
Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

Volume XCIV
for 2005



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**Volume XCIV
for 2005**

Editor Alison Taylor

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Editorial

These Proceedings take us on the usual chronological tour of Cambridgeshire's past, from scant traces of Neolithic occupation at Fenstanton to the impact of 19th century entrepreneurship and 20th century planning on Cambridge's Victorian New Town. As ever, we aim to bring you the most significant results of the latest archaeological excavations, together with the Society's parallel interest in historical and landscape studies. Residents of Cambridge should feel especially well served by the painstaking work represented both in Philomena Guillebaud's reconstruction of the events and effects of enclosure of the West Fields, and Bryan and Wise's analysis of one area of post-enclosure development — as they say, a microcosm of development quite typical of Cambridge in an exceptionally dynamic age. Anthea Jones literally lets the past speak for itself, through the letters of the wife of an Ely bishop, whose domestic concerns were little affected by her husband's daunting ecclesiastical responsibilities.

Outside the normal running of an active local society, CAS has been involved in a peripheral but deeply concerned way with the heritage service (including archaeology, archives and museums) of the County Council. Regular readers will be aware of the concerns we have expressed over the years at what we have seen as a general failure to support excellent staff by providing the right resources. This spring, financial matters became significantly worse, and CAS joined a substantial body of protest which at least postponed for one year one tranche of cuts (worth £100,000). This cut will however go ahead in 2006, leaving Heritage Services to face a 30% budget reduction from £927,000 to £650,000, even though Cambridgeshire is already well below neighbouring counties in funding these services. A consultants' (Kentwood Associates) discussion paper notes among other things that one decision that has caused most damage to the Council's reputation is the abolition of the post of the County Museums Officer, and CAS knows how much John Goldsmith, a vastly effective supporter of local museums since 1975, would be missed (August 2005). They note too that proposed cuts will require far-reaching policy decisions to withdraw from non-statutory services which would have 'a major impact, both for the public directly and on the ability of those services to lever additional — and often substantial — funding from external sources'.

The consultants are particularly flattering about archaeology. 'We believe this to be an outstanding example of a County Council Archaeology Service. Its archaeology and countryside advice services are held in high regard by planners, developers, other local authorities, and regional and national organisations. The service has an enviable track record in obtaining external funding... The outreach programme — particularly work with schools — is exemplary.' The report is concerned that such work is not put at risk, and it is critical of the current short opening hours of the County Record Office, of the County's failure to provide public access to historic buildings information since 2002, and the loss (August 2005) of a valued mentor for small museums. It is also worried that, if a proposed new Historical Resource & Cultural Centre is built with PFI money, there would not be funding to staff it adequately for the hours the public would reasonably expect.

There are clearly frightening times ahead, not least for our small, mostly voluntary, museums. This is very sad at a time when there is so much public enthusiasm for the past and so many new sources that can be tapped if the right support and advice are available. CAS has already filled some gaps, for example by taking responsibility for *Conduit* and publishing 'Recent Fieldwork' without grant support, and we are hoping to reinstate some financial support for local archaeological groups. We will continue of course to co-operate with the County Council through advice, by offering joint working and by fruitful liaison with their over-worked staff. We hope this coming year will see some solutions rather than additional problems, and a better atmosphere of hope and confidence. CAS is certainly willing to give all the support it can.

Just as these *Proceedings* were going to press, we heard the sad news that Rev Prof William Frend had died, at the age of 89. His had been a long and distinguished career (or perhaps series of careers, as theologian, soldier, priest and archaeologist), and he did outstanding work on early Christianity. In his later years in Cambridgeshire he impressed and worried us in turn with his continuing excavations, which were fruitful to the last. He has already submitted the results of this work to CAS for publication, and I am guilty in not having yet edited them for publication. The next *Proceedings* (2006) will include a full obituary for William, with his excavations at Great Wilbraham and accounts of Christian artefacts from Roman Cambridgeshire.

Alison Taylor
Editor

Letters from Mary Yorke, the wife of the Bishop of Ely 1781–1808

Anthea Jones

Mary Yorke was an enthusiastic and fluent letter-writer. From 1762 until 1823, she wrote frequently to her sister in law, Jemima, Marchioness Grey, wife of the 2nd earl of Hardwicke, and to Jemima's daughter, Amabel. Mary Yorke's letters were preserved at Wrest Park by these two recipients. James Yorke became Bishop of Ely in 1781 and resided in Ely for some months each year. First a selection from Mary's letters is presented describing the sequence of events from initial hints to James's translation from Gloucester, and Mary's excited impressions of her new Palace and of Ely House in London. As the family settled into the routine of Ely residencies, extracts show some aspects of the company in the area, the social activities of the bishop and his wife, a balloon ascent from the Palace garden and Mary's appreciation of the countryside.

In the second part, selections from her letters illuminate matters of concern to such a political family, events in Ely itself, and family involvement in the Bishop's clerical business. The 1790s particularly were marked by serious food shortages and riots in Ely which she reported, together with her and the Bishop's humanitarian reactions. Two sons followed the Bishop into the church; conscientious attitudes are evident in these transactions. Finally, a sketch of the Bishop as a person is drawn from the letters. They open a door with an immediacy on the late 18th century comparable with that portrayed in Jane Austen's novels.

Introduction

From the time Mary Maddox married James Yorke, on 29 June 1762, aged 18, she wrote regularly to her sister-in-law, Jemima, and to her niece Amabel, known to the family as Lady Bell. This series of lively and often humorous communications was preserved by the family, and extensive extracts on Ely life are presented here for the first time, together with a few letters from James Yorke. Mary Yorke's sister-in-law, Jemima, married Philip Yorke in 1740 and within a few weeks inherited the title of Marchioness Grey from her grandfather, together with Wrest Park in Bedfordshire. Philip succeeded his father as 2nd Earl of Hardwicke in 1764. Philip and Jemima had two daughters: Amabel, who

married Lord Polwarth in 1772 but was widowed at the beginning of the same year in which James became Bishop of Ely; and Mary, who married Lord Grantham the previous autumn. Jemima was widowed in 1790 and died in 1797. Amabel inherited the barony of Lucas of Crudwell from her mother. Mary maintained the correspondence with Amabel and her last letter was written only a few days before her death on 30 December 1823. Amabel died ten years later.

Mary Yorke's letters are held by Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service, and are part of the Wrest Park (Lucas) archive. Letters to Jemima from Mary have the reference L30/9/111 and to Amabel L30/11/339. Simplified references are given to these



Figure 1. A miniature by Philip Jean held by family tradition to be of Mary Yorke. See Plate 8a.



Figure 2. Jemima, Marchioness Grey. See Plate 8b.



Figure 3. Amabel, Lady Polwarth (later Baroness Lucas). See Plate 8c.

two series in the form 9/<number> and 11/<number>. Other letters are given a fuller reference but omitting 'L30'. Drafts of some of James' private letters were preserved at Forthampton Court and have now been deposited at Gloucester Record Office, D2240/Box22, and are here simply referenced GRO. Two previous collections of Mary Yorke's letters have been published by the author: those concerned with Wales, 'Letters from the bishop's wife', in *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary* 38, 2002 (pp.14–35); and with Gloucester, 'The Gloucester music meeting of 1781', in *Trans Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 121, 2003 (pp.243–266). James Yorke has been the subject of several articles: by EAB Barnard, who is not always reliable, in three articles in *Notes and Queries* (see Bibliography) and by D Owen in *Report of the Society of St George's and the Descendants of the Knights of the Garter* 1967–68 (pp 371–80) and 1968–69 (pp 433–39).

In presenting Mary Yorke's letters, abbreviations have been expanded, and spelling, punctuation and most capitalisation modernised; some capital letters have been retained to give the flavour of the original, and some frequently used abbreviations: Bp (Bishop); Ld (Lord); Ld H (Lord Hardwicke); Ld P (Lord Polwarth). A few editorial additions have been made within square brackets. Dates within round brackets are inserted from postmarks but were not in the original letters; those in square brackets are based on internal evidence or other reasonable inferences.

The making of an Eighteenth Century Bishop of Ely and a view of his surroundings

A wife's view of the translation of James Yorke to Ely

Mary Yorke moved easily in the ecclesiastical world. She was the daughter of Isaac Maddox, who was Bishop of Worcester from the time she was born until his death in 1759 when she was 15; the date of her birth is not known, but her marriage settlement helps to establish her age. Her mother, Mrs Elizabeth Maddox, also had ecclesiastical connections; she was reputedly the niece of Edward Waddington, Bishop of Chichester, and had met her future husband while he was a protégé of the Bishop and a prebendary of Chichester. One writer reported that 'Dr Maddox, to show his freedom in love, ran away with the prelate's niece' (Noble 1806 iii 92). Mrs Maddox died on 26 February 1789, in her 89th year, eight years after James reached the pinnacle of his career.

James Yorke, coming from a well connected family, had quickly obtained lucrative church preferments. He was born on 9 March 1730, the 5th and youngest son of Philip Yorke, a prominent Whig lawyer and Lord Chancellor 1737–57; Philip Yorke was created Baron Hardwicke in 1733 and Earl of Hardwicke in 1754. James followed three scholarly brothers to Bene't College, Cambridge (now Corpus Christi); all had a reputation for studiousness. He was ordained rector of Great Horkesley, Essex, in 1754 and presented to a prebend at Rochester; gave up both to become a canon of Windsor, 1756–62 and Vicar of St Giles, Reading, 1756–68; exchanged St Giles' vicarage for the rectory of All Hallows, Thames Street, in 1768–76 (he did not

hold this living as long as some accounts suggest). A few months before he married in 1762, James was made Dean of Lincoln and retained this office until 1781. In 1774 he was raised to the episcopal bench as Bishop of St David's, and translated to Gloucester in 1778.

James Yorke was reluctant to accept the bishopric of Ely, but did so out of a sense of obligation to his older brother, the 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, rather than personal ambition. The first earl had purchased a family seat at Wimpole in Cambridgeshire, and this made the Yorkes interested in who should be their diocesan bishop, in addition to their political concerns. James had been Bishop of Gloucester for a mere two years, and was particularly happy in this position because it enabled him and his family to live in their own Gloucestershire home of Forthampton Court, when he was not required in London. His wife, however, as her letters show, was more adventurous, or perhaps ambitious.

News of the possibility of James being translated to Ely had reached Mary in Forthampton even before Edmund Keene (1714–1781), Bishop of Ely since 1771, had died.

8 June [1781]

It would be an unpardonable affectation in me not to appear interested in the other subject that employed your pen or not to readily acknowledge the fresh instance that we are likely to receive from our friends of their kind attention to us, should the departure of your old Neighbour give them an opportunity. Nor am I so insensible as not to rejoice in every thing that may be of advantage to our numerous family in their future prospects of life, and present education. But you Dear Madam know me too well to suspect me of indifference upon these heads, therefore I need add no more at present. (9/101)

The 'numerous family' consisted of four sons and three daughters. Edmund Keene died on 6 July 1781. The day before, James had written to his brother Lord Hardwicke.

5 July 1781

Lady Grey's very kind letter to Mrs James and my own sensations in consequence of it, compel me to write to you again though I have troubled you so lately. When I addressed you at that time, I must own, that I was perfectly tranquil, and on every private consideration as grateful and contented as I ought to be. The very great change that may happen in my situation has set all this afloat, and confounded and disturbed ideas that were almost fixtures for the remainder of my days. I must own myself much obliged to my friends for the interest they so kindly take in what concerns me. But indeed here my business and domestic concerns were so much within my ideas of convenience and pleasure and so concentrated, that I cannot without reluctance give in to the propriety of taking advantage of blind fortune's favours (if I may) in order not to incur the censure of those who wish me well; or be found fault with by my descendants hereafter for stand-

ing in their way. It is with real regret that I hear of your Bishop's situation. When I left him in London I thought him declining very fast. He should have finished his career at a longer hereafter than now seems probable, could my wishes have availed him: so little hope or expectations had I formed on the succession. No small expense, much trouble, and connections rather unsuited to my nature and qualifications must be incurred by me if I am to succeed him. It is by no means my desire. And yet when I reflect on my large family, and the opportunity it may afford me of aiding your views in the county (to whom I am already so much obliged) and of discharging reasonable expectations and engagements of my nephews; I am compelled to waive my own speculations, and bow to advantages I neither merit nor would sue for. Should it therefore be agreeable to your Lordship to receive such a boon at his Majesty's hand, and for private reasons it appears eligible to the family at large that I should be the object of it, I shall think myself obliged to acknowledge the favour as unmerited and considerable: though at the same time unsought for, and undesired. Whatever your friendship may think fit to contribute towards it will deserve my best thanks. But I should be very sorry if it put you to any extraordinary trouble: and hope (if that is probable) you will permit me to solicit you against it. Thus circumstanced I know not how to adopt your hint of writing to Lambeth on this subject. I am at a loss for proper words or introduction. But a hint from you may determine me.

I have thus endeavoured to state to you my mind, without enumerating several refinements that occur. I hope you will collect from it my acquiescence in what has certainly plain good sense and propriety on its side, and believe me with thanks and compliments to you all, Dear Brother
always your faithful and obliged humble servant
James Gloucester (GRO)

James's modesty is clear. Mary attempted to mollify some probable impatience in the Earl of Hardwicke.

[?5 July 1781]

I must Dear Madam entrust a private line to your Ladyship's friendship, just to say that my Bishop is perfectly resigned to the event hanging over him — the expression will make you smile, but you know Dear Madam that ambition, pride, or love of money never had the least place in his heart, which is entirely filled with an anxious solicitude to discharge the duties of his function properly, and which always strike most forcibly when he is removing to a new situation where those duties may be increased; indeed must necessarily be so at first by their novelty. He is however very sensible of Ld H's attention to him and tells me he has endeavoured to express it in his letter. I should take as a particular favour if Ld H in his answer, would take no notice of phrases that may appear to savour of dissatisfaction, imputing them to the true cause, a little sudden alarm upon the spirits at so unexpected an event, which will soon pass over, but would indeed make a lasting impression, if

it brought upon him fraternal displeasure.

For this and every other mark of sincere friendship that we have, or may receive from Ld H and your Ladyship's goodness accept Dear Madam the most grateful acknowledgements of your ever obliged

M Yorke

Please to take no notice of this note when you honour me with a letter. (9/102)

A few days later James had accepted the new honour which was imposed on him, as his next two letters, written to his sister-in-law, Marchioness Grey, indicate.

9 July 9th 1781

Your Ladyship's obliging letter of the 6th Instant as secretary to my brother, is so peculiarly explicit of your good wishes, and of our chance of success in a matter of very great consequence to my family, that I cannot help thanking you for it, and by the return of the post. I hope by this time my letter in consequence of the honor of the former received from you by Mrs Yorke has been to hand, and gives that satisfaction I intended and wished it might. I am sure I feel myself extremely obliged by the attention shown on this occasion to my interests and those of my friends; and shall receive with just satisfaction and thankfulness so creditable and advantageous a preferment. I am sure it will make me enjoy the benefits of it with real satisfaction, if Lord Hardwicke is gratified and inconvenienced by it. And as my possession of it will be entirely due to his situation and pretensions, it will be my study to show myself on every occasion mindful of it; I will flatter myself at the same time with your Ladyship's continuance and protection in a situation of more notoriety than I aimed at.

In consequence of his Grace's note which you was [so] good as to enclose, I intend to address to him a line of acknowledgement and will await Lord Hardwicke's directions for any further steps it may be necessary for me to take. I see by the papers the Bishop is dead, and therefore the business will now be soon decided and almost presume upon my good fortune.

With a thousand thanks to your Ladyship and Lord Hardwicke ...

James Gloucester

Mrs Maddox is not a little pleased, she is used to such satisfactions. (9/106/6)

10 July 1781

For the sentiments I feel on this occasion towards those friends who have interested themselves for me, I refer your Ladyship to the letter which accompanies this and was intended for this evening's post. I will not therefore repeat my grateful acquiescence in Lord North's proposal but in my address to his Lordship, which I will beg leave to forwards through Lord Hardwicke's hands as my proper medium to him for my correspondence at this period of the transaction ... With my particular thanks for the honour of so able and considerate a negotiator and Secretary as your Ladyship on the present event.

(9/106/7)

In the event James and Mary Yorke both happily fulfilled the duties of his position until James's death in 1808.

A new London house

Mary had early become used to a peripatetic life-style. When first married, James Yorke had been Dean of Lincoln and Vicar of St Giles's, Reading, so requiring the couple to reside part of the year in each place, while summer holidays were spent at Forthampton Court (Plate 9). Although the living at Reading had been exchanged in 1768 for one in London, this only reduced their travelling by a small amount. At this time, they purchased a London home in Upper Brook Street. When James became Bishop of St Davids, in 1774, they undertook regular journeys to Wales and within the diocese for visitations, and occupied the palace at Abergwili for several short periods. By this time Mary and James had four sons: Joseph, Charles, James and Philip; and three daughters: Margaret, Mary and Elizabeth; Elizabeth, the youngest, was not yet two years old when James became Bishop of St Davids. For the two years that James was Bishop of Gloucester, the palace was occupied for a short time, most notably during the Gloucester music meeting of 1781; James had to leave his wife there because of his elevation to Ely. He told Lady Bell 'I came to Town just time enough to miss of Lord Hardwicke, which was unlucky; and to turn my back on the greatest portion of the music meeting, which was not so much so. I left my house open, and a very capable Mistress of the Ceremonies, who I doubt not would give great satisfaction' (11/331/12).

Mary's next letter to Amabel was written in the excitement of the new situation. Now, there was not only the Bishop's Palace but an official London residence in Dover Street, and their own London home became redundant; it helped the newly-widowed Amabel to become their tenant in Upper Brook Street. Mary sent Charles, the second son, who was then 17 years old, to keep his father company when he went to London in connection with the formal ceremonies involved in his translation; Charles became a very close companion to his father, eventually himself taking orders, but he was delicate, and died in 1791.

Tuesday Evening [10 July 1781]

The bustle of this day being a little over, and the rage of expresses subsided, I set down to cool myself by writing a line to my Dear Lady Bell ... Express the first at nine O'Clock this morning, at three arrives express the second, from Mr Yorke to desire the Bishop to be in Town tomorrow by twelve; or Friday noon; the first was impossible, however between five and six this afternoon he set out (in order to be ready for the second) in very good spirits, and for fear of any failure in that respect I have despatched Charles to be of his party who is most amazingly delighted with this new piece of good fortune of his father's ... Will you laugh at me if I add, I most sincerely join in the general congratulation they will receive upon the success of their warm endeavours for our advance-

ment? May we know how to make a proper use of the abundance poured out upon us! is the prayer of Dear Lady Bell's most affectionate

MY

P.S. Our house I do not doubt you may command (though I have not discoursed the Bp upon it). We shall be happy in so good a tenant, at least for two years, by which time perhaps our present expenses will have drained us so much as to make selling it proper, if Joseph should have any great demands on us. (11/55)

James echoed the congratulations when he wrote to Amabel 'accept my congratulations on the family's promotion to Ely, in which I consider your Ladyship as my coadjutor together with Lord and Lady Grey etc. The humble representative in the episcopal chair feels bolder by so honourable a Corps of assistants' (11/331/11). James was shortly able to confirm in a letter to Lord Hardwicke written from Mrs Maddox's house in Green Street that the first stage in his translation had been accomplished.¹

13 July 1781

Dear Brother

I think it proper to acquaint you that I was at the Levée to day, and have kissed his Majesty's hands for the bishopric of Ely. Sir Joseph was so good as to accompany me; and we were graciously received as is the common phrase on such occasions. The bishop (my chief) I also visited, and returned him my own and the family thanks for his zeal on the occasion, which indeed he deserves. Our nephews' friendship and alertness has exerted itself extremely; and in short I think we have occasion to be pleased with each other, our friends, and his Majesty for an event so very eligible in a family light, and so commodious to my domestic concerns. For my share I am very grateful to you all, and particularly to your Lordship as our Chief, and the *primum mobile* and political vortex round which we secondary planets revolve; and from whose Centre we derive a reflected light ... If the Queen has no drawing room I shall return home the end of next week. Indeed I am to preach the Infirmary Sermon at the assizes at Gloucester; and have some Confirmations in different parts of the Diocese at the beginning of next month upon my hands. My own confirmation in Bow Church will bring me to town again in about three weeks, or a month, when I hope to perform Homage and finish my gauntlet of ceremonials ...

I do not yet make out my successors at Lincoln or Gloucester. I wish our friend the Master of Queen's might have one of them. But I doubt his friends have exhausted their interest on themselves ... I propose to leave a card at Lord North's, unless he has a Levée, at which I shall attend. (GRO)

Mary was soon enthusing from Forthampton about the new part of the country where she was to live.

