

ART. XV.—*Mary Lady Clerk's work-box*. By W. A. J. PREVOST.

Read at Carlisle, May 31st, 1973.

A PAPER entitled "Dame Mary Dacre or Clerk . . ." was published in CW2 lxx in 1970. Since then Sir John Dutton Clerk has given me permission to search "Mary Lady Clerk's work-box" which is in his possession at Penicuik. Mary was the daughter of Joseph Dacre of Kirkclinton in Cumberland. She was born in 1745 and in 1777 married Captain John Clerk, R.N., who after his father's death in 1784 became the fifth baronet of Penicuik. Sir John died on 19 February 1798 and Lady Mary retired to live in Edinburgh where she died in 1834.

Her work-box contains a few relics, a few recipes and some letters. Among the odd items there is her sampler "worked in the ten year of her age", a pair of elbow length soft leather gloves and a mob-cap with a fringe of very fine Flemish lace, both of which items "belonged to M. D'Acre of Kirkclinton" in the years before her marriage. A lock of her light brown hair is labelled 6 June 1794 and a lock of her husband's dark brown hair tinged with grey is labelled 30 December 179—, the last figure being illegible. Finally, a snippet of material labelled a "Piece of the Court train worn by Lady Clerk at the Drawing-room held by George IV at Holyrood on 20 August 1822", and a remarkable undated silhouette of her ladyship's profile.

It is well known that Mary Dacre was a very attractive and good-looking young woman. She had admirers and it is surprising that she had to wait until she was 32 before getting married. However, it seems

that she and William Scott (1745-1836), the future Lord Stowell, were rather more than just good friends, only William delayed making an offer of marriage until such time when his father's death made him a wealthy man, but by then Mary Dacre was about to marry Captain Clerk. His misfortune was hinted at by his brother John, the first Earl of Eldon (1751-1838), in a letter, 14 April 1829, addressed to Lady Clerk. "Dear Molly Dacre, Pardon my use of a Name, which belonged to you when I first knew you. I can sincerely assure you that I have often and often thought of the person who bore that Name when I first knew her, with, may I say, Sentiments of most sincere Affection. If I had been Lord Stowell, her Name now might neither have been Molly Dacre, nor Mary Lady Clarke. . . ."

Next on the list of admirers was Captain Charles Morris (1745-1838), 17th Foot, who spent his boyhood at Carlisle, possibly at Bell Bridge where his grandfather had settled after having received a severe wound in the French war under Marlborough. Charles was a song-writer of merit which earned him a mention in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. In a letter of 29 May 1829 from No. 1 Thornhaugh Street in London, Morris writes to Lord Sidmouth (1757-1844) as follows: ". . . I find a few Stanzas on my *deathless Passion* for my first love written in my latter days, and as such an extraordinary and singular coincidence on the subject ocured at your table on Wednesday, I take the liberty of enclosing them to you. . . ." In a postscript Morris continues: "I beg to add that as it is sixty eight years since I lived at Carlisle with my Father and Mother, Lady Clerk will of course have no recollection of my *Boyish adoration*, but to recal it if possible to her memory I would wish her to know that it is Chas. Morris, Son of Col. Morris of the 17th Reg. who lived with my mother at Carlisle and with

whom Lady Clark and the Dacre Family were acquainted.' The captain's five ingenious stanzas are as follows:

*The years have spread around my Head
 The sober veil of Reason,
 To close in Night Sweet Fancy's light
 My heart rejects as Treason.
 A spark there lies still fanned by Sighs,
 Ordained by Beauty's Maker,
 And fix'd by Fate burns yet, tho' late,
 For lovely Molly Dacre!*

*Oh! while I miss . . . the days of Bliss,
 I pass'd in rapture gazing,
 The Dream impress'd . . . still charms my breast
 Which Fancy's ever raising.
 Tho' much I meet . . . in Life is sweet
 My Soul can ne'er forsake her,
 And all I feel . . . still bears the Seal
 Of lovely Molly Dacre.*

*Whene'er her course . . . in chaise or horse,
 Convey'd her to our City,
 How did I gaze . . . in bless'd amaze,
 To catch her smile of pity.
 Around her door . . . the night I wore
 Still mute as any Quaker
 With hope fed zeal . . . one glance to steal
 From lovely Molly Dacre.*

*When rumour clear . . . proclaimed her near,
 Her charms a crowd amusing,
 How would I start . . . with panting heart
 To catch her eye while passing;
 When home she turn'd . . . I ran & burn'd (?)
 O'er many a distant Acre
 To hope by chance . . . one parting glance
 From lovely Molly Dacre.*

*I've often thought . . . that happy lot
of Health and Spirits lent me
Is deem'd as due . . . to faith so true
And thus by Fate is sent me
While here she be . . . there's Life for me
But when High Heav'n shall take her
A like last breath . . . I'll ask of Death
To follow Molly Dacre.*

The singular coincidence to which Morris refers in his letter to Lord Sidmouth is explained in a letter to Sir George Clerk, the sixth baronet of Penicuik, dated almost exactly a year later, from John Pearson, Chitten Lodge.

Chitten Lodge

June 3rd: 1830.

My dear Sir George

Enclosed I send you Capt: Morris' Verses which I mentioned to you. The circumstances which occasioned them were the following. Lord Stowel, Lord Sidmouth and Capt: Morris with some other Friends were dining with me last spring when Lord Stowell remarked that although Capt: Morris was the same age as himself he was much more active and elastic. Capt. Morris attributed this to his having been ardently in Love the whole of his Life, and on being urged to disclose the object of his passions confessed that it was Lady Clarke, who at the age of sixteen won his affection, and that although he had been since married she had never ceased to exercise an influence on his heart and be a source of animation. Lord Stowell immediately acknowledged that by a remarkable coincidence he also had been enamoured of Lady Clarke, and at the same age of sixteen, and that although he had been twice married the recollection of her charms had not been effaced from his mind. This of course gave rise to much mirth among the company, Lord Sidmouth particularly laughing at the Lovers, who at the age of eighty four declared that their passion was undiminished towards a Lady who had attained the same age.

I am, my dear Sir George, yours truly,

John Pearson.

Charles Morris (1745-1838). Both his father and grandfather had served in the 17th Foot. The latter, after having received a severe wound in the French war under Marlborough, settled at Bell Bridge, Dalston. Charles entered the 17th Foot in 1764, married the widow of Sir William Stanhope, and died at Brockham aged 93, on 11 July 1838. He was a song writer of note.

Ref. DNB.

Henry Addington (1757-1844), Viscount Sidmouth, B.A. Oxford in 1778. Married Ursula, daughter of Leonard Hammond of Cheam in 1781. M.P. for Devizes in 1784. Created Viscount Sidmouth in January 1805.

Ref. DNB.

John Scott, first Earl of Eldon (1751-1838). Born in Newcastle, brother of William Scott, Lord Stowell. B.A. Oxford in February 1770. Eloped with Elizabeth Surtees and married 19 November 1772. Took Silk 4 June 1783. Solicitor general and knighted 27 June 1788. Created Baron Eldon of Eldon in County Durham 19 July 1799.

Ref. DNB.

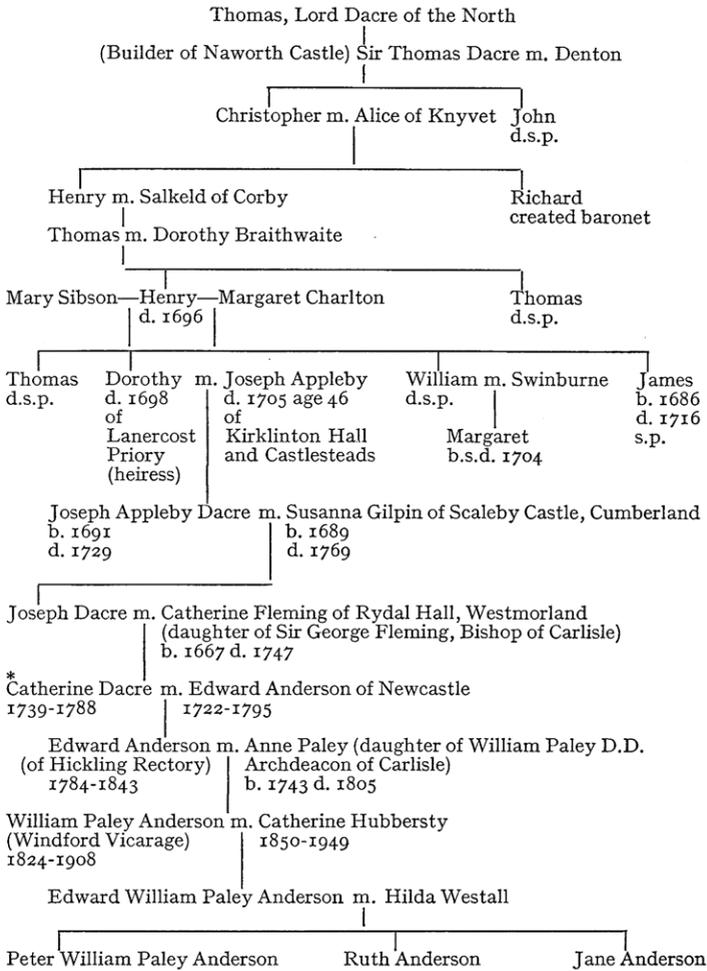
William Scott, Lord Stowell (1745-1836). 20 November 1764 B.A. Oxford. His father died in the autumn of 1776 and left William £24,000. Judge of the high court of admiralty in 26 October 1798. Created Baron Stowell of Stowell Park, Glos., in 1821.

Ref. DNB.

The following is a copy of a pedigree found in the work-box.



Silhouette of Mary Lady Clerk.



* elder sister of Mary Dacre m. Sir George Clerk