sir William] had presented the vase to the Society of Antiquaries, increasing its fame and the curiosity of the fashionable elites. The craze for antiquities, further spread by young men returning from their Grand Tour, was at its apex. Illustrations of the vase were present in *L'Antiquité expliquée* by Bernard de Montfaucon and had contributed to disseminating its reputation all over Europe."²⁴⁴

Sir William's ambitions for the vase as a celebrated art work useful in the furthering of a British school of art were tempered with a need to recuperate the financial loss he had suffered in buying it from the Scottish dealer James Byres. Writing later in 1786, he described his impetuous purchase: "The person I bought it of at Rome will do me the

²⁴¹ Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William and His Collection* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 190.

²⁴² Bartolozzi's engravings of the Vase were published by John Boydell in April 1786. Charles Greville is perhaps best known today as the lover of Emma Hart (later Hamilton), whom he introduced to his uncle in 1785. For more on their relationship, see Kate Williams, *Emma Hamilton: Seduction and Celebrity* (London: Thames and Hudson 2016) and Flora Fraser, *Beloved Emma: The Life of Emma, Lady Hamilton* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

²⁴³ John Flaxman to Josiah Wedgwood, 5 February 1784, Wedgwood Museum, Staffordshire. Mss 2-30188.

²⁴⁴ Laurence Machet, "The Portland Vase and the Wedgwood copies: the story of a scientific and aesthetic challenge" *Miranda* 7 (2012): 6.

justice to say, that the superior excellence of this exquisite masterpiece struck me so much at first sight, that I eagerly asked - Is it yours? Will you sell it? He answered, Yes, but never under £1000.”²⁴⁵

The value of the Portland vase as a signifier of ancient artistic achievement has long informed its narratives and is most regularly confirmed in the semantics that surround it. Possibly the earliest recorded instance of this veneration of the vase, and its identification as a singular example of classical craftsmanship and storytelling, can be found in a letter written by the artist Pierse, who referred to it as a “monumenti dell’antiquita.”²⁴⁶ In the eighteenth century, the idea of the vase as a monument to the classical world appeared repeatedly in both published texts and private writing. In his *Account of the [...] Vase*, Wedgwood, for example, describes it as “this beautiful monument of ancient art.”²⁴⁷ Maria Grazia Lolla identifies that “eighteenth-century definitions of ‘monument’ were broad enough to include buildings, sculptures, texts and ordinary objects”²⁴⁸ Sir William’s manifesto to enrich British art had begun years before his return to Britain with the Portland vase. In 1771, he expressed his aspirations in a letter to Walpole, writing:

I am in great hopes of receiving soon the Kings permissions to return home for a few months. You shall then see that I have not been idle since I have been here, & the lovers of Antiquity will I think be obliged to me for enriching our Country with a most singular collection.²⁴⁹

From Italy, he relied on a network of friends and acquaintances back in England, to whom he regularly sent artefacts he had excavated or purchased in Europe.²⁵⁰

Throughout his life, vases held a special significance in Sir William’s manifesto for artistic and historiographical development. Writing to Walpole on 17 April 1792, he mused:

²⁴⁵ Sir William Hamilton to Josiah Wedgwood, 24 July 1786, quoted in W. Mankowitz, *The Portland Vase and the Wedgwood Copies* (London, 1952), 29-30

²⁴⁶ 23rd June 1623, Peiresc to Aleandro: 'Principalmente se si potesse havere disegno del vase di smalto del Card. del Monte, ch'io trovava altre volte de' piu belli monumenti dell'antiquita'. Barberini Latin MSS, Vatican Library, Rome, MS.6504, fo1.122, quoted in David Jaffe, “Peiresc, Rubens, dal Pozzo and the 'Portland Vase',” *The Burlington Magazine* 131, no. 1037 (1989): 557.

²⁴⁷ Wedgwood, *Account of the Barberini, now Portland Vase*, 1.

²⁴⁸ Maria Grazia Lolla, “Monuments and Texts: Antiquarianism and the Beauty of Antiquity,” *Art History* 23, no. 4 (2002): 432.

²⁴⁹ Letter from Sir William Hamilton to Walpole, writing from Naples on 5 March 1771, LWL MSS Box 13, no. 3.

²⁵⁰ Keynes has previously pointed to Sir William’s problematic removal of antiquities from this region, citing contemporary laws that forbade such trafficking.

Now that I have a little leisure I shall endeavour that the first volume of my new collection of Vases all of which were under ground 3 years ago shall be published within two months, and I flatter myself that their publication will be of infinite use to the arts & will lay upon a Noble field for Antiquaries to display their Erudition – but my object is principally as it always has been, to assist & promote the Arts.²⁵¹

Sir William had presented vases of historical and artistic import to the Society of Antiquaries previously. In 1775, he showed a “marble vase,” described in the society’s minute book as “the finest Monument of the kind in Europe.”²⁵² In March 1784, by which time he had secretly sold the Portland vase to the duchess, he “was pleased to produce [it], for the inspection of the society.”²⁵³ The *Gentleman’s Magazine* reported the vase’s presentation: “Sir William Hamilton exhibited, for the inspection of that learned body, the admirably curious Barberini vase which he has lately brought from Italy, and which was found in the Sarcophagus of the Emperor Alexander Severus.”²⁵⁴ That the duchess owned the vase at this time whilst allowing its continued and unimpeded exhibition underscores her clear comprehension of its importance in British cultural life as well as her own influence and power in having gained possession of it.

Although the displaying of the original vase at such learned and male-dominated institutions was clearly a priority for Sir William, his ambitions to make its image ubiquitous and useful to artists as well as antiquarians consumed much of his time and money. Jenkins and Sloan note that “as least as early as January 1784, [Sir William] conceived of a publication to celebrate the Portland Vase in England.”²⁵⁵ For this work, he chose the draughtsman Cipriani, who had “established his reputation as an able recorder of antique subjects.”²⁵⁶ The production of the drawings (figs. 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4), like the exhibition of the vase itself, would continue beyond the duchess’s purchase of it, with the vase being returned to the duchess via Hamilton on the completion of Cipriani’s drawings in July 1784.

²⁵¹ Sir William Hamilton to Horace Walpole. 17 April 1792. LWL MSS 1, box. 13, no. 10.

²⁵² Society of Antiquaries Minute Book XIV, 1775, 246.

²⁵³ Society of Antiquaries Minute Book XIX, 1784, 260-261.

²⁵⁴ *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 56 part 1 (London: E. Cave, 1784), 227-228.

²⁵⁵ Jenkins and Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes*, 109.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* For more on Sir William’s work in reproducing antiquities in his possession, see Thora Brylowe, “Two Kinds of Collections: Sir William Hamilton’s Vases, Real and Represented,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 32, no. 1 (2008): 23-56.

Mount has previously examined the tension within established models of eighteenth-century connoisseurship between the traditional veneration of Renaissance works by Old Masters and a growing interest in “the fresh growth of modern British art” as informed through hegemonic encounters with the classical world.²⁵⁷ One way in which this could be achieved was through the commissioning and disseminating of pictorial reproductions of antiquities. Lolla has argued that “Printing and engraving were analogous in that both were icons of modernity [...] both were valued for being instrumental to the advancement of knowledge because they multiplied access to sources”²⁵⁸ For Sir William and his circle, there was a definite shift away from venerating the material singularity of the vase and encountering it first-hand. Instead, his possession of it can be characterised by a move towards methods of reproducing the vase in image and text and disseminating it to a wider audience that, as well as the elite of British society, also included artists, antiquarians and industrialists. Paintings and prints of antiquities were, of course, ubiquitous in the mid-late eighteenth century, and served to expand what Lolla terms the cultural “memory” of artefacts, sculpture and architectural fragments that might have been destroyed or lost to history.²⁵⁹ As increasingly standard antiquarian practice, the representation of such “monuments” raised questions about “the essence of the monuments and their value; about their physical boundaries and the best means of their reproduction”²⁶⁰ In the case of the Portland vase, the tension between Sir William’s ambitions to commit it to a wider and more accessible British aesthetic and the duchess’s exclusive and secret acquisition of the original indicates some ambiguity or, rather, fluidity in the vase’s physical and artistic qualities that might allow for the expression of different (sometimes polar) antiquarian, connoisseurial, and collecting priorities. Certainly, the enduring survival of many of the visual and textual sources relating to the vase and produced under Sir William’s instruction or encouragement has contributed to the erasure of the narrative of its association with the duchess, obscuring the ambitions and concerns that would have driven her acquisition.

In order to find a buyer for his vase, Sir William turned away the masculine institutions of the Society of Antiquaries or the British Museum, where interest in the vase was almost exclusively rooted in its potential for debate and art criticism rather

²⁵⁷ Mount, “Constructions of the Connoisseur,” 171.

²⁵⁸ Lolla, ‘Monuments and Texts’, 431.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 432.

than in its purchase. Instead, he looked to the Bluestocking salons, engaging his niece as his guide. For Sir William, Hamilton was a useful contact who could spread the word about the availability of many antiquities in his collection among those attending the salons, whilst also gaining him access to the salonieres and their guests. As this thesis demonstrates, for those involved in the Portland Museum, conversation, in verbal and epistolary form, was central in navigating material objects and negotiating the social networks that enabled their exchange and display. As Sir William struggled to balance these two disparate aspects of his life and activity in London, he relied increasingly on his niece to arrange his appointments with members of her circle. In February 1784, he wrote to Hamilton “I forgot yesterday that I am obliged to attend a Committee of the British Museum today at 12. I have sent my excuse to L^y Stormont [...] excuse [me] My D^r Miss H.”²⁶¹

The structure of the Bluestocking salon allowed for the spread of information about potential sellers and buyers, as well as generation of (art) historical debate. This circulation of data and conversation, and its role in reintroducing Sir William and his antiquities into London society, is evident in a brief letter (fig. 2.5) dating from November 1783.²⁶² The original content of the note was written by Horace Walpole and addressed to Elizabeth Vesey, while the same paper was later reused by Vesey in a message to Hamilton. Walpole’s lines, written and sent first, allude to his desire to meet Sir William at Vesey’s salon: “Mr Walpole will certainly wait on Mrs Vesey tomorrow, but with all his regard for her, hopes she will not interpret it as a Visit solely for her sake.” Although Sir William’s reappearance in Britain was no doubt a point of interest to many, Walpole’s motives for seeing him were likely antiquarian in nature. Scrawling at the bottom of the paper, Vesey recycled the original letter and readdressed it to Hamilton, as the keeper of her uncle’s social calendar, declaring “I will not be convenient to you Mad^m first if you do not invite Sr Wm Hamilton whom all my friends are so fond of [...] I expect you will make us acquainted.” The letter makes plain the systematic networks of social organisation that Hamilton harnessed to advance her uncle’s exposure to this coterie, as well as the clear demand for his company and, potentially, his collection.²⁶³ For Hamilton, letter-writing, and the imagined and physical

²⁶¹ Sir William Hamilton to Mary Hamilton, 13 February 1784, HAM/1/4/4/12.

²⁶² Horace Walpole to Elizabeth Vesey, Elizabeth Vesey to Mary Hamilton (recycled), November 1783, HAM/1/6/2/7.

²⁶³ For more on the material properties and social circulation of letters in the early modern period, see James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512-1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For more on the gendered experience of letter-writing and circulation, see

spaces it accessed, was central to her model of negotiating during the weeks that followed. The social, material, linguistic and literary significance of Bluestocking letters has been widely attested by scholars including Markman Ellis and Deborah Heller.²⁶⁴ For Alison E. Hurley, epistolary correspondence was “a means of elaborating conversations out of the world that they were often unable to enact within it.”²⁶⁵ Certainly, letter-writing provided Hamilton with the practical means and intellectual platform from which to signal, develop and perform her antiquarian and connoisseurial work. Operating outside of institutions such as the Society of Antiquaries, and augmenting the sociable interactions of the salons, Hamilton relied on epistolary exchange to circumnavigate what Hurley has described as “the obstructions posed by both domestic and public society by giving women an opportunity to make conversation in the nowhere and anywhere of textual circulation.”²⁶⁶ In conducting the secret sale of the vase, Hamilton’s letters represent the formal record of conversations that passed among her circle and which have been subsequently obscured. These were spaces in which, as I shall demonstrate, the value and ownership of the vase were negotiated alongside individual, group and gender identities as the vase was reassessed in London before entering the Portland Museum.

Negotiations

By the winter of 1783, knowledge of the vase’s presence in London had reached the duchess, who began to seek out Sir William for further discussion. A letter written by Sir William in December of that year indicates his movement in the highest social circles, but also the duchess’s apparent and keen invitation that he, along with his nephew Greville, might join her at Bulstrode:

I did not answer the Duchess’s most gracious Letter inviting us again to Bulstrode because Charles & I fully intended to have answered it in person at Bulstrode. Yesterday I was told that the King had said he would send for me to

Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn and Elizabeth Carter* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

²⁶⁴ Markman Ellis, “Reading Practices in Elizabeth Montagu’s Epistolary Network of the 1750s” in *Bluestockings Displayed*, 213 – 232; Deborah Heller, “Unbound: Elizabeth Vesey as the Sylph in Bluestocking Correspondence,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, No. 1/2, Reconsidering the Bluestockings (2002): 215-234.

²⁶⁵ Hurley, “Watering-Place Correspondence,” 7.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

pass a few days at Windsor the end of this week – Saturday we had fixed for paying our respects to the Duchess – but it is now impossible for me to absent myself from Town, as my intelligence was from a good quarter. Be so good then to say everything you can imagine to the Duchess that is most respectfull [sic] and assure her Grace (which is very true) that I am much disappointed, as I really was made happy the days I passed with you & wished much to have repeated the visit. As soon as the Duchess comes to Town I will wait upon Her & shew Her the Vase, which from Mr. Lightfoot’s report I dare say Her Grace is eager to see.²⁶⁷

Sir William notes that the duchess invited him “again,” indicating her early and enthusiastic perusal of the vase, a fact underscored by “Mr. Lightfoot’s report” of her apparent eagerness to view it. Significantly, Sir William’s letter suggests that any such viewing must take place in the city, where he “will wait upon” the duchess’s return from her country estate. This was, no doubt, in part due to the difficult practicalities and risks involved in moving such an important and delicate object. Hamilton was an asset to both parties. Sir William’s insistence that she “assure her Grace” indicates the trust that existed between her and the duchess, whilst his request that she “be so good then to say everything you can imagine to the duchess that is respectfull [sic]” denotes Hamilton’s skill in verbal and social manoeuvrings.

By the end of December 1783, the duchess had retired from the country and taken up her winter residence at the house in Privy Gardens, accompanied by Delany and Hamilton. This was a busy period in the life of the Portland collection. Hamilton’s diaries from these weeks with the duchess are filled with references to cleaning and sorting, viewing and organising the cabinets of that house.²⁶⁸ Certainly, this was a time of intense collecting and curatorial activity for the duchess and her circle, and it is within this context that the vase came to enter the assembly. On New Year’s Eve, Hamilton went with the duchess and Delany to view the vase for the first time:

At ½ past 1 ye Dss d^r of Portland’s coach came for me, and I went to Mrs. Delany’s; I did not get out; she came to me, and we went to my uncle, Sr Wm H., at ye hotel King str, S. James’s; ye Dss was already there, &c.; saw ye fine

²⁶⁷ Sir William Hamilton to Mary Hamilton, 9 December 1783, HAM/1/4/4/7.

²⁶⁸ See *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 201. See also Hamilton’s diaries HAM/2/3, HAM/2/4 and HAM/2/5.

vase, &c, staid there till ½ past 3 o'clock, and ye Dss and I went home wth Mrs. Delany (Mrs. D. Eyesight so well again that she saw ye vase, &c.)²⁶⁹

Fascinatingly, this first encounter with the vase took place not in one of the many museum or salon spaces which this group frequented, but in the neutral setting of a hotel. It is most likely that these were Sir William's rooms during his stay in London (he does not appear to have had property in the city at this time).²⁷⁰ Of the encounter itself, Hamilton indicates several important details. Firstly, that the duchess had arrived long before Hamilton and Delany, having had time to then send her carriage to collect them. Of the topics of conversation covered between the duchess and Sir William before their arrival, one can only assume a mutual expression of interest in each other's collections, and perhaps the beginnings of negotiating potential sales or exchanges of artefacts between the two.

The details of the viewing, in particular how the vase was displayed, elude us in Hamilton's brief account. An entry in her diary however, written much later after the duchess had purchased the vase, reveals the preferred method of displaying it, with Hamilton recording "Gave Wm a Commission to Mr Crighton ab^t y^e stand for my Uncle Williams [sic] Vase – w^{ch} he promised to do tomorrow."²⁷¹ That the vase was shown in isolation seems most likely, perhaps placed on a plinth or similar stand in order to provide a mono-visual experience for the onlookers and to focus their full visual and intellectual attentions. Vicky Coltman has examined Sir William's experiences in looking at ancient sculpture whilst in Italy, turning to a letter written to Charles Townley in February 1778 in which he describes a viewing of the sculpture collection of Cardinal Alessandro Albani, nephew of Pope Clement XI. Particularly interesting to Coltman is Sir William's account of "the particular scopic practices whereby a

²⁶⁹ Mary Hamilton Diary, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 191-2. It is likely the hotel Hamilton refers to here is Nerot's hotel, which occupied numbers 23-24 of King's Street, St James Westminster. Founded in 1776 by John Nerot, the hotel was demolished in the early nineteenth century to make way for St James Theatre. During the eighteenth century, its patrons included Edmund Burke and Horatio Nelson. See 'King Street', in *Survey of London: Volumes 29 and 30, St James Westminster, Part 1*, ed. F H W Sheppard (London, 1960), 295-307. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols29-30/pt1/pp295-307> [accessed 29 June 2018]; *Correspondence of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, ed. Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam, and Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Bourke, 1844. vol. IV, 289; *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*, ed. Sir Nicholas Harris Nicholas, 1845, vol. IV, 268.

²⁷⁰ In 1902, H. C. Smith referenced this early viewing, although his account is not concerned with positing the duchess as any kind of inquiring antiquarian mind, instead relying on the deep-rooted narratives laid by Horace Walpole's early comments which characterised her as a chaotic and undiscerning acquirer of things. Smith writes: "Through the writings of numerous connoisseurs and men of letters the fame of the vase had preceded its arrival in this country, and among the first to visit Sir William at his hotel was the Duchess of Portland [...] who at once opened negotiations for acquitting this renowned object for the museum she was then busily forming." H. Clifford Smith, "The Full and True Story of 'The Portland Vase'," *The Magazine of Art* (Jan 1902): 309-313.

²⁷¹ Mary Hamilton Diary, 12 September 1784, HAM/2/14.

prolonged visual engagement with a sculptural masterpiece [...] is followed by a period of mental repose.”²⁷² That the duchess, Delany and Hamilton would have had time and space in the hotel room to move around the vase, examining it from different angles, getting close to its surfaces, pointing out details to each other and discussing its historic and artistic value seems highly probable. Although we cannot be certain that the vase was the only antiquity displayed for inspection in the space (indeed, this is unlikely considering the range of Sir William’s collection and his usual preference for transporting items to Britain for potential sale to collectors), it was clearly at the centre of discussion. Whilst the duchess and her companions may not have taken time for the individual “mental repose” favoured by Sir William in European collections, Hamilton’s writing makes evident that the group spoke at length about the vase “till ½ past 3 o’clock.”

Within antiquarian circles, the vase was the subject of heated debate, and indeed its decorative schemes and meaning remain concerns for scholars today. In 1786, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* reported on “the inconsistent ideas of our modern Antiquarians concerning the application of this monument.”²⁷³ Horace Walpole, in writing to Sir William, describes the complexity in reading such objects in terms of mythological narration and art historical commentary:

The Ancients had some ingenious & beautiful Allusions in their Mythology, they mixed or engrafted on it a great deal of fantastic & contradiction, & parts so far fetched, that they have left to the moderns a vast deal of guess...Even in yr famous Barberini Vase, the finest Large Cameo extant, the Story is so wretchedly told, & the personages have so little relation to or connection with each other, that no mortal can tell what they mean.”²⁷⁴

That the duchess, Delany and Hamilton were actively engaging in the visual inspection and verbal interrogation of the vase points to their contestation of established antiquarian behaviours as overtly and exclusively masculine. Certainly, the aesthetic of looking at and inspecting antiquity in this period was largely the preserve of elite men. In his study of print culture, Mount has demonstrated how connoisseurs, critics and

²⁷² Vicky Coltman, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain since 1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 208.

²⁷³ *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 56 part 1, 97 – 98.

²⁷⁴ Walpole to Sir William Hamilton, 30 September 1792. LWL MSS 1, box 13. no. 11.

antiquarians were habitually shown wielding ocular aids useful in inspecting antiquities or artworks.²⁷⁵

In the male-dominated world of antiquarian London, antiquities and artworks were most often the subject of a gendered gaze. Whilst looking at and inspecting objects visually was by no means an activity exclusive to men, contemporary pictorial depictions of these occasions regularly applied overtones of sexual objectification and consumption in their interrogation of the relationship between the appraiser and the appraised. Shelton has noted of Sir Joshua Reynolds's painting 'The Society of the Dilettanti' (fig. 2.6) that many of its members "display more interest in modern claret-filled crystal goblets than in the antique gems or Sir William's musty old clay pots."²⁷⁶ Certainly, themes of comestible and sexual consumption by men appear repeatedly in images concerned with the simultaneously performative and enquiring act of looking at objects from the ancient world. Often, as in Reynolds painting, where femininity is presented, it is most usually for the delectation of the male gaze. Shelton has highlighted of Reynolds's painting "[Sir William] holds aloft a woman's garter while casting a rakish glance out toward the viewer."²⁷⁷ This, Shelton suggests, "tells us something of the nonantiquarian interests of the Dilettanti but also functions to eradicate femininity from the aesthetic and intellectual discourses" represented by such gatherings.²⁷⁸ Moreover, Sophie Thomas has argued that "museum culture offered an increasingly full visual experience."²⁷⁹ The duchess's long viewing of the vase, then, had the potential to overwrite typically masculine viewing behaviours by bringing it into the orbit of her female circle. For the duchess and her friends, the vase was visually and bodily enlightening. In Delany's case, it literally enabled her eyesight "so well again that she saw y^e vase," emphasising its affectiveness as a restorative object, and its aesthetic power in provoking corporeal, as well as intellectual, response from these women. Discussion of the experience as bodily, and emotionally, transformative continued when, the next day, Delany wrote to Hamilton of the viewing; "The calm delightful society of yesterday, not forgetting the vase, did me more good than freezing fingers

²⁷⁵ Mount, "The Monkey with the Magnifying Glass," 172.

²⁷⁶ Andrew Carrington Shelton, "Storming the Acropolis: Gender, Class and Classicism in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Art and Culture in the Eighteenth Century: New Dimensions and Multiple Perspectives*, ed. Elise Goodman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 136.

²⁷⁷ Shelton, "Storming the Acropolis," 136. Shelton actually mis-identifies the holder of the garter as Sir William Hamilton, when it is actually the antiquarian and Fellow of the Royal Society Sir John Taylor (1745 – 1786). See Jenkins and Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes*, for more on this print.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Sophie Thomas, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 84.

can express.”²⁸⁰ The experience of the viewing continued for Hamilton and Delany beyond their visit to the hotel. Although physically and visually absent in Hamilton’s diary and Delany’s letter, each text articulates an enduring concern with the vase in terms of its effects on them bodily and emotionally, testifying to the potential power of the vase and its relevance to their group.

Whilst the vase itself was, along with other fashionable antiquities, art works and prints, undoubtedly the subject of much discussion in the Bluestocking gatherings, the duchess’s association with it remains, for Sir William’s sake, at the discretion of those who already knew it. Beyond the small group present at this first intimate viewing, the duchess’s interest in the vase remained a secret, maintained by Hamilton’s increasingly complex practical and social manoeuvring. Whilst visiting Delany with Hester Chapone on 3 January 1784, Hamilton received secret word from the duchess; “[Delany] came and told me she had a secret message to me from y^e D^{ss} D^r Portland.” Unable to speak openly about the matter, Hamilton describes dining with Delany and Chapone, afterwards looking over “some prints from y^e antique,” until Delany “under y^e color of getting me to look for a book took me to her bed-room and told me what y^e D^{ss} wanted me to do, viz., to purchase y^e V. of my uncle W^m, &c.”²⁸¹ The deal was a complete secret, with Hamilton forced to communicate each stage of the negotiation with secrecy and discretion whilst in the company of other, unknowing friends. That same day, Hamilton reports in her diary “I wrote a note to [Sir William] to come to me, but he was out.” No sooner had she done this, “y^e D^{ss} D^r Portland, y^e Bishop of Exeter, and S^r W^m Musgrave came to tea; my uncle, S^r W^m Hamilton also came.” In a scene of comedic proportions, in which Hamilton was briefly the only party in possession of all the information regarding the sale, she recalled afterwards how Sir William had arrived at Delany’s “without having rec^d my message.” Hamilton, with her characteristic tact and intelligence waited until Hester Chapone, the bishop and Sir William Musgrave had left before taking her uncle “down to y^e parlour under pretence of shewing him y^e pictures, and then told him w^{ht} y^e D^{ss} wish’d ab^t y^e vase.” It seems this conference was vital in negotiating the complex social situation in which Hamilton was at the centre; it was only after she had alerted her uncle to the situation and informed him of the duchess’s intentions that he and the duchess “talk’d upon y^e

²⁸⁰ Delany to Hamilton, 1 January 1784, in Llandover, *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 192.

²⁸¹ Mary Hamilton Diary, 3 January 1784, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 195.

subject.” Leaving in her uncle’s coach that evening, Hamilton was informed by Sir William “he w^d think upon w^{ht} y^e D^{ss} had said.”²⁸²

From this point, the negotiations began in earnest. Hamilton’s correspondence with Sir William from this date underscores the duchess’s clear knowledge of his collection in London and the value of several items within it. In addition to the vase itself, the duchess employed Hamilton in negotiating a deal on a number of extra items, revealing her discriminatory and connoisseurial approach to acquisition. In a letter to Hamilton written at the end of January 1784, Sir William wrote:

I send you, with a farewell pang, my head of Jupiter & I send the Sulphur of the damaged Piombino Augustus with the name of Diosconides thereon, proving plainly that The Augustus is the work of the same celebrated Artist. Be so good as to present both to the Duchess.

Sir William’s combining of the “head of Jupiter” and the “Sulphur” in “proving plainly” the shared authorship of the two works reveals not only the duchess’s concern in building an authentic and legitimate collection, but also something of the ongoing conversation between the two collectors themselves. In sending the two items together, Sir William is presenting each piece for the duchess’s close inspection and comparison and, in doing so, defers to her expertise, trusting her ability to examine and pass judgement on the artefacts. In the same letter, Sir William continues:

I will if possible wait upon her Grace by 3 o’clock. The bills which are in her Grace’s pocket, very unprofitably, wou’d save me 5% which I am paying; if the business can be closed, I shall gain & the Duchess will not lose. I think the enclosed receipt wou’d secure the Duchess in case any accident shou’d happen to me before the Vase is delivered to her Grace. I hope Cipriani will begin his drawings next week, but he is not to be depended upon; I had as soon wish that the Duchess wou’d keep the Vase till he is ready to make the drawing, or have It myself for I have daily plagues upon the Subject²⁸³

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Sir William Hamilton to Mary Hamilton, 24 January 1784, HAM/1/4/4/11.

Hamilton was, according to her uncle's letter, involved as a financial agent as well as being employed as the physical purveyor of the items themselves. As Sir William's need for a swift sale intensified, he turned to his niece to ensure the practicalities of the transaction were explained to the duchess, having enclosed a receipt for her to pass onto her patron. The physical transportation of the vase from Sir William's collection to the duchess's was an important concern for all involved, with its extraordinary artistic and financial value compounding anxieties about potential damage. The letter reveals this moment of transition as one of deep uncertainty for Sir William, whose expression of the "daily plagues" suffered as custodian of the vase are voiced privately to Hamilton, confirming the intimacy of their relationship and the reliance of the uncle on his niece. Just as Cipriani was "not to be depended upon," it is to Hamilton herself that Sir William looks to for stability in this process. The extent of Hamilton's responsibilities is evident in her journal entry written on the same day as Sir William's letter:

My Uncle W^m sent me a letter & the Jupiter's Head. His servant was to deliver it into my hands. [...] At 1 o'clock I went to y^e Duchess of Portland's, she had me in the Breakfast room & made me drink coffee. I have her y^e Jupiter's Head and shewed her my Uncle's letter [...] My Uncle William came at 3, y^e Duchess & him settled part of the Business— she shew'd him some very curious & rare & beautiful pieces of Japan, some Medals, &c.²⁸⁴

Her literal underscoring of "into my hands," carved into the page of her diary, testifies to Hamilton's appreciation of her responsibility as physical as well as social purveyor of the objects being sold and purchased. That Sir William continued to visit the duchess's house at Whitehall beyond the completion of the sale highlights his ongoing interest in the Portland Museum, and the mutual reciprocity that existed between the two.

In the weeks after Hamilton secured the sale of the vase, she was tasked with organising private viewings of the vase, still in Sir William's custody. One occasion saw Susanna Buller, nee Yarde (1740 – 1810), wife of Sir Francis Buller and an associate of the Bluestocking circle, apply to see the vase. Buller was known among the Bluestockings for her classical erudition. In a letter written in March 1782, Frances Burney reported an occasion in which she saw "all the *belles Esprits* [...] Mrs Boscawen,

²⁸⁴ Mary Hamilton diary, 24 January 1784, HAM/2/7. Emphasis Hamilton's own.

Mrs Chapone, Hannah More, Mrs Carter, Sophy Streatfeild, - Mrs Buller, famous for Writing *Greek* notes in Greek Books.”²⁸⁵ The arrangement seems to have suited both Hamilton and her uncle, with the latter often deferring to the judgement of the former: “I am quite sick of having the vase but if you think Mrs Buller worthy I will be at home any hour she pleases on Wednesday morning to shew it to her.”²⁸⁶ By the summer of 1784, Sir William was preparing to return to Italy, after a tour of Scotland and Wales with Charles Greville. In a letter to his niece written on 8th June, he assured her of his “most sincere and true affection,” and advised that “Cipriani sent me two of the drawings of the Vase & they are exquisite, the whole will be finished in a Week (as he says) & then I have directed him to bring the Vase to you & you will be so good as to convey it secretly to the Duchess.”²⁸⁷ The same letter reveals the extent of the vase’s fame in Britain, and Hamilton’s now-established role in managing it: “the Queen has desired to see it therefore Cipriani is to wait on her Majesty the day he brings it to you – let me know when it is safely lodged as I am uneasy till I hear it is so.”

As this thesis has demonstrated thus far, the duchess’s methods, and those of her circle, of collecting and interacting with objects in her museum developed outside and beyond rigid and, as Sweet has argued, typically masculine norms. Indeed, Sweet has suggested of the antiquarian Richard Gough, “an informed appreciation of antiquities demanded learning, and the issues of property and genealogy, with which antiquarian topography was particularly concerned, rendered it the natural preserve of the gentleman.”²⁸⁸ I have examined here how the duchess’s connoisseurial assessment was made by appropriating and, in so doing, contesting established masculine models of antiquarian assessment and art criticism. This chapter has provided close evaluation of the feminized spaces, outside of the male-dominated institutions of the day, in which the duchess and Hamilton operated. Within the salons and drawing rooms of the Bluestocking women, as well as in letters and diaries, both women conducted the negotiations, viewings and subsequent sale of the vase, utilizing the apparatus, learning and systems of collaboration fostered among their collective.

²⁸⁵ Frances Burney to Samuel Crisp, 14 March 1782, Lars E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke eds., *The Early Letters and Journals of Fanny Burney*, vol V 1782 – 1783 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012) 32 -33.

²⁸⁶ Sir William Hamilton to Mary Hamilton, 22 March 1784. HAM/1/4/4/15.

²⁸⁷ Sir William Hamilton to Mary Hamilton, 8 June 1784, HAM/1/4/4/18.

²⁸⁸ Rosemary Sweet, “Antiquaries and Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 4 (2001): 181.

For both the duchess of Portland and Hamilton, antiquarian work and connoisseurial activity provided opportunities to shape and present their identities both within their social circle and broader networks. Sweet has suggested that “a sense of the past and historic identities,” as offered through artefacts and antiques, “were essential features in the imagined communities of eighteenth-century nationalism.”²⁸⁹ Certainly, both the duchess and Sir Hamilton were interested in the opportunity for national, group and personal (auto)biography offered specifically by the vase, of which there existed a lengthy list of successive owners whose individual and familial identities had been repeatedly intertwined with the object itself. Identity and narrative were key components of the vase’s history and, for the two women, this presented an opportunity to confirm and advance their own. For the duchess, the vase was undoubtedly the highlight of her museum, but also represented a continuation of the narrative of matriarchal history cultivated through the duchess’s other acquisitions and taken up in various guises by her female visitors. As Sweet has previously stated, “it was antiquarianism that provided the raw material from which the narratives of history could be fashioned”²⁹⁰ Hamilton’s role in the acquisition of the vase advances my claims about the value of female friendship in the Portland Museum, positing such collaborations as central to models of collecting and debating objects. As a social framework, friendship amongst these women allowed for the development of conversations that would envelop the materials of the museum.

Although the duchess collected a broad variety of classical and historical objects and artworks, the vase, in its artistic status and fame, was unlike anything she had previously acquired. The act of its acquisition into her museum was one of contestation of the established notions about women’s ability (or lack thereof) to appreciate the meaning and value of classical antiquities compared to their male contemporaries. To purchase an object that had been the subject of centuries of masculine artistic debate, fuelling a rich archive of published commentaries as well as oral discussion in the institutions and salons of eighteenth-century London, was to change its cultural contexts entirely and to absorb it into a uniquely feminized and Bluestocking context.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 189.

Chapter Three

Containing the Museum

Just as the careful negotiations surrounding the sale of the Portland vase have since been obscured from the historical record, so too have the nuanced and intimate conversations that took place in the various sites and spaces of the duchess's collection. Within the Portland Museum, objects were organised and displayed in a range of containers which provided physical structure to the collection as well as a framework, as I shall demonstrate, for the sociable and often intimate interactions taking place there. Recovering the geography of the collection across Bulstrode and Whitehall is challenging, as the buildings themselves have since been demolished and new buildings erected on both sites. However, the following study of space within these now-lost interiors provides insight into the architecture of the museum as well as the diversity of visual and tactile experiences available to those who encountered it. The complex arrangement of the museum environment and the range in its texture and scale were captured by Elizabeth Seymour Percy, duchess of Northumberland (1716-1776) in May 1760. Writing in her diary, she reported:

Went to dine at Bulstrode [...] Hall large but to [sic] high in proportion [...] one of the longest Marble Tables I ever saw; Cieling of papier Machie that & ornaments all vastly well gilt. [...] Room next the Hall hung with plain Light Blue Paper; this room is large & well proportioned. It has 5 windows on 2 sides. It has handsome Tables & Glasses, & is hung with Pictures amongst which are some very fine ones [...] The next Room is very small; the next again is a Bedchamber, the Bed Crimson Velvet trimmed with Gold. The Hanging Tapestry at the Bed's Feet a four leaved screen made of Feathers & round the Bed a very pretty Exeter Carpet, with Sprigs of Flowers. The Drawing Room is hung with Pictures, & amongst others a Head of Mary of Medicis in a frame

ornamented with Mother of Pearl. There is another Bedchamber & thro that the Dss. Dressing Room, where there are a thousand Curiositys. The Toilet is furnished with Boxes and Glass of Red Indian Paper with Landships & Flowers in Black & White. [...] Thro this is a small Closet; over the Doors are Crayon Pictures of Ly. Weymouth & Ly. Harriet Bentinck, & a number of pretty things.²⁹¹

The duchess of Northumberland provides a detailed account of the objectscape at Bulstrode, with her report indicating much of the rich environment collected and crafted there. Recognisable and readable to the specific coterie operating within the museum salon, the structures and physical frameworks that accompanied such displays served to inscribe and define actions, positions, and relationships. This chapter examines the modalities of placement and processes of experience within the museum and aims to discern how the various definitions of space worked to dictate the itineraries of those who inhabited it. It is concerned with what Constance Classen has called “the sensory life of things, or the ways in which objects are experienced and imbued with meaning through diverse sensory practices.”²⁹² I identify a variety of spaces within the museum as central in the contextualisation of the objects collected there, highlighting their function in advancing and defining both social identities and tactile encounter.

Across Bulstrode and the house at Whitehall, the museum was divided into various units which served to delineate the collection in geographical and spatial terms. Most effective in lending order and expression to constellations of objects within the museum, and therefore the focus of this chapter, were its closets, cabinets, drawers, boxes, albums and folios. Miles Ogborn and Charles Withers have previously argued that the eighteenth-century “public sphere was a matter of connected geographies: of production, movement and spaces of consumption,” whilst Maria Zytaruk has identified the need for a “deeper investigation” into the geographies of the elite home.²⁹³ Beyond acting as the physical frameworks of categorisation, these spaces can be read as aesthetical and choreographic models of sociable curiosity within the collection. In the

²⁹¹ Elizabeth Seymour Percy, Duchess of Northumberland, *The Diaries of a Duchess*, ed. James Grieg (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), 15-17.

²⁹² Constance Classen, “Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum,” *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (Summer, 2007): 896.

²⁹³ Miles Ogborn and Charles W. J. Withers, “Introduction: Georgian Geographies?” in Ogborn and Withers eds., *Georgian Geographies: Essays of Space, Place, and Landscape in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 4; Maria Zytaruk, “Mary Delany: Epistolary Utterances, Cabinet Spaces and Natural History,” in *Mrs. Delany and Her Circle*, 132.

instance of natural history collection, specimens might be arranged using symmetry which, as Bettina Dietz suggests of Parisian shell collections of the period, “allowed the elements of an artwork to be grouped in such a way that the observer perceived a unity.”²⁹⁴ Elsewhere in the museum, objects of varying proportions including antiquities, art works and archaeological small finds, which “might now seem disconcertingly heterogeneous”²⁹⁵, were organised together in displays that invited both visual and tactile delectation.

Various spaces in the museum were used to store, order, display and share elements of the collection. Closets, cabinets, drawers, boxes and albums all provided a physical dimension to the models of collecting undertaken by the duchess and her circle characterised by conversation and dextrous experiment. Susan Pearce has suggested that collected and museum objects are the material expression of ideas; “they are intentional inscriptions on the physical world which embody social meaning [...] social ideas cannot exist without physical content, but physical objects are meaningless without social content.”²⁹⁶ Certainly, a museum salon would be an empty exercise without the objects about which to build discourse. However, the objects of the Portland Museum were not the leaders of conversation, but rather the physical things around which guests might gather, and from which language and thought, regularly translated back into material culture after the encounter, were prompted. Susan Stewart has proposed a model for collecting in which the eighteenth-century collector becomes a producer “by arrangement and manipulation.”²⁹⁷ Cabinets, drawers, boxes and albums, then, were the portals to this process. Through the physical, bodily act of opening a door or turning a page, conversation could be initiated and, through the formal bounds of these structures, contoured. Dietz has suggested that, in tracing these performative actions and examining “which individuals or groups of people actually came into contact with these objects [...] and in what spaces they were displayed [...] spatio-temporal, social and epistemic contours can emerge.”²⁹⁸

In retheorising social and object encounters as museum work, I turn to the apparatus that furnished its discourse. Pearce has proposed that “theoretical stances are implicit in every action” and that “therefore the writing of every label or the filling of every show-case is a theory-laden activity underpinned by a wide range of conceptual

²⁹⁴ Dietz, “Mobile Objects,” 371.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 370.

²⁹⁶ Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Books, 1993), 21.

²⁹⁷ Stewart, *On Longing*, 158.

²⁹⁸ Dietz, “Mobile Objects,” 364.

stances.”²⁹⁹ This chapter asks how such structures and physical frameworks, objects in their own right and present throughout the museum, might have been used in setting the criteria of perception – in forming the parameters of experience and corresponding response.

Closets

The duchess of Northumberland’s report is certainly useful in establishing many of the sites and spaces in which objects, both collected and crafted by the women at Bulstrode, were displayed. At the end of her account, when she describes the termination of her tour through the house and its culmination in its most intimate spaces, she describes a “small Closet” off the duchess of Portland’s own bed chamber. “Over the Doors”, Northumberland recalls, “are Crayon Pictures of Ly. Weymouth & Ly. Harriet Bentinck, & a number of pretty things.” This extraordinary space, decorated with the artistic productions of a number of women in the duchess of Portland’s circle, is also described by Mary Hamilton in her 1784 unpublished manuscript *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode* (fig. 3.1). Although the main portion of the text (the subject of chapter five of this study) is concerned with the duchess’s collection of antiques and historical relics, a list of paintings hung at Bulstrode, in which Hamilton records their location, artist and subject, is included at the end of the work.³⁰⁰ Dividing the list into subsections organised based on the various rooms at Bulstrode, Hamilton writes that the contents of “the Closet” contain the following artworks:

- Lady Essex, A Child by [?]
- Lady Viscountess Weymouth – Blue Veil
- Countess of Stamford – Yellow Veil
- 2 Drawings in straw frames, Lady Andover
- A Chalk Do by Lady Weymouth
- A View of Cornberry [?] by Mrs Delany
- A View near Bath, Mrs Delany
- A Rock copied by Lady Andover from Mrs Rush

²⁹⁹ Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*, 21-22.

³⁰⁰ Mary Hamilton, *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, HAM/3/4.

Two Curious pictures in work –
Lord Treasurer Oxford
A Landscape [...] by Mrs Letitia Rush
A Ruin by Mrs Dashwood
Fine cut paper by Lady Andover
A Flower piece in feathers by Mrs Grace Cole

Listed here are nine individual female artists, revealing a rich community of women associated with the duchess and engaged in the production and sharing of amateur art works. The subjects of these works range from Lady Essex's portrait of a child, presumably copied from a professional piece, to Mary Delany's sketch of "A View near Bath," possibly taken on an excursion, and highlight the diversity of aesthetic and narrative interests represented in the group. That the artists listed by Hamilton include the duchess of Portland's daughter Lady Weymouth and her companion Delany indicates the significance of the closet space as one in which the duchess was able to exhibit, even prioritise, her familial and friendship ties.

In her study of models of sociability in eighteenth-century interior organisation, Mimi Hellman has suggested that "most rooms in a luxuriously decorated house were furnished according to two interdependent systems."³⁰¹ The first of these systems, Hellman posits, relies on the permanent arrangement of "objects that occupied fixed positions and often reiterated the materials and motifs of the walls: chimney-pieces, console tables, large pieces such as commodes and armoires, and matched sets of upholstered furniture including beds, sofas, and large chairs."³⁰² Hellman proposes that such sets of items "established a unified visual and spatial rhythm that was then inflected and complicated by [...] an array of smaller, lighter pieces such as tables for writing, dressing, game playing, or serving coffee, and [...] larger seat furniture-for reading, con- versing, or reclining."³⁰³ The art works in the duchess of Portland's closet can be read as bridging these two seemingly separate systems of domestic spatial organisation at Bulstrode – they are the product of female activity conducted around what Hellman calls "lighter" pieces of furniture and, in their inclusion in the wall displays of the duchess's closet, are incorporated into more systematic and permanent

³⁰¹ Mimi Hellman, "Furniture, Sociability, and the Work of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century France" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32, no. 4, *Sites and Margins of the Public Sphere* (Summer, 1999): 419.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

modes of display. Assembled together, they not only form a record of the important women who occupied privileged positions in the duchess's social circle, but represent both individual artistic labour and a collective manifesto expressed in female amateur art.

Cynthia Wall has discussed the gendered uses of interior spaces during the eighteenth century. She notes that, by the end of the century, the dining room became the preserve of men, and the drawing room of women. She proposes that “a bargain of sorts had been struck [...] in exchange for increasing exclusion from formerly shared space, women were give or (assumed) a separate (but equal?) space of their own.”³⁰⁴ Tita Chico has demonstrated the role of the closet, or dressing room, in the private and interior lives of women, revealing that “By mid-century, the terms ‘dressing room’ and ‘closet’ were interchangeable” and that such spaces “offered some women a room of their own.”³⁰⁵ At Bulstrode, the elite inhabitants were overwhelmingly female, although a community of male associates including Lightfoot and Solander, as well as a handful of male servants, lived on the estate. As the drawing room at Bulstrode was being transformed into a laboratory, artist's studio and library, the upstairs spaces of the house retained more traditional and widespread structures characteristic of the period and specific to broader notions of femininity. Bed chambers and closets at Bulstrode served as private female spaces, used for the kinds of intimate meetings, personal contemplation and calm retreat that scholars of literature, particularly theatre, historians have widely attested to. As a literary and theatrical space, the eighteenth-century closet has received sustained attention from scholars and is often defined in terms of its potential for performance, the making and consuming of narrative, and the cultivation of identity. For Catherine B. Burroughs, the private space of the closet “served as a metaphor for privacy and intense intellectual engagement, but it also identified as a literal space in which a variety of theatrical activities – many particular to women – took place.”³⁰⁶

In outlining potential theoretic approaches to the closet, Chico suggests that the closet “allows us to understand the means by which certain women were able to negotiate the differences between public and private life.”³⁰⁷ In particular, Chico

³⁰⁴ Cynthia Wall, “Gendering Rooms: Domestic Architecture and Literary Acts,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5, no. 4 (1993): 350.

³⁰⁵ Chico, *Designing Women*, 27.

³⁰⁶ Catherine B Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theatre Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 105-6. See also Chico, *Designing Women*, 31-2.

