

10 Rich, Male and Single. The Consumption Practices of Edward Leigh, 1742-1786¹

Jon Stobart

During the winter of 1763-64, Stoneleigh Abbey was alive with craftsmen working to prepare the house in time for Edward Leigh's coming of age in March, when he would inherit the estate and become a peer of the realm. His steward, Samuel Butler, was kept busy writing letters to a variety of tradesmen, including the London upholsterer, Thomas Burnett. Being informed that some of the furniture ordered the previous year was now ready for delivery, he wrote in February 1764: "as to sending the furniture down at present, twill be best to retain it where is it is, for our House is now in greater confusion than ever ... any furniture for the bettermost Rooms will run great hazard of being spoil'd if sent yet, as we are making great alterations to the middle part of the House".² This correspondence and the events surrounding it at once confirm and question many of our understandings of elite domestic consumption in eighteenth-century England. We have a very wealthy young man, soon to inherit an estate worth around £10,000 per annum, busily improving his house and filling it with new furniture ordered from London. But there is no wife, and apparently no prospect of one for Edward Leigh. This is a single man, refurbishing a house acquired by his family following the Reformation and substantially extended by his grandfather, the third Lord Leigh, with a grandiose neo-baroque west wing.³ What can this case tell us about the wider processes and practices of domestic consumption amongst the elite and the impact on these of being single and male?

Elite consumption during the eighteenth century has received a great deal of attention from historians in recent decades. A traditional concern with collecting and connoisseurship has vied with a long-established critique of the decadence of luxury, fashion and overt displays of

wealth and power.⁴ Only recently has attention focused more fully on the practicalities and pleasures of domestic consumption, and on processes of acquisition as well as ownership. Here, the work of historians such as Vickery, Greig, Lewis and Harvey has been particularly significant, not least in stressing the importance of women in shaping the domestic environment.⁵ We might see this as emerging from a literature which viewed female materialism and indulgence as a fundamental driving force in consumption.⁶ However, it also links to a growing recognition of the important role played by women in consumption for and the construction of the material culture of the eighteenth-century home – a fruitful offshoot of the rather sterile debate over separate spheres.⁷

Despite this excellent research, we still know surprisingly little about the consumption priorities and practices of single people, especially wealthy men. Research on singles has generally centred on poorer people, particularly women, whose single status put them at the economic margins of the town. Where single men from the gentry or middling sort have been considered in their domestic setting, the focus has often been on their preparations for marriage – as Vickery observes: “It was a truth universally acknowledged that a Georgian house with a drawing room, French windows and lawn must be in want of a mistress”.⁸ But what happened when there was no bride? Research by Finn, Vickery, Harvey, and Hussey and Ponsonby has given us important insights into ‘men’s things’, and the relationship between masculinity and domesticity.⁹ They have suggested a distinctive male domestic material culture, albeit one that was often transitory (based around lodgings, for example); suffused with the desire for a marriage partner, or perhaps accommodating female tastes in the form of sisters or nieces.

What I want to do in this chapter is explore the situation for elite men, especially where no female hand can be detected. I draw on a large collection of bills covering many areas of the personal and household spending of Edward, fifth Lord Leigh (1742-86) – a man who never

married; had little experience of family life (both parents had died by the time he was seven), and whose only close relative, an older sister called Mary, lived in London. Edward's early life is largely obscure: educated at Westminster School in London, he matriculated to Oriel College, Oxford in 1761. Edward inherited the estate in 1763, but from 1768 was showing signs of the mental illness that resulted in him being declared insane in 1774. For the remainder of his life he lived away from Stoneleigh, in the care of a variety of doctors. The analysis therefore covers a relatively short period, c.1763-68, yet allows us to explore three related issues. First, what characterised his spending and what does this tell us about the man? Second, how did Edward's spending bring him into contact with urban tradesmen and urban environments? In other words, how did this single man engage with the city? Third, how did the absence of a wife and family influence Edward's behaviour? Did he act as a free agent or were choices constrained by other factors or other people? In short, what did it mean to be single?

Consumption and character

Campbell has argued that consumption was shaped by character ideals, the principles of which underpinned the behaviour of individuals. He focuses on three main types: sensibility and romanticism (which were primarily associated with the middle classes), and aristocratic.¹⁰ According to Campbell, the aristocratic ideal centred on honour, with its associated virtues of pride, independence and accomplishment; restrained behaviour and the absence of passion; and heroic or manly qualities as seen in heavy drinking or dangerous sports. For dandies, these were overlain with concerns for refinement and elegance, and for hyper-sensitivity coupled with extraordinary sang-froid. More recent analyses of elite masculinity have confirmed many of these categories, but have also placed considerable emphasis on ideas of

family, virtue, self-control, morality and oeconomy.¹¹ If this was the ideal to which aristocratic men might aspire, how do they help us to understand the behaviour of elite consumers such as Edward Leigh? Addressing this issue is problematic, because almost all of his personal papers were destroyed when Edward died, so there are no letters, diaries or journals on which to draw. Such documents would be invaluable in testing Harvey's argument that men increasingly constructed their identity through diachronic writing about themselves and their households.¹² However, many of the surviving bills demonstrate active decisions and actions, rather than habitual purchases, and thus provide some insight into his character. Moreover, as a single man, we can see consumption behaviour stripped of the needs and wants of other family members. In this sense, Edward's consumption was egoistic and, as Hussey and Ponsonby argue, his home can thus reveal something of his personality.¹³

We know little about Edward's spending patterns whilst at Oxford as only a handful of bills surviving, mostly for incidental expenditure on books, shoes and stockings, and laundry. From 1763, however, there was a dramatic growth in spending at Stoneleigh in order to make the house ready for the new Baron Leigh. This was the cause of the upheaval described by Butler in his letter to Burnett and marked the start of a massive spike in expenditure at Stoneleigh Abbey, the bills recording outgoings in excess of £13,600 in the six year period up to 1768. This was not reckless spending and Edward is revealed through the bills as a responsible landowner who had absorbed values of sound financial management, thus conforming to ideals of self-control and oeconomy.¹⁴ Many of the bills were associated with improvements made to the estate, including the costs of enclosure, but what concerns us here is his spending on the house.

