

# Men, women and the supply of luxury goods in eighteenth-century England

## Introduction

The pursuit of luxury has long been seen as a key element in the consumption practices of the elite: it marked their status and distinguished them from lower social groups. Such concerns have, in the past, been viewed as part of a male domain concerned with dynastic spending that defined status. Men were the builders of country houses, the discerning Grand Tourists, the collectors of art and antiquities, and the inheritors of estates.<sup>1</sup> The consumption of landowners is thus seen as essentially male: it embodied masculine virtues of self-control, taste and pride in family.<sup>2</sup> Of course, women also bought a wide range of luxury goods. Indeed, for Sombart, it was female addiction to luxury that underpinned spending and was ultimately responsible for the emergence of capitalism – an argument that is rehearsed by McKendrick and others when emphasising the key role played by women in a fashion-led consumer revolution.<sup>3</sup> Yet only recently have historians begun to scratch the veneer of male dynastic spending, to discover men relying on their wives to determine and carry out decorative schemes, implicitly if not explicitly acknowledging their refined taste.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, there is a growing body of research on the consumption practices of elite women which emphasises their key role in exercising restraint and care, rather than succumbing to the decadent pleasures of luxury and seducing their men to do the same.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, distinctly masculine forms of consumption have received rather less attention (but see the chapters by Ijäs and Ilmakunnas in this volume): they are often the un-variegated ‘other’ against which the subtleties of female consumption are highlighted. Recent studies have begun to question some of the stereotypes of ostentatious display, connoisseurship and overt manliness, highlighting instead the importance of

character, life cycle and status.<sup>6</sup> Yet the focus is often on bachelors, not least because this is the surest way of knowing that it is male rather than family consumption being assessed. Attempts at drawing together male and female consumption are generally done within the confines of marriage, the contrast being made most clearly by Vickery in her analysis of the account books of elite husbands and wives. She shows men indulging their tastes and passions, buying coaches and saddlery, wine and fine clothes. Their wives, meanwhile, were responsible for managing the household budget and supplying the everyday needs of their husband and children. Moreover, men enjoyed a close, even chummy relationship with suppliers, whilst women interacted with tradesmen in a more functional and transactional manner.<sup>7</sup>

From such analysis, we know a growing amount about the ways in which male and female consumption was inter-related within the nuptial home. However, there is a danger that we conflate male and female with husband and wife: gender becomes confused with marital relationships. By looking instead at the consumption practices of a brother and sister, we try to bring a different perspective on the relationship between gender and consumption, one that challenges some of the easy stereotypes of dynastic husband and domestic wife. This chapter offers an analysis of the consumption practices of [an English brother and sister](#), Edward, fifth Lord Leigh (1743–86) and the Honourable Mary Leigh (1736–1806) – successive owners of Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire. Their father, Thomas fourth Lord Leigh, had died when they were still in their minority and they were brought up under the care of relatives. Neither Edward nor Mary married. He appears to have been troubled by mental problems from the age of about 25 and was declared insane in 1774, the administration of the estate passing to the hands of a Commission comprising a cousin, William Craven, and Mary.<sup>8</sup> She had considerable independent wealth and spent much of her time in London, yet never appears to have attracted suitors. Together, they form an interesting case against which to test some of our assumptions about gender and

luxury consumption. Drawing on a large collection of receipted bills and related correspondence, we begin by mapping out the overall spending patterns of Edward and Mary, and assess the importance of gender in relation to status, life-course and the character of the individual. Building on this, we examine the nature of their relationship with suppliers [in London and in provincial towns, like Warwick and Coventry](#), and thus with the urban economy. Unsurprisingly, most supplies came from towns, but examining how the pattern and geography of supply varied with status, gender and life stage, allows us to explore the dynamic relationship between town and country, and challenge any simple dichotomy of urban supply and rural consumption. Overall, our analysis challenges easy stereotypes of gender-based consumption by highlighting the complexities of consumption practices and the layered nature of gender identities.

### **Spending, gender and lifecourse**

We know little about Edward's early life. He was educated at Westminster School in London and probably spent some of his time during the 1750s at the Warwickshire estate of his guardian, William Craven, before matriculating to Oriel College, Oxford in 1761. As a consumer, Edward sparkled brilliantly, but briefly in the mid 1760s. When a young man at university in Oxford, his spending comprised mostly the costs he incurred within college, although there were outlays for buying, mending and cleaning clothes; for books, and for some luxury items such as a watch and chain bought at Woodstock.<sup>9</sup> Most of his discretionary spending took place between his inheritance in 1764 and the onset of his mental illness, which appears to have occurred sometime in 1768, although he was only officially declared insane six years later.

Edward's major areas of spending show a concern with his estate and financial obligations, as would be expected of a substantial landowner. His spending on the estate included the renewal of leases on land, and the purchase of additional land and shares in the South Sea