³⁰⁷ Chico, *Designing Women*, 14.

proposes an examination of the “instability” of the closet “as an enclosed space” and what she terms “its very illusory promise of full disclosure.”³⁰⁸ How did the duchess of Portland and her guests navigate the fluidity of these spaces? Female guests traversed the bounds of public and private life at Bulstrode through a system of different behavioural models that unlocked the spaces of the closet and opened channels of interaction between the individual nodes in the house. Acts of collaboration, production and consumption, exchange and gifting were all performed within the dressing rooms and closet spaces of the site. The closet at Bulstrode was an intrinsically homosocial space, and one that has been of especial interest to queer theorists. Building on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, Chico has suggested the queer closet, in its literary and ideological form, “is an open secret that functions as a narrative structure.”³⁰⁹

Invitation into a dressing room at Bulstrode usually coincided with the request to complete a particular activity, either in collaboration or as a performative act done by one individual to entertain others. On 6 December 1783, for example, Hamilton recorded in her diary how “Mrs Delany came to me at 11, and desired me to accompany her to her room, as she had received letter w^{ch} alas! Her eyes were not in a state to read.” Here, the intimacy of the space correlates with that of the task itself, with Hamilton exclaiming “I felt much honoured by the confidence she placed in me.”³¹⁰ Social interaction within the closets at Bulstrode was usually less formal than the activities practiced elsewhere in the house, where male guests and servants bore witness to the duchess and her female friends. Later in the same entry, Hamilton describes how in the afternoon the duchess visited her in her dressing room, where she was having her hair dressed by her maid servant Betty. Hamilton notes “I sent B – out of the room.” Later again, Delany joins the duchess in Hamilton’s dressing room, where both women “said many kind things to [the now-returned] Betty.” Hamilton continues, “as y^e upper servants dine at 2, Betty left me soon after y^e servants brought y^e oysters and laid y^e napkin in my dressing-room. I was obliged to receive Mrs Delany en robe de

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 70;

Susan Lanser, “Bluestocking Sapphism and the Economies of Desire,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1, *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (2002): 257-275.

³¹⁰ Mary Hamilton Diary, 6 December 1783 in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 157.

chambre.”³¹¹ A few days later, Hamilton wrote of another intimate meeting she shared in her closet at Bulstrode, this time with the duchess:

After Dinner the Dss carry’d me to her dressing-room; we staid there till tea time, looking over books, china, &c., &c., She shew’d me her *turning*-room, &c., &c., After tea ye Dss read something out of ye Foundling Hospital for Wit. I then read in the answer to ye Dss of Marlbro’ memoirs.³¹²

As well as providing opportunity to look over individual items including “books” and “china” from the duchess’s collection, the closet functioned as a space of consumption. Here, Hamilton’s time in the closet with the duchess combines tea-drinking with reading aloud from published works. The reading of the duchess of Marlborough’s memoirs serves to further advance female narratives within the space. The turning room mentioned by Hamilton appears to be a further space off the duchess’s main dressing room, confirming the closeness between private female space and domestic craft work.

Cabinets and Drawers

An essential feature of the collector’s interior environment, the cabinet of the eighteenth-century museum was ubiquitous in elite homes. Indeed, across Europe cabinets, predominantly used in the collection and display of natural history specimens, adhered to similar principles. In her study of shell collecting in eighteenth-century Paris, Bettina Dietz has outlined a typical set of criteria:

An eighteenth-century shell cabinet contained a large number of flat drawers storing the shells, often grouped to form a picture. In order to separate background and foreground, the drawers might be lined with coloured satin, which provided a contrast with the shells. The optical impact could be even further enhanced by building small boxes out of wooden slats in the base of the drawer. Each ornamental compartment would then contain a shell which [...] might lie on satin of a colour contrasting with that of the lining of the drawer.

³¹¹ Ibid, 158.

³¹² Mary Hamilton Diary, 11 December 1783 in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 171.

For viewing, the drawer was pulled out or removed and placed on a table so that the observer could look down on the contents.³¹³

The cabinets and drawers of the Portland Museum were unfixed and constantly altering at the hands of different contributors. For the duchess's circle, the cabinet was part of a landscape of furniture employed within the sites of their domestic life and was used in the display and advancement of different individual and group identities. These were spaces in which objects could be exhibited, but also in which action could take place and social practice enacted. Inevitably, they were also the sites in which complex notions of identity, gender, class and taste could be played out. Many of the duchess's contemporaries saw the spaces of her natural history collecting as implicitly linked to her status as an elite woman. In 1768, for example, Johan Christian Fabricius wrote in a letter:

The natural history cabinet belonging to the widowed Duchess of Portland is very fine indeed. It has both the outer beauty and the inner wealth that befit the collection of a lady of rank. It consists of cone shells and of insects from her native country. The number of cone shell species and variations is enormous because the Duchess, a true expert in natural history, includes even the small, plain ones in her collection. It contains an extraordinary number of new specimens that have not been described yet and I could almost claim it to be one of the richest in Europe.³¹⁴

Loaded with gendered language, Fabricius's account presents the duchess's marital and collecting status as somehow intertwined. Indeed, the criteria he uses in judgement of her collection might be easily mistaken for those employed in measuring female virtue, with his description of the contents of her cabinets reading like an analysis of her bodily and intellectual attributes. That the cabinet spaces of the Portland Museum offered opportunity for intimacy with the duchess, however, is widely attested across the correspondence of her close circle. As Zytaruk has already noted in her study of Mary Delany's letters about collecting spaces, "in the eighteenth century, 'cabinet' still

³¹³ Dietz, "Mobile Objects," 372.

³¹⁴ Johann Christian Fabricius, 10 September 1768. In *Briefe aus London vermischten Inhalts* (Dessau and Leipzig: Buchhandlung der Gelehrten, 1784). Translations from the German original by Julie Neill, The Language Centre, University of Glasgow, 2007 with permission of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow. I am grateful to Dr Dominik Huenniger at the University of Göttingen for drawing my attention to this source.

retained its political meaning as a group of persons who met in the private chamber of the sovereign, and Mrs. Delany deployed this term to highlight the extraordinary nature of the meetings at Bulstrode and their connection to museum culture.”³¹⁵ Certainly, to have entered the cabinets of the duchess’s collection, either through visual or bodily action, was to have confirmed one’s place within her social circle. Different divisions and subdivisions of space, then, allowed for different delineations of social intimacy.

At all stages, shell collection was an intrinsically visual and bodily experience. In a letter to one of her children, written in November 1752, the duchess describes the systems through which she acquired and selected specimens:

Mr Cavendish dined with me last Friday [.] he has promised to get me some shells. Do you know from what place the shells come that Lady Stair intends me? We have got Da Costa [.] he hunts for Fossils all morning & all the evening [.] I make him pick shells till the water runs out of his Eyes.³¹⁶

As well as relying on her friends and relations (here “Mr Cavendish” and “Lady Stair”) to acquire shells on her behalf, the duchess engaged the services of the naturalist Mendes Da Costa. From her letter, the duchess’s involvement, even guidance, of Da Costa’s processes of enquiry is evident. Writing home, she presents her activities as fuelled by an insatiable enthusiasm for shell hunting that even surpasses that of even Da Costa, with the duchess forced to “make him pick” specimens. It is likely that the duchess is writing about a specific shell-hunting expedition, most probably to Weymouth where, as Tobin has previously shown, she spent extended periods searching for and gathering specimens. In narrating her encounters with shells, the duchess’s letter indicates an early connection made between processes of selecting and collecting natural history, and the body, as she quips that the intensity of activity by her accomplice causes water to run “out of his Eyes.” For the duchess, proximity to shells, looking at and touching them, brings about a kind of combining of human and object, until the boundaries between the two are unidentifiable. Of course, the water that “runs out of [Da Costa’s] Eyes” refers to tears brought on by fatigue in looking and examining shells. Detectable, perhaps, is a double meaning, as the duchess makes a possible reference to oceanic water from which the shells originated.

³¹⁵ Zytaruk, “Mary Delany,” 136.

³¹⁶ Duchess of Portland to unknown recipient (possibly one of her children), 5 November 1752, Pw D 748, Portland (Welbeck) Collection, University of Nottingham.

At Bulstrode, Zytaruk has suggested, the virtú to be found in the careful classification and contemplation of variety outweighed the appeal of excessive accumulation, with the activities of its “philosophical cabinet” prioritised over the commoner “propensity for transitory pleasures and [the] indifference to the intricacies of the natural world.”³¹⁷ Of course, visual education of this kind relied on a complex system of educational and preparatory activities. Bleichmar has noted the role of books in preparing and supporting connoisseurs, with volumes containing images and instructions on how to see and inspect objects.³¹⁸ In the Portland Museum, it was the hand, as well as the eye, that worked to educate and demonstrate that education. Previously, Spray and Tobin have both noted the triangulation (to borrow Tobin’s term) between hand, eye and object, where the choreographic relationship between all three provides a model in which to generate and share knowledge through the conversational actions of seeing, handling, and discussion.³¹⁹ During encounters within the cabinet, the eye could pick out visual cues that might invite action from the hand (a handle for turning, a drawer front for pulling). James Gibson has called these cues “affordances,” material invitations that represent or propose a potential corresponding action and so imply a “complementarity” of the physical environment and the people within it.³²⁰

Afterwards, the hand might be used to fashion a material response to the objects of the collection – from the crafted objects examined in the previous chapter, to Delany’s paper mosaics in chapter four and Hamilton’s *Catalogue of Curiosities* in chapter five, female hands were busily employed in a range of reactionary activities within the museum. Although Bulstrode offered perhaps the most ample and regular opportunity for this type of social and dextrous performance, the duchess and her associates engaged in cabinet-work throughout their lives and across the houses and sites that defined them. Deborah Lutz has previously proposed visual and tactile evidence of ‘the hand’ (through writing, cutting, pasting, manoeuvring of objects) as “a metonym for the body” deployed in signalling individual presence within a collection.³²¹

The Portland Museum contained a rich variety of furniture used in the storage and display of objects, although there is very little scholarship on the subject. Of particular note was a “magnificent cabinet of ebony” (fig. 3.2) which Walpole noted in

³¹⁷ Zytaruk, “Mary Delany,” 141.

³¹⁸ Bleichmar, “Learning to Look,” 89.

³¹⁹ Spray, “Pierre Pomet’s Parisian Cabinet,” 78; Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 12-13. See also Bruno Latour, “Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands,” *Knowledge and Society* 6 (1986): 1-40.

³²⁰ James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 127.

³²¹ Deborah Lutz, “The Paper Museum,” *Victorian Review* 43, no. 1, (Spring 2017): 26.

his *Anecdotes of Painting in England* was “bought by [the duchess’s] father the Earl of Oxford from the Arundelian Collection at Tart-hall. On each of the drawers is a small history of Polenburg, and pieces of architecture in the manner of Steenwyck by Van Bassen.”³²² Cabinets could be collected objects in their own right, functioning as material presences and works of art as much as enclosed spaces, to be coveted by others. By 1784, the Arundel Cabinet (as it is now known) was stored at the house in Privy Gardens. In her diary from that year, Mary Hamilton recalls how she “went to y^e Dss; staid wth her till past 4 looking over fine gems, antiques, miniature pictures, &c, out of y^e beautiful cabinet, the inside of w^{ch} was painted by Polemberg.”³²³ Investigation of the cabinet would involve the entire body. Standing before the cabinet, the visitor would need to use their full arm-span to open the double painted doors operating on gilt hinges, their eyes to ascertain the various compartments within, and their fingers to tease them open. The ornate interior of the cabinet consisted of two large panels on the inside of each door decorated with classical interiors painted by Bartholomeus van Bassen (1613 – 1650) signed and dated 1630. Various smaller classical and pastoral scenes covering the drawer frontages were painted by Poelenburgh. Punctuating the drawers were three wooden architectural elements, carved in ebony, with the two smallest flanking the large, central formulation and each with columns, entablature and pediments. Inside the niches of the two smaller of these carved elements were miniature sculpted figures. Above the drawers of the cabinet, and revealed when the main doors were pulled back, a latin inscription ‘Altius hic scrutare latent sub frondibus uvae’ (‘Look more closely here, the grapes are hidden under the leaves’) invites the advances of any onlooker, reiterating the cabinet’s self-referential agency as an interactive object with spaces to be excavated and plundered. Below the main body of the cabinet were two large drawers, each lockable and unlockable as required. This was, as Zytaruk has identified of natural history cabinets of this period more generally, “a structure that permits both display and secrecy,” with the sociable and visual delight originating in the performances that accompanied its unveiling.³²⁴ The speculation prior to the opening of the doors and drawers, and the ritualistic fetching of the key, the turning of the lock would slowly reveal layers and subdivisions of spaces gradually less public and more intimate.

³²² Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 112.

³²³ Mary Hamilton Diary, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 201. The artist referred to variously by Walpole and Hamilton is Cornelius van Poelenburgh (1594 – 1667), a Dutch landscape painter and draughtsman.

³²⁴ Zytaruk, “Mrs Delany,” 131.

As Zytaruk has already demonstrated, it is in Delany's letters that we find the most sustained and thorough engagement with the cabinet space. Certainly, "the image of Mrs. Delany's letter migrating from her closet to the wider social world of epistolary space" is a compelling one that "forces us to consider how the natural history cabinet, itself tied to letter writing, embodied numerous, more public processes of exchange."³²⁵ In 1750, Delany wrote to her sister of a cabinet she had formed at her home at Delville. She describes herself as "covered with dust and wearied with the toils of cleaning and new arranging my cabinets of shells, throwing out rubbish, adding my new acquisitions, all which has been the work of yesterday and this morning to the present hour of one."³²⁶ The cabinet, then, was a site of rhythmic labour and the expenditure of creative energy, combining repetitive "cleaning" tasks with the careful and aesthetic selection and arrangement of suitable objects. Although here a solitary activity, the maintenance of a cabinet was certainly worthy of note in Delany's correspondence; as her letter highlights, cabinet-work was a suitable subject for conversation, and its associated practices deserving of textual reproduction. Indeed, correspondence networks were an efficient means of specimen acquisition as collectors informed their correspondents of gaps in their assemblies, as well as specific tastes and priorities in their collecting habits. In 1775, Delany wrote to her niece:

Pray give my love to your brothers for the curiosities they have been so kind as to send me, and to your mama for the Shells, some of which are the best of the kind I have met with, particularly that which was wrap'd in the bit of brown paper, which the D of Portland has placed in her cabinet.³²⁷

The cabinet was the most common destination for natural history specimens and antiquities alike, containing "the stuff of complex epistolary, economic, and social transactions."³²⁸ Absorption of one's object into the cabinet of a prominent collector presumably carried with it a kind of prestige whilst, for collectors like the duchess, to insert such "curiosities" into these sites was to claim ultimate ownership and authority over them. Within the spaces of the cabinet then, collectors and visitors could engage in the signalling of social relationships through displaying, arranging, cleaning objects.

³²⁵ Ibid, 132.

³²⁶ Delany to Mrs Port, 8 June 1750, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, II, 551.

³²⁷ Delany to Miss Port, 22 January 1775, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 312-3.

³²⁸ Zytaruk, "Mary Delany," 132.

Certainly, scholars have identified the potential of eighteenth-century women's hands in creating and acting-out identities. Kate Smith has argued, for example, that as well as performing practices of manipulation on their own bodies, "sewing and shellwork offered important avenues through which eighteenth-century British women could engage in processes of meaning making and memorialization"³²⁹ Within the duchess's circle, the natural history or antiquities cabinet offered space in which to perform and define friendship as well as familial relationships.

The cabinet space offered opportunities for intimacy, both emotional and physical, as the duchess and those around her leaned over its drawers, or else laid out its contents on a table. In 1779, Mary Delany's niece Mary Port paid her aunt a visit to her house in St James's Place, London. Writing to the young girl's mother, Delany reported "Mary is now at my elbow looking over a drawer of shells."³³⁰ The cabinet was a space in which skill and learning could be transferred from one individual to another through close engagement with its material contents. Likewise, it might function as a space of outward performative femininity and potential armorial flirtation: "My precious charge, who was much pleased with her visit and brought away shells in abundance; her collection increases so fast that you must provide her with a cabinet to keep them, for she promises herself much joy in sorting and entertaining Mr. Beresford with them."³³¹ Here, Delany aligns her niece's development into womanhood with her increasing need for a cabinet of her own, where her "sorting" of its contents might demonstrate her virtú to those around her.

A list of cabinets sold in the 1786 auction and recorded in *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum* gives a broad (though by no means exhaustive) impression of the interior landscape at both Bulstrode and Privy Gardens. The diversity amongst the Portland furniture in terms of their specific functions reveals the cabinet's potential to mark and exercise categorisation within the museum. Among the catalogued lots are "A Jewel cabinet, the front marble, with drawers," "A small mahogany shell cabinet, with 7 drawers," "A book case" and "Two [...] china shelves."³³² Many of the examples listed in the *Catalogue* point to a rich set of accompanying actions and performances. For example, "A mahogany table for sorting shells, with a rim on the back" was likely built to accommodate the work of sorting, examining and arranging shells, with the back rim

³²⁹ Smith, "In Her Hands," 491.

³³⁰ Delany to Mrs Port, 27 February 1779, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, II, 333.

³³¹ Delany to Mrs Port, 17 April 1779, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, II, 340.

³³² Lots 1723, 1728, 1734 and 2434 in *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*.

presumably added to prevent specimens from tumbling over the edge of the surface as the duchess or her guests worked. “A wainscot cabinet for insects, the drawers lined and glazed” would allow for the aesthetic arrangement and subsequent viewing of specimens. Elsewhere, “Two very handsome mahogany cabinets, with drawers, of beautiful wood, with upper parts of plate glass, the back silver plated” may have been useful in displaying larger objects, affording the visitor a three-dimensional view of the item through its reproduction in the reflective surface of the glass. Similarly, “An exceedingly beautiful small mahogany cabinet [...] with 18 drawers, lined with cork and glazed; quite new, and made in the best manner for containing Insects” indicates the presence of commissioned and purpose-made pieces within the museum environment. Tobin has identified the high value and cost in producing new cabinets, noting that as keeper of the natural history collections of the British Museum, Daniel Solander “had to get permission from the trustees to have more made.”³³³ Sometimes the furniture was itself a curiosity, as in the case of a “very handsome case of drawers, with a Chinese villa in ivory.”

A number of the pieces listed contained remarkably numerous drawers. Amongst the cabinets sold in 1786 were “A very fine large mahogany cabinet, with 48 drawers,” another “for insects, with 30 drawers,” and “An exceeding handsome large cabinet, with 36 drawers and folding doors.” As a general rule, cabinets were often highly complex constructions and could feature “two tiers, each of twenty drawers of varying depths, ranging from 1.5 to 2.5 inches for most shells, reserving space on top of the cabinet for larger specimens, preferably under glass classes or domes.”³³⁴ Encountering these structures in the Portland Museum, visitors would no doubt have spent hours working through the enclosed spaces of each drawer, taking care to open and close them in a performance both rhythmic and explorative. The visual and tactile penetration that followed would likely rely on vocal or visual cues taken from the duchess as she, like a saloniere inviting her guests to join the conversation, would loquaciously unlock the doors and slide open the drawers of the museum.

Certainly, the duchess was often the initiator of such experiences. In her diary from December 1783, Mary Hamilton recalls how, during a visit to the duchess “Dr Lind brought y^e D^{ss} some shells and fossils; we look’d y^m over, and placed them in

³³³ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 94. For more on cabinets commissioned and made especially for other contemporary collectors, see Ralph Edwards, “Cabinets Made for Horace Walpole and Thomas Brand” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 74, no. 432 (March 1939): 128-129

³³⁴ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 94.

drawers, &c.”³³⁵ As demonstrated in Hamilton’s report, drawers were often brought out to the duchess by servants, pointing to the performative elements in presentation, as well as a routine deference to her authority, ownership and knowledge. Tobin has previously attested to the role of servants at Bulstrode and the house at Whitehall and has identified “a convivial scene where young and old, men and women, servants and peers were gathered around talking, reading, and carrying out various collecting and sorting activities involving data management, antiquarian archiving, and the manipulation and evaluation of natural objects.”³³⁶ In her diary from December 1783 Hamilton records:

We had a barrel of West India shells to look over. I took Mr. Lightfoot in, making him believe there were *oysters* coming to eat: this occasion’d much mirth. The D^{ss} pronounced the shells to be “*good for nothing*,” afterwards was so good to look out some fossils and shells for me out of her own drawers; Mr. Agnew [the head Gardener at Bulstrode] came and assisted to sort them out [...] After dinner y^e Duchess had a box of shells brought; we look’d y^m over together, and she gave me ye box and its contents; this employ’d us till Mrs. Delany came from her room.³³⁷

The servants at Bulstrode were not only the facilitators of a broader collecting scheme, but trained and knowledgeable curators of the museum’s treasures. In his letter of 1768, Fabricius similarly describes how “[the duchess’s] servants have observed her love of collecting and acquired an excellent understanding of how to handle insects. They can spot any change in a caterpillar, and feed and nurture it carefully. They now take great delight in discovering a new variety.”³³⁸ For the duchess’s guests and servants alike, the rhythm of domestic life at Bulstrode was marked by regular encounters with objects in the collection. For Hamilton, the *naturalia* of the collection provided opportunity for strengthening social bonds between the inhabitants of the site. Here, she turns the shells delivered to the duchess into a joke between Lightfoot and herself. Her purposeful misclassification of the shells as “oysters,” as well as her humorous misrepresentation of

³³⁵ Mary Hamilton Diary, 17 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 172. Hamilton refers to Dr James Lind (1716 – 1794), a Scottish physician and inventor.

³³⁶ Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 92-93.

³³⁷ Hamilton Diary, 17 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 182 – 83. Also quoted in Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 92.

³³⁸ Fabricius, 10 September 1768.

them as items “to eat,” points to a pre-existing understanding within the group of the role these objects played as material signifiers of rigorous natural history practice and scientific enquiry. When alteration of the physical qualities and uses of these objects is linguistically proposed, hilarity ensues. Hamilton also captures something of the shared experience of enacted performance and labour when she reports that “we look’d y^m over together, and she gave me y^e box and its contents.” In this instance, the box and its shells double as a gift, augmenting the social process enacted in that moment to continue to exist beyond the temporal and even physical bounds of the museum itself.

As well as containing much of the duchess’s vast shell collection, drawers in the Portland Museum were also used to store intaglios, gems and other small antiquities. In December 1783, Hamilton reports “ye Dss brought me a large collection of seals – to take impressions from.”³³⁹ Seals, intaglios, gems and jewels (figs. 3.3 and 3.4) made up a significant portion of the Portland Museum and appear to have been a point of particular interest within the duchess’s circle. In January 1784, Hamilton wrote in her diary how “ye Duchess of Portland sent her coach for me [...] we arranged a cabinet of agates.”³⁴⁰ In 1786, the final day of the auction that saw the collection dismantled saw the sale of sixty-one lots containing jewels, including “A very fine large Saxon topaz, in gold setting,” “One superfine emerald,” and “One festoon of flowers, diamonds, and coloured stones, enamelled, with a pearl Dolphin.”³⁴¹

Intaglios were pressed in the wax seals of letters sent to and from Bulstrode (fig. 3.5). Those depicting the heads of Roman women were most regularly deployed in the technologies of letter-locking, in an act of alignment by the duchess and her circle with the learned historical and imagined female figures of antiquity. Here, the negative space of the wax impression represented the object itself, transporting it along with the epistolary contents of the folded paper to sites outside of Bulstrode and Privy Gardens, thereby expanding the scope and reach of the collections and its intellectual and visual models of circulation. Correspondence provided a space in which to express and hone this desire to reflect and evoke, in particular, the Roman world, with the letters making textual, as well as material reference to antiquity. In 1768 James Granger wrote to the duchess, finishing his letter “I know your Grace will acquit me of pedantry and impertinence, when I conclude me letter to you with that very simple but excellent

³³⁹ Hamilton Diary, 3 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 150.

³⁴⁰ Hamilton Diary, 14 January 1784, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 204.

³⁴¹ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 192.

admonition, which the old Romans used at the conclusion of their letters to those friends whom they valued and respected most: ‘Be diligently careful of your health.’³⁴²

Boxes

A notable, and entirely overlooked, survival from the Portland Museum is a large wooden box (fig. 3.6) lined with paper and containing a selection of ethnographic and archaeological materials all labelled with text written in the duchess of Portland’s hand.³⁴³ Although remarkably singular in its physical make-up and its contents, this box serves as a useful example of the composite and sophisticated material frameworks used by the duchess in displaying and encountering objects within her collection. The box itself is wooden and opens with a lid that can be lifted backwards to reveal a deep interior space. The inside of the space is lined with paper likely selected and pasted in by the duchess or another in her circle. Decorated in blue-grey dots, the paper features cut and pasted segments of printed text which, although visible on all interior surfaces of the box, are positioned in a seemingly random sequence.

The contents of the box provoke fascinating insights into eighteenth-century tastes for ethnographical and antiquarian items represented in the collection alongside its more famous *naturalia*. Contained within are:

A green hardstone hatchet or axe head (147 x 62 x 20 mm)

An ancient Egyptian amulet or figurine of a pharaoh with traces of green faience glaze (114 x 34 x 20 mm)

A carved shell figurine (116 x 60 mm)

An eagle stone geode in a sewn wash-leather bag (Geode 56 x 44 mm)

A folder paper containing a preserved butterfly attached to the reverse of a piece of a letter written in English.

Whilst the opening of the box might offer a dextrous experience akin to those that accompany the other cabinets and drawers of the museum, it presents a variation of the typical visitor encounter presented thus far. The depth of the box and the limited space

³⁴² Granger to the duchess of Portland, 1768, in *Letters Between the Rev. James Granger*, 11.

³⁴³ The box is now in the Portland Collection at the Harley Gallery in Nottinghamshire. I am especially grateful to Assistant Curator Sophie Littlewood for drawing my attention to this.

within mean the objects stored there cannot be viewed to their best advantage when compared, for example, to large shell specimens that might be afforded a space under a bell jar or their own satin-lined drawer. Overlapping with one another, the objects inside the box are forced to compete for space, as they are not immediately and fully visible to anyone that might peer over its ledges. Seemingly spatially confused, this model for exhibiting items is not as chaotic as it initially appears. Instead, this system of display requires excavation. Hands must reach inside, sort through and discern, choosing which objects to select, remove and examine elsewhere. As Classen has highlighted of the early modern museum, “in the case of a private collection [...] it was (and is) customary for collectors to handle their pieces and to allow favoured guests the same privilege.”³⁴⁴ Lutz has similarly attested that any visitor to the eighteenth-century museum was “encouraged to touch the items displayed,” citing an incident from 1786, in which a woman at the British Museum, in search of the immediacy of historic experience, inserted her hand into an ancient Greek urn to touch the ashes: “I pressed the grain of dust between my fingers tenderly, just as her best friend might once have grasped her hand.”³⁴⁵ Here, the box invites a re-enactment of the objects’ discovery in which the museum visitor is cast as an antiquarian or archaeologist, exploring and exposing the submerged contents of the container.

Contained within the sewn wash-leather bag in the box is an eagle stone geode which, according to the label, is filled “with loose earth in the cavity.” Eagle stones, or aetites, are formed in the stomachs or necks of eagles and have enjoyed a long-standing role in folkloric traditions as amuletic or apotropaic objects particularly associated with childbirth.³⁴⁶ Both medical and folkloric history are generally under-represented in the Portland Museum, although the duchess’s interest in the eagle stone no doubt lay in its value as a natural history object, as well as its unusual social and gendered function. Although it is unlikely that the duchess used the object in this manner during her own pregnancies, its presence in her collection demonstrates her interest in such practice. In terms of its spatial dimensions, the eagle stone is unique. Hollow and filled with earth, the stone encases secret and unknowable space (in order to examine the inside of the stone, one would need to destroy it, disturbing and emptying its contents). Tightly enclosed in the sewn-leather bag, the stone is, however, discoverable through the layers

³⁴⁴ Classen, “Museum Manners,” 898.

³⁴⁵ Lutz, “The Paper Museum,” 27. Also quoted in Classen, “Touch in the Museum” in Classen ed., *The Book of Touch* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005): 277-78.

³⁴⁶ See T. G. H. Drake, “The Eagle Stone: An Antique Obstetrical Amulet,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 8, no. 1 (1940): 128-132.

of tactile exploration imposed upon it. To reveal it entirely, a visitor would need to draw back the lid of the box, insert their hand into the space, sort through and select the correct artefact, before carefully removing the leather.

Of the ethnographic items in the box – the axe head, the Egyptian amulet and the carved shell figurine – all are objects whose origins lie in the dextrous nature of both their creation and function outside of European modes of artistic production. The handling of them in a museum context might imply a proximity between the original creator and those encountering the objects within the museum itself, of the hands that made and the hands that would explore and appraise in obliquely Western terms.³⁴⁷ Of the shell figurine, the duchess records on its label that “this was found on a small isl[and] near Exuma it is supposed to have been left there by th[e] Indians and made of the shell of a conch.” The island of Exuma, in the Bahamas, was originally occupied by the Lucayan people (the “Indians” the duchess mistakenly refers to) before the arrival of European colonisers in the seventeenth century. Represented here is further evidence of the global scope of the museum, as discussed in chapter one. Contained within the box, then, is a projected and largely fictive European fantasy of an unknown people, epitomised in the object itself which, through recontextualization in the Portland Museum, has apparently shed any tangible connection to its actual origins. Of its makers, the duchess, in the few short lines of text she supplies to her guests, presents an intriguing and fetishized narrative. She simultaneously creates distance between the “Indians” and her own social circle through evoking the mysterious manner of the object’s abandonment (“it is supposed to have been left there”) and emphasises its ‘discovery’ as the central moment of its biography, to be repeated and relived each time the box is opened. In its detection in and removal from the box, the figurine could again be “found” by those in the museum.

Throughout the space, the handwritten labels tied or pasted onto objects assert the duchess’s connoisseurial authority as well as the projected historical or fantastical worlds conjured by her words. As textual punctuation in an otherwise tactile conversation between object and visitor, the labels work to ensure the duchess’s

³⁴⁷ For more on the presence of Native American material culture in British collections, see Troy Bickham, *Savages within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005); R. Richardson, *The Savage and Modern Self: North American Indians in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); R. B. Phillips, “Materiality and Cultural Translation: Indigenous Arts, Colonial Exchange, and Postcolonial Perspectives,” in P. N. Miller ed., *Bard Graduate Center Cultural Histories of the Material World*, 134-143 (University of Michigan Press, 2013).

omnipotence throughout so that, even if she were herself not bodily present at the moment of the box's opening, her identity as the collector and patron of these artefacts remains present. Of the axe head, she claims "this is an Indian hatchet many of which I have seen but this is the best and most perfect." Here an imagined sequence of lesser hatchets appraised by the duchess points to an established history of this *sort* of object whilst simultaneously highlighted is the duchess's ability to ascertain "the best and most perfect" from within this objectscape.

Encased inside folded paper within the box is a preserved butterfly, stored alongside a label written in French and a different hand to the duchess's. It reads "Sortes de papillons qui sont produit dans les rivieres; d'un espece nouvelle, qui se forment dans l'espace d'un demi quart d'heures apres qu'on les en tirent, dignes de l'attention de messieurs de la S. R."³⁴⁸ The letters "S. R." are likely an abbreviation of 'Society Royale', or the Royal Society, evidencing the extent of the duchess's networks of acquisition and specimen exchange. Whether this particular butterfly was ever brought to "l'attention de messieurs" there remains unknown, but that the author of the note, likely a French naturalist sending the specimen to Britain, claims it as a new species is especially important and signals the presence of potentially singular objects in the Portland Museum. Furthermore, like the shell figurine and the 'Indian' hatchet, the butterfly and its accompanying label point to the duchess's awareness and involvement in broader and potentially global networks of object exchange beyond the enclosed display spaces of her own collection.

Folios, Catalogues and Albums

Folios, catalogues and albums were ubiquitous across the duchess of Portland's collection. Perhaps the most famous survival of these types of production is Mary Delany's *Hortus Siccus*, made up of several bound volumes containing cut paper and dried flowers. As objects, the album and folio functioned as stores of material and intellectual knowledge. Pictorial and textual information was kept in their pages. Folios were filled with prints, engravings and sketches whilst dried plants were pressed and installed inside albums, sometimes unfastened, to be removed or reassembled, else fixed to the paper of the structure using needle and thread. Botanical specimens from the

³⁴⁸ "Types of butterflies which are produced in rivers: of a new species, which is formed in the space of a quarter of an hour after they are taken from them, For the attention of men of the S. R."

duchess's gardens at Bulstrode were represented in cut and coloured paper in order to preserve the inevitably ephemeral. They could be finite structures that, once assembled, were intended to remain so. Also common within the Portland collection, however, albums were understood in more fluid and organic terms, as the spaces into which objects and ideas could be inserted and taken away, through which works might travel and be temporarily displayed before removal and exhibition elsewhere. The duchess herself produced several handwritten catalogues of different aspects of her museum. Among those to survive are a *Catalogue of the plants in Duck Island at Bulstrode* and several lists of plants and fungi growing across her estate.³⁴⁹ Several loose pages (fig. 3.7) from a once-bound catalogue, written in the duchess's hand, of fungi at Bulstrode survive at the University of Nottingham, with entries ordered numerically, suggesting the loss of a substantial text.³⁵⁰

Albums could serve as sites of inspiration, as spaces from which visitors might mine useful physical, pictorial or thematic sources for work elsewhere. As collecting spaces, albums and folios were regularly used as systems of ordering and display within elite collections of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kim Sloan has, for example, noted that on his death, Sir Hans Sloane had collected "500 framed and mounted pictures," while his library "included over 100 albums that contained perhaps 15,000 drawings and watercolours."³⁵¹ Such assemblages have not been the subjects of sustained and serious analysis. Often, folios and albums of this nature were broken up and raided in later periods, with individual works taken for use elsewhere, therefore making the practical or projected reassembly of these composite structures especially difficult.³⁵²

The duchess possessed numerous folios containing almost countless prints and engravings. Some of these were purchased as complete and self-contained objects from the collections of others, but the majority were compiled gradually as the duchesses acquired their contents separately and assembled them into groups based on artist or theme. Collecting prints and engravings of art works and gathering them in folios was typical practice in the eighteenth century. Ingrid Vermeulen has identified the collecting

³⁴⁹ *Catalogue of the plants in Duck Island at Bulstrode*, Pw E 71, Portland (Welbeck) Collection, University of Nottingham. See also several lists of plants and fungi in the duchess's handwriting, Pw E 63.

³⁵⁰ Extract of text about fungus *Agricus Reticulata*, in the duchess of Portland's handwriting, date unknown. Pw E 63/3/2, Portland (Welbeck) Collection, University of Nottingham.

³⁵¹ Kim Sloan, "Sir Hans Sloane's Pictures: The Science of Connoisseurship or the Art of Collecting?" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 382.

³⁵² *Ibid.* Indeed, Sloan argues that "methods of classification changed frequently, and instead of staying together as historical collections, individual items were moved to reflect modern disciplines and their categories."

of art prints as useful illustrations in the writing and publication of art historical texts of the period.³⁵³ In elite collections, folios of prints and drawings by Old Masters served to denote connoisseurship. Among the many folios sold at the 1786 auction of the Portland collection were “A most capital and matchless book of Raphael’s Ornaments in the Pope’s Gallery, at the Vatican Palace at Rome, inimitably coloured, and exquisitely finished” and “A most curious collection of drawings, by Holbein, of Knights in Armour, &c., beautifully coloured, and exceedingly scarce.”³⁵⁴ Often, the descriptions of the 1786 Catalogue offer a glimpse into the physical properties of such items as structures for storage and display. For example, lot 2561 describes “a parcel of miscellaneous prints, in a port-folio.”³⁵⁵ Prints and engravings might be collected together and displayed according to type, subject or artist. Amongst those at Bulstrode were several folios containing collected portraits. The duchess had in her possession:

Twelve portraits of the Emperors, after Rubens, & 23 ancient portraits
 Fifty-two small portraits of illustrious personages
 Fifteen portraits, various, after Vandyke, by Lombart
 Fifty-one ditto, by Audran, Nanteuil, and others
 Twenty-one scarce old English portraits
 Fourteen metzotino [sic] portraits, Dutchess [sic] of Hamilton, Countess of Kildare, and others
 Forty-four portraits of Popes and Cardinals, some very scarce.³⁵⁶

The duchess’s tastes, typical for this period, ran to prints of landscapes and pastoral works. Amongst the folios and albums of prints sold in 1786 were several “prospects” and works on “the Natural History of Scotland” by the antiquary and surveyour Rev. Charles Cordiner (?1749 – 1794) as well as a “set of 12 very neat prints, representing the Progress of the Irish Linen Manufactory, by Hinks.”³⁵⁷ Formed of various constituent parts, folios were valuable objects in their own right. Among those in the duchess’s collection, for example, were “three exceeding good small port-folios, bound in red Morocco, with fine paper, green silk sides and ribbons.”³⁵⁸

³⁵³ Ingrid Vermeulen, *Picturing Art History: The Rise of the Illustrated History of Art in the Eighteenth Century* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

³⁵⁴ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 125.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 117

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

Folios could be raided and prints taken out of them for use in decorative schemes elsewhere. In December 1783, Hamilton was tasked with decoupageing a chimney board for the library at Bulstrode using prints from the duchess's folios stored in the same room:

Mr Levers, ye house steward, came to me and brought ye chimney-board he had made for ye library, wch I had promised ye Dss to cover wth prints [...] Mrs Delany came to me; I began to *repair* a beautiful chimney-board of *her doing* in color'd paper, vases, antique figures &c. &c.³⁵⁹

In her entry for the same day, Hamilton describes how the duchess led the way in inviting her to select materials from the collection, writing “ye Dss and I look'd over prints in a folio; she gave me some out for the board I am doing.”³⁶⁰ Decorating around fireplaces and doorways was rife at Bulstrode. Llandover, in the *Autobiography and Correspondence*, notes that alongside shell work at Bulstrode, Delany made “numberless mantel-pieces with Etruscan and other designs in cut paper laid upon wood, which had the effect of inlaying.”³⁶¹ In 1772, Delany wrote her niece from Bulstrode “I have done 3 chimney boards for the drawing-room here, the dining-room, and the Dss own bed-chamber. They are mere bagatelles; but the weather has been so fine we have lived much abroad, and my *agility* is now equal to my *imagination*.”³⁶²

Within the Portland Museum, there existed a close relationship between the cabinet and the album and folio, with the latter inviting many of the same actions and visual interests as the former. *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, for example, lists “two large port-folios, with leaves” that could be pulled out and unfolded, with visual or textual information stored on and underneath them. Zytaruk has identified the early *hortus siccus* created by Mary Somerset, Duchess of Beaufort (1630 - 1715) and contained within the Sloane Herbarium at the Natural History Museum as providing some of the “conventions” that Mary Delany's famous flower mosaics, produced at Bulstrode, later adhered to.³⁶³ Indeed, “in its use of fold out compartments” the duchess's use of

³⁵⁹ Hamilton Diary, 9 December 1783, *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 166.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 168.

³⁶¹ Lady Llandover, *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 502.

³⁶² Delany to Mary Port, 4 October 1772, *Autobiography and Correspondence*, II, 469.

³⁶³ Zytaruk, “Mary Delany,” 143.

collapsible paper to cover and reveal the dried specimens mounted beneath echoes the doors and drawers of natural history collection of the period.³⁶⁴

In 1784, the duchess of Portland was accorded a place in an exclusive list of recipients of John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute's (1713 – 1792) privately printed *Botanical Tables*, alongside Catherine the Great and Joseph Banks. Dedicated to Queen Charlotte, the work was bound in nine volumes. The queen's copy (fig. 3.8) was housed in a satinwood cabinet with mounted gilt bronze handles, doors decorated with painted flowers and, on top, Charlotte's personal cipher. As Bute proposed in his dedication to the queen, the work was "composed solely for the Amusement of the Fair Sex under the Protection of your Royal Name."³⁶⁵ The duchess's own copy was mentioned by Mary Hamilton in her diary of 1784, where she includes it in a list of items within the objectscape at Bulstrode: "Left a Cabinet of Natural Hist^y for y^e DP. to read given her by Lord Bute. 9 Quarto Vols."³⁶⁶ Of particular note here is Hamilton's reference to the work as a "cabinet", suggesting that the duchess's copy was presented in a similar decorated wooden structure to that which housed the royal version. Also significant is Hamilton's notation that she "left" the cabinet for the duchess "to read," identifying herself as a purveyor of the object to Bulstrode. In this instance, the cabinet functions as a portable object, carrying the information bound inside it between different sites and collections, and entering the Portland Museum as a pre-established space of data management and display. Furthermore, it was a space designed to prompt and promote gendered female intellectual study. In her acceptance of Bute's dedication, Charlotte wrote that she was "much flattered to be thought capable of so rational, beautiful, & enticing Amusement, & shall make it my endeavour not to forfeit this good opinion by pursuing this Study steadily, as I am persuaded this Botanical Book will more than encourage me in doing it."³⁶⁷ To use Bute's work, the queen, the duchess and its other esteemed recipients would all need to open the doors of the cabinet, to choose one of the nine bound volumes and to remove and open that in turn. The physical properties of both the cabinet and the albums themselves, then, invited active female participation – in practical engagement with the spaces and form of the work, the women could perform the specific identities it offered them through dextrous enactment and the physical encounter.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, *Botanical Tables* (1784). See Roberts ed., *George III and Queen Charlotte*, 279-80.

³⁶⁶ Mary Hamilton Diary, October 1784. HAM/2/14.

³⁶⁷ Quoted in Roberts ed., *George III and Queen Charlotte*, 280.

Albums, particularly those containing art works created within the spaces of the Portland Museum, were often at the centre of performative sociability and could be brought to the hands of visitors, laid out on tables or displayed on stands. During December of 1783, Mary Hamilton was invited to look over a “book of drawings [...] of shells, birds, &c.” made by “Mr. Levers, her Grace’s house steward, and of Mr. Agnew, y^c gardener.”³⁶⁸ A week later, she was in her private room at Bulstrode when “Mr. Levers, ye house steward, came and brought me a large portfolio of his drawings. Mrs. Delany came and we look’d the over.”³⁶⁹ Such works functioned as a visual treatise of artistic and social identity. Like a paper museum, these were spaces to be visited, pages turned, objects viewed. Creator and curator were the same, and applications could be made to them by visitors keen to rifle through its leaves.

In 1786, almost a year after the duchess’s death, the picturesque artist William Gilpin and his wife applied to Delany in order to see the volumes of her *Hortus Siccus* (fig. 3.9). In April of that year, Gilpin wrote “If a half hour’s call would not be inconvenient, may I ask the father favour, that you wou’d be so good as [to] have one of your delightful volumes of plants on a table, that Mrs. Gilpin (who travels with me) may have it to say she ‘has looked into them.’”³⁷⁰ Of particular note is Gilpin’s expressed desire to look “into” rather than “onto” them – he positions Delany’s albums as spaces of depth to be penetrated and entered into through perceiving them visually. Clearly enamoured with Delany’s production, Gilpin later described in a letter to Delany how her work had “furnished us with an agreeable topic of conversation during the afternoon.” Continuing, Gilpin begins a fascinating comparison of Delany’s albums with the exhibition of natural history specimens in Sir Ashton Lever’s collection, with particular emphasis on their varying modes of specimen display:

He has *endeavoured* to array his birds to the best advantage by placing them in *white* boxes round his rooms, and when you enter you are presented with a succession of rooms, still multiplied by a mirror at the end, everywhere invested with these little apartments. I know not how this general appearance affected your eye, but mine is *greatly disgusted*. Nothing can be *meaner* and *poorer* than the general effect, and more opposite to what (we painters) call “*rich*.” He would

³⁶⁸ Hamilton Diary, 3 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 152.

³⁶⁹ Hamilton Diary, 14 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 175.

³⁷⁰ Rev. William Gilpin to Delany, 24 April 1786, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 346.

say, I doubt not, that he spread a white ground behind his birds to show their colours more advantageously, but in that I think *he is deceived*.

In his identification of the “little apartments”, Gilpin aligns the methods of delineating space in Lever’s museum and his arrangement of specimens with the pages of Delany’s albums. As Zytaruk has argued of his letter “in visualizing her collages as specimens in a cabinet of multiple compartments, Gilpin helped to define them as a visual translation of the eighteenth-century models of collection and display that Mrs. Delany witnessed.”³⁷¹ Indeed, Delany regularly included part of dried specimens alongside coloured papers when creating her mosaics, incorporating pieces of the real-life plant in her own interpretation. For Zytaruk, “the conventions of the herbarium survive in the plant material that Mrs. Delany incorporated into such collages.”³⁷² In his analysis of Lever and Delany’s differing approaches to the display of natural history specimens, Gilpin identifies himself, and possibly Delany, as “we painters”, suggesting an established notion of object exhibition and representation as painterly and requiring a degree of artistic knowledge and aesthetic inspiration. Furthermore, while Gilpin’s primary concern here is clearly the visual effect of Lever’s “apartments” compared to the pages of Delany’s *Hortus Siccus*, he introduces the idea of richness and depth, both visual and tactile, as an important element of display, highlighting the characteristic closeness between art and science that defined much of elite collecting in this period and the work at Bulstrode in particular. He continues:

His rooms are so light that his birds would detach themselves from any ground; and what a gorgeous display of birds would some of those little splendid touches of Nature’s pencil exhibit if they were set off by some *deep shadow behind*? Not that I should array a room full of birds (as you do flowers) *in black*, tho’ I am *now fully* convinced that black is the best ground you could have chosen; and as your flowers are exhibited one after another, the ground on which you place them cannot injure the eye; yet I doubt whether it would not appear too dismal if they were spread like Lever’s boxes over the *whole superficies of a room*.³⁷³

³⁷¹ Zytaruk, “Mrs Delany,” 145.

³⁷² *Ibid*, 143.

³⁷³ Gilpin to Delany, 8 May 1786, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 349-350.

Here, Lever hits on the complex relationship between “ground” and specimen as central to contemporary models of display and as identifiably important in the work of both Lever and Delany. Gilpin’s concern that Lever’s displays are “so light that his birds would detach themselves,” raises interesting questions about the practicalities of securing objects within museum spaces and is especially comparable to Delany’s albums where tools such as pins, scissors and needles, invisible in the final produced work, would all be used to fasten and emplace specimens. Although he concedes Delany’s mode of display is different to Lever’s, noting “your flowers are exhibited one after the other,” his speculative imagining of the effect of Delany’s flowers, anchored in their black grounds and “spread [...] over the whole superficies of a room” sees the *Hortus Siccus* projected into a public and three-dimensional space beyond the bounds of its paper pages. Similarly, his notation that Delany’s black grounds “cannot injure the eye” points to a real concern about the bodily experience within the spaces of human-object encounter, revealing Delany’s album to possess physical and tactile properties comparable to those of the cabinets, drawers or boxes elsewhere.