The largest outgoings related to the refurbishment of a house which had lain empty for about 15 years. It needed to be made both habitable and hospitable, and fitting to a man of Edward's rank and status. Much of this appears to have been done in a fairly conservative style.

Plasterwork in the hall represents the life and apotheosis of Hercules – a popular allegory for virtue and courage, the familiarity of which was reinforced by the Grand Tour and study of the classics. Yet it was executed in a style that was sufficiently old-fashioned by the 1760s that the architectural historian, Andor Gomme, struggles to identify a stuccoist still able to execute such work.¹⁵ Edward's apparent appreciation of old decorative styles was also apparent in payments to rehang gilded leather wall-hangings in a number of bedchambers, including his own. A more general conservatism might be detected in the drapery bought to furnish the chapel, where crimson velvet was combined with gold braiding and tassels in a display of noble opulence.

All this might suggest a somewhat dated, masculine style of furnishing, perhaps reflecting Edward's single status and certainly more in keeping with his grandfather's original interiors than with the work being undertaken by his Warwickshire neighbours.¹⁶ The effect was moderated, however, by the furniture and upholstery ordered from Burnett and another London firm, William Gomm & Co.¹⁷ This included numerous items for bed chambers, but also a range of chairs, dining and Pembroke tables, sideboards, music tables and so on that provided a context for informal sociability. There were occasional excursions into rather dated rococo ornamentation (an elaborate altar table was made to the designs of the architect responsible for much of the internal decoration of the house, Timothy Lightoler); but most pieces were "fine", "solid" or "neat", built in the plain style which marked mainstream English elite taste at this time.¹⁸ Edward combined these with drapery that rendered his rooms elegant and tasteful. The Dining Parlour, often the centre for male domestic sociability, was decked out in green silk and worsted damask – much in favour for parlours and drawing rooms.¹⁹ This restrained sense of fashion was continued in his choice of wallpapers, purchased from another London firm, Bromwich and Leigh. He chose a fine pea green paper for his sister's bedchamber and added two large and 15 smaller Indian pictures in gold papier

maché frames. For his own room, a painted paper was matched with chintz hangings supplied by Burnett, suggesting an eye for co-ordinated schemes.²⁰ Vickery remarks on this kind of decorative sensitivity in her discussion of men fitting up houses for their prospective wives, but it is generally seen as absent from the homes of single men.²¹ Yet here is a man living alone and showing a keen appreciation of the nuances of decorative good taste.²² Being single did not impair Edward's ability to produce a house in which to live in a grand yet comfortable manner. Stoneleigh Abbey was not like Blenheim: a draughty palace in need of a woman's touch.²³

Edward also spent handsomely in pursuing his own personal interests, particularly books, science and music, on which we laid out over £1500 in the period 1763-68. These were typical areas of elite male spending, communicating taste, discernment and learning. Books in particular were part of a generally male passion for collecting, which could variously emphasise content, rarity and physical appearance. Edward acquired some truly remarkable volumes, including *Recueil des Peintures Antiques* costing £52 10s and *Herculaneum & Caserta*, in 4 volumes at £50.²⁴ Rarity was important (only 30 copies of *Recueil des Peintures* were printed), but so too were physical qualities because, like all collectors, Edward was keen to ensure his books looked impressive. Something of this can be discerned from a 1766 bill presented by the London bookseller, James Robson, which included "Baskets great imperial Bible, 2 vols richly bound in blue turkey with purple ribbons & Gold Fringe" and "Marsigli Cours du Danube, 6 vols, impls folio", which he had bound in 'Russia Leather Gilt with a border of Gold, double headbands' at a cost of nine guineas.²⁵

Purchases of sheet music covered a wide range of genres, but songs appear to have been a particular passion. There were numerous volumes of catches by a wide range of composers, and Edward was a member of the aristocratic Catch Club that sought to encourage the composition and performance of canons, catches and glees.²⁶ This practical interest in music

is underlined by the presence in his collection of a volume simply called ‘violin tutor’ and by a 1764 bill from William Hayes which includes £17 8s 9d for “205 times attendance” and a further 7s 6d for tuning the harpsichord.²⁷ A similar combination of collecting and practice is seen in his purchases of scientific equipment. Alongside the usual globes and barometers were an air pump, syringes, receivers, cylinder glasses; together with a range of books on astronomy, chemistry and anatomy, and a group which he headed “algebra, figures, mathematics, geometry, logic, metaphysics”.²⁸ This suggests an interest beyond that of the typical learned gentleman, but what really stands out is Edward’s bequest of both his library and his scientific instruments to Oxford University – a gift reinforced by the £1000 given to the Vice Chancellor to purchase equipment to illustrate “mathematical lectures and experiments”.²⁹ Here, it was Edward’s single status and family circumstances that mattered: without an obvious heir, affinity with his alma mater appears to have out-weighed commitment to a wider kinship group.