21 July 1781

I have heard no particulars yet of either of my new Houses, but by the account that is given of the Isle

of Ely in the map of Cambridgeshire it seems to be a wonderful place! It is said to have been originally a beautiful spot covered with verdure, and enriched with woods (the remains of large oak trees being still to be found in digging some feet under the ground) but by some violent concussion of an earthquake, an event happened not unlike that of the Solway Moss. The whole face of the Island was disfigured and became a Jelly! The bleating of sheep, the cheerful pipe and whistle of the plowman was no longer heard! Dullness with all her Court attendants of Fogs, and Steams, presided uncontrolled: nor could Pope have found a properer spot for the summer residence of his favourite Goddess! But the active Spirit of Industry could not long submit to her leaden sway, She shook off the cumbrous load and began to exert herself. Canals were made, bridges built, the quaking lands compacted, manufactures introduced, the basket maker rejoiced, and the paper mills enlivened the scene. Then the Country [county] became populous, cultivation improved, the corn fields and valleys began to laugh and sing, and the rosy coloured cinquefoil completed the cheerfulness of the whole. But still alas! the willow lives exulting over the oak (who lies indignant at his feet) and beareth its plumes with a mournful kind of triumph on its unexampled victory!

This is the account I have collected Dear Madam from the map, and must beg of you to inform me how true it is. The views of the town make it appear very like Windsor and Lincoln, but I flatter myself it has vastly the advantage of them both, in one particular, which your Ladyship will easily guess, though I will not make myself so unpopular as to mention, even in a whisper. I have had no letter from Lady Bell to fix the time of our having the pleasure of seeing her, I wish her to set out as soon as possible because I am afraid towards the last week in August, this place would be rendered very disagreeable to her by music meetings — Confirmations (which as the orders are given out, I suppose the bishop must perform) and noisy boys' holidays, though for the latter particular I could trust her good nature, the former are unsurmountable, as we must remove to Gloucester, soon after the 20th August.

I am sorry to find Mr Keene's almost stripping his London House of furniture, with other particulars, obliges the bishop to decline having the honour of our new tenant in Upper Brook Street for more than one year from Michaelmas. That term, however, she may depend upon he assures me, as likewise all the furniture she may desire: beg the favour of her not to have an uneasy thought upon the subject, and I shall settle it in a manner equally convenient to both. The confidential friendship with which she honours me makes me very capable of being her agent in this affair, and I trust she will not find me a careless one, which is saying a good deal in the way of Agency. As there is a necessary expense attending a change of Church Preferment your Ladyship will be glad to hear we have had the good luck not to be at all out of pocket by our removal to Gloucester,

for which I am sincerely grateful to Dame Fortune.

(9/104)

Presumably Mr Keene was Benjamin Keene, Bishop Keene's only son; the Bishop had only recently furnished Ely House and he died there. The expense for James Yorke of furnishing Ely House, it seems, made him think he might need to sell his Brook Street house after a short occupation by Lady Bell, but this did not prove to be necessary; regular half-yearly payments of rent were scrupulously made and acknowledged and Lady Bell also paid a quarter of the Poor's Rate. She finally purchased the house.

An erroneous idea that Bishop Yorke and his wife did not move into their official London house until 1797 has become established; EAB Barnard (1949) seems to be the originator, through misinterpretation of a bill from A Seddon of Dover Street, a famous specialist in furniture.² Letters from his brother, from his wife, and from the Bishop himself written from Brook Street, make clear that the family moved into Ely House immediately.

Brook Street 15 September 1781

Dear Lady Bell Polwarth

I write in the midst of perplexity and bustle, being on the eve of removing to Ely House and leaving this in proper order, I hope, for your comfortable residence. Some more freedom I must take with the furniture than I at first intended, but whatever is a real detriment must be allowed for in the rent. When that is done I shall set out for Ely to adjust matters, which are there voluminous and costly. The expense I shall stand at in my exchange will be at least, fees and furniture, £1100. But that may be amply repaid; as contrary to State Lotteries this seems to promise more prizes than blanks ...

I am going to perform the old feudal ceremony of Homage, and expect to observe much care upon our gracious Sovereign's brow. A King of this Country at this period is by no means an enviable character to support. With all my occupations I shall scarce return home these 10 days: but when I do I shall repose till November sets in with the farmers.

(11/331/12)

The amount of the tax called 'First Fruits' paid to the Crown by a new bishop of Ely amounted to £213, a relatively small amount compared with the other expenses, and the new bishop's optimism was certainly justified; Ely was the eighth richest see. Twenty years before James Yorke was translated there, it was estimated to have an annual income of £3400; St David's and Gloucester each had about £900 and the relative poverty of these latter sees, and of others poorly endowed, was held to justify a bishop holding other preferments as well as a bishopric. In Bishop Yorke's case he held the Deanery of Lincoln which was officially said to be worth £800 during the time he was there. A survey of episcopal incomes made at the behest of parliament in 1835 showed Ely then to be the third richest see, with an income of £11,000; only Canterbury, Durham and London had more. No doubt the income had increased since James Yorke's death in

1808, but the relative affluence of the position is clear (Hirschberg 1981, 213 *Parliamentary Papers* 1835: 22).

A letter from James's brother John, written about this time, discusses the financial implications of James's new position.

[September] 1781

Dear Brother

Your unexpected kind letter of the 1st from Ely House, calls not only for my acknowledgements, but my compliments on your being in full possession of your new and most comfortable residence, and the heartiest wishes of your friends here, that you may enjoy all the comforts and emoluments of that situation in health and cheerfulness for many years. I hope this may find you returned as well pleased with Ely as with Dover Street, and that all the transactions with the Agents of Predecessors may be speedily and smoothly settled. I have always heard that the house at Ely was an admirable one. If so, you will be eased of a good deal of trouble as to dilapidations and repairs at least, and the furniture must be almost as good as new, which may save Mrs Yorke some trouble. I have not yet heard any body named for Lincoln. I imagine you may have occasion for a journey thither to give orders, and remove some of your effects at that place. I shall be glad to find that to be unnecessary, as the season grows latish, and you will have enough of that sort of business. (GRO)

Bishop Keene had been responsible for selling the old Ely House in Holborn and (with the proceeds) building a new one in Dover Street between 1772 and 1776; the house had been finished just five years before Bishop Keene died. It had been designed by Sir Robert Taylor, surveyor to the Bank of England, and is faced with Portland stone. It is considered one of the finest surviving 18th century town houses in London, listed Grade I, and shows its past with a bishop's mitre in the centre of the façade and in some details inside, though it ceased to be the official London residence of the bishops of Ely in 1909 (Hussey 1953; Robinson 2002). Mary would recognise the building today, despite large additions.³ Her reaction on seeing Ely House was a little apprehensive.

22 September [1781]

In the first place My Dear Lady Bell (even before I thank you for your very kind Letter) I must tell you how much I am pleased with this excellent House, it is not only airy and pleasant; but handsome; nay pompous to a degree (that if you will forgive me for saying so) I scarcely think suitable to an Ecclesiastical situation. The house at Ely is likewise by the Bishop's account a most excellent one, and very elegantly furnished, the environs there likewise not unpretty. But to return to this house; you judged very rightly Dear Madam when you supposed I should not be in a hurry to furnish the new rooms; the moment I set my foot in it, all the pleasing ideas of purple poppies and twining wreaths that had floated about in my mind during the summer, subsided at once; and such was the immense size of it, I had no wish left but that it might never be furnished at all! With my



Figure 4. Ely House, Dover Street, London, the town house of the Bishop of Ely, was built by Bishop Keene between 1772 and 1776. A bishop's mitre is carved on the centre roundel on the street facade. It is now the property of Fleming Family and Partners. (Glyn Jones)

thanks therefore for the trouble I have given about the patterns ...

Your house in London looks very comfortable. When our family arrived here, we were obliged to make some of the tables and chairs take a walk to Dover Street, but their places will all be supplied before we leave Town again, and I hope you will find it every way convenient ... I hope all Friends will assemble from all quarters by the meeting of Parliament and that we shall have a very comfortable winter together. (11/58)

To Jemima she reviewed the financial implications of moving to Ely, the Bishop having been confirmed in the temporalities of the see of Ely on 3 October.

Sunday 7 October [1781]

Yesterdays post brought the Bishop an account of his being completely made Bp of Ely; the whole expense of coming on being as nearly as I can collect (fees, furniture, and first fruits) £4200: but as not above half of this is to be paid the first year; and as I am told we are likely to receive (fortunately) from Ely £1400 that narrowly escaped being paid to the former bishop, we shall fight our way through very well: this last circumstance indeed we have as yet heard only from

report; but I trust it is true, as otherwise that quarter will produce very little the first twelve month. Your Ladyship's kind attention to our affairs will make any apology unnecessary from me for troubling you upon this subject. The furniture we have to dispose of at our two houses I understand will not produce any great matter not being splendid, but still it must be the addition of some hundreds. (9/107)

Arrival at Ely and the Bishop's Palace

As James had predicted, his family did not reach Ely itself until December.

17 December (1781)

Dear Lady Bell

After an excellent drive on a sweet day I had the pleasure of finding all here perfectly well, in one of the best houses I have ever seen belonging to a Church situation, or indeed to any other, neatness, space-ness, airiness, gay apartments and sweet sunshine, conspire with the spirits of my young Folks to make every thing about me perfectly *riant*. The Church too I admire, especially the elegant little choir and its arches. One part of the ceremony appeared to me very droll, namely the sallying forth out of our pews into the middle of the church to sermon (where the congregation of two other churches were assembled, and where the bishop was placed in due form in an Elbow Chair, his Family (myself at their head) forming the back ground behind him); I fancy the whole of this foundation is very ancient as there is not any thing to be seen so modern as a bishop's Throne, nor does he set in the usual Episcopal part of the choir. The Militia contributed a little to help out the show of company, otherwise there seems to be hardly any people of fashion in the place, at least that ventured to Church. (11/66)

The 'elegant little choir' was built about 1770 so was as new as Ely House. The Bishop of Ely, representing the Abbot from the period before the monastery became a Cathedral church, in 1109, sat in the Abbot's former stall, on the south side of the choir screen; the Dean, representing the Prior, sat on the north side. Part of the Palace of Ely was 15th century, and part 17th century, but the Yorkes had the advantage of the 'rebuilding' or remodelling of the interior carried out by the Bishop's predecessor, Bishop Keene, in 1771, which to Bentham's eyes 'left only the outer walls standing', and which he considered made it the best episcopal palace in the country (Figures 6, 7 and 8). In practice, some older parts of the Palace and other old walls were incorporated in Bishop Keene's construction (Bentham 1812, Addenda 12, Hussey 1928). It was the practice at Ely at least from mid-18th century and into the 19th century, for morning prayers ('College Prayers') to be said in the choir of the cathedral, and in the Lady Chapel and St Mary's church at the same time in the morning. The three congregations then joined together under the Octagon at about 11 o'clock to hear a sermon, a custom which Bishop Yorke followed (Meadows & Ramsay 2003, 293). Jemima was given a similarly enthusiastic account.

22 December 1781

I would not trouble your Ladyship with a letter till I could give you a full account of this place, its environs, inhabitants etc. First with respect to the house it is an excellent one and not too large, the ground floor containing only parlour, hall, drawing room and study, with the chapel and offices; the floor over, three fine apartments besides single rooms, and the attics are so numerous, tidy, and like each other, I should not have known when I had been in them all, if the doors had not been numbered on the outside. One observation I could not help making, in going over the offices, namely that our predecessor was more of a *dévôte* than I had at first imagined. The reasons are certainly strong for supposing his Lordship wore a hair shirt or something of the scrubbing nature, instead of linen; as there is no sign either here or in London of any thing of that convenience called a laundry! With respect to the gardens they are spacious though not quite enough open to the country to admit of prospect, they would admit of more improvement than we shall allow ourselves to think of, and there is a high stone wall just by the parlour windows which looks one in the face, and with a tempting effrontery says, come pull me down: we shall not be bullied by him to begin an attack, which might end too much at our expense, though I must confess his hiding the shrubbery part of the garden from us, is a provoking circumstance that would lead people of more taste than ourselves into a scrape.

The Company here consists of about four or five families, the principal of whom are Mr and Mrs Cole, people of fortune.⁴ We have been visited by them, and the Militia Officers in form, with others of the Church, but much less numerous than either at Lincoln or Gloucester.

The choir of the Church and side chapels are beautiful, the length of the middle aisle from the west door is rather monstrous than pleasing, and from being

not ceiled looks very unfinished ...

P.S. I have not had time to walk beyond the gardens, but am told in summer the fields are not unpretty, and I assure your Ladyship here is no want of trees. I have an excellent pair of clogs ready of Lady Bell's when I go. The country in general is very odd, at least the Bp has made us laugh heartily (with some of his boys) at the account of their rides, part of it I take to be wit and perhaps some reality. (9/112)

The Palace living rooms mentioned in this letter were in Bishop Keene's south-facing building.

On the last day of December 1781 Mary's letter to Amabel commented on local food supplies: 'with respect to the Markets of this place we are in general well served with every thing but Fish. This latter article is scarce and dear, however twice a week a Crier arrives in the Market Place and with an audible voice proclaims: Eggs, Poultry, Rabbits, Fish — concluding with God save King!' (11/67) The family was quickly becoming familiar with life in Ely.

A view of the Palace of Ely

Once settled into the palace at Ely and Ely House in London, the comforts and amenities of the two houses are only occasionally the subject of comment in Mary Yorke's letters. When the family returned to Forthampton Court for the first time after living at Ely, she gave a humorous and illuminating account of the contrast. To Amabel she wrote

11 August [1782]

That charming house however almost spoil us for Forthampton. When we first came here the children appeared (even the girls) six feet high, and as for myself I seemed to be in danger of knocking my head against the ceiling or my elbow against the walls every time I rose from my chair or put my hands in my pocket: the rooms however have been growing larger every day for this fortnight, and are now of a very comfortable domestic size. (11/71)

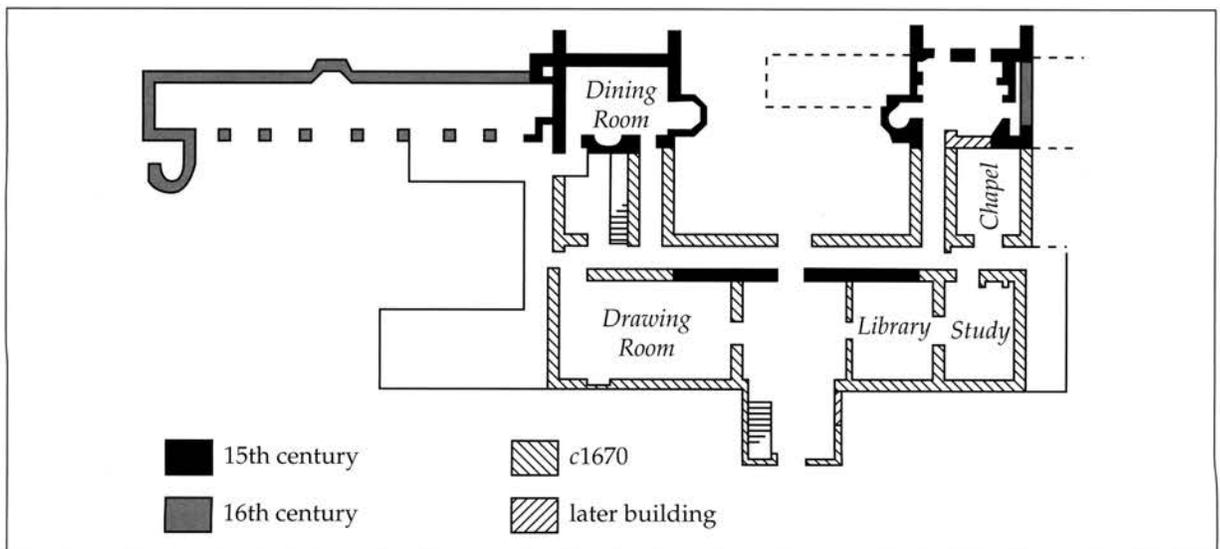


Figure 5. Plan of the Palace of Ely. After C. Hussey, 1928.



Figure 6. The north front of the Bishop's Palace at Ely. (Glyn Jones)



Figure 7. The gracious and well-windowed garden facade of the Old Palace fronts a symmetrical south range built by Bishop Laney in the later 17th century; Bishop Keene added the Venetian window over the porch. (Glyn Jones)



Figure 8. An unusual view of the Bishop's Palace at Ely from the Kitchen Garden drawn by Alexander Ansted for Episcopal Palaces of England (E. Venables, 1895).

There are several hints in the letters that Mary was rather tall.

Quite soon after their arrival in Ely, the Yorkes made some improvements to their immediate environs. Mary told Jemima in January 1783 that a 'principal amusement'

26 Jan 1783

not only in the performing, but in its consequences, has been the carrying of a gravel (alias sand) path round two sides of our pleasure garden, and uniting it (by breaking a hole through the wall) with the kitchen garden etc, this for the expense of about 50 shillings gives us a dry walk near half a mile in length, and is a vast acquisition. (9/121)

Mary Yorke was interested in her gardens, and flowers are often mentioned in her letters. For example, she wrote to Amabel

[February 1783]

Elizabeth brought me a nosegay in water (or rather ice) this morning that you would have thought very odd and pretty, it consisted of polianthus and such other flowers as warm borders usually produce in February mixed with the young green sweetbriar leaves. These were put in a large glass, the frost entirely froze the water, so that it came out of the glass in one solid piece, with the flowers quite fresh sticking about in it and the stalks intermixed between the

The Choir of the Church of s. Charles are beautiful
 the length of the middle Ile from the West Door
 is rather monstrous, than pleasing, & from
 being not ciled, looks very unfinished;
 I hope the accounts from Bath are good, & that s.
 R. at least finds the place agree, with him, tho
 he cannot yet expect much benefit. when you
 write, we will trouble your Lady's with our Compliments
 in which we join ^{to yourself} Lady Bell, Lady Grantham
 & his Lordship. from Dear Madam
 Your Lady's ever oblig'd & faithful
 Mary Yorke

A!
 I have not had time to walk beyond the
 Gardens, but am told in Summer the
 Fields are not unpretty. & I assure your
 Ladyship here is no want of Trees.
 I have an excellent Pair of Clogs ready
 of Lady Bells when I do go. The Country in general
 is very odd; at least the B. has made us laugh
 heartily, (with some of his Boys) at the account of
 their rides. part of it I take to be wit & perhaps
 some reality

Figure 9. Part of the first letter from Mary Yorke to Marchioness Grey written from Ely.

spar of the ice like basket work; if you have a mind to see it, look — here it stands on the table. (11/75)

A few years later she could report 'as to myself, my garden and green-house (which the Bp has kindly just furnished with a pretty collection of plants from Cambridge) have afforded me many pleasant moments. I assure you the jessamin and roses are still blooming' (11/103). That was on 1 November 1787. But just over a week later she told Lady Grey 'Our

weather is still mild, but Autumn now reigns in my garden, no more roses and jessamin, but yellow is the predominant hue in my flower borders' (9/149).

In December 1784, the Palace garden was the scene of an Air Balloon ascent:

28 December [1784]

After several unsuccessful attempts last week, it was made by Major Tolver, and had a very pretty melon effect, being quarterd purple and yellow, but did not carry even a letter with it. All the quality assembled

in our garden, the mob on our walls and neighbouring houses and buildings; it was not very large but had served to excite all the usual Air Balloon passions, that are commonly felt on these occasions, viz curiosity of the common people, rage at their disappointment (proceeding to threats of *mumbling* Mr Tolver), impatience — at the second trial, joy and holloaing at the perturbation and manifest anxiety in the countenance of the projector, who turned quite pale and trembling as it began to rise from the pole; a pleasing exhilaration of spirits in the females upon the gravel walks, expressed by a universal gabbling; I never was present at one of these exhibitions before, but presume from what I have heard, these are the regular effects to be produced and all that is necessary to make it reckoned a regular and complete exhibition ...

P.S. Our Garden was the only clear spot the Major could find. (11/89)

Experiments with hot-air balloons had taken place in France two years earlier, and in England the first ascent was from Highgate in November 1783; Amabel seems to have witnessed this and sent the Bishop's wife a description which led the Bishop to quote a lullaby:

There was an old woman went up in a basket
Two or three times as high as the moon ...

and ending

What do you there so high so high?
I am sweeping the cobwebs off the sky. (11/81)

In 1784 there were several balloon ascents from various English cities, of which Ely was one. (Rolt 1985, 29–31, 61)

Residence at Ely was regular during the autumn months. The Yorkes found the palace a good dry house, which contrasted favourably with Lincoln Deanery where the damp ran down the walls (11/7); 'it is but justice to say, our house and environs are very dry and wholesome', Mary wrote (9/115), and on Christmas Day 1782 'This is certainly an excellent winter house, for its exposure all day to the sun, which in summer was troublesome, at this season is gay and cheerful' (9/119). But after a time comments on how cold it was became more frequent: 'our frost and snow begins to put us in mind of London' (9/150); in London they were close to other members of the large Yorke family, stopping for a while the flow of letters. One winter Amabel was told 'I thank God, none of us here have felt any great inconvenience from [the severe weather] (though this house is not a warm one) (11/89). This was the impression of some visitors, too.