Whilst this chapter is not exhaustive in its survey of all of the spaces utilized in the assembling, display and discussion of the duchess of Portland’s museum, it has attended to many of the sites of these processes. In doing so, it has revealed a framework, adapted from contemporaneous and widely-used models of object and collection display, that the duchess and her guests used as the settings and apparatus of their conversation. Within the museum, closets, cabinets, drawers, boxes, albums and folios served as variable and interactive environments that could be manipulated, action within them performed, and modes of sociable and conversational exchange contoured. As sites of intimacy, such spaces were crucial in the enacting of relationships within the duchess’s social circle and in the museum-salon she patronised, allowing for varying levels of formality and informality. Central to the systems of social and tactile activity that maintained these spaces was central to the duchess’s particular approach to collecting and facilitated innovative uses of the museum within her milieu, inviting cross-class, cross-geographical and cross-media interactions as a means to understand both the objects collected and crafted and the identities that were intertwined with them.

Chapter Four

Royal Friendship

Alongside the objects housed in the cabinets and library, menagerie and landscape of the Portland Museum, the museum-salon born out of it held significant cultural capital, emitting an important aesthetic and intellectual legacy beyond the limits of the collection itself. As well as maintaining strong connections with the Bluestocking salons in London, the duchess and her circle were also involved with the royal court of George III. As I shall demonstrate in this chapter, the association of the duchess's coterie with Queen Charlotte and her daughters, which reached its apex in the early 1780s, saw the development of creative collaborations inspired by the Portland and royal collections. Manifest in domestic craft, these female friendships took place within the sites and spaces of the Portland Museum and Windsor Castle, confirming social and material relationships between the two spheres.

This chapter takes as its starting point an album of *découpage* (fig. 4.1), created at Bulstrode by Mary Delany sometime before the winter of 1781 and gifted to George III's consort, Queen Charlotte. The album covers twenty pages forming blue grounds and contains one hundred and fourteen individual paper cut designs, from intricate and realistic botanical representations to more abstract decorative motifs. Despite the size and scope of the work, however, it has received no scholarly attention to date. This previously unknown album, a hybrid manifesto of artistic ideas, is vital in developing ongoing conversations about Delany's methods and materials, as well as the function and performance of such objects within social, creative and emotional relationships. A brief mention of the album appears in Ruth Hayden's *Mrs Delany and her flower collages*, who recorded in her 1992 edition "the recent appearance at Windsor Castle of a booklet of silhouettes cut by Mrs Delany" that gives proof of the "mutual esteem" between queen and artist.³⁷⁴ Held in the Royal Archives, the album was similarly absent from the

³⁷⁴ Hayden, *Mrs Delany and her flower collages*, 166.

2009 Yale Center for British Art exhibition *Mrs. Delany & Her Circle*, which produced a substantial and vital body of scholarship that greatly advanced our understanding of Delany's social world and working methods. Recently digitized as part of the groundbreaking Georgian Papers Programme, this album now needs to be situated within Delany's vast corpus and, more broadly, within practices of paper-cutting within the royal court and elite circles of the period.³⁷⁵ This chapter proposes a reading of the album as part of a series of exchanges between Charlotte and Delany, providing insight into their creative lives, the conversational and collaborative nature of domestic handicrafts and role of such materials in enacting and confirming elite female friendships. As Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway and Sarah Randles have argued, for scholars interested in uncovering historical emotions, the physical manifestations of such relationships, the objects exchanged between people in the past, should be positioned "at the centre of the research investigation, as essential to investigations of the emotions that surround them."³⁷⁶

In their study of the practice of gifting during the eighteenth century, Linda Ziankowski and Cynthia Klekar have proposed the gift as marking a "central role in distributing and aggrandizing power and creating and dismantling relationships in all aspects of social life."³⁷⁷ I read the exchange of craft works and other objects between Delany and the queen within the context of gifting and a domesticated sociability expressive of elite female friendship. Moving away from Ann Bermingham's earlier definition of domestic creative employment as "confinement" and of women's amateur creative efforts as the "tendency to transform the home into an aestheticized space of commodity display," I present evidence of cross-site and cross-rank collaboration and the development of an artistic and aesthetic language formulated in the materials of women's productions and defined within practices of friendship exchange.³⁷⁸ Whilst it would be unrealistic to propose the works exchanged between the queen and Delany as overtly subversive, or as existing outside of the traditional models of elite femininity, I argue that the material productions of their friendship provide evidence of artistic and emotional expression beyond the prescribed notions of leisured and amateur activity in

³⁷⁵ The album can be viewed at

www.gpp.royalcollection.org.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=ADD2%2f2%2f6&pos=2

³⁷⁶ Stephanie Downes, Sally Holloway and Sarah Randles eds., *Feeling Things: Objects and Emotions Through History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 7.

³⁷⁷ Linda Ziankowski and Cynthia Klekar, *The Culture of the Gift in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

³⁷⁸ Ann Bermingham, "Elegant Females and Gentlemen Connoisseurs," in *The Consumption of Culture*, 509. See Vickery "The Theory & Practice of Female Accomplishment," 94.

this period. Certainly, Ariane Fennetaux has suggested that women's domestic work such as "embroidering or decorating was seen as commendable and virtuous [...] they were encouraged and therefore participated in fostering domesticated femininity."³⁷⁹ However, I argue that examination of these works can reveal altogether more personal narratives, and provide evidence of artistic ingenuity and creative conversation that went beyond what Bermingham famously called the "gilding of the cage," reflecting instead broader discussions occurring in the collected and assembled materials of this period.

Elizabeth Eger has identified that "the eighteenth century has long been interpreted as a period during which the tenacity of feudal and contractual relationships loosened as a new commercial society emerged – a situation that enabled friendship to flourish more freely across traditional boundaries of class and station."³⁸⁰ Whilst it is impossible to dismiss the distance in rank between Delany and Queen Charlotte, I position their relationship, one of mutual respect as well as artistic collaboration, within a context of material exchange conducted primarily in the domestic environments of the two women's worlds. These settings allowed for the transgression of such strict boundaries away from the highly visible and ritualistic aspects of court life. Within such spaces, the gifting and receiving of objects, anchored in ideals of female friendship, embodied conversational, emotional and intellectual exchange alongside the material. As Eger has suggested of the Bluestockings "many women expressed their intellectual ambitions through the more conventional media of female 'accomplishment', such as cut-paper work, needlework, and feather and shell work."³⁸¹ As I explore in chapter one of this study, Bulstrode served as a setting for such activities, providing the inspiration, apparatus and space in which materials and skills could be exchanged and labour performed.

It was during her time at the duchess's estate that Delany produced many of her most famous works; the botanical paper mosaics that have been the focus of intense scholarship. Delany's art work and her friendship with the duchess was, in many ways, the currency with which she managed to maintain her lifestyle amongst a singularly elite and exclusive social circle that included the king and queen. She first exhibited her work to the queen during a royal visit to Bulstrode in 1776, where the informality of the gathering allowed for the transcendence of social rank and the establishment of a

³⁷⁹ Ariane Fennetaux, "Female Crafts," 94.

³⁸⁰ Eger, "Paper Trails and Eloquent Objects," 111.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, 113.

reciprocal friendship; “The King desired me to show the Queen one of my books of plants: she seated herself in the gallery; a table and the book laid before her. – I kept my distance till she called me to ask some questions about the mosaic paper-work.”³⁸² In the decade that followed their first meeting, Delany and Charlotte passed gifts between Bulstrode and Windsor, collaborating on domestic projects and developing an aesthetic language through which their emotional and creative bond was eloquently expressed and recorded. The interior environments of both Bulstrode and Windsor were crucial sites in this process.

The relaying of objects and conversation between them can be read in the context of practices of collecting and display within both the Portland museum and the royal court. Certainly, there were deep social, and practical, connections between the two places. By the late 1770s, the duchess’s daughter, Lady Weymouth was serving as a lady-in-waiting to the queen at Windsor and was a regular conveyor of messages between her mother, Delany and the royals. Similarly, Mary Hamilton served as a lady-in-waiting to the royal daughters before leaving court in the early 1780s. For Delany and the queen, their creations, rooted in the domestic and overtly feminine environments cultivated at Bulstrode and Windsor, bridged the distance between practices of collecting, production, and consumption. Taken within the context of the gathering and sharing of materials serving the collective aesthetic curiosity of the duchess of Portland’s circle, crafting produced layered and sophisticated artefacts that, read in the context of the museum, can enrich our understanding of how its contributors interacted with and interpreted it.

Friendship, and its Materials

The role of friendship amongst elite circles was paramount in espousing creative values, and in communicating and negotiating the social order. For elite women, in particular, it provided a framework in which they could prescribe and administer behaviours and moral values. On 11th February 1791, for example, Princess Elizabeth wrote to her brother, Prince Augustus on “the subject of Friendship.” In her letter, she defined it as “one of the greatest if not the greatest blessing of life to speak well of one’s friend.”

³⁸²Delany, “Letters from Mrs Delany to Mrs Frances Hamilton, Containing Anecdotes of their late Majesties and the Royal Family,” in *The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* 86, (December 1820): 485.

Meditating on its nature, Elizabeth proposed that “one may certainly have some real friends, but that some comes to be very few for a great many real friends is I believe impossible for us poor mortals to aspire to. I have thank God very few very dear friends [.] a great many acquaintance but it is not of ten in the company of acquaintance that one can be comfortable.”³⁸³ Certainly, intimate friendship amongst elite women was highly valued, both at court and in society more broadly. Historians have considered the friendships of Queen Charlotte in the context of the monarchy, and the restrictions placed on the queen in terms of social interaction and public performance. As Campbell-Orr has suggested, “the Queen was immensely constrained by virtue of her role; she could not opt out of public life.”³⁸⁴ The royal family, Campbell-Orr has identified, “needed private moments of respite” and “opportunities for seclusion from public display” where they were able to cultivate friendships and enjoy domestic life.³⁸⁵ Bulstrode was one such place, where the duchess’s famed museum provided diversion for the royals and context for their own collecting and connoisseurial pursuits.

At Bulstrode, the queen was invited to engage with the intellectual and artistic work of the duchess and her guests. Hayden has previously argued “that Mrs Delany held no position at Court may well have been part of her attraction for both the King and Queen, for they knew they could relax in her company, free from any officialdom.”³⁸⁶ Campbell-Orr suggests that, for both the king and queen, Delany was akin to a grandmother; Charlotte had lost her own mother prior to her marriage, whilst for the king, Delany may have recalled the earlier times of his parents and even his grandfather.³⁸⁷ Nicole Pohl has noted the complex intersections between the Bluestocking circle and the royal court, in particular the relationship that Elizabeth Montagu and her family enjoyed with George III.³⁸⁸ Similarly, Elizabeth Carter, who first met Queen Charlotte in 1791, cultivated a shared interest in German books with the queen, leading to “Charlotte lending [Carter] books...from her own library.”³⁸⁹ Certainly, these inter-sphere associations between the queen and the Bluestocking women were deeply anchored in the gifting and exchange of knowledge-making apparatus; books, tools, papers and crafted objects were exchanged alongside oral

³⁸³ Princess Elizabeth to Prince Augustus, 6 February 1791. GEO/ADD/11.

³⁸⁴ Clarissa Campbell Orr, “Queen Charlotte, ‘Scientific Queen’,” in *Queenship in Britain, 1660-1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 240.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ Hayden, *Mrs Delany and her flower collages*, 166.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁸⁸ Pohl, “Cosmopolitan Bluestockings,” 75 – 76.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

conversation and the teaching and transference of dextrous skills. From Delany's letters, we are privy to instances of such collaboration, initiated by the queen and rooted in the material culture of both Bulstrode and Windsor; "a locket with her hair or a pocket book fitted with beautiful instruments to assist with the flora; looking attentively at Delany's chenille work and asking how she achieves her effects."³⁹⁰

Inside the first page of the album is a dedication, written in Charlotte's hand (fig. 4.2); "This elegant little Book was given to me by Mrs. Delany on the 13th of November 1781 at Bullstrode [sic] in the presence of Her Amiable Friend the Dutchess Dowager of Portland."³⁹¹ The duchess was a vital link in the development of friendship between the queen and Delany, often facilitating or bearing witness to their material exchanges. Delany, who had enjoyed a close friendship with the duchess since her youth, was first invited to reside at Bulstrode after the death of her second husband, Patrick Delany (1686-1768). In a dedication written within her famous *Hortus Siccus*, Delany recorded in 1779 the role of the duchess in supporting her art work, setting a precedent for paper albums as the material sites and spaces of elite female friendship: "To her I owe the spirit of pursuing it with diligence and pleasure [...] my heart will ever feel with the utmost gratitude, and tenderest affection, the honour, and delight I have enjoy'd in her most generous, steady, and delicate friendship, for above forty years."³⁹²

Much of the Delany scholarship of the last two decades has focused on positioning her artwork within women's domestic crafts in the eighteenth century, revealing it to be of the highest accomplishment and artistry within a predominantly amateur school.³⁹³ Similarly, scholars have been much engaged in exploring the sociability of her practices, and the production of work by Delany at a variety of locations and contexts. As Amanda Vickery has previously identified, "from cut paper on chimney boards and shellwork on frames to embroidery on all sorts of furnishings, there can have been few objects at Delville and the houses of her friends that did not bear Mrs. Delany's personal stamp."³⁹⁴ Vickery has argued that, within the historiography of the study of women's craft, such works have largely been seen in a context of female subjugation and domestic confinement. Domestic and craft labour, done by women in this period more generally and produced in commercial as well as

³⁹⁰ Campbell-Orr, "Mrs Delany and the Court," 61.

³⁹¹ Mary Delany, Book of Découpage, GEO/ADD/2/65.

³⁹² Delany, 5 July 1779, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, V, 444.

³⁹³ For discussion of Delany's place within amateur female art practices in this period, see Amanda Vickery, "The Theory & Practice of Female Accomplishment," 94-109.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 94.

private and genteel situations, as Chloe Wigston Smith has demonstrated, have often been obscured from history, revealing a broad invisibility of women's work across the classes.³⁹⁵ Eger has demonstrated the function of crafted objects and works given as gifts amongst the Bluestocking circle, revealing their intellectual as well as material value within such exchanges.

Within the context of handicrafts and their exchange as domestic gifts, advice and instruction were often shared between creator and recipient, with knowledge transferred through the dextrous and haptic experiences of performative labour. In an account by Delany of a visit to the Queen's Lodge at Windsor in 1782, she recalls how Charlotte, "quite alone in her dressing room," was working on "a fringe in a frame, and did me the honour to show me how to do it, and to say she would send me such a frame as her own, as she thought it was a work that would not tire my eyes."³⁹⁶ Demonstrated in Delany's account is the reciprocal nature of their friendship, with the queen taking her turn to instruct her and, as with the contents of the pocketbook, provide the tools necessary to engage in such work. Delany's account also reveals something of the tender and genuinely caring nature of this transgressive relationship; the queen knows her well enough to appreciate and foresee the disabilities that arose from her poor eyesight and has tailored the craft work accordingly. Similarly, the situation, with the queen "quite alone in her dressing-room," indicates the privilege afforded to her. Delany's proximity to Charlotte and the opportunity to see her in this private and exclusively female space indicates a high level of trust and a relationship that ventured beyond formality. On 2 December 1781, Delany was engaged in teaching the queen to use a spinning wheel, after Charlotte had seen her at work on her own:

Yesterday the Queen, with the Princess Royal, Princess Augusta, and Lady Courtown came to wish the Dss [sic] of Portland joy; the Queen caught me at my spinning wheel, and was so gracious as to take a lesson from me, and has desired the Dss [sic] of Portland to get her just such a wheel; I am to set it in order and have the honour of giving her Majesty another lesson.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ Chloe Wigston Smith, *Women, Work and Clothes in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 112.

³⁹⁶ Mary Delany to Mrs Frances Hamilton, 17 December 1782, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 123.

³⁹⁷ Delany, 2 December 1781, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 73

Delany appears to have gifted a wheel for the queen's birthday in January 1782. Writing to Mary Hamilton, then a lady-in-waiting, Delany exclaimed in a letter "were it sensible of its station, how enviable it would be! – happy wheel!"³⁹⁸ A week later, Delany sent the present, accompanied by a poem marking the occasion of transference of both tool and skill, to the queen:

Go, happy wheel! amuse her leisure hour,
Whose grace and affability refin'd
Add lustre to her dignity and power,
And fill with love and awe the grateful mind.³⁹⁹

Spinning was a craft particularly favoured by Charlotte. On 25th November 1789, the queen recorded in her diary a visit with "the ladies Holderness & Courtdown to the Spinning School" in Windsor.⁴⁰⁰ On 18th November of the same year, she writes that one of her ladies-in-waiting "brought me some Spinning Silks."⁴⁰¹ By 1783, Delany held special interest for the Royal family, with George and Charlotte contributing tools, technologies and equipment to her artistic progress. On 10 October, for example, Delany recalled in a letter a scene of domestic industry and conversation born out of handicraft at Bulstrode:

I found the Queen very busy in showing a very elegant machine to the Duchess of Portland, a frame for weaving fringe of a new and most delicate structure; it would take up as much paper as has already been written upon to describe it minutely, yet it is of such simplicity as to be very useful. You will easily imagine the grateful feeling I had when the Queen presented it to me, to make up some knotted fringe which she saw me about. The King at the same time said he "must contribute something to my work," and presented me with a gold knotting shuttle of most exquisite workmanship and taste; and I am at this time, while dictating, knotting white silk to fringe the bag which is to contain it.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ Mary Delany to Mary Hamilton, 21 January 1782, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 81.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ Queen Charlotte Diaries, GEO/ADD/43/2, f. 18-19.

⁴⁰¹ GEO/ADD/43/2, f. 21.

⁴⁰² Mary Delany to Mrs Frances Hamilton, 10 October 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 148-9. For more on spinning women, see Smith, *Women, Work and Clothes*, 49-50, 118, 177. It is possible that this frame was not for weaving but instead was used for knotting, as suggested by the accompanying shuttle.

For the duchess and her circle, the performativity of craftwork taking place at Bulstrode was crucial in the expression of friendship. The contributions of equipment by the queen and king, in the form of a weaving frame and a gold knotting shuttle, indicate the centrality of craft paraphernalia and the apparatus of women's work to models of gifting and patronage useful in confirming hierarchical relationships and social connection.

Delany's Album and Charlotte's Pocketbook

On 13 November 1781, the king and royal family attended a hunt at Gerrard's Cross, a few miles outside of the duchess's estate. During the course of the day, the duchess and Delany received the queen at Bulstrode, where Delany presented her with the book of *découpage*. Later relating events to her niece Mary Port, Delany described how the queen, princesses and ladies-in-waiting had absconded from the overtly masculinised events of the hunt in order to attend the duchess within the feminised, private spaces of Bulstrode:

The Duchess of Portland returned home in order to be ready to receive the Queen, who immediately followed, before wee [sic] could pull of [sic] our cloaks! We receiv'd her Majesty and the Princesses on the steps at the door, but she is so gracious that she makes everything perfectly easy. We got home a quarter before eleven, and the Queen staid till two.⁴⁰³

Although Delany gives no indication of her presentation of the album to the queen during this visit, a note written by Mary Hamilton, the day after the hunt, gives a glimpse into the conversation and activities enjoyed during the queen's time at Bulstrode. Writing from the Queen's Lodge on 14 November, she reports to Delany that "the King wishes so much to have the pleasure of seeing her Grace and *his* "dear Mrs. Delany" (his own expression, *I assure you*)". In a significant postscript, Hamilton added "The Queen wishes to have the proper title of y^e Abridgement of the History of England – *the book she saw yesterday wth y^e D'ss maiden name wrote in it.*"⁴⁰⁴ Revealed here is the exchange of materials between the sites of Bulstrode and Windsor that were so

⁴⁰³ Delany to Mary Port, 18 November 1781, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 69.

⁴⁰⁴ Hamilton to Delany, 14 November 1781, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 66. Italicisation as in Llandover's text.

deeply rooted in the duchess's museum collections, situating Delany and Charlotte's gifting within a context of knowledge as well as material exchange.

On 15 December, a month after Delany's presentation of the album to the queen, Charlotte sent a letter the ten miles from Windsor to Bulstrode. Accompanying the letter was a small pocketbook (fig. 4.3), embroidered in cream-coloured silk by the queen with metal sequins, an enamelled clasp and containing ten sewing tools made from mother-of-pearl and steel. This remarkable object was a gift; its intended recipient, Delany. The letter covering the pocketbook in Charlotte's hand read:

Without appearing imprudent towards Mrs. Delany, and indiscreet to her Friends who wish to preserve her as her excellent qualities well deserve, I cannot have the pleasure of enjoying her company this Winter which our amiable Friend the Dutchess [sic] Dowager of Portland has so frequently and politely indulged me with during the Summer. I must therefore desire that Mrs. Delany will wear this little Pocket-Book in order to remember at times, when no dearer Person's [sic] are present, a very sincere well wisher, Friend, and affectionate Queen.⁴⁰⁵

An exquisite example of Charlotte's own artistic endeavours, and of the economy of material exchange in which she operated, the pocketbook has become an object of increasing interest to scholars of material culture and the royal court, appearing in the 2017 exhibition *Enlightened Princesses: Caroline, Augusta, Charlotte and the Shaping of the Modern World* produced in collaboration with the YCBA and Historic Royal Palaces. Following the delivery of the pocketbook, the duchess of Portland wrote a reply to the lady-in-waiting Mary Hamilton on behalf of Delany, whose eyesight, at the age of eighty-one, was beginning to fail:

Mrs Delany attempted to write to you to express her gratefull acknowledgements to the Queen, for the magnificent present Her Majesty did her the Honour to bestow on her; but is miserable to find her Eyes fail her too much to gratifye her sensibility on this occasion; indeed I think nothing can exceed her gratitude, she was delighted! with the Elegance & taste of the pocket-book & its contents; but when I read the Letter to her (her Eyes being too weak

⁴⁰⁵ Queen Charlotte to Mary Delany, 15 December 1781. GEO/ADD/2/68.

to read it herself) she was quite overcome, to receive such a mark of high Honour & great Condescension of her Majesty; which she shall ever esteem as a Treasure of the greatest value.⁴⁰⁶

The rapidly diminishing quality of Delany's eyesight was well-known amongst her circle by the winter of 1781. In November, Mrs Boscawen wrote to Delany "if eyes were to be purchas'd, *what presents* you wou'd receive!" In the same letter, Boscawen reveals the difficulty Delany had in writing and reading her correspondence; "we certainly do love to see your handwriting...if it has cost you the least degree of pain, *Spin on* therefore, my dear madam, and remember me sometimes while you turn your wheel, but don't tell me so (in writing)."⁴⁰⁷ As Boscawen reveals, for Delany and those in her social milieu, handicraft could function as an alternative form of communicating emotional attachment and recalling absent friends. For Delany in particular, it served as another medium in which to invest her voice as writing became more and more challenging. As Charlotte's note indicates, the pocketbook worked in much the same way, revealing the broad encompassing of craft as an emotional and social language. For Downes, Holloway and Randles, the close relationship between emotion and dextrous, creative practice, relies on the embodying of emotions that seemingly "materialize in human interactions with objects that were made by hand."⁴⁰⁸ Serving as an extension of her physical self, the intended function of the pocketbook was to evoke memory of the bodily-absent queen in moments "when no dearer Person's are present," suggesting an imagined proximity between creator and recipient, one realised in the materials of the craft and emphasised by Charlotte's request that Delany "wear" it.

The methods and experience of producing both paper-cuts and embroidery had much in common, sharing materials, tools and techniques. Often, scissors and knives used in needlework would be similarly employed to cut and slice delicate cut-paper designs and would be associated with works produced in each medium.⁴⁰⁹ For example, a set of steel scissors suitable for both handicrafts has been preserved alongside an anonymous album of *découpage* from c. 1760, now in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum. This conversational overlap of both materials and methodology in the two disciplines is clearly represented in the tools gifted by Charlotte and contained

⁴⁰⁶ Duchess of Portland to Mary Hamilton, 16 December 1781. HAM/1/7/11/2.

⁴⁰⁷ Mrs Boscawen to Mary Delany, 12 November 1781, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 64-5.

⁴⁰⁸ Downes, Holloway and Randles, *Feeling Things*, 4.

⁴⁰⁹ Curator's notes, Victoria and Albert Museum. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O79594/scissors-unknown/>, accessed 12 July 2017.

within the pocketbook. According to Ruth Hayden, the set was described in a note written by Delany's waiting woman as "a beautiful pocket case, the outside satin work'd with gold and ornaments with gold spangles, the inside lined with pink satin and contained a knife, sizsars, pence, rule, compass, bodkin."⁴¹⁰

The embroidered pocket demonstrates both the patronising habits of Charlotte as a royal champion of the arts and her genuine comprehension of Delany's working method. It also signposts the sociability of the labour that would inevitably accompany the tools - even when working alone, Delany would still be reminded of Charlotte and the queen's investment in her work through engagement with the gifted objects. As Rozsika Parker proposed of such crafters, "eyes lowered, head bent, shoulder hunched - the position signifies repression and subjugation, yet the embroiderer's silence, her concentration also suggests a self-containment, a kind of autonomy."⁴¹¹ In this context, scissors and other cutting implements accrued significant agency - as the physical extension of the mind of the artist. Not only are they used to cut away the negative spaces of the paper in order to reveal the desired shape, they function as the enacting apparatus of artistic process, used in creating and conjuring the theoretical and imagined vision of the cutter. Similarly, the pocket book itself can be read within the historiography of women's pockets as private spaces, compellingly discussed by scholars such as Ariane Fennetaux and Jennie Batchelor as feminist issues. Certainly, such spaces could be subversive, providing the opportunity for direct female agency and creative freedom - an enclosed (and therefore secretive or intimate) physical and intellectual environment intrinsically linked to the maker or wearer.⁴¹² Within the intense physical and intellectual processes of production, Delany and Charlotte would have been able to enter into a private world which, although cultivated in their respective domestic environments, could be shared in by those engaged in the craft.

Certainly, Charlotte was familiar with Delany's working methods and, at Bulstrode, had direct access to the spaces in which she worked and the tools with which she undertook that work. In a letter to her niece Mary Port, written in the autumn of 1782, Delany records how the queen was a regular witness to her craft:

⁴¹⁰ Hayden, *Mrs Delany and her flower collages*, 155.

⁴¹¹ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: Women's Press, 1986), 10. See Vickery, "The Theory & Practice of Female Accomplishment," 99.

⁴¹² See Ariane Fennetaux, "Women's Pockets and the Construction of Privacy in the Long Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 20, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 307-34; Jennie Batchelor, "Fashion and Frugality: Eighteenth-Century Pocket Books for Women," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 32 (2003): 1 - 18.

On Saturday, as I was at my usual work, and the D^{ss} D. of Portland just preparing for her breakfast, between 11 and 12, her Majesty, Princess Royal, Princess Mary, and Princess Sophia, attended by Lady Courtown, walk'd into the drawing rooms, and caught me...in some confusion, which was soon dispers'd by the Queen's most gracious (I may say) *kind* manner. She would not suffer me to remove any of my litter, but said it was her wish to see me at my work; and by her command I sat down and shewed her my manner of working, which her great politeness made her pleased with.⁴¹³

It is generally agreed that Delany rarely, if ever, used graphite to sketch her patterns prior to cutting the paper. Rather, it was done by eye. Peter Bower sees Delany's paper-cutting as an intrinsically sociable activity, "both educative and enjoyable, done alone or with a small group of friends."⁴¹⁴ In 1783, Frances Burney witnessed Delany's practice of staining paper and layering it on top of the grounds to create the illusion of nature in her famous mosaics:

[Delany] shewed me the new art which she had invented. It is staining paper of all possible colours, and then cutting it out, so finely, and delicately, that when it is pasted on paper of vellum, it has the appearance of being pencilled, except that, by being raised it has still a richer and more natural look. The effect is extremely beautiful.⁴¹⁵

As Kohleen Reeder has suggested of her paper mosaics, "Delany must have built up a vast assortment of colored papers over time," continuing that "it also has been suggested that she selected papers with textures of finishes that would give an accurate impression of those plants."⁴¹⁶ As Bower has argued, "what sets her apart from the genteel traditions of cut paper patterns and images is her unique accuracy."⁴¹⁷ Moreover, he makes important connections between the paper Delany used for her mosaics and that used in her correspondence, furthering the notion of paper cutting as conversational, with the material itself as imbued with transmissive and communicative

⁴¹³ Mary Delany to Mary Port, 22 October 1782 in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 58.

⁴¹⁴ Peter Bower, "An Intimate and Intricate Mosaic: Mary Delany & her Use of Paper," in *Mrs Delany & Her Circle*, 236.

⁴¹⁵ Frances Burney, *The Diary and Correspondence of Fanny Burney*, 175.

⁴¹⁶ Kohleen Reeder, "The 'Paper Mosaick' Practice of Mrs Delany & Her Circle," in *Mrs Delany & Her Circle*, 225.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid*, 236.

qualities. Writing on her flower mosaics, he notes “it would seem that many of these papers were actually cut from the writing papers she used for her correspondence.”⁴¹⁸ If she cut from life in front of her, then the album gifted to Charlotte can be viewed as an intimate record of interactions between the two. A silhouette of George III (fig. 4.4), at the start of the album points to an intimate acquaintance with and regular proximity to the king. Appearing as a pasted-in frontispiece, it sets the tone of the work and, possibly, serves as a visual dedication to the monarch. This would also suggest, then, that the album was created as a gift and that Charlotte was, most likely, the originally intended recipient from its earliest inception.

Within the album, pages display between one and thirteen individual cuts and are stitched together and bound between two boards tied with blue ribbon. Unlike her famous flower mosaics, which are naturalistic, arranged one per page and situated in the centre of the space, this album presents various works across each page, practically adapting the scheme and strategy of display depending on the size and movement of the designs in order to show them to best and clearest advantage. Cuts within the album are generally grouped according to theme; there are whole pages of botanical designs, classical figures and decorative patterns. Thick cream coloured paper, for example, is used in the silhouette cuts of people. There are three silhouette portraits including that of the king, with the other two copied from busts possibly also representing the king or his royal sons (figs. 4.5 and 4.6). The same paper is used in creating a group silhouette showing women and children in a pastoral, possibly classical scene (fig. 4.7). The album also features classical designs reminiscent of the fashionable taste for the ancient world that characterised aspects of the collection at Bulstrode (fig. 4.8). Close in subject matter to the prints depicting antiquity cut and pasted by Mary Hamilton onto chimney boards in the duchess’s library and discussed in chapter three, such vignettes were part of a broader aesthetic theme across the Portland Museum.

Delany may have intended the work to be read as a catalogue of patterns suitable for reproducing in paper or other domestic media. The album functions as a collecting space, a material extension of the collector’s cabinet and a site in which to exhibit the conceptual and emotional aspects of Delany and Charlotte’s relationship. Previously, Arlene Leis has treated the paper albums of collector Sarah Sophia Banks in much the same way, aligning them both physically and conceptually with the natural

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 243.

history collections of her brother, Sir Joseph Banks.⁴¹⁹ Leis proposes that Sarah Sophia's collections, which consisted mainly of visiting cards and printed ephemera, were organised according to the same taxonomic principles as her brother's collections of insect and animal specimens, with the pages of her works reflecting the cabinets and drawers of his. Delany's album can be read as a functioning display or catalogue of forms suitable for interaction, inspection and, crucially, reproduction. Like individual themed drawers within a collector's broader museum, formed on each page are brief vignettes within the coherent whole.

Occasionally, Delany combines more than one idea on the same page, possibly suggesting their potential for combination if copied in another medium or by another artist. For example, a page containing three repeated but variant bow shapes combines these with a thatched cross-shaped repeated pattern as well as ornate border designs (fig. 4.9), all of which are visible in the decoration of Charlotte's pocketbook, where the queen employs a similar background thatching that echoes that of Delany's design. Also identifiable within Charlotte's decorative scheme are the sprawling ribbons, formed into bow-shapes similar to those that also appear in Delany's album and which, as I will demonstrate in the last portion of this chapter, were taken up and repeated in the decorative arts of the women at court in the subsequent decades. Delany's treatment of the paper used in forming these bows, her attempts at depicting movement along the ribbon through folding parts of the paper strands back on themselves, evokes an agility within her design suggestive of richer materials other than paper and indicating, perhaps, their suitability in embroidered design.

Beyond a singular anthology of Delany's ideas cut in paper, we might consider the album in the context of printed pattern sheets of the period. Taken from popular publications such as *The Lady's Magazine*, individual patterns were used by professional and amateur seamstresses alike.⁴²⁰ These were intrinsically social works and disseminated to their audience both design and means to create within a prescribed and broad community engaged in and characterised by domestic handicraft. These pattern templates were meant for direct imitation, with the designs often produced in pen and ink so they remained visible if placed under fabrics such as muslin or gauze. Certainly,

⁴¹⁹ See Arlene Leis, "Cutting, Arranging, and Pasting: Sarah Sophia Banks as Collector," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 9, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 127 – 140.

⁴²⁰ See *The Lady's Magazine: Understanding the Emergence of a Genre*, an important research project at the University of Kent. <https://www.kent.ac.uk/english/ladys-magazine>. Accessed 5 September 2017. See also Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell ed., *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

this method of creating, sharing and reproducing design was common amongst the social groups of elite women. Many surviving pattern designs include hand-written annotations noting the names of particular women for whom the pattern was intended, or who may have reproduced it. For example, an archive of such materials at the Victoria and Albert Museum associated with Lady Middleton, daughter of the 1st Earl of Chichester, reveal “a whole web of relationships within a group of neighbours and relatives in East Sussex” with the annotated names of her sister’s step daughter Maria Josepha Holroyd and a Miss Thrale.⁴²¹ Certainly, there is evidence that Charlotte worked from such sources. In a letter to Lady Charlotte Finch in October 1775, the queen revealed the conversational nature of such works, and the opportunities for collaboration they represented, asking “If You my dear friend should not think it troublesome I should be very much obliged to You if You would send me either the pattern or one of the ruffles which you work’d in Gobbel stitch.”⁴²²

Such designs were traceable using an embroidery frame or tambour. As Vickery has identified, “craft paraphernalia became familiar domestic furniture, corresponding in finish to the other cabinetwork in the parlour and advertising that there was a polite but domesticated lady in the house.”⁴²³ In one of the 1819 sale catalogues that accompanied the dismantling of Charlotte’s belongings after her death, Christie listed amongst the queen’s treasures “A...work table, richly ornamented, the frame composed of brass, *in very splendid taste*; the top covered with blue velvet, with a well of silk at each end.”⁴²⁴ *A Description of the Machinery in Her Majesty’s Tambour Table*, held at the Royal Archives, gives an account of another of the queen’s tables.⁴²⁵ Whilst the date of the account is unknown, it seems likely that it was using such an item that Charlotte may have produced many of her embroidered designs including the pocketbook of 1781. This fascinating account, which provides a detailed description of the working part of the machine as well as details of payments to craftsmen for its various parts, gives an insight into the significance of such a piece within the royal domestic environment. The table was “compos’d of a mahogany frame with 4 hollow legs with a mahogany box’d frame over it about 4 Inches deep whose top is like unto the lid of a box.”⁴²⁶ Operated

⁴²¹ *Designs for Embroidered Fashion: Lady Middleton’s Pattern*, Victoria and Albert Museum Online. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/d/lady-middletons-pattern>. Accessed 22 August 2017

⁴²² Queen Charlotte to Lady Charlotte Finch, 7 October 1775. GEO/ADD/15/815.

⁴²³ Vickery, “The Theory & Practice of Female Accomplishment,” 98.

⁴²⁴ James Christie, *A Catalogue of the first Part of a Magnificent Collection of Oriental Curiosities and Porcelain, &c. &c. &c. which will be removed to Mr Christie’s Great Room, Pall Mall, and Will be Sold by Auction, By Mr. Christie, on Friday, May 7, 1819*. (London: 1819), 12. G545, 2c Royal Library, Windsor.

⁴²⁵ *A Description of the Machinery in Her Majesty’s Tambour Table*, GEO/MAIN/52698-9.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

through a series of “racks,” “remote wheels,” “long spindles” and “Iron plates,” this was an item of extravagant design and cost. Indeed, the document records that, for “expences [sic] of workmanship and mateirals [sic] in finishing on the neatest manner the many various parts of the above described machineary, ” the queen paid out fifty-one pounds and two shillings.⁴²⁷ In addition, four pounds was paid for the inclusion of “2 four Joynted brass Swing Candlesticks,” revealing something of how this piece of furniture would have been experienced and used. With the mahogany frame and iron plates illuminated by two candles, it would have been a focal point of any room, and with the extra lights could have been used during both the day and in the evening.⁴²⁸

The material expressions of friendship not only evoke the physical and intellectual labours surrounding the production of craft, but also extend to the collection of bodily fabrics. Poignantly, a lock of the queen’s hair (fig. 4.10), gifted to Delany in 1780 is now held at the Royal Archives, where it is mounted on silk (possibly woven by Delany) and encased in a paper packet. Written on the exterior of the packet in Delany’s hand is the notation; ‘Queen Charlotts Hair’ The Lock was sent me from her own hand by Miss Hamn [Hamilton] 6 Novr 1780 ‘The greater part of the Lock is set in a locket’.⁴²⁹ The specimen of Charlotte’s hair that survives at the Royal Archives is arranged on its silk mount and fasted using blue ribbon, tied in bows –the same blue ribbon, also tied in bows, that is used on the spine and boards of Delany’s album of created a few short months later. Such material correspondences confirm the development of a distinctive aesthetic language that unites many of the objects created and shared within their friendship, and positioning the album itself at the heart of such collaboration and exchange.

Paper Princesses: Delany’s Legacy

The artistic influence of Delany’s album, developed from an aesthetic cultivated within the Portland Museum, can be seen in several cut-paper works created by the queen and her daughters in the years that followed, pointing to a tangible and enduring aesthetic connection between Bulstrode and the royal court at the end of the eighteenth century. Craft work, in particular the use of coloured and cut papers, was prevalent at the royal

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Lock of Queen Charlotte’s hair, gifted to Mary Delany in 1780. GEO/ADD/2/64.

residences, particularly the Queen's Lodge at Windsor and, later, at Frogmore House. Queen Charlotte's six daughters, Charlotte (1766-1828), Augusta (1768-1840), Elizabeth (1770-1840), Mary (1776-1857), Sophia (1777-1848) and Amelia (1783-1820) all engaged in such practices as a method of entertainment and self-improvement in line with notions of female accomplishment suitable to their station.⁴³⁰

Certainly, the domestic environments of the queen and her daughters at both Windsor and Frogmore can be characterised by the alignment of creative craft working alongside the collection of antiques, furniture, jewels and books in processes of display and exhibition closely reflecting those at Bulstrode. Indeed, Christie's sale catalogue published in accompaniment to the 1819 sale of the Queen's affects, reveals items such as "a mahogany case for containing watches and miniatures with a plate glass door" arranged alongside crafted objects including "Two small sliding skreens, the one with a vase of flowers, the other with a Cossack in pursuit, executed in bead work, and elegantly mounted."⁴³¹ It is within this context that paper-cuts, embroidery and other handicrafts were valued and exchanged, collected and displayed. Paper-cutting and the formation of albums were practices engaged with on a regular basis at both Bulstrode and the royal court. The influence of Delany's early work of 1781 can be read within several surviving royal works, indicating a cross-generational, cross-site legacy generated in the context of the Portland Museum and extending far beyond its spatial and temporal limits.

As the recent exhibition *Enlightened Princesses* has demonstrated, Queen Charlotte was quick to encourage and enable her children, especially her daughters, in the creative arts. Similarly, Flora Fraser has noted that under the guidance of the queen, governesses and tutors, the princesses "became beautiful needlewomen, adept at lacemaking, crochet work and all kinds of fine embroidery" even, in the cases of the younger princesses, at the expense of their geographical or historical learning.⁴³² At Windsor, as well as at the queen's Frogmore estate, the genteel and sometimes rustic disciplines of *découpage*, embroidery, sketching, spinning and turning were all enjoyed, and indeed often contributed to the fabrics of the interior environments in which the royals lived. Just as the female inhabitants of Bulstrode had engaged with and aligned the spaces of the house and museum, so too were the royal residences filled with the tactile labours of the

⁴³⁰ For an account of their lives, see Flora Fraser, *Princesses: The Six Daughters of George III* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2004).

⁴³¹ *A Catalogue of The First Part of a Magnificent Collection*, 12-13. G545, 2c Royal Library, Windsor

⁴³² Fraser, *Princesses*, 145.

princesses. At Frogmore, for example, Princess Elizabeth decorated the Cross Gallery with botanical paintings and paper-cuttings pasted onto the walls.⁴³³ In her diaries, the queen recorded the programme of arts education undergone by her daughters and, often, directly overseen by her. Many of Charlotte's diary entries give accounts of their activities; "We breakfasted at 9. At 10 the princesses went a Painting"⁴³⁴ and on another occasion, "staid together till 10, when the Younger princesses went home & the Eldest to their Drawing Masters."⁴³⁵

Princess Charlotte's account books contextualise her purchases of arts materials and tools alongside her spending as a charitable patron as well as a collector, situating such behaviours within a broader landscape of feminized social practices and entertainments typical across elite sites and performed specifically at the royal court. In January 1808, the Princess Royal paid "Ackerman's bill for fancy papers," costing thirteen shillings and six pence.⁴³⁶ Rudolph Ackermann (1764 – 1834), a famous purveyor of art works and artist's materials whose repository was situated on the Strand, was a supplier to the royal family and appears elsewhere in Charlotte's accounts. On 8 June of the same year, the princess settled an account for the amount of one pound, three shillings and six pence, suggesting a regularity in her ordering habits.⁴³⁷ For February 1809, listed amongst Charlotte's new acquisitions are "2 pair of Sissers [sic] with files," thus aligning the tools used in domestic handicraft with habits of collecting. Similarly, in January 1811, the princess's accounts record the acquisition of "a Knife" for five shillings.⁴³⁸ This was, most likely, an instrument akin to those objects gifted by the queen to Delany in November 1781 and would probably have been employed in the activities of paper-cutting and embroidery.

The direct influence of Delany's album of 1781 can be clearly seen in a page of cuts produced in 1788 by the Princess Royal and gifted to a friend at Windsor (fig. 4.11). Certainly, the work bears similarities in style, subject and colour to Delany's earlier work. Charlotte's paper-cut creation, mounted on a black ground recalling those used in Delany's albums of flower mosaics, was produced in January 1788. As the handwritten note that accompanies the page of cuts records, it was gifted to Lady Charlotte Waldegrave (1761–1808). Closely following Delany's practice, Charlotte's

⁴³³ There has been little scholarly focus on Elizabeth's work at Frogmore, or indeed on the site as one of elite female crafting more generally.

⁴³⁴ Queen Charlotte's Diary, GEO/ADD/43/2, f. 5.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Princess Charlotte's Account Books 1809-1811, GEO/ADD/17/82.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

figures are cut from paper that has been stained or painted blue and brown.⁴³⁹ The princess's two cuts, arranged in the top and bottom halves of the black ground, depict two cherubs, executed in an orange-brown paper and holding an hourglass, and a group of women and children in a pastoral silhouette, cut in blue paper. Closely mirroring the colours and arrangement of near-identical cuts in Delany's 1781 album, the Princess Royal's work similarly exhibits the orange cut at the top of the composition, and the group in silhouette at the bottom. Further comparison can be made between the two artist's silhouettes. Just as in Delany's version, the women and children of Charlotte's work are grouped together, having been cut from a single piece of blue paper and conjoined using a continual beam across the base of the work, from which the figures project. Replicating the fluidity and animation of Delany's cutting, Charlotte appears to have drawn significant inspiration from Delany's two female figures. In negotiating the negative space between the figures, which would involve the complex slicing and removal of paper from the remaining, positive shape (being the intended outcome), Charlotte has almost identically replicated the cut in between the faces of the two figures which, in both instances, are turned inwards to each other. Similarly, Charlotte has replicated the arrangement of the legs and feet of the two figures, reversing Delany's original but including the depiction of one of the feet, extended and raised slightly so as to suggest movement and character. During this period, it is highly likely that Delany was witness to the princess's work and may even have provided instruction or advice on its completion during her interactions with the royals. Her letters reveal that, in the winter of 1787-8, she was living at Windsor and was a regular guest of the royals. In one letter to Mrs. Granville, sent on 5th January 1788, she wrote "I expect the Royal Family home this evening, to stay till about the 16."⁴⁴⁰

Like her sister's work, the craft works produced by Princess Elizabeth show similar and compelling evidence of Delany's influence of the royal women and their creations. In 1787, Elizabeth created a decorative fire screen (fig. 4.12), formed of folded and twisted pieces of cut and coloured papers. The practice of filigree, as this form of paper-working is known, is an effect achieved "by tightly coiling hundreds of narrow strips of paper which are then glued to a flat surface."⁴⁴¹ Pre-rolled papers could be purchased from suppliers of artist's materials and it is known that Elizabeth was a

⁴³⁹ Kim Sloan, *A Noble Art: Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters c. 1600-1800* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), 236-237.

⁴⁴⁰ Mary Delany to Mrs Granville, 5 January 1788, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 470.