Edward’s was a different kind of masculinity from that outlined by Vickery and forms an implicit rejection of aristocratic ideals of heroic manliness; horses, clothes and wine were purchased, but their consumption did not define his spending or his identity.³⁰ It is useful here to think in terms fragmented identities rather than stereotypes; Edward’s character drew on many different aspects of masculinity rather than conforming to ideals that might be traced through conduct literature.³¹ Whilst enthusiastic in his pursuit of academic interests, Edward was no unworldly aesthete, with aristocratic and family pride being clearly expressed through his consumption practices. Rank and dignity were reflected in his construction of a tasteful interior at Stoneleigh and his use of expensive and fine materials,³² but it was more explicitly stated in his spending on overt symbols of status. Within the décor of the house, the family crest appeared over and again in the plasterwork and the woodwork. Edward even drew it on each of his rather fanciful sketches for remodelling the façade of the West Wing.³³ In terms of

moveables, carriages and silverware were most important as carriers of status. With the former, there were bills for two new coaches, that from James Cope in 1764 including “the Arms and Dignity in very Large Mantles”.³⁴ The public demonstration of status made through owning a coach was reinforced by the painting of Edward’s coat of arms which communicated status, but also family. Less public, but no less important was the engraving of arms onto larger items of silver tableware such as epergnes, candlesticks, basins and plates.³⁵ With crests appearing on each piece of cutlery, the status of the Edward and the Leigh family was quite literally pushed down the throat of dinner guests. Moreover, as Berg argues, stamping title onto material objects in this way rendered them “signifiers of family and memory”, suggesting that Edward was a single man firmly in touch with his familial identity.³⁶

Analysis of Edward’s consumption reveals a complex character. His wealth and independence gave him considerable scope to choose, although he operated within the expectations of society and the constraints of estate and family responsibilities. This range of factors was experienced by many elite men and women; like others, Edward acquired goods that fitted his needs and reflected aspects of the aristocratic ideal. He demonstrated accomplishment, restraint and pride in his rank and heritage, but drew on particular notions of aristocratic manliness – more learned and virtuous than heroic. His single status does not appear to have resulted in the distinctive patterns of consumption seen in the bachelors studied by Hussey, Vickery and others; but his creation of a comfortable and tasteful domestic interior reveals that neither marriage nor syncretic family were necessary in this process.

Engagement with the city

As a major landowner, it is unsurprising that Edward had links to several towns in the area around his Warwickshire estate. Indeed, it is likely that these links were stronger than is suggested in Table 1 since many of the suppliers who cannot be located firmly in space were probably from the local area. In Norfolk, the Le Strange family visited a hierarchy of centres, including nearby Kings Lynn and more distant Norwich, from which higher status goods were acquired.³⁷ Such hierarchical distinctions were less apparent with Edward. Coventry was most important in quantitative terms, supplying a range of goods including china, nails, locks, stationery, medicines, spirits and above all groceries. Two individuals stand out: Hugh Jones and Lilley Smith, who between them presented 18 consolidated bills for a wide range of groceries between 1763 and 1768.³⁸ Goods also came from Kenilworth in the form of servants' livery and highly skilled craftsmen came from Warwick, most notably Timothy Lightoler and William Hiorns, who undertook building work at Stoneleigh during 1764, mostly fitting chimney pieces and hearths to upper storey rooms.³⁹ Yet, of the provincial towns, it was Oxford that probably held greatest sway over Edward; not in terms of spending, but rather in his emotional ties to the city. Such long-term connections were seen in other members of the Warwickshire elite, Sir Roger Newdigate enjoying a close relationship as the University's MP (1751-80) and marking this with donations for college feasts and to the Ashmolean Museum.⁴⁰ In Edward's case, his election as High Steward of the University in 1765 was probably crucial, but the post-mortem gifts, noted earlier were unusual in that they involved personal goods as well as money.⁴¹

[Insert Table 1]

Above all Edward looked to London to meet his consumption needs. Aristocratic presence in and dependence on London was frequently criticised as it was seen to undermine the social

and economic bonds between landowner and locale. John Byng constantly complained of houses closed up because their owners were in London and newspapers argued that absentee landowners “spend only the most contemptible portion of their incomes in the country”.⁴² Like his neighbour, Sir Roger Newdigate, Edward looked to London when furnishing his home, cementing his status through positional goods, and feeding his taste for books (Table 2).⁴³ In this sense, the metropolis was central to Edward’s self and public image. His suppliers included famous craftsmen, such as Edward Nairne, who patented several electrical machines; prominent partnerships, like Bromwich and Leigh, which specialised in supplying imported and English wallpaper to the provincial elite; and celebrated booksellers, including Thomas Payne, whose shop formed a well-known focus for the London literati. They were spread across London, from the traditional retail areas east of Cheapside, to the fashionable streets of the burgeoning West End; but most particularly in the key areas around the Strand. Edward was thus engaged with the whole of the city, at least as it was defined by its core retailing. However, his relationship with suppliers was far from uniform.

[Insert Table 2]

The extent to which Edward shopped for himself is uncertain, but the practice was certainly widespread amongst the London elite. A note attached to Paul Vaillant’s bill of October 1764 makes clear that Edward sometimes visited shops in person, the bookseller writing that: “When My Lord chose books at my Shop he took the trouble to enter down in his pocket book the titles & prices of all but One, which he bespoke a day or two afterwards”.⁴⁴ This is revealing in a number of ways, not least as a reflection of Edward’s assiduity in checking bills. Most telling here, however, is that it shows that he was browsing in Vaillant’s shop and perhaps others as well: seeing what was available, noting prices, buying some items and

returning with further orders. Such practices may have been restricted to his book buying, but they chime with Claire Walsh's descriptions of elite shopping in London and with the practices of other male shoppers, including Newdigate.⁴⁵ It is likely that Edward visited the showrooms of china dealers such as Charles Vere on Fleet Street, from whom he bought figurines in 1765, and perhaps those of his silversmith, Thomas Gilpin who in the same year supplied a "fine large brilliant diamond set around with seventeen small brilliants in a ring", which would surely have been bespoke in person.⁴⁶ That Edward was present in London and socialising with others is apparent from his membership of the Catch Club, the bill for which included both a subscription and payment to the Master of the St Alban's Tavern who presumably provided victuals.⁴⁷ That said, he was not a very clubbable man and not especially active in political life. It was attendance at Parliament that often drew the gentry and nobility to London, generally with their families in tow, helping to create a lively social season which increasingly became a major draw in itself. Newdigate shopped in London whilst in town for Parliamentary sessions, his purchases of books in particular having a distinctive seasonal rhythm. However, whilst Edward took his seat in the House of Lords, he attended only occasionally and, in a rare surviving letter to his sister Mary, he excuses himself for not visiting her in London where she lived.⁴⁸ Perhaps his visits would have been more frequent if he had had a wife anxious to join metropolitan society, but other bachelors do not appear to have found their marital status an impediment to such socialising. Indeed, shopping could be seen as part of the social round and central in constructing a leisurely and fashionable self-image.⁴⁹

In his metropolitan shopping, Edward drew on his sister Mary; a practice common amongst provincial landowners, especially those living in more remote parts of the country.⁵⁰ She sometimes acted as a proxy shopper, for example being reimbursed 40 guineas for a batch of china sent up to Stoneleigh. We lack details of the processes involved here, but Mary

probably behaved in the same assiduous manner noted by Walsh amongst others operating in this capacity.⁵¹ On other occasions, she probably provided information on products and prices. More generally, however, Edward's links with London were conducted through correspondence, much of it now lost. This was common practice amongst elite shoppers, even when they lived in London. It depended, to some extent, on a trusting relationship between customer and shopkeeper, without which arguments over price, quality and payment could easily escalate – an experience all too apparent in the correspondence of Elizabeth and Henry Purefoy.⁵² That said, the practice of sending samples (of cloth or wallpaper) and the growing availability of pattern books for stuccowork, chinaware, and especially furniture, made it a far less risky undertaking, particularly when dealing with large London firms experienced in supplying the rural gentry. Gomm & Co., Burnett, and Bromwich and Leigh all supplied Stoneleigh remotely, although each had teams of workmen and a supervisor working in the house itself. Even so, problems could arise. Complaints were made about the poor quality of some of the furniture sent to Stoneleigh by Burnett: “the wood in general appears to be very green, & the workmanship is intolerable”.⁵³ The outrage expressed by Edward's steward was keen because it was supposed that the goods had come from Gomm & Co. of whom much higher standards were expected. When it transpired that this was not the case, the anger subsided a little, but not the disappointment with the furniture or the resentment that Burnett's man on the ground, Mr Greenhouse, had tried to defend the furniture as acceptable.⁵⁴ Indeed, it was through corresponding with Burnett himself, not through discussions with Greenhouse that the problem was eventually resolved. This reveals that a close working relationship could be maintained with a large London firm from a distance of a hundred miles or so. Provincial consumers could be tied to the city without being part of it. But what difference did it make that Edward was single? Would the presence of a wife have affected this exchange or, more generally, the nature and practice of domestic consumption at Stoneleigh?

Single status, advice and choice

In the absence of a wife or any other family resident with him at Stoneleigh Abbey, it might be assumed that Edward had free reign to make his own choices about what to buy and how to furnish his home. At one level, this was certainly true, but it is worth considering the extent to which we should view Edward as single. He was unmarried, to be sure, but it is unlikely that he ever lived on his own except, perhaps, in his rooms at Oxford.⁵⁵ At Stoneleigh Abbey he had an extensive body of servants and was in close contact with his uncle and guardian, William Craven, who appears to have been at Stoneleigh Abbey almost as much as Edward during 1763 and early 1764. In addition, there were numerous craftsmen and workmen present in the house, often for weeks or months at a time. Some of the purchases made by Edward were therefore providing for the needs of other household members, for example the furniture for servants' room included in the order from Burnett. Moreover, he was not short of people to whom he might turn for advice when it came to his domestic consumption.

Somewhat surprisingly, there is no evidence that his sister, Mary, played much part in these processes. She and Edward were on good terms and she may well have introduced her brother to a variety of London retailers, especially drapers and mercers. Beyond this, however, there is nothing to suggest that she offered advice, even on the furnishing of her rooms at Stoneleigh Abbey. Perhaps the key person in this regard was William Craven. As guardian, he managed Edward's affairs until he came of age in 1763, but continued to play an important part in Edward's life for at least the following year or two. His influence was most obviously seen in the fact that a good number of bills in the Stoneleigh Abbey archive were presented to him, even when Edward had officially reached his majority. For example, in December 1763, Jordan, Heyland and Biggar sent their bill for a variety of sheets and napery, addressing it to

‘W^m Craven, Esq., for the Right Hon^{ble} Lord Leigh’.⁵⁶ In some ways, this was a formal nicety, acknowledging the route through which an order came and thus the proper route that the bill should follow. Yet it also signalled the wider influence that Craven carried. In the complaints made to Thomas Burnett about the shoddy furniture he had supplied, Craven is placed alongside Edward Leigh in adjudicating quality and determining the best way to proceed. At the start of the process they are described inspecting the furniture together; later they are presented at dinner, discussing the matter and agreeing with everyone present that the workmanship and material were severely wanting, and that the goods should be returned; finally, we hear that Craven (in the absence of his nephew), has determined that they can remain, Burnett having apparently offered a reduced price.⁵⁷

We might view Craven as a father figure to Edward – a kind of *loco parentis* – guiding him through the trials of setting up and furnishing his house. However, the situation goes beyond that: a father would almost inevitably be dead in order that his son could inherit and stamp his own mark on the house and estate; and it is clear that the ultimate authority lay with Edward: it was his Lordship’s displeasure that formed the constant point of reference and all actions were taken in his name. There was no power struggle between the generations of the kind that Vickery describes amongst middling families and no question of who was in charge.⁵⁸ What is more difficult to determine is whether his uncle helped to shape Edward’s decisions in terms of domestic consumption – perhaps in this way taking on a role usually occupied by a wife. It is perfectly possible that the two men discussed the kind of furniture, drapery, wallpaper and stuccowork that might best adorn the rooms at Stoneleigh Abbey. It may have been from his uncle that Edward acquired his rather conservative, even slightly old-fashioned tastes. Certainly Craven’s own home, Coombe Abbey, was still largely the house constructed by his ancestor in the late seventeenth century. We know little about its interior, but it is striking that his successor, another nephew also called William Craven with whom Edward was at Oxford,

set about making significant alterations to the house and grounds when he inherited Coombe Abbey in 1769.⁵⁹

Much is uncertain, then, but we can be sure that Craven had a great influence on his young ward, not least inculcating restraint in spending.⁶⁰ However, Edward's interests were also well served by his steward, Samuel Butler, who comes across as a solid and trustworthy character with a clear sense of his duty to his employer. One aspect of this is seen in his correspondence with Craven about Timothy Lightoler, the architect-builder engaged to oversee the refurbishment of the house in the 1760s. He noted that Lightoler:

“seems to have cut out a great deal of work for his Lordship, sufficient to take up a good deal of his ready money; if he does not give estimates with his plans, it might be advisable for his Lordship to require it, that he might see how he was going on, for I apprehend it would be a very disagreeable circumstance to his Lordship to be run aground before he was aware”.⁶¹

Later, when writing to Burnett about the decision to retain the faulty furniture, he noted that “the goods may remain at Stoneleigh if you think well at the price you have sent down, tho' we have many workmen here that will undertake to make better for less money”.⁶² Such concerns are fitting for a steward, but they also strike a chord with the financial prudence seen as an essential part of oeconomy and good housewifery. Indeed, it is not too fanciful to see the steward fulfilling some of the roles of household management often associated with wives in gentry and middling families: dealing with the servants and the day-to-day finances of the household, ensuring that bills were paid and that the accounts balanced. As Harvey argues of middling sort wives, Butler's role was vital in underpinning the financial and thus moral probity of the household and, by extension, the male householder.⁶³ Yet in some respects Butler's remit went beyond this; it was he that wrote to tradesmen to confirm orders or complain about poor goods – a position very different from that seen in many genteel

households, including that of Elizabeth and Henry Purefoy, who dealt with these matters in person.⁶⁴ In this role, Butler appears to have been meticulous, especially in his dealings with Thomas Burnett. He struck a tone that was at once friendly and authoritative, always holding the trump card of his Lordship's displeasure.

In many other ways, of course, Butler's position was very much less than that of a wife, not least because he had little if any influence in matters of choice or taste – precisely the role given to wives and prospective wives by modern historians and in contemporary literature. Much of Jane Austen's discussion of domestic arrangements, for instance, presumes a consensus amongst her readers that one of the chief roles of a wife was to bring a proper feminine taste to bear on the drawing room and parlour.⁶⁵ Butler was reluctant even to order a replacement stove, fearing that the cook would disapprove his choice. Moreover, he was anxious not to appear to operate above his station, and stated in his letter to Craven about the possible escalating cost of Lightoler's schemes that: "I hope sir that you will not, from what I've said, infer that I presume to prescribe rules for his Lordships conduct. Intentions of that kind are far from me".⁶⁶