15 December [1785]

The Master of Queens and his eldest daughter, made us a visit for two or three days last week. He was pretty well, but I fancy found this place cold if I may judge by the information of his Boot-Stockings, in which he sat with his feet on the fender in my dressing Room. (9/140)

Dr Plumptre, master of Queens' College, Cambridge,

was often in touch with the Yorkes. The two families had a long-standing link in Dover in Kent (Yorke 1913, ii 563). Robert Plumptre had been at Dr Newcome's school in Hackney where he was a contemporary of James's older brothers; from 1752 he was also rector of Wimpole, and so was close to the first Earl of Hardwicke, who was his patron in several church preferments, and then to the second Earl, James's oldest brother. Lady Grey obviously counselled Mary not to be too scathing about warm footwear, as this advice was ruefully referred to when Mary wrote to Amabel.

6 January 1786

Having put on my gloves, and drawn my table and chair pretty near the fire, I shall endeavour Dear Lady Bell so far to make use of my fingers as to thank you for your obliging letter, and at the same time beg of you to accept from me the usual compliments of the season ... Lady Grey was a true prophetess, I no longer laugh at Boot-Stockings, on the contrary adopted something of the idea when I went to the cathedral last Thursday.

But enough you will say of the weather, and yet what else shall I talk about? (11/95)

There was another glimpse of the palace in winter a year later:

17 November 1786

As for ourselves (thank God) we are all pure well (thanks to the Bark [quinine] which has set me up, and my daughter Mary) ... this is a most excellent winter house when the weather is not very cold indeed. Mr Yorke and Lady Elizabeth — who left us about half an hour ago — assured me they found themselves perfectly comfortable in it, and wondered I should think it cold ... I made preparations for them all some days before, but what do you think they consisted in? Why in ordering over for them seven new warm blankets! (11/99)

Mr Philip Yorke (1757–1834) was James's nephew, the son of his brother Charles, and his wife was Elizabeth Lindsay, daughter of the 5th earl of Balcarras; he became the 3rd earl of Hardwicke in 1790.

The last word should go to Mrs Maddox, after she had stayed with Mary. While Dr Maddox was Bishop of Worcester she had lived some years in Hartlebury Castle, the official residence.

21 May [1784]

My mother is perfectly happy here (as indeed I thought she would be) ... happily she has an acquaintance with some families of our Chapter, of 30 and 40 years standing, and indeed with the clerical connections of most. She is charmed with this house, which much exceeded her expectations though she had heard so much of it. She owns (what indeed is very clear) that it greatly exceeds the Bp of Worcester's at Hartlebury. (9/130)

The Ely neighbourhood

Mary Yorke always threw herself wholeheartedly into whatever situation James' career dictated, and was as enthusiastic about Ely as she was about the Palace. The first spring there, an epidemic of influenza affected London, but Ely was presented as markedly healthier.

5 May 1782

The rest of my family have all been ill more or less, at present only one maid servant keeps her bed. The natives of Ely have none of them yet fallen, but it is begun among the soldiers, fifteen of whom fell sick yesterday, and the day before, but I have no doubt it is much slighter here, than in London. Our air is certainly good, and we had a fine walk in the fields last night which was really not unpretty, and perfectly dry, all the party thought so as well as myself who am sometimes suspected of puffing Ely. I own I think it has not always justice done it, people at a distance being apt to connect an idea of Fen with it, which it really does not deserve. (11/68)

The good air of Ely was a frequent subject of comment. Lady Grey was informed 'this air agrees perfectly well with all this family' (9/121). Amabel was told

[February 1783]

I think I cannot give a stronger proof of the healthiness of this place than by mentioning the death of three of its inhabitants in the course of this month; perhaps you will think this is rather an Irish way of setting about my proof, but when I inform you the youngest was 84 the objection will vanish, as even Ely air cannot make its inhabitants immortal'. (11/75)

And the contrast with London continued to be drawn. 'As to myself I am in perfect charity with Ely air, never having been better, and the Bp may say very nearly the same; we shall however change this clear atmosphere for the smoke of London before next month [January] is out' (11/89). Later, there was an admission that Ely air might also be damp. About a deferred visit by Amabel she wrote

8 October [1787]

I can assure her if she was here, she would think it the middle of summer — the air is so soft, the garden so gay, roses and jessamine in full bloom, and the evening walks so pleasant, that nothing but the sudden shutting in of them and disappearance of the sun convince one that it is not June. At the same time I must be honest enough to confess that the weather is not so agreeable to everybody's feelings as my own, the air being so exceedingly damp that when you go out, it enwraps you round like a wet warm blanket, or a tepid bath in which people walk about in a kind of muz: bordering upon sleepiness. (9/148)

The watery fens gradually become a stronger theme in the letters, leading her to refer to 'we poor web footed animals' (9/140) and the tendency to floods stimulated some of Mary's characteristic word pictures. In the first May after their arrival she wrote to Lady Grey

28 May [1782]

The water in the Island has certainly sunk near a foot, but it still bears a large proportion to the land; the children were much surprised and (as usual with all novelties) delighted with the first view of the great expanse of water; a little circumstance likewise contributed to their amusement: in the midst of the water stood a windmill, near which, in a small boat appeared the miller in his great coat, spooned along by a staring miss without a hat. At a small distance (seemingly just emerged from the flood) stood his house, and in the doorway his wife, waiting impatiently for the return of her family, who she did not dare to advance even one step over the threshold to meet. (9/115)

On a fine day she noted how the Fens when flooded 'shine a good deal' (9/150), and the change of weather to frost after floods led her to describe a different scene.

6 January 1786

The last fortnight has however been a great blessing to this place, and put an end to a fatal fever that raged amongst the poor in the lower watery part of the town, from whence I was informed there [were] not less than 30 funerals in a few days; indeed this place is never more in health and beauty than in a very hard frost, the quantity of ice, and the people skating upon it with now and then a man drawing his wife after him, seated in a sledge on a basket, her feet supported with a small barrel, form a scene truly Dutch; the exercise is certainly a fine one, and Philip [her son] assures me so warming, that they are soon thrown into a state of perspiration and thaw, and when the sun shines, it must be allowed to be very picturesque; I grant it — but it does not warm me: it is not with us "Who can hold fire in his hand by thinking on the frosty Caucasus?" but (*toute au contraire*) who can keep Jack Frost out of every joint, by thinking on these sweaty Fen men? (11/95)

As the Severn at Forthampton and Tewkesbury often floods, and the water could come quite close to the Court, the Bishop's family were quite accustomed to this feature of Ely's surroundings. In a letter from Forthampton she compared hay-making in the two places; hay-making and harvest were always subjects of interest and concern.

11 August [?1782]

The weather however with us has been very rainy, and still continues so, but not enough yet to make our walks in the fields dirty though it has swelled our river so much as to make it step over its banks on the opposite side from us, damaging a good deal of hay and grass; so that I need not have laughed at the mowers as I drove from Ely to Cambridge who were cutting hay in their boots, and every step they took with their scythe the water splashed up to the tops; did you see this operation? — a woman at a little distance standing (I suppose to the ankles in water) making hay, or at least dragging it out with a long rake. (11/71)

Mary was appreciative of countryside and of 'the verdure and blossoms of Ely ... We are here indeed in the highest beauty this part of the world is capable of: the cherry orchards round us are all in high bloom, and our own gardens (quite a nosegay)' (9/130). Both she and James were keen walkers, and Amabel, an early visitor to Ely, walked with them. But she could not deny the flatness of the countryside. She invited Amabel to write a description of Fountains in Yorkshire;

1 November 1783

I do assure you, it will not be flung away upon us; our taste for the beautiful, and the romantic, is by no means subsided; and we shall be happy to have it so recalled; (besides it would be a sort of charity to fling half a dozen rocks and a promontory or two amidst the scenery of the isle of Ely). If you grant this our humble petition, you will oblige her who is always (in damp or dry, dingle or wet fen) your Ladyship's obliged and affectionate Mary Yorke (11/80)

Even so, Ely could be favourably contrasted with the scenery to the north. Ten years after arriving in Ely, Mary felt her duties towards her family had sufficiently abated to be able to accompany James on a visitation to Wisbech:

4 June 1791

As I had never seen that part of the country my curiosity was alert, but though I looked out of the window all the way as I went, I read most of it back again, and my pencil which was put as usual in my pocket, there remained untouched; to say the truth I thought I never saw Ely to so much advantage as upon my return as I rose from this boundless never ending kind of flat, to the corn fields, hedge rows and little risings and fallings of the country within four miles of this place ...

My curiosity as I was strolling about in the villages as we passed during the Bp's Confirmations led me into the church yards: where I was struck and shocked at the number of children mentioned in the tomb stones — on four of these melancholy memorials, in one small church yard, no less than 24 babes were said to have died in their infancy — in another the fatality of the same kind was no less striking, and the following ill wrote lines will but too well apply not only to that, but every church that I was in, not excepting that at Wisbech. My son Charles who remembers them better than me says they were as follows, raised over the ashes of a young girl of 14 (who was buried with 5 younger brothers and sisters)

Thus had we raised the beauteous vine
And thought the promises were very fine.
Some Eastern wind or some pernicious frost
Cropt our fair flower and all our hopes were lost.

I have only to observe it was unfortunate frost was essential to the verse, as it is seldom pernicious in such a country. (11/133)

It is interesting to know how Mary passed her time while the Bishop was conducting his ecclesiastical business.

The pleasures of the situation were spoilt a little when the local farmers started 'burning the ground'. On returning after an absence of four months

11 August (1792)

We found Ely as we left it in April, burning hot ... but [it] loses all the merit of a country situation from the vile custom of burning turf or grass in the fields; it is done almost every night, and the columns of smoke that roll along the valley enter our very chambers and pervade every thing; it is a close, warm suffocating sort of smell that I dislike extremely, and robs us of the cool and pleasant season, the evening, entirely. I hope as the harvest comes on they will find some thing better to do, otherwise I shall not forgive our neighbouring farmers for introducing this queer kind of tillage now, when the ceremony of burning might just as well be carried on in colder weather, when we might not dislike it. (9/250)

The practice continued, and a letter six years later makes a similar complaint.

5 June 1798

The rain that has fallen lately has been of infinite service to us, not only as to the crops upon the ground but more particularly to ourselves personally as it has put an end (I trust for the whole summer) to that most abominable system of agriculture, burning the ground! The two or three nights after we first came it was truly distressing to us, but afterwards the wind sometimes changed and carried it from us. (11/175)

Travelling

The Bishop's family spent many hours travelling back and forth across the country, sometimes breaking the journey in London or Wrest. The normal pattern was that after spending the summer at Forthampton Court in Gloucestershire, the family would move to Ely in October; there would be a removal to London in January; Easter seems to have been spent in Ely; sometime in May or June the family was back in London and in July was on the move again to Gloucestershire. Travelling, the state of the roads, and safe arrivals were therefore very frequent topics in letters. Mary claimed that she did not dislike travelling, which was just as well; 'as for the hurry and busy-ness of moving I really do not find anything in it at present; my clothes and things are so used to travelling that all of them almost jump into their proper places without any assistance, especially when they are going to a place their mistress likes' (9/60). A few years later: 'I find myself once more surrounded with boxes and immersed in packing. That life is a journey is a maxim that we surely need never forget, but if we have our healths I do not doubt our rubbing over this part of it as usual' (9/67).

The Bishop sometimes went to London while the family stayed in Forthampton or Ely. For example she wrote to Jemima from Ely, 'As the Bishop is in Town, I know not why I should trouble your Ladyship with a letter, he being able to give every information about us as well as I can do so by my pen, it is purely the pleasure of conversing makes me take it up (9/161). Here

is nicely expressed her approach to letter-writing. A typical letter written from Ely informed Amabel:

1 November 1783

It is not impossible the Bp may come up to the meeting of Parliament, for a few days ... I cannot be of his party, my daughters have not been well enough lately to allow me to leave them with comfort ... in the mean time, the weather is fine enough to cure all complaints; we were very fortunate in having it so on our journey, and indeed performed our excursion across the country with more ease than I expected. As to *ourselves*, the conveying the maids and boxes was more opperose, but another time I can make that very easy, by sending over to Paris for an *Air Balloon* that may convey them all together with the greatest ease — or upon second thoughts, as I know my *kitchen maid* has no particular taste for *aerial* situations, I rather think I shall change places with her, being you know myself often called upon to take *bird flight views*, for which purpose the *Air Balloon* is most peculiarly adapted. (11/80)

This latter is a reference to the Bishop's tendency to ask Mary to sketch a scene when they were out walking; the results of one such view exists in a letter from Wales.

There is a glimpse of the Bishop's travelling arrangements in a letter after a journey from Ely to Forthampton:

10 July 1784

The country is now indeed in the highest beauty and must appear particularly so to you as it does to us after 9 months absence (for I cannot fairly reckon either Richmond or Ely country situations). We meant to see Wimpole on our road, but when we came to Royston, found it would take us near 16 miles out of

the way; so we stopped only to tea; but long enough however to awaken envy, or rather the spirit of ambition in the breast of an honest country man, who sat in the kitchen chimney corner with his jug, and who upon viewing our two carriages etc — wished most heartily 'that he was Lord Hardwicke'. I heard him as I passed behind the screen, and concluded his train of thought was, if the youngest brother can kick up such a dust, what must the eldest do? I shall not moralize upon this story, but proceed to tell you we had a sweet drive through Bedfordshire (which is really as pleasing a gentlemanlike county as any body would wish to live in) to Wrest. (11/85)

In all these removals the season and the weather were of considerable importance, as was the state of the roads, and, as the members of the Lunar Society demonstrated, the cycle of full moons. Of a January removal she wrote, 'The Bishop ... means to be in Town by Wednesday evening. Myself and brats reach London on Thursday evening, as the days are too short and moonless to manage it with our own horses in less than two days' (9/113). She coped cheerfully with rain. 'We had a very wet journey but the rain had been of such infinite use to the country I must not lament the rains having penetrated into our clothes in the trunks on the top of the coach commonly called the Imperial' (11/76). Rain was indeed not always unwelcome for travellers. From Ely Jemima was told 'Our journey was made very pleasant by a fine rain just before we set out the first morning' (9/151). The good state of the roads around Ely was commented on quite often; 'nothing can be finer than they are in all this neighbourhood' she boasted on 1 June 1787 (9/144).

In 1785 Mary accompanied the Bishop when his



Figure 10. Wimpole House, Cambridgeshire, the country home of the Earls of Hardwicke. The 1st Earl purchased Wimpole in 1741. The south front was refaced in red brick with Portland stone dressings, and remains substantially unaltered. (Glyn Jones)

episcopal business enabled her to visit Wimpole. As always she was observant of the countryside and the probable harvest.

6 August [1785]

We left [London] in a very agreeable change of weather. This country had already received great advantages from the rain, the meadows are perfectly green, and nothing can be finer than the face of the corn all over Cambridgeshire; this the Bp and myself may venture to pronounce upon, having taken a pretty general survey, he by going on some Confirmation business almost to Peterborough, and myself attending him the other way as far as Wimpole. I had not seen this place for nine years and then very imperfectly ... It was one of the finest days we have had this summer, though rather hot, for which reason the groom had very considerably got ready his chair and horse to convey me about. I did not however make use of it till I returned from the Park Hill House (I think one always catches the different objects and points of views best upon ones own legs). You cannot imagine Dear Madam how I was astonished at the improvements of the scene in the last twenty years! I had formed a different idea of the place, the variety, and rise and fall of the grounds seemed to me like a new creation, never having even walked in those fields; the ruin is beautiful and will grow every year more so as the ivy comes up about it, the colour of the stone however already begins to mellow. The House was always a good one, but the new Great Parlour however appears to me not only fine but almost necessary addition, the old one lying so much to the sun, and besides not large enough for a public company. The whole house and grounds were in neat order, the new picture of the Speaker and Sir B. W. just fits, and suits the place it is put up in over the chimney next the Library.

The servants told us, many more than usual have been to see Wimple this year, it is indeed saying but little to say it is much the finest place in the County, it would deserve the name of a fine place in any County. (9/138)

Between the mid-1760s and mid-1770s Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was working at Wimpole, and the 'ruin', of three linked towers, was built in 1774. There had indeed been a transformation of the grounds in the twenty years previous to Mary's visit.

Despite their frequent journeyings, James and Mary added voluntarily to the tally. That same autumn, they made a 'little Tour into Norfolk by way of changing the scene, and enjoying more of the advantages of the summer season'. As well as visiting Houghton, and lamenting the removal of many pictures 'out of the Kingdom' and their replacement with large decorative canvasses, they went to see some 'antiquities'.

8 Oct 1785

I am not certain whether the antiquities were not the most curious part of our tour. The ruins of Castle Acres abbey are uncommonly fine, the town of Bury furnishes many equally curious, but to the antiquarian those at Thetford are the most so, as being

the most ancient. When we arrived at the town the Bishop and Charles sallied forth to what is called the Danish Camp, and being desirous to pick up all possible information upon the spot applied to a Cicisbeo, and as the account he gave was not long, and perfectly clear and uncontestable, I will trouble your Ladyship with it. Take the conversation as follows:

Bishop. Pray Sir what are these ruins?

Cicisbeo. These ruins Sir? Why these are the ruins of ancient buildings, in former days, in times of prosperity.

After this learned explanation, which I have repeated verbatim, the Bishop and Charles returned to their Inn, perfectly satisfied.

Though I promised not to be tiresome with detailing what I had seen, yet it would be a shame to finish a Norfolk tour without naming that charming picture of Belizarius at Ld Townsend's, which Strange's Print gives a poor idea of, though a good print. (9/139)

'Cicisbeo' was a word current in the 18th century, probably derived from Italian, meaning 'attendant'. Both duty and pleasure led them often to travel through Cambridge. Advice was offered to Amabel:

1 September 1797

As to the inns at Cambridge, I think the *Cap* not only the best in itself, but infinitely the most convenient, as it saves the passing through the town, and leads to the road at the back of the colleges (one of the prettiest circumstances of the drive here). Nevertheless we have *all* left it for its democratical principles, and jolt and jumble over the stones with the hearts (and bottoms) of true loyal subjects. As to the other inns they are all alike; we have followed Ld H. from one to another. (11/168)

'Democratical principles' at this date were linked with the events of the French Revolution; the sympathies of the Yorkes were with the poor but did not incline them to challenge the dominance of aristocracy in government.

Social life

Social life in Ely for the Bishop's family depended on the particular prebendaries in residence, on a small number of gentry families in the town or nearby, and on visitors, both family and friends. In her first year in Ely, Mary told Jemima 'We don't expect many more of our country neighbours down as yet, so that our visits which are not very numerous are entirely confined to Ely' (9/115). Mary immediately appreciated her social position as a leader of the small circle of gentry, and in June 1782 sought advice from Jemima in 'this long Court mourning ... before I presume to give any colour to the Isle'. She supposed she would not need to put on mourning in Ely but should she at a public meeting in Cambridge? (9/116)

It was her impression that Cambridgeshire was denuded of gentlemen, a view the Bishop shared. 'I know of no county in England where there is so great

a scarcity of gentlemen fit to represent a county as in Cambridgeshire', he wrote to Lord Hardwicke (*History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754–1790*. I 218). A few years later, when Sir Thomas Hatton died, Mary wrote to Jemima

12 Nov 1787

The present young Baronet it is said is just married to a French girl, a dancer; his ruin is complete, as he never can extricate himself from his debts and annuities; consequently cannot live in England. Thus another house in Cambridgeshire will be deserted. I fear in a few years we shall scarcely have a neighbour left, even at twenty miles distance; Sir John Cotten is so lame, he cannot come to us as usual, and even in the small circle in Ely, three of my principal ladies are fallen off from visiting me: one (Mrs Cole) being dead, the other two, incurably sick. But this I take to be the case of most country places; the younger folks all run up to London. (9/149)

The small number of gentry families meant few eligible young men, although the Yorke's oldest daughter, Margaret, was lucky.