⁴⁴¹ Curator's notes, Victorian and Albert Museum. www.collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O58580/fire-screen-elizabeth-princess-princess. Accessed 8 September 2017.

regular customer of Charles Elliott, who was active as a supplier of such materials in the later decades of the Georgian period. Employing the same striking black ground as Delany used in her *Hortus Siccus*, Elizabeth's work presents a rich cacophony of varying motifs, visual ideas and designs. Combining botanical imagery with decorative borders, Elizabeth's screen marries the two seemingly disparate elements of Delany's work that exist separately in the flower mosaics and the album of *découpage*. Just as Delany, the queen and the duchess of Portland worked at Bulstrode in handicrafts that were used to respond to and augment the domestic environments that were the sites of their friendships, so Elizabeth produced the screen as an object to sit within the interior of Windsor or, more likely by 1787, Frogmore House. Within the decorative scheme of the screen, Elizabeth includes realistic flowers; folding individual pieces of paper to form petals and tendrils representative of specific and varied types of plants. Combined with these precise and delicate elements, the princess evokes the broader visual language of court craftworks in her formation of ribbons concluded with golden tassels and looped back on themselves to form bows similar to those visible in the earlier works of both Delany and the queen. At the edges of the work, intricate border patterns may have drawn inspiration or else copied directly from the popular published patterns available for purchase in this period "from shops such as 'The Temple of Fancy' at 34 Rathbone Place, London."⁴⁴²

In July 1808, Elizabeth produced an album of paper-cuts, bound in dark green leather and fastened at a silver clasp stamped with her cypher (fig. 4.13). Created at Windsor, this album appears to have been an organic and ongoing project, with works added over a number of months, possibly years and containing the works of the princess alongside those of other artists also working in paper-cuts. Previously, Jane Roberts has associated the album with Sarah Sophia Banks, proposing its function as a gift confirming a creatively collaborative friendship with Elizabeth.⁴⁴³ Sarah Sophia, who was the sister to Sir Joseph Banks, was an avid collector of paper ephemera and friend to the princess. Certainly, the album contains materials that relate directly to her; A poem, written on a loose sheet of paper in Elizabeth's hand and inserted in the assemblage gives further proof that, like Delany's album twenty-seven years earlier, the princess's work can be posited in a context of elite female friendship, suggestive of similar and ongoing cultural practices beyond Delany's initial actions. It reads "Sophia

⁴⁴² V&A curator's notes.

⁴⁴³ Roberts, *George III & Queen Charlotte*, 85-87.

Zarah Banks – Genius, good sense, and Friendship kind, Must ever bring you, to my mind. Eliza,” enforcing the significance of crafted objects in evoking memories of an individual and in extending the self through the object, soliciting an emotional response.⁴⁴⁴ However, paper pasted onto the leather binding on the front of the album records “Cuttings made by Princess Elizabeth, daughter of George III & given to Lady Banks”, indicating instead that the recipient was in fact Sarah Sophia’s sister-in-law Dorothea, wife of Sir Joseph Banks.⁴⁴⁵ Although there has been some confusion in previous scholarship regarding the identity of the recipient, it is likely both Banks women shared the album and participated in the assembly and arrangement of art within it. It is possible that both women would have socialised with the princess at the same time; both Sarah Sophia and Dorothea resided at 23 Soho Square, London, the house purchased by Sir Joseph in 1777, and would therefore have had access to the same materials, books and art works within that environment.⁴⁴⁶ Such a reading also reflects the intrinsic sociability of the album as a media used in collaboration as well as in augmenting conversation between individuals and sites.

Containing black and white paper-cuts, ink-printed woodcuts, sketches and dried flowers, the album houses a handwritten note at its start, written by either Sarah Sophia or, more likely, Dorothea; “This delightfull [sic] Book [...] was a present from The Princess Elizabeth July 12, 1808. It contains some very beautifull and to me invaluable cuttings out by Her Royal Highness.”⁴⁴⁷ An inventory, written in the same hand, reveals that the collection was added to over a period of several years, with the initial gift of 1808 developed as the princess created new works to gift to her friend(s). Purple ribbon tied on the exterior of the album enhances its function as a gift between women, recalling the ribbon wrapped around the boards of Delany’s 1781 album and echoing the economies of friendship that governed models of exchange between Bulstrode and Windsor two decades earlier. Meanwhile, the silver clasp and surviving key point to the album’s over use as a physical exhibition space; one in which the paper-cuts, sketches and other works can be contained and displayed. Inserted loosely between the pages, the works inside the album have no fixed position or arrangement. Indeed, acidic residue on some of the pages has left ghostly marks indicating where works have been stored, only to be moved at a later point. Like the collector’s cabinet,

⁴⁴⁴ *Note addressed to Sophia Zarah Banks*, RCIN 1047678.b. The Royal Collection, Windsor.

⁴⁴⁵ Records for the Royal Collection identify the album as belonging to Dorothea Banks, not Sarah Sophia.

⁴⁴⁶ Leis, “Cutting, Arranging, Pasting,” 129.

⁴⁴⁷ RCIN 1047678. 6

the album is a space to be extended and rearranged according to the activities and tastes of the contributors. Within this context, it is possible to read something of the process of assemblage and the performed and sociable craft that characterised album-making. Similarly, the author of the inventory identifies a number of specific cuts contained within the pages, and relates the circumstances in which she received them, revealing the nature of the album as a dynamic diary or record of experience and action as much as of completed and static work. On one occasion, the writer records how she was permitted “the Honour and delight of seeing [the princess] cut it out at Windsor.”⁴⁴⁸ Another work, gifted in 1817, was “drawn whilst I was present,” thus demonstrating the performative and participatory aspects of handicrafts and dextrous labour at the sites of Windsor and Frogmore.⁴⁴⁹

Although created a significant period after Delany’s album was gifted to Queen Charlotte and entered her collection at Windsor, Elizabeth’s assemblage does bear striking similarities to many of her designs. This suggests that Delany’s own work was, at the very least, part of a broader culture of paper-cutting at the royal court, if not providing a direct point of reference, or directory of design from which the princesses and other court ladies were working. In particular, a cupid cut in black stained paper (figs. 4.14) combines with ribbons, arranged to form bows and knots, recalling both Delany’s cuts and also those in the queen’s embroidered pocketbook. As the author of the inventory, most probably Dorothea, records, this was one of the works sent from Windsor by the princess herself. Similarly, a woodcut printed onto loose paper in black ink, depicting a group of children and women engaged in play (fig. 4.15), offer significant comparisons with the earlier cuts of Delany’s 1781 album. Visible here is Charlotte’s evident proficiency at other handicrafts; she likely designed and created the woodcut before printing it in ink. Furthermore, this offers evidence that such works could be shared and intended as instructive tools in the transmission of both artistic design and skill. Woodcut works could be traced, perhaps by the Banks women themselves and then cut out in paper, demonstrating an interdisciplinarity to the designs and a collaborative way of working.

⁴⁴⁸ RCIN 1047678.d

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

Delany was a renowned artist whose work has been the subject of continued and intense scholarly interest in the past decade. As a close companion of the duchess, she spent several years living at Bulstrode, where she contributed to the duchess's famous museum and regularly included items from its natural history collections in her botanical paper mosaics. This chapter has contextualised her album within a series of object exchanges; reading handicrafts, collage and paper-cutting as tactile representations of female conversation. The exchange of such materials, freighted with emotional and intimate meaning, functioned as part of a private currency used to confirm friendship and can be understood within cultures of object exchange and collection at both the Portland Museum and royal court. Tracing material and social connections between the two sites, I considered how the album worked as both narrative display and portable directory of a private iconography.

For Delany and Queen Charlotte, crafting was highly performative and emotionally effective. Materials, tools, correspondence, and dextrous training were passed between the two women in cross-site, cross-rank, and cross-media exchange. Rooted aesthetically and geographically in the Portland Museum at Bulstrode, Delany's work sat within traditions espoused there of album-making and craft production formed in response to the duchess's collection. As I have shown, Delany's work had legacies that extended beyond the museum, underscoring the cultural implications of the community and its artistic identities. Taking women's domestic craft as my focus, I have shown inter-generational and material associations between the Portland Museum and the royal court, expanding an understanding of the duchess's circle and the reach of her collection to include Queen Charlotte and several of her children.

Chapter Five

Authoring the Museum

While the Portland Museum was augmented in cut-paper by Mary Delany and Queen Charlotte, it was similarly expanded in text. In the winter of 1784, Mary Hamilton completed an extensive and complex account of many of the artworks and antiquities assembled in the collection. Although this text was never published, the original manuscript (fig. 5.1), entitled *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, survives in the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester as a key, if overlooked, example of antiquarian writing by a member of the Bluestocking circle.⁴⁵⁰ Hamilton's annotation, scrawled on the first page of the manuscript (fig. 5.2), gives us a clue as to her aims and hopes for the work. She writes that the *Catalogue* is "An Humble attempt to a description of some of y^e things in y^e possession of her Grace the Duchess Dow. of Portland. Bullstrode Nov^{ber} 1784. There is not mentioned in y^e following Catalogue any thing y^t was not purchased by her Grace or given to her."⁴⁵¹ Despite her relatively modest claims, Hamilton's text is significant for a number of reasons. Accentuated by the bold underscoring of her name on the first page of the work, the *Catalogue* serves as testament to Hamilton's ambitions for female antiquarian authorship within the museum-salon. Furthermore, it provides crucial data on a number of objects in the collection, many of which are not recorded elsewhere and so have previously been lost from the historical record.

I position Hamilton as an important chronicler of the museum, whose multifaceted, rich and varied accounts of the artefacts and collections she encountered emerge as important witnesses to the social, material and intellectual practices of antiquarian and historiographical writing. Through close engagement with the manuscript alongside Hamilton's diaries, I contextualise her writing within the wider

⁴⁵⁰ Mary Hamilton, *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, 1784, HAM/3/4. I will refer to it hereafter as *Catalogue*.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

genre of historiographical commentary, exploring the mechanisms of critical analysis and narrative creation that informed the cultural life of both objects and collectors. As Katherina Boehm has highlighted, the mid to late-eighteenth century saw a “new prestige of object oriented antiquarian research.”⁴⁵² This chapter examines Hamilton’s writing as forms of both biographical and self-constructive literary production. Her account of the museum centres on her own experiences, responding to both the objects gathered in the museum and the community that sustained it, displaying and prioritising her own knowledge, tastes and social relationships in the text.

Rosemary Sweet has highlighted that “if there were few histories by women written, there were even fewer antiquarian publications.”⁴⁵³ Similarly, both Daniel Woolf and Crystal B. Lake have demonstrated the problematic obscurity of women’s contributions to the study of history in the eighteenth century, with Lake identifying that, “when looking for antiquaries, we tend to look towards an elite, landholding class of conservative gentlemen,” thus discounting the (often invisible) contributions of Georgian women in writing national, regional and object histories.⁴⁵⁴ Scholars are, however, beginning to recover the ways in which women were engaging with history in textual and material terms. Devoney Looser has outlined the contributions to historiographical writing made in the mid-late eighteenth century by women writers including Charlotte Lennox and Catherine Macaulay, whilst William McCarthy and, more recently, Oriane Smith and Marnie Hughes-Warrington have all paid close attention to the writings of Hester Thrale Piozzi.⁴⁵⁵ Lake, in particular, has argued “that women were encouraged to read and sympathize with a history that marginalized them in myriad ways, while they were discouraged from writing it themselves, engendered

⁴⁵² Katherina Boehm, “Empiricism, antiquarian fieldwork and the (in)visibilization of the past in the early eighteenth century”, *Word & Image* 33, no. 3 (2017): 258.

⁴⁵³ Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), 69. See also Sweet, “Antiquaries and Antiquities in Eighteenth-Century England” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no.2 *Antiquarians, Connoisseurs and Collectors* (Winter, 2001): 181-206.

⁴⁵⁴ Crystal B. Lake, “Redecorating the Ruin: Women and Antiquarianism in Sarah Scott’s ‘Millenium Hall.’” *ELH* 76, no. 3 (Fall, 2009): 663. See also Daniel R. Woolf, “A Feminine Past? Gender, Genre, and Historical Knowledge in England, 1500-1800” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 3 (June 1997): 645-679. Woolf rightly argues that “the world of the published historian remained, for all but a few, well out of reach until the nineteenth century,” 645.

⁴⁵⁵ See Devoney Looser, *British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670-1820* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000). Judith Dorn has similarly noted Charlotte Lennox’s importance as a historiographer in the period before 1800, in her discussion of Lennox’s monthly publication *The Lady’s Museum*, which ran from March 1760 to January 1781 and which was particularly noteworthy in its efforts of “presenting historical essays directly to its female audience.” See Judith Dorn, “Reading Women Reading History: The Philosophy of Periodical Form in Charlotte Lennox’s *The Lady’s Museum*” *Historical Reflections* 18, no. 3 *The Eighteenth Century and Uses of the Past* (Fall 1992): 7. For more on Hester Thrale Piozzi, see William McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi: Portrait of a Literary Woman* (Chapter Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Marnie Hughes-Warrington, “Writing on the Margins of the World: Hester Lynch Piozzi’s Retrospection (1801) as Middlebrow Art?” *Journal of World History* 23, no. 4 (December 2012): 883-906; Oriane Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

unique opportunities for women to intervene creatively in historiography.”⁴⁵⁶ She reveals how they managed to negotiate such marginalization by experimenting as the authors or collators of history via “historical novels, poems and plays, staged historical battles, history paintings, and museum collections.”⁴⁵⁷ The duchess’s collection provided the perfect opportunity for the development of an antiquarian author, offering a rich assembly of art works and antiquities with which to engage. For Hamilton, the *Catalogue* generated a new textual and visual space for the Portland collection, superimposing onto its assemblages her own tastes, ideas and aspirations. In recording and representing the museum, Hamilton turns to her own tactile and visual encounters with objects at Bulstrode, as well as many shared conversational exchanges that took place there.

The prose is numerically-subdivided, with objects selected and prioritised according to Hamilton’s own experiences, rather than historical chronologies or the spatial organization of the museum. Strikingly, she chooses to focus on the art and antiquities in the collection, entirely omitting the natural history objects that formed the vast majority of the duchess’s museum. In so doing, she uses the manuscript to assert her own aesthetic and historical curiosity into the museum’s broader narrative. As a physical object, the *Catalogue* is a composite and complex item, composed of bound pages of handwritten text alongside loosely inserted pieces of cut and ripped paper and printed text. It is essentially collagic in its form, methodologically composed through literary collecting and material assemblage, manufactured over a period of several weeks. Notably, Hamilton produced her account while in residence at Bulstrode.

Woolf has proposed that “the foundations of women’s wider participation in historiography were laid in the eighteenth century” and that by the middle of the 1700s female writers of historiographical commentary had begun to emerge with texts such as Catherine Macaulay’s *The History of England from the accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line* first appearing in 1763 and Charlotte Cowley’s *Ladies History of England* in 1780.⁴⁵⁸ Of the many objects Hamilton addresses in the *Catalogue*, some of the most compelling descriptions are of objects relating to the histories of women. These include an ornate prayer book “composed, & Written by Queen Elizabeth’s own hand”, a note

⁴⁵⁶ Crystal B. Lake, “History Writing and Antiquarianism,” in Devoney Looser ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Women’s Writing in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 88 – 100. Lake cites Catherine Macaulay’s eight-volume *History of England from the Revolution to the Present Time* (1763 – 83) as the “exception that proves the point.”

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁵⁸ Woolf, “A most indefatigable love of history,” 690.

written by Queen Mary II, and an “Ornament given by Mary Queen of Scots to the Duke of Norfolk.” It is tempting to think of the *Catalogue* as a protofeminist text, written *by* a woman, *for* women and, often, *about* women. However, Margaret Ezell has identified that “the study of early women’s texts is encrusted with several layers of assumptions which must be dug through before their works can be re-visioned.”⁴⁵⁹ Looser has similarly suggested that such works were rarely produced in “the uncomplicated, foremotherly [...] ways that many of us hope to discover.”⁴⁶⁰ She argues that “feminist investigations into women’s contributions must define ‘history’ more broadly and must acknowledge that women writers used historical material with widely diverging interests, aims and results.”⁴⁶¹ Within the social and material context of the Portland Museum, I argue, Hamilton was able to engage fully with her ambitions as a writer of (art) historiography and that the duchess of Portland actively provided the material and intellectual stimuli necessary in producing the *Catalogue*.

Composed in the vibrant feminine and feminist community at Bulstrode, as outlined in chapter one, Hamilton’s *Catalogue* takes a broadly inclusive approach to history and its objects. Whilst she cultivated a particular focus on objects in the Portland Museum that related specifically to women, she also included artefacts with the potential to conjure moments of emotional or political import in male histories, paying particular attention to the earring worn by Charles I at the moment of his beheading, as well as a Turkish dagger worn by Henry VIII. Her approach thus echoes Looser’s broader findings about women’s histories in the period: “many trailblazing women writers did not identify with or construct *women’s* historiographical tradition”, instead employing rather more “generic strategies” that contributed in part to their later obscuring and dismissal from the accepted canon of historical commentary.⁴⁶² Their diverse accounts demand that we attend to “the complex, local, particular, and sometimes contradictory ways that British women writers concerned themselves with mainstream historiographical practices.”⁴⁶³ Hamilton’s varied topics and her interest in recreating historical moments of intimate emotion and individual narratives might be understood in terms of early Romantic tastes for what Lake has defined as “the histories of private lives, local regions, and social manners.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁹ Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 67.

⁴⁶⁰ Looser, *British Women Writers*, 3.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid*, 2.

⁴⁶² Looser, *British Women Writers*, 23.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, 24.

⁴⁶⁴ Lake, “History Writing and Antiquarianism,” 88.

Hamilton's *Catalogue*, however, is not simply what Lake has termed "an optimistic historiographical project of feminist retrospection."⁴⁶⁵ For much of her knowledge-making and data-collection, she was reliant on and in some respects answerable to a broader antiquarian circle that included, amongst others, her uncle Sir William Hamilton and Horace Walpole. It is impossible to claim Hamilton's work to be the isolated production of singularly female antiquarian labour. Rather, as I aim to show, it can be viewed as a testament to the extent of her ambition as a writer and her efforts to position herself within broader discourse through a network of both male and female historians and collectors. In doing so, I propose the Portland Museum itself as an important node in these history-making circles, and as a vital platform in facilitating the development of Hamilton's skills as a writer, antiquarian and connoisseur.

Whilst Hamilton focuses almost entirely on monarchs and elite individuals, her enquiries consistently centre on revealing, even recreating, the private and human aspects of the past through a specifically material turn, as I show across the three sections of this chapter. The first of these seeks to situate the text in terms of Hamilton's social circle as well as contemporaneous genres of historiographical and collections writing. The second provides close analysis of extracts from the text in order to reveal Hamilton's strategies in asserting her authority, paying particular attention to her attempts to establish her voice within the broader art historical discourse advanced by several figures within her circle. The final section of the chapter deals with Hamilton's approach to writing the objects and lives of historical figures, revealing her interest in evoking emotional and bodily proximity to individuals and moments of the past.

Situating the Text: Genre, Gender and Sociability

Of Hamilton's readership, there is little definitive testimony, although there is evidence that the manuscript was circulated privately among friends. Beyond the original text, held at the University of Manchester, there is just one other extant. Although its location in the private collection of Lord Bath at Longleat House unfortunately prevents further study, its presence at Longleat points to Hamilton's connection with the duchess of Portland's daughter, Lady Weymouth, whose husband was Thomas

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, 91.

Thynne, third Viscount Weymouth and first marquess of Bath (1734 – 1796), whose portfolios of properties included the estate.⁴⁶⁶ For Lady Weymouth, the *Catalogue* might have functioned as a material embodiment of familial and dynastic ties between Longleat and Bulstrode. As an exchangeable, giftable object, the manuscript served not only to augment the sites and spaces of the Portland Museum, but to confirm and enhance the social bonds and conversation that were so crucial to its survival (and which were erased so efficiently following the museum's dispersal in 1786). The presence of this copy of Hamilton's text raises the possibility of further copies having been made and circulated within the group.

Correspondence exchanged within the circle attests to Hamilton's identity as an author. Following a brief stay in London in December 1784, a month after completing the *Catalogue*, she received a letter from Delany expressing the loss that the duchess and she felt at Hamilton's absence from Bulstrode: "most sensibly have I missed my amiable morning Companion. My works have gone on slow and sad."⁴⁶⁷ In the same letter, Delany reveals something of the role Hamilton played in the intellectual life at Bulstrode, when she quips; "Where is Miss Hamilton and Her Manuscripts? says our Dear Dutchess [sic]."⁴⁶⁸ In a postscript to the same letter, the duchess of Portland writes to Hamilton, continuing a conversation they appear to have been having about the value Hamilton's writing. The duchess writes; "My Dear Friend how can you ask if your Journals are worth paying for [.] to me they are of infinite value [.] continue my Dear I beseech you."⁴⁶⁹ The letter provides a glimpse of an ongoing discussion at Bulstrode about the financial and literary worth of Hamilton's writing, therefore proponing her contemporary *Catalogue* as more than the panegyric musings of a grateful and admiring house guest. Certainly, Hamilton's attempts to assert her identity as a writer within the complex public and private circles associated with the Bluestockings can be understood in terms of the debated and shifting understanding of literary production as a potentially financial and self-supportive avenue, and demonstrate the seriousness of her venture. Betty Rizzo and Elizabeth Child have both noted the commercialism of Elizabeth Montagu, demonstrating the previously unacknowledged closeness of Bluestocking ideals with commercial endeavour.⁴⁷⁰ Similarly, Jennie Batchelor has highlighted how,

⁴⁶⁶ PO/Vol. XXII. Portland Papers, Longleat House.

⁴⁶⁷ Mary Delany to Mary Hamilton, with postscript written by the duchess of Portland. 24 December 1784. LWL Mss vol. 75, f. 40-41, Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University. Published in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 243-245.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ See Elizabeth Child, "Elizabeth Montagu, Bluestocking Businesswoman" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 65, no. 1/2 Reconsidering the Bluestockings (2002): 153-173. See also Rizzo, *Companions without Vows*, 111.

whilst women such as Sarah Scott “attempted to divorce writing from labour [...] by condemning those who wrote for profit,” others like Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson “emphasised their need to labour for bread.”⁴⁷¹ Hamilton’s writing was never published during her lifetime, but it is clear from these early discussions that she possessed an understanding of the climate in which her female contemporaries were producing and, often, selling their work. Furthermore, her deference to the duchess for advice and validation of her writing suggests Hamilton’s ambition to locate herself within that system, garnering support and patronage.

As a beneficiary of the salon models, Hamilton had access to the systems of material and knowledge exchange within them and turned to the Portland Museum as the specific social and physical space in which she might produce the text. Woolf has previously attended to the opportunities to engage in historiographical and art criticism within the Bluestocking salon, proposing somewhat problematically:

This ‘salonification’ bridged two related gaps: that between the public realm of the historian (the great man of political and military experience in Thucydidean mode, a Clarendon or Bolingbroke, or the accomplished and erudite man of letters in the fashion of a Robertson, Gibbon or Hume) and the private realm of the home; and that between the reading and writing of history.⁴⁷²

Although conversation and debate were staples of the salon experience, access to historical objects, texts and artworks was most often gained through visits to country houses and museums. Understanding the provenance and historical importance of objects gathered within elite houses, and recording them within textual accounts, was part of what Cynthia Wall has termed “the cultural consciousness of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the act of looking for those historical details of furniture and fabric.”⁴⁷³ Caroline Fabricant has proposed a reciprocal relationship between reader and both the country house and museum guidebook, with each influencing the “aesthetic judgements” of the other. As Esther Moir has argued of visitors to the English country house, “a great part of the pleasure of touring houses lay

⁴⁷¹ Jennie Batchelor, “Woman’s Work: Labour, Gender and Authorship in the Novels of Sarah Scott” in Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan eds., *British Women’s Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 21.

⁴⁷² Woolf, “A most indefatigable love of history,” 691.

⁴⁷³ Wall, *The Prose of Things*. 178.

in passing judgement upon the architecture and criticizing the internal décor.”⁴⁷⁴

Demand for textual accounts of famed collections was widespread. In 1790, for example, a guidebook to Sir Ashton Lever’s museum entitled *A Companion to the Museum* was produced following “repeat and daily Applications made by Persons who visit the Museum for a Catalogue.”⁴⁷⁵ As the preface to the text denoted, “Persons visiting the Museum will be accommodated with the Use of this Catalogue [whilst] they are inspecting the various Articles that may attract their Notice.”⁴⁷⁶

However, for prolonged and meaningful visits to private collections, where proximity to the objects could be guaranteed, there needed to be a necessary degree of social familiarity between host and guest. Although the eighteenth century saw a rise in guidebooks, and with them, middle class visitors to elite homes, antiquarian scholars would usually need to belong to the same social rank and circle as the collector in order to gain sustained and comprehensive access to the collections. While Hamilton’s *Catalogue* might be partially understood in the context of public collections commentary, its author was able to surpass the limitations of the genre to produce instead a privileged and intimate account of the duchess’s collection as well as her social circle and the knowledge exchanged privately within it. Her extensive and sustained access to the museum allowed Hamilton to transcend the template of catalogue writing, producing instead a personal text reflective of the tastes and conversations of the group of which she was a prominent member. As well as being a regular guest at the duchess of Portland’s museum, Hamilton made numerous trips to Walpole’s home at Strawberry Hill. On 5th September 1784, two months before she began work on the *Catalogue*, she visited Walpole with her uncle:

A little before 3 we got to Mr. Walpole’s his Chaise was at y^e door to carry him to Mrs Garricks – but we would go in – he was pleased to see us but he had been so disappointed in not seeing my Uncle at Strawberry Hill this summer that he said he did not think he w^d let him in if he had not heard my name. We spent ab^t 20 minutes very agreeably – Mr. W. carry’d us through some of y^e Rooms to show my Uncle some things w^{ch} he had not seen – particularly y^e beautiful Cabinet of Lady Di: Beauclerks Drawings in y^e Great Bed Chamber⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ Esther Moir, *The Discovery of Britain: The English Tourists, 1540-1840* (London: Routledge, 1964), 63-71. See Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 194.

⁴⁷⁵ *A Companion to the Museum (Late Sir Ashton Lever’s)* (London: 1790), 3

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Mary Hamilton Diary, 5 September 1784. HAM/2/14, f. 57-58. Emphasis Hamilton’s own.

Although Walpole's quip about admitting Sir William only because of Hamilton's presence is no doubt meant in friendly flattery to Hamilton, it reveals an important social dynamic that governed the etiquette of visiting elite homes and their contents. This familiarity meant that Walpole himself showed them round, opening drawers and cabinets and providing an oral commentary to the objects which, although likely rehearsed and repeated elsewhere, was not necessarily recorded textually and readily available to other guests. Hamilton's keen interest in the different processes of recording objects pervades her diary entry. Embedded within the text is a brief sketch of the cabinet she saw at Strawberry Hill, decorated with works produced by Lady Diana Beauclerk (1734 – 1808), a favourite of Walpole's (fig. 5.3). The cabinet, which still survives (fig. 5.4), was a highlight in Walpole's collection, one he proudly opened for the delectation of his better-known guests.

For the Bluestockings, history represented a popular topic of both reading and writing. In his study of Elizabeth Montagu's epistolary network, Markman Ellis has identified that "history of all kinds comprises nearly a third of the circle's reading, notably in significant works by Charles Rollin, David Hulme, the Earl of Clarendon, Nathaniel Hooke, Paul Rapin and Voltaire."⁴⁷⁸ As well as engaging with published historiographical texts, Hamilton had access to unpublished manuscripts circulated in the London salons and at Bulstrode, works that set a precedent for sharing and disseminating information. Hamilton made extensive use of such networks of exchange and collected the unpublished works of several antiquarians whose writing would inform her own. Inside her manuscript copy of Walpole's *Notes to the Portraits at Woburn Abbey*, also held at the University of Manchester, an annotation at the front of the manuscript reads "By my friend H^{ble} Horace Walpole".⁴⁷⁹ She notes two dates, the earliest of which (18 June 1782) is eighteen years before its publication in 1800, denoting her early and privileged access to this unpublished version. The most comprehensive edition of Walpole's famous *Description of the Villa at Strawberry Hill*, "reprinted [...] with plates," was produced in 1784, the same year in which Hamilton was writing her own account of the Portland museum.⁴⁸⁰ Hamilton's own copy of the text, gifted by Walpole in 1797 and now held in the Lewis Walpole Library, is annotated

⁴⁷⁸ Ellis, "Elizabeth Montagu's 1750s Epistolary Network," 219.

⁴⁷⁹ Manuscript copy of *Notes to the Portraits at Woburn Abbey*, HAM/3/5.

⁴⁸⁰ See Clarke, "Lord God! Jesus! What a House!" 357.

throughout, demonstrating her close engagement with Walpole's work.⁴⁸¹ From Hamilton's diaries, it is clear that she was similarly acquainted with the picturesque artist and writer Rev. William Gilpin, whose work she also had access to pre-publication. An entry for 15 December 1784 describes how she "began Mr Gilpin's Man[uscript] in y^e Eve^s." At the end of the same entry, Hamilton records the title of this manuscript as "Remarks on Forests and other Woodland Scenery, (relative chiefly to picturesque beauty) illustrated by y^e scenes of New Forrest in Hampshire [...] 1781 by y^e Rev^d Mr Gilpin."⁴⁸² Gilpin's text was not publicly available until a decade later, suggesting Hamilton had been gifted a private copy.⁴⁸³

Strategies of Authority

Hamilton's strategies for selecting objects and art works for description in her *Catalogue* point to her aspiration to authenticate and legitimise her work. Her account privileges both her immediate circle of elite friends and a wider, contemporaneous antiquarian and connoisseurial discourse. One of the main features of Hamilton's writing, raising it from a blind exercise in the copying-out of information from solely exterior sources, is her intriguing combining of models of connoisseurship alongside the more traditional and established concerns of the eighteenth-century antiquarian. Certainly, she selected objects from the museum selected for their artistic and aesthetic qualities as much as their rarity and the richness of their biographical history. The *Catalogue* was an opportunity to reflect the tastes and ideas represented in the museum generally, but also for giving expression to her own aspirations as an (art) historian.

Hamilton's strategies in asserting her authority are two-fold. In her text, Hamilton engages in the conventions of the genres of historiographical and critical writing she attempts to emulate. Her work combines the typical antiquarian concerns with object-biography with sophisticated visual analysis and the close reading of artworks. Elsewhere, Hamilton takes advantage of the *Catalogue's* manuscript form,

⁴⁸¹ Mary Hamilton's copy of Horace Walpole, *Description of the Villa at Strawberry Hill*. LWL Quarto 33 30 Copy 7.

⁴⁸² Hamilton Diary, December 1784. HAM/2/14.

⁴⁸³ Bulstrode had itself been a subject of William Gilpin's *Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty*, published in 1776. The author, who travelled extensively across Britain, recording and publishing his visits to country estates, wrote of the duchess's collection "The house contains some good pictures. One particularly, by Rubens, in which he has given several different attitudes of himself, and his three wives, is much admired. There are also two or three well-painted heads." William Gilpin, *Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1776, of several parts of Great Britain*, II (London: Printed for R. Blamire, 1789), 187-190.

treating it more as a work closer to a commonplace book by inserting additional pieces of printed as well as handwritten papers serving to extend the spaces the work occupied both textually and physically.

Of course, the scope of Hamilton's unpublished text and its limited engagement with objects exclusively in the Portland Museum, dictated its relatively modest audience. Nevertheless, taking its cue from the well-established genres of writing I have already discussed, the *Catalogue* would have been a legible form of writing to those who encountered it. Peltz has shown that, for elite women, work on catalogues and collections commentaries could provide opportunity to experiment with authorship and assert the legitimacy of their voices in discussion of historic and art objects.⁴⁸⁴ Hamilton's *Catalogue* reveals an important precursor to Peltz's nineteenth-century models, underscoring the links between a museum created by an elite female collector and the women invited into her collection.

The physical structure and form of the *Catalogue* reveal something of Hamilton's concern in legitimising and contextualising her authorial voice. A newspaper cutting (fig. 5.5), dating from mid October 1784 and reporting the birth of a son to the Prince of Asturias and his consort Louisa Maria, serves to offer a temporal context for her writing and also to augment the elite historical narratives presented in her text through the signalling of unfolding events as history-in-progress.⁴⁸⁵ Elsewhere, Hamilton includes a short list of "Pictures bought by y^e Duchess Dow^r of Portland from S^r Luke Schand's Sale" (fig. 5.6), demonstrating her intimate knowledge of the provenance of objects in the collection, as well as the social and financial systems that supported its assembly.⁴⁸⁶ This can be read in the broader context of antiquarian models of authorship – as Boehm has noted more generally, "proof of the author's first-hand experience of the ruin or object in question became a powerful authentication strategy."⁴⁸⁷ Among the pictures purchased by the duchess, according to Hamilton, are a "View of Antwerp – Paul Rubens" bought for £551, as well as "Virgin, our Saviour & St John" by Correggio, bought for £220. Hamilton's interest in recording the movement of art works and objects at auction is further represented in a second list, detailing items from the Portland collection and the names of their purchasers at the 1786 auction following the duchess's death and suggesting Hamilton's use of the

⁴⁸⁴ Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 329-336.

⁴⁸⁵ HAM/3/4, f. 74.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, f. 76.

⁴⁸⁷ Boehm, "Empiricism, antiquarian fieldwork and the (in)visibilization of the past," 259.

manuscript beyond its initial completion in 1784. Significantly, in selecting objects from the thousands of lots for inclusion in her list, Hamilton chooses only objects that she has herself written about in the *Catalogue*:

		£ sh
Duke of Bedford Missal	Mr Payne	213..3
Don Julio Clovio	Walpole	169..1-
Queen Eliza's	Mr Glover	106..1
Prayerbook		
Hollar's Works	Ld Stamford	385-1
Alexr Severus's	D: Portland	1029 – 4 -
Sepulchral Urn [Portland Vase]		

From 1783 – 4, she recorded aspects of the Portland museum throughout her diaries, often trialling techniques in writing the collection before committing text to her *Catalogue*. In December 1783, Hamilton recalled how, after accompanying Mary Delany in a walk around the grounds at Bulstrode, she “return'd to y^e D^{ss}; she had got together many fine things to shew me.” Listing the items showed to her, Hamilton demonstrates the conversational priorities in her enquiry, going beyond basic descriptions of objects' physical properties to report the anecdotal information imparted to her by the duchess in the moment:

a missil w^{ch} had been given to Edward y^e 6th, some fine miniatures, 2 by Isaac and 2 by Peter Oliver – a Lord and Countess of Pembroke, y^e other 2 unknown; Milton and his mother in one large locket in a tortoiseshell case; S^r Walter Raleigh and his son in an old-fashion'd locket, w^{ch} had been ornamented with jewels in a large locket black and green enamel; it had belong'd to Lady Raleigh, y^e cyphers of W. R. and E. are still remaining, tho' y^e enamels is damaged; a missil bound in silver of a smaller size given y^e Duchess by y^e *present* queen.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁸ Mary Hamilton Diary, 12 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 173.

Reflected in Hamilton's writing is her concern with recording the oral histories and commentaries she gathered, as well as the more conventional textual inheritances taken from earlier antiquarian works and which served to situate their own writings within broader, established conversations. Initially, Hamilton appears systematic in her arrangement of the objects she finds at Bulstrode. Indeed, in her diary, they are presented in a successive and detailed list. However, her account reveals much about the encounter itself, and the social, practical and, later, literary processes through which Hamilton quantifies and relates it. The items she lists, for example, are arranged in the order in which she experienced them at Bulstrode- that is, the order the duchess presents them to her. Through the mechanism of writing and, later, reading this list, the experience can be relived, the moment reanimated. Similarly, details such as the "large locket [of] black and green enamel" as having "belong'd to Lady Raleigh" and a "missil bound in silver" as having been a gift from Queen Charlotte to the duchess disclose the otherwise obscured conversation between Hamilton and her host. These small measures of information are the inheritances of Hamilton's text, drawn directly from oral communications and, therefore, energized by immediate experience of the Bulstrode community. Hamilton's strengthens her authorial voice with flourishes of historiographical and narrative enrichment. Furthermore, her recording of a women's network of exchange points to a system of acquisition and commentary within the Portland Museum based on the gendered behavioural models outlined in chapter one.

Throughout the main body of the text, Hamilton utilizes an overarching descriptive strategy; first describing the subject(s) of art works and antiquities, and then their material properties. This is usually followed by the provenance of each piece, often with an attempt to align the history of the object with the duchess of Portland, thus positioning Hamilton's patron in the wider narrative of elite connoisseurial practice. For example:

Head in Oils by Corregio of St Sebastian in Profile looking upwards wth great sweetness & expression. The Duchess got this Picture from Sr J. Reynolds who purchases it out of Cardinal --- collection. The merit of this great Master is too well known to render any close necessary. This picture is allowed by all y^e Connoisseurs to be an undoubted original. It is painted on Canvas wch by way

of preservation has been put upon a board & is in a glass frame – Size 13 Inch:
by 10 ½.⁴⁸⁹

Often, Hamilton's records include information about the significance of the object in the context of broader cultural debates about canonical artists. For example, writing on Correggio's portrait, her referral to “all y^e connoisseurs” serves to indicate her awareness of such debates and to legitimise her own choice in selecting the art work for her attention.

Ann Bermingham has previously suggested that women were regularly barred from making any meaningful contribution to art historical disquisitions due to the imposition of patriarchal structures onto public conversation. She has claimed that “Women were positioned in relation to high art culture - that is to say in relation to all the cultural sites and practices from which they were excluded by virtue of their sex - by being positioned in relation to certain specific constructions of masculine subjectivity - the artist, the critic, the artisan, the connoisseur, to name but a few.”⁴⁹⁰ In some ways, Hamilton was the exception. Her privileged position in the duchess of Portland's circle meant she had access to an important art collection within the context of a group of educated and informed women. Close engagement with the oral and textual pronouncements of established male individuals within her circle, itself a useful exercise in data-gathering and self-education, provided only part of Hamilton's strategy in building her authorial voice. Sir William, Joshua Reynolds and Walpole make the most regular appearances in the text, used by Hamilton as reliable sources from which to quote directly. As the confident prose of her *Catalogue* testifies, she sought not only to document these ongoing commentaries, but contribute to them. Although her text cannot be claimed as overtly subversive in its aims of asserting a gendered female antiquarian and connoisseurial voice (it remained unpublished after all), it does present a more nuanced and complex perspective on the strata of eighteenth-century textual and sociable art criticism within private elite coterie.

Throughout the *Catalogue*, Hamilton inserts smaller pieces of paper, usually cut into long rectangular shapes. These serve as physical and textual interventions to the main work onto which she transcribes anecdotal information and art historical analysis she has gathered from oral conversation with individuals from within her social circle

⁴⁸⁹ HAM/3/4, f. 3

⁴⁹⁰ Ann Bermingham, “The Aesthetics of Ignorance: The Accomplished Woman in the Culture of Connoisseurship,” *Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 2 (1993): 5.

whom she considers to possess useful connoisseurial knowledge. The opinions and input of individuals to (art) historical discussion held enormous sway over public and private forums alike. Woolf has identified how “the reactions (both intellectual and monetary) of male and female readers to individual historical works guided revisions of [published] works in subsequent editions” and states that “changing tastes and increasingly niche-divided markets” were regularly altered and guided by instances of individual pronouncements.⁴⁹¹ The most regular contributor to these is Walpole. An unbound entry on two seventeenth-century artists represented throughout the Portland Museum (fig. 5.7), stored at the beginning of the manuscript (its position may be the result of later archival organisation and not necessarily indicative of Hamilton’s original placement), reads: “Mr Walpole says that Julio Clovio’s neatness & Taste in Grottesque were exquisite, but that he cannot be compare wth Isaac Oliver because Clovio never painted Portraits & y^e latter little else.” Below she adds in a later entry “Isaac Oliver died 1687 his 61 or 2nd year.” Hamilton’s referral here to Walpole’s analysis in comparing the two artists suggests it as a topic of previous debate between them, with their art historical discussion taking place within the context of the duchess’s collection and translated by Hamilton into her text. Rather than being derivative however, her text, with its scrawled extra-annotations and paper additions, works to draw the attention of the reader to the sociable processes of conversation and knowledge exchange in which she is engaged. In doing so, she anchors her voice amongst those of other, better known and usually male voices in an act that, although initially seemingly deferential, ultimately functions to assert her place within the group whose members, through composition of the text, she can include or discount at her pleasure.

The flow of antiquarian data and connoisseurial commentary worked both ways, with Hamilton’s vivid and informed text providing a potential source for other authors to reference. Of a rare manuscript illustrated by Clovio in the Portland Museum (later purchased by Walpole in 1786) Hamilton writes “A rare & curious Man: in Latin [...] on y^e finest Vellum richly adorned & bound wth chased corners & clasps of Gold finely wrought; all ye Psalms are writ wth ye neatest pen [...] it is adorned with ye finest illuminations by ye famous Man: Painter Don J: Clovio.⁴⁹² Hamilton demonstrates her understanding of the artistry of the piece when she continues “The Ill [...] of y^e figures & y^e Borders are 21 of y^e highest perfection, & for y^e beauty of colors enrichments of

⁴⁹¹ Woolf, “A most indefatigable love of history,” 692.

⁴⁹² HAM/3/4, f. 11

ornaments, beyond compare”, continuing “neither Ancients nor Moderns can compare with his works”.⁴⁹³ She also records the provenance of the manuscript, tracing its movement through the hands of various owners:

This Book was inscribed to ye Noble Prince, ye Dke of Anjou by Clovio. an: 1537 & frm him came into ye possession of ye curious & Noble Thomas Earl of Arundal & Surry [sic]. Frm his Collection it was sold at Lord Staffords sale an. 1720 & bought there by ye Rt Hon. Ld. Harley, E. of Oxford & Mortimer.”⁴⁹⁴

After purchasing the manuscript in 1786, Walpole annotated onto its pages the known provenance of the work. This text, recorded in *A Catalogue of the Classic Content of Strawberry Hill Collected by Horace Walpole* published to accompany the 1842 sale at Walpole’s home, closely mirrors that of Hamilton’s work, suggesting her text as a potential source in Walpole’s own antiquarian writing:

This beautiful MS. of the Psalms, illuminated for the Prince d’Anjou, in 1537, by Don Julio Clovio, scholar of Julio Romano, and afterwards purchased by Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, was on the dispersion of the Arundel collection, bought, in 1720, by Edwards Harley, Earl of Oxford, who bequeathed it to his only daughter, Margaret, Duchess of Portland, on whose death it was purchased, in Mary, 1786, by Horace Walpole...As there was no Duc d’Anjou in 1537, the Princip. Andegavensis, mentioned in one of the illuminations, must have been Theordore d’Anjou de Mazières, who was aged about thirty in 1537, and who was son of a natural son of Charles d’Anjou, K. of Naples.⁴⁹⁵

That Walpole turned to Hamilton’s work here, perhaps in order to refer back to their earlier conversations on the Clovio manuscript, reveals the fluidity of such written accounts and the collaborative exchange that existed between them.

Hamilton’s control and management of the data in her *Catalogue* is especially interesting, and points to its composition as an ongoing and organic process. Often,

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Handwritten note by Horace Walpole, quoted in George Edward Waldegrave and George Robin, *A Catalogue of the Classic Content of Strawberry Hill Collected by Horace Walpole* (London: Printed by Smith and Robins, 1842), xvii-xviii.

anecdotal or additional information would be added into the margins, whilst elsewhere heavy editing is evident in the prolific crossings-out. In several instances, Hamilton finds she has given herself too small a space in which to enter all the information she has about an object. Most likely, she gained more in-depth knowledge on objects in the Portland Museum as her association with the duchess progressed, so that she was forced to go back and revise or augment the entries she had previously made. For example, within the *Catalogue*, Hamilton describes “An exquisite Miniature in Enamel by Old Petitot of Cardinal Mazarine.” On the page (fig. 5.8) it is clear from the horizontal lines drawn in pencil that Hamilton planned this part of her text so that the entries might appear part of a neat and organised scheme. However, as Hamilton learns more about the miniature, she writes further notes onto a separate piece of paper (fig. 5.9) which survives as an unbound and partially cut and ripped addition within the *Catalogue* volume itself. Cross-referenceable thanks to a notation reading “No. 23” at the top of the paper, this extra entry provides a richer history of the work. Evident here is Hamilton’s practice of self-editing, confirming the manuscript as a work in constant flux, as words are crossed out else inserted in between the lines of text. Alongside the words written in dark ink are two pencil annotations, also in Hamilton’s hand. The first simply reads “done”, with an emphatic underscore added by Hamilton in the finality of completion. The second, “to add to my Book”, indicates the fluid and intertextual use of the *Catalogue* within Hamilton’s wider writing, in which individual entries might be copied out in commonplace books or diaries.

The margins of the *Catalogue* are similarly used to include visual data alongside Hamilton’s prose. In particular, Hamilton uses this space outside of the main body of the text to represent the signatures of artists whose works she is describing. Her strategy in doing so is likely an assertion of her own art historical knowledge; in citing these instances of visual information, she is indicating her own connoisseurial ability in recognising and confirming the legitimacy of particular artworks, as well as the broader legitimacy of the duchess’s collection. In an entry describing a miniature portrait of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, Hamilton imitates Isaac Oliver’s signature to the left of the text (fig. 5.10). She continues this practice throughout the *Catalogue*, including the marks of artists John Petitot (fig. 5.11) and John Hoskins (fig. 5.12). In the entry for a work by Hoskins, a miniature portrait of Lady Frances Cecil, Countess of Cumberland, Hamilton augments her description of its physical properties with the following information; “The Duchess D^{vr} of Portland had the counter part of this

Miniature by the same hand which she gave to the Hon^{ble} Horace Walpole, it is, if possible, superior to the above.”