Company, to the tune of £20,546, although the latter do not feature in the receipted bills.<sup>10</sup> What we do find there is investment in the estate, including costs associated with enclosure, although some of this took place during the period after he was declared insane and the estate was being run by a committee of trustees. This suggests that such spending was integral to the running of a successful estate. Edward's discretionary consumption was marked more particularly by his spending on Stoneleigh Abbey itself. Building, decorating and furnishing an impressive residence was, of course, an important aspect of elite male spending. It served to define their status within society, the elite and the family.<sup>11</sup> Edward certainly made an important impact in this area and patronised a wide range of artists and craftsmen.<sup>12</sup> However, his ultimate ambitions were unfulfilled. In addition to several sketched designs in his own hand, he commissioned plans for a new north front, a large and impressive library; a new set of service buildings, including a large brew house and laundry, and a huge new north wing – no doubt with an eye to complementing and perhaps upstaging his grandfather's monumental west wing.<sup>13</sup> That few of these plans came to fruition, because of his insanity and early death might be seen as curtailing Edward's masculinity in terms of his dynastic impact. Yet this reflects a much broader tendency for the ambitions of even elite consumers to run ahead of their ability to realise them. Building may have been the ultimate expression of gentlemanly virtue, but it could easily be frustrated by demographic or economic misfortune. Moreover, we might argue that a failure to follow through lavish building programmes in fact demonstrates appropriate manly restraint – an argument in line with French and Rothery's analysis of elite masculinity. Control and management of the self was believed to be the basis of the projection of power and authority over others, whether family members or the lower orders, and the control of finances was considered to be a particularly important component of elite masculinities throughout the early modern and modern periods.<sup>14</sup> Edward's income was considerable, but he spent within his means – even during the

period of highest expenditure immediately following his inheritance when major interior work put the house 'in greater confusion than ever'. The decorative work undertaken in the west wing included two impressive fireplaces for the hall, papering most of the upper storey rooms, and painting much of the house, which together cost £667 14s.<sup>15</sup> Edward also commissioned impressive plasterwork for the hall, staircase and chapel, for which few bills have survived, but which must have cost several hundred pounds. Analysis by the architectural historian, Andor Gomme confirms that these interiors were not just rich and ornate, but executed to a very high standard.<sup>16</sup> However, they were far from being ruinously expensive. The same was true of the large quantities of furniture purchased to fill the many rooms left under-furnished by his grandfather and father. Most of this came in two huge orders placed with William Gomm & Co. and Thomas and Gilbert Burnett, suppliers who were perhaps a notch or two down from the best and most expensive.<sup>17</sup> He eschewed men like Adam and Chippendale, engaged by some of his Warwickshire neighbours, yet still acquired a number of very fine pieces, including a large mahogany music table for the library and a splendid communion table.

The apparent restraint shown by Edward was, in part at least, down to his guardian, William Craven, who must have played an important part in shaping the character of his ward. Training in the control of finances began when young gentry men first left home for boarding school and continued through to university education, the [Grand Tour](#) and into adulthood.<sup>18</sup> It is significant, then, that Craven continued to look after the young man as he planned his new home, corresponding with the steward at Stoneleigh Abbey about the need to manage outgoings in order to avoid financial embarrassment.<sup>19</sup> There was a huge spike in Edward's spending as bills for decorating and furnishing flooded in, the peak coming in 1765 when the bills record total spending of nearly £5000. It appears that cash flow, rather than shortage of capital, was the main concern and we must recall that this amounted to well under half the income derived from the estate. Edward's general

restraint in spending might be said to reflect his successful absorption of masculine values probably learnt under Craven's guidance. At the same time, Craven's correspondence reflects the tension in masculine consumption between the imperatives of restraint and display.

Edward also spent handsome sums on books. This formed another typical area of elite male spending – communicating taste, discernment and learning – yet is surprisingly missing from Vickery's sample of gentry families.<sup>20</sup> Some book owners aimed at an assembling impressive collection, characterised by the quality, rarity and completeness of its contents; other sought to build a library that would be useful and used. Edward appears to have tended towards the former, but also bought many 'useful' volumes. His books were visually impressive and he was clearly concerned with their physical appearance. Perhaps even more striking was the pace at which he assembled his impressive collection, laying out around £1500 in just six years.<sup>21</sup> This speed might be seen as displaying a lack of self-control, but again the spending was far from ruinous and it is clear that his library reflected a genuine interest in the arts and especially sciences. At Oxford, he was praised for his diligence and his 'literary qualifications', and was later appointed High Steward of the University and made a Doctor of Civil Law.<sup>22</sup> He appears to have had a particular interest in science and maths, amassing a collection of scientific instruments that went beyond what was typical of the aristocratic man of leisure. He had the usual globes and barometers, but also bought an air pump, syringes, receivers, cylinder glasses, and so on, from Edward Nairne, a famous scientific instrument maker of Cornhill in London, who patented several electrical machines.<sup>23</sup> Edward's decision to bequeath both his library and his scientific instruments to his alma mater might be seen as further evidence that he wanted these things to be used – a point underlined by his gift of £1000 to the Vice Chancellor of Oxford University and the Provost of Oriel College to purchase scientific equipment to illustrate lectures.<sup>24</sup>

Edward was thus both typical of elite male practices of collecting and seemingly exceptional in his erudition and intellectual abilities. This same paradox was also seen in his plans for remodelling the west front of Stoneleigh Abbey: they reflect a wider tradition of the gentleman architect, but reveal an individual with extraordinary vision and either a playful or eccentric willingness to experiment with different styles. These characteristics also tie into his masculine identity as a virtuous scholar. This was a different kind of masculinity from that outlined by Vickery: horses, clothes and wine were purchased, but they did not define his spending or his identity as a consumer. Indeed, Edward appears to have been relatively uninterested in conforming to the stereotype of the polite gentleman, with its concern for display, sociability and manners.<sup>25</sup>

Mary lived much longer than her brother and her life included more complex and complete transformations of status. Like Edward, little is known of her childhood, spent in the care of Elizabeth Verney.<sup>26</sup> She emerges in the Stoneleigh Abbey bills in the early 1750s, living in the vicinity of Hanover Square, London. Here she remained through much of the 1760s, although she also had a room at Stoneleigh Abbey. When her brother was declared insane in 1774, her life moved into a different phase as she took on joint responsibility for the estate. It shifted to a third phase when she inherited twelve years later. Unsurprisingly, these changes brought about considerable shifts in Mary's spending as revealed through the receipted bills. Overall, this was characterised by large sums laid out on clothing and consumables, but to dismiss her as interested only in frocks and food would be to miss the complexities of her life and consumption habits.