In contrast, one person who certainly did aim to shape Edward's taste and decisions about domestic consumption was Lightoler himself. He was an accomplished architect, author of *The Gentleman and Farmer's Architect* (1764) and co-author of *The Modern Builder's Assistant* (1757), and had moved to Warwick in 1750. At Stoneleigh Abbey, he was responsible for many of the improvements both in the house, presenting designs for several of the principal rooms, and the kitchen garden, stables and "other offices".⁶⁷ His influence went further; the two chimney pieces in the hall, made by Bastard and Fox in London, were "by the order of Mr Timothy Lightoler", and (as noted earlier) Gomm's rococo altar table was to his design. He also placed an order on Edward's behalf for architectural books with Robert Sayer of London.⁶⁸ As Wilson and Mackley make clear, this kind of arrangement was not unusual:

architects often had a privileged relationship with their patrons, wielding considerable influence and moulding decisions concerning interior as well as exterior design. However, they also note that landowners took advice from friends and family, and often viewed proposed designs with a critical eye. Rather than slavishly adopting proposed schemes, then, many patrons were proud to report how designs were arrived at mutually.⁶⁹ This seems to have been the case at Stoneleigh Abbey. None of Lightoler's decorative schemes were adopted in full, although elements of several can be found on the staircase and in the hall. There are some hints of the Herculean story in one of Lightoler's drawings for the hall, but there was quite clearly a dramatic shift in terms of how the scheme would be executed as well as its scale.⁷⁰ Perhaps Edward himself was responsible for this change? He was certainly well versed in architecture and purchased a wide range of books on the subject, both practical and decorative; and he was quite capable of producing detailed architectural drawings, as his designs for the west front make clear.

Lightoler's influence over the young Edward Leigh was thus circumscribed by his employer's own tastes and desires; yet there is also evidence that Edward changed his mind, perhaps as a result from advice given by Lightoler or one of the key suppliers of his domestic furnishings. He switched the colour scheme in the chapel from blue to red and a memorandum in his own hand suggests ideas for arrangements in his 'own room' that were radically different from those that were executed. He lists a blue bed, "plain like the others ... with a flock wallpaper d^o"; Burnett fitted chintz curtains, and Bromwich and Leigh supplied painted paper to match.⁷¹ Either Burnett or Bromwich, who appear to have operated closely in their work at Stoneleigh Abbey, may have suggested this change and perhaps had a broader input into the decorative schemes. Upholsterers frequently offered advice as well as providing goods, their position at the centre of a wide network of craftsmen giving them authority in terms of taste. It is striking that many of the bedrooms fitted out by Burnett had co-ordinated colour schemes, suggesting

that Edward had opted for a series of standard types rather than impressing his own taste on every room. This would make a great deal of sense when furnishing a large number of bedrooms all at once, allowing work to progress quickly and yet giving each room a slightly different identity. Whether the idea came from Edward, Burnett or Lightoler is impossible to determine; again, a negotiated position seems most likely. In absorbing ideas and advice in this way, Edward was no different from many other consumers, both married and single.⁷²

Conclusions

Edward was, in many ways, an exceptional young man. His wealth and status set him apart, but so too did his single status and, ultimately, his descent to insanity. Yet his life, and more particularly his pattern of spending, throws up many questions which challenge our understanding of the relationship between character, bachelorhood, domestic consumption and the city. As Vickery and others have argued, most men wanted or needed a wife. The material culture of the house was an important lure in attracting a prospective partner, both in terms of what was present and what potential there was to enhance the décor.⁷³ The permanent absence of a wife was felt in bachelor rooms and houses, which are often portrayed as both distinctive and distinctly wanting in the possibilities for polite sociability, not least because men, especially single men, often socialised outside the home, in coffee houses, taverns and clubs.⁷⁴ Edward's domestic consumption and domestic environment challenge this image: Stoneleigh Abbey was not an especially masculine space and differed very little from the kind of interior created in many other Georgian country houses. The taste was, perhaps, a little conservative, but it was fashionable enough and provided ample opportunity for the less formal sociability that increasingly marked country house living at this time.⁷⁵ This offers further evidence of the problems inherent in the idea of separate spheres and also

challenges assumptions about the gendered nature of domestic consumption. As Harvey has recently argued, men were interested in their domestic environment, both in terms of its oeconomy and its aesthetics.⁷⁶ Moreover, the transformation of the house came with inheritance, not marriage, again questioning the importance often accorded to the latter as the key moment in economic and domestic transformation. For the aristocracy – and indeed for many ordinary people – it was inheritance that gave financial freedom and allowed the establishment of a separate household shaped around a new householder.

To realise his ambitions and furnish his country house, Edward looked to towns, and particularly to London. His great wealth allowed him to draw supplies from a wide range of craftsmen and retailers; to employ architects to help mould and articulate his ideas, and to buy goods of the highest quality. Such practices were common amongst the English landowning classes, but they underline the fact that consumers did not have to be in the city to feel its influence or benefit from the world of goods which it opened up. In choosing from this cornucopia, Edward was influenced by many factors. It might be argued that his single status was important in allowing him to mould his whole domestic environment rather than having to negotiate decisions or defer to a wife's preferences. Certainly his wealth opened up opportunities unavailable to most people, whether married or single. Nonetheless, it is possible to see the constraining hand of family on the shoulder of even a wealthy bachelor such as Edward Leigh. His restraint was not simply a result of the watchful eye of his steward, but part of the expected behaviour of a responsible landowner who invested much more than he spent. In this he conformed to a set of aristocratic ideals that are also seen in his accomplishments in book collecting and music, and his pride in heritage and rank, marked by the imprinting of his arms on a range of material objects, from cutlery to coaches.⁷⁷ What makes this emphasis on family all the more remarkable is the absence of parents and of the prospect of any children – either his own or his sister's, since Mary also remained single.

Edward was, in effect, dynastically isolated. But perhaps this position helps to explain his emphasis of family as part of his heritage, status and identity; although single, the concept of family remained very real.

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² Shakespeare Central Library and Archive (SCLA), DR18/17/27/96 – letter to Thomas Burnett, January 1764.