One of the most successful and vivid descriptions in Hamilton’s text is that of the sculpted head known as the Jupiter Serapis (fig. 5.13). As we have seen in the previous chapter, the sculpture was purchased by the duchess from Hamilton’s uncle Sir William along with the Barberini (Portland) vase. For Hamilton, this provided an opportunity to display her almost exclusive knowledge of and proximity to it. Of the sculpture she writes:

A most inimitable piece of Sculpture of Egyptian Workmanship. A Head of Jupiter Serapis cut out of the hard Egyptian green Basaltes, it was found at Portici and it was purchased out of the Barberini Cabinet by Sr William Hamilton who parted with it to the Duchess Dow^{gr} of Portland when he was in England in 1783.⁴⁹⁶

That Hamilton makes no explicit reference to her own involvement in this sale is not surprising. Her silence on the subject is likely in line with the continuing secrecy that surrounded the negotiations I have already explored. Certainly, this is confirmed by the fact Hamilton does not include the Portland vase in her *Catalogue*, despite its significant fame and potential for more of the art historical discussion and close analysis that characterise her text. Her statement that “this Head is allow’d by all those who have the true taste and judgement (and many Connoisseurs abroad & in this Country have seen it) to be a Work of the most exquisite perfection” works again to signal to her readers her expert knowledge of contemporary discourse specific to each object she selects for discussion. Her visual analysis and interpretation of the sculpture enrich her entry further as she proposes:

There is in the Countenance a Sublimity and sweetness not to be described, the features are regular and extremely handsome – the hair flowing in Ringlets over the forehead & sides of the face but not concealing y^m – as the Artist has with the nicest Skill laid them hollow, the hair thus handing over the forehead adds

⁴⁹⁶ HAM/3/4, f. 47.

dignity to the Brow, and the hair joins the Beard in such a manner as to Complete the grace of the [sculpture].⁴⁹⁷

Her sentiment that the “Sublimity” and “sweetness” of the work are “not to be described” is echoed in the conclusion of the entry, where she exclaims “in short, to use Shakespeares [sic] words ‘It beggars all description!’” In such a lengthy and detailed object commentary, Hamilton’s suggestion that description is somehow beyond her serves to emphasise both the singularity of the object she is describing and her own skill in rendering it as text. Rather than undermine her writing, this clever mechanism foregrounds her authorship. Furthermore, the trope of inexpressibility is deployed here to signpost broader discussions in the period concerned with articulating sublime aesthetic experience.

The *Catalogue* is full of objects that Hamilton relates back to her uncle, further strengthening the narrative she presents of connoisseurial connection between Sir William and the duchess, thus legitimising the Portland Museum as an important collection and therefore her own venture in recording it. “No. 22” in the *Catalogue* records a Roman intaglio, set into a gold ring and brought to Britain by her uncle in 1783, where it was sold to the duchess in the same transaction:

A precious fragment of an Antique Intaglio, in a cornelian of the finest sort having a Yellowish tinge. S^r William Hamilton purchased it at Rome where it was found and parted with it to the D^{ss} Dow^{gr} of Portland in 1783. It represents Hercules as low as the Waist, he is sitting in a skiff which has the Lions Skin for a Sail, a little part of which is seen and one of the paws is fasten’d by a String which hangs in the air over the head of Hercules [...] the Head is very fine and the strength of the neck & Back are admirably shown..⁴⁹⁸

Once again, Hamilton’s vocabulary, the use of “precious,” “finest,” and “very fine,” underscores her concern with valuing the object in terms of its singularity. As the entry progresses, she demonstrates her ability to engage in close and discerning visual analysis, paying particular attention to the “strength of the neck & back.” She pronounces that “it is hardly possible to conceive that in so small a compass so much

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ HAM/3/4, f. 49. Emphasis Hamilton’s own.

expression could be convey'd," and in doing so invites her reader to simultaneously marvel at the work and her own success in identifying and recording this otherwise near-impossible aspect. She concludes with stating "It is set in Gold as a ring and is of this Shape." At the bottom of the same page, she includes a small sketch of the intaglio (fig. 5.14), complete with precise measurements and testament to her investment in precise detail.

At the end of the manuscript and separated from the main text, is a second list Hamilton titles *A Catalogue of the Pictures at Bulstrode*, which I have discussed in part in the third chapter of this thesis. This is a more comprehensive work which Hamilton divides based on the geographical location of each artwork within the duchess's house, drawing on the traditions of similar texts dealing with art works, particularly paintings, including Walpole's *Notes to the Portraits at Woburn Abbey*, of which she possessed a private manuscript copy. The list provides much-needed details of the interior at Bulstrode and the modes of displaying artworks there. It also reveals the spaces to which Hamilton had access and was familiar with, thus revealing the most sociable and well-traversed areas of the building. Amongst the spaces listed are the hall, dining room, drawing room, breakfast room and bed chamber, with the locations of artworks including "over the door", "by the window" and "over the chimney, all of which actively serve to locate Hamilton and her text within the museum space.

Contemporary artworks created by amateur female artists were displayed alongside paintings by the Old Masters, characteristic of the duchess of Portland's curatorial approach to her museum that is here reflected in Hamilton's text. Indeed, this interest in treating the work of elite women as worthy of display and recording alongside more established genres of painting denotes the development of an aesthetic taste and ideological approach to the organisation of objects in the museum. This was not the undiscerning and chaotic curation proposed of the museum by twentieth-century historians, but rather a model useful in the careful cultivation of a group identity enacted in both art practice and display. The list of paintings in Hamilton's text, then, can be read as an extension of a collective manifesto. Indeed, an entry in Hamilton's diary from the period records how "the D^{ss} gave me the Catalogue of her Pictures," suggesting the existence of an earlier source used in the composition of this portion of her text and with it, a pre-existing model in recording these displays, therefore

confirming Hamilton's deference to and efforts to build on the principles of the wider group in her text.⁴⁹⁹

Historical Figures and Material Relics

In his study of Bluestocking engagement with the past, focusing specifically on the epistolary writings of Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Carter, Woolf has proposed that:

In the context of eighteenth-century literary society, the boundary between history-*writing* and history-*reading* was a threshold rather than a chasm. There is a point in reading at which the consumer becomes a producer, when encounters with the historical spark an inclination to think further and more deeply about them and, ultimately, to share those thoughts with a select audience.⁵⁰⁰

For Hamilton, the history-*writing* and history-*reading* that Woolf has shown to be so prevalent amongst the Bluestocking circle sat alongside object-*writing* and object-*reading*. Hamilton was especially interested in using objects to narrate or conjure moments in history, evoking human experience and emotion through material culture. Karen O'Brien has argued that historical culture in the mid-eighteenth century can be characterised "as one of deepening interest in the imaginative, affective and experiential aspects of history."⁵⁰¹ Similarly, Woolf has proposed that "women's reactions to history in its literary embodiment cannot be studied without reference to their emotional reactions to the physical remnants of the past."⁵⁰² Indeed, Woolf has argued this to be a specifically gendered approach to historical engagement, pointing out that "While eighteenth-century male tourists do not often record flights of time-travelling imagination inspired by local sites or artefacts [...] female writings are suffused with such mental expeditions."⁵⁰³

⁴⁹⁹ HAM/2/3.

⁵⁰⁰ Woolf, "A most indefatigable love of history," 691.

⁵⁰¹ Karen O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 204. See also Mark Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740 – 1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰² Woolf, "A most indefatigable love of history," 691.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

Hamilton presents objects as preparative; as opening a channel to historical events, people and narrative. In encountering historical artefacts in the collection, Hamilton's historical and real-world experiences combined. In her *Catalogue*, she captures not only the immediacy of her own experience, but that of the historical moment an object might represent. Boehm has proposed "antiquaries increasingly bolstered their authority by emphasizing the usefulness of material objects and monuments as carriers of historical information."⁵⁰⁴ Of the objects Hamilton selects for particular attention, most are singular in their narrative significance, selected not only as exemplars of an historical period, but as the material evidences of past lives and connective tools through which to engage and evoke the past. Of particular note is an entry dealing with a pearl earring associated with Charles I (fig. 5.15):

The Pearl Earring which was taken from King Charles the first's Ear after he was beheaded it is a Single drop the pear of a beautiful Shape & Colour. Upon the top of the Pearl is a Crown of Gold, it hangs pendant to a small Gold Ring. This Earring was given by Queen Mary to William Bentinck, 1st Earl of Portland. With the Earring is kept a paper on which was written by Queen Mary the following "This Pearl was taken out of the King my Grandfather's Ear after he was beheaded & given to the Princess Royall."⁵⁰⁵

Evoking the moment of Charles I's execution, this account revels in an historical moment which defined the king's legacy and shaped subsequent perceptions of him. The imagined proximity of the earring to the detached head and severed neck evokes the physical brutality of the act; a visceral action further recalled through Hamilton's likening of the earring itself to the king's body; the head of the pendant topped, like the toppled monarch with, with "a Crown of Gold." As Woolf has suggested, "the tactile experience of the old object," conjured textually here by Hamilton, "provided an occasion for the re-presentation of the past, and a focus for imaginative reconstruction of historical events."⁵⁰⁶ Hamilton's inclusion of the note, handwritten by Queen Mary, serves to bring further human interest and immediacy to her account of it. Reading this note, we are allowed a glimpse into a private familial inheritance of the queen, whose voice, animated through Hamilton's, enables the reader a fleeting proximity. Here,

⁵⁰⁴ Boehm, "Empiricism, antiquarian fieldwork and the (in)visibilization of the past," 257.

⁵⁰⁵ HAM/3/4, f. 111.

⁵⁰⁶ Woolf, "A most indefatigable love of history," 696.

Hamilton prioritises a posthumous female voice, giving textual space in her *Catalogue* to the words of Charles I's granddaughter.⁵⁰⁷

The earring of Charles I was an extremely high-profile piece within the duchess's museum, and it was known by those outside her immediate circle that she possessed it. As early as 1749, George Vertue had included it in his engraving *Jewells in the Possession of her Grace Margaret Duchess of Portland containing Images of a seal of Charles II when Prince of Wales, two emeralds, two views of an oriental topaz, a sapphire, and a pearl earring of Charles I*. Similarly, in a series of letters exchanged between James Granger and the duchess in 1775, Granger asked to include it in his *Biographical History of England* (published first in 1769 and added to over several years). A letter written by the duchess to Granger in May of that year reveals the growing interest garnered by the earring within antiquarian circles:

I have not a print of the bust of King Charles I [...] I had an engraving, made by [George] Vertue, of the pearl, with Queen Mary's inscription (which I send you a proof of); it is in a plate with other jewels and cameo's [sic]. I don't know how you can have a better attestation of it, than by inserting the inscription, and that the original is in my possession.⁵⁰⁸

Whilst Hamilton's interest in the earring was not necessarily original, it denotes her awareness of contemporary antiquarian debate, its influence on her own curiosity and her processes of selecting objects from the Portland collection for particular attention. What makes her attending it so interesting, however, is the clear textual priority she gives to the human and therefore emotional story that accompanies it.

Across the duchess of Portland's collection, female historical figures were well represented in miniature portraits, relics, and manuscripts. The *Catalogue* provides a veritable anthology of women's histories, drawing together objects that represent female dextrous and intellectual work and conjuring an imagined proximity to the historic body and mind. Ezell has previously signposted the early modern tradition of creating anthologies or biographical dictionaries aimed at gathering together a female literary

⁵⁰⁷ See Elizabeth Goodhue on the contributions of posthumous female dialogue by Bluestocking women writers to narratives of both literary and lived histories. Elizabeth Goodhue, "At the Margins of Menippean Dialogue: Sarah Fieldings' "History of Anna Boleyn" and the Muted Female Figures of Lucian's Satiric Underworld" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 266. See also J. F. Burrows and A. J. Hassall, "Anna Boleyn and the Authenticity of Fielding's Feminine Narratives," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 21 (1988): 427-53.

⁵⁰⁸ Duchess to Granger, May 1775 in *Letters Between the Rev. James Granger*, 14.

canon. As Ezell suggests, these were at once entertaining and useful in introducing “what the compilers feel is crucially significant.”⁵⁰⁹ Instead of gathering literary authors, Hamilton set her criteria for selecting objects associated with historical women to mirror the ideals of female aspiration and achievement, thought and action, espoused by her own social group.

Adrienne Chernock has identified “the antiquarian impulse” in the mid-eighteenth century “to have been drawn to the ‘history of famous women’ genre primarily because they identified women’s pasts as uncharted terrain, ripe for investigation.”⁵¹⁰ Indeed, Chernock highlights that “some of the earliest British chroniclers of ‘exceptional’ women [...] would not necessarily have acknowledged their histories as interventions in contemporary debates about the status of women” but, rather, engaged in such enquiry as a means of legitimising the author’s own antiquarian voice.⁵¹¹ For Hamilton, her selection of particular women’s histories reflects the social and physical environment in which she produced her text and is limited to those items already subject to the acquisitional policies of the duchess of Portland. Hamilton’s text organises these objects, and their associated histories, as they exist in the museum itself; as a series of synchronic vignettes exemplifying instead seemingly isolated instances of female industry and virtue useful in underscoring contemporaneous Bluestocking values. In attending to historical instances of women’s (art) historical work in her commentary, Hamilton aligns her writing with the wider acquisitional and narrative priorities of her social circle, contextualising them within the culture of the Bluestocking salon generally, and the Portland Museum specifically.

In December 1783, Hamilton recorded in her diary how she was aided by the duchess’s resident botanist and curate Rev. John Lightfoot in transcribing a manuscript: “At ½ past 9 went upstairs... Mr. Lightfoot so good as to read y^e man^t of Q. Eliz. prayers, y^t I might see if I had written mine correctly.”⁵¹² Hamilton’s transcription of the prayers, which were contained in a manuscript in the Portland collection and written in Elizabeth I’s own hand, appear in her *Catalogue*, revealing that, by the winter of 1783, Hamilton was certainly gathering materials for the text, if not already working on

⁵⁰⁹ Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History*, 69.

⁵¹⁰ Adrienne Chernock, “Gender and the Politics of Exceptionalism in the Writing of British Women’s History” in Pamela S. Nadell and Kate Haulman eds., *Making Women’s Histories: Beyond National Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 119.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁵¹² Mary Hamilton Diary, 12 December 1783, in *Autobiography and Correspondence*, III, 173.

arranging and writing out the catalogue itself.⁵¹³ In her *Catalogue*, Hamilton presents the manuscript as the premier item in the collection:

This Book contains Six Prayers, composed, & Written by Queen Elizabeth's own hand, there are 2 in the English language, 1, in Latin, 1, in Greek, 1, in Italian & 1, in French – The Duke D'alencons Picture (in Miniature, Water Colors), by Hilliard and that of Queen Elizth by the same hand on the inside of the Covers of the Book which is bound in black Shagreen, there are 55 leaves of Vellum, 34 only of which are written upon, there is a Margin round each leaf mark'd by a Gold line, this line enclosing the Neatest and most beautiful hand-writing, the Capital letters are in Gold, each prayer is written in a different Character, Viz. Roman, Italian Text & the Greek characters appear to be equally well written with the Others.⁵¹⁴

Hamilton's attention to the details of its formal composition, particularly to the fact that "each prayer is written in a different character" and that of its "55 leaves of Vellum, 34 only of which are written upon," signposts her interest in the Elizabethan methods of textual organisation and spatial delineation within the manuscript. She adds that "the prayers are, in my Opinion, a proof of Queen Eliz^{h's} talents and we must hope her devotion was as heartfelt as it was in Words fervent," aligning herself with the values and aspirations of a readership with which she is clearly familiar. She imagines the manuscript's creator, Elizabeth I, in the context of contemporary female and crucially Bluestocking values of piety and scholarly study, particularly espoused at Bulstrode. Hamilton's notation of details like the "black Shagreen" binding of the volume, and the edges of the papers "mark'd by a Gold line" emphasise the treatment of the manuscript as a physical object open to tactile experience. Her own dextrous labour, evidenced in the copied-out prayers that follow the manuscript's description in Hamilton's text, serves to transform the Elizabethan into the Hamiltonian in a self-referential act that reanimates the process of literary creation itself and unites momentarily author and queen as Hamilton literally retraces the text.

She also notes how "this precious little Manuscript is kept in a Crimson Velvet Case (made by Mrs Delany) which is fastened with two large pearls."⁵¹⁵ This detailing of

⁵¹³ HAM/3/4, f. 23-29.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 22

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, f. 23.

Delany's material and laborious contribution to the collection is particularly striking within Hamilton's account and denotes her interest in showing the ongoing layers of female activity and interpretation within the museum. Her note thus develops a temporal continuity that serves to further connect the historical female subjects of Hamilton's enquiry with the creative efforts of her contemporaries. Hamilton was not alone in her interest in Elizabethan history, nor in her taste for further applying female histories to this particular period and, in doing so, creating links between the past and the present. Contemporary to Hamilton's manuscript and published between 1783 – 5 was Sophia Lee's Gothic novel *The Recess*. Lake has attended to Lee's text, which "reimagines the reign of Queen Elizabeth" and presents its readers with "an inventive and alternative history of women" in which the narrative invites "her readers to imagine a lost line of [female] monarchs."⁵¹⁶ In both instances, Hamilton and Lee seek, although through different genres, to sketch into the histories they are relating a kind of female genealogy that takes its cues from traditional antiquarian concern for what Sweet notes as "issues of property" and the tracing of generational inheritance.

As well as treating objects textually in her *Catalogue*, Hamilton recorded items of especial interest visually, pointing to a symbiotic relationship between image and text in conjuring materiality. Later inserted into the main body of the text, Hamilton used individual sheets of paper on which to record visually her expeditions into the Portland Museum. Evidence of Hamilton's process can be seen in a preparatory sketch (fig. 5.16). It is highly probable that this sort of pictorial annotation functioned as a preparatory work useful in quickly recording the details of an object during an initial encounter and to be used afterwards as a memory aid as Hamilton set about describing it in the main body of her *Catalogue*. At Bulstrode, it can be surmised, Hamilton set about sketching and annotating on paper as she gathered visual and contextual data to add into her formal work. The practice of drawing historical objects within antiquarianism denoted an informed and conscientious attendance to minute detail in keeping with the behaviour of an antiquarian fieldworker - a close focus on the physicality of the object as a means of communicating the studiousness of the observant and, crucially, reliable, scholar. Unbound in the volume, the sketch provides the basic outline of "An Ornament given by Mary Queen of Scots to the Duke of Norfolk." The corresponding formal account, most likely composed afterwards, reads:

⁵¹⁶ Lake, "History Writing and Antiquarianism," 92.

“No. 42 [...] of curious Workmanship Gold fillagree & enamelled leaves, in the Corner is a Cornchain [?] with the head of Queen Mary set in Gold which opens with a hinge, there is a Cavity to contain a Relick, on each side the head is a pretty large sapphire [?] Emerald, under it the same, & above it a Turkey Stone. There are 3 Pearls hanging Pendant, at the bottom of the Ornament. The Duke of Norfolk was an Ancestor of Lord Arundels [sic], out of whose collection this was purchased.⁵¹⁷

Beyond the typically Hamiltonian attention to the material qualities of the object, the “Gold fillagree” and “large sapphire”, the description evokes the author’s tactile encounter. Through the text, Hamilton invites her reader inside the object, opening “the head of Queen Mary” at the hinge to reveal “a Cavity”, the emptiness of which is expressed in her simple notation that the space is “to contain a Relick.” From her preparatory sketch, it is clear that the depth of the cavity in the centre of the object was an aspect Hamilton deemed important, going over the shape of the indented area in ink more than once so that the lines overlap in darkened emphasis.

Inserted elsewhere in the *Catalogue*, Hamilton dedicates an entire page, unbound in the main volume, to a large sketch of a decorative and religious object (fig. 5.17).⁵¹⁸ Fascinatingly, here she has cut the paper to reflect the shape of the object she is representing, in keeping with the practices of paper cutting at Bulstrode examined in the previous chapter and which, as I have shown, had broad aesthetic implications beyond the site of the museum itself. Here, Hamilton employs her scissors in an attempt to evoke the materiality of the object. Once again, inside the main *Catalogue*, the object is described more fully:

No. 49 A Portable Altar of Gold. Enamelled, it is done in the Oldest Style of Enamelling the Gold being first Engraved and the Colors [sic] laid on. The Coloring [sic] is transparent and beautiful. On the back is represented the Virgin Teaching our Saviour to read, on the front which is a folding door, an Apostle on each side, they have a scroll in their hands upon each of which is written an inscription[.] on the Reverse in 4 divisions are represented the Offering of the wise men.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁷ HAM/3/4, f. 109.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, f. 5.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 115.

She finishes her account by noting “In the Centre of the Altar is a large Onyx on which is sculpted in Demi Relivio the Birth of our Saviour – the Altar hangs by 3 Gold Chains to a Ring,” all of which are identifiable in the sketch. Of course, Hamilton’s sketch is rudimentary in comparison with her masterful and highly descriptive account of it in the main text. Indeed, as a visual source, it gives little of the information so carefully set down by Hamilton in words. As it is physically separate from the bound volume itself, we might inevitably conclude its role as an extra and informal illustration employed in the construction of the *Catalogue*, and not to be included in the final version. This, then, reveals much about Hamilton’s process and her intensive material and textual encounters with items in the Portland Museum.

In creating a new space for the Portland Museum, Hamilton’s *Catalogue* functioned both as a sociable object and an important record of the contents of the collection. By absorbing a number of voices (the most notable among them Horace Walpole’s) into her own prose, Hamilton was able to reflect the conversable nature of the museum, whilst also asserting her own legitimacy as an antiquarian author and connoisseur. More broadly, the *Catalogue* points to various methods used in formulating identities and narratives within the museum. Close analysis of Hamilton’s mechanisms in describing and recording objects reveals conversation, specifically the sharing of object-commentary, as central in confirming collective identities within the museum. Hamilton routinely prioritises female historical narratives, cultivating how they are materialised via objects and relics associated with women of the past. For Hamilton, these histories, textual and material, of women align with the ideals of learning, industry and craft championed by the Bluestockings.

Hamilton is fascinated with the materiality of the artworks and objects she encounters, giving over large portions of her *Catalogue* to lavish descriptions and attending closely to the details of artistic process, methods of physical composition and the recreation of dextrous experience. She presents history as affective and tangible, but also conversational. From writing-out Elizabethan texts to opening the doors of a portable altar, Hamilton engages objects she finds in the Portland Museum through models of dextrous and textual experience, and in doing so, proposes them as potential portals through which to reanimate and relive historical experience.

Chapter Six

Selling the Duchess

On 25 June 1785, the duchess of Portland, who had been suffering with an illness, sent a note to Mary Hamilton, whose wedding to John Dickenson had recently taken place. Managing to scrawl a few lines to her friend, the duchess wrote:

Accept my dearest Mrs Dickenson the sincerest wishes an affectionate heart can form for your mutual Happiness & I beg you will make my Comp^{ts} & Congratulations to Mr Dickenson [.] I am impatient to see you & hear of your future plans & flatter my self I may be a partaker of them, tho' at present the amendment is so slow I can hardly perceive I gain strength [.] My Dear Friend I can no longer hold my pen⁵²⁰

On 17 July 1785, the duchess of Portland died. Her death was marked by great loss to those around her, in particular her close female friends whose lives and labours had been so closely intertwined with the duchess's collection. Just a week after the duchess's death, Lady Anne Murray wrote to Mary Hamilton from Kenwood House, describing how "we heard the Melancholy event in the most unprepared & unexpected manner, & were as you may conceive shocked beyond expression." Continuing, Murray testified to the value of the duchess's friendship within her circle, writing "it is unnecessary to dwell upon our own feelings, because as you rightly observe, it was impossible to know the many great, admirable, & respectable qualities of our dear departed Friend, without deploring our loss, or being convinced there are few such left."⁵²¹ In a similarly emotional letter written in August, Frances Burney reported on the devastation caused by the duchess's death and felt perhaps most acutely by Mary Delany:

⁵²⁰ The duchess of Portland to Mary Hamilton, 25 June 1785. HAM/1/7/11/5.

⁵²¹ Lady Anne Murray to Mary Hamilton (then Dickenson), 21 July 1785. HAM/1/5/2/9.

Among the many inferior losses which have been included in her great and irreparable calamity, has been that of a country house for the summer, which she had in Bulstrode, and which for the half of every year was her constant home. The Duke of Portland behaved with the utmost propriety and feeling upon this occasion, and was most earnest to accommodate her to the best of his power, with every comfort to which she had been accustomed; but this noblest of women declared she loved the memory of her friend beyond all other things, and would not suffer it to be tainted in the misjudging world by an action that would be construed into a reflection upon her will, as if deficient in consideration to her. She steadily, therefore, refused all offers, though made to her with even painful earnestness, and though solicited till her refusal became a distress to herself⁵²²

Delany's "refusal" to accept the 3rd Duke's invitation to select objects from the museum as the material legacy of her relationship with the duchess, or indeed financial support, was certainly characteristic of the polite models of friendship and complex structures of class hierarchy through which her circle operated. For Delany in particular, the emotional bond shared with her friend and previously played out in the dextrous work undertaken within the collection at Bulstrode, was now ended. Terminated at the moment of the duchess's death, the museum-salon she had cultivated could no longer offer practical, tactile or emotional sustenance to the milieu that until now, had gathered around it.

The duchess's death was made all the more painful for those who survived her when no will was initially found. Just a week after the duchess had died, Sarah Scott wrote of the consequences in a letter to his sister Elizabeth Montagu: "I see by the papers that the Dowager Duchess of Portland is no more; pray she has done any thing for Mrs Delany [...] I think she must feel a good deal on the loss of her old Friend, who has been most constant to her, tho' perhaps not truly generous."⁵²³ Montagu replied to her sister:

⁵²² Frances Burney to Dr Burney, 24 August 1785, in Marjorie Fulton and David Widger eds., *The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, I (2018).

⁵²³ Sarah Scott to Elizabeth Montagu, 23 July 1785 in Nicole Pohl ed., *The Letters of Sarah Scott*, II (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 249.

I hear y^e Duchess of Portland dyed without a Will from good authority, which surprizes & grieves me & I cannot help but a Will may still be found. Her Grace surely could not forget M^{rs} Delany & she must undoubtedly have given annual sums to so many people, & it w^d be a cruelty her nature c^d not be guilty of to leave them to feel distress.⁵²⁴

The difficulty in discerning the value of the duchess's estate and in validating her many female friendships in financial or material terms was acute. For Delany in particular, to claim material or monetary remuneration seemed utterly inappropriate. Instead, the fate of the Portland Museum was to be revalued as it passed, without the discretion and leadership of its patron, into a public and commercial realm.

Beginning on 24 April 1786 and taking place over the subsequent thirty-eight days, an auction dismantled the majority of the museum, with only a few items kept back by the duchess's family. Although, during her lifetime, the duchess was an engaged member of the Bluestocking circle, unlike so many of her contemporaries like Montagu, Anna Barbauld, Hannah Moore or Elizabeth Carter, her activities were rarely reported in the press, her portrait rarely circulated and her curatorial activities confined to a closed circle of elite intellectuals. Elsewhere in her circle, celebrity had been a force to be garnered and used to advantage. Claire Brock has identified how "women came increasingly to dominate a feminized literary culture [...] and were celebrated for their achievements."⁵²⁵ However, for the duchess, whose actions as a collector and crafter existed outside of the bounds of public literary culture and whose museum-salon was highly exclusive, fame was not an invitation to personal autonomy or prolific public achievement. Rather, it was a concept to be applied after death and by those with an entirely different set of criteria and priorities; specifically, the delectation of a public, paying audience. The largest part of her museum was removed from Bulstrode to London and repositioned within the urban marketplace where fictionalised narratives of her celebrity, cultivated post-mortem, helped drive the commercial success of its auction.

Following her death, the duchess's identity as a private collector and curator was revised and reinvented, positioning her as a curiosity to be bought and sold. As Cynthia Wall has suggested, "the first fiction of an auction is often about what is (or is not)

⁵²⁴ Montagu to Scott, 14 August 1785. MO 6112, quoted in Pohl, *The Letters of Sarah Scott*, 254 – 55.

⁵²⁵ Claire Brock, *The Feminization of Fame, 1750-1830* (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2006), 1.

really there; the second is about what might (or might not) be acquired.”⁵²⁶ Reconciling inconsistencies between the lives of eighteenth-century women, and their perceived and public post-mortem legacies can be complex. Claire Brock has noted in her discussion of Catherine Macaulay’s fame, for example, that such negotiations can present “a frustrating inconvenience for historians” as the details of public and private lives were altered to support shifting and sometimes opposing narratives.⁵²⁷

This chapter positions the accompanying sale text *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum, Lately the Property of the Duchess Dowager of Portland, Deceased*, as a vital tool in understanding the auction as a cultural event, in which post-mortem narratives of celebrity were disseminated in order to drive profit.⁵²⁸ I argue that the text functioned as a point of contact between the duchess post-death and the culturally literate consumer community that grew up around the sale and which relied heavily on the *Catalogue*, as well as other printed ephemera, to inform both their perceptions of celebrity and their buying habits. Commissioned by the auctioneer, Thomas Skinner, and compiled by the collector George Humphrey and the duchess’s librarian Rev. John Lightfoot, the text reorganised the collection. It gave new meaning to the objects, unravelling previous curatorial approaches and rewriting the duchess as a saleable commodity.

The sale, which was preceded by a public exhibition, took place in the duchess’s townhouse in Privy Gardens, Whitehall (fig. 0.3) and was widely reported in daily newspapers and periodicals alike. As early as February 11, the *Morning Post* intrigued its readers with promises of a “most copious and splendid collection” which, the paper touted, contained amongst its legions of specimens “insects,” “corallines,” “petrifications,” “snuff boxes,” “pictures and prints,” “old china,” and Greek and Roman sculptures including the head of Jupiter Serapis and the widely celebrated Barberini, later Portland, vase.⁵²⁹ The house itself provided an important backdrop to the unfolding drama, with its location and illustrious associated history underscoring the prestige of the sale. Indeed, just four years earlier, the Danish zoologist Johan Christian Fabricius had revealed in a letter the surroundings of the Portland Museum, and their propensity to serve as the sites and spaces of public, national spectacle:

⁵²⁶ Cynthia Wall, “The English Auction: Narratives of Dismantlings,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31, 1 (Fall, 1997): 14.

⁵²⁷ Brock, *The Feminization of Fame*, 47.

⁵²⁸ I will refer to it hereafter as the *Catalogue*.

⁵²⁹ 11 May, 1786. *The Morning Post*.

Whitehall, the former residence of the English King but now burned down [...] the spot that is occupied indicates a vast scale, but one wing containing the treasury and several buildings at the back where the Duchess of Portland lives are all that remain. It is the same wing in which poor King Charles I was kept prisoner before his beheading. The window through which he stepped onto the scaffold was later bricked up [...] opposite the palace is the main police station, the Horse Guards and the Admiralty, the first of which contains the main entrance to St James's Park.⁵³⁰

For the public, the spectre of history loomed large, adding to the impending spectacle of the sale itself. In the eighteenth century, the auction was at once performative and fictionalised, prescribed and precarious. It presented a scene reflective of “shifting (sometimes temporary) identities.”⁵³¹ In many ways, it was an event contoured by the auctioneer and accompanying texts, advertisements and visual data that served to shape and inform the experience of the audience.

Coinciding with the increase in shopping as habitual Georgian behaviour was the explosion in the production and availability of print media. This chapter reveals how, at the auction, these two aspects of urban life combined in the form of the *Catalogue* to drive profit and reposition previously private property as public inheritance. Drawing on newspaper reports, epistolary evidence and the text itself, I map the varying ways the catalogue was disseminated and the range of responses it generated. I examine surviving copies, revealing widespread practices of marginal annotation and extra-illustration that further served to cultivate the narrative of celebrity and extend the social life of the catalogue beyond the bounds of the sale. I consider it as a multi-faceted object, a handbook, diary, inventory, advert, guidebook, manifesto and celebrity narrative that could be augmented, written in, and even absorbed into the libraries of others.

Death and the Auction

⁵³⁰ Fabricius, 10 September 1782.

⁵³¹ In *Spaces of Consumption*, Stobart, Hann and Morgan, cite the established and well-rehearsed scholarly narrative of eighteenth-century consumerism “both as a concept and as a set of practices.” Jon Stobart, Andrew Hann and Victoria Morgan *Spaces of Consumption: Leisure and Shopping in the English Town, c. 1680 – 1830* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 1.

By the latter half of the century, the private cabinets of the deceased or bankrupt elite, informed by the European *Kunstkammer* tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were increasingly being translated and dismantled in an age of commercial revolution. From the depositing of Sir Hans Sloane's collection into the newly formed British Museum in 1753, the movement of objects from private to public spaces swiftly became the norm.⁵³² The 1780s saw the disassembly of two major museums associated with individual collectors and, although the tradition of the virtuosi collector would continue into the nineteenth century, it would never regain precedence. The Holophusikon or Leverian museum, assembled by Sir Ashton Lever, was partially sold via lottery tickets in 1784, whilst 1786 saw the destruction of the Portland museum.⁵³³ With increasingly regularity, this was to become the widespread fate of the connoisseur's cabinet; in 1793 Walpole exclaimed in a letter "Who knows how soon my playthings may fall under Mr Christie's hammer!"⁵³⁴ Revealed in this pattern was the emerging, public and often commercially-driven accessibility of *things* in the latter half of the century, reflective of the fashion for object encounters and demonstrative of the public predilection for shopping as the marker of good taste.⁵³⁵ By the time of the Portland sale, the rapidly expanding material world meant that coveted goods were becoming increasingly available within the commercial sites of major urban centres, often transferred from the domestic spaces of others, in order to redefine and enhance the lives of the emerging middle classes and to provide material, social and economic legitimacy.

Increasingly, as Troy Bickham has recorded, "auctions served as ways to dispose of the goods of the deceased and bankrupt" and so were inevitably associated with the undertaking trade.⁵³⁶ Furthermore, auctioneers often doubled as cabinet and coffin makers, with their cabinets housing the goods of the dead and their coffins, the bodies; suggesting a physical as well as economic connection between death and the auction.

⁵³² For more on Sloane and the founding of the British Museum, see Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*.

⁵³³ For more on the Leverian museum, see Adrienne Kaeppler, *Holophusikon: The Leverian Museum: An Eighteenth-Century English Institution of Science, Curiosity, and Art* (Altenstadt: ZFK publishers, 2011). See also Anne Nellis Richter, "Spectacle, Exoticism, and Display in The Gentleman's House: The Fonthill Auction of 1822," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 543-563.

⁵³⁴ Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 16 July 1793, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 34, 184. Quoted in Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 167.

⁵³⁵ For more on the shopping habits of the Georgians, see Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Serena Dyer, "Shopping and the Senses: Retail, Browsing and Consumption in 18th-Century England," *History Compass* 12, 9 (2014): 694-703 and Helen Berry, "Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (Jan, 2002): 375-394.

⁵³⁶ Bickham, *Savages within the Empire*, 45.

Skinner's trade card (fig. 6.1), made in the earlier stages of his career prior to 1786, advertises his skills as a “Sworn Appraiser Who Buys and Sells all sorts of Houshold [sic] Goods. Also Cabinet Maker & Undertaker...N. B. Coffins & Shrouds Ready Made,” revealing that he too dealt in the complex administration of both the belongings and bodies of the dead. Following the death of the duchess of Portland, public speculation about the potential dismantling of her collection began almost immediately; an issue greatly exacerbated by the apparent initial failure to discover her will or other legal documentation relating to her museum. In a letter to his friend Lady Ossory, Horace Walpole (1717-1797) captured the tone of uncertainty, as well as the wider public interest in the fate of the collection in the days after the duchess’s death:

Mr Horace Walpole⁵³⁷ (not myself) called on me yesterday morning, when no will of the Duchess of Portland has been found. He thinks the bulk of the collection will be sold, but that the Duke⁵³⁸ will reserve the principal curiosities – I hope so, for I should long for some of them, and am become too poor to afford them.⁵³⁹

Tobin has noted that “when the news soon spread that all would be sold at auction, rumors circulated about her having bankrupted herself purchasing natural history specimens and *objets d’art* and the need for an auction to refill the ducal coffers.”⁵⁴⁰ As she confirms, “these rumors proved to be untrue; she had simply stipulated in her will that the auction’s proceeds were for the benefit of her younger children as her first son would inherit her several residences and estates.”⁵⁴¹

In the late Georgian period, public sales of aristocratic estates were the subject of satire, as the processes of the auction regularly exposed familial discord, private relationships or financial difficulties. Gossip grew in the weeks preceding the Portland sale, with the topics of both public and private speculation including the reasons for the auction itself, what would be sold there, and who would buy what. Famously, James Christie sold at auction a large portion of Queen Charlotte’s, belongings in several sales during the summer of 1819.⁵⁴² The prolific satirical artist George Cruikshank captured

⁵³⁷ Walpole is referring here to his cousin, Thomas Walpole, with whom he was in regular correspondence.

⁵³⁸ William Cavendish Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland (1738-1809), was the duchess’s eldest son.

⁵³⁹ Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 23 July 1793, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, 33, 484.

⁵⁴⁰ Tobin, “Virtuoso or Naturalist?” 217. See also Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 220-221.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² See Roberts, *George III & Queen Charlotte*, 385-6.

the exquisite combination of public speculation and private embarrassment that such events provoked in his *Sales By Auction!* (fig. 6.2). Following Charlotte's death, her son the Prince Regent, depicted here as the plump and ridiculous auctioneer, presented his mother's estate for sale. Behind the auctioneer's rostrum, Charlotte's daughters, luxuriant in their fine dresses, encourage a crowd of bidders in the sale of their mother's possessions, holding their hands out in supplication. The text beneath reads "Sales by Auction! – or Provident Children Disposing of their Deceased Mother's Effects for the Benefit of the Creditors!!" Meanwhile, the Prince Regent touts on tip-toe from his stand; "Poor soul she died very poor having given away all her money to charity. So pray my good people, Bid Liberally or the children will be destitute."

Crucial in disseminating narratives of commercial desirability prior to and during such sales, auction catalogues acted to shape public conversation and drive mounting competition. The authorship of the *Catalogue* has been the subject of debate amongst several historians. In his 1962 essay "The Authorship of the Portland Catalogue (1786)", S. P. Dance proposed a variety of candidates, drawing on earlier accounts to build a landscape of male collaborators who worked with or for the duchess of Portland during her lifetime and who were regular guests at Bulstrode Park. Amongst them, Dance proposed the prolific shell collector George Humphrey, and naturalist to Captain Cook, Daniel Solander.⁵⁴³ More likely, as Tobin has suggested, it was the auctioneer Thomas Skinner who oversaw the text's construction and both Humphrey and the duchess's librarian Lightfoot who executed it.⁵⁴⁴ Skinner was a prolific and successful salesman. Maintaining offices in Aldersgate Street, he was mainly an estate auctioneer, specialising in the dismantling of the houses, lands and the personal effects of his upper-class clients. As Theophilus Quin later recorded in his 1821 *Biographical Exemplar*, "there is scarcely a corner of the kingdom that has not experienced the weight of his hammer, which, like a magician's wand, could transfer the land from one owner to another."⁵⁴⁵ It is likely that Skinner dictated many of the practicalities of the sale text, including the instructive pages detailing the times and conditions of the sale. However, he understood that, in order to construct a compelling narrative of the duchess and the desirability of her collection for an auction of this scale, he would need to solicit the aid of those who had enjoyed access to the duchess's circle. He quickly turned to those who were

⁵⁴³ S. P. Dance, "The Authorship of the Portland Catalogue (1786)," *Journal of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History* 4, 1 (1962): 30.

⁵⁴⁴ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 223-230.

⁵⁴⁵ Theophilus Quin, *Biographical Exemplar; Comprising the Memoirs of Persons who Have Risen to Eminence by Industry and Perseverance in the Beneficial Occupations of Life* (London, 1821), 260.

intimately acquainted with the museum and who could be called upon to produce a convincing portrait of her post-death. Humphrey was, most likely, responsible for the references and abbreviations detailing specimens of natural history throughout the *Catalogue*, many of which were innovations in the field and introduced by the duchess and her collaborator Solander in the last years of her life.

Lightfoot had been appointed to the position of curate at Bulstrode Park in 1767, aged thirty-one, and had remained there as a librarian until the death of his patron, working closely with the collection as well as the duchess herself. His standing in the hierarchy at Bulstrode and his intimacy with the museum generally would have made him an ideal candidate to carry out the task. Following the duchess's death in July 1785, the vast assembly of objects were moved to Whitehall. During the remaining months of that year, Lightfoot moved into the building and began working to reorganise and record the museum ahead of the sale. In a letter to his friend and colleague, the Linnaean botanist James Edward Smith (1759-1828), Lightfoot wrote of his "unspeakable Loss" following the death of the duchess, continuing:

You may depend upon it that her Noble Museum will be sold by Auction in Feb and March 1786. I am appointed to assist in marking out & naming the Lots, & am to attend diligently every Day for that purpose at Whitehall whilst I am to be shut up till the Business is done, & no one's to be admitted till the whole is finished.⁵⁴⁶

As Tobin has previously highlighted "the almost giddy carnivalesque atmosphere evoked within the gossip columns of newspapers [and by the sale text], belies the real grief" felt by Lightfoot and the duchess's close associates, including her long-time companion Mary Delany.⁵⁴⁷ Instead, understanding of the duchess and her collection, its ordering and representation had begun to move towards a public-facing and semi-fictionalised reimagining. By the early months of 1786, Lightfoot and Humphrey had completed the *Catalogue*, along with a preface in which Lightfoot outlined the duchess's collecting practices and contributions. In it, he reveals something of his strategic fiction of celebrity:

⁵⁴⁶ Rev. John Lightfoot to James Edward Smith, 1 September 1785, GB-110/JES/COR/6/12. Linnaean Society Archive Online, accessed 4 October 2016.

⁵⁴⁷ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 217.

There is no one Article contained in [the catalogue] but was a Part of the Genuine Collection of the late Noble Possessor, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess Dowager of Portland. Nothing is foisted into it from the Cabinets of others; but every Subject here recorded came into her Possession, either by Inheritance, the Assistance of those who were honoured with her Friendship, or by her own Purchase and Industry.⁵⁴⁸

The Social Life of the Text

Formed of a twenty-six centimetre quarto, with frontispiece (fig. 0.1), preface and instructions for the conditions of sale, the *Catalogue* contained the descriptions of over four thousand lots. It was available for purchase at the site of the exhibition, as well as at Skinner's offices in Aldersgate Street. Each copy was given a unique number upon printing, adding to the culture of exclusivity being cultivated by Skinner both prior to and during the auction. Portable, the text could be carried around by its purchaser and displayed on their person; it marked participation in a closed and fashionable community that was swiftly building around the sale and reflective of the wider relationship between consumerism and sociability. Engagement with it provoked conversation, newspaper coverage and epistolary circulation, revealing processes of textual sociability as well as contemporary modes for disseminating notions of 'celebrity.' Beyond Wall's study of the rise of the auction house and its auctioneers in this period, very little work has been done to understand the cultural and material significance of the auction catalogue in the late eighteenth century and even less to place the Portland text within this singular genre of contemporary print culture. As Wall has argued, "through the textual structures of the catalog, a collection, a library, a house... is decontextualized, separated, reordered, and itemized" in such a way as to create and control narrative reflective of the priorities of an increasingly commercialised and urban society.⁵⁴⁹ For those participating in the Portland auction, the text provided an apparent, though quasi-fictionalised, route into the duchess's life.

⁵⁴⁸ John Lightfoot, "Preface," *Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, iv.

⁵⁴⁹ Cynthia Wall, "The English Auction," 14.

Purchased at five shillings and doubling as an admission ticket to the exhibition and sale, the *Catalogue* provided literal and textual access to the duchess's house, collection and private world. It was crucial in negotiating the redistribution of property from an elite upper class and downwards through society to a newly-moneyed middling sort in a process both interactive and engaging. Printed and sold prior to the exhibition and sale of the museum, the text was inherently public in its nature. It was a tradeable and transportable object that could be read, shared, and collected. Similarly, it was responsible for exposing and reimagining the duchess's private life and actions, serving as a tool to promote speculation and excitement, as well as competition amongst punters.

The careful arrangement of visual and textual depictions of objects, and their organisation within the catalogue, shaped how an audience might experience and understand items. Writing on the vital importance of descriptive processes at auction, Bettina Dietz has suggested that “countless descriptions of objects in the auction catalogues make it possible to assemble an idea of what an eighteenth-century [...] collector wanted to see in a *collection curieuse*: the objects selected fulfilled the criteria of being pleasing, rare, valuable and [...] beautiful.”⁵⁵⁰ The Portland catalogue certainly adheres to these principals. Epithets such as “very rare,”⁵⁵¹ “richly coloured,”⁵⁵² “singularly beautiful,”⁵⁵³ and “curious,” developed by Skinner, Humphrey and Lightfoot and perpetuated by the newspapers, were deployed in setting up the desirability of the museum's many objects as well as the wonder of the spectacle at large.⁵⁵⁴ This vocabulary acted to drive and inflate notions of value. As Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor has suggested “Eighteenth-century retailers rarely discussed specific prices in their advertisements, but over time they developed a commercial vocabulary to train potential customers in how to value the goods for sale.”⁵⁵⁵ As there were no fixed prices at the auction, hyperbole was vital in establishing competition and ensuring escalation during bidding. This portable text allowed the reader to feel part of the community growing around the sale, and fostered feelings of emotional as well as financial investment. On 8 April 1786, Walpole speculated in a letter to his cousin:

⁵⁵⁰ Dietz, “Mobile Objects,” 371.

⁵⁵¹ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 6.

⁵⁵² *Ibid*, 20.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid*, 128.

⁵⁵⁴ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 58.

⁵⁵⁵ Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, “Public Sale and Public Values in Eighteenth-Century North America,” *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 13, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 759.