As a young woman, Mary's spending centred on millinery, drapery and dressmaking. Through the 1750s and 1760s, these accounted for an average of about £50 per annum – a relatively modest sum which suggests moderation on the part of a very wealthy young woman. At the same time, there were also bills for music and language lessons;<sup>27</sup>

entertainments, such as trips to the opera and Ranelagh Gardens; tableware, tea and mineral water; hiring and buying coaches, and charitable contributions. By the 1760s, she was renewing the furnishings in her London rooms, acquiring a new chair, repairing other pieces and having curtains refashioned. .In all, this was fairly typical expenditure for a wealthy woman without family responsibilities. Mary spent freely, but not to excess. Dress embodied gender identities and Mary's focus on this area of spending reinforced her identity as a woman, especially when augmented by her purchases of jewellery. It also underlined her status: a woman, but the sister of a peer of the realm and in possession of a substantial private fortune.

The little we know of Mary's spending during the period of the Commission suggests that she continued to live in London and that her overall pattern of spending remained broadly stable, although the substantial sums laid out on the hire of horses and coaches suggests a significant amount of travel, perhaps so and from the Warwickshire estate. On becoming owner of Stoneleigh Abbey in 1786, she spending took on a very different character: established female patterns were now overlain with much larger sums relating to those of a wealthy landowner and a minor player in London society. As a landowner, there were costs incurred in running the estate. These form a continuation of the patterns established by her brother and during the time Mary and William Craven ran the estate during Edward's insanity, with spending on enclosure, ditching and fencing, maintenance of farm buildings, and so on. Like the aristocratic women studied by Lewis, she was also engaged in impressing her own character in the house, albeit in ways that might appear modest against the building programme of her grandfather or the major refurbishment undertaken by her brother.<sup>28</sup> In the ten years following her inheritance of Stoneleigh Abbey, Mary spent about £460 on furniture and upholstery, to which we should add a further £299 for repainting the interior of the house.<sup>29</sup>

The amounts of furniture were, perhaps, quite modest, but the amount of work being



undertaken was clearly considerable, as was its impact on Stoneleigh Abbey. This was perhaps clearest in the ‘new rooms’ and print room created by Mary, apparently in the late 1780s. It is likely that some of the work undertaken by the upholsterer, David Frost – probably a Warwick craftsman – involved furnishing and decorating these rooms. In a 1790 letter written to her friend and solicitor, Joseph Hill, Mary described these as being ‘pretty’, but the 1806 inventory suggests that they were relatively plainly furnished with a range of mahogany and japanned furniture.<sup>30</sup> If these were, indeed, rooms seen as particularly personal to Mary, they were markedly different from her bedroom which, in 1764, had been lined with pea green wallpaper and decorated with two large and eight small Chinese landscapes.<sup>31</sup> This feels a far more feminine space than that apparently created by Mary herself. Of course, it is possible that Mary was describing to Hill her more general improvements to the house. Like those of Lady Irwin at Temple Newsam and Lady Boringden at Saltram, these produced comfortable and sociable spaces in which to entertain her friends, including a print room furnished with fashionable satinwood furniture.<sup>32</sup> But there was hardly a room in the house left untouched. As well as introducing new items and refreshing the soft furnishing, she moved many items between rooms. In the principal entertaining rooms – the Breakfast Room and Dining Parlour – the turnover was considerable, furniture being brought in to create a more informal atmosphere and serve a range of recreational uses. The result probably resembled Humphrey Repton’s ‘Modern Living Room’, which he juxtaposed with the stuffy and old-fashioned formality of the ‘Old Cedar Parlour’.<sup>33</sup>

Mary’s attitude to paintings is especially interesting. She moved many of these between rooms, augmenting the display in the Breakfast Room and Dining Parlour with additional landscapes and conversation pieces. These were hung alongside fifteen family portraits left in place whilst these rooms were reworked, a practice which was repeated across the whole house – portraits being left largely where they were. There was no apparent attempt to

produce the kind of pictorial family tree created by Henrietta Cavendish at Welbeck.<sup>34</sup> Yet Mary was clearly conscious of her family's lineage, carefully marking all her silverware as well as her coach with the arms, supporters and coronet that signalled her rank and dignity – a practice she had begun in the 1750s when still a young woman in London.<sup>35</sup> That said, Mary did more than simply preserve and present the marks of lineage that she inherited. She was willing to replace heirloom items such as silverware, imprinting her own taste on the family collection. Purchasing £1031 of silver from William Makepeace, Mary received £534 for unspecified but clearly unwanted items that she sold back to the silversmith.<sup>36</sup> In this way she augmented her gendered status as a woman with her social status as a titled and landed gentlewoman.