12 Jan (1788)

It has been fortunate that we have every evening enjoyed the company of an amiable young man who you know is bound in *duty* to be *agreeable*. He has long since won the hearts of the Bishop and all his family, indeed now I hope I may add my daughter to the number ... young men are so scarce in this place your Ladyship will easily guess this can be no other than young Mr Waddington whose character (thank God) both at school, university, and at home bears the strictest investigation; he is said in short to be totally unlike all of his name, and makes a most dutiful and attentive son to rather an odd father. (9/266)

In the event, Margaret won round old Mr Waddington, who became quite a social asset to the group. 'Perhaps you will be surprised to find old Mr Waddington ... is grown quite *extravagant*, giving the supper of towards forty dishes with hot soups quite in a style' (11/113). John Waddington (1730–1796) lived in the handsome 18th century house called 'The Chantry', built on the site of the medieval chantry buildings across the Green from the Palace. Another member of that family was less fortunate. 'Miss Waddington looks very handsome this winter, it is pity such a woman as her, with £12,000 to her fortune, should be thus lost and hid from the world as she is at Ely' (9/161).

The presence of soldiers in the town was therefore a useful addition to the company, and was often mentioned in Mary's letters; officers were regularly entertained at the Palace. 'The Bishop says, he does not above half like these *young* officers about one's daughters, and seems half afraid of a trip of *one* of his family, with a *red coat* you have some acquaintance with' (9/140). Later, there was reference to events in France and to military and naval success and failure. At one time the red coats so far outnumbered the civilians in Ely that 'we look like a garrisoned town'; but at least the numbers 'will fill and warm

the church' (11/180). Of the Nottinghamshire militia, in November 1795 she says 'I am told they are well behaved gentlemanly men, and of a proper age, none of them young, which is much better for the quiet of the place' (9/218). Watching the soldiers drilling was also an entertainment.

22 May 1788

The rest of us attended our Colonel (who is very indefatigable) in the review of his Militia and seeing them perform their exercise; the spot is so pretty they have chosen for this purpose that I was agreeably surprised at the scene, though something tired by a walk of near two miles. (9/151)

A month later Amabel received a similar account.

7 June 1788

It will seem very odd to you Dear Lady Bell who have been living in the very vortex of bustle and pleasure, that anybody so settled as I am in the midst of the Fens should plead engagements and want of time for not writing to her friends; and yet this I must plead, or run the hazard of appearing neglectful. At present however I fancy that all parties are pretty quiet: you retired to Putney ... I reduced to the usual circle of this place, by the departure of our Colonel and his Corps on Sunday, and of Mr and Mrs Waddington on Friday. The former gave us much of his company, and enlivened the place in every way — the evening exercise on a very pretty spot not far from Mr Potter's made the smartest promenade for the ladies possible, and our being obliged to go in carriages and get out helped to increase the fuss, consequently the pleasure. I really did not dislike it, and it was surprising how well the men performed before they were dismissed. They are in general very well looking smart figures, and the officers declare themselves so well pleased with their quarters here, as to wish to come again next May. (11/106)

The Bishop and his wife fulfilled a necessary sequence of official entertaining. The Bishop would announce his 'Public Days' when, in addition to those specifically invited, it appears others could simply arrive. 'Our last Public Day at Ely was the fullest; but upon the whole very thinly attended as to ladies, not having *one* at any of them, except those I asked' (11/85). It was the practice to offer a 'feast' to ordination candidates; when the Chapter was meeting, members would call; and then as the Bishop of Ely's diocese includes Cambridge, the Heads of Houses would also be entertained at the Palace. The guests could include royalty, although Mary suggested such company was too grand for her, but James Yorke was friendly with at least one of the princes.

23 June (1790)

The two last days have seemed to us uncommonly hot, partly perhaps owing to our having had forty friends dine with us in the course of them. On the first, the Heads of Houses honoured us, and with them was to have come Prince William but the Duke of Gloucester came down on that day and prevented him. We should indeed never have thought of asking him to a party so very ill suited to *any* young man, if

a hint had not been given the Bp it would be agreeable (I suppose anything by way of schism) and he has an odd academical turn, knows every thing, and every body; the Bp smiled at a story of his precision in wishing to wait upon all these Heads, before he took his degree, and the friend he consulted told him (to be exact) his highness must go between the two congregations! (9/169)

Venison from Wimpole was frequently requested to assist in these large public entertainments. Amongst many examples, in 1788:

20 June 1788

We have of late been furnished with such a variety of good things from Wimple that we should think ourselves inexcusable if we did not make our earliest acknowledgements; the Bishop therefore and myself Dear Madam desire that your Ladyship and Lord Hardwicke will accept our best thanks for some fine venison (no less than a whole buck at two different times) which furnished our table for *three* Public Days, and for the entertainment of the Heads of Houses, who came yesterday very politely in a large body, and by what little I saw of them at tea, went away well pleased with the Bishop's reception of them. (9/152)

And a few years later:

17 June 1794

I have three feasts in the course of this week; that of yesterday was an Ordination, at which I had the pleasure of seeing my son [Philip] admitted (as I hope) a useful member of the Church ... Our numbers this year were rather larger than usual from the request of our neighbouring brethren, and our Bp was happy to relieve in any degree the load now resting on the poor Bp of Norwich⁵ who is engaged in a long visitation ... his brother and eldest son being blown up in the *Ardent* at sea, he is at present at Bury very low and very anxious for his wife, who poor woman expects every day to be confined.

I am at my garden, which is more than tolerably shady, and the weeping willows uncommonly fine; no houses in view, and my imagination lulled into a persuasion of a considerable extent about me, when lo, the vision has this moment been dispersed by the appearance and voice of my *kitchen maid* (one of the largest reddest nymphs often seen) crossing the lawn before me, and vociferating after the gardener for herbs, lettuces, peas etc, for the cook against the evening! The rural charm is broke! The *Public Day* stands confessed before me, and I am brought back to ladies in silver muzzlins, gentlemen in gowns and cassocks, soups — sauces — fish — and VENISON! for which accept Dear Madam our repeated thanks. (9/206)

Despite much entertaining, Mary did find Ely quiet. She asked Amabel for news 'that she thinks may enliven our Island; which is a spot so much within itself, that it does not afford many novelties' (9/116), talked of 'breaking the sameness of an Ely residence' by a

visit to Wrest (11/146), or suggested 'this place affords little amusement to our guests any more than to our correspondents' (11/224), though at that date (1804) she adds that 'the number of our young family about us make it cheerful to ourselves'. Yet one source of entertainment which might have been thought much to the Yorkes' taste was prevented.

17 Nov 1786

If the County affords no news, you will not expect it from the Isle: gaiety indeed Ely has been threatened with but luckily that has been put a stop too. No less than a whole Company of Players talked of erecting their Theatre in one of the large rooms of our inns, and were a good deal encouraged by Mrs Cole and other *great* Ladies of our town, but it would have been a very ruinous thing in this very poor place for all the lower ranks; this the Bp just hinted to the Magistrates. (11/99)

Margaret Waddington's first child and Mary's first grandchild, Jemima, was born prematurely on 16 January 1789; the round of Christmas gaiety was eclipsed by this event.

28 Jan [1789]

I should long since Dear Lady Bell have acknowledged your last kind letter, and taken up the gauntlet you threw to me when you declared you should like to hear of some corner of the world where *people eat, and drink and perform Christmas gambols* etc by sending you a whole budget full of such kind of anecdotes, and thus accepting your challenge, if this same forward *grand daughter* of mine had not stepped into the world, and entirely occupied my time and thoughts for this last fortnight and driven from my mind the impressions (not very deep) of three balls and as many concerts; the gaiety of the company, the politeness of the Beaux, and the conquests of the Belles, must now all die in oblivion. (11/113)

A constant source of pleasure to the Bishop and his wife was music making; their sons and daughters were encouraged to play musical instruments, and in their first summer residence in Ely, in 1782, she wrote about how they were entertained by a child violin prodigy of about six years of age, dressed 'in petticoats', delicate-looking, but exploited by his father (9/116). They also attended the music meeting in Cambridge. Mary criticised the singers there just as she did in Worcester and Gloucester. 'I was myself however well entertained with the music, and really thought Miss Abrahams performed in her best manner; but her voice always wants strength, and the little thing does not open her mouth' (11/70). To Jemima she added

6 July 1782

our weather at Cambridge was fortunately not very hot, and I passed the two days there very comfortably, the music being excellent, the voices as usual too weak for the Rooms ... I was only sorry that so much excellent music should be performed to so indifferent an audience, there being but a very humble show of genteel company. The Charity however

cleared above fourscore pounds. (9/117)

Soon the Yorkes were encouraging musical activities in Ely.

26 Jan 1783

You will no doubt be curious to know Dear Madam how we amuse ourselves in this retired spot; with respect to society, our vicinity to the University prevents our often being alone, and as to *gaiety* for the young folks the Christmas holidays when attended with health and spirits generally secure that *point* for themselves ... with respect to us grown people, the Bp and myself are both too fond of music to live in a town with a *choir*, and a regiment and *band*, and not attempt some thing in the concert way, the bill of fare of which I here enclose your Ladyship, though I am not sure whether Lady Grantham's christening cake that was handed about *between* the acts, was not reckoned by some of the company the best part ... Now when I have mentioned a ball to which my family are invited on Monday, I have done with *Ely* amusements and anecdotes. (9/121)

Mary Grantham's second son, Frederick John, had been born 30 October 1782. Somewhat later, she said that, 'our Organist has formed a plan for a Subscription Concert here which I hope will succeed; he is to have the best hands from Cambridge, and we young folks are well pleased with the idea, they begin next week' (11/103). Probably he had been encouraged by the Bishop and his wife. The organist was Highmore Skeats, who had been appointed three years before Bishop Yorke. He was well thought of, and was given some additional stipend in 1795; probably the Bishop had encouraged this gesture by the Chapter. When Skeats moved to Canterbury, his son succeeded him in Ely (Meadows & Ramsay 2003, 252).

Thereafter, letters quite often refer to Cambridge music meetings, and sometimes Mary stayed for the Commencement Ball. She soon formed the opinion that 'Cambridge itself is at present seized with the dancing influenza, and I hear of more dancing there than I think is quite consistent with an Academical situation' (9/140). In 1788 she said that they were staying with Dr Plumtre, 'and thus will end our gay doings' (9/152). Visits also took place to Cambridge when the Bishop was conducting a visitation of the whole diocese, which he did every four years (Owen 1971, 7), and for business in the four colleges of which he was the 'Visitor'. 'A drive over to Cambridge tomorrow to do our *honours* to the ladies and gentlemen there, will finish our civilities of this Residence', she wrote in 1783 (9/122). Until his death in 1788, the Yorkes stayed with Dr Plumtre in Queens'; then, as during a visitation in 1791, 'our being so comfortably placed in Jesus Lodge contributes not a little to our repose, it being quite in the country' (9/180).

Amidst the comforts and privileges of their position, the Bishop's duties were always prominent in Mary's thoughts.

Political events and clerical business

Mary's letters provide insight into some of the attitudes and assumptions of the Bishop. In their later years at Ely there were a number of family tragedies which dimmed her exuberant vitality, but she continued to offer her relations a flow of news, observation and humour. These were the years of the wars with France, and of bad harvests and high prices, particularly in 1795 and 1799–1800, which affected the poor most severely. Her letters give a real-life version of a Jane Austen novel. As well as interesting glimpses into current events, they show how true Jane Austen's novels are to the manners and *mores* of conscientious but affluent clergymen and the social circles to which they belonged.

Local references to national events

Although Mary claimed to be uninterested in politics, her letters do contain many references to political events. The fact that she read accounts of parliamentary debates, indeed, belies her declaration. By the time she arrived in Ely, the war against the American colonies was almost over, but an early Ely letter refers to one local symptom of that war. She wrote to Jemima 'Lady Bell's favourite walk to Mr Potter's is spoilt by a new scheme he is entered into of making Sour Crout for the Government, 3000 hogsheads of which are to be dragged over our unfortunate path, which is already rendered unpassable' (9/119). This project, presumably to supply the soldiers fighting with the American colonists, was described in more detail two weeks later, though happily by then finished for that season.

10 January 1783

All my walks were restored to me, Mr Potter's delightful! and not the worse for the manufactory of Sour Crout being over, especially as there was enough of the machines, etc left to make an exhibition for our visitors ... but to return to the Crout, of which you desire to know the history. The contract with government you have been informed of, to fulfill which, he has planted all his fields here (not wanted for his other schemes) with the finest white Dutch cabbages. The enclosed paper gives you the detail of the process.

[*Enclosure*] Mr Parker's method of making the Sour Crout

Large white cabbages are cut in half with a broad knife and the stalk towards the heart taken out — these are put into square boxes made without a bottom which slide over knives fixed in a wooden frame, representing the instrument to slice cucumbers. They are shaved very fine into a large basket and sprinkled with as much salt as is contained in a common sized hand bowl, from thence removed into barrels and rammed down very close: on the top of each barrel is placed a very heavy weight to press out the juice from the cabbage which would soon become putrid by confinement. The cork which stops the barrel is left out a short time for the crout to ferment.

[*On the back is a drawing*] A Wooden frame
 B Knives fixed in it to slice with
 NB. This frame is laid across the tub the cabbage falls
 through into. (11/74)

When peace terms were put to parliament she told
 Amabel

[February 1783]

With respect to Politics, you know my turn is but
 little that way, but some particular things come too
 near one's feeling to be passed over insensibly. I read
 last weeks Debates with unusual attention, but nei-
 ther in Mr Pitt's [and] Ld Shelburne's speeches, nor
 the K's answer to the address could I meet with the
 satisfaction I sought for, respecting our treatment of
 the Loyalist! (11/75)

She added a postscript 'N.B. all the Spinning Wheels
 in Ely are in high spirits on the return of work for
 Holland etc.'

The following month she was clearly aware of the
 parliamentary manoeuvres which led to the defeat of
 the government on the peace terms, 'for what Mortal
 that had read the debates in the House of Commons
 for the last four years, could ever imagine any event
 so improbable and extraordinary as a junction be-
 tween Ld North & Mr Fox?' (9/122). Political com-
 ments continued to be made from time to time and it
 is interesting that in 1789 she commented at length on
 the 'disgrace' of the Slave Trade, though wisely noting
 the difficulties in any sudden reform.

The war against France which started in 1793 pro-
 vided the backdrop to the rest of the Yorkes' Ely years.
 Cambridgeshire was alert for a potential invasion, and
 soldiers were quartered in the town. French prisoners
 were brought to the Isle in 1797, and were the sub-
 ject of comment in the first surviving letter to Amabel
 after she became Lady Lucas.

28 April 1797

In the evening our friends marched to join their regi-
 ment near Sleaford in Peterborough, where they are
 appointed to what I believe they think the rather
 ignoble office of guarding the French prisoners, of
 which we have now I believe above 6000. Why they
 were all brought into this neighbourhood we were
 at some loss to make out; at last a friend of yours
 has hit upon an excellent reason: namely that they
 may be the more easily fed - by the constant supply
 of frogs we can furnish them with, out of our Fens.
 (11/164)

The following year a sight-seeing tour was arranged
 following the Bishop's Confirmations at Peterborough,
 and included a visit to Yaxley Barracks (then in
 Huntingdonshire but now in Cambridgeshire).

10 September [?1798]

We finished our jaunt by seeing Burleigh once more,
 and the French prisoners at Yaxley Barracks. Of the
 former I am certain you do not wish any detail, the
 latter is a newer scene, and as I think you have never
 been there, I will at the risk of tiring your patience
 enlarge a little. I felt a little repugnance but curiosity

got the better; and I advanced between 4000 French
 men (secured by high palisadoes) up to the Block
 House, which is placed in the middle of 4 large in-
 closures, each containing ten acres of ground: in case
 of any disturbance this House being circular is fur-
 nished quite round with cannon, and port holes full
 up with small arms if it should be approached too
 nearly for the cannon. The inclosures are divided
 by four lanes or streets, and the palisadoes are not
 close, so that the French men on seeing strangers
 approach, set up an incessant clamour to come and
 buy their things, which ceased when we selected
 those we purchased of. The square that enclosed the
 French prisoners, from the gaiety of its inhabitants
 brought instantly to my recollection the play place
 at Sunbury School; their manner of amusing them-
 selves seems to confirm the national character given
 of them: they sing, dance (sometimes minuets) and
 play a thousand childish gambols, or if you please
 monkey tricks; but occasionally the more ferocious
 passions peep out, not only in serious quarrels (in
 one of which lately they were near killing a Dutch
 man) but even in their diversions, a favorite one
 being that of pelting a live duck to death, which they
 place in a square hole for that purpose.

The story of the Dutch man is a serious one.
 At first the French and Dutch were all together, and
 in a quarrel amongst them one of the latter very
 impudently said, he wished he had a soup made of
 French men's hearts; of course this speech enraged
 them extremely. They appointed a court martial to
 try him (the usual course of French justice) and his
 life was only saved by the English regiments being
 drawn round the square with their pieces charged
 at the moment of execution, ready to fire if they did
 not release him. What the punishment was I did not
 hear. And since that time the different nations have
 been separated, and we saw the Dutch men walk-
 ing up and down their place of confinement in sad
 and sober sort; nor did they look so well clothed as
 the French. These latter are certainly very ingenious;
 they make their own drums out of old kettles and
 play upon them extremely well; to this they have
 added a violin by purchase, which composes their
 band — for they keep up a sort of mock military
 amongst them and are regular in their exercises.

The officers are in the 3rd square. They have
 lately been amusing themselves with acting a French
 play, what it was I did not learn. They erected a stage
 before their lodgings and invited the English officers
 to the exhibition; I wished much to have learnt some
 particulars of this evening representation, but unfor-
 tunately the officer on guard in the Block House was
 an old Hanoverian who seemed quite at a loss for
 English; and the above particulars were all collected
 by Elizabeth from a smug little ensign who was tel-
 ling the secrets of the prison house to her on the other
 side the building, while the Bp and myself were get-
 ting on very slowly with the Great Man. (11/525)

Mary told Amabel that she became convinced 'more
 and more every day of the propriety and usefulness

of the Bishop's being stationary this summer in his diocese', and referred particularly to the effects of the rebellious Irish situation.

5 June 1798

Little as of late I have wished to hear of or talk about unhappy Ireland, it is impossible not to feel occasionally some alarm at the account of the number of idle (I hope they will not prove) mischievous people, who are pouring in upon us from that country; their numbers have been said to amount towards a thousand in this Isle; perhaps this may be exaggerated, and we are happy in a very active and united magistracy, who however are much assisted by the presence and advice of their Bp who with the Ld Lieutenants' assistance will unite with them in guarding against sudden riotous surprises. (11/175)

In connection with this comment on the Bishop's usefulness, much interest attaches to Mary's descriptions of events in Ely itself during the difficult years of the 1790s.

Ely events

The second decade of Bishop Yorke's Ely period was marked by serious social unrest nationally; it is estimated that there were more than a thousand riots in England and Wales between 1790 and 1810. East Anglia experienced more than elsewhere in the country, one explanation being that water transport facilitated the export of grain from this rich arable area to London (Bohstedt 1983, 5; Stevenson 1979, 94). Wisbech was the scene of a riot in 1795 reported nationally. The Bishop played an important part in meeting local discontent.

Mary's first experience of possible trouble in Ely was in June 1794, when the justices of the peace were the target for

17 June 1794

a mob of about two hundred men from Grunty Fen armed with bludgeons, forks, etc to request justice respecting some trifling quarrel about cutting turf for which they apprehend some of their party were to be confined. Our justices usually meeting of a Saturday (Mr Thomas Waddington one of them) this address was presented to them, but by a little cool conversation they dispersed the party, promising to hear what could be said on the subject another Saturday, upon condition they sent their *deputies*, but would have nothing to say there when they came in so large and tumultuous a body. With this they were satisfied, drank a cheerful cup in the town, and returned home peaceably in the evening. Their exertions we learnt were meant against the Bridewell (which they intended to pull down had their friends been confined) not against the persons of the justices; happily however there never was any intention of confining in the case. (9/206)

The following summer, protest was more serious. The Yorkes returned to Ely early in September and Lady Bell was given this account:

21 September (1795)

I should scarcely have troubled you so soon after

having wrote to Lady Grey, if I had not been apprehensive you both might be kindly alarmed about us, from some flying reports (which always make things worse than they are) of *riots* at *Ely*. The truth is, last Friday [18 September] a tumultuous mob of men, women, and children, having been assembled by the sound of an horn between 9 and 10 at night, proceeded to the house of the principal farmer of this place (who they had threatened before by sticking up papers against his barns) amounting in number to about 200; and insisted upon having corn and flour, and at lower prices. He being much alarmed sent for the magistrates, and after some difficulty and the mob saying something amongst each other about calling on the Bishop, they dispersed, satisfied with the promise of the farmer to send off his wagon that night to Cambridge for flour. The distress was a *real* one; from want of wind, *no* flour was provided — and when it did arrive in the wagon, the quantity was not adequate to the demand. Potatoes therefore were ordered for sale at a certain low price and the poor informed of it by hand bills. On Thursday night the horn was again sounded but no mob assembled; yet seditious fellows were found to be sowing the seeds of discord, and talking of inviting *in* the neighbouring parishes to riot. On Friday, more wheat (or flour I should say) was secured from Swaffham, and bills stuck up that it would be sold at a moderate price by the gentlemen at the Town Hall on the market day (when rioting was expected), but all passed quietly, though the deficiency of supply still continued. On Sunday, however, happily the vessels all came well laden from Cambridge. In the mean time advises [*sic*] have been sent to our Lord Lieutenant who is very kind and zealous, and at the request of our magistrates is securing us a troop of horse to keep us in order for some weeks. I must say the Bishop's being here has been extremely fortunate for the town, and had his advice been taken sooner, it would have been more so, but by neglecting it the farmers have allowed *clamour* and *insult* to obtain what *real* want and necessity could *not*. This is a bad lesson to our poor at all times, particularly now. But you see Dear Lady Bell that we had not much reason to be alarmed in this town. Indeed as to the Bishop he is extremely popular and all the measures that have been now taken for the relief of the place are imputed to him. In the mean time permission has come down from the Duke of York to our magistrates to send for troops from Mildenhall if wanted. (11/157)

Typical accompaniments of protest at this period are here in Mary's account: the horn summoning the mob, the demands for corn and flour to be sold at lower prices, the focus on a farmer (probably suspected of selling his corn at an unreasonably high price or of sending it out of the district), and on the market place.