The catalogue of the Duchess of Portland's collection is come out. The auction begins on the 24th. Out of the 38 days, there are but eight that exhibit anything but shells, ores, fossils, birds' eggs and natural history – and in the eighte days there are hundreds of old-fashioned snuff-boxes that were her mother's, who wore three different every week; and they probably will sell for little more than the weight of the gold [...] The Hamilton Vase is in the last day's sale – it will not, I conclude, produce half of what it cost the Duchess, unless it is sent for to the Houghton Collection in the North.⁵⁵⁶

On the first day of the Portland auction, the *Morning Chronicle* reported overcrowded and chaotic conditions as visitors squeezed themselves into the previously private spaces of the duchess's life, demonstrating what Tobin has described as “the extreme popularity of the event:”⁵⁵⁷

The crowds at the Portland Museum for the last few days have been such as made all the rooms very inconvenient [...] The numbers of catalogues already sold is far beyond all expectation; seventeen hundred or more were reported to us on Friday; and computing on the apparent demand for catalogues, it may not be much out of compass to suppose that 500 L. may arise from this part of the business. The number of people that attended the Duchess of Portland's Museum on Saturday last (being the last day of viewing) is scarce to be credited; the rooms were at once so exceedingly hot and crowded, that several ladies fainted. The sale begins this day, and in what room the auctioneer is to exhibit, our correspondent knows not, but is satisfied that the largest room in that house is much too small to contain half the persons who would wish to attend as purchasers.⁵⁵⁸

Revealed in the *Morning Chronicle's* account is a clear correlation between the widespread “demand for catalogues” and the commercial success of the sale. An ink annotation on the title page of Walpole's copy of the *Catalogue* (fig. 6.3), now housed at the Lewis Walpole Library, records that over two thousand copies were sold.⁵⁵⁹ Each sale day laid

⁵⁵⁶ Horace Walpole to Thomas Walpole, 8 April 1786, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, 36, 236.

⁵⁵⁷ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 231-232.

⁵⁵⁸ 24 April 1786, *Morning Chronicle* and *London Advertiser*.

⁵⁵⁹ Walpole's annotated copy of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, LWL 49 3902.

out in the *Catalogue* was organised to reflect the physical areas of the duchess's interior world, and was constructed in such a way as to alter the readers' perception of that space, until the mercantile fiction prioritised within the catalogue was manifest in the tactile experience of the auction-goer. Indeed, the auction text of the eighteenth century regularly operated within a “narrativized rhetoric,” one that presented “a fully imagined, fully filled domestic space.”⁵⁶⁰ Within the *Catalogue*, the rooms were assigned numbers one to eight, although sometimes the same spaces were named for their original, domestic functions. For example, the first day of the sale began in “Room No. 1,” “Room No. 4” was used for the sale of vegetables and dried flowers, whilst on the eighth day of the sale the dining room was filled with shells, exotic insects and crystals. Similarly, the *Catalogue* delineated the spatial and temporal architecture of the sale: days, hours, spaces and objects of the auction were translated into tangible, legible pieces of text. Time and things are written as compartmentalised, separated modules bringing order to the apparent chaos of the museum in its state of impermanent suspension between the duchess's death and the eager purchases of a paying public.

As Tobin has suggested “apart from those who were actively engaged in purchasing items, many people, if not most, came to look at the duchess’s things and to watch the spectacle of bidding itself.”⁵⁶¹ On 9 May 1786, the diarist Caroline Powys recorded in her journal some of the entertainments she and her young family had encountered during a visit to London:

I was scarcely enough recovered to partake of the spring diversions of London, as indeed they are now all so late, it must be a very strong constitution that can [...] To the play I went, as those are early; and I was really glad not to be deprived of again seeing Mrs. Siddons, and Jordan [...] We took Caroline (who was too young at eleven for public places), to see Sir Ashton Lever's museum, the Exhibition, the late Duchess of Portland's sale of curiosities, and the British Museum, all which highly entertained her.⁵⁶²

Although Caroline Powys had no personal connection to the duchess of Portland, her words serve to contextualise the sale of the museum within a wider landscape of cultural

⁵⁶⁰ Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 167.

⁵⁶¹ Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 233.

⁵⁶² Caroline Powys, *Passages from the diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys of Hardwick house 1756-1808* (London: Longmans, Green, 1899): 225. Also quoted in Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 233.

entertainments during this period. Powys positions the popularity and spectacle of the auction alongside competing entertainments for the same audiences who attended the theatres, museums and other urban recreations. Moreover, Powys confirms that “the late Duchess of Portland’s sale of curiosities” was positioned firmly on the agenda of the fashionable urban elite.

While Powys’s diary affirms that women attended auctions, they were unlikely to place bids themselves. Men and women could access such sales, but the processes of bidding and purchasing were masculinized, in sharp distinction to the duchess’s own collecting agency and the museum’s open access to her female friends. Of women’s experience at the auction, Lucy Peltz has suggested that “in such homosocial space, it seems unlikely that any [woman] would ever bid for themselves.”⁵⁶³ Indeed, in her study of Charlotte Sutherland’s auction-going experiences, Peltz has demonstrated that a woman at such sales might engage a man to initiate purchasing and to annotate their personal copies of accompanying catalogues so that he was “quite literally doing her bidding.”⁵⁶⁴ Where the experiences and actions of women had been central to the composition and maintenance of the Portland Museum, then, it is likely that the auction removed this model, replacing it instead with a overtly commercial and generally masculinised framework.

The *Catalogue* provoked conversation and excitement, promising exquisite and unusual treasures for sale. It also prompted satire. On 24 April, a correspondent for *The Morning Herald* reported on some of the alleged conversations overheard at the sale as visitors moved through the spaces of the museum, trying to correlate what they had seen advertised in the catalogue with what was on display before them:

“The Dutchess of Portland’s Museum was on Saturday crowded in an uncommon degree; some of the most interesting remarks in this miscellaneous assembly were, - “In which room is the walking oyster to be seen?” - “Where do they keep the Phenix’s [sic] nest with the *seven young ones*?” - “I want to have a peep at the *white black-bird*.” - “Let me come by to see that *flying lobster*!” - “They tell me there are a *pair* of shells of so curious a nature that there is only *one* in the universe.” - “Who had seen the pieces of *live marbles*” - “What I would not give to see the *nipples* of the *suckling fish*!”⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 317.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁵ 24 April 1786. *The Morning Herald*.

Such reports permeated the newspapers, as textual responses to the auction outside of the published catalogue were imbued with further narratives of celebrity, marking an intertextuality characteristic of practices within popular print culture of the period. Indeed, whole portions of Lightfoot's preface, along with descriptions of some of the more celebrated and unique lots, were taken directly from the sale text and reproduced in a number of newspapers and periodicals across Britain; thus disseminating the curated narrative of celebrity, prescribed and cultivated by Skinner, Lightfoot and Humphrey, to a wider audience keen for information about the famous sale and the details of its drama.

Augmenting this, *The Morning Herald* produced "a list of Supposed Purchasers" of each day's sale – these were, in fact, "an amusing fabrication, linking public personages with shells that they supposedly bought; many of the shell names, silly enough on their own, were put into play with real and fictional personalities."⁵⁶⁶ By 24 April, the reports adopted a particularly salacious and euphemistic tone when two aristocratic women, both associated with high-profile trials following adulterous scandals, were reported buying items from the collection. As discussed above, women were unlikely to place bids themselves, and so the assertion that certain individuals engaged in this overtly masculine process of public competition and spectacle works to further the slur on their seemingly unruly femininity. Seymour Fleming, Lady Worsley, whose elopement with Captain George Bisset of the South Hampshire Militia had seen her at the centre of a shocking court proceeding opposite her husband, Sir Richard Worsley, 7th Baronet in 1782, reportedly purchased several shells including an "Orange Wide-mouthed Cone."⁵⁶⁷ Meanwhile, at the same day's sale, Lady Anne Foley, who in 1786 was the subject of a similarly public adultery trial, reportedly bought a "Thorny Woodcock" from the duchess's shell cabinet. The public appetite for reports of who bought what continued beyond the thirty-eight days of the auction; subsequent weeks saw the publication of *A Marked Catalogue, containing the lots, what each respectively sold for, and the names of the purchasers of the four thousand two hundred and sixty-three articles. Which constituted the Portland Museum; late the property of the Duchess Dowager of Portland, deceased. Which was sold by auction by Mr. Skinner and Co., etc.* Produced as a bound quarto and advertised in the newspapers in the weeks following the auction, this text was as equally

⁵⁶⁶ For further discussion of these newspaper lists and their satirical motivations, see Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 232.
⁵⁶⁷ 25 April 1786. *The Morning Herald*. See Tobin, *The Duchess's Shells*, 232-3.

collectible as the original sale catalogue: “enabling every Connoisseur to know among whom these valuable Curiosities are distributed, and the Sum every Lot produced”⁵⁶⁸ and further ensuring the textual afterlife of the sale itself.

Such was its own celebrity that the life of the *Catalogue* as a culturally significant text extended far beyond the thirty-eight days of the auction. Copies were absorbed into the libraries of King George III, Queen Charlotte, Sir Joseph Banks, Sir John Soane, and Walpole, suggesting a much broader cultural legacy. Its value was also measured in the commercial marketplace. The table below details a number of public sales and auctions following 1786 in which the *Catalogue* was sold.

Date	Sale Catalogue	Description	Price (if known)
1790	<i>A Catalogue of Books, Prints, and Books of Prints, Mss. and Missals, Lately bought out of several Curious Libraries, in Various Languages, Arts, and Sciences, For the Year 1790.</i> London: John Simco	Lot 615. Catalogue of the Portland Museum, <i>with prices</i>	5s
1791	<i>A Catalogue of Books Comprehending many Libraries, Particularly that of Robert Butler Esq. And a General Officer, Lately Deceased.</i> London: James Robson	Lot 2269. Catalogue of the Portland Museum, <i>with the prices, neat and gilt</i>	12s
1794	<i>A Catalogue of a Very extensive and valuable collection of books.</i> London: William Otridge and Son	Lot 563. Catalogue of the Portland Museum, with the prices of what the respective Lots sold for, <i>in boards</i>	10s 6d
1798	<i>A Catalogue of a General Collection of Books, in every Branch of useful and ornamental Literature, including Several Libraries Recently Purchased,</i> London: Thomas Edgerton	Lot 2884. Kennedy’s Description of the Antiquities and Curiosities in Wilton House, <i>plates, new and neat</i> , 1786. Also, Catalogue of the Portland Museum, <i>with frontispiece, sewed</i> , 1786.	3s
1800	<i>A Catalogue of Books for the Year 1800 in Various Languages and Classes of Literature.</i> London: J. Cutchell	Lot 465. Catalogue of the Portland Museum	4s
1817	<i>A Catalogue of the Library Belonging to the Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. Vol. 3</i> Edinburgh: Alex Smellie.	Catalogue of the Portland Museum, <i>London</i> , 1786, in 4	Price unknown

Table 1. List and dates of commercial sale catalogues featuring *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*.

⁵⁶⁸ 12 June 1786, *The Times*

For future collectors, the *Catalogue* became an important work in an emerging canon of texts recording the contents of private museums and elite estates. In 1798, for example, it appeared in a lot alongside a copy of *A Description of the Antiquities and Curiosities in Wilton House*, a text detailing the antiquarian collecting of Thomas Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (1656-1733).

Text as Collage: Marginal Annotation and Extra-Illustration

The *Catalogue* allowed for active and personal engagement with the duchess's collection and, by extension, the duchess herself (as reimagined by the careful posturing of Skinner and Lightfoot). Her life, laid out in a series of objects via the text, was further interpreted and augmented through practices of annotation and extra-illustration. The ephemera circulated during and associated with the sale defined ideas of her 'celebrity' and provoked public conversation. The integration of multiple voices and authorities through the adaptation of the text in a variety of ways reflected the multi-collaborative nature of the auction process.⁵⁶⁹ Such practices empowered the purchaser to emphasise their role as participant, asserting their own experience and identity with the museum and aligning their own experience with the previous elite and closed world of the duchess.

In her extensive survey of extra-illustrative practices in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Peltz has documented its "commercial promotion and popularization," citing works such as Thomas Pennant's 1790 *Of London*, a lively antiquarian tour of the city, as especially significant in orchestrating "an exclusive, clubbable experience" among readers.⁵⁷⁰ As Peltz demonstrates, Pennant's text, of which several heavily extra-illustrated copies survive, makes "continual reference to the aristocratic and mercantile characters who have populated the city and shaped its history," revealing the potential of such works in formulating historical and celebrity

⁵⁶⁹ This was not a new phenomenon. As discussed in chapter five, the duchess's museum was subject to similar processes of multi-voice integration and authorial experiment in Mary Hamilton's *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, albeit in an unpublished work circulated amongst a select circle of the duchess's associates.

⁵⁷⁰ Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 237. See also Peltz, "A Friendly Gathering: The Social Politics of Presentation Books and their Extra-Illustration in Horace Walpole's Circle," *Journal of the History of Collections* (2006): 1-17.

narratives for a public and largely amateur demographic.⁵⁷¹ In this way, the *Catalogue* offered a completely artificial reality; one in which narrative was cultivated and where the purchaser was enabled to feel invested in and as contributing to the collection. Certainly, extra-illustrated volumes were often tied into notions of personal and communal identities. Peltz highlights, for example, “the convention of naming extra-illustrated books according to the collector who compiled them” as a means of denoting the superimposition of new authorship over pre-made, usually printed, texts.⁵⁷² Furthermore, Peltz claims that the “cultural authority of the amateur” was a “social archetype that was key to the development of extra-illustration” and that its role in recording the reading and consuming of works can be particularly associated with “polite masculine identity.”⁵⁷³ This is far from the feminized practices I have examined elsewhere and can helpfully demonstrate the shifting status of the Portland Museum in 1785 – 6, as it moved further away from the Bluestocking salon culture in which it had thrived, dominated by intellectual women, and toward a genteel and overtly public identity as prioritised through largely masculinised systems of valuation and augmentation.

The frontispiece of the *Catalogue* is the only surviving visual record of the collection prior to its dismantling at auction and was engraved by Charles Grignion after the artist Edward Francis Burney. Its absence from many of the surviving copies of the text suggests its agency as a separately collectible item which could be removed and treasured, shared and traded by any catalogue owner. Far from an accurate representation of the collection as it would have appeared in Whitehall following the duchess’s death, it serves instead as an advertisement. It is rich in its texturing; layers of objects and materials are piled before the viewer’s eyes, with shells creeping out of exposed drawers, corallines perched atop cabinets and ornate porcelain gathered on the floor amongst leather-bound albums. Burney, who was the cousin of the novelist Frances Burney, had enrolled as a pupil at the Royal Academy in 1776, where he studied until the mid-1780s. He was a prolific draughtsman, his work regularly used to illustrate books and pamphlets. As Patricia Crown has previously identified, in the period from 1780 (when the Royal Academy moved from Old to New Somerset House) until 1784, Burney was engaged in sketching the institution’s collections and in recording, both

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid, 64.

visually and textually, each exhibition.⁵⁷⁴ His rendering of the Portland museum owes much to his experiences and artistic encounters at the Academy and reveals his interest in depicting objects, comparing and contrasting textures and in his ability to prioritise and emphasise certain features within the narrative of each assembly.

Although Burney later reworked his exhibitions sketches into more substantial visual records of the same displays, it is likely that his initial drawings were used for journalistic purposes also. Crown has revealed that “In the 1780s Edwards Burney’s cousin Charles Burney, D. D., was an editor of the newly founded *London Magazine*,” suggesting that, as “the periodical published short reviews of the Royal Academy Exhibitions [...] it is possible that one of the purposes of [Burney’s sketches] was to be a sort of reporter’s notebook.”⁵⁷⁵ Certainly, his rendering of the Portland museum worked in much the same way. Here, it functioned to give a journalistic impression of the lots of offer, extending the narrative of the text itself and perpetuating visually an impression of the duchess’s museum as one of spectacular variety and abundance.

A large number of the surviving Portland catalogues contain extensive marginalia and handwritten annotations, suggesting these practices were commonplace at such sales and that purchasers of the text felt able to write in and alter their copies. Peltz has argued of extra-illustrated and annotated copies of Granger’s *Biographical History of England* (first published in 1769) that “if marginal annotation served as a useful filing and retrieval system for private study, it also represented a degree of audience complicity with the book as a platform for performative exchange between the like-minded.”⁵⁷⁶ Although in many of the surviving Portland catalogues the names of the original owners have now been lost to us, their notes and sketches reveal intimate and personal records of experience and interaction at the auction. Details of the names of those bidders who won goods were usually inserted at the edges of the pages, next to the printed description of the corresponding lots. These surviving copies can be read as interactive, rather than static texts - made up of collaborative voices which, if observed together, can reveal different experiences, and, often, vantage points within the auction. Many of the surviving copies, including those at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Sir John Soane’s Museum and the National Library of Australia, show this practice. Marginal annotation, then, was a way of personally extending and continuing

⁵⁷⁴ Patricia Crown, “An Album of Sketches from the Royal Academy Exhibitions of 1780-1784,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 44 (1980): 60-6.

⁵⁷⁵ Crown, “An Album of Sketches,” 61.

⁵⁷⁶ Peltz, *Facing the Text*, 65.

the narrative offered in the text. Sir John Soane augmented his copy of the catalogue with architectural pencil sketches on the final pages, suggesting its use as a scrapbook, or visual, as well as textual diary.⁵⁷⁷ Adding information and representing the drama of the unfolding sale alongside of and amongst the printed text offered a method of (auto)biographical writing and object narration. Material histories, and their future trajectories, could be represented through a lens that sets the annotator at the centre of that action.

The assertion of alternative or extra authorial voices within the text is most emphatically evident in Walpole's copy of the catalogue.⁵⁷⁸ Luisa Calè has noted how, for Walpole, the catalogue of a dispersed collection held particular attraction in its potential to evoke a legacy of historical narrative and imagination.⁵⁷⁹ Through marginal annotation (fig. 6.4) and extra-illustration, he incorporated his own voice into that of the printed catalogue, revealing his experience and authority within the unfolding action. Bound between marbled boards, Walpole's copy of the *Catalogue* is annotated throughout. For example, on the twenty-seventh day of the sale, next to lot 2918, "The Works of Hollar, comprise in 13 folio volumes," Walpole notes a remarkable sale price of £385. Although the printed description of the lot describes how the works were "collected by her Grace in the most liberal manner, at an intense expense," Walpole augments the information, adding "but afterwards sold to Lord Somers for 300£." Of lot 2941, "the portrait of La Duchesse de la Valiere, when in the height of her beauty, enamelled by Petitot, extremely fine in an ebony frame," Walpole claims in a lengthy annotation at the base of the page, "This is not the Duchess de la Valiere, nor was painted by Petitot. It was offered to me for about 12 guinease, and I wd not buy it, nor was it then named. The possessor then christened it & sold it to the Duchess of Portland. I don't know for how much, but I know it is not worth five guineas."

Arranged alongside the main *Catalogue* is a handwritten account of the duchess's life and collecting habits, written over four sides of a quarto and functioning as a personalised preface, was inserted by Walpole (fig. 6.5).⁵⁸⁰ This serves to augment the sale catalogue both textually and physically. Here, Walpole gives a survey of the types of

⁵⁷⁷ I am grateful to Dr Frances Sands, Curator of Drawings and Books at Sir John Soane's Museum, for her insights into Soane's copy of the catalogue. Soane was a regular attendee of auctions in this period and, with paper an expensive and valuable commodity, it is unclear whether this sketch was completed during the Portland auction or, at a later date and different location.

⁵⁷⁸ Walpole's copy of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, IWL 49 3902.

⁵⁷⁹ Luisa Calè, "Horace Walpole's Dream: Remembering the Dispersed Collection," *Critical Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2013): 42-53.

⁵⁸⁰ This was later published by W. S. Lewis as *The Duchess of Portland's Museum by Horace Walpole* (New York: The Grolier Club, 1936).

objects collected: “At first her Taste was chiefly confined to Shells, Japan & old China, particularly of the blue & white with a brown Edge, of which last sort She formed a large Closet at Bulstrode.”

Elsewhere, he condemns her methods of acquiring art works, and her apparent lack of financial restraint, describing how “Prints of Hollar, to compleat his work, She bought at any price. On the death or Sr Luke Schaub the Duchess began to buy pictures, which She did not understand, & there & in other instances paid extravagantly.” He continues that “Latterly She went deeply into natural history, & her Collection in that Walk was supposed to have cost her fifteen thousand pounds.” Certainly, Walpole’s vocabulary in depicting the duchess’s collecting practices is one concerned with monetary value and the duchess’s own seemingly insatiable lust for objects whose real, artistic or historical worth which, according to Walpole, she did not know.

Of the sale, he wrote; “The Collection was accordingly sold in May & June 1786, in a Sale of thirty-eight days [...] the Produce of the Auction was Ten thousand nine hundred sixty five pounds ten shillings & six pence.” Crucially, he noted “the disproportion between the large Sum which the Duchess had expended, and the produce of the Sale was not near so great as it seemed. Several of the most valuable articles in her Collection were not exposed for Sale.” Here, his choice of “exposed” touches on contemporary anxieties about the public and potentially embarrassing, revealing nature of the auction.

Also for sale during the auction were printed portraits of the duchess and some of her most celebrated objects. Many such works were collected as paper extensions of the museum and regularly inserted into the catalogue, marking what Murphy and O’Driscoll have termed the “interplay of text and image that marks so much of the material” in this period.⁵⁸¹ On April 25, *The Morning Herald* advertised “A Portrait of the late Dutchess Dowager of Portland, from a Marble Bust, executed by Rysbrack.”⁵⁸² Sold by the print maker George Humphrey at a cost of 1s 6d, this engraving was produced in quarto, matching the size and shape of the catalogue suggesting that, despite being made and sold separately from the *Catalogue*, it was intended to speak to and even be inserted inside it.⁵⁸³ This image was quickly circulated amongst those interested in the sale –

⁵⁸¹ Kevin Murphy and Sally O’Driscoll eds., *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), 2.

⁵⁸² April 25, 1786, *The Morning Herald*.

⁵⁸³ Tobin, *The Duchess’s Shells*, 230-231.

despite the fact that the bust itself was sculpted in 1727 and depicted the duchess at the age of twelve, it served to inform an eager public previously unfamiliar with her appearance. The image depicts the duchess as the elevated subject of classical antiquity. In line with contemporary modes of portraying cultural elites as busts, the duchess is memorialised through sculpture.⁵⁸⁴ And yet, as a disarticulated head and shoulders, the duchess is twice removed from the auction audience through sculpture and later engraving, thus rendered a tantalising, yet untouchable celebrity. Furthermore, the duchess's bust is placed on a table behind a retractable curtain, where she becomes akin to a curiosity in her own museum and placed on display for the pleasure of a viewing public. Highly collectable, Walpole pasted a copy of the print into his own *Catalogue* (fig. 6.6). Similarly, a copy survives at the National Portrait Gallery in London where it was bound within an extra-illustrated copy of the *Early Diary of Frances Burney 1768-78 and Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay 1778-1840*, formed of 25 folio volumes and featuring images of individuals and places written about by Burney including Alexander Pope, John Locke and Daniel Solander.

Alongside the engraved portrait of the duchess, bidders at the sale could also purchase similarly produced images of the Portland vase, the penultimate lot of the sale and its most famous object. The detailed description of the vase in the sale text identified both its material singularity and its intriguing provenance:

*The most celebrated antique VASE, or SEPULCHRAL URN, from the Barberini cabinet, at Rome. It is the identical urn which contained the ashes of the Roman emperor ALEXANDER SEVERUS, and his mother MAMMEA, which was deposited in the earth about the year 235 after CHRIST, and was dug up by order of POPE BARBERINI, named URBAN VIII. between the years 1623 and 1644.*⁵⁸⁵

Known originally as the Barberini vase, the duchess had purchased it just a year earlier from Sir William Hamilton, in the secret negotiations managed by Mary Hamilton and the subject of chapter two.⁵⁸⁶ Sir William had, in 1785, commissioned engravings of it by

⁵⁸⁴ Alison Yarrington has highlighted the use of busts in portraying elite women, noting in particular Anne Damer's busts of Mary Siddons, Lady Aylesbury and Lady Melbourne. See "Anne Seymour Damer: A Sculptor of 'Republican Perfection'" in *Bluestockings Displayed*, 81-122.

⁵⁸⁵ *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 194.

⁵⁸⁶ For more on Sir William Hamilton's career as an antiquarian and collector, see Ian Jenkins and Kim Sloan, *Vases and Volcanoes: Sir William Hamilton and his collection* (London: British Museum Press, 1996). Also Nancy H. Ramage, "Sir William Hamilton as Collector, Exporter, and Dealer: The Acquisition and Dispersal of His Collections", *American Journal of Archaeology* 94, no. 3 (Jul., 1990): 469-80.

Cipriani, after the artist Bartolozzi, which were in public circulation by the time of the auction.⁵⁸⁷ Although included in the *Catalogue* for public sale, the vase itself was bought back by the 3rd Duke of Portland for 980 guineas in the final, dramatic moments of the sale. Its significance as an artwork worthy of shaping the tastes and aspirations of an emerging British middle class was confirmed when, just days after the auction, the Duke loaned the vase to the industrialist Josiah Wedgwood. Wedgwood went on to reproduce the vase in Jasperware, confirming the shifting perceptions of this rare antiquity - and jewel of the Portland collection – following the auction in 1786 into the realms of an evolving commercialism and wider public consciousness that saw the duchess's museum materially reproduced for a middling audience.⁵⁸⁸

In a letter to Sir William recounting its arrival at his factory in Etruria, Wedgwood recognised the auction as the moment in which the vase's name and association with the Barberini cabinet in Rome shifted to that of the Portland dynasty:

You will be pleased I am sure, to hear what a treasure is just now put into my hands, I mean the exquisite Barberini vase with which you enriched this island, and which, now that we may call it the Portland vase, I hope will never depart from it. His Grace the Duke of Portland being the purchaser at the sale of his Late Mother's museum, has generously lent it to me to copy⁵⁸⁹

As I have discussed in chapter two, for Sir William the vase had the potential to reshape and inform British art. Its presence in the duchess's museum and the sale text, then, confirmed her reputation as a connoisseur which, in turn, served to generate more competition at the sale. Bidders were keen to learn from and emulate her taste. The vase's provenance and its arrival in Britain had been the focus of much public gossip. By early 1786, it was reported in several London newspapers that its movement into the duchess's museum had been a secret, revealed only as the *Catalogue* emerged. The cloud of speculation surrounding the object was confirmed by Walpole who wrote in a letter "I have heard [...] that Sir William Hamilton's renowned Vase, which had disappeared with so much mystery, is again discovered; not in the tomb but the Treasury of the

⁵⁸⁷ For a comprehensive history of the vase, see Susan Walker, *The Portland Vase* (London: British Museum Press, 2004). For more on its arrival in Britain and its association with Sir William Hamilton, see Kenneth Painter and David Whitehouse, "The Vase in England, 1780-1800," *Journal of Glass Studies*, 32 (1990): 27-61.

⁵⁸⁸ For more on Wedgwood's recreation of the vase, Walker, *The Portland Vase*, 31-40.

⁵⁸⁹ Josiah Wedgwood to Sir William Hamilton, 24 June 1786. 18976-26 vs.11, Wedgwood Museum Archives, Staffordshire.

Duchess of Portland.”⁵⁹⁰ Walpole’s allusion to both the “tomb” and “treasury” of the duchess captured a key element of the auction and its fiction of celebrity – namely, the close relationship between the duchess in death and her material possessions. In many ways, the sale at Whitehall, with the objects of her life laid out for public viewing, served as a kind of fluid, temporary mausoleum, a memorial to her life as a collector immortalised in print, and a material embodiment of her death reimagined for the purposes of commerce. By the beginning of the sale, it was clear that the vase, itself a celebrity, had become synonymous with the duchess, taking on her familial name, representing her collecting habits and conjuring notions of matriarchal demise. Indeed, Clare Barlow has convincingly discussed Bluestocking portraiture of the latter half of the eighteenth century in terms of the objects associated with individual women which, Barlow suggests, were regularly used as signifiers of their contributions and activities.⁵⁹¹ In particular, Barlow suggests, the evocation of the Roman matron was widely discussed in relation to intellectual and public women of the period, citing Katherine Read’s portrait of Elizabeth Carter (c.1785) in which she is shown in the “costume and long veil” of a Roman woman.⁵⁹²

Identified as a Roman funerary urn containing the ashes of Mammea, the mother of the emperor Alexander Severus and discovered within their joint tomb outside Rome, the Portland vase summoned, in 1786, ideas of the materiality of matriarchal death. The importance of the vase within both the sale and its accompanying text was similarly indicated in the frontispiece of the *Catalogue* where, Susan Walker has previously highlighted, “the objects are scaled according to the value rather than their actual size, the Portland Vase thereby acquiring dominance far beyond its natural measurements.”⁵⁹³ Represented visually at the start of the *Catalogue* and textually on its final page, the vase framed the sale, contouring its textual architecture and evoking the presence of the bodily-absent duchess. In one copy, the purchaser inserted a copy of one of Cipriani’s engravings of the vase alongside the final page of the sale text (fig. 6.7), revealing an intertextuality in collecting and displaying accounts of the vase as well as the flexibility of the *Catalogue* as a scrapbook and personalised record of the auction experience.

⁵⁹⁰ Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 10 August 1785, in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, 33, 486.

⁵⁹¹ Clare Barlow, “Virtue, patriotism and female scholarship in Bluestocking portraiture,” in *Bluestockings Displayed*, 60–80.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁹³ Walker, *The Portland Vase*, 22.

The auction was an immersive experience that invited its participants into the duchess's world. Its structures and procedures provided spatial and financial articulation of the duchess's posthumous celebrity, displaying and measuring, ordering and recasting her activities, tastes, friendships, expenditure and choices in material and monetary terms. The *Catalogue* acted as a ticket to an imagined world, transforming elite female experience into a saleable and, crucially, purchasable commodity. Furthermore, the text invited purchasers to comment on and augment the narrative of celebrity submitted by the organisers of the sale through processes of marginal annotation. Commentators could note the extent and quality of the collection and the financial and connoisseurial decisions of its collector. Similarly, engraved images of the duchess and her most celebrated objects sold during the sale provided spectators with a set of carefully manipulated visual data that served to inextricably unite collection and collector, confirming the opportunity to purchase items from the museum and, in doing so, possess a piece of the duchess herself. When used in practices of extra-illustration, such material could prove (imagined) proximity and connection to the famed duchess. Beyond the careful focus on the duchess herself, the *Catalogue* and the accompanied press were concerned with broader notions of female celebrity. Newspapers parodied prose from the *Catalogue* in order to report on various high-profile women in attendance at the auction, transforming whole portions of the text and inserting overtly sexualised and gendered language referencing the personal lives of individuals including Lady Foley and Lady Worsley. Elsewhere at the auction narratives of female learning, closely associated with public perceptions of the Bluestocking group of which the duchess was part, were deployed in building the duchess's reputation as a discerning collector and in aligning objects in her possession, most notably the Portland vase, with the material implications of her death.

It is clear that, following her death, the duchess's selection and patronage of objects were important factors in confirming public notions of both the significance of the collection before her demise, and the saleability of it afterwards. Collectors, connoisseurs and tourists flocked to London, drawn by the possibility of owning a small part of this famous museum. The *Catalogue* functioned as an inventory of the duchess's collection and as a vehicle for her post-mortem celebrity, providing an account of her life, her wealth and her networks of both object exchange and social interaction. Formed across the sale text and subsequent newspaper accounts drawn from it, a

carefully constructed narrative of elite acquisition and voracious collecting was presented by the auctioneer Skinner and a cast of the duchess's close associates and disseminated through epistolary and gossip networks. Now those across the upper and middle classes were able to comment on and even purchase objects associated with a previously undisclosed life now laid out textually and materially.

Textual and ephemeral representations of the duchess and her museum communicated the opulence and exoticism of her collection. Moreover, they made available the obscurities of her life, turning them into potential topics for gossip and speculation. The *Catalogue* provided the foundations of such accounts, with daily newspapers and periodicals borrowing whole sections of text, descriptions of objects and biographical details. Through purchase of the *Catalogue*, buyers were essentially able to hold the entire museum in their hands, consuming it both physically and intellectually. This document was bought, shared, transported, reproduced, written on, extra-illustrated and absorbed into private libraries. It was simultaneously instructive and accommodating; it provided structure and information whilst at the same time, could be appropriated and altered to serve the individual. As a mass-printed text, it proposed a group identity to its readership. For five shillings and the effort of leafing through its pages, any reader was automatically included in the newly established community surrounding the sale. At the same time, the private act of reading the text, coupled with the practise of annotating the margins, allowed its pages to become the record of personal and intimate experience, where encounters between individuals and objects marked across the pages. For many, this text served as a ticket into a previously undisclosed world of elite luxury; encountering and purchasing the objects described in the catalogue allowed transcendence of the boundary between the real-life and the literary. In this context, the *Catalogue* acted as a souvenir to be both read and consumed, but also to be saved, collected and possessed as an important extension of the Portland Museum and its patron.

Conclusion

This thesis opened with a challenge to the previously well-established narrative of the Portland Museum as a chaotic, insubstantial and ill-fated collection existing fleetingly under the patronage of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, duchess of Portland before its dismantling at auction in 1786. It contests common and mis-informed histories of the museum, first laid down by Horace Walpole in his comments on its patron and perpetuated by scholars such as W.S. Lewis and Geoffrey Edmunds in the twentieth century.⁵⁹⁴ Instead, I have sought to re-establish the Portland Museum as an important and influential collection, proposing the study of material and literary works by its community of contributors as vital in advancing our understanding of (art) historiographical discourse and practices of collection and display within the Bluestocking group. Building on scholarship emerging from the ‘material turn’ by those including Amanda Vickery, Vicky Coltman, Beth Fowkes Tobin and Maureen Daly Goggin, Chloe Wigston Smith and Elizabeth Eger, this study introduces previously unknown or neglected sources alongside sources known to Bluestocking scholars useful in recovering the voices of individual and subsets of women within the duchess’s circle.

Contesting previous scholarship that has portrayed the duchess as a virtuosic and indiscriminating collector of ‘curiosities’, this thesis represents the first sustained study of the museum in relation to the Bluestockings. A feminist reading of its history, this study asserts women’s narratives within the museum as both a physical and conceptual space in the eighteenth century. This study owes much to Tobin’s *The Duchess’s Shells*, a crucial work that asserted the importance of the duchess’s museum and which has paved the way for future scholarship. Taking up Tobin’s invitation, I have sought to augment our perspective on the Portland Museum, expanding my enquiry beyond the duchess as a natural history practitioner. Instead, I reposition her as both a collector and salon hostess, whose broad collection of natural history specimens,

⁵⁹⁴ Walpole to Lady Ossory, 19 Aug 1785. In *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence*, vol. 33, 489.; W. S. Lewis, “Introduction” in *The Duchess of Portland’s Museum*, v; G. C. Edmonds and Aubrey Baker, *A History of Chalfont St. Peter & Gerrards Cross*, 136.

art works and antiquities provided a rich environment that provoked conversational, literary and material response from those who came into contact with it. I have demonstrated the significance of the Portland Museum to our understanding of models of collecting, knowledge-making and material culture within this group of mid-late eighteenth-century women. Expanding in particular on Eger's assertion of the importance of the material turn in establishing frameworks of sociability and conversation in the Bluestocking salons, I position the duchess's collection as an extension of that model, as a space in which the traditional Bluestocking economies of conversation were enacted through collecting and craft practices.⁵⁹⁵ As well as uncovering the physical spaces of the museum, where visitors experienced dextrous, visual and intellectual debate, this study turned to catalogue manuscripts, crafted objects, letters, journals, albums and folios (many of which have received no previous scholarly attention), all of which served to expand the museum beyond its collected objects, extending it conceptually as well as physically.

I have argued that the collection, although owned by one woman, was articulated by a polyvocal collective of women. My study has sought to investigate the self-conscious and collective formation of an intellectual and creative milieu through the material and textual productions of its members, turning to ephemeral and overlooked intermedia productions to uncover a rich and active circle. Cynthia Wall has discussed the function of diaries and other "occasional meditations" in registering and interpreting "the things of the world into patterns and text."⁵⁹⁶ Beyond the established readings of the taxonomic systems of information and object management that have characterised the historiographies of contemporaneous collectors, I have considered collagic and composite forms, life-writing and domestic craft as legitimate forms of collection commentary and knowledge generation within the duchess of Portland's circle. Of the works I examined in this thesis, most were made within the environments of the museum itself, incorporating found and collected items from its cabinets into reformulated products representative of those same encounters. Within the duchess's museum, collaboration became commonplace as economies of gifting and exchange (of both materials and skills) governed production. Ideals of polite sociability were inscribed in practices of dextrous labour and manifested in the physical result.

⁵⁹⁵ Eger ed., *Bluestockings Displayed*.

⁵⁹⁶ Cynthia Wall, *The Prose of Things*, 3.

This study focused on the physical records of these processes, of subjective, exploratory and lived experience. I selected materials that are at once interpretive and to be interpreted as evidence of an ephemeral encounter and simultaneously the manifestation of thought, emotion and action. Material productions of this kind, such as those formulated at Bulstrode, were often the result of elite female industry and sit within the complex space between the collected object itself and its formal record. This is an area that has previously occupied Vicky Coltman, who proposes a reading of this problematic relationship through the concept of “immaterial culture [...] [a] shared objectscape between material culture and history of art based on the idea of the anticipatory or phantom object that survives not in its definitive material form, but via its representation in material traces, or in other forms of cultural expression.”⁵⁹⁷ Indeed, whilst the objects I examined are certainly materially present, they are often interpretive responses to separate and absent objects from the duchess’s collection.

In broadening our perspective on the interconnectedness of the Portland Museum, this study has revealed the duchess’s collection to be the product of various cross-site, cross-rank and intergenerational collaborations ranging across important groups and institutions in contemporaneous British culture. The duchess and her circle were intrinsically invested in a number of culturally influential public and private spheres in British society, including the Bluestocking group, the royal court, and institutions like the Society of Antiquaries and the British Museum. As a natural history collector, the duchess of Portland relied on trans-global networks of material exchange, turning to associates including Captain James Cook, Sir Joseph Banks and the male relatives of many of her circle enlisted in the British navy and serving in territories of ecological and ethnographic interest. As natural history and ethnographic objects were gathered at Bulstrode Park, the global collided with the domestic. Through craftwork, specimens were transformed at the hands of women intent of producing a localised, specifically female, and overtly Bluestocking identity.

I have sought to establish the duchess of Portland as a significant member of the Bluestocking circle, emphasising her connections with well-known figures such as Elizabeth Montagu, Mary Delany and Elizabeth Vesey, while also revealing her patronage of less-established members of the milieu, including Mary Hamilton. Furthermore, I have shown how, towards the 1780s, the productive female community

⁵⁹⁷ Vicky Coltman, “Im-material Culture and History of Art(efacts),” in A. Gerritsen & G. Riello eds. *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014): 17-32.

at Bulstrode became intertwined with that of the royal court. The royal family were regular visitors to Bulstrode and contributors to the collections there. As I have shown, the interest of George III and, most particularly, Queen Charlotte in the Portland Museum led to material exchanges between the royals and the duchess's circle. The queen's close friendship with Mary Delany, explored in chapter three, saw the development of a shared aesthetic language and the routine exchange between Bulstrode and Windsor of tools and skills useful in domestic craft. The visual and material interests of Delany's art, born from the duchess's collection, permeated that of the royal women for generations after the museum itself had been dismantled.

Similarly, the duchess of Portland maintained important connections with a number of male-dominated institutions in London during the period with which this study is concerned, making significant, though largely invisible, contributions to national cultural life. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, she had clear links to the British Museum and acted as consultant in the selection of new trustees, while her connections with keepers of the collections there meant it was often through application to her that antiquarian scholars could gain access. In her purchase of the Portland vase, negotiated in secret by Mary Hamilton, the duchess sought to align her acquisitional priorities with those of her male contemporaries operating in the city's networks of antiquity exchange. In doing so, she contested popular notions of the antiquarian as overtly masculine, instead asserting herself and those women in her circle as informed assessors of art historical value. In her contact with Sir William Hamilton, the duchess intercepted and contributed to important art historical debates taking place across organisations including the Society of Antiquaries. Furthermore, she enabled the development and involvement of those in her circle. For Mary Hamilton, the duchess's acquisition of the vase represented an almost-unprecedented opportunity to negotiate the spaces and networks of antiquarian knowledge and collecting that were usually closed to women. Indeed, for Hamilton, the Portland Museum was central to her development as an antiquarian writer. As discussed in chapter five, Hamilton's *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode* survives as an important example of women's history writing at the end of the eighteenth century, as well as a significant record of items in the museum that have elsewhere been lost from its history.

As the final chapter of this thesis attests, the auction of 1786 represented an irreversible shift in cultural perspective on the Portland Museum, as well as the literary and material conversations surrounding it. Although processes of textual and physical

augmentation were still applied to the collection via the sale catalogue, the practitioners of this type of work had changed. From the moment of the duchess's death, the previously closed set of elite friends and associates chosen by the duchess herself to commentate her collection were disbanded, replaced by members of the buying public who used the sale text as a space in which to extend narratives of commercialism and celebrity, and to validate their own amateur antiquarian and connoisseurial identities.

The rich complexities of the Portland Museum, and the networks that sustained it, continue to inspire women artists. In 2009, Jane Wildgoose produced a work titled *Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship & The Order of Things: An Installation by Jane Wildgoose in Celebration of the Friendship between Mrs. Mary Delany & The Duchess Dowager of Portland* (fig. 7.1).⁵⁹⁸ Displayed alongside the *Mrs Delany & Her Circle* exhibition at Yale Centre for British Art, the work gathered together natural history specimens, books, manuscripts and newly-made art works to present “a memorial tribute” to the collaborative and deeply intimate relationship between Delany and the duchess.⁵⁹⁹ The accompanying catalogue, which takes its cue from the 1786 sale text, demonstrates the ongoing potential for the kind of visual and textual response to the museum discussed in this thesis, resituating these feminized and previously invisible models of interpretation in modern art practice. Wildgoose describes how her interest in the two women found expression in “the themes of order and nature, creating decorative assemblages celebrating its beauty, and integrating all within the objectscape of the domestic environment.”⁶⁰⁰ In examining the objects that might furnish her reimagining of their friendship, Wildgoose looked to the “combination of nature and decorative order” that best expressed it.

⁵⁹⁸ See Jane Wildgoose, *Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship & The Order of Things: An Installation by Jane Wildgoose in Celebration of the Friendship between Mrs. Mary Delany & The Duchess Dowager of Portland* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2009).

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

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- 8-9 - Correspondence from Mrs. Elizabeth Elstob to Duchess of Portland
- 14-29 - Correspondence from John Lightfoot to Duchess of Portland
- 30-57 - Correspondence from Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu to Duchess of Portland
- 58 - Letter from Jean Pellet to Duchess of Portland
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Illustrations



Fig. 0.1 Charles Grignion after Edward Francis Burney, frontispiece to *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 1786. LWL 49 3902. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.



Fig. 0.2 Samuel Hieronymus Grimm, *Bulstrode, the Seat of the Dowager Duchess of Portland*, 7 May 1781. Ink wash on paper, 17.4 x 26.3 cm. © British Library Board, K Top Vol. 8, 11.1a.

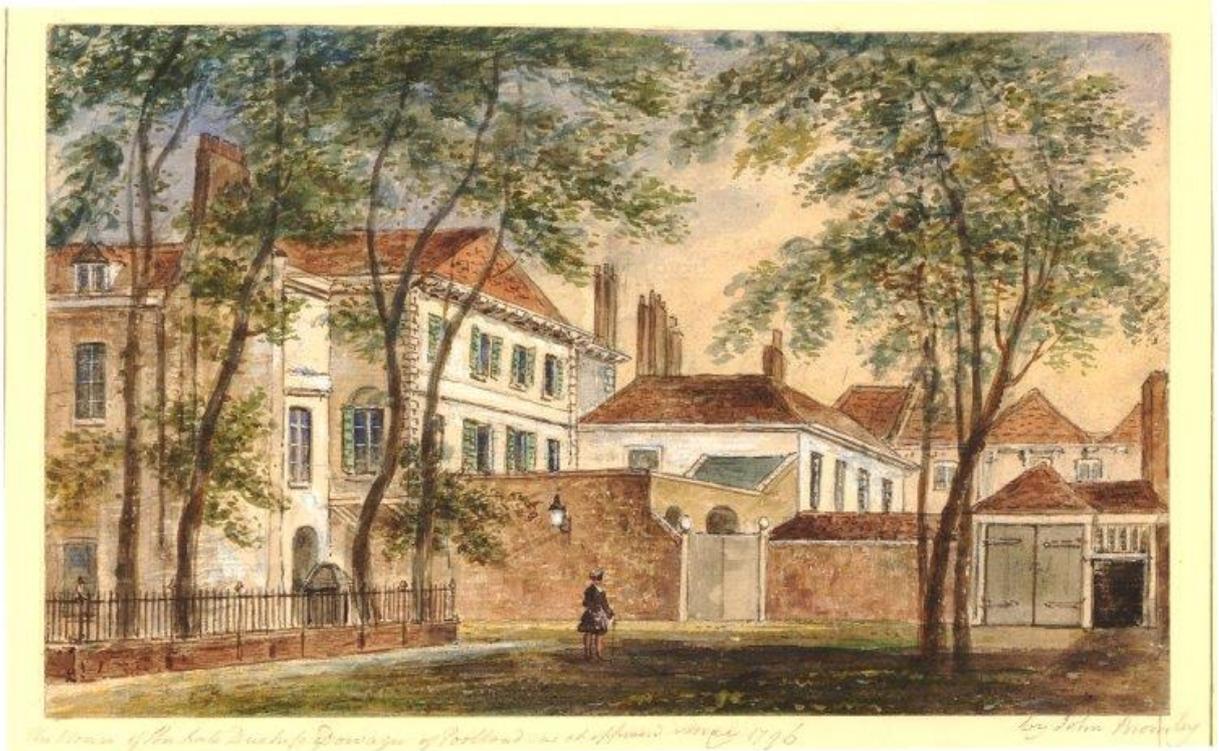


Fig. 0. 3 John Bromley, *View of the house and museum of the duchess of Portland in the Privy Garden, Whitehall, 1796*. Watercolour on paper, 14.1 x 23.1cm. Inscription at the bottom reads "The House of the Late Dowager Duchess of Portland as it appeared in May 1796, by John Bromley." © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 0.4 Mary Delany, *Spiraea*, 1788. Collage of coloured papers, with bodycolour and watercolour, on black ink background. 35.2 x 22.9 cm. © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 0.5 Sarah Sophia Banks, First page of a folded sheet, ten decorated visiting cards of thanks, all within rectangular borders; inscribed and lettered; dated by Banks between 1779-1793. © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 0.6 Unknown maker, *The Portland Vase*, c. 1 – 25 AD. Glass, 24.5 x 17.7 cm. ©Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 0.7 Christian Friedrich Zincke, *Gold box decorated with an enamel miniature of Lady Margaret Harley and Edward Harley, Lord Oxford, 1727*. The Portland Collection.