Mary's claim on her family's heritage and her place within this lineage served to cement her social status (an aspect of landed women's activities that historians have recently begun to note).<sup>37</sup> However, Mary also struck an importantly independent note, acquiring a house in Kensington Gore from which she could comfortably retain her connections and social life in London. This occupied much of her attention in the early 1790s, a series of bills being paid to builders, carpenters, plumbers, painters, glaziers and plasterers.<sup>38</sup> This work helped to make Grove House a comfortable and pleasant place in which Mary spent her winter months. Moreover, it is clear that this presence in London was important to her public reputation as well as being a convenient base for her social activities. This is most evident from her purchases of livery – an important marker of rank and status. Mary's servants at Stoneleigh and Kensington appear to have received new livery each year through the 1790s.<sup>39</sup> The average outlay per servant at Stoneleigh was about £7 5s – a considerable sum, but one that was significantly outweighed by the provision that Mary made for her London servants, each of whom received four suits costing a total of about £25 per head.<sup>40</sup> This public display of status was clearly a matter of some importance to Mary – indeed, the surviving bills show that she spent far more on these than had her

brother who seems to have been in London for only limited periods of time.

This was spending linked to status more than gender, but Mary also crossed into a world more closely associated with specifically male identity. Whilst she acquired her first coach in the 1760s, most of her transport needs during this period were met through hiring rather than buying. By the 1790s, she was still hiring coaches, horses, coachmen and postilions in London; but was also paying for horse feed, and for repairs to her own carriage. Moreover, there were regular bills for a bewildering variety of harnesses, whips, combs, etc. – what Vickery refers to as ‘an utterly masculine, dark brown territory of goods’.<sup>41</sup> There is no evidence that Mary herself went to the coach makers to finger or commission these things, but then it is not always clear that elite gentlemen immersed themselves in such worlds – they had servants who could readily bespeak these goods. What is clear is that Mary prioritised them as part of her material culture, incurring a total of 32 separate bills for coach repairs and saddlery. This behaviour might be seen as making Mary a masculine consumer – something perhaps seen more clearly in the fascination that such goods appear to have held for Anne Lister.<sup>42</sup> More likely, it reflects her desire for a public display of status and dignity which was not defined by gender in a straightforward sense.

Just like the family portraits and silverware in Stoneleigh Abbey, servants’ livery and the coaches emblazoned with the family arms were a means of maximising the status that Mary could achieve, whether in London or in the country, the status of a wealthy gentlewoman, part of a long line of honourable landowners. Yet Mary, like her brother, spent well within her means, the improvements being relatively modest and the bills trifling in comparison with her considerable wealth. The repairs to Grove House, for example, amounted to around £350 in total. We might see this self-control as characteristically masculine consumption but, again, it is perhaps better understood as part of the expectation placed upon any landowner: that they should foster and manage

resources to augment rather than dissipate the family estate.<sup>43</sup> Certainly, we can see the skills of good financial management in other elite women; Alice le Strange, for instance, managed resources so that her husband was free to invest in and improve the building and estate. Mary thus conformed to certain norms of the respectable (male) landowner, showing self-control, pride in family and lineage, and oeconomy at a scale beyond the domestic.<sup>44</sup>

### **Tradesmen and towns: the relationships of supply**

Edward and Mary both dealt with hundreds of retailers and craftsmen, of which about one-third can be definitively located in space. Overall, London dominated their supply systems, with the towns and villages around Stoneleigh accounting for most of the other purchases recorded in the bills.<sup>45</sup> However, life course changes and particularly the responsibility of estate ownership made important differences to the geography of supply.

Edward's pattern of spending was relatively straight-forward. As a young man, his purchases were largely restricted to Oxford and its environs. In addition to his college bills, the bills record purchases of stockings and shoes, and the cost of cleaning and repairing clothes.<sup>46</sup> Once he came of age and took ownership of the estate, the geography of his spending refocused onto London and, to a lesser extent, the towns and villages around Stoneleigh Abbey (Table 1). The metropolis dominated in terms of total spending, in part because of the large bills for furniture presented by Gomm & Co and Burnett, but Edward also settled substantial bills for books, architectural plasterwork, paintings, wallpapering, silverware, household linen, wines, chinaware and a carriage, as well as tailoring for himself and livery for his servants. London was clearly central to his refurbishment of Stoneleigh Abbey. At the same time, Edward turned to tradesmen and women in Coventry and Warwick for groceries, china and earthenware, coopery and hardwares, but also for house painting and building work. He undoubtedly employed many craftsmen and

labourers from the surrounding villages as well, but these are more difficult to attribute to a specific location. That said, men like Michael Clarke, who undertook masonry work; Richard Gardener, who supplied ironmongery and periodically repaired the pump, and Richard Cheshire, who was paid for labouring, probably lived in one of the villages around Stoneleigh Abbey.

Table 1. The distribution of retailers supplying Edward Leigh, 1763–1786 and Mary Leigh, 1750–1806

	Edward Leigh				Mary Leigh								
					1750-1769				1786-1806				
	No.	%	£ s d	%	Suppliers		Total value		Suppliers		Total value		
	No.	%	£ s d	%	No.	%	£ s d	%	No.	%	£ s d	%	
Bedworth	1	1.1	71-5-0	0.7	1								
Birmingham	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	0	25-17-0	0.0
Coventry	16	17.2	408-13-9	4.1	7	7.1	35-11-0	1.9	28	19.6	824-11-5	7.9	
Kenilworth	1	1.1	27-2-0	0.3	0	0	0	0	2	1.4	419-1-2	4.0	
Kensington	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	18	12.6	1217-14-5	11.7	
London	65	70.0	9035-14-6	91.0	88	89.8	1819-9-2	95.9	69	48.3	6880-15-1	66.1	
Other	3	3.2	2-0-0	0.0	1	1.0	14-6-11	0.8	-	-	-	-	
Stoneleigh *	1	1.1	138-11-11	1.4	0	0	0	0	13	9.1	229-18-4	2.2	
Warwick	6	6.5	233-15-9	2.3	2	2.0	27-4-4	1.4	12	8.4	812-14-4	7.8	

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

Note: figures for Stoneleigh exclude servants wages which are only rarely recorded in the bills.

During her long life, Mary patronised over 500 suppliers, of which 241 can be definitively located in space. In the 1750s and 1760s, London dominated both in terms of the number of suppliers and the total value of goods and services provided. This reliance on London suppliers is remarkable, but unsurprising since Mary appears to have spent little time outside the capital during these years. The occasional purchases made in the Warwickshire towns of Coventry and Warwick were for small amounts of cloth, haberdashery and gloves,

often from retailers who also supplied other family members. In short, Mary shopped locally. In the later period, when she had inherited the Stoneleigh estate, the geography of supply was more complex. London accounted for fewer than half of the suppliers and around two-thirds of goods by value; Coventry and Warwick were now more important points of supply, as was the village of Stoneleigh and Kenilworth, a small town situated just two miles to the west of the estate. From these places came groceries, haberdashery, upholstery, stationery, medicines, earthenware and livery, plus painters, braziers and farriers. More striking, perhaps, is the emergence of Kensington tradesmen supplying meat, bread, coal, fish and candles, amongst other things. Again, these shifts are readily explained by Mary's new role as a Warwickshire landowner and her winter residence in Kensington. Much shopping was still being done locally, but this now meant a number of different spaces, so that flows of goods ran not simply from town to country, but from London to suburb and province, and sometimes from countryside to town as game from the estate was sent up to Grove House.<sup>47</sup>

There was a certain logic to the patterns of supply servicing both Edward and Mary. A hierarchy of goods was written onto the urban hierarchy, so that luxury and other high-end products (silverware, furniture, books, artwork, etc.) came from London whilst everyday goods and services (provisions, ironmongery, ditching, plumbing, etc.) were drawn from local suppliers. There were exceptions, of course: Warwick provided highly skilled craftsmen and designers, including Williams Hiorns and Timothy Lightholer, who played a vital part in completing the interiors at Stoneleigh Abbey;<sup>48</sup> and the Coventry china dealer, William Allen, supplied chinaware, cutlery, and a tea chest and tea board.<sup>49</sup> Conversely, large quantities of everyday goods were bought in London. In part, this is attributable to Mary's residence in London and later Kensington, which meant that provisions were drawn not from the environs of Stoneleigh, but from the metropolis and its suburbs. Such life cycle or seasonal shifts in residence serve to complicate the relationship between urban

and supply hierarchies.

Convenience and the necessity to acquire fresh food on a regular basis encouraged local shopping. For Mary, this meant patronising Kensington retailers such as the butcher, Roger Buckmaster, the poulterer, Henry Davies, and the fishmonger, John Loader;<sup>50</sup> but she also sent into London for a wide range of groceries and household goods, as well as clothing, silverware and so on. For her, London was readily accessible, although, if goods were ordered by correspondence and delivered by the carrier, the distance between shop and residence mattered little. Bills rarely make it clear whether Edward or Mary visited shops in person to bespeak the goods they required. We know that Edward frequented London book shops and it is likely that many of Mary's purchases of cloth and clothing in the 1750s involved going into shops. Most purchases, however, were probably made remotely. The friction of distance was effectively lubricated by the Leigh's ability to pay for the packaging and carriage of goods – just as it was for many other wealthy consumers. With a trusted supplier or an agent acting upon their behalf, provincial elites could thus bypass local towns and send to London for a wide range of goods: not just luxuries but everyday items such as groceries. We see this in the distribution of grocers supplying Mary in the period 1786–1806 when a large proportion of goods came from retailers in the city of London – some distance from her Kensington home and, of course, around 100 miles from Stoneleigh. It is made clearer still in the correspondence of Elizabeth Purefoy, who ordered groceries from a number of London grocers in the 1730s and 1740s. These letters also illuminate some of the mechanisms whereby trust was established between retailer and customer. Elizabeth Purefoy was always very clear in her requests, leaving little room for error, and was quick to complain if she felt poorly served in terms of price or quality.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps most important, though, she remained loyal to her preferred suppliers, patronising Mr Cossins of St Pauls Churchyard in the 1730s and continuing to do so when the business passed to Wilson and Thornhill in the 1740s.

Such loyalty built trust and was central to shopping practices of the elite and others in the eighteenth century since it encouraged good service and reduced the transaction costs of shopping.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Berry argues that Judith Baker, gentlewoman from Durham, bought from a small set of suppliers on her trips to London. Her choice was ‘predicated upon a system of patronage, personal acquaintance and credit’.<sup>53</sup> Such priorities can be seen in the behaviour of Edward and Mary Leigh, both of whom returned to known suppliers over a number of years. Given Edward’s rather truncated period of active purchasing, it is unsurprising that only a handful of tradesmen supplied him for more than five or six years. Amongst these, local craftsmen were most common: Thomas Howlett of Stoneleigh, who undertook blacksmithing between 1764 and 1780; Arthur Roome, who did bricklaying work from 1764 and 1774, and Thomas Harman, who presented bills for carpentry and painting between 1768 and 1776. Continuity, then, came primarily in terms of servicing the estate – a process which continued through Edward’s mental illness. Those supplying goods were generally patronised for shorter periods, but were often used intensively during that time: the London tailor, William Fell, presented six bills totalling over £224 between 1763 and 1767, and Thomas Payne, also of London, billed Edward on twelve occasions in four years, as did the Coventry grocer, Hugh Jones.<sup>54</sup>

Once established, relationships between elite provincial consumers and urban, often metropolitan retailers could be strong and long-lasting. Yet the question arises as to how choices of retailer were made in the first place. Here, attention usually focuses on consumers’ assessment of quality and price, and on the ability of retailers to construct and project a good reputation.<sup>55</sup> The former could be judged in person, most readily by visiting the shop, but also by having samples sent to one’s home.<sup>56</sup> The latter drew on links to previous proprietors, the prestige of certain streets, and cachet of patronage by nobility or royalty.<sup>57</sup> It was then communicated and augmented through networks of family and friends. Of particular interest, therefore, are the suppliers which Edward and Mary had in



common, since they can reveal something of the mechanisms through which knowledge, trust and reputation were transmitted.

There are many instances where Mary used tradesmen initially patronised by her brother. At one level, we see William Butler twice supplying livery to Edward before Mary began using him in 1787.<sup>58</sup> More telling, perhaps, when undertaking some small changes to the furnishings of her rooms in London in 1768, Mary turned to Thomas and Gilbert Burnett, the upholsterers who had played such a large part in the refurbishment of Stoneleigh Abbey three years earlier. That they were willing to execute such a modest order may reflect the importance of her brother's patronage.<sup>59</sup> Much the same appears true of Mary's purchases of coaches: she followed Edward's lead in going to the same coach maker, John Hatchett of Long Acre, that he had used in 1771, first to purchase a new coach (1794) and later to have it repaired (1799).<sup>60</sup> As we have seen, Edward spent a lot of money on books in his quest to amass a library befitting a gentleman. Mary was far less of a bibliophile, but again followed Edward's judgement on booksellers, making a small purchase from James Robson – an important bookseller who supplied over £400 worth of books to Edward between 1766 and 1768.<sup>61</sup> In some ways, these introductions are unsurprising, especially as the dynastic nature of many of these goods meant that they were most often purchased by men. Edward's familiarity with these areas of spending put him in a position to provide a personal link to reliable and trustworthy tradesmen..

On other occasions, Mary took the lead, especially when it came to buying textiles and clothing. We have already seen that she patronised a great variety of London drapers, haberdashers and milliners. Several of her favoured suppliers were later patronised by her brother. For example, Edward made two purchases of material from the drapers, Carr, Ibetson and Bigge in 1763 and 1768 – a supplier that Mary had begun using in 1754 and to whom she remained loyal through to the early 1770s.<sup>62</sup> Similarly he made four purchases from Budd and Devall, milliners in Bruton Street, London, following Mary's initial

purchase of ribbons and muslin in 1760.<sup>63</sup> In the 1760s they both used Jordan, Heyland and Bigger, drapers in Leadenhall Street, London. Again, Mary had made the first contact, in 1762 when she was billed for linen to the value of £1 1s 8d. Quite likely on her recommendation, Edward looked to these suppliers when placing a much larger order (worth over £128) for a variety of table and furnishing linens the following year.<sup>64</sup> The lines of communication in operation here resemble those described by Walsh and others, who have demonstrated how provincial elites frequently drew on knowledgeable friends in convenient locations (often London or Paris) to provide information about goods and suppliers, and sometimes to acquire specific items.<sup>65</sup> In this light, we can see Edward drawing on Mary's experience as an experienced metropolitan shopper with first-hand knowledge of retailers and goods.

Some suppliers held a different and perhaps even stronger relationship with the family. Thomas Gilpin, a London silversmith and engraver, first supplied the Leigh family back in 1737 when Edward, third Lord Leigh, paid a bill for some engraving work.<sup>66</sup> His grandson, Edward, fifth Lord Leigh, bought jewellery and silver as a young boy in 1751 and, when in charge of the estate, made more substantial purchases as well as selling around £700 of unwanted silver to Gilpin in 1765.<sup>67</sup> Over a similar period, Gilpin also supplied Mary with silverware and jewellery on three occasions, in 1751, 1753 and 1765.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Edward and Mary's father, Thomas 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Leigh, made five purchases of clothing and material from Robert Hughes of Coventry during the 1740s.<sup>69</sup> Edward, or more probably his guardians, then went to Hughes for livery in 1753, as did Mary in 1753 and 1756.<sup>70</sup> In both cases there appears to be a shared culture of consumption that both Edward and Mary inherited from earlier generations. Since both of them were very young when their father died we can assume that this information on reliable suppliers of quality must have been transferred through their guardians, who were both related to the Leighs, or through the Stewards of the house, which adds another possible layer to the relationship of the family

with their suppliers. In some cases the consumer choices of Edward and Mary continued across several generations of the suppliers' families – continuity being provided by the customer rather than the tradesman. Two generations of the Fell family, of St. Martin's Lane, London, supplied drapery and livery for Edward and Mary from the 1760s through to the early nineteenth century. These common suppliers confirm that Edward and Mary shared information, probably both in terms of quality and reliability, and thus defined *together* the relationships of the Leigh family with their suppliers. Such choices were personal and individual, and to some extent gendered along conventional lines, but they were also embedded in family relationships.

## **Conclusion**

Edward and Mary spent their money in very different ways: they bought different things for different reasons, reflecting and constructing their gender identity through their choices. But their gender identities were tempered by aristocratic status, which brought with it a set of common responsibilities, not least in servicing a substantial country house and a leisured lifestyle underpinned by luxury consumption. To some extent, the geography of Edward's and Mary's spending – and therefore their relationship with towns – flowed from the goods they purchased, both in terms of value and type but they were also defined by their lifestyles and different courses their lives took. Mary's London residence and sociability was reflected in her purchases of fine clothing and food from metropolitan suppliers. Edward's love of books and architecture were similarly reflected in his engagement with the luxury market in London, partly transferred through his sister and her knowledge of that complex city. Their upbringing was, of course, defined in part by gender. Edward, with his natural assumption of the role of a country landowner after a young life formerly educated in the classics and Mary with her life of a sociable young lady amid the social circles of London. But they shared and inherited information on suppliers

and showed considerable loyalty to favoured tradesmen and women. Gendered and personal preferences were thus tempered by family as well as status.

All of this illustrates the close and complex ways in which gender and social status interacted and how such identities could shift across the life-course. Edward's consumption choices may not have been 'utterly masculine', to use Vickery's phrase, but they were masculine none the less: they showed self-control, taste and learning, and pride in family/pedigree.<sup>71</sup> Mary's concerns may have strayed beyond the enduring female concerns centred on the private domestic sphere, but as the owner of almost twenty-thousand acres, one of a long line of wealthy powerful landowners, it was inevitable that her purchases became more 'masculine' than we might anticipate. Of course, the classic patriarchal relationship of a married couple with its attendant systems of power and subjugation is not represented here. To some extent Edward and Mary were unusual in that they both died unmarried and experienced a more subtle form of gender relationship as brother and sister. These findings do, however, inform our understandings of gender, status and consumption precisely because of the way in which they isolate elite consumption practices from those more rigid familial and domestic spheres.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Richard. Wilson and Alan Mackley, *The Building of the English Country House* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2000); Christopher Christie, *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). With the middling sort, this translated into a male predominance in shaping the household economy – see Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic. Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65-7, 80-6.

<sup>2</sup> Colin Campbell, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century England: a character-action approach', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), 40-58; Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's Estate. Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Werner Sombart, *Luxury and Capitalism* (1922; Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Neil McKendrick, 'The consumer revolution of eighteenth-century England', in *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, ed. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb (London: Methuen, 1982), 9-33.

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- <sup>4</sup> 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, 117-55; Hannah Greig, 'Leading the fashion: the material culture of London's *Beau Monde*', in *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds), (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 293-313; Judith Lewis, 'When a house is not a home: elite English women and the eighteenth-century country house', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter. Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), passim; Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors. At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 106-28, 184-207.
- <sup>5</sup> Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, esp. 183-94; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 106-28, 184-207; Helen Berry, 'Prudent luxury: the Metropolitan tastes of Judith Baker, Durham gentlewoman', in *On the Town Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, eds. Penelope Lane and Roey Sweet (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 130-54; Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*, 234-43.
- <sup>6</sup> See, for example, Margot Finn, 'Men's things: masculine possession in the consumer revolution', *Social History*, 25 (2000), 133-55; Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp.49-82; David Hussey, 'Guns, horses and stylish waistcoats? Male consumer activity and domestic shopping in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century England', in *Buying for the Home. Shopping for the Domestic from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, ed. David Hussey and Margaret Ponsoyby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 47-72; David Hussey and Margaret Ponsoyby, *The Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), esp. 117-23.
- <sup>7</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp.114. This pattern is confirmed for the middling sort by Harvey, *Little Republic*, 82-6.
- <sup>8</sup> For details, see 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 (2012), 379-407.
- <sup>9</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4017. This type of spending was fairly typical of young men at Oxford although, as mentioned earlier, young men were expected to control their finances whilst at University. See the several examples of parental advice on this matter in French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, 85-137.
- <sup>10</sup> SCLA, DR18/31/456 Auditors Account, November 1763-May 1774.
- <sup>11</sup> See Campbell, 'Understanding traditional consumption'. Women played a key role when it came to interior decoration, a point discussed in detail by Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 129-65.
- <sup>12</sup> There are bills for chimney pieces, plasterwork, wallpapering and painting – see, for example: SCLA DR18/5/4203, DR18/5/4395, DR18/5/4402.
- <sup>13</sup> SCLA, DR671/33 Designs for Stoneleigh Abbey by Edward Leigh and Timothy Lightholer, N.D.; DR18/5/4291 Architectural designs by Giovanibattista Cipriani, 1 April 1765.
- <sup>14</sup> French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*. For studies of other social groups see Alexandra Sheperd, 'Manhood, credit and patriarchy in early-modern England c. 1580-1640', *Past and Present*, 167 (2000), 75-106; Anthony Fletcher, 'Manhood, the male body, courtship and household in early-modern England', *History*, 84 (1999), 419-36; Helen Berry, 'Soul, Purse and Family: Middling and Lower-Class Masculinity in Eighteenth Century Manchester', *Social History*, 33 (2008), 12-35.
- <sup>15</sup> SCLA DR18/5/4203, DR18/5/4395, DR18/5/4402.
- <sup>16</sup> Andor Gomme 'Abbey into palace: a lesser Wilton?', in *Stoneleigh Abbey. The House, Its Owners, Its Lands*, ed. Robert Bearman (Stoneleigh: Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2004), 82-115.
- <sup>17</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4408, DR18/3/47/52/15.

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- <sup>18</sup> French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, 85-184
- <sup>19</sup> SCLA, DR18/17/27/97, Letter from Samuel Butler (Estate Steward) to William Craven re: costs of house and garden alterations, 11 February 1764.
- <sup>20</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 106-29; Campbell, 'Understanding traditional consumption'.
- <sup>21</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*; Jon Stobart, 'Gentlemen and shopkeepers: supplying the country house in eighteenth-century England', *Economic History Review*, 64 (2011), 885-904.
- <sup>22</sup> SCLA, DR18/17/27/52; Purcell, 'A lunatic of unsound mind', 249.
- <sup>23</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4515, DR18/5/4385.
- <sup>24</sup> SCLA, DR18/13/7/13-4, Will of Edward Lord Leigh, proved 22 July 1786.
- <sup>25</sup> See Campbell, 'Understanding traditional consumption'; French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, passim.
- <sup>26</sup> Mairi MacDonald, "'Not unmarked by some eccentricities": the Leigh family of Stoneleigh Abbey', in *Stoneleigh Abbey. The House, Its Owners, Its Lands* ed. Robert Bearman (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2004), 148, 153-5.
- <sup>27</sup> See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/3593, DR18/5/4308.
- <sup>28</sup> Lewis, 'When a house is not a home'.
- <sup>29</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/5864, DR18/5/5822, DR18/5/5905, DR18/5/5703.
- <sup>30</sup> SCLA, DR671, 22 August 1790; DR18/4/59, Inventory, 1806].
- <sup>31</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4402. For a fuller discussion of wallpaper and colour, see: Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 166-83.
- <sup>33</sup> Humphrey Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London, 1816).
- <sup>34</sup> Kate Retford, 'Patrilineal portraiture? Gender and genealogy in the eighteenth-century English country house'. in *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 337-8; Adrian Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist: Four Centuries of Country House Visiting* (New York, 1999), 108.
- <sup>35</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3194
- <sup>36</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/5809.
- <sup>37</sup> For example see Peter Mandler, "'From Almack to Willis": aristocratic women and politics, 1815-1867', in *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics 1750 to the Present*, ed. Amanda Vickery (Stanford: ????, 2005), 152-67; Retford, 'Patrilineal portraiture'.
- <sup>38</sup> See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/6122-6130.
- <sup>39</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/6051, DR18/5/6099.
- <sup>40</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/6098.
- <sup>41</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 124.
- <sup>42</sup> Helena. Whitbread (ed.) *I Know My Own Heart: the Diaries of Anne Lister, 1791-1840* (London: Virago, 1988), esp. 249-50.
- <sup>43</sup> On masculine self-control, see French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, 61-66, 78-80, 169-71,
- <sup>44</sup> Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, 203-8; Harvey, *Little Republic*, 24-35, 65-76.
- <sup>45</sup> Stobart, 'Gentlemen and shopkeepers'; Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, 'Geographies of supply: Stoneleigh Abbey and Arbury Hall in the eighteenth century', in *Consuming the Country House*, ed. Jon Stobart and Andrew Hann (London: English Heritage, forthcoming).
- <sup>46</sup> See, for example: SCLA, DR18/5/3925, DR18/5/3982, DR18/5/3980.

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- <sup>47</sup> Stobart, 'Gentlemen and shopkeeper'.
- <sup>48</sup> Gomme, 'Abbey into Palace', 87, 95, 97-9, 101-05. The hierarchy of supply is discussed in more detail in Stobart and Rothery, 'Geographies of supply'.
- <sup>49</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4192, DR18/5/4031, DR18/5/4078, DR18/5/4171.
- <sup>50</sup> See, for example, SCLA, DR18/5/6351, DR18/5/6172, DR18/5/6434.
- <sup>51</sup> Eland, *Purefoy Letters*, nos. 103, 104, 105, 106, 111. See also Jon Stobart, *Sugar and Spice. Grocers and Groceries in Provincial England, 1650-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203-13.
- <sup>52</sup> Bruno Blonde and Ilja Van Damme, 'Retail growth and consumer changes in a declining urban economy: Antwerp 1650-1750', *Economic History Review*, 32 (2010), 638-63; Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, 134-5, 144-5, 156-7.
- <sup>53</sup> Berry, 'Prudent luxury', 146.
- <sup>54</sup> For examples, see SCLA DR18/5/4133 (Jones), 4195 (Howlett) and 4389 (Payne).
- <sup>55</sup> See Blonde and Van Damme, 'Retail growth'.
- <sup>56</sup> Claire Walsh, 'Shops, shopping and the art of decision making in eighteenth-century England', in *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 151-77; Stobart, *Sugar and Spice*, 147.
- <sup>57</sup> Jon Stobart, 'Selling (through) politeness: advertising provincial shops in eighteenth-century England', *Cultural and Social History*, 5 (2008), 309-328.
- <sup>58</sup> SCLA DR18/5/4657, DR18/5/5062.
- <sup>59</sup> SCLA DR18/5/4620; DR18/3/47/52/15.
- <sup>60</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/6054, DR18/5/6446.
- <sup>61</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/5000 (Mary's purchase). For examples of Edward's purchases from Robson, see: DR18/5/4529.
- <sup>62</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/4035, DR18/5/4661.
- <sup>63</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3970, DR18/5/4126, DR18/5/4139, DR18/5/4511.
- <sup>64</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3960, DR18/5/4028.
- <sup>65</sup> Walsh, 'Shops, shopping'. See also Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 168-9.
- <sup>66</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/1989.
- <sup>67</sup> SCLA, DR18/5/3121, DR18/5/4574, DR18/5/3121.
- <sup>68</sup> SCLA DR18/5/3136, 3194 and 4333.
- <sup>69</sup> For example, see SCLA DR18/5/2129.
- <sup>70</sup> SCLA DR18/5/3331 (Edward), and DR18/5/3349, DR18/5/3638 (Mary)
- <sup>71</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, 124; Campbell, 'Understanding traditional consumption'; 'French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, 61-66, 78-80, 169-71.