³ Andor Gomme, ‘Abbey into Palace: a Lesser Wilton?’, in Robert Bearman (ed.), *Stoneleigh Abbey. The House, Its Owners, Its Lands* (Stratford: Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2004), 82-5.

⁴ On the powerful influence of luxury and fashion in driving consumption, see: Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (1913; Michigan: Chicago University Press, 1967); Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: an Economic Study of Institutions* (London: Macmillan, 1899); Neil McKendrick, ‘The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England’, in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb (eds.), *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (London: Methuen, 1982), 9-33. For a summary of the debate over luxury, see: Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21-45; Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Luxury. A Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), esp. 138-9.

⁵ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter. Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Hannah Greig, ‘Leading the Fashion: the Material Culture of London’s *Beau Monde*’, in John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds.), *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 293-313; Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors. At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Judith Lewis, ‘When a House is Not a Home: Elite English Women and the Eighteenth-Century Country House’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), 336-63; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic. Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 82-6.

⁶ This tradition that goes right back to Sombart, but finds its clearest expression in McKendrick’s interpretation of an eighteenth-century consumer revolution.

⁷ David Hussey, ‘Guns, Horses and Stylish Waistcoats? Male Consumer Activity and Domestic Shopping in Late-Eighteenth and Early-Nineteenth Century England’, in David Hussey and Margaret Ponsonby (eds.), *Buying for the Home. Shopping for the Domestic from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 47-72. At the same time, Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 52, notes that Georgian men have traditionally been seen as part of the public sphere; their role at home is generally overlooked.

⁸ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 83. On the importance of marriage as a key lifestage moment for men, see Harvey, *Little Republic*, 102-5. On the role of wives in structuring the domestic environment, see also: Hannah Greig, ‘Eighteenth-century English interiors in Image and Text’, in Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant (eds.), *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance* (London: V&A Publications, 2006), esp. 121-2; Lewis, ‘When a house’.

⁹ Margot Finn, ‘Men’s Things: Masculine Possession in the Consumer Revolution’, *Social History*, 25 (2000), 133-55; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 49-82; Karen Harvey, ‘Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Gender and History*, 21:3 (2009), 520-41; David Hussey and Margaret Ponsonby, *The Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), esp. 22-7, 151-8. For more general discussion of masculinity and domesticity, see Harvey, *Little Republic*.

¹⁰ Colin Campbell, ‘Understanding Traditional and Modern Patterns of Consumption in Eighteenth-Century England: a Character-Action Approach’, in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), 40-58.

¹¹ See Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1-20; William Stafford, ‘Gentlemanly Masculinities as Represented by the Late Georgian *Gentleman’s Magazine*’, *History*, 93:309 (2008), 47-68; Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man’s Estate. Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Similar arguments have been made for the middling sorts by: Woodruff Smith, *Consumption and the Making of Respectability, 1600-1800* (London:

Routledge, 2002), 25-62; Hannah Barker, 'Soul, Purse and Family: Middling and Lower Class Masculinity in Eighteenth Century Manchester', *Social History*, 33 (2008), 12-35; Harvey, *Little Republic*, esp. 134-68.

¹² Harvey, *Little Republic*, 134-58.

¹³ Hussey and Ponsonby, *Single Homemaker*, 110-11.

¹⁴ French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, 78-80, 141-51; Harvey, *Little Republic*, 65-9.

¹⁵ Gomme, 'Abbey into palace', 114.

¹⁶ See Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, 'Fashion, Heritage and Family: New and Old in the Georgian Country House', *Cultural and Social History* (forthcoming, 2014); Geoffrey Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1994), esp. 9-15, 64-70.

¹⁷ These bills are found in SCLA, DR18/3/47/52/15; DR18/5/4408.

¹⁸ John Cornforth, *Early Georgian Interiors* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Geoffrey Beard, *Georgian Craftsmen and their Work* (New York: AS Barnes & Co, 1966).

¹⁹ Hussey and Ponsonby, *Single Homemaker*, 115-24.

²⁰ SCLA, DR18/5/4402.

²¹ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 94; Hussey and Ponsonby, *Single Homemaker*, 120-1.

²² See also the discussion of James Watt in Hussey and Ponsonby, *Single Homemaker*, 53-5.

²³ Lewis, 'When a House', 343-8.

²⁴ SCLA, DR18/5/4202; Mark Purcell, "'A Lunatick of Unsound Mind": Edward, Lord Leigh (1742-86) and the refounding of Oriel College library', *Bodleian Library Record*, 17 (2001), 253-4.

²⁵ SCLA, DR18/5/4529.

²⁶ For example: SCLA, DR18/5/4554.

²⁷ SCLA, DR18/4/75 – list of books at Stoneleigh Abbey, 1766 and 1785; DR18/5/4173.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ SCLA, DR18/13/7/13-4, Will of Edward Lord Leigh, proved 22 July 1786.

³⁰ Campbell, 'Understanding Consumption', 50; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 106-28. See also Hussey, 'Guns, Horses and Stylish Waistcoats'; Finn, 'Men's Things'.

³¹ For a useful critique of over-reliance on conduct literature, see Karen Harvey and Alexandra Shepard, 'What Have Historians Done with Masculinity? Five Centuries of British History, c. 1500-1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), 274-80.

³² Greig, 'Beau Monde', discusses the ways in which rank and status were communicated through fashionable interiors.

³³ SCLA, DR18/671/33 – Designs for Stoneleigh Abbey.

³⁴ SCLA, DR18/5/4350.

³⁵ For example: SCLA, DR18/5/4251.

³⁶ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 242.

³⁷ Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household. The World of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55-64. For other regional shopping practices, see Helen Berry, 'Prudent Luxury: the Metropolitan Tastes of Judith Baker, Durham Gentlewoman', in Penny Lane and Roey Sweet (eds.), *Out of Town: Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 131-56; Jon Stobart, Andrew Hann and Victoria Morgan, *Spaces of Consumption. Leisure and Shopping in the English Town, c.1680-1830* (London: Routledge, 2007), 53-5.

³⁸ There is a marked absence of purchases of food by Edward, suggesting that bills in this area of spending have not survived in any number.

³⁹ SCLA, DR18/5/4192. The relationship appears to have ended abruptly, with Hiorn receiving a warning about attempts to bribe servants, written by Edward Leigh himself in the receipted bill.

⁴⁰ Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, 'Geographies of Supply: Stoneleigh Abbey and Arbury Hall in the Eighteenth Century', in Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann, *The Country House: Material Culture and Consumption* (London: English Heritage, forthcoming, 2014).

⁴¹ SCLA, DR18/17/27/52.

⁴² John Byng, 5th Viscount Torrington, *The Torrington Diaries*, ed. C.B. Andrews, 4 vols (London, 1934-38); Anon, 'English and Irish Land-Letting', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 17, 101 (June 1825), 684.

⁴³ Stobart and Rothery, 'Geographies of Supply'.

⁴⁴ SCLA, DR18/5/4202.

⁴⁵ Claire Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping and the Art of Decision Making in eighteenth-century England', in John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds.) *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 151-77; Stobart and Rothery, 'Geographies of Supply'.

⁴⁶ SCLA, DR18/5/4383, DR18/5/4251.

⁴⁷ SCLA, DR18/5/4554.

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- ⁴⁸ Roy Porter, *London: a Social History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 134; Mark Rothery and Jon Stobart, 'Inheritance Events and Spending Patterns in the English Country House: the Leigh Family of Stoneleigh Abbey, 1738-1806', *Continuity and Change*, 27:3 (2012), 379-407; SCLA, DR18/17/27/71 – letter from Edward Leigh to Mary Leigh, 15 March 1763.
- ⁴⁹ Greig, 'Beau Monde'; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 63-5.
- ⁵⁰ This was more noted in women than men. See, for example, Berry, 'Prudent Luxury', 145-6; Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 168-9; G. Eland (ed.) *Purefoy Letters, 1735-53* (London, 1931), passim.
- ⁵¹ SCLA, DR18/17/27/101; Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping'.
- ⁵² Eland, *Purefoy Letters*, nos 103, 104, 106, 111. See also Stobart, Hann and Morgan, *Spaces of Consumption*, 157-63.
- ⁵³ SCLA, DR18/17/27/82 – letter to Thomas Burnett, 27 September 1763.
- ⁵⁴ There was a suggestion that perhaps it was the work that Gomm made for the export trade – SCLA, DR18/17/27/84 – letter to Thomas Burnett, 13 October 1763.
- ⁵⁵ On the furnishing of such rooms, see Hussey and Ponsonby, *Single Homemaker*, 180-2.
- ⁵⁶ SCLA, DR18/5/4028. See also DR18/5/4069.
- ⁵⁷ SCLA, DR18/17/27/82, DR18/17/27/84, DR18/17/27/85 – letter to Thomas Burnett, 27 October 1763.
- ⁵⁸ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 61-2.
- ⁵⁹ Tyack, *Warwickshire Country Houses*, 60-2.
- ⁶⁰ For fuller discussion of this, see Rothery and Stobart, 'Inheritance Events'.
- ⁶¹ SCLA, DR18/17/27/97 – letter to William Craven, 11 February 1764.
- ⁶² SCLA, DR18/17/27/85.
- ⁶³ Harvey, *Little Republic*, 64-76; Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, 26-48.
- ⁶⁴ Eland, *Purefoy Letters*, 103, 104, 105, 106, 111.
- ⁶⁵ See Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 83-8.
- ⁶⁶ SCLA, DR18/17/27/97.
- ⁶⁷ SCLA, DR671/33. See also Gome, 'Abbey into Palace'.
- ⁶⁸ SCLA, DR18/5/4203, DR18/5/4408, DR18/5/4209.
- ⁶⁹ Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise. The Building of the English Country House* (London: Continuum, 2000), 109-44; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 156-7. Contemporary illustrations, such as Frederick Elegantly Furnishing a Large House (an anonymous etching and engraving from 1786, reproduced in Greig, 'Eighteenth-Century English Interiors', 127) generally show the owner directing craftsmen in their work in furnishing the house, often with a woman also present.
- ⁷⁰ Gomme, 'Abbey into Palace', 105,-14.
- ⁷¹ SCLA, DR18/3/47/52/12, DR18/3/47/52/15, DR18/5/4402.
- ⁷² See Clive Edwards, *Turning Houses into Homes. A History of the Retailing and Consumption of Domestic Furnishings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 84-8.
- ⁷³ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 83-105; Hussey, 'Guns, Horses and Stylish Waistcoats'; Lewis, 'When a House', 357-62.
- ⁷⁴ See Hussey and Ponsonby, *Single Homemaker*, 119-23.
- ⁷⁵ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 181-244.
- ⁷⁶ Harvey, *Little Republic*, 64-80, 115-25.
- ⁷⁷ Campbell, 'Understanding Consumption', 49-51.