Fig. 0.8 Christian Friedrich Zincke, *Portrait of Margaret Cavendish Bentick, duchess of Portland*, c. 1750. Enamel miniature. The Portland Collection.



Fig. 0.9 George Vertue after a painting by Zincke, *Portrait busts of William Bentinck, 2nd Duke of Portland, at centre, his wife Margaret Cavendish Harley at left, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu at right, in ovals, with coats of arms below, allegorical objects between, curtains at left and above, in ornamental frame, 1739.* Stipple, etching and engraving, 240 x 345 mm. © The Trustees of the British Museum

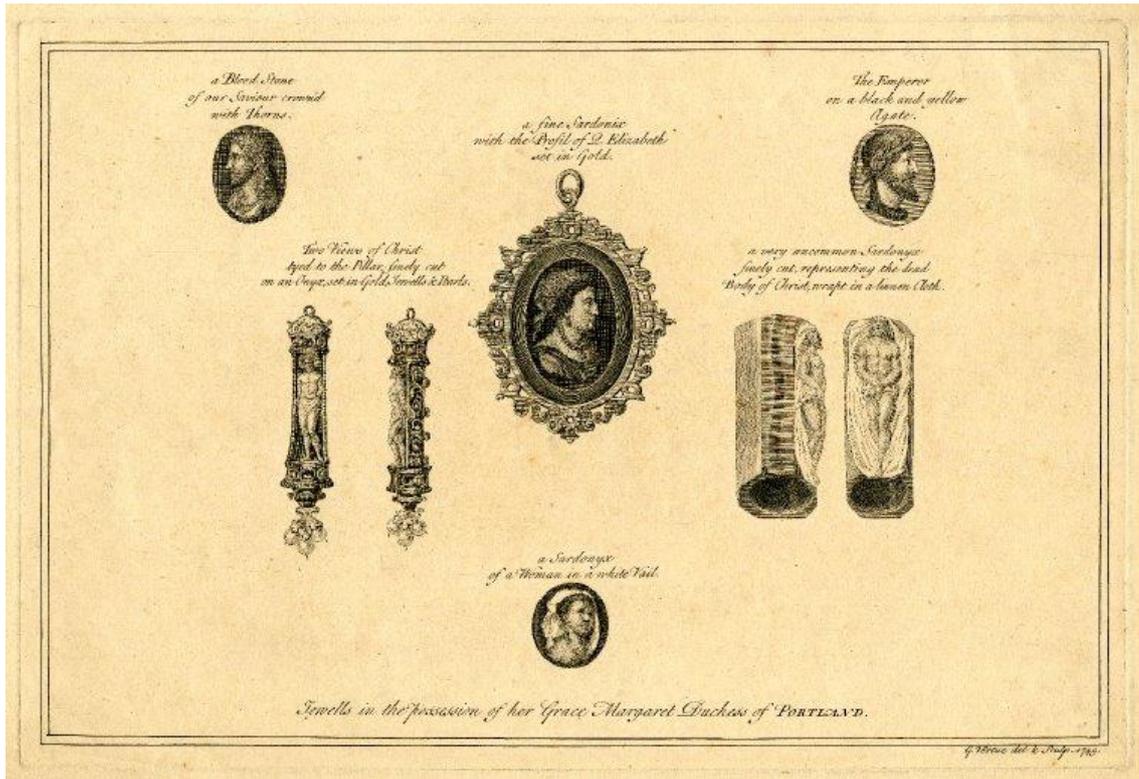


Fig. 0.10 George Vertue, *Jewells in the Possession of her Grace Margaret Duchess of Portland containing Eight carved precious stones: a bloodstone with image of Christ, a sardonix with image of Elizabeth I in a gold frame, an agate with image of a Roman emperor, two views of an onyx and a sardonix with images of Christ, and a sardonix with image of a young woman*, 1749. Etching on paper., 23.7 x 25 cm. © Trustees of the British Museum

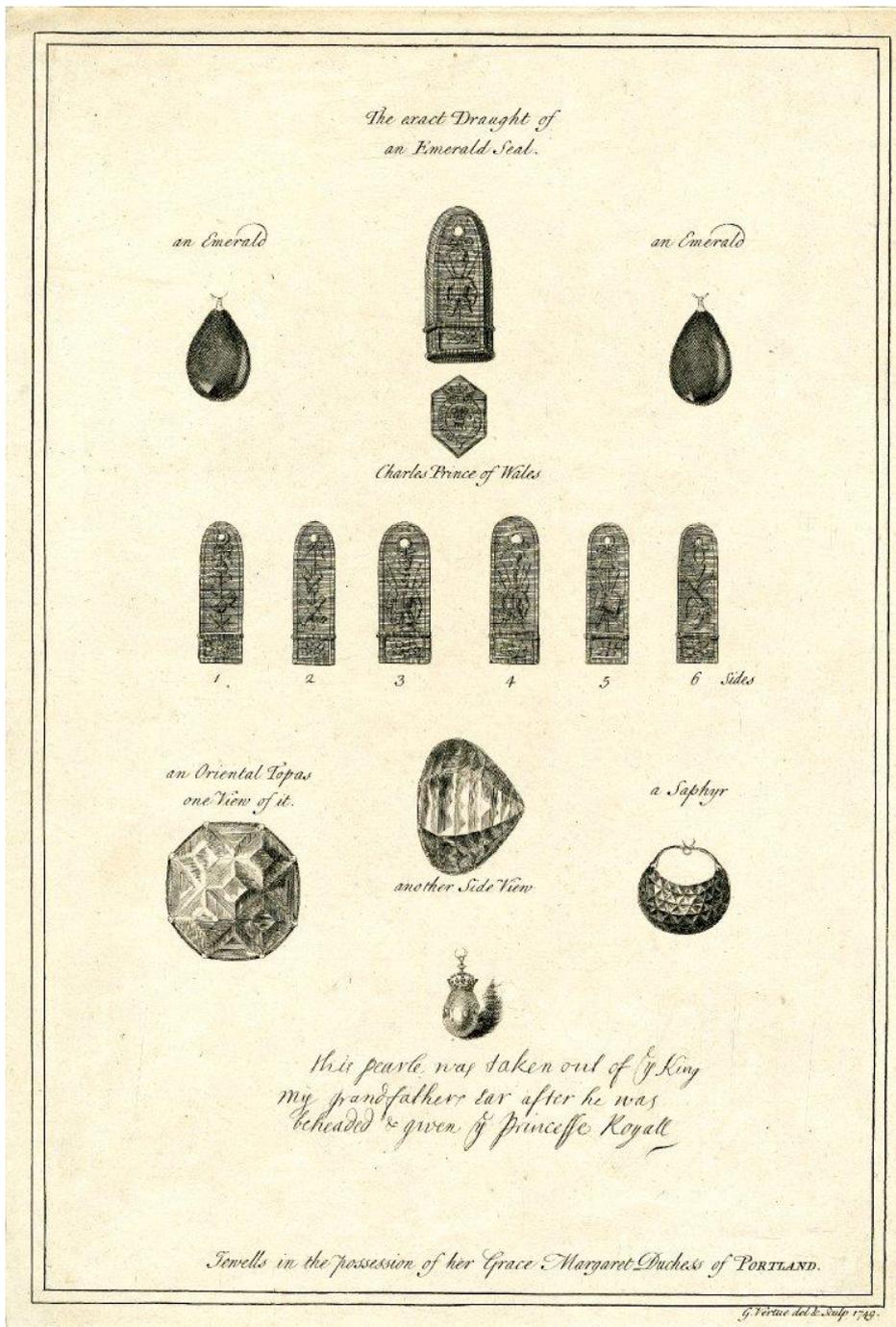


Fig. 0.11 George Vertue, *Jewells in the Possession of her Grace Margaret Duchess of Portland* containing Images of a seal of Charles II when Prince of Wales, two emeralds, two views of an oriental topaz, a sapphire, and a pearl earring of Charles I, 1749. Etching on paper., 35 x 23.8 cm. © Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 0.12 I Baglow, *The Duchess of Portland, flanked by books, birds and shells*, date unknown. Engraving. Buckinghamshire County Museum.



Fig. 1.1 Thomas Rowlandson, *A Rout at the Dowager Duchess of Portland's*, 1811. Museum of London.



Fig. 1.2 George Stubbs, *Zebra*, 1763, Oil on canvas. 102.9 x 127.6 cm. Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.



Fig. 1.3 Samuel Hieronymus Grimm, *Grotto in the Park at Bulstrode*, 1781. Ink on paper. ©British Library Board, K Top Vol. 8, 11.1d.



Fig. 1.4 John Hall, after George Carter, *The Death of Captain James Cook*, 1784. Engraving on paper. 34.2 x 58.6 cm. © Trustees of the British Museum.

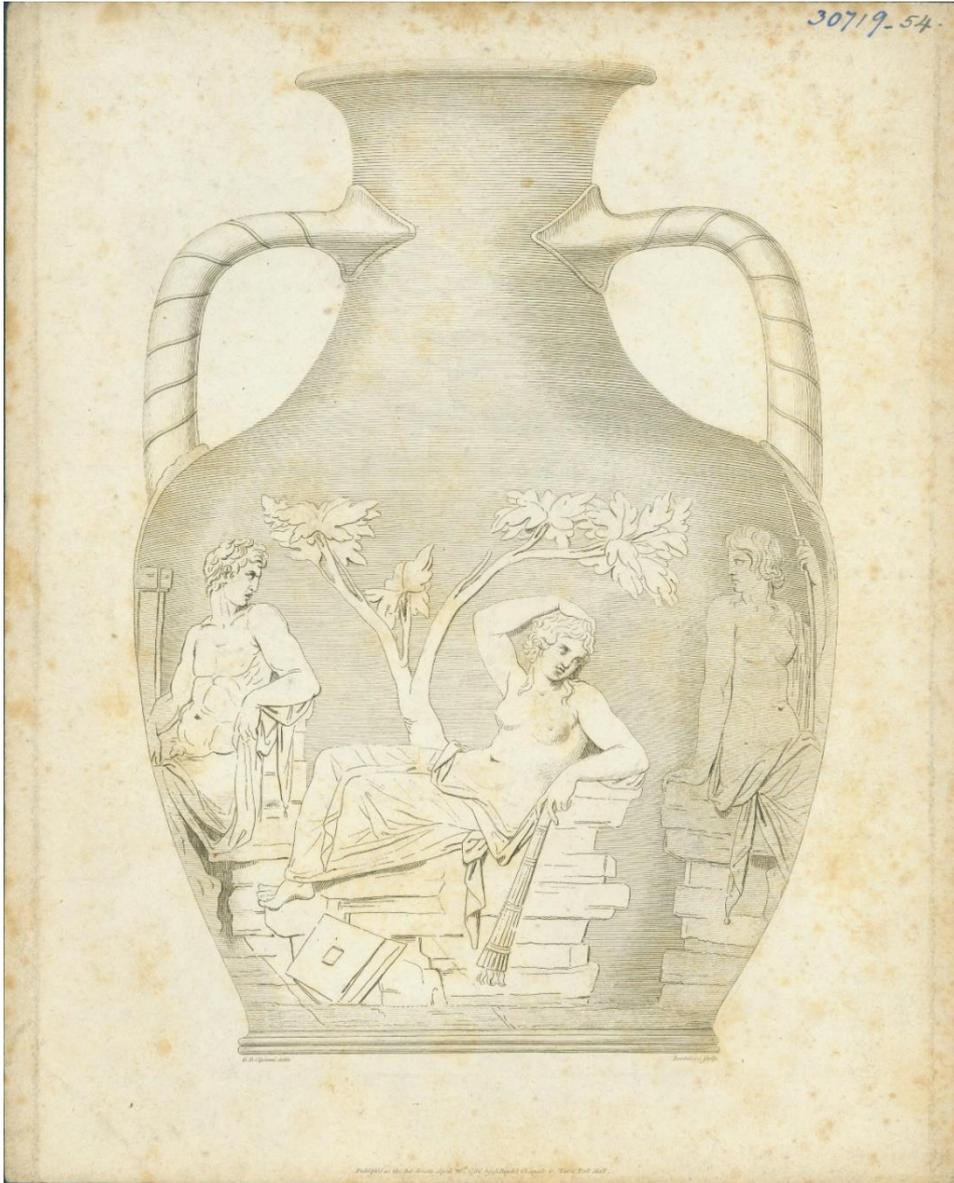


Fig. 2.1 Giovanni Battista Cipriani, *The Portland Vase*, 1784. Engraving, dimensions unknown. V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 30719 – 54. Presented by the Art fund with major support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, private donations and a public appeal.



Fig. 2.2 Cipriani, *The Portland Vase*, 1784. Engraving, dimensions unknown. V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 30720 – 54.



Fig. 2.4 Cipriani, *The Portland Vase*, 1784. Engraving, dimensions unknown. V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 30721 – 54.



Fig. 2.4 Cipriani, *The Portland Vase*, 1784. Engraving, dimensions unknown. V&A/Wedgwood Collection, MS No. 30722 – 54.

Nov. 14th 1783

Mr Walpole will certainly wait on Mrs Vesey tomorrow,
but with all his regard for her, hopes she will not interpret
it as a visit solely for her sake.

To Mrs Vesey.

I declare I will not be convenient
to you much this if you do not wish
Mr Wm Hamilton whom all my friends
are so fond of I expect you will make
acquainted

Fig. 2.5 Note from Horace Walpole to Elizabeth Vesey, and from Elizabeth Vesey to Mary Hamilton, 1783. HAM/1/6/2/7. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

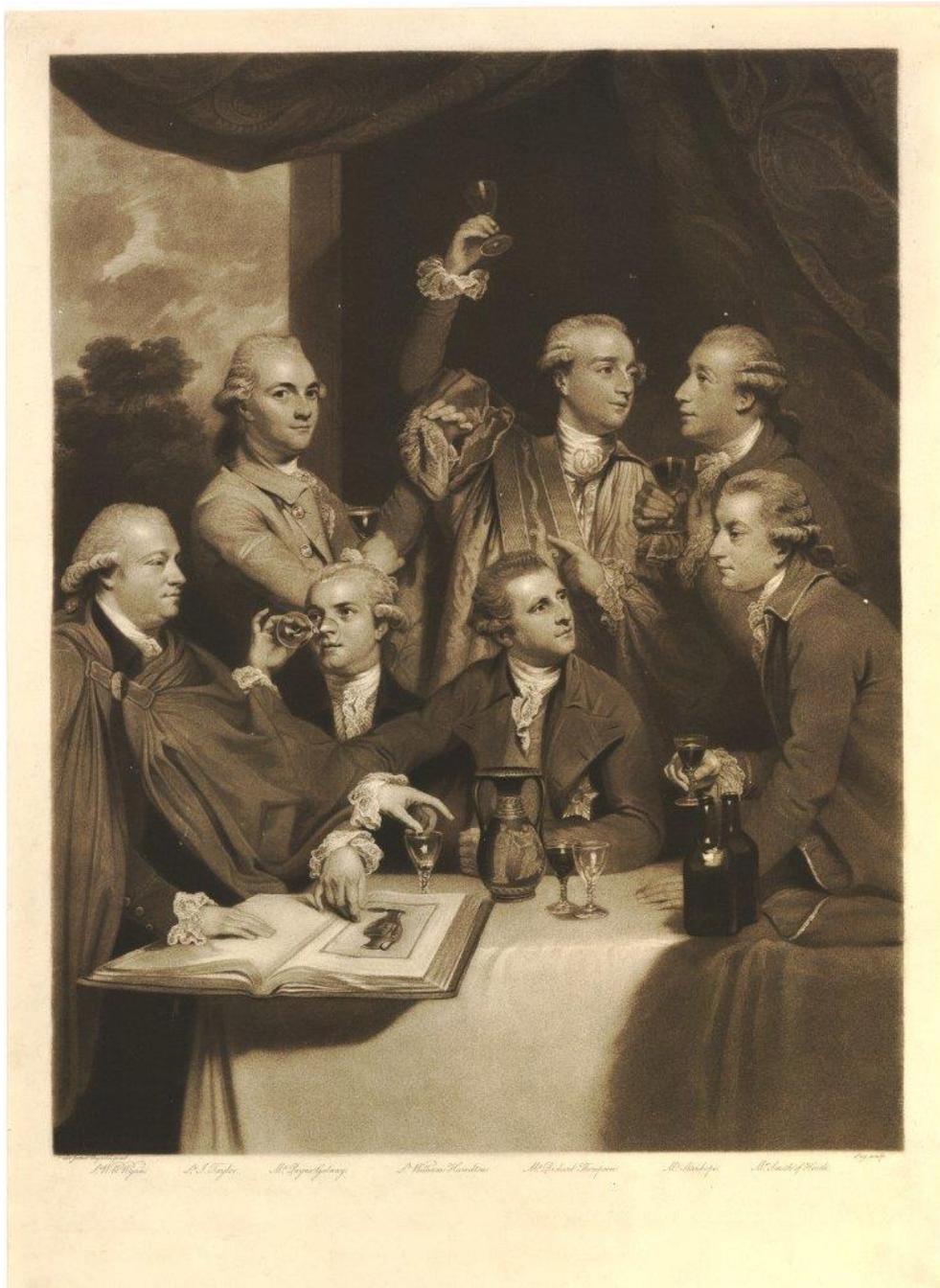


Fig. 2.6 William Say, after Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Members of the Society of Dilettanti*, 1812. Mezzotint on paper, 57.9 x 41.6 cm. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

a Drawing by Lady Andover
 a D^o with a cut card frame by D^o
 a Moon-light Drawing by Lady Weymouth
 2 Boys singing by Mrs Selany
 a Drawing of Gophers by Robins
 a Drawing of a Closet
 Lady Effie a Child by Vicksiter
 Lady Viscountess Weymouth - Blue Veil
 Countess of Mansford yellow Veil
 2 Drawings in Straw frames Lady Andover
 a Chalk D^o by Lady Weymouth
 a View of Cornbury by Mrs Selany
 a View near Bath by Mrs Selany
 a Rock copied by Lady Andover from Mrs Mush
 Two curious pictures in work
 Lord Treasurers of Lord
 a Landscap in dried pencils by Mrs Letitia Mush
 a Ruin by Mrs Dashwood
 Six cut paper by Lady Andover
 an Hermit in Quere
 a Flower piece in feathers by Mrs Grace Cole
 Shells in Oil on Glass
 a Drawing of a woman by Francis Thynn - J. H. Somerset
 a View of Albury by Lady Andover
 a Drawing - by Mrs Selany
 an Hermit's Cave - by D^o
 a View by Mrs Dashwood
 Gothic Cell window painted by Arise
 The Chapel painted by Sebastian Ricci
 The windows by Arise
 Prisoner and Child Bandyke - latter in the Chapel
 China Glass window by Jarvis

Fig. 3.1 Mary Hamilton, List of artworks in *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode with label written in Hamilton's hand*, 1784. HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.



Fig. 3.2 Maker unknown but painted by Bartholomeus van Bassen and Cornelius van Poelenburgh, *The Arundel Cabinet*, c.1630. Ebony, Copper, Gilt, Bronze, Walnut, 1041mm wide. The Portland Collection.



Fig. 3.3 Artist unknown, *Oval Agate Pendant Carved in Cameo and Mounted*, date unknown. Mount, 17th Century. Agate and Gold, dimensions unknown. The Portland Collection.



Fig. 3.4 Artist unknown, *An Oval Sardonyx Engraved with the Head of an Emperor*, date unknown. Sardonyx, dimensions unknown. The Portland Collection.



Fig. 3.5 Detail showing wax seal of letter from duchess of Portland to Mary Hamilton, 29 September 1782. HAM/1/7/11/3. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.



Fig. 3.6 Various makers, unknown, *A Wooden Box Containing a Small Collection of Ethnographic Material*, date unknown. Wood, leather, miscellaneous. The Portland Collection.



Fig. 3.9 Mary Delany, *Physalis*, formerly in an album (Vol. VII, 71a), or Winter Cherry, 1772-1782. Collage of coloured papers, with bodycolour and watercolour, and with plant fibre samples, on black ink background, 292 mm x 179 mm. © Trustees of the British Museum.

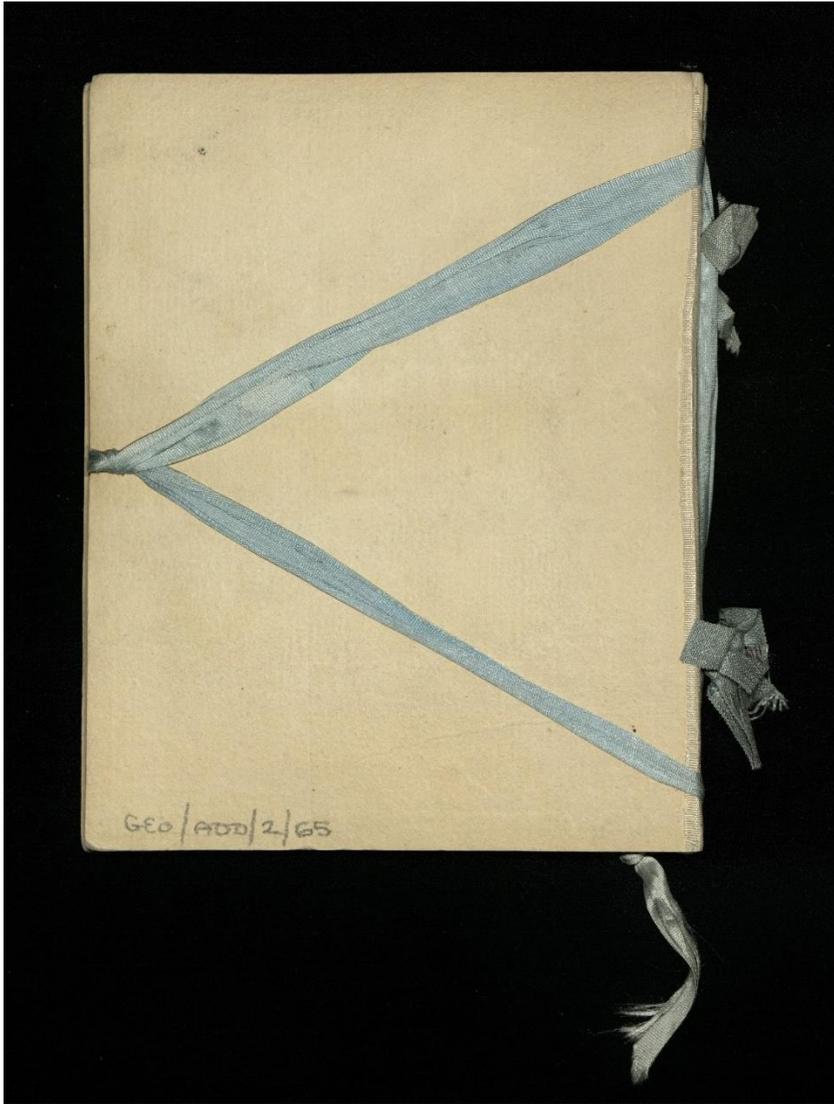


Fig. 4.1 Mary Delany, front and back boards of the album of *découpage* tied with blue ribbon, 1781. GEO/ADD/2/65. The Royal Archives, Windsor. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

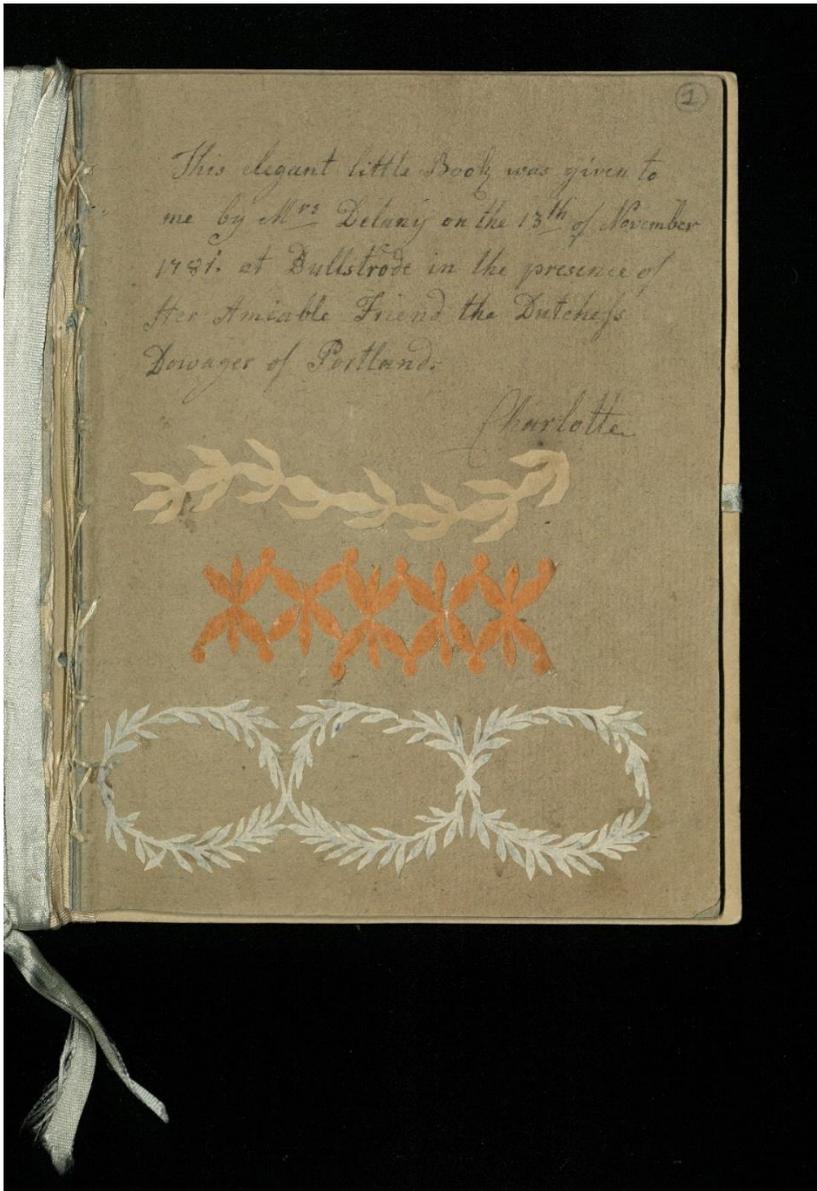


Fig. 4.2 Mary Delany, Book of decoupage with handwritten dedication by Queen Charlotte, 1781. GEO/ADD/2/65. The Royal Archives, Windsor. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



Fig. 4.3 Needlework pocket-book containing tools and gifted to Mary Delany by Queen Charlotte, 1781, satin, coloured silks and enamelled gold, 10 7/8 x 9 7/8 x 5/8 inches (open). Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018



Fig. 4.4 Mary Delany, *Silhouette, possibly of King George III in album of decoupage*, 1781. GEO/ADD/2/65. The Royal Archives, Windsor. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

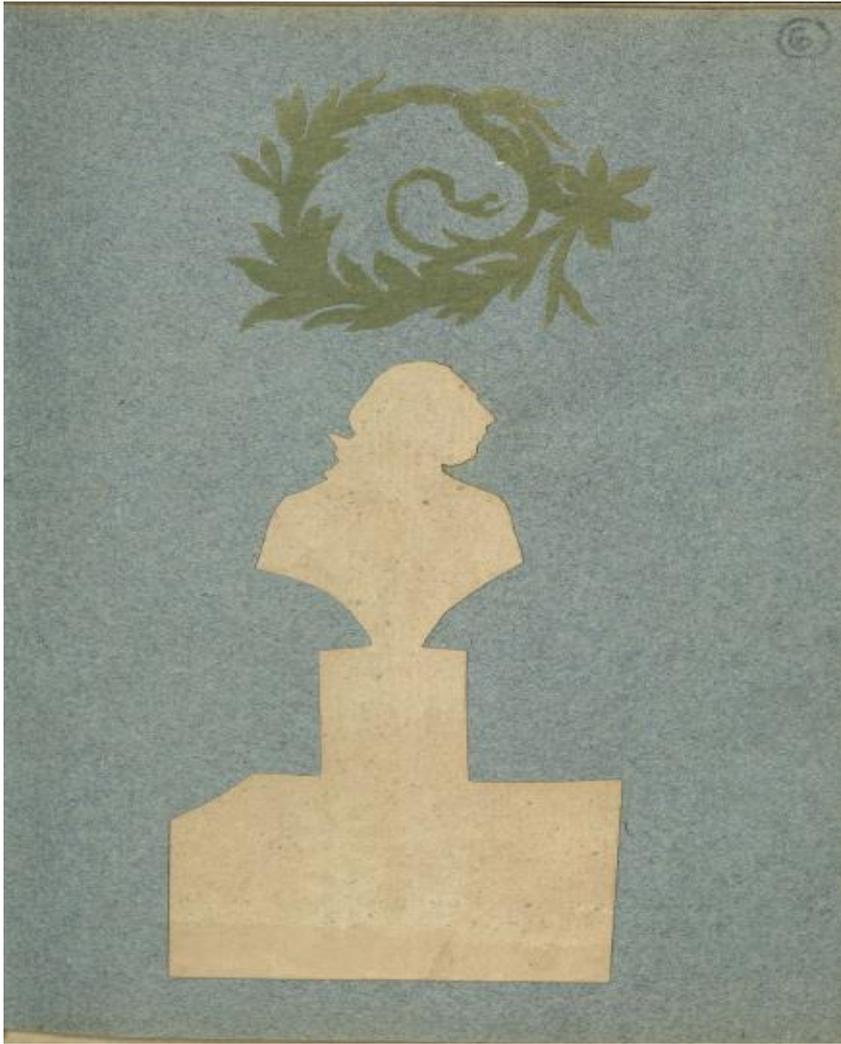


Fig. 4.5 Mary Delany, *Silhouette in album of decoupage*, 1781. GEO/ADD/2/65. The Royal Archives, Windsor. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

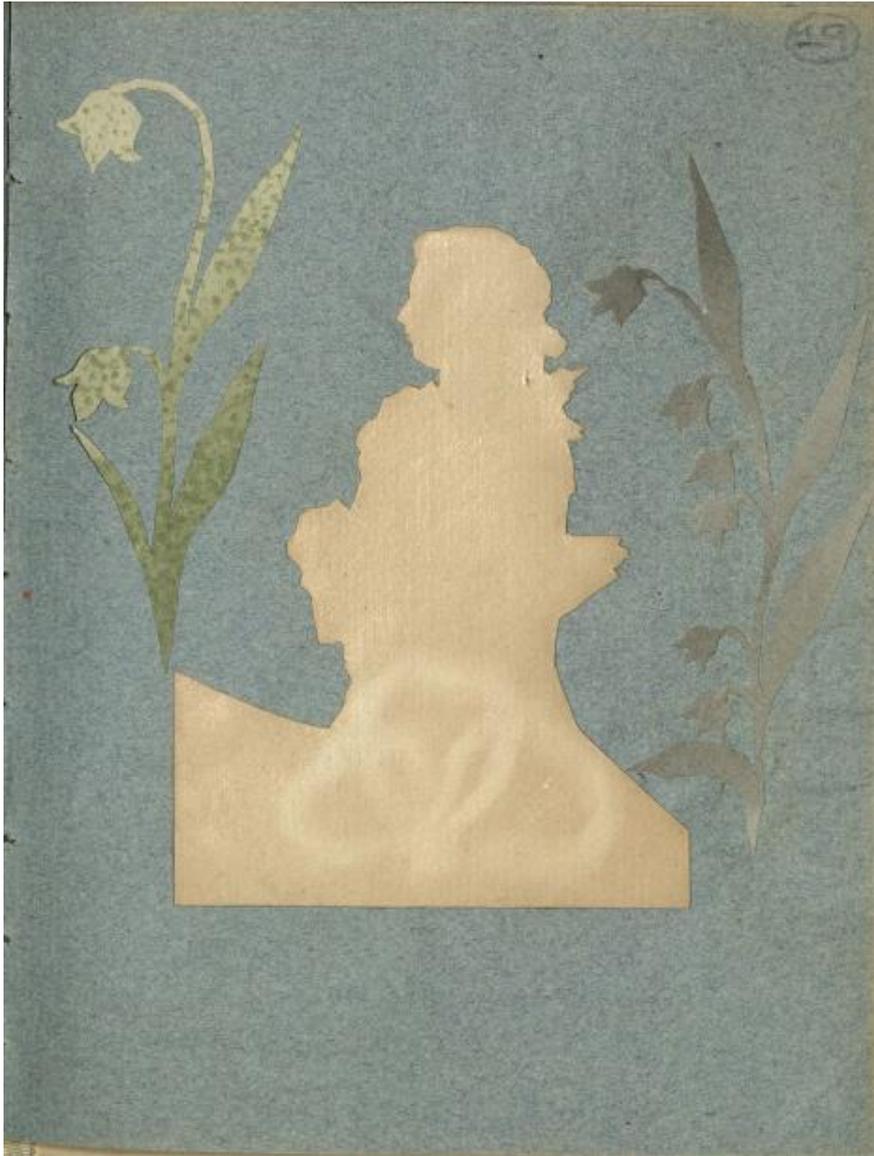


Fig. 4.6 Mary Delany, *Silhouette in album of decoupage*, 1781. GEO/ADD/2/65. The Royal Archives, Windsor. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

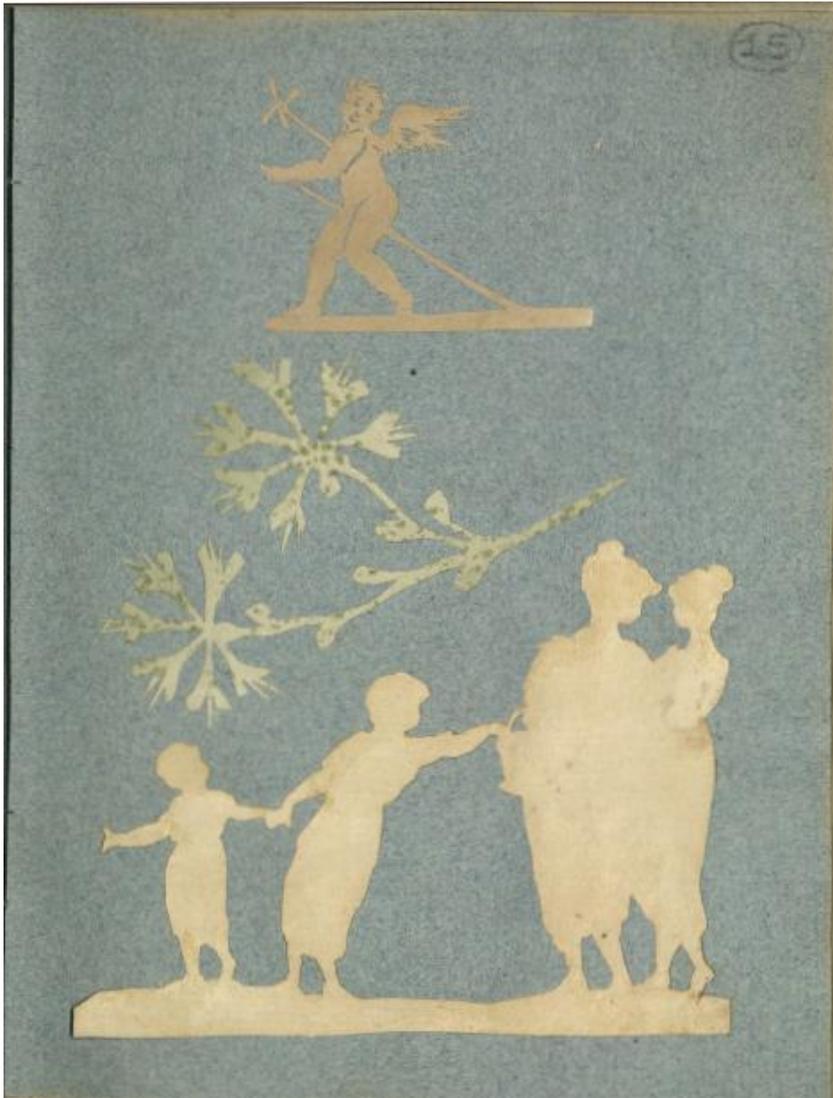


Fig. 4. 7 Mary Delany, *Cupid and Flowers and Women and Children*, 1781. GEO/ADD/2/65. The Royal Archives, Windsor. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

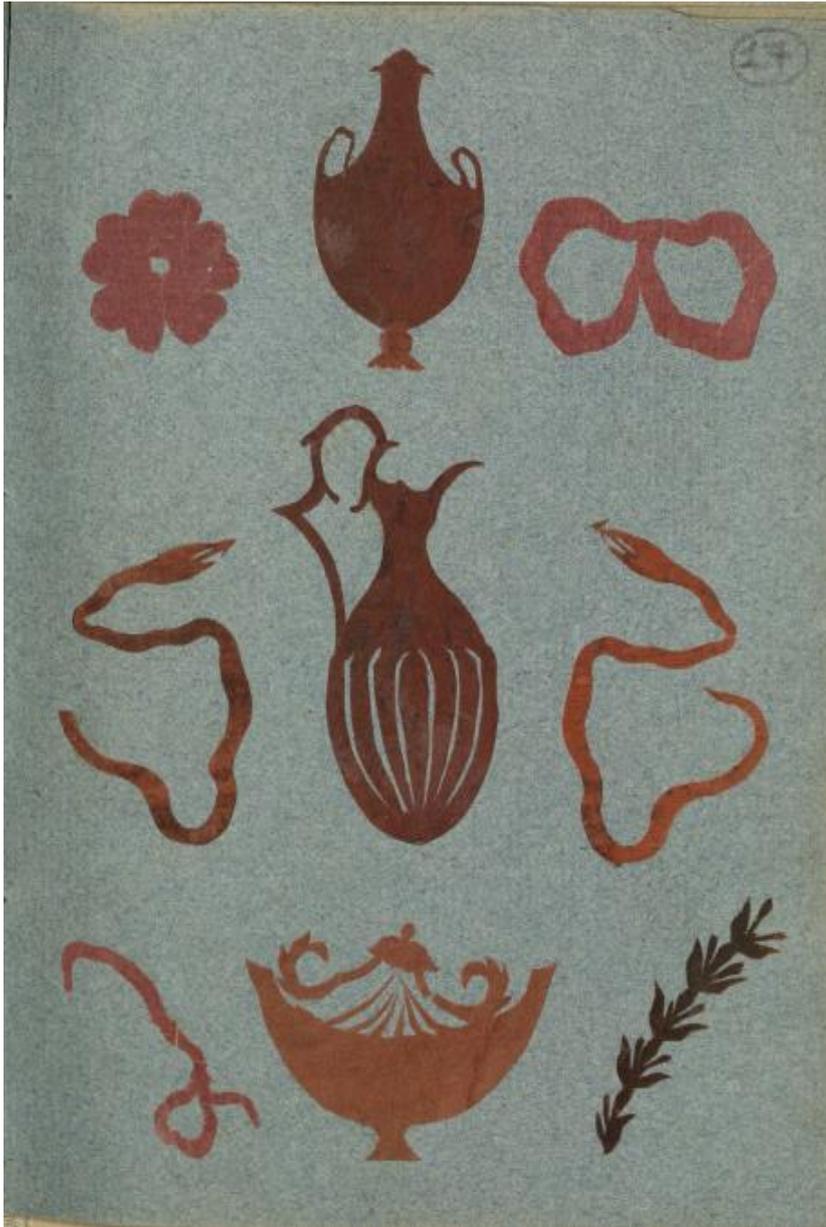


Fig. 4.8 Mary Delany, *Classical urns and vases with botanical and serpentine motifs*, 1781. GEO/ADD/2/65. The Royal Archives, Windsor.

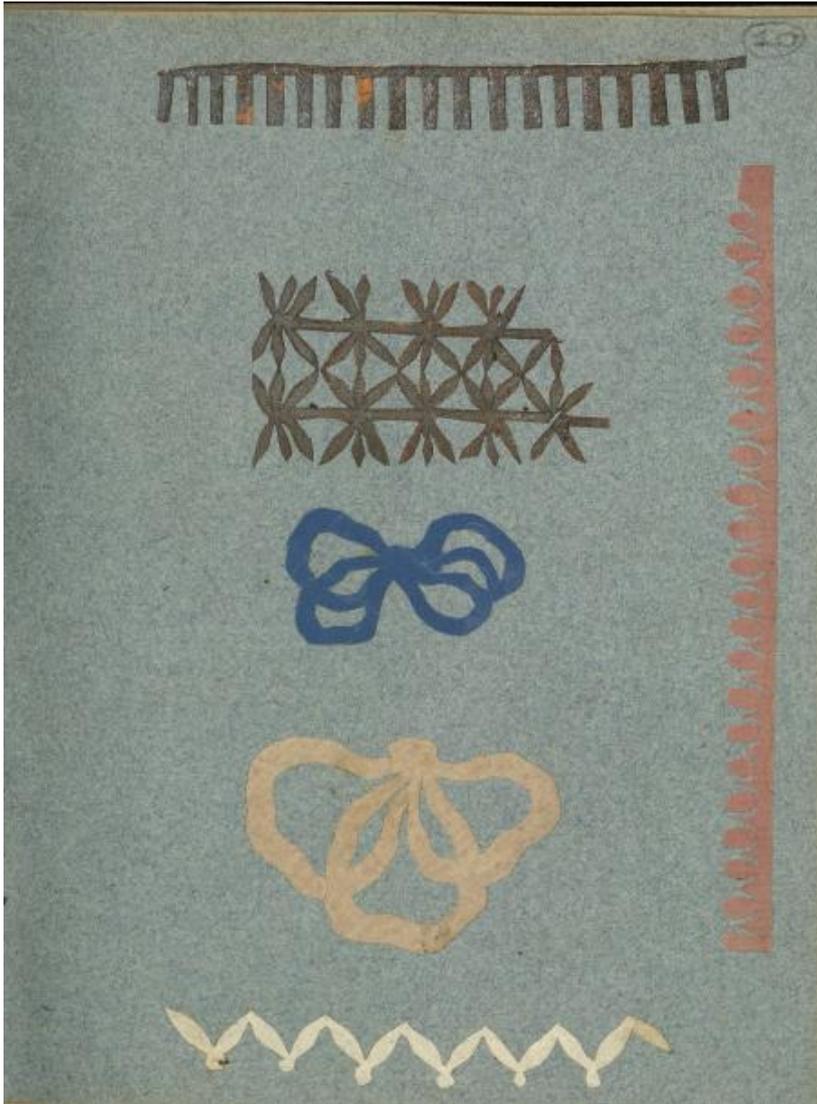


Fig. 4.9 Mary Delany, *Ribbon bows and cross-thatch*, 1781. GEO/ADD/2/65. The Royal Archives, Windsor.
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

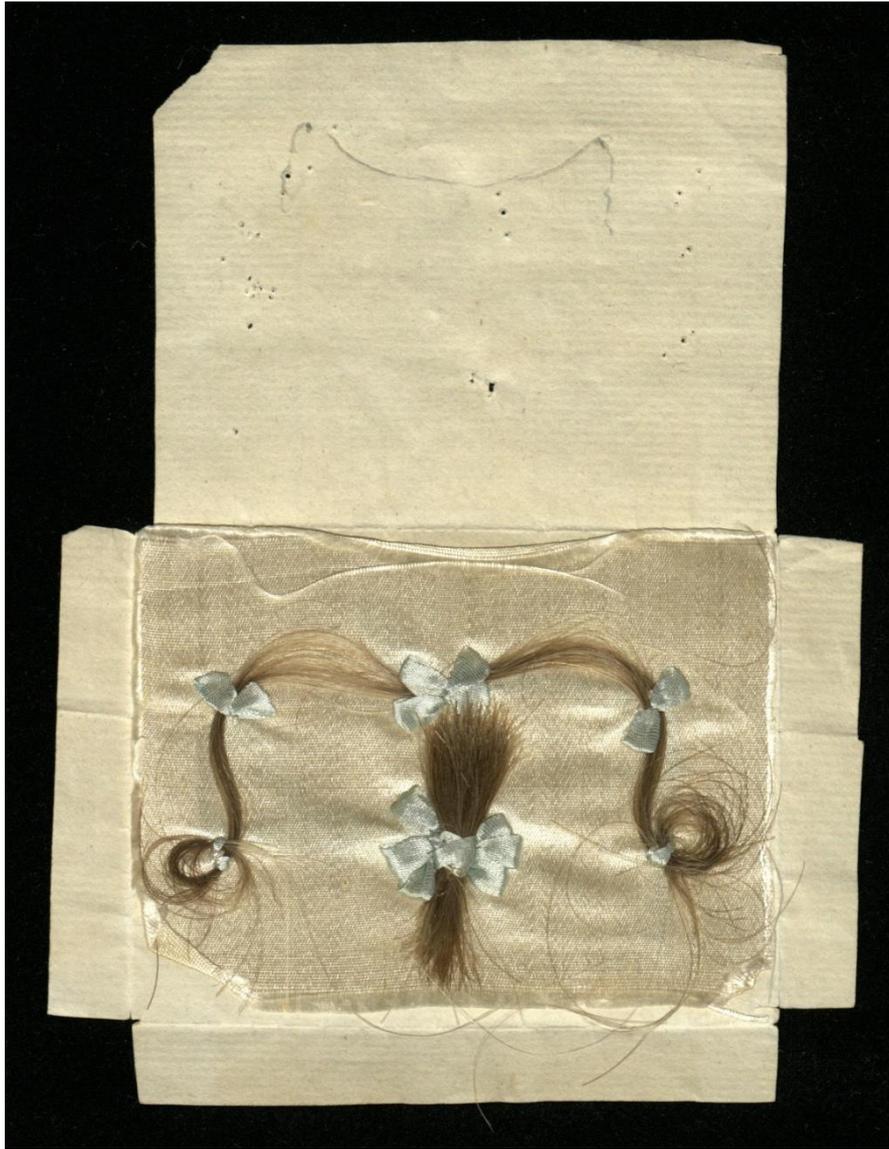


Fig. 4.10 *Lock of Queen Charlotte's hair mounted on silk and tied with blue ribbon by Mary Delany, 1781.*
GEO/ADD/2/64. The Royal Archives, Windsor. © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

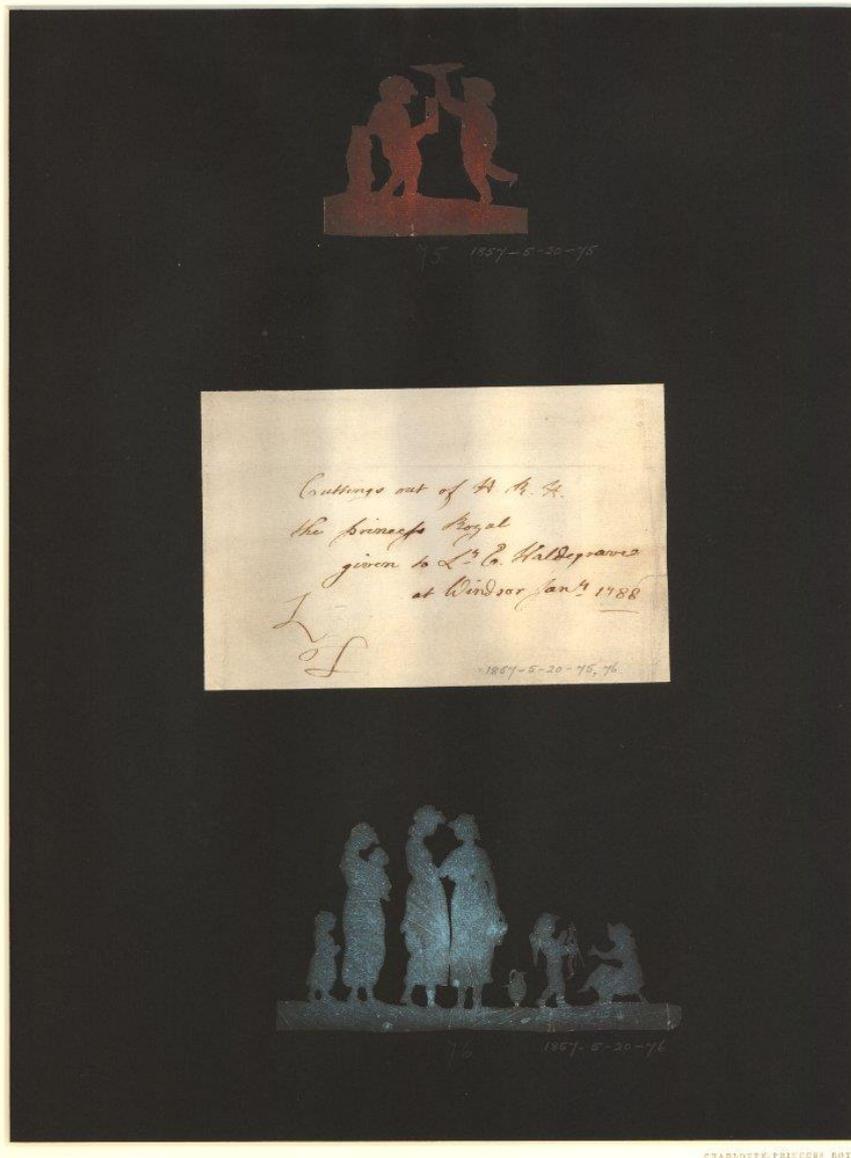


Fig. 4.11 Princess Charlotte, *Cupids with an hourglass* and *A Group of Women and Children*, 1788. Graphite and black chalk on orange and blue paper, scraped, 8.8 x 15.5 cm. © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 4.12 Princess Elizabeth, *Fire screen*, 1787. Rolled paperwork on a wooden frame. 124.5 x 55 cm.
©Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

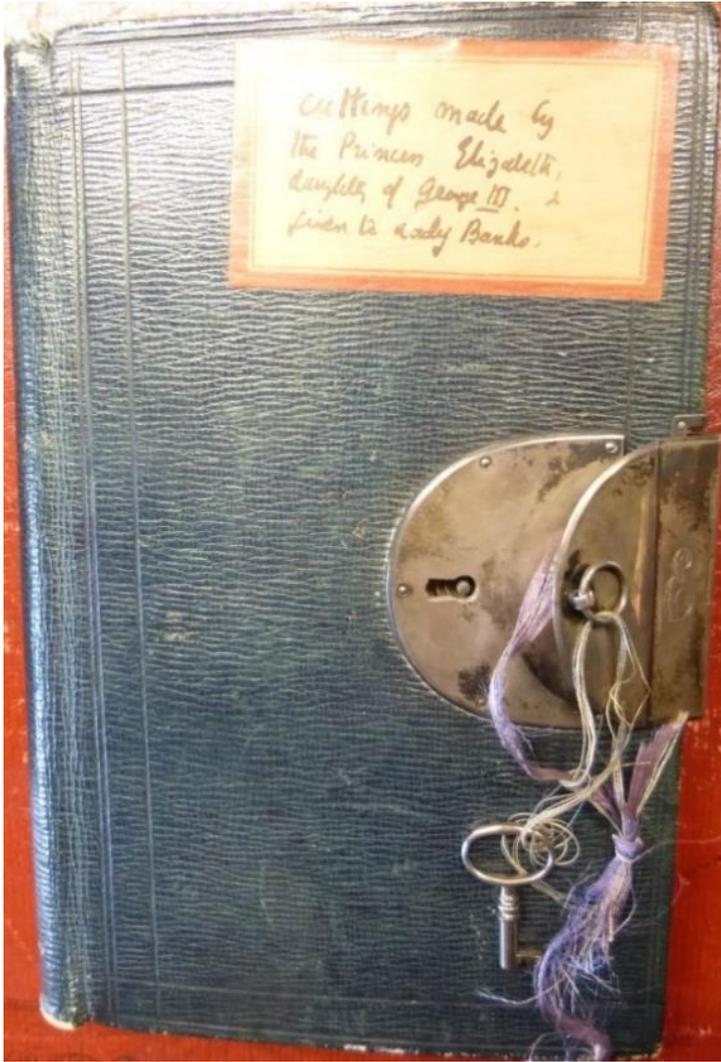


Fig. 4.13 Front of an album of cuttings made by Princess Elizabeth, daughter of George III, and given by the Princess to Lady Banks, c. 1807-8. RCIN 1047678. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018



Fig. 4.14 *Silhouette cut in black paper from an album of cuttings made by Princess Elizabeth, daughter of George III, and given by the Princess to Lady Banks, c. 1807-8. RCIN 1047678.m. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018*



Fig. 4.15 *Monograph silhouette produced by woodcut from an album of cuttings made by Princess Elizabeth, daughter of George III, and given by the Princess to Lady Banks, c. 1807-8. RCIN 1047678.u. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2018*

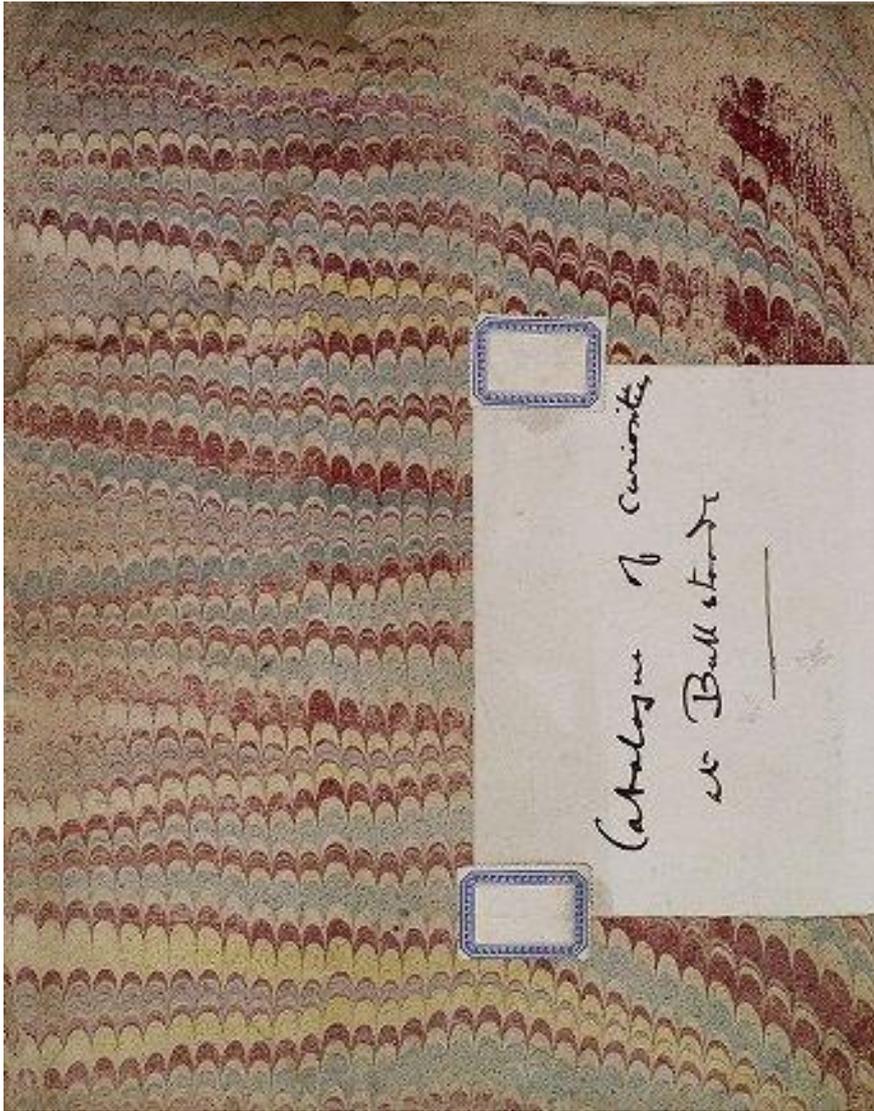


Fig. 5.1 Mary Hamilton, *Front board of Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode with label written in Hamilton's hand*, 1784. HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

An Humble attempt to a description of some
of y^e things in y^e possession of her Grace the
Duchess Dow. of Portland
Bulstrode Nov. 1704.

There is not mentioned in y^e following Catalogue
any thing y^t was not purchased by her Grace or
given to her neither are Pictures &c. w^{ch} y^e late
Earl of Oxford gave to y^e late Duke of Portland nor
any part of y^e Collection at Woburn

Mary Hamilton.

Charges Street London.

Fig. 5.2 Title page and inscription in *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, 1784. HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

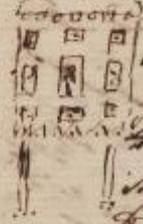
did not think he wd have let him on if he
 had not heard my name. we spent a Mr
 De Munnings very agreeably - Mr W. carried
 us through some of y. Rooms to shew my
 knote some things w^{ch} he had not seen
 particularly y. beautiful Cabinet of
 Lady Di: Beauchamp's Drawings
 in y. great bed Chamber.

 as we were afraid of sleeping Mrs
 G. waiting for dinner we were obliged
 to hurry away to my infinite regret
 it was about 1/2 past 3 before we got
 to Hampton - we found Mr. Wals-
 ingham & Miss Boyle wth Mrs. Jarvis - Mrs
 G. had not told Mr. W. I was to come
 on this occasion Mr. W. to express how
 agreeable y. surprise was & made
 every excuse for not having been
 to Thomas Sutton Mr. W. said how
 great her disappointment had been
 as she had hoped to have seen me for
 a long time this summer & had
 formed many agreeable parties for
 me - to see places de see. that I
 now could not make her amends as she
 was going next week to Japan & was
 to visit Lady Clifford de see.
 Our Party consisted only of Mrs W.
 Miss B. & Mr Boyle but soon Mr. Walspitt
 came & we had a most agreeable dinner

Fig. 5.3 Page from Mary Hamilton's diary with sketch of cabinet embedded in text. HAM/2/14, f. 58. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.



Fig. 5.4. Various makers, *Beauclerk Cabinet*, date unknown. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

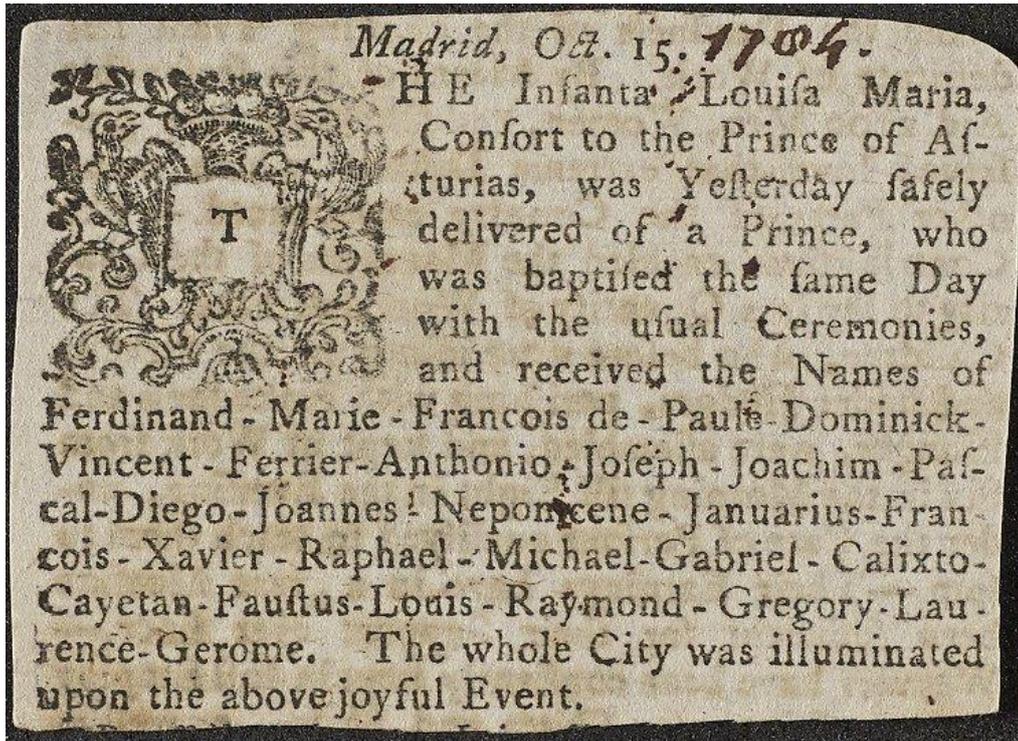


Fig. 5.5 *Newspaper cutting unbound in Catalogue of Curiosities*, 1784. HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

View of Antwerp - Peter Bruegel
- Rubens - Titus Van Broughel
551-5

Anthony de Leva Titian
43-1

Virgin & Christ Play Titian
232

Virgin and Child & St John
Corregio 220 10

Large Capital Picture
of Holy Family Raphael
703-10

Pictures bought by
Jacobus Dox of Portland
from St. Luke's Church
Sale

Fig. 5.6 Handwritten list of artworks bought at auction in *Catalogue of Curiosities*, 1784. HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

Mr. Walpole says that Julius Clovio's neatness
& taste in grotesque were exquisite, ^{that he} but cannot
be compared wth Isaac Oliver because Clovio
never painted Portraits & of lesser little else.

Isaac Oliver died 1637
in 61 or 2^d year.

Fig. 5.7 Unbound note with anecdote about Horace Walpole in *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, 1784. HAM/3/4.
Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

27

N^o 23 An exquisite Miniature in Enamel by old Petitot of
Cardinal Mozzerino

N^o 24 Cardinal Richlieu in Enamel by old Petitot in his
best manner

N^o 25 An Unknown head of a Man by old Petitot. Enamel

N^o 26 A Miniature in very fine preservation by Cooper,
of Canterbury
of Arch bishop. (Beldon). 4 in: by $3\frac{1}{2}$ set in black
Shagreen bordered with a silver filagree on y^e back of
which in filagree is a letter B

N^o 27 A Small picture in Oils of a Mans head. The painter
unknown, it is finely painted.

N^o 28 a miniature of Michael Drayton the poet crown'd with
laurel, he has on a lace band and round the head
is this Motto "Let Christ thought on be els never think on
me" enclosed in an old fashioned silver locket with two
compartments, in the 2^d is an head of Christ crown'd with
Thorns with this Motto "If you love me keep my coun-
selments, Joh: 14. 15. The size an inch by near an inch.

born
1569
and 1691

Fig. 5.8 Mary Hamilton, Page with entry for Petitot miniature in Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode, 1784. HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

No 23
 done enamel to add to my book
 An exquisite picture by Petitot of Cardinal
 Magarino his hair scathed grey a Bishop of ^{2 printed}
 Cardinals ^{scarlet laced} Red Cap. Band. Red.襟
 within ~~an~~ ^{by} ~~the~~ ^{is} ~~then~~ ^{is} ~~an~~ ^{is} ~~inch~~ ^{is} ~~long~~ ^{is} ~~near~~ ^{is} ~~an~~ ^{is} ~~inch~~
 wide complexion fair of countenance grave
 must ^{but hat} in black ^{Box} Ebony case

Fig. 5.9 Mary Hamilton, Unbound note about a miniature by Petitot in Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode, 1784.
 HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

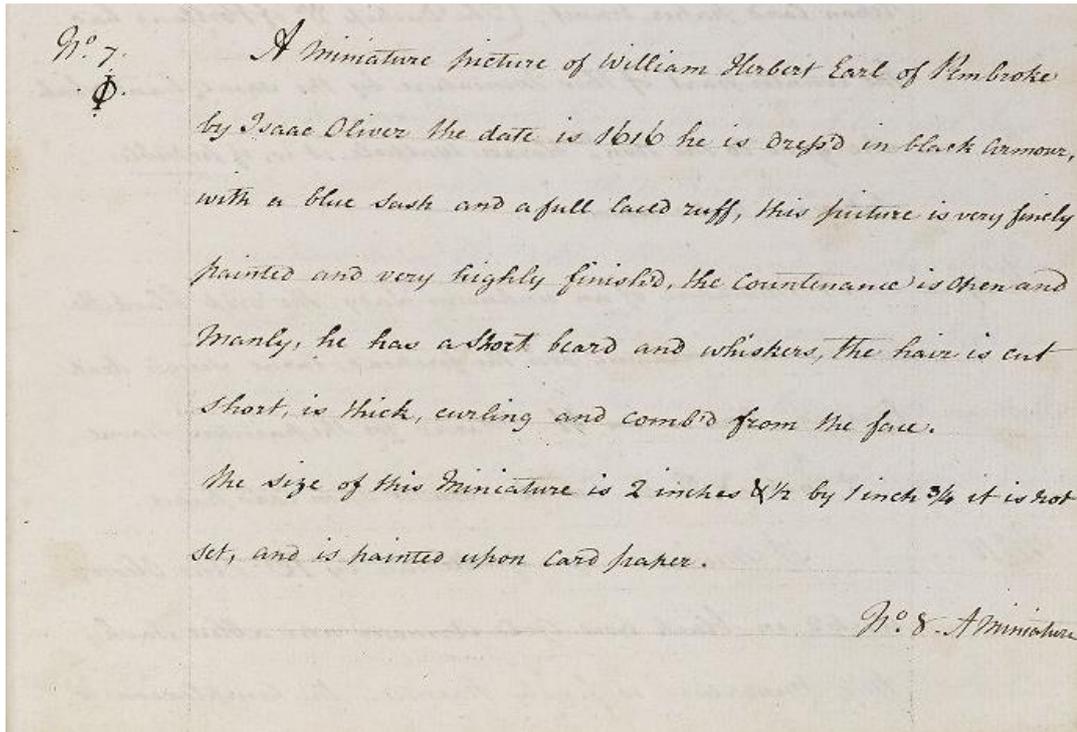


Fig. 5.10 Mary Hamilton, *Representation of Isaac Oliver's signature in Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode, 1784*. HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

22
N^o 15 in the middle he has small whiskers. His countenance
is Manly, serious, placid and sensible; his features are
handsome. This picture is set in Gold, as a Locket, the
back is Enamell'd, a light blue Ground, with a Cipher in
white of J.P. (viz. John Petitot.) the size 1 inch $\frac{5}{8}$ by $1\frac{3}{8}$.

Fig. 5.11 Mary Hamilton, *Representation of John Petitot's signature in Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode, 1784.*
HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

18
N^o 8 A Miniature, of Lady Frances Cecil Countess of Cumberland,
by John Hoskins (H) this picture is finished with great
delicacy, the clearness of a fine complexion which is so
transparent as to shew the Veins and the beauty of the
Coloring is equal to any thing I ever saw, for looking at
this Portrait with a Magnifying glass it appears a living
Object. The Countess is in an elegant dress of the times and
the head is simply adorned. is 2 Inches $8\frac{1}{2}$ by 1 $\frac{1}{8}$.
Upon Card paper, mounted; (The Duchess D^{ca} of Portland had
the counter part of this Miniature by the same hand which
she gave to the Hon^{ble} Horace Walpole, it is, if possible
superior to the above.

Fig. 5.12 Mary Hamilton, Representation of John Hoskins's signature in *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, 1784.
HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

24
N^o 19

A most inimitable piece of sculpture of Egyptian Workmanship
A Head of Jupiter Serapis cut out of the hard Egyptian
Green Basaltis, it was found at Portici, and it was
purchased out of the Barberini Cabinet by S^r William Hamilton
who parted with it to the Duke of Devon^{sh} of Portland when he
was in England in 1753.

This Head is allow'd by all those who have true taste
and judgment (and many Connoisseurs Abroad & in this
Country have seen it) to be a work of the most exquisite
perfection. The size of this piece of very fine sculpture
is about 4 Inches — There is in the Countenance a
Sublimity and sweetness not to be described. The
features are regular and extremely handsome. The hair
flaming in Ringlets over the forehead & sides of the face
but not concealing ^{on} — as the Artist has with the nicest
Skill laid them hollow, The hair thus hanging over the
forehead adds dignity to the Brow, and the hair joins the
Beard in such a manner as to complete the grace of the
in short, to use Shakespeares words "It begets all description!"

Fig. 5.13 Mary Hamilton, Page with description of the Jupiter Serapis in *Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, 1784.
HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

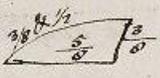
N^o. 22 A precious fragment of an Antique Intaglio, in a
 Cornelian of the finest sort having a yellowish tinge,
 Sr^t William Hamilton purchased it at Rome where it
 was found and parted with it to the R^s. Dow^r. of Scotland
 in 1783. It represents Hercules as low as the waist, he
 is sitting in a Skiff- which has the Lions Skin for a
 Sail, a little part of which is seen and one of the stems
 is fastened by a string which ^{hangs} in the air over the head
 of Hercules, it is hardly possible to conceive that in so
 small a Compass so much Expression could be conveyed,
 the Head is very fine and the strength of the neck & Back
 are admirably shown. It is set in Gold as a ring
 and is of this shape 

Fig. 5.14 Mary Hamilton, *Sketch of Roman intaglio in Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode*, 1784. HAM/3/4.
 Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.



Fig. 5.15 Maker unknown, *Charles I's Pearl earring*, c. 1616. Drop shaped pearl with gold mount. 19 mm long. The Portland Collection.

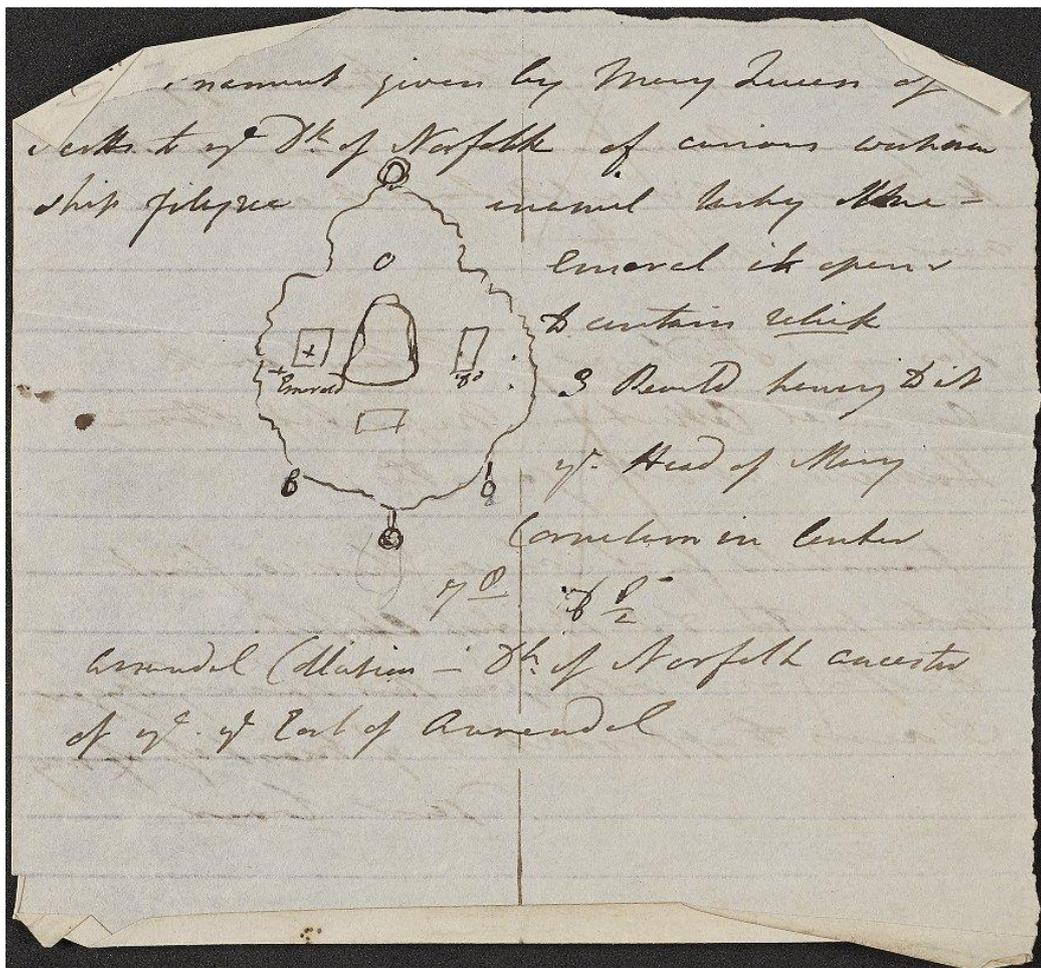


Fig. 5.16 Mary Hamilton, *Sketch of ornament given by Mary Queen of Scots to the Duke of Norfolk, 1784.*
 HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.

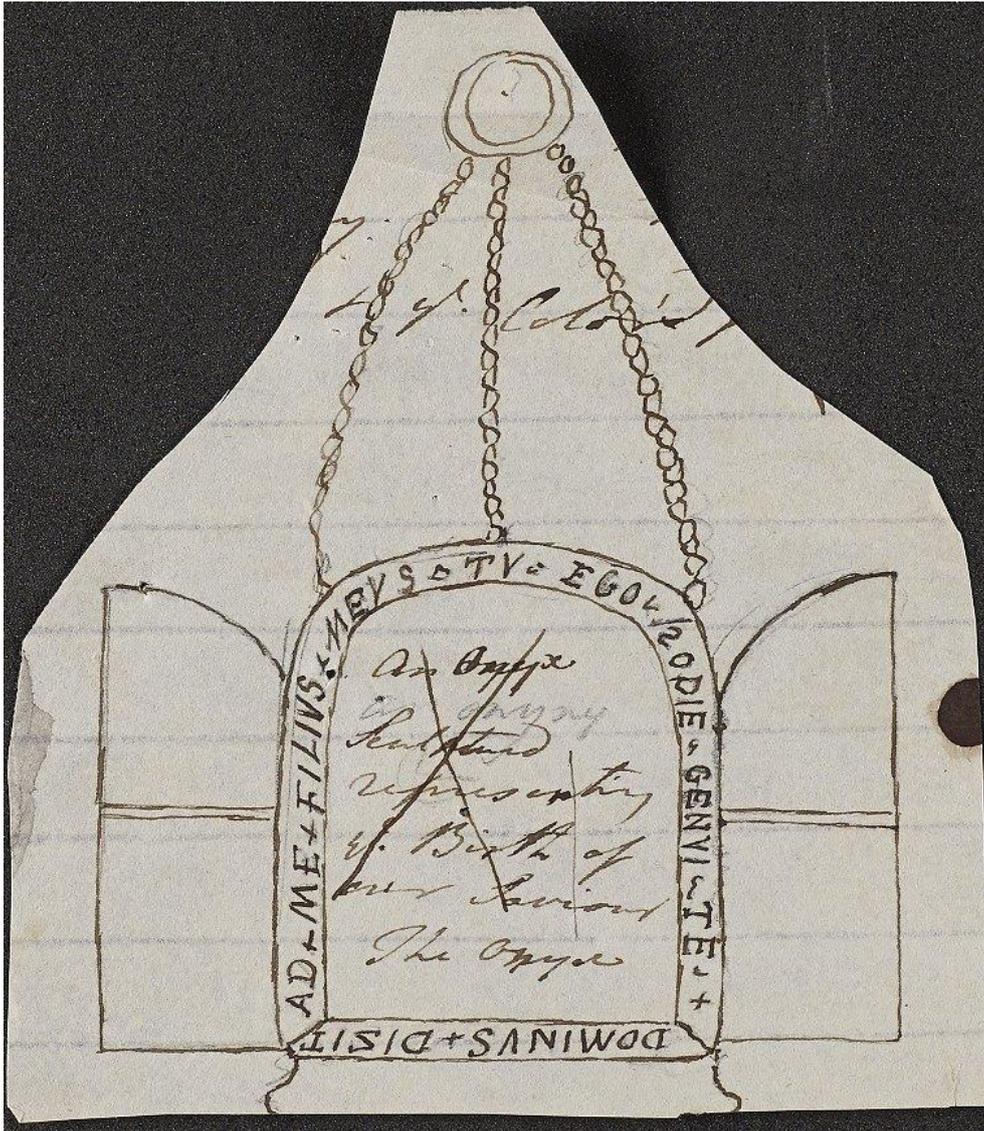


Fig. 5.17 Mary Hamilton, *Sketch of portable altar in Catalogue of Curiosities at Bulstrode, 1784*. HAM/3/4. Mary Hamilton Papers, University of Manchester.



Fig. 6.1 Thomas Skinner, *Trade Card*, date unknown. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.



Fig. 6.2 George Cruikshank, *Sales by Auction! - or Provident Children Disposing of their Deceased Mother's Effects for the Benefit of the Creditors!!*, 1819. Etching with hand-colouring in watercolour on paper. Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

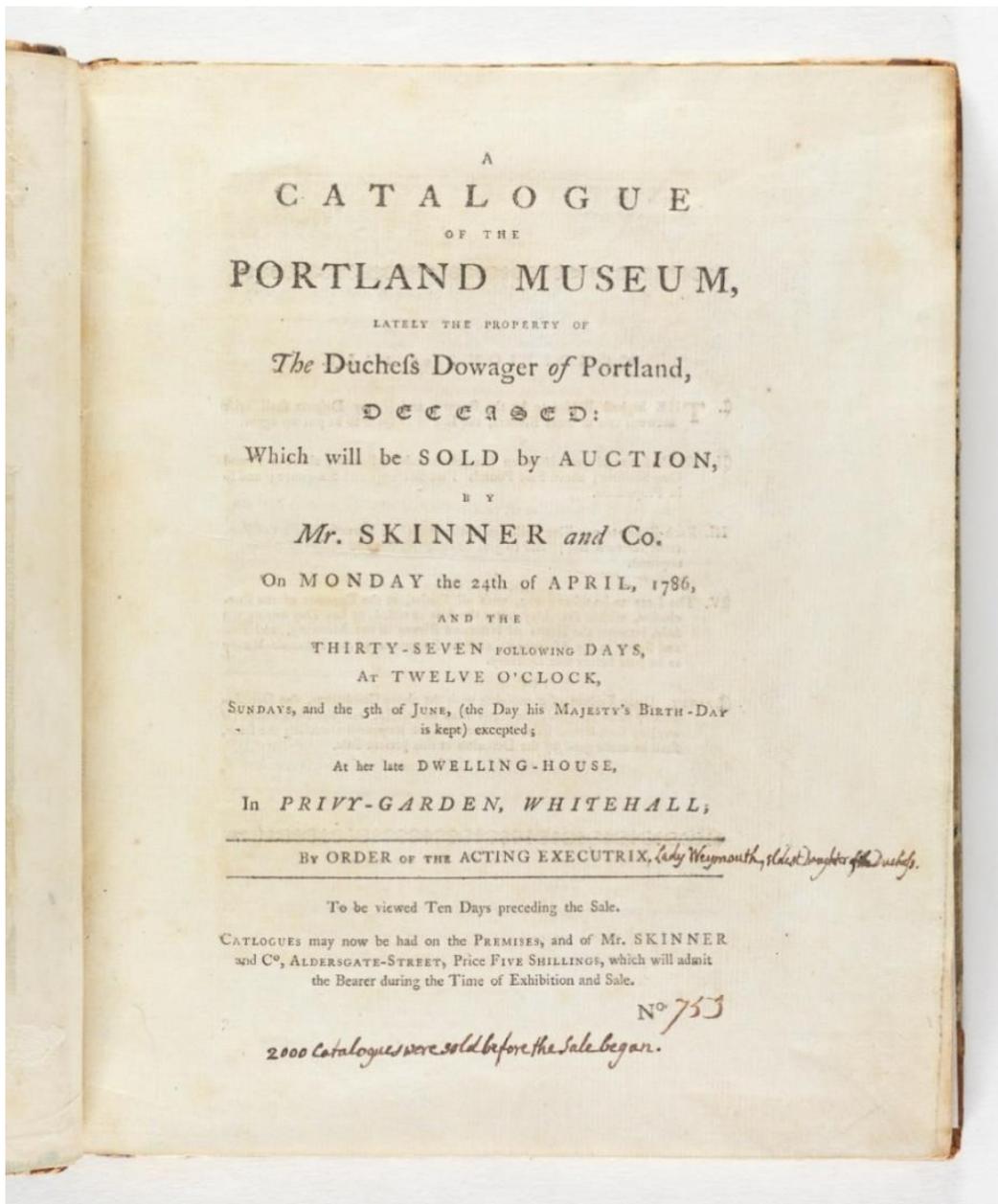


Fig. 6.3 Title Page to Horace Walpole's copy of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*, 1786. LWL 49 3902. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

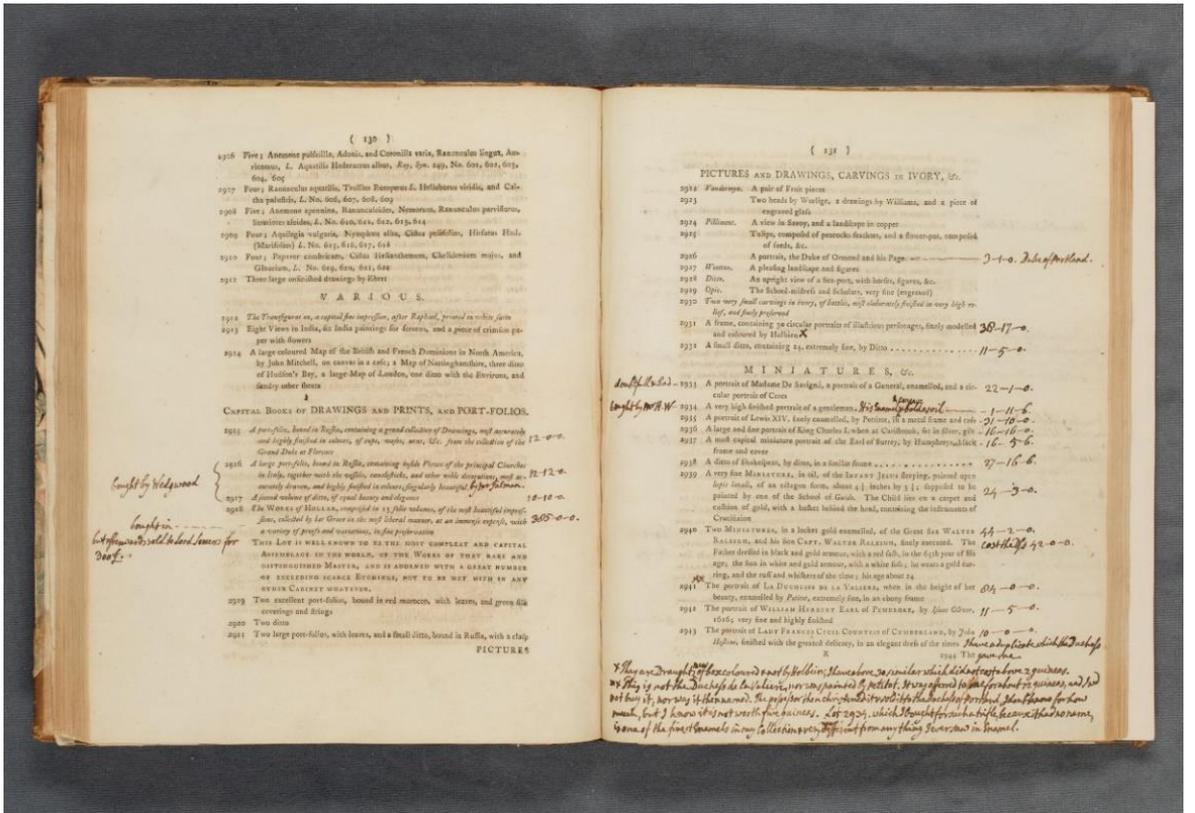


Fig. 6.4 Annotated pages from Horace Walpole's copy of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*. LWL 49 3902. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

Robert Harley Earl of Oxford, Lord Treasurer to Queen Anne, began collecting books & MSS. at great expence. Robert Spencer Earl of Sunderland formed a Library of printed books at the same time; and their competition raised the price to a great height. Robert, the second Earl of Oxford, continued to have the same passion, but with an additional taste for all sort of curiosities. The Dispersion of the Arundelian Collection furnished Lord Oxford with many precious rarities. His Library of books and prints grew so vast, that he built an extensive Gallery, ^{at Marlborough} to receive them. But the expence of that Earl & his Countess, tho she was Heiress of the last Cavendish Duke of Newcastle, inherited a very considerable portion of his Estate, the major portion of which however had been adjudged after a litigation to her Cousin Thomas Hollis, Duke of Newcastle, whom her Father had wished her to marry, was so great, that on the Earl's Death, his magnificent Collection was sold, except what he bequeathed to his Widow, & his Collection of Hollis's works, and a rich cabinet which will be mentioned hereafter, which he left to his only Child Lady Margaret Cavendish Hollis, Harley, wife of William Bentinck, second Duke of Portland. The pictures, Statues, Busts, Bronzes, Coins, Medals, & various other curiosities, were sold by Auction. The MSS (except what were purchased by one of the Executors) were bought by Parliament for the British Museum. The Library of printed Books, with an immense collection of English Tracts, was bought by Osborne & Gray's Inn, Bookseller, for thirteen thousand pounds. The prints that were bound richly in Russia leather gilt; but by blending good & bad prints together to get off the bad, those volumes sold for little more than the binding had cost. The Books however indemnified him. The Duchess of Portland inherited the Passion of her Family for collecting. At

Fig. 6.5 Horace Walpole's handwritten account of the life of the duchess of Portland, bound inside his copy of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*. LWL 49 3902. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

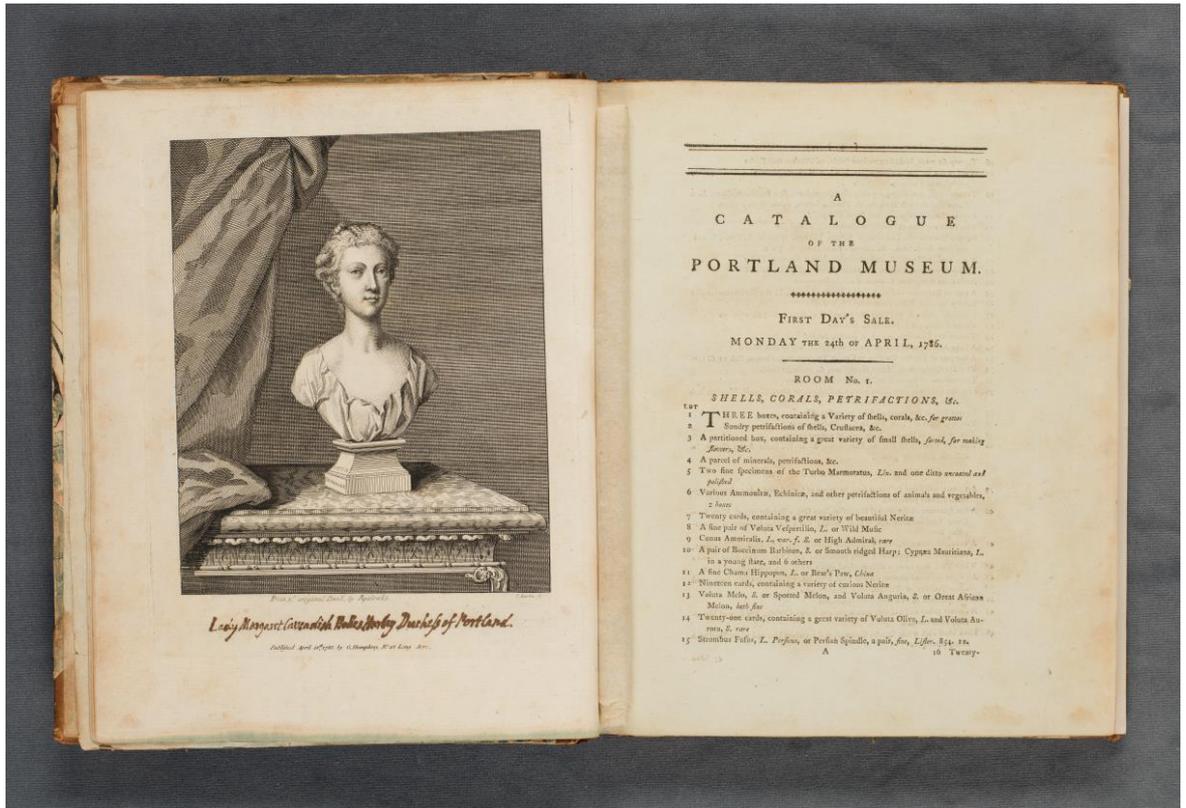


Fig. 6.6 George Vertue, after John Michael Rysbrack, *Margaret Cavendish Bentinck*, 1727. Extra-illustration in Horace Walpole's copy of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum*. LWL 49 3902. Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University.

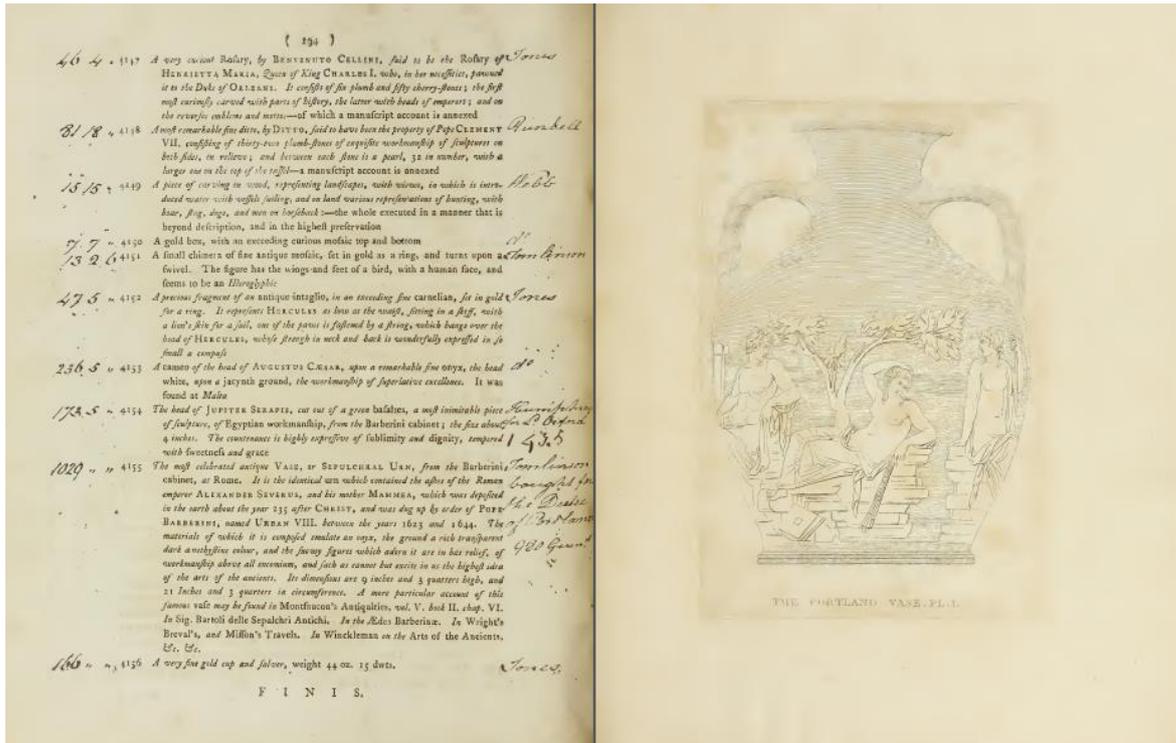


Fig. 6.7 The final page of *A Catalogue of the Portland Museum* with extra-illustration, 1786. Thomas J. Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 7.1 Jane Wildgoose, "Friendship" cabinet, *Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship, & the Order of Things*, Yale Centre for British Art (2009) © Jane Wildgoose