Mary's letter echoed in several particulars a letter from James to his nephew, the 3rd Earl Hardwicke, dated 10 September.⁶ He referred to entering into the

L 20/11/339/157
 Dear Lady Bell
 Ely
 Sept 21st Ely
 1795

Notwithstanding I have a kind of
 long Letter now by me unacknowledged, yet I
 am conscious of being so very dull a Correspondant
 that I should scarcely have troubled you so
 soon after having wrote to Lady Grey; if I had
 not been apprehensive You both might be kindly
 alarmed about us. from some flying reports (which
 always make things worse than they are) of
 Riots at Ely. The truth is, Last Tuesday a tumultu-
 -ous Mob of Men, Women, & Children, having been
 assembled by the sound of an Horn between 9 & 10
 at Night proceed^d to the House of the principal
 Farmer of this place (who they had threaten^d before
 by sticking up Papers against his Barns) amounting
 in number to about 200, & insisted upon having Corn
 & flour, & at lower prices. he being much alarmed
 sent for the Magistrate, & after some difficulty
 & saying something amongst each other about
 calling on the Bishop - they dispersed satisfied
 with the promise of the Farmer to send off his

Figure 11. A page from Mary Yorke's letter describing the food riots in Ely.

Earl's ideas 'for the due ease of the poor in the article of Flour', saying they had obtained it from every quarter that they could, and adding a comment about the 'rapacity of millers and mealmen'. He said that fifty constables had been sworn in, and a message sent about obtaining help from the military. He added 'the ring leaders of the mob are two mean men: well-known and watched, Tingy a common labourer and

one Fuller a bricklayer'. Mary had been offered a refuge with the Lord Lieutenant, but had chosen at present to remain in the Palace. If it seemed expedient, she would go, though James would stay 'in the Citadel', but 'I should be concerned to lose her friendly society'.

At the end of October, having gone to London, Mary sent an account of the attack on the King's coach

as he drove to parliament. A debate was started in the House of Lords, she reported, on the subject of the scarcity of corn but suppressed as 'a very imprudent discussion' (9/217). The scarcity was real enough, and advice was sought from Lady Grey.

25 December 1795

I cannot let this day pass without making it convey the Bishop's my own and family's good wishes Dear Madam to yourself and all that are most tenderly connected with you ... [*the poor quality of a Cotnam cheese discussed*] The transition from this subject to bread is natural, and we Ely people wish much to know what we are to do about it? And what bread is generally used in the houses of members of parliament? We are all very willing to do as our Governors bid us, but want some general rule to go by. (9/219)

Mary had sympathy with what she saw as real distress; corn prices rose in 1795 to an exceptional height, and indeed the Privy Council attempted to encourage people to eat brown bread (the English equivalent to 'Let them eat cake'), but timely relief measures could probably defuse real disaffection. Anxious comment was made the following year on the prospects for the harvest, but the crisis in Ely passed. The faith that the Bishop was playing a useful role in moderating unrest in Ely may be justified; partnership between the rank and file and those in authority was important in averting trouble, and it is notable that Ely was the scene of serious riots in 1816 (Stevenson 1979. 95, 105; Bohstedt 1983, 17).

In 1799, Mary accompanied her husband on a visitation journey to Wisbech. She wrote in surprise at the 'apprehension of breaking one's neck by falling from a narrow road, down a steep bank into a river below', which was the position for 'a mile or two before we enter Wisbech'.

3 July 1799

The town itself is interesting built on each side the river, and (with its fine stone bridge of one arch) I was told resembled Venice. On our return home, we met with rather a grinning honour; the Bishop having subscribed to a new Corps both of Horse and Foot at March, they paid him the compliment of drawing up upon both sides of the road, and giving him the salute. As we went on to the town where he was to *Confirm* they attended us, and as I peeped out of the window at the back of the carriage and saw myself close pursued by the whole troop on horseback armed *cap a pee*, and with swords drawn, if I had not been assured it was a great compliment I should have almost thought we were taken prisoners; and could not help thinking of the poor Bishop of Killala when engaged in a similar duty in his own diocese. When Church was over they joined us again, a little distance from the town; we alighted from our carriage, and after above an hour spent in reviewing the whole exercise (which being new to us performed on horseback with the broad sword was rather amusing), we proceeded on our journey home, the Bishop thus concluding the fatigues of his Visitation in a manner rather novel. (11/177)

A similar compliment was paid the Bishop in 1807. The story of the Bishop of Killala was possibly known from his own published account of his capture.⁷ A small French invasion force landed in Killala Bay on the northeast coast of County Mayo on 22 August 1798, although too late to assist an Irish rising which had already been defeated, and proceeded into the town. The newly-appointed Bishop was Joseph Stock, a former fellow of Trinity College, Dublin; in the course of his visitation of his diocese he was entertaining some clergymen and army officers to dinner in the Bishop's Palace, and on a fine summer evening the company was about to join the ladies when a messenger announced the arrival of the French. General Humbert took up his quarters in the Palace, where he stayed for three weeks until the French force was defeated. The Bishop acted with great presence of mind, aided by a knowledge of French; he even lent on officer a book on Christian apologetics (McDowell 1979, 646–47).

Two months later, exceptionally wet weather dominated her letters. She feared in case it should lead to a bad harvest and consequent distress amongst the poor. From Forthampton, she commented

25 August 1799

Our river [the Severn] has taken the liberty of stepping into the meadows ... By an article in the papers Silsoe has likewise been drenched with rain, and I apprehend you have felt the inconvenience of this very particular season. I trust however the harvest will not suffer; with us it is hardly begun. (11/178)

Silsoe in Bedfordshire is near Amabel's home of Wrest Park. It proved a vain hope that the harvest would be unaffected. A month later, the Bishop told her to report to Amabel that 'we are running away from a drowning country to our ark in London ... the horn of news men, and the rattle of carriages over the streets, will be preferable to the constant rushing of heavy showers and the mirey lanes'. (11/179) After their return to Ely she wrote about a pleasant circumstance

4 November 1799

which perhaps may surprise you, namely that we found this country much dried since we left it in July. The waters are visibly sunk, and I am convinced the rains that have fallen and the coolness of the summer have been productive of much health to the inhabitants. In the uplands the farmers have lost by their barley and oats as they have in other Countries [counties]. In the Fens nothing could be cultivated this year even had the weather been perfectly the reverse of what it was. (11/180)

But soon she was reporting distress in the town.

21 November [1799]

What with gentlemen in blue coats, and gentlemen in red coats, and the canaille in *no* coats, at all, my time has been much occupied. The latter society, however, are the only ones that are attended to, with difficulty. The distresses of the poor of Ely are particularly pressing this season, not only from the price of provision, but likewise from the total want of firing; the peat which they used to burn is all of it too wet

for the purpose, and indeed in general covered with water. The Bishop however has taken upon himself to supply them all with the comfortable article of firing by laying out fifty guineas in coals which are to be sold out to them at half the price of peat (or turf); the money they pay, to be again laid out for them on the same terms, till the whole is exhausted. And as coals are much cheaper here than in London this will last through the winter. The next article is bread, which with potatoes is to be sold out at a cheap rate, the bread of the brown flour; to these will be added broth, and the Bishop will I fancy subscribe to these schemes about £40 more. The Birmingham plan of public kitchens for cheap broth (and which lately has been adopted in Spittlefields) Mr Waddington has wrote for, and I believe received printed directions from the fountain head, Count Rumford's boilers making a very essential part of the scheme. (11/181)

It is interesting that Mary was informed about the work of Count Rumford. Sir Benjamin Thompson (1753–1814) was created Count von Rumford after being in the Elector of Bavaria's service; he experimented and wrote about the efficient design of chimneys, methods of fuel economy, food and cooking, and the management of the poor (*DNB*). She continued:

As for employment for the men this winter it is out of the question while the Fens are in the present state, but the parish officers (to encourage industry in the women) mean to double the price of spinning. Excuse my dwelling so long on this subject but it is here (and indeed at Forthampton where corn is much higher) a serious business.

P.S. Give me leave to ask as usual if you have any want of new blankets on your servants' beds that I may become purchaser of the old ones.

It was her opinion that provisions were always cheaper in Ely than in London or even in Gloucestershire, and from the point of view of 'economy' it was wisest to continue residence at Ely as long as possible (9/122); she had earlier remarked that butter was dearer in Gloucester, 'even in this dairy country', than in Ely (11/153). As to blankets, here is an insight into charity. Mary purchased used blankets from Amabel, and gave them to the poor. She said that she changed the blankets on her servants' beds every five or six years, because they became dirty and thin, and then I 'give the degraded ones to the poor of this place (the most miserable) who have none' (11/182).

The crisis affecting the poor continued, inevitably, into the following year.

7 January 1800

A word or two with respect to what you mention as to the wages of the *poor*, for nothing at present strikes my mind more forcibly than the necessity of attending to *them*. Should there continue till the next harvest a scarcity of corn, the situation of this Country will be like that of France in the years 89–90. I know nobody who understands better, or acts or writes with more judgement on this subject, than Lord Hardwicke; the Bp had an excellent letter from

him on it last week, and I will without difficulty recommend the methods he has adopted at Wimpole and the neighbouring parishes. As to men's wages, especially in this country, they vary in the summer from 9 to 11s per week; at present they are 8s when they can get work; but that in the winter often fails. The parish officers therefore have doubled the price of spinning to the women, as being a more certain relief. (11/183)

As an amusing parenthesis, remembering the debates on the question in 2000, Mary commented on the arrival of the year 1800, which Amabel had said she had long looked forward to with awe; it made her smile 'when at the very moment of the arrival of the period (according to common ideas) a dispute should arise whether we are entered the long looked for century or no?' (11/183). On 1 January 1801 she started her letter with seasonal greetings and the comment that the new century was 'now allowed by all to be begun' (11/191).

In August at Forthampton the Yorkes were optimistic about harvest prospects generally.

8 Aug 1800

My daughter tells me in their journey from hence [to Cambridge] the harvest wore a most promising appearance: wheat was reaping, oats and peas carrying. We have the same report here of an old stock of corn being on hand as you have in Bedfordshire; and the bakers make it an excuse now the old wheat is coming out that it has been kept so long it makes their bread streaky and clammy; it is certain it does not keep, but it is extremely difficult to ascertain the true cause. I trust however we shall have so plentiful a harvest as shall put an end to every endeavour to keep up the price. About us, the wheat is uncommonly fine, though not quite ready for cutting; nothing has suffered with us but beans and potatoes, the latter I lament most. Such a summer as *this*, and that of 1798, surely ought to secure us from difficulties; I remember it was then said, the produce of the earth was equal to any thing that has been known in Gt Britain for above sixteen years. (11/187)

But when they returned to Ely, she was less cheerful.

23 November 1800

The subject you touch upon respecting provisions is a very serious one; we have thought and talked of little else since we came to this miserable poor place. After the most mature consideration of all the wisest heads here we are come to a determination which I cannot help thinking in my poor judgement is the most rational (the most practicable, for many fine schemes sound well in theory which cannot be brought into practice) that can be adopted. It is simply this, to suffer all the poor to be relieved by the poor rates as usual (excusing the small shop keepers and such as can ill maintain *themselves*) to pay the poor in the proportion of 3s. a head a week, reckoning *in* their own earnings, as a part of the pay, as for instance if a man is paid 12s. per week for his work and has a wife and 5 children who earn nothing, the

parish officers will pay him 9s. per week, which with the 12 makes 3s. each.

This is not a large allowance but that the money may go as far as possible, *rice* is sold by the grocers in their own name by single pounds to the poor at 3d. a pound, and dried herrings at 6s per 100. Lord Hardwicke's *receipt* for saving flour is to be adopted immediately, and to be sold by a proper person in his *own* name. I will insert it below. The loss upon these articles it is hoped will not be very great; whatever it is, will be supported chiefly by the Bishop, and probably the Dean and Chapter will assist; but the secret of their having any thing to do in it must be kept sacredly, or it will again lower the poor rates, which must not be. Mr Pitt would by no means approve this scheme and many others will object to it, as giving the poor money may tempt them to buy fine flour. Being convinced this apprehension is ill founded, it has no weight with us here; indeed I consider both humanity and justice best attended to by this method.

As to clothing, we have sent for some cheap clothes from Leeds to sell and common worsted cheap stockings are knit in the schools and sold at reasonable prices. I make no apology Dear Lady Lucas for this dull detail as I thought you seemed to wish it.

Earl Hardwicke Wimpole November 1800

Ten bushel of wheat

Ten bushel of barley

4 bushel of rye

4 bushel of white peas

The whole to be ground together & sold at 1s. 6d. a stone to the poor. (11/189)

The Ely overseers had adopted a method of poor relief on the lines of the scale drawn up by the magistrates at Speenhamland in Berkshire in 1795 for supplementing wages according to both the number in the family and the price of bread. A recent study of similar systems in two Bedfordshire parishes, Campton and Shefford, found that they were short-term expedients to meet crises in the same way that Mary Yorke describes for Ely, and included the sale of herrings (Williams 2004). Mary's humanitarian comments strike the modern reader as commendable, and the charge that the overseers would reduce the amount collected from the inhabitants by means of the poor rate if they knew the Bishop was helping the poor puts them in an unfavourable light. However, the balance between generous support and encouragement to exploit the benefits system has not, then or subsequently, proved easy to strike. Thereafter, the condition of the poor improved, although Mary suggested prayers were needed for better fortune in general.

1 January 1801

In this place however we feel some local improvements since the last winter, when our Country was deluged and desolated by the waters, and our poor starving for want of their just faring [supply of food]. Upon the whole we are at present under no further anxiety about the poor of this place having done the best we can for them; and I trust in the best manner.

(11/191)

In 1803, England was again at war with France, after the brief interval of peace bought by the Treaty of Amiens the previous year. Napoleon was preparing an invasion fleet, and the Eastern counties were very aware of the danger.

20 October 1803

I am happy to say we are all as well as you can wish us and our *good Bishop* (to use the Ely Phrase) could not resist the *impulse* he felt at this awful moment, to give us a very interesting and animated sermon on the Fast Day, to a very numerous congregation, of which our military Volunteer Corps now consisting of above 250 men made a part. I must say your zeal in Bedfordshire is wonderfully behind hand with ours in Cambridge, and when we first came to Ely, we felt as in a garrisoned town: drumming, fife-ing, and exercising were continually going on, on the *Green*, but the major has now politely removed his Corps into a field at a distance from the Palace. Four of our own Livery Servants learnt the exercise with them, but are now waiting for pikes etc. In the mean time I cannot collect from Mr Buller who with his sister is now with us that any thing certain is known in London, only that he believes from a few words that passed between him and Mr Yorke, the ministers expect an invasion will be attempted soon. Buller asked him if he wished them to raise any more volunteers in Cornwall; his answer was, whatever you do must be done quickly. Mrs Philip Yorke so near Colchester is the only one of the family I am particularly anxious about, as in her *state* any hurry or surprise might be very hurtful, and she has promised me to set out for Ely the moment the *red flag* (the signal for the enemy being in sight) is set up, to set out with her two boys; she cannot prevail upon herself to leave her husband sooner.

The Bishop upon the recommendation of Lady Somers purchased a French novel ... and [it] may amuse you, at Wrest, should you keep the resolution you have formed of continuing to wait the arrival of Buonaparte at that place. Perhaps it may shake your resolution when I inform you that some of the young men of fashion in Town, (particularly one an acquaintance of Mr Buller's) lay bets: 5 Guineas to 500 that he will not land 5000 men in England before the middle of February. (11/214)

The bets of some young men of fashion paid well on this occasion. John Buller of Morval in Cornwall was the recently widowed husband of Mary's daughter; they were married in 1798 but Elizabeth died in 1802. Mary's son Philip's family was at Horkesley and her daughter in law was expecting their third child.

Parliamentary elections

Mary may have claimed not to be knowledgeable about politics, but nonetheless her comments are interesting. Several members of the Yorke family sat in the Commons or the Lords, and Lord Hardwicke's estate was in the county. The 1780 election took place before

James Yorke became bishop of Ely, but his nephew, Philip Yorke, later the 3rd earl, was one of the candidates involved in the expensive and confusing three-cornered contest for the two county members. The two families who usually dominated the county were the Yorkes, supporters of the administration, and the Manners, opposition supporters; the third candidate in 1780 was Sir Sampson Gideon, who won a considerable number of votes. Manners died in 1782, and Mary was in Ely for the election which followed.

5 May 1782

Our election at Cambridge will pass without opposition, which I rejoice in. You will have heard a little attempt was made by the violent party to raise a bustle; and a report prevailed, Wilkes was coming down. My Bp talked of driving over to Cambridge on the occasion; but now all is quiet so I hope it will not be necessary. (11/68)

John Wilkes did not stir up trouble. He had been a political firebrand a decade earlier, criticising the government and making parliament look foolish when he was elected several times in quick succession after being declared ineligible to sit, but after 1774 he did not figure prominently in politics, and he joined the side of authority during the Gordon Riots in 1780. The 1782 Cambridgeshire election passed off peacefully, with Sir Henry Peyton returned unopposed, supported by both Yorkes and Manners.⁸

There were brief mentions of the 1790 election in Mary's letters: 'a strong opposition is raised at Cambridge against Adeane by Ld Duncannon,⁹ it is only this day however which is the day of election' (9/169). It appears Mrs Adeane, whose family seat was Babraham, was one of Mary's social circle. She reported machinations which had been necessary to help secure the election of their favoured candidate involving 'old Mr Waddington': he had a 'queer friend, Mr Gardener, who is immensely rich' (and he had hoped his son would marry Mr Gardener's daughter but Mary's daughter Margaret was preferred).

11 August 1790

Old W. interests himself warmly for this family. He took a journey to London last spring to get Gardener off from serving Sheriff: and succeeded by Lord Dover's assistance, who undertook it at Mr P Yorke's request. It was a pity to get such a man off; but he is too powerful to be said nay to, near a General Election. (11/129)

Charles Philip Yorke, half brother to the 3rd Earl of Hardwicke, and General James Whorwood Adeane were elected with the agreement of the Rutland (Manners) interest, after the Earl of Hardwicke agreed to give up any Yorke interest in Cambridge borough to them. The Whig opposition quickly collapsed, as Mary said.

Mary's judicious if not impartial political attitude was evident in her report about the Eau Brink canal, the act for which was to be an issue in the election of 1802.

16 October 1793

This place affords no news that I can suppose the least interesting to you, though it is highly so to some parts of our family: that old Mr Waddington has been prevailed upon to sign his name to the Eau Brink Canal; this subject (in which the minds of many are so warmly agitated) is I assure you very catching among the ladies — for one evening when I met Lady Balcarras [the 3rd Lady Hardwicke's mother] and Mrs Keith at Lady H's soon after they returned from Wisbech, they would talk of nothing else, and I had heard, and read so much, that they would have made a good figure in presenting the Bill to Parliament — only (as they owned) they were a little partial, having studied but one side of the question. It is my fate to hear both, but I do not presume to form an opinion myself, am satisfied by my friends that it is a most desirable event to this Country. (11/147)

The agricultural interest was in favour of creating a straight channel from the Eau Brink to King's Lynn harbour, removing a large meander of the River Ouse; it was thought the cut would reduce flooding. The 3rd Earl of Hardwicke was the major proponent of the scheme. The port and shipping interest was against the scheme, fearing that instead of preventing silting, it would increase it. The Act [35 Geo III, c 77] was passed in 1795 and the Eau Brink Cut was finally made in 1821 (Jackson 1990, 28–34; *VCH Camb* II: 82, 113).

The act was an issue in the hotly contested election of 1802. Mary in one letter turned from 'the innocent cheerfulness of my grand children' to

7 May 1802

the fuss and horror of a contested election, for though we have little to do in it, yet one cannot help being shocked with the details of the different scenes of riot, and drunkenness, and the lives lost (two in this town) in consequence. It is however now happily I trust over, the poll will be concluded this morning, in favour of Sir H Peyton. The mothers of the two candidates have exerted themselves with great spirit and are said to be excellent canvassers, her Grace even appearing at a bow window and distributing favors amongst the mob at Cambridge. I am anxious for Dr Waddington's return as I fear his long continued fatigue will lay him up; this success however will help to console him, and I sincerely hope prevent any future contest at a general election which would bear so hard upon our friends, though there is not the least danger as to the final result. (11/202)

The candidates' mothers were Mrs Agneta Yorke and the duchess of Rutland (Mary Isabella Somerset). Ladies could be keen electioneers: for example, Viscountess Duncannon campaigned in Westminster for Charles James Fox in 1784 with four other ladies. (Watson 1960, 275) Mary's next letter continued the account:

19 July 1802

you will kindly rejoice with all Mr Ys friends in the conclusion of the Cambridgeshire election and his

success in it, the whole attended I doubt with considerable expense as well as vexation. Perhaps I ought not to reckon amongst the latter, as it is a trifling circumstance, our being disappointed of the pleasure of seeing his name at the head of the poll, but Waddington assures as (in the letter he wrote while the members were chairing) that Mr Y had many friends in the fields making hay whom he would not disturb to vote for him, as the numbers were so decidedly superior to Mr Brand's in *his* favour. We are perfectly ready to admit of this explanation.

P.S. Since I wrote the above I have learnt our *Friend's* expenses will be about £6000. (11/314)

This appears to be an underestimate of the costs of the election to the earl of Hardwicke; a modern statement is £7908. The results of the poll were Lord Charles Henry Somerset Manners: 1942 votes; Hon Charles Philip Yorke: 1436; Hon Thomas Brand: 559. Charles Philip Yorke himself said in his review of the election results for his half-brother that the fact that he did not call on the outvoters, that is those not resident in Cambridge where the poll was held, was a significant factor. He also acknowledged that the family had recently neglected the county; the earl of Hardwicke was at this time Viceroy of Ireland. The Eau Brink navigation act lost the Yorkes many friends, for example all the votes at Cottenham, and the family were castigated as the worst landlords in the county. The Radicals had brought forward the Hon. Thomas Brand; he realised after two days that he was not going to defeat the other candidates. Charles Philip sat for the county until 1810; by then, Bishop Yorke had died and Mary was living in Gloucestershire.

Clerical business

The Bishop had responsibility for oversight of the episcopal estate of lands and manors, some civil jurisdiction, and probate of wills in most of the diocese, as well as appointment and oversight of the clergy. As the daughter of a bishop and the wife of a bishop, it would be surprising if Mary Yorke were not as familiar with matters concerning the church as she was with episcopal finances, but the Bishop's clerical concerns are only occasionally mentioned by Mary. There are, however, interesting exceptions.

Christmas Day 1782

When we first came here, old Mr Bentham (our Pope) was absent on an extraordinary occasion; some gentleman with whom he was scarce acquainted had taken such a fancy to him as to present him with a Living of £200 p.a., and he was gone to take possession. During absence, another of the Residentiaries, with the Minor Canons etc etc took their long walk, in the manner Lady Bell remembers, to meet the Bishop at the great West Door in the usual form to conduct him to the Choir, to the sound of slow music. This ceremony was rather more in season in June, than January. The Bishop therefore for the ease of all parties dispensed with their attendance, and every body got to their seats in half the time. This morning Mr Bentham returned, looking well

in health, but there was a certain air of melancholy spread over his countenance, and a look as if he had something on his mind which he wished to disburthen. When the service was over, he joined the *Bishop* who had observed his dejection, but guess what his surprise was when he found *himself* the cause of it. Mr B began with an apology, and proceeded with his petition, that himself and his brethren might be suffered (as they usually were and indeed as had been the custom for so many centuries) to meet his Lordship at the *great West Door*; so ancient and graceful a ceremony he could not bear should be dropped while he was a member of the Church. The Bp you may be sure was melted into compliance, and now I do not doubt in the coldest frost they will proceed step by step — to the sound of slow music up the Choir as usual. (9/119)

James Bentham had been a minor canon of Ely since 1736, and a prebendary of the 2nd stall since 1779, so his claim to have a long knowledge of the traditions of the cathedral was justified (Plate 10). He also wrote the *History of Ely Cathedral*, published first in 1771, giving him another claim to authority. When he died, Mary described his funeral to Lady Bell. She seems to indicate a sensibility which is surprising.

December 1794

As for myself I got a slight cold by attending in our cathedral the funeral of Mr Bentham on a foggy day; but I do not regret it – I expected the ceremony to be fine – but it exceeded my expectations, and when the procession crossed our Church beginning with the 30 choristers singing the first verses of the service (*I know that my Redeemer Liveth*) followed by the clergy, and vicars, and prebends – and lastly the Bishop who preceded the corpse and family of the deceased, I wished for you at my elbow; the manner the service was performed in different parts of the Church (and I think you must allow me to say, the manner particularly, in which the Bishop gave the Blessing and read the last prayer over the grave in the Church) was highly interesting; and the gothic arches, and solemn echo they returned to the sound of the voices, was in perfect unison with the ceremony. Had poor Bentham left a family behind him, or we had been more intimately acquainted with him, neither the Bp nor myself could have gone, but his age and his infirmities made his death no subject of concern – he was near ninety.

Upon looking back upon my letter the subjects seem to have too *sombreous* a cast – at least for reading out. I shall therefore step immediately to a *wedding* – that of the Prince of Wales. (11/156)

Mary's letters indicate that her husband shared his concerns with her. After only six years in Ely, she noted in 1787 that his episcopal duties as Visitor of Jesus, St John's and Peterhouse were proving onerous. A visit from their friends the Jenyns family, she wrote, 'is the *pleasant* part of our engagements: the affair at Peterhouse, the *unpleasant*; indeed the Bishop has been particularly unfortunate to be called upon so often as

a Visitor since he came to the See, this being the third, and he is not without apprehension of a fourth application, but I hope Peterhouse will be determined first' (11/103). It is not surprising that the Peterhouse affair was called 'unpleasant'. Immediately on the death of the Master, in August 1787, eleven of the twelve college fellows tried to present the Bishop with a *fait accompli*. He had to choose who should be the next master from two men chosen by the fellows. They offered him one whom all the fellows voted for and another who received eight votes, but was Vice Provost of King's and would not normally have been considered; later he abused the Bishop for giving him the position. The third candidate had only three votes. The Bishop accused the fellows of removing his right of election by this stratagem. He therefore appointed the third candidate. Unhappily for the Bishop, the fellows applied to the King's Bench, and after a costly law suit, won on the technicalities of the Visitor's powers. So he appointed the King's man, Dr Barnes, who was master for the next fifty years (*VCH Camb.* III: 338–9).

Two years later he had to exercise his Visitor's powers in Jesus.

6 July 1789

The Bishop of Ely has been endeavouring to tempt an excellent man now in the North to return once more to the University (where he will be joyfully received) by offering him the headship of Jesus; I sincerely hope he will accept it, being as I am told as agreeable in private life, as he is useful as an author – this is no less a person than Mr W. Paley. But he has taken time to consider of it. (9/166)

William Paley (1743–1805) did not accept the honour, being comfortably provided for as Chancellor of the diocese of Carlisle, and holding several good rectories and vicarages. Five years later, in his dedication of *Evidences of Christianity* to the Honourable and Right Reverend James Yorke, he acknowledged the 'disinterestedness of the motives' which had prompted the offer to one having no connection or even personal acquaintance with the Bishop, 'a notice which I regard as the most flattering distinction of my life'. The Dean of Ely, William Pearce (1744–1820), was appointed.

Mary clearly shared with the Bishop distress caused by letters from disappointed men when a vacant Ely prebend was filled by Mr Jenyns.¹⁰

24 October 1802

Mr Jenyns the successful petitioner left us this morning after spending two or three days with us, while going through the usual ceremonies in the church ... I think I never knew any appointment which gave a more general satisfaction. Yet the pleasant conversations I have been ear-witness to between yourself and the Bishop upon the *worry* of being a patron, have come fully to my mind upon the present occasion, and between ourselves you would be surprised at the style of the letters from the disappointed candidates since they received the Bishop's civil refusal. I feel myself quite piqued at them, as they really are very little short of insult. But the manners are changed since I lived with my father at Hartlebury,

and people in these times form expectations, from the *ideas* of their own merits, rather than from the *reality* of them. (11/204)

Questions of preferment are the clerical subject most frequently mentioned, and when a member of the family was concerned, the correspondence becomes fuller. On such occasions it is clear that Mary understood the issues. A series of letters referred to the Yorke's son in law, Thomas Waddington. He was ordained in 1787 and married Margaret, the Yorke's first child, early in 1788. Although rector of Kelshall near Royston in Hertfordshire, the young couple initially went to live in Trumpington. Mary told Lady Grey 'The house is a very good one (indeed too good, and too complete in apartments ever to be considered as a good preparation for any Parsonage house whatever) (9/151). Several years later she told Lady Bell that Mr Anstie 'drove' him from Trumpington (11/147). At that moment the family was able to place him at Wimpole. The death of Dr Plumtre gave the opportunity, by vacating the rectory of Wimpole, a living in the gift of the Earl of Hardwicke. What followed is both a good example of the natural nepotism of the 18th century church, and a demonstration of careful principle.

Dr Plumtre, who five years earlier Mary had said was 'in a valetudinarian state', (11/74) was known to be very ill in mid-October 1788. Even before he died, on 29 October, it seems that the clerical fraternity, including the Bishop's family, was considering the consequences. Robert Plumtre D.D. (1723–1788) had a portfolio of positions: the rectory of Wimpole and vicarage of Whaddon, to which he had been presented by the 1st earl of Hardwicke in 1752, a prebend of Norwich (1756), and the mastership of Queens' since 1760. Mary wrote from Forthampton, probably on 23 October; few of the letters on this topic are dated, but dates have been determined by reference to events and sequences.

Thursday morning [?23 October 1788]

Your Ladyship will easily believe how much we feel for, and pity poor Mrs Plumtre and the daughters. The dutiful attention of the eldest son will now be put to the test; and he will have a fair opportunity of fulfilling the Bp's attention to the family, when he put a Living into his hands of £500 p.a., professedly with an eye to their benefit. Fortunately, too, he has no children of his own; but his slowness in complying with the Bp's repeated injunctions to build a Parsonage house, and his taking his name out of the Books,¹¹ give but a narrow idea of his gratitude or tractableness. I hope however I may be mistaken in his character.

The poor Master's various preferments will make much stir (and indeed have done so, at Cambridge) amongst the Clerical Body. If I was a young clergyman and certain your Ladyship etc would go every year to Wimpole (as indeed, as it agreed so well, I hope you will) I should use all my interest to obtain that tempting situation, and if I had no family should not object to change it for the Bishopric of Ely, though that grows every year more

and more grateful to me. My son Philip now settling at St Johns is a fresh tie; Charles has as little ambition as his mother, and does not seem in a hurry to settle at Wisbech; he is so amiable and pleasant a companion to his father (and indeed is aware himself how essential his society is become to him) that he knows not how to quit his home for 8 or 9 months in the year, and has too strong a sense of the duties of a clergyman to allow of a shorter residence in so laborious a situation. (9/247)

The sentiment concerning the duties of clergymen certainly reflected the Bishop's attitude. In August 1786, for example, Bishop Yorke wrote to the church warden round Cambridge enquiring if the clergy were performing their duties during the summer months (Barnard 1949 (ii), 452–54).

Immediately Dr Plumtre died, the Yorke family went into action. Letters passed rapidly between the various branches. Even while Mary was concerned at the health of her elderly mother and staying at her house in Green Street, London, she found time to write several times on the subject of Wimpole Rectory. On 2 November she penned a slightly sardonic note to Jemima referring to 'so plump a piece of Black-Game' which was to be carved up (9/261). On 3 November she told Lady Bell that everything was nearly settled: Waddington was to be presented to Wimpole, and a young Mr Lindsey, who was about to get married and had apparently been given reason to hope he would succeed Dr Plumtre at Wimpole, had been compensated by the Bishop with the vicarage of Wisbech; the Bishop of Ely had the patronage and advowson of nearly a hundred Livings. Charles was very willing to forego his opportunity to move there, and the Bishop's nephew, Philip, soon to become the third Earl of Hardwicke, was also agreeable to the change of plan.

[6 November 1788]

I wrote to Lady Grey yesterday to say all our clerical business is happily settled. Lindsey is very happy with Wisbech, the Waddingtons extremely so with Wimpole, and Charles perhaps happier than either with nothing at present; but however paradoxical it may sound, *we* shall, I am convinced, be much more in pocket by his not taking it than we should with. Though he is my son, I must say he is one of the most truly amiable young men I know, nor are his parts at all of an inferior kind, but somehow he seems to me to have a poor idea of the management of a family etc, and a good deal would be expected of him in so large a place as Wisbech, both as a *Yorke* and the Bp of *Ely's son*. Then what with repairs, taxes, furniture, and curate, first fruits and tenths, I fancy you will agree with me there would not have been much saved out of three hundred, or we will say £350 p.a., so that in an economical light it is best for us for [if he stays] at home ... But now I must mortify you a little by telling you, that notwithstanding all my partiality to my son in law, Mr Lindsey would have made you a more lively agreeable companion in conversation. *He never left my house that we three females did*

not agree he was very *good company* to us; whereas our friend Waddington possesses less the art of conversation than any man I ever saw of his good sense – and we really believe would willingly never talk at all, but to his wife; with her they say he chatters and laughs by the hour when I am not by. You must know the Bp of Ely, who is very delicate, was so much convinced that he would not upon this account be agreeable to Ld H that he would not I really believe have applied for it if I had not encouraged him, and I will take it upon me to say, no party will ever repent of it; real merit rises the more it is seen into, and diffidence of course goes off. Margaret will be *so* happy with you all in the Autumn! (11/111)

Gerald Yorke, who studied Mary's letters, annotated the words 'when I am not by' with the comment 'Thomas Waddington was clearly terrified of Mary'. The Waddingtons moved into Wimpole rectory house in April 1789.

Her good opinion of her son-in-law was justified by a later account of his success at Kelshal. He seems to have seen a good deal of his parish though living at Trumpington.

7 March (1789)

I ought to be ashamed of having neglected making some enquiries which Mrs Waddington desired me to trouble your Ladyship with (I believe two months ago) respecting the *poor* people at Wimpole ... When Mr W went first to Kelshal he found his Church entirely deserted, the upper part of his parish are all Dissenters and of course never came, the lower followed their example. He however has raised to himself a congregation by the following methods, first by establishing a Sunday School at his own expense, accommodating them with benches in the aisle, and then persuading the older people to come to see how the young ones behaved, encouraged thereto by certain great coats, cloaks, and linen sent by them from hence in the cold weather. You see therefore Dear Madam you cannot oblige them more than by making them *useful*. (9/249)

Wimpole parish was rather different.

April [1789]

Mr Waddington now seems aware his parish contains but few of the poorer sort; the last Sunday when he did duty there, he was surprised at the appearance of abundance of smart ladies with high hats, curls etc, who he understood belonged to the farms. (9/262)

The Waddingtons' stay at Wimpole was not very long. The same year that Thomas became rector there, the Bishop of Ely was able to present him to the rectory of Downham which is not far from Ely. As Thomas Waddington's father lived in Ely, there was much to be said for the couple moving to Downham, and in March 1790 Mary was able to tell Jemima that 'This weather is very fortunate for a grand object we all have in hand – no other than the building of a Parsonage house about three miles distant, upon Mr

Waddington's Living; tomorrow is the day appointed for us all to go in a party to settle the spot' (9/168). In April she reported that 'the first brick of the Parsonage House was laid last week. Old Mr Waddington gave us a Ball and Supper at his house that night' (11/125). A year later she gave Lady Grey an explanation of how the project was being financed.

20 April (1791)

The building during this fine season (for we have had only a few hours snow which melted by the evening) goes on most prosperously of the Parsonage house at Downham, and continues to afford us *all* amusement in the morning rides and drives. The old gentleman is very kind, but I believe I shall be difficulted (*sic*) to explain the method of his proceeding. He advances the greatest part of the money not absolutely as a gift, but a loan of such a nature as the young people may easily convert into a gift, if they are so pleased. It is managed according to an Act of Parliament passed some years back to enable the clergyman to mortgage the Living for a certain sum, with which sum the house is to be built. The intention was good, but the difficulty of finding any body that would advance the money has rendered the Act of little use (stupid Plumptre at Wisbech now avails himself of this excuse for not beginning his house). Old Mr W however pays down the money, accepts the mortgage, and when the house is built, if the young people do not approve either that, or the situation, or choose to change the Living, they leave the *whole debt* behind them to be paid by the succeeding incumbents in the course of twenty years. So much for *his* loan, his free gift is a complete roof to the house, rather a clumsy present, but a valuable one. (9/252)

Gilbert's Act 1777 allowed clergy to borrow on mortgage for parsonage house improvements a sum not exceeding two years' income from the living, the first of a series of acts which attempted to encourage the residence of clergymen on their livings (Jones 2000, 205). It was thought that the poor state of a parsonage house or its smallness was frequently the reason for non-residence. Thomas Waddington's Parsonage house is built of yellow brick with a roof of variegated tiles, and 'TW 1790' is recorded on the west chimney stack.

In 1793 the Bishop instituted Thomas Waddington to the 5th stall in Ely; he had the gift of all eight prebends. Mary took an interest in the house which her daughter would occupy.

27 November 1793

I left the female part of my family at Ely all well; the Waddingtons on the point of moving to their *Prebendal house* which I am glad of as at this season it is cheerfuller (especially on evenings) than the Parsonage, as that always requires something of a moon to visit at. This same Prebendal house, however, as your Ladyship observed of another in Ely, is wretched enough in good truth, but the late incumbent new floored and made tidy two good rooms in it, a bed chamber, and drawing room, the

latter *such* a room as your Ladyship never saw. It was built in the fifth century, being part of a chapel belonging to the old conventual church founded by our Etheldreda; the whole is gothic arches which join in points in the ceiling and these are picked out with white. It has however a good chimney and sash windows, and green baize doors double, and warm; the length I think not 30 feet. The rest of the house is very little and contains a few dog holes which will scarcely do for little George and the servants (and an underground study): though this room luckily is new floored and joins the drawing room. Next spring they mean to build an apartment in front, which will stand very pleasantly, this being the last house in the row upon the slope of the hill, has plenty of garden and orchard about it, and commands the best view (such as it is) in the place. When the leaves are on the trees, it really is not unpretty. (9/202)

This Prebendal house had formed part of the monastic Infirmary, a late 12th century building which had included a chapel with a chancel. The allocation of monastic buildings to the fifth prebend had included 'the little chappel in the fermery church' (Stewart 1897, 175). 'In plan the original Infirmary was a building of church-like form, so church-like, indeed, that the 18th century antiquaries took it to be the church of the Saxon monastery' (Atkinson 1933, 99). Mary was not alone, therefore, in her statement about the house. But she made the building much too old; Etheldreda founded her monastery in 673 and died in 679; in any case the monastery was destroyed by the Danes in 869. Thomas Waddington's work in building onto his canonry was less destructive than DJ Stewart suggested in 1897 when he referred to 'the summary proceedings of Dr. Waddington' and said that 'he built a new prebendal house'. The Dean of Ely Cathedral now occupies this house (the Deanery having become the Bishop's House); although 'largely modern', it incorporates a house of uncertain medieval date, and the vaulted chamber is the Dean's study.

As soon as Thomas Waddington was settled at Wimpole in April 1788, the York's oldest son, Charles, who was then 24 years old, renewed his interest in pursuing a clerical career (Plate 12a). He suffered much ill-health, and at the same time, as was shown in an earlier letter about the vicarage of Wisbech, was a close companion to his father. Perhaps his awareness of these two aspects of his situation prompted him to secure a partial separation before what he foresaw would be a final one in the not too distant future. Mary's attitude was apparently to put a brave face on this. She approached the subject of Lady Grey's patronage obliquely through Amabel:

8 April 1789

I write now Dear Madam at the request of a person who I must confess I little know how to refuse anything he desires of me; and this must plead my excuse for troubling you on a subject which I fear will appear to you rather extraordinary. You know my son Charles is intended for the Church, and the various circumstances relating both to himself and

his friends have hitherto interfered with his actually accepting any preferment of going into orders, yet he seems not to have relinquished the idea, but upon hearing of Mr Bland's death upon Lady Grey's Living near Colchester applied to his father to know (supposing it every way as eligible as he imagines it to be) whether he might hope for the honour of being appointed to it. His Father made him a very obvious answer – that having so lately had such a favour conferred on his son in law, he could not so soon apply to the same quarter for his *son*; I likewise beg to be understood to have exactly the same sentiments with the Bishop. My request goes no further [than] to beg you to inform Charles through me, of the value and situation of it, which side and what distance from Colchester? And what sort of a house upon it, whether standing or falling? You will say it is rather odd a Bp of Ely's son should be looking abroad for preferment, but the dryness, cheerfulness and picturesque appearance of the country I find have a weight with him I was not aware of ... He is (though I say it) an amiable youth, and possesses qualities both of the head and heart which might do him credit, but there is a little indolence in his disposition I *must* regret, and therefore wish to see him obliged to exert himself in a profession, that will I trust call him out. (11/117)

The living was the rectory of Milend, which was a parish with a small population in the Liberty of Colchester; Thomas Bland had 'served the cure when his health permitted' for six months in the year (*VCH Essex*, 9: 407). Mary recalled that Amabel's ancestor, Sir Charles Lucas, had been one of the Royalist commanders involved in the siege of Colchester in 1648; she did not mention that when the town was taken by Sir Thomas Fairfax, Lucas and Sir George Lisle were shot (*Moul & Hill*, 6–8).

On this occasion, for whatever reason, Charles' wish was not gratified, and in the autumn he was very ill. By March of the following year, he was less of an invalid. In November 1790, he saw the notice of the death of the new incumbent, Dr Lort, and again put himself forward for the position. Michael Lort (1725–1790) held a number of church benefices but had much improved the house at Milend; he died unexpectedly of a carriage accident. Charles wrote on 6 December accepting the Living and expressing his gratitude, but Mary expressed her apprehensions. To Jemima she said that she could not reasonably interfere, and that the Bishop would allow the ordinations (to deacon and priest) immediately to follow each other 'where age and character are satisfactory'. So Charles moved to Milend, and like his brother in law embarked on alterations to the parsonage house under the provisions of the same Act Mary had quoted in relation to Downham. There was another bout of illness. His brother James looked after him. A touching letter dated 17 August requested Lady Grey's permission for James to shoot on her manors adjoining Milend.

17 August 1790

Allow me with great deference to add on my own

account that my health is so very indifferent and life uncertain, that I sometimes doubt whether the alterations which I am making, though justified by the extreme badness of the building, may not fall into the hands of some other incumbent. It would give me the greatest pleasure to hear that should that change be soon, your Ladyship, taking into consideration the circumstance of my brother and the short time that I had held it, was willing to add to the satisfaction I should feel from my endeavours to secure residence upon the living the reflection that my successor might eventually be my brother Philip for whom it might be held. I write this without concert with any of my relations here or at home and upon my own suggestion, but I am sure they would be made happy by it.

P.S. The paper not being signed and the work begun, there would be otherwise great expense for dilapidations. My father would readily make any arrangement. (9/99/2)

A sum of money for 'dilapidations' to put a parsonage house in repair was negotiated between patron or outgoing incumbent and the incoming man. At Milend, the house was possibly very old, and had been regarded as unfit for the rector to occupy in 1727. Although repaired by the Yorkes, it was demolished in 1842 (*VCH Essex* 9: 406). The provision of suitable parsonage houses for such as Thomas Waddington and Charles Yorke, with their social status and private means, was part of a general 'gentrification' of the clergy of the Church of England which continued until late in the 19th century. The repair of Milend parsonage house was again a subject of the Bishop's concern, when in 1800 he offered to waive instalments and interest on the mortgage from the then incumbent if he would spend the money on the 'premises now much out of order from various causes' (11/187).

Following a few weeks at Margate, Charles was taken ill on the return journey to London and died on 30 October 1791. Mary told Amabel the loss was of 'more than that of a child: of a friend — the faithful companion of our lives' (11/135). They were to lose Mary in 1795, Margaret in 1800 and Elizabeth in 1802; like Charles, their daughters were often ill.

Philip, the youngest son, also determined to enter the church; he was ordained deacon in June 1794, and priest the following February (Plate 12b). 'His long and steady attachment to this profession (notwithstanding his father has repeatedly for many years back offered to assist him in any more active line) makes me trust he will be very happy in it – and his amiable qualities joined to a good plain understanding makes me hope likewise (if it pleases God to grant him his health) he will be an active and good parish priest, but cannot be admitted into priests' orders till next February' (9/206). In preparation for this, the Bishop arranged an exchange of Livings between George Owen Cambridge (1756–1841) who then held Milend, and his son in law, Thomas Waddington.

24 October 1795

I take the opportunity of Mrs James' cover to recall

to your Ladyship's memory such conversation as passed between her and your Ladyship on the subject of the Living of Milend in your patronage ... From her, therefore, I presume it was understood that (with your permission) it would be agreeable to me that Mr G Cambridge should exchange *Milend* for a valuable sinecure in my gift: and at present held in trust by my son in law Waddington. This exchange I am well aware is most disproportionately in his favour and by many will be considered as bordering upon absurdity. But from the best consideration I can give it, I am convinced that the objects I have in view from it will be most satisfactorily answered by it ... My principal concern is, to provide liberal competence, comfortable residence, and professional occupation, for my succeeding clerical Son. The expense and attention bestowed upon Milend by myself, and Mr Cambridge, have most agreeably secured these particulars ... It would be wasting your Ladyships time to egotize on my personal gratifications by this unselfish indulgence. (9/106/11)

The presentation was made, and Philip was visited at Milend in July 1795 (9/215). But a month after the Bishop's letter to Jemima, prebendary Bentham died, and this facilitated a larger exchange of livings and prebends.¹²

13 September 1795

Our return to Ely was rather hastened by a little business in our Chapter and an event that is likely to take place in it which will perhaps surprise your Ladyship if you have not heard of it. I think we may say Mr G Cambridge was born under a lucky planet – for he is shortly to be installed into Mr Bentham's Prebend in this Church. It seems the Archbishop has had an old friendship with the father, Mr Cambridge, as well as partiality to the son, and when he removed his chaplain Dr Radcliffe the other day to Canterbury he made it a condition that he should resign his Ely Prebend in favour of Mr G Cambridge; this indeed could not be done without the consent of the Bp of Ely, but the same sentiments with respect to the Cambridge family which influenced the *one* Bp to ask the favour, would likewise influence the *other* to grant it. Indeed we ladies are likewise pleased with the idea of having such an agreeable addition to our society here. But you will say, Dear Madam, here is some confusion between Bentham's Stall and Radcliffe's – this I will immediately clear up by adding that Dr Radcliffe's house being a tighter, smaller dwelling for our son Philip, the Bishop puts *him* in that Stall as it is certainly a sufficient compliment to Cambridge after all that has been done for him, to present him to any one of these seats of dignity in the Church of Ely. (9/216)

Philip was also presented to the rectory of Gt Horkesley in Essex, which was in the gift of Lady de Grey and had been held by his father when young, and he became Registrar of Ely Cathedral; his comfort was well-assured by these preferments. He made a good marriage to a distant relation, Anna Maria Cocks, daughter of

Lord Somers (his brother Joseph married her cousin), and in 1805 was busy building a new parsonage house at Horkesley (11/231), but Mary was to suffer Philip's death in 1817.

Mary took a natural feminine interest in houses, even if not for her own family's occupation. After prebendary Dr Knowles died, in 1802, and before Mr Jenyns was installed, she went to look round the 'old prebendal house' which she had never seen (11/204). Following closely on that business 'a fresh alarm' occurred concerning prebendary Dr Gooch; 'all the evil consequences were coming thick upon our heads of letters by the post etc, etc. Happily however the present storm has blown over, and by the skill of Sir Isaac Penington and the powers of bark and red wine the Dr is recovering ... Sir Isaac gives us hopes he may live a year or two' (11/206). This expectation was accurate. The same letter referred to the case of a poor curate. 'Amongst other clerical business, the Bishop has taken under his protection a Mr Jones upon the recommendation of the Bishop of Lincoln ... the above Welshman ... walked here from London in humble sort, in order to take possession of a curacy still 30 mile further in the Fens'.

19 December (1802)

The story of this man is interesting. Above 20 years since the Bishop ordained him, with 40 or 50 more, at Aberguilly, since which time we heard no more of him till about three weeks ago he wrote a very interesting letter to say that he was suddenly dismissed from his curacy and a small school he kept near Oxford by a Dr Dechene, who would reside himself; turned adrift with a wife and three or four children, and a debt upon his back on the place he lived of near £30, not having received all he ought from the parents of the children. All this was fully confirmed by a letter from the Bp of Lincoln, who likewise named the Bp of Gloucester and Lady Mordaunt as being his friends. He solicited a curacy in this Diocese and the one that once belonged to *Halloran* of *odious* memory being vacant, the Bishop has put him into it. Mr Jones has arrived here on foot poor man! from Banbury and was proceeding in the same manner, when Dr Waddington (with his usual good humour) hired a chaise to carry him on (as he had a dreadful cold). Our Bishop likewise gave him £50 with which he seemed quite overcome; £35 of this goes to the removing of his family, and paying the debt; the remainder he has been obliged to lay out on the house and garden which were left in a most dreadful condition, and fixtures; so I fear he is again in distress not only for furniture, but how to live till the next Quarter Day, as he says nobody will now trust the curate having been so ill used by Halloran. This I heard by chance, for he never solicits, and indeed his letters, both in hand, still are above what is generally to be met with in his station. (11/207)

It seems that Mary could take for granted that Amabel knew about the Halloran case. He would today be called a conman. Three years before, he had bought a school which had been established by the vicar in

Elm Vicarage house and he wished also to become the curate, but Bishop Yorke did not consider him either qualified or fit, nor did he wish the incumbent vicar to be able to sell the curacy to whomever he wished. There were arguments, petitions, and attacks on the Bishop but he stood firm for principle. It was his prerogative to appoint a curate and place him in the Parsonage house, which was not intended to be a school. Then in June 1802 Halloran was arrested for debts, said to amount to £1000, including £260 to the baker and two butchers. No wonder Mr Jones was doubtful of his credit.¹³ In a second letter Mary reflected

n.d. [?December 1802]

The Bishop of Ely cannot be expected to do more for him, and indeed gentlemen of this description (I am sorry to say) so frequently come within our knowledge that we have at present a list of respectful clergymen (not fewer than four) equally distressed with Mr Jones and recommended by friends of undoubted veracity. When I consider that I have all my life lived in ease, affluence, I mi[ght almost have said] luxury, from the protection of the same *profession* that these unhappy families are starving in, it is natural for me to wish to relieve them *all!* And my Bp joins in the same wish. But it is not possible, nor is it a little sum that would do it effectually. I trust the new Residence Act will not increase the number of distressed curates? (11/208)

The Residence Act, passed in 1803, required Bishops to make yearly returns of non-resident clergy, and gave them some control. As non-resident clergy employed curates to carry out their pastoral duties, there might be some curates put out of work if they should start residing on their livings, as in the case of Mr Jones' superior (Jones 2000, 205–6). When the draft bill was published, Mary Yorke commented that 'it seems less complex than was expected', but she did not recommend it to Amabel for her own reading (11/1211). The Jones story puts the Bishop and his wife, and their son in law Dr Waddington, in a good and charitable light.

The Bishop was popular, as indicated by 'the Ely phrase, Mary suggested, "our *good Bishop*"' (11/214). The Dean and Chapter paid him a compliment when Charles Cole, the steward of the Court, died in 1804; they offered the position to the Bishop's son, James (Plate 12c). Charles Cole, she said, held so many positions that he might well have been called 'prime minister, if not of East Anglia yet [of] the Franchises of the Bishop of Ely' (11/228). In return for his son's appointment, the Bishop gave them a handsome rostrum for the church (11/227). The gift was one of a considerable list of generous benefactions by the Bishop to Ely cathedral; they included commissioning reports on parts of the structure, the gift of an altar piece, money for substantial repairs to the West Porch (Galilee Porch), and the west window, and the purchase and installation of some 16th century French stained glass (Meadows and Ramsay 2003, 209). In connection with the western approach to the cathedral, the Bishop had also 'lowered the ground before

the front, removed the clumsy doors at the entrance, erected the iron gates, and restored all the mouldings and ornaments of this Porch, with nice attention to the originals'. He also had a road constructed in a curve round the Green (Supplement to Bentham's *History*, 58 note 1). One of the last letters in his personal collection formerly at Forthampton Court was a letter from the Dean thanking him for the gift of the west window. His care for the building was one aspect of his conscientious acceptance of his duties both as a bishop and as a relatively wealthy private citizen.

The Bishop at home

The portrait of Bishop Yorke at Ely shows a kindly-looking man, with a hint of a humorous smile (Plate 11). His humour was indeed surprisingly irreverent. 'When [the holidays] are over we shall begin to think of London, though we cannot actually remove, till the grand affair of the Bishop's visiting the Chapter is over, which they oblige him to, though it is so very uncommon that the last instance of the kind happened almost threescore years ago' (9/140). The practice must have become more regular, because in 1786 Mary wrote 'I trust [the Bishop] will be quite recovered before his visitation day comes on. Little square pieces of parchment have been stuck against the backs of all the stalls (by way of summonses) for this fortnight or more; he says blisters are always on sometime before they draw. I think I see you Dear Lady Bell say, 'pshew! that is like the Bishop!' We shall remove to Town as soon as ever this disagreeable affair is over'. (11/95)

James Yorke was a scholarly man, and his library contained about 3100 volumes (Barnard 1949 (i), 208); he bequeathed it to future occupants of Ely Palace, and it was transferred by the Church Commissioners to Cambridge University Library in 1952 and will be the subject of an article in a future book commemorating 900 years of the see. His blue-stocking niece, Amabel, went to him for critical comment on her own writing, and wrote plays for the family to act. The Bishop was also keen on drama, although he was 'professionally excluded' from going to the public theatre — this was James's own phrase in a letter to his brother (GRO) — and he often read aloud to the family; Dr Newcome's school in Hackney to which he and his brothers, and then his sons, were sent, was particularly noted for its interest in drama. One daughter, Mary said, possessed most of 'their father's spirit for the stage' (11/90). He wrote a great deal of verse for the amusement of his immediate circle and he could be relied on for verse prologues and epilogues to their plays, no matter how busy he was. A number of his compositions has been preserved at Forthampton. Mary sent an example to Lady Bell.

21 July 1794

The underwritten is a parody upon some lines that I believe you are not unacquainted with — wrote on the following occasion: one morning here last week when our aged house maid went into the study to dust it, she saw seated with great gravity in the Bishop's own chair a great *ow!* in her joy, she called

the gardener to see it, and not contented with *that*, she then assembled the maids. The story being told at breakfast, the Bishop turned it as follows —

Parish has caught the gravest bird of night,
The hugest of his kind: you'll smile to see the
Solemn fowl how awkwardly he sits i'the
Bishop's chair:
Winks at the light; and rolls his stupid eyes,
While crowds of teasing girls, who mock at
him,
Unfeeling laugh, tittering and pointing at his
queer
Phiz — and scream and jump for joy — then rush
out
Romping with much rustic fun. (11/152)

Yet the Bishop was not in favour of public plays.

His mother had considered him a delicate child, but although he often suffered from colds, his wife took care of him and for him. She took some of the burden of administration from his shoulders, running the three houses which they occupied while he was Bishop of Ely, and judging from some letters and copies of his letters in her handwriting, was sometimes his secretary.

James and Mary Yorke were a most happily married couple. Both took pleasure in their domestic scene. James wrote to his brother after returning from a Welsh tour of duty 'You will easily conceive how much we shall think the alteration for the better, by removing from form and uninteresting acquaintance, into domestic scenes' (GRO). Mary not infrequently expressed her sense of her good fortune, particularly about the time of her wedding anniversary. For example, she wrote to Lady Grey

24 July 1786

I cannot conclude without returning my thanks for the kind wishes expressed in Friday's letter for the *happiness* of myself and family; may I never prove ungrateful for the uncommon share I have, and *do enjoy!* Sure never woman was so blest in every circumstance, and relation, in husband, children, *friends!* Nor can I help here particularly to acknowledge your Ladyship's condescending goodness to me during *the four and twenty years* I have had the honour of being connected with the family. (9/142)

When the Bishop was in London, it seems that he wrote to Mary every day. Alas she did not keep his letters, nor he hers, apart from an odd exception. One expression of his appreciation of their partnership has survived through being quoted in a letter from Mary to Lady Bell.

28 January 1789

The Bishop says to me in his letter of yesterday that in a family at peace and blest as ours is at present, it is more agreeably complacent to dwell on domestic subjects than public; of the latter however he gives me a detail every post, and such as makes me sincerely wish to have him released from so painful an attendance as I am certain it must be to a person of his feeling ... I have nothing more to add but to desire

you to send me down my Bishop again. (11/113)

The unhappy political matter keeping him in London was King George III's illness and the question of a Regency was a severe political problem. In the House of Lords, a political struggle over the Regency Bill was being fought. This time, the King recovered.

Although she made no parade of it, Mary also shared his religious beliefs, expressed movingly after the death of their daughter Elizabeth in 1802. When summoned urgently by Elizabeth's husband, Mary's thought was that she must quickly return to Ely as 'the Bp is solitary in the Great House and very melancholy' (11/192). Elizabeth died two weeks later.

7 May 1802

Though in the case of recent affliction you justly observe that time, and resignation to the will of Providence, must work the cure in calming the passions, yet change of objects and situation will do something, yet I confess I should be sorry to owe that to time or change of place — which ought to be the effect of reason, religion, and gratitude for numberless blessings showered down upon me through the course of a long life, harbingers I hope of still greater in the future part of my existence, through merits not my own! (11/202)

In their later years in Ely, the round of 'eating, drinking (tea I mean) and visiting' went on as usual (11/242). The Bishop and his wife often entertained visitors and their own growing families of grandchildren; both Joseph and Philip had several children, and Margaret Waddington's son and daughter were frequently in Ely. The routine of autumn and spring in Ely, winter in Ely House in Dover Street, and the summer in Forthampton was maintained, Ely House providing them with convenient quarters to break their journeys back and forth. In 1807 the Bp fulfilled his duty of a visitation of his diocese. Although Mary expressed some concern 'fearing the exertion might be too much for his strength (as *four* years has passed since the last call of this kind)' he carried it through successfully, 'staying in lodgings at Cambridge for two or three days as head quarters for that part of the Diocese' (11/244). James was then aged 77 years; there was no retirement for bishops. The same letter reported to Amabel that 'At Ely we had on the [King's] birth day a Confirmation in the morning, and a little *interlude* of the appearance of our whole Volunteer Corps in the evening upon our Green, who treated the Bishop with firings and cheers etc. etc. and he treated all them — with two rounds of his ale'. He attended parliament, and neither this 'nor the dust and rumble of the journey' to Forthampton that summer, she said, caused him trouble.

That autumn they stayed longer in London than usual because of fever in Ely; however they reached the Isle before a heavy fall of snow 'shut them in' for several days. Elizabeth's husband and his sisters visited them; Mary noted that they would shiver in 'our long corridors and colder church', but they and other visitors would contribute to keeping at least the

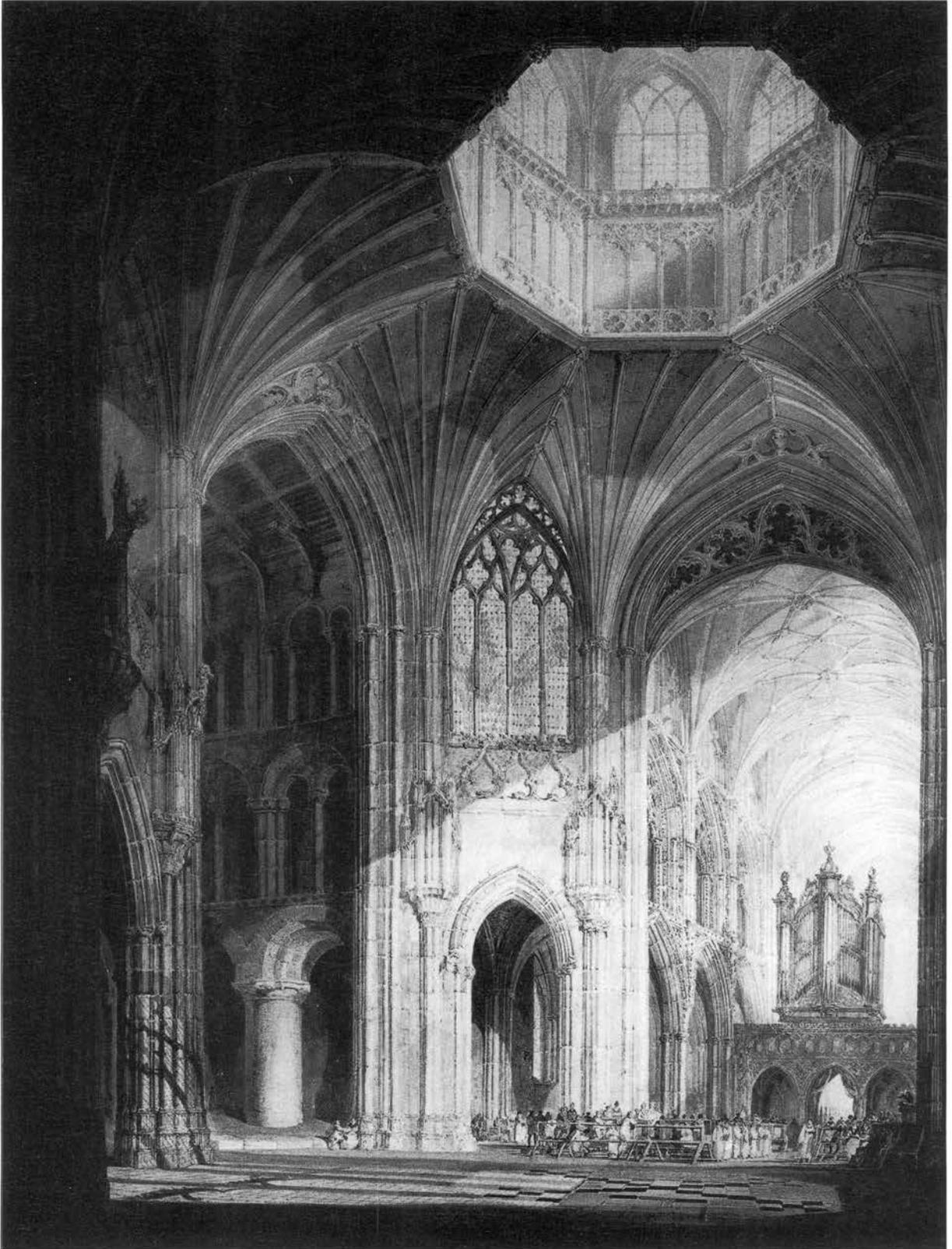


Figure 12. This picture of Ely Cathedral by Turner belonged to Bishop Yorke and in his will was left to his grandchildren. (Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums Collections)

sitting rooms warm (11/249). Clerical and social duties were fulfilled. As was customary, the Yorkes went to London in early summer 1808, before moving to Forthampton. A letter to James from the Dean of Ely, of 18 June 1808 (GRO), conveyed the thanks of the Chapter for 'this fresh instance of his Munificence' in 'his present of the West Window in the Cathedral, the whole of which, as well as the painted glass in it, are at his expense'. James received a query from a publisher about 'Athenian Stuart' (11/253)¹⁴ and wrote to Amabel to ask if she might be able to supply information.

The Yorkes were at Forthampton in July 1808, and Amabel was told that the Bishop 'flirts of an evening with two young ladies of his and your acquaintance, Miss Talbot and Miss Carter. I have not always been of the party, but by the little observation I have been able to make I am convinced that notwithstanding all Miss Talbot's imagination and vivacity, you certainly judged rightly of her character, when you said She was frequently labouring against low spirits' (11/254). The letters of these two well-known bluestockings, Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806) and Catherine Talbot (1721–1770), were published in 1808 by Elizabeth Carter's nephew, Montague Pennington, and James must have enjoyed reading them, possibly out loud to his wife. Catherine had been a close friend of Jemima, who tried to 'argue her out of her depression' (Myers 1990, 69, 75). But in late August James had an apoplectic stroke and died on Friday 26 August. His oldest surviving son, Joseph, broke the news to Amabel, and said that his mother was less surprised than the rest of the family as he had had one such attack some months before. (11/335/1)

James had made his will in 1805. He left his wife fully in control of his estate for her lifetime, and also of making payments as she judged fit to servants who had been with them for seven years or more. His sons and his two sons in law were given bequests, and his grandchildren alive at the time of his decease were left £500 'and also my drawing by Turner of Ely cathedral' (Figure 12). The watercolour is of the interior of the cathedral, illustrating brilliantly dramatic lighting effects. This picture was exhibited at the royal Academy in 1796, and was based on a study made during Turner's tour of the Midlands two years earlier (Tate Gallery 1974, 37). It remained in the Yorke family's hands until 1875, and is now in Aberdeen Art Gallery. Portraits of his brothers hanging in Ely House, Dover Street, were bequeathed to their relations. Charitable bequests included the fund for widows and orphans of poor clergy in Ely diocese, which he had inaugurated (9/160), Ely City Sunday schools and the poor of Ely and Forthampton. His two leasehold houses in London were left to his wife and son if they wished to occupy them, and if not to be sold. He wished 'If it should please God, for whose Grace and Goodness to me I am most humbly grateful, that I should die at Ely or at Forthampton, that my remains may be interred at either of these places, but should it be in London, then in the vault prepared for them in Forthampton church.'¹⁵ Accordingly he was buried in

Forthampton.

Widowhood was met by Mary with the same energy and undaunted spirit that she met personal losses and also in due course old age. She went to live permanently at Forthampton, taking a close interest in the running of the estate. Her grand daughter Mary Agnes, Margaret's daughter, was a much appreciated companion for a time, and other members of the family also stayed with her and she interested herself in her grandchildren's activities. She visited Amabel and other relatives, and entertained. In her last years, her only surviving son, Joseph, who was estranged from his wife and suffering a nervous breakdown, lived with her, and he told Amabel of his mother's death. Only a week before she had written a customary cheerful letter to Amabel, giving her the title of a book referred to previously.

Christmas Day (1823)

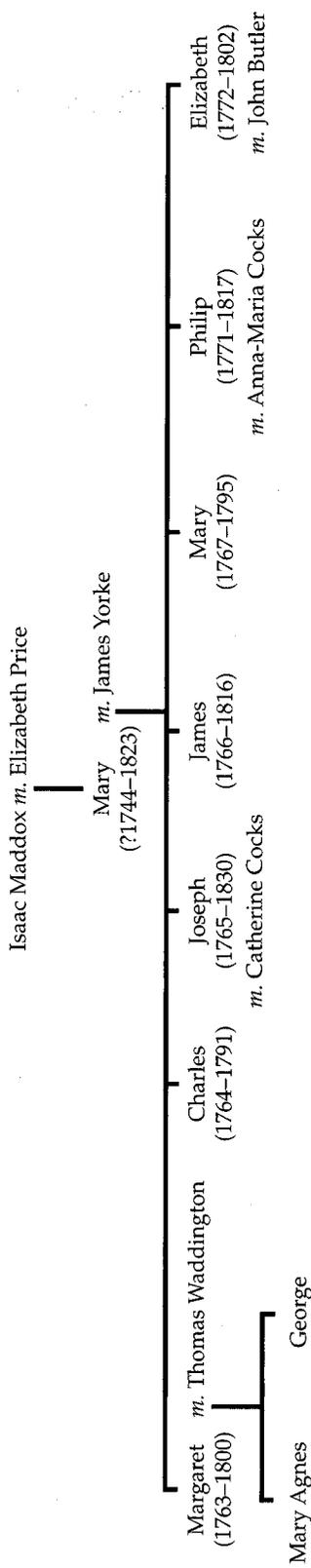
I hasten to return you my best thanks for all your kind attentions for your two notes and enquiries after my health and for the Doe Venison safely arrived which my grandson and the rest of us will feast upon – for I must persist in my idea that it is lighter on the stomach than your favorite casserole of mince meat and rice which has milk or cream with it — or *Charlotte* pudding the crust of which is made out of bread and butter. But what of either of those is expected of the digestions equal to what is exercising at Wrest Park at this Season — Hare — Venison — Pheasant — above all Scotch Beef ... I must now cast my eyes to the top of this page and beg you will accept of the kind wishes of the Season for yourself your sister and all belonging to you who all seem going on so happily! May they long do so. (11/601)

What a characteristic and fitting ending for sixty years of affectionate correspondence.

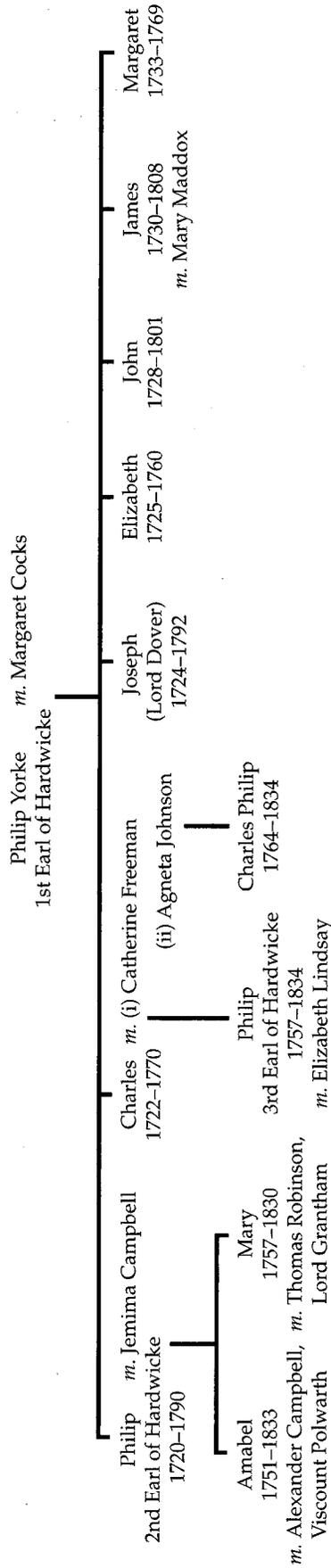
Acknowledgements

The helpfulness of the archivists at Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service is warmly acknowledged. A study of Mary Yorke's letters has been facilitated by John Yorke's generous loan of transcripts made by his father Gerald Yorke. Peter Meadows, Keeper of Ely Diocesan Records & Dean and Chapter Archives in Cambridge University Library, gave me information and made helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. Peter Richardson of Fleming Family & Partners, was of considerable assistance, giving up time to show me Ely house in London and providing information. Anne Coombs has enthusiastically discussed James Yorke and shared her knowledge with me.

John Yorke of Forthampton Court has greatly supported the project of making his ancestor's letters available to a wider public and has given permission to use portraits and other material in his possession. The permission of Ely cathedral Dean and Chapter to reproduce material in their archives is gratefully recorded. The National Trust Photographic Library



Members of Mary and James Yorke's family mentioned in the text.



The family of Philip Yorke, 1st Earl of Hardwicke mentioned in the text.

generously made available the portrait of Jemima, Marchioness Grey, and Turner's picture of the interior of Ely cathedral is part of the Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums collection. To my husband, Glyn Jones, I owe both encouragement to pursue Mary Yorke across the country, and also several photographs reproduced in this article.

Notes

- 1 James's letter refers to: his older brother, Sir Joseph Yorke (1724–1792), later Lord Dover; Frederick Cornwallis (1713–1783), Archbishop of Canterbury 1768; the sons of his older brother Charles, who had briefly been Lord Chancellor before his death in 1770; the master or president of Queens College, Cambridge, 1760–88, Robert Plumtre (1723–88).
- 2 There are other mistakes in these articles; for example, in 1781 James and Mary Yorke had three daughters, not two; James did not hold the deanery of Lincoln with Ely bishopric but resigned the deanery as soon as his appointment was confirmed by the king; in the summer the family did not go to Little Downham but to Forthampton Court. (The oldest daughter's husband became Rector of Downham in 1789).
- 3 The last occupant of Ely House was Bishop Lord Alwyne Compton, who resigned in 1905. At that time a two storeyed attic behind the balustrade was added and alterations and considerable extensions were done by Smith & Brewer. In 1993 the house became the headquarters of Fleming Family & Partners and has been carefully and generously restored.
- 4 Peter Meadows comments (personal communication) that William Cole of Ely is sometimes confused with his namesake the antiquary William Cole (1714–82) of Milton. The roof of the middle aisle was not boarded over until the mid-1850s, when it was decorated by the artists Henry Styleman Le Strange and, after his death, Thomas Gambier Parry.
- 5 Charles Manners Sutton (1755–1828), grandson of the 3rd Duke of Rutland, was Dean of Peterborough 1791, Bishop of Norwich 1792–1805, Dean of Windsor 1794, Archbishop of Canterbury 1805–28; eventually he had three sons and ten daughters.
- 6 British Library, Hardwicke MSS 35,376 f.276
- 7 Joseph Stock (1740–1813), bishop of Killala 1798 and of Waterford and Lismore 1810, wrote a diary published in Maxwell's *History of the Rebellion of 1798* and in 1799 his own *Narrative of what passed at Killala in the Summer of 1798*. DNB.
- 8 Unless otherwise specified, details of elections are drawn from *History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1754–1790* I: 218; 1790–1820 1986 I: 26–30.
- 9 William Ponsonby (1704–1793), Viscount Duncannon and earl of Bessborough (both Irish titles) was in office in the 1740s and 1750s.
- 10 George Leonard Jenyns (1763–1848) M.A. of Bottisham Hall, vicar of Swaffham, born Eye, studied at Cambridge; had a great knowledge of farming and served as Chairman of the Board of Agriculture.
- 11 Anne Coombs suggests that this is a reference to Joseph Plumtre resigning from the Commission of the Peace; Bishop Yorke was concerned that few of the more senior clerics resided on their livings and were willing to become JPs. [Personal communication]
- 12 The prebendaries referred to in the following paragraphs were: Bentham, who held the 2nd stall; Houston Radcliffe

D.D. the 6th, and became Domestic chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1787 — their houses occupied parts of the former Infirmary; Thomas Knowles DD (1727–1802), who held the 8th stall; his successor, George Jenyns. see note 10; Dr John Gooch (?1731–1804), of the 4th stall, whose daughters were married to Dr Radcliffe and to Dr Beadon, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and who died at the Palace at Wells on 7 January 1804.

- 13 Anne Coombs generously made her notes on this story available to me.
- 14 James Stuart (1718–1788) painter and architect, published in 1762 *The antiquities of Athens*. He designed Lord Anson's house in St James's Square, probably the first of that style; Lord Anson was a brother in law to James. Stuart also designed the memorial in Wimpole church to the 1st earl of Hardwicke and his wife.
- 15 PROB 11/339/1485/98/164 Proved 16 September 1808.

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Plate 8a. A miniature by Philip Jean is held by family tradition to be of Mary Yorke. It is dated to c. 1790, when she was 45 years old, but a lock of thick fair hair at the back suggests she was younger than the impression given by the conventional powdering. (John Yorke)

Plate 8b. Jemima, Marchioness Grey, painted by Allan Ramsay in 1741, the year following her marriage to Philip Yorke, son and heir to the 1st Earl of Hardwicke. (Wimpole Hall, The Bambridge Collection (The National Trust)/ NTPL/Roy Fox)

Plate 8c. Amabel, Lady Lucas in 1815, by John Wright in coloured chalk. She was then aged 64 although the picture seems to show a younger person. (John Yorke)





Plate 9. A watercolour of Forthampton Court, dated c.1860, shows the house much as it was in Mary Yorke's time. The large medieval Great Hall is hidden by a pine tree to the left. Mary and James Yorke built the pedimented front entrance, but the colonnade is later. (John Yorke)

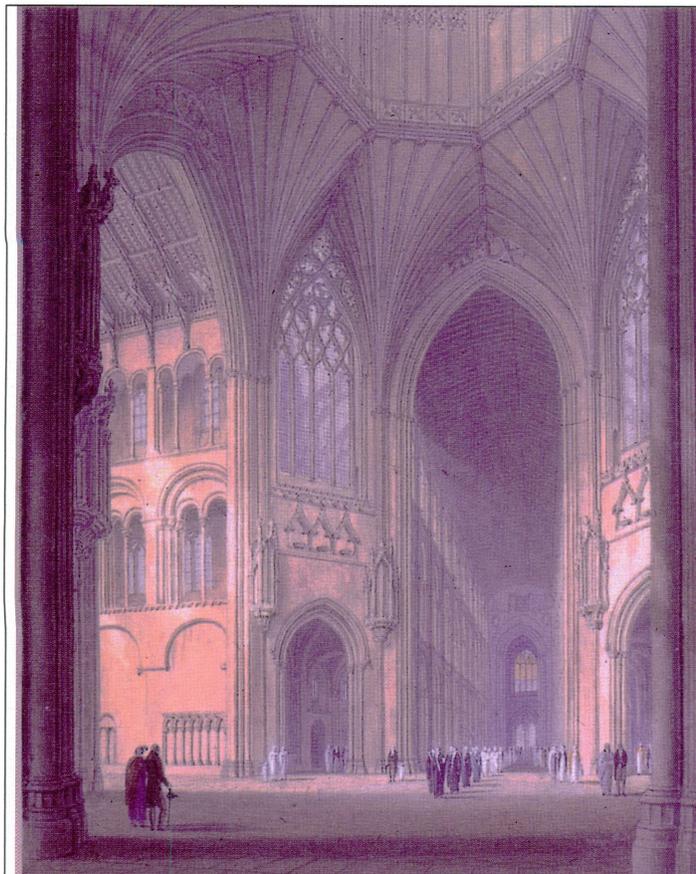


Plate 10. 'Long procession' in Ely Cathedral. The custom has been revived on one recent occasion and proved how impressive was the procession which Bentham wished maintained. (Ely Dean and Chapter Archives)



Plate 11. The portrait of Bishop James Yorke by D Monier hangs in the Old Palace. (Ely Dean and Chapter Archives)

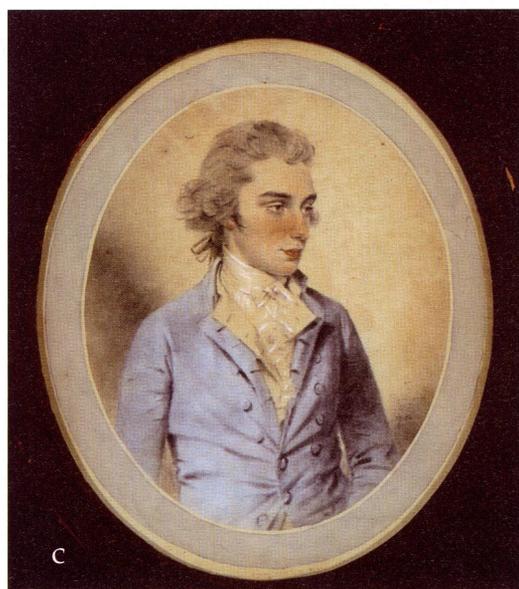
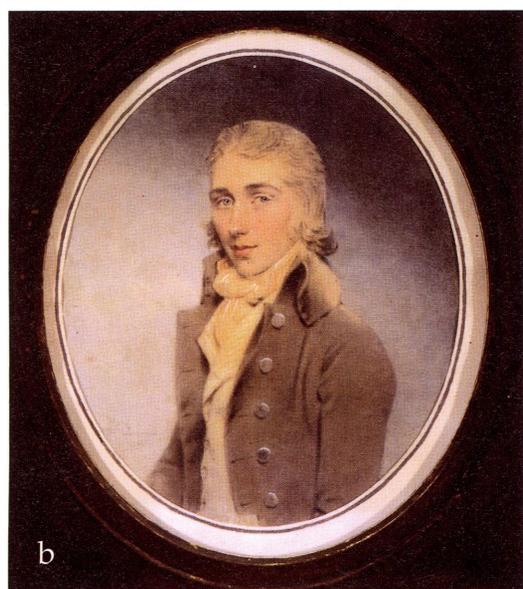
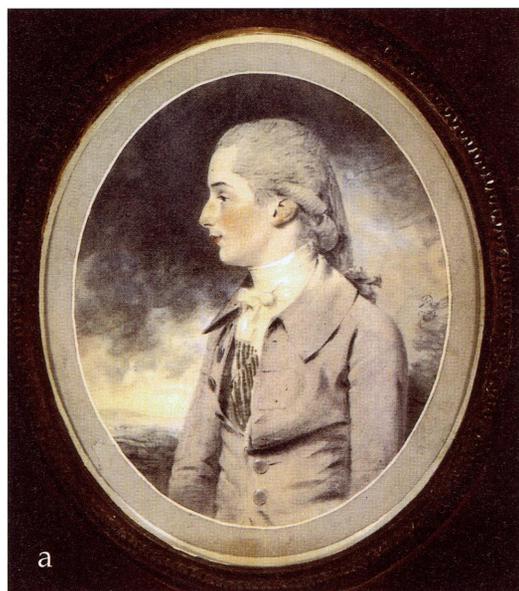


Plate 12. Three sons of Mary and James Yorke. a. Charles (1764-1791) aged 18; b. Philip (1771-1817) aged 21; c. James (1766-1816) aged 18. (John Yorke).

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