

‘SEDUCED BY THE DEVIL’: DIVORCE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NORFOLK

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SUMMARY

Three of the Trials for Adultery reported on in depth by J. Gill of Paternoster Row, London, in his publications of 1779–1802 deal with Norfolk cases. Spanning the period between 1772 and 1801, these accounts provide many insights into contemporary attitudes towards divorce, and the changing manner in which it was reported. The last of the cases published by Gill — one which was widely publicised, since it touched upon Thomas William Coke of Holkham — is also represented by a large body of correspondence which survives in the Holkham archives, and is examined here in depth.

Introduction

The reporting and publishing of legal cases began in England, tentatively at first, in about 1690. However, by the mid-18th century those involving adultery, especially cases of a sensational nature, had become lucrative for those who publicised them. After 1750 the tone of the reports began gradually to change, as greater interest was taken in the moral and legal aspects, but the number of reported cases increased and by the 1770s had swollen to a flood.¹

Prior to 1760 there had been five means of resolving an unhappy marriage: through the church courts, by Act of Parliament, by a private agreement for separation (the most common method for the middling classes), by desertion or elopement, or through wife sale. With the decline of church courts as adultery was decriminalized, the King’s Bench was set up in Westminster Hall. Here ‘criminal conversations’ were argued out before a judge and jury, the male parties (husband and lover) being represented by lawyers.² Any wives accused were powerless to contest their case: the trials were conducted exclusively to prove adultery, which they did by means of witness testimony. The women — and only a tiny minority of trials concerned wives suing husbands — were unrepresented. They were not called to give evidence, or to plead, and if found guilty they stood to lose their homes and their good names; rather more painfully, their children would be lost to their husbands’ care. Women were still seen traditionally as property. Once divorced, however, they would be free to marry a lover, if they so desired.

Among the curious spectators at these trials was Mr J. Gill of 16 Paternoster Row, London, who produced a series of books between 1779 and 1802, all with the self-explanatory title *Trials for Adultery*. Gill took down the proceedings in shorthand, ‘direct from the Records and arranged for Publication’. The resulting volumes were presented in a semi-legal format, the later ones being illustrated and containing some short ‘impartial Reflections’ by himself. Three of these trials published by Gill had their roots in Norfolk, each involving people of the middling class rather than the elite or the wealthy.

The first two Norfolk cases can be dealt with briefly since there is no archival or other material with which to contextualise Gill’s reports, while they were not reported in the newspapers. The third, however, which took place 25 years after the others, did receive considerable publicity. It reached the front page of the *Norwich Mercury* and must have been discussed throughout the county, if not the country, for it involved no less a person than Thomas William Coke. The existence of a newspaper report may reflect the changing times, but the *Norwich Mercury* was a Tory paper and could not resist a slur, however indirect, against the ardent Whig Coke. This case

is of further interest as much of the original correspondence concerning it has survived in the archives at Holkham; in particular, interviews with the parties concerned allow a more in-depth view into the case than that seen by Gill. The case is also noteworthy for the employment of a private detective.

1772: Greene vs Goddard

The first trial took place in December 1772. It concerned a wife committing adultery with the lodger — a frequent occurrence in the cases recorded by Gill. In this instance the injured party was a vicar, the Rev. John Greene, who had married Elizabeth Hooke in 1756. The couple had met in Norwich, where Elizabeth lived in St Giles's Broad Street close to the Dolphin, an Inn frequented by the Rev. Green. At the time of their marriage he was the curate at Grimston, and here the couple lived for eight years before moving to Lynn in 1764. In Lynn they took a house belonging to one Thomas Goddard who 'continued to board with them'. The trouble started when Mrs Greene began an affair with Goddard, which went on for some years and was judged to be 'public knowledge'.

By 1771 the Rev. Greene could bear it no more and moved out of the house, out of Lynn, and even out of Norfolk, going to London to the parish of St Giles in the Fields. Soon afterwards the adulterous couple also moved to London, lodging with Mr Fennymore, a peruke maker of Suffolk Street, near the Haymarket. They took two rooms in his house, wherein there was only one bed. The Rev. Greene then sued for divorce, the solitary bed being a vital piece of evidence. Fennymore and his wife co-operated with the Rev. Greene and claimed to have witnessed signs of adultery, as had their maid, all of them saying they had seen the couple in bed together. The divorce was granted. No children were mentioned, and Gill did not record any damages.³

1777: Lockwood vs. Knowles

The second trial took place five years later, in 1777, and involved a clergyman's daughter, a Mrs Lockwood, who was married and the mother of seven children.⁴ Her husband Mr Lockwood was in the Navy but it would appear that he had been absent for prolonged periods, as the couple had had ten children during the thirteen years of their marriage. More likely he was on half pay waiting for employment, further suggested by the fact he had not risen above the rank of Lieutenant. The Lockwoods had no home of their own but lived with their seven surviving children in East Bradenham Vicarage, the home of Mrs Lockwood's parents, the Rev. Joshua and Mrs Crofts. This couple also housed Lockwood's mother, 'an old lady'. It was in the vicarage that Mrs Lockwood committed adultery with a servant. This was an especially shocking act: cross-class liaisons were by 18th-century standards the most outrageous since the male servant, by taking his master's place in the matrimonial bed, committed a dastardly act of disloyalty and, by so doing, usurped the latter's power over both mistress and servants.⁵

Prior to 1775 the family's lives seem to have been uneventful. Mary Owen, a servant who had known Mr Lockwood for ten years, said that he had a 'vast love' for his wife and that she always behaved well in front of him. Had Mrs Lockwood been a loose or 'lewd' woman, Gill would not have hesitated to tell us in his preliminary notes: instead, he says she was 'seduced by the devil'.

The trouble began shortly after Christmas 1775 when Simeon Knowles came to the house as servant to the Rev. Mr Crofts. The main evidence in the case was given by two maids, Elizabeth Smith of Market Dereham, aged 24, and Mary Owen (46), the Lockwoods' nursery maid. Elizabeth Smith said that within a month of his arrival Mrs Lockwood took frequent

opportunities of getting together with Knowles and 'toying and playing and that several times Mrs Lockwood put her hand into Simeon's breeches'. Mrs Lockwood was smitten by a sort of madness. Simeon was a 'menial servant' and they both lived in a house full of people, yet they were frequently seen (by the servants) 'with her petticoats up and his breeches down' in many different beds in the house, lying on the bleach ground in the garden, and once, *in extremis*, in a dry ditch at the side of the road.

Matters came to a head a few months later, when Mrs Lockwood gave birth to a baby, Mr Lockwood was away in London, and during the month of Mrs Lockwood's lying in, Simeon 'for the first ten days came and lay down on the bed night and morning'. On the eleventh day Mrs Lockwood told the maid Mary Owen that Simeon would be spending the entire night with her, whereupon Mary Owen replied if that was to happen, she would leave. In any case, she had sat up so many nights to attend her mistress and the child that she was in need of a good night's sleep. Mary Owen ordered Elizabeth Smith to take her place. Simeon duly turned up, wearing only his night shirt, and stayed until six the next morning. Feeling the young Mistress had finally gone too far, Mary Owen went to Mrs Crofts (Mrs Lockwood's mother) and told her what had happened. On his return from London, Mrs Crofts informed Mr Lockwood. No other details are given save that the trial took place on 14 May 1777 and the sentence was divorce. The *Norfolk Chronicle* did not report it.

1801: Edwards vs Crick

By 1801, the date of the third trial, Gill had altered his style. In the earlier accounts he had begun by stating the names of the people involved, and the date and place of their marriage, before identifying the guilty and innocent parties. The proceedings of the earlier trials consisted almost entirely of evidence given by the couple's acquaintances and servants. Twenty-five years later, however, Gill had adopted a more legalistic approach, with few if any quotes from witnesses and more points of law. In this particular case Gill was at pains to make sure that everyone understood the trial would not simply be between an ordinary husband and a wife, Mr and Mrs Edwards, but would feature Thomas William Coke Esq. He laboured the point in the title: *The Trial of Mr Crick (steward to Mr Coke of Norfolk) for Adultery with the wife of Mr Edwards, then resident with Mr Coke's family, at Holkham*. He began:

Mr Erskine was leading counsel for the plaintiff, and conducted the cause with uncommon ability. After a few general observations upon the nature of the injury for which this action was brought, he stated, that Mr Edwards in the year 1793, married an amiable young woman ... he earnestly wished to spend his life in her society; but the narrowness of his fortune put this out of his power. He was obliged to undertake a voyage to the East Indies soon after his marriage. Before he set out, however, he placed his lady in a situation where she might receive protection, and live comfortably in his absence ...⁶

It is clear at once whose side Gill is on. However, piecing the story together from the archival material allows a somewhat more balanced picture to emerge.

Charlotte Flower married Robert Edwards in early 1793, when she was 31 years old. Prior to that she was a servant, first to Lady Lonsdale and then to Mr Pierrepont. At the time they met Robert Edwards was described as having 'recently returned from India with General Meadows', a relative of Mr Pierrepont's, so it may be assumed that they met in Pierrepont's London house.

Charlotte Flower was a good catch for Robert Edwards. Her aunt Mrs Ann Horton of Tyson Street, Bethnal Green, was to testify in 1798 that Charlotte had been left £300 by her uncle John Horton, and a further £30 by her mother. Prior to her marriage Charlotte had lent £75 to a Mr Metcalfe of the Tower Hamlets Militia. This last sum may have come from Charlotte's share in

'some Mills etc' that her aunt said she owned in Leicester. In London she had two further relatives, a sister (Mrs Smithwaite, whose address was given as Bruton Street), and a cousin (Mrs Horton's son William, a shopkeeper in Newgate Street).⁷

According to Charlotte's evidence when interviewed by Coke's lawyer Mr Hanrott, she and Robert Edwards were married on a Sunday and on the following Friday Edwards left her to return to India. She says she only slept with him for one night. However they had made plans for their future: once settled in India Edwards was to send for her, and in the meantime she was to seek employment. As a married woman Charlotte would find it hard to obtain a good position if she was to continue as a servant, so they agreed to keep the marriage a secret. Edwards was evidently not able to provide for his wife even for a few months, and it was he who arranged for her to go to Holkham as housekeeper under her maiden name of Flower. In so doing he was hardly placing her in a situation of protection and comfort, as Gill reported.⁸

Two letters from Edwards have survived from this time, both written on board ship at Portsmouth on 3 and 5 April 1793 and addressed to Mrs Edwards at 65 Mount Street, Grosvenor Square. In the first he writes that the weather is bad, 'the wind is fowl' (sic), and he hopes to hear from her before the ship sails: 'We shall go in Company with about thirty sail, four of which are Ships of war ...' He asks her to address her letters to him in India at Madras and put them in a box in the India House in the city: he says Mr Metcalf is often going into the city and 'will put them in for you'. He ends, 'Good bye my Dear Girl.' This further reference to a Mr Metcalf, though not the Mr Metcalf of the Militia mentioned above, suggests a Holkham link: Coke's lawyers in London at that time were Messrs Hanrott and Metcalf, with offices at 5 New Square, Lincoln's Inn. By now it would seem that Charlotte had left her employ with Mr Pierrepoint and been staying with or working at Mr Metcalf's house, and that Metcalf knew of the marriage.⁹

The following month Charlotte set out for Holkham, arriving on 28 May with luggage labels, if she had any, marked Charlotte Flower. Charlotte's predecessor at Holkham, Elizabeth Crump, had been there less than three years, and it was agreed that Charlotte's wages were to be the same as Elizabeth's: £25 a year.¹⁰ Her employer was Mr Thomas William Coke, an MP and landowner. Where there was a master in the house all domestic servants were employed by him: it was the man of the house who provided the money to pay their wages, and consequently it was to him that their primary loyalties lay. Coke had been married since 1775 and had two daughters, Jane and Anne.

Charlotte made a favourable impression at Holkham, which was fortunate since her husband Robert Edwards was 'disappointed' in India and did not stay there long. He returned to England in the following summer of 1794 and went at once to Holkham. On his arrival Charlotte 'mentioned' the marriage and this was accepted by Mr and Mrs Coke, who showed some tolerance of the deception: not only did Charlotte continue in her post as housekeeper, but Edwards was allowed to stay with her for six weeks. During this time it was proposed that Edwards might take an inn at Fakenham, though the evidence for this is slight. Edwards certainly did not see himself as an innkeeper, since at the end of his stay it was agreed that Charlotte should carry on at Holkham while he returned to Town to seek a post in service. Before too long he secured a place with Lord Harewood as his Groom d'Chambre.

Prior to leaving Holkham, Edwards arranged with the Cokes that he would visit his wife once a year, but he did not encourage her to visit him either in Yorkshire, where Lord Harewood's seat was, or in London — 'he objected'. There is no record to say whether Edwards did visit his wife during the following three years as he said he would, but since he later repeatedly 'blamed himself for neglecting her' he probably did not. As housekeeper at Holkham Charlotte would

have been expected to remain in the country while the family were in London, generally about six months a year, during which time she was in charge of admitting and entertaining visitors who came to see the house as tourists (on Tuesdays).

In the spring of 1795 two babies were born in the mansion at Holkham. The first was born in March to Mrs Coke (her third surviving child, a daughter, Elizabeth Wilhelmina); on 10 May, Charlotte the housekeeper gave birth to a son, whom she named Robert. In his account of the trial Gill says that the father of this child was Edwards, and that Mr and Mrs Coke were so well pleased with her conduct that:

...they allowed it to be brought up in the house. In this manner the two [Charlotte and Edwards] lived not unhappily in the mean time and with the consoling hope of soon settling together and employing their mutual exertions in the education of their children.

Elizabeth Wilhelmina Coke flourished but little Robert Edwards did not, and in January 1798 he died. Poor Charlotte, despite the undoubted kindness and sympathy of Mrs Coke, would have been somewhat isolated, as were all Upper Servants. Hers was a privileged but solitary position: she did not mix with the other servants, but had her own separate accommodation and a maid. Now it is hard not to take on the tone of Gill and the three-volume novel, for there was one person who was willing to ease her pain: Francis Crick the Holkham steward. Crick, a married man, had been at Holkham since 1786 when he is entered in the Account Books as Mr Coke's Valet. He became Steward in 1793. In 1798, the year baby Robert died, Crick was 43 years old and Mrs Sarah Crick, his wife, 50. They were a childless couple.¹¹

One fact is beyond dispute, Crick fell for Charlotte and only a few months after her little boy was buried, Charlotte was pregnant again. This time she did not continue as housekeeper but in July 1798, according to a later report of the King's Bench Trial in the *Norwich Mercury* of 4 July 1801, she 'asked permission to go to Cromer for her health, and did not return'. Cromer was well established as a bathing resort at this date.

In her own account, taken by dictation by Coke's lawyer, Charlotte makes no mention of Cromer but says she went to London on leaving Holkham. From there she wrote to Robert Edwards to inform him of her situation, but gave him no contact address. She was at pains to point out that not only was her husband in receipt of all her money, but that she had never cost him a penny.

Edwards was alarmed at receiving her letter but it was not until two months later, in September, that he wrote to Charlotte's cousin William Horton asking her whereabouts and stating that he was very anxious to find her. William Horton had long since known of her semi-secret marriage. However, learning from his mother Mrs Anne Horton of Charlotte's present situation, William was disinclined to help Edwards. He simply told Edwards that Charlotte was 'comfortably situated', adding that a settlement was to be made on her by the father of the unhappy child, though he did not know who he was. Edwards wrote back thanking him.

Soon afterwards Edwards was in London and called on Horton at his shop in Newgate Street, again asking to know Charlotte's address. Again Horton refused. Edwards appeared perfectly calm, and not angry with Charlotte, but concerned nonetheless. Edwards persuaded Horton to invite Charlotte to a meeting, and although Horton agreed, Charlotte refused. At this second meeting with Horton, despite the non-appearance of his estranged wife, Edwards continued to play the humble husband. He acknowledged he was to blame and that she was a 'neglected woman'.

When William Horton reported this to Charlotte she softened, and went with her maid Ann Jordon to call on Edwards at Lord Harewood's a few days later, on a Friday night. During the visit Edwards repeated he was to blame, and so reconciled were they that Charlotte agreed he might accompany her back to her lodgings in Islington, which he did. At Islington he stayed over an hour, talking to Charlotte and repeatedly asked her who the father of her child was — but this she refused to tell him. Edwards called on Charlotte a second time when her aunt Mrs Horton was present. He must have had the day off, for Mrs Horton in her evidence described how Edwards breakfasted, dined and drank tea there. She alleged that Edwards showed no anger towards Charlotte at first, but treated her with the 'greatest tenderness and affection'. Charlotte re-assured Edwards that he 'might make himself easy, as she was provided for'. However, this harmonious state did not last. After tea (usually taken at 7pm) Edwards, tired of being placated, took on the role of irate husband; getting up, he searched Charlotte's pockets and pocket books but found nothing. This only made him more angry: he wanted to find a letter that would lead to the discovery of the child's father. He asked to search the house but Charlotte resisted. She told him that he had already got all her money and that he was welcome to it, and asked only to be left alone, assuring him that she would be no expense to him. It was a day of high emotion. Mrs Ann Horton continued: 'On the whole he seemed to treat her with great affection, but constantly appeared anxious to know who the Father was. She [Charlotte] was greatly concerned, cried much, and Edwards took her on his knee and kissed her.'

Having failed to achieve his objective of discovering the name of his wife's lover, it would seem that Edwards was now despairing. After leaving her he went next to Holkham and looked through more of Charlotte's boxes which had been left behind: although he found a number of letters in them, there were 'none that were material'. Next, he arranged to have the boxes sent to Charlotte in London.

After his abortive visit to Holkham, and realising he would make no more headway with his wife, Edwards asked for one more meeting with William Horton before returning to Yorkshire. He and Horton met at the Saracen's Head and again Edwards repeated his inquiries as to the identity of the father, saying once more how very much he pitied Charlotte's situation and blamed himself. Horton could not enlighten Edwards, the two men parted, and from September 1798 until March 1801 no more was heard of Edwards, although, as Charlotte stated, he knew where to find her. During this time she lived partly in Islington and, after the baby was born, spent eighteen months at Stowmarket in Suffolk, at Mrs Bayly's.¹²

From the time of her arrival in London in July 1798 Charlotte had been visited by Crick several times. According to evidence later given at the trial, they lived together as man and wife in the house in Islington where Charlotte had taken lodgings in her own name of Mrs Edwards, and where she was seen to be with child. The baby was duly born in London, in January 1799: it was a girl, and named Charlotte. A letter from Crick written shortly after the birth and produced at the trial began by addressing Charlotte as his dearest life, congratulated her on her recovery from pain, and trusted she rested comfortably at night with 'his dear babe'. It likewise informed her that he had been very ill with a fever, an illness which made him appear very delicate, and concluded by asking her to meet him in London at Furnival's Inn coffee-house where he would supply her with some money, as he supposed she must be in need.¹³ Why he was unable to visit Charlotte at the lodgings is not explained. He had already settled some money on her, with her cousin William Horton as one of the trustees.

In about March 1799 Charlotte moved to Stowmarket to live with William Bayly and his wife, an arrangement probably made by Crick: it was thought that country air would be good for the child. Towards the end of her time in Suffolk Charlotte heard rumours that Robert Edwards was

making inquiries about the law and threatening to bring an action. By this time, however, Edwards had got it into his head that the real father of Charlotte's baby was Thomas William Coke. Francis Crick arranged for Charlotte to leave Suffolk and to move to Mrs Painter's in Islington. Charlotte moved in 'immediately'. It was now September 1800. A month later Charlotte moved to Paul Street, Islington, to lodge in the house of a Mr Hatton and his daughter.¹⁴

Turbulent events took place in Mr Hatton's house six months later, which Hatton recorded on 3 April 1801. He stated that while living at his house Charlotte had no visitors for the first few months, other than her sister and another relative or two. However on a day towards the end of March 1801, at seven o'clock in the morning, Edwards banged on the door of the Paul Street house and was let in by Mr Hatton's maid. He had brought an attorney with him. The maid informed Edwards that Mrs Edwards was not yet stirring. Edwards and the attorney told the maid they were relations, and wanted to speak to Charlotte at once. 'On the maids going up they followed her and Edwards rushed in to the Bed Room and immediately went and took Mrs Edwards's Pockets from under her Head and took out her Keys and everything else in them.' Mr Hatton was woken up by the commotion; going into the room, he found Edwards opening the drawers and taking possession of all he found there. Edwards then went upstairs to another floor and opened a box belonging to Charlotte and turned everything out, taking away a number of her pocket books. He then came down and 'basted' (sic) all the papers he had got from the dining room, and next opened a little writing desk and took all the papers from there. Mr Hatton expressed his concern to the attorney, saying he hoped no (further) disturbance would be made in the house; the attorney answered that Mr Edwards only wanted papers concerning an action they were intending to bring against Mr Coke. When Mr Hatton asked if he meant 'Mr Coke of Holcomb', the attorney said 'Yes'.

At this point Charlotte came into the room, which put a stop to further conversation. The Attorney then 'desired Mr Hatton to take notice that Mr Edwards would pay no Debts that Mrs Edwards should contract', upon which Charlotte replied: 'Why Edwards you know you had all my Money, and what is to become of me, am I to go to the Workhouse? To which Mr Edwards made no reply. Then Charlotte insisted on seeing what paper he had taken and they sat themselves down and Mr Hatton left them looking over the papers.'¹⁵ Whether at this stage Edwards seriously suspected Coke of being the father or was taking a general swipe of frustration at Holkham may only be guessed at. If he could prove the father was Coke, however, then he might expect to receive a considerable sum in damages.

Charlotte confirmed in her evidence that Edwards and the attorney Mr Harpur called at her lodgings while she was still in bed, forced open the door and taking away all her letters and papers, among which were letters from Francis Crick, 'but not signed or directed'. She says the two men stayed an hour and a half, and that Edwards hoped the papers would enable him to bring an action for damages against Mr Coke. She added that Edwards and Harpur warned Mr Hatton not to trust her, and ended her evidence by saying that Edwards had had between four and five hundred pounds from her.

Charlotte's evidence is dated 18 April 1801. On 25 May she wrote a short letter to Mr Dunn of Messrs Hanrott and Metcalf, repeating that Edwards already had all her money and stating that her health was much impaired and that were it better she would be glad to earn her living as she had formerly: she hoped this would all be taken into consideration. This letter must have been in answer to one written to her by Coke's lawyers, which has not survived.¹⁶ Charlotte was afraid, with good reason, that a successful legal action against Crick could bankrupt him and that she would lose the annuity he had settled on her and upon which she was now dependant, since her notoriety would be a serious impediment in finding future employment.

Edwards was obliged to renounce the idea of bringing an action against Coke: despite having raided Charlotte's Paul Street lodgings and read her personal correspondence, he still had no real evidence as to the father's identity (none of the letters were signed), and his attorney may have persuaded him that to pursue Coke would end badly whereas an action against Crick would at least stand a chance of producing damages. Who suggested to him that Crick could have been the father is unknown, but Edwards now sued for divorce citing Francis Crick, and the date was set for 26 June 1801.

The trial was reported in the *Norwich Mercury* of 4 July 1801. It took place before Lord Kenyon, a judge known to be very hard on adulterers. The main evidence produced by the plaintiff, Robert Edwards, was the unsigned letter, already quoted, from Crick to Charlotte written after the birth of the child. Edwards then played a trump card. In consequence of reading that letter, and because it had not been signed, he had hired a detective to follow Crick's movements when Crick was in London. Crick had been followed to the house in Paul Street, and was seen to emerge some time later arm in arm with Charlotte. By making enquiries, the detective discovered that Crick had visited Charlotte when she lived at Mrs Holder's in 1798, and that they had lived there as man and wife. This proved the adultery. It was also proved that the plaintiff had behaved with the greatest affection towards Charlotte and that they appeared to be particularly attached to each other.

The evidence gathered by Mr Dunn of Metcalf and Hanrott on Crick's behalf — even the presence of Mrs Horton to give witness on Charlotte's character — did little good. The Attorney General concluded for the defendant Crick, arguing that since the case was brought for the sole purpose of the damages, the plaintiff had entirely neglected his wife and had already received all the earnings of her labour, and that the defendant had made reparation for the injury by settling an annuity of £60 upon the lady, surely he should not be punished further. All of this was rather wasted on Lord Kenyon, the judge. He replied that the number of cases of this kind to come before him of late depicting the profligacy of the time, and that bygone examples, instead of serving to stem the torrent, seemed to have added new strength to vice. It was highly necessary, in order to check this growing evil, that juries should press heavily on the purses of the defendants in such actions. He abhorred the fact that the defendant was middle-aged and married, and that the husband's absence on business was offered as an excuse.

In the end Crick got off lightly with a fine of only £400, instead of the thousands he might otherwise have expected, and indeed could have afforded, to pay. Despite the extensive publicity Coke showed a remarkable tolerance towards Crick: he was not dismissed as might have been expected, but stayed on as steward at Holkham to his death in 1814. His wife too appears to have forgiven him, perhaps because reconciliation was a condition of his continued employment, for in his will Crick refers to her as his 'dear wife' Sarah, leaving her sufficient funds for 'comfortable support and maintenance during her life'. She lived until 1822. Crick also provided for the daughter of his liaison with Charlotte. He left an allowance for her education and maintenance, and in 1814 Charlotte and the child were still living in the house in Paul Street, Islington.

Conclusion

While Gill asserted that the trials he recorded were 'humouress, ridiculous' and sometimes 'amorous', by publishing them Gill showed his readers that divorces were open to the well-off middling classes, and not merely confined to the elite. In a sample of 73 trials recorded by him, only 22 involved titled members of the aristocracy. The main interest in the first of his Norfolk trials lies in the mobility of those involved. Not only did the Rev. John Greene, curate at Grimston, travel to Norwich to socialise, where he met his wife; later on, having left King's Lynn for

London, he was able to call on witnesses there who had often visited him in Norfolk. Elisabeth Elstobb of Bloomsbury (not the noted Anglo-Saxon scholar Elizabeth Elstob, 1683–1756) had known the Greens for fourteen years and ‘often visited them in their house of residence at Grimston and saw them in the houses of several other families’. Elizabeth and Peter Magnet of Westminster had known Greene for twenty years; Elizabeth’s father had the Dolphin Inn in Norwich, frequented by Greene, and she had known his wife Elizabeth since infancy. In her testimony Elizabeth Magnet confirmed that after the Greene’s marriage she had visited them in Grimston and several times in Lynn after they had moved there. The expense of travel at this period is generally thought to have acted as a deterrent, yet considerable distances were involved in these journeyings.

The second trial concerns a husband humiliated and usurped: as already mentioned, no middle-class woman in the 18th century could commit adultery with a servant without overturning the whole household. Rather than supporting their mistress, as was often the case in trials for adultery, the servant witnesses turned against her. Lt. Lockwood was not looking for financial gain by divorcing his wife but expected to be awarded a large enough sum in damages to ensure that Simeon Knowles, unable to pay, would spend the rest of his life imprisoned as a debtor.

The last of these trials, concerning the household at Holkham, almost tells us more about Thomas William Coke and the running of his household than about adultery *per se*, though it does illustrate the vulnerability of female servants. The numbers of female upper servants who bore illegitimate children and needed to give them up in order to seek re-employment was surprisingly high according to the records of the Foundling Hospital, which suggest that 37 per cent did so by 1820.¹⁷ Charlotte Edwards was fortunate that her lover stood by her.

In the 19th century a gradual change in the attitude to divorce emerged. Slowly it was acknowledged that a woman who committed adultery was not necessarily a threat to property (the great fear being that she might produce a bastard who could inherit an estate); in 1857 the first divorce bill was introduced into Parliament, after which men ceased to be compensated in money for the loss of their honour.¹⁸

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1. Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce* (Oxford 1992), 249
2. *ibid.*, 233–4
3. Gill’s *Trials for Adultery*, vol. 6, facsimile Series ed. R. Trumbach (New York and London 1985).
4. Gill’s *Trials for Adultery*, vol. 5, facsimile Series ed. R. Trumbach (New York and London 1985).
5. Tim Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender 1600–1750* (Harlow, 2000), 120.
6. Gill’s *A New Collection of Trials for Adultery from 1780 to the present year 1802*, vol. 2.
7. Holkham Archives F/TWC Bundle 1, Mrs Ann Horton’s account.
8. Holkham Archives F/TWC Bundle 1, Mrs Charlotte Edward’s account.
9. Holkham Archives F/TWC Bundle 1.
10. Holkham Archives Household Accounts A/46.
11. Wills of Francis Crick PRO PROB 11/1569 and Sarah Crick, NRO Consistory Court 181 Sadler.
12. Holkham Archives F/TWC Bundle 1.
13. Gill’s *A New Collection of Trials for Adultery*, vol. 2.
14. Holkham Archives F/TWC Bundle 1.
15. *ibid.*
16. *ibid.*
17. John R. Gillis, ‘Servants, sexual relations and the risks of illegitimacy in London 1801–1900’, in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan and Judith R. Walowitz, eds, *Sex and Class in Women’s History* (London 1983), 117–18.
18. Lawrence Stone, *op.cit.*, 289–91.

Appendix: Holkham correspondence relating to Charlotte Crick Wall

Letter from Charlotte Edwards from Paul St to Mr Dunn, no 5 New Square, Lincoln's Inn dated May 25 1801:

Sir, the inclosed is the memorandum my Uncle made Mr Horton with the pocket book, when he attends the trial — and I will swear to my Uncle's writing if necessary. Respecting the trial I am Unacquainted with the forme — therefore how I — have a right to ask for some Allowance from my Husband, I leave to Mr Dunn better judgement — as I have already said my Husband has all my money — I never cost him a shilling, nor have I at this time contracted a debt to that amount, for him to pay — My health is much impaired, and [even] were it good, I have not the opportunity to earn my living I had formerly, I hope this will be considered and shall ever remain Sir your obliged C. Edwards.

What happened to Charlotte Edwards and her child after the trial cannot be known precisely, but there are extant documents which answer in part. The account books at Holkham testify to the fact that Francis Crick remained at Holkham as steward until his death in 1814. In his will drawn up in 1808 and proved in June 1815 [PRO prob. 11/1569] he appointed Thomas William Coke and the Fakenham lawyer William Stokes his executors. After providing for his wife, he left a legacy for the 'education, maintenance and bringing up of Charlotte Crick Edwards aged about ten years the daughter of Charlotte Edwards the wife of Robert Edwards the said Charlotte Edwards now residing in Paul Street Pentonville' [Islington]. The child was to receive this allowance until she was 21 or until she married if before that age; he had also made provision for her mother.

As executor and lawyer William Stokes was responsible for paying the annuities, but he was a careless and disorganised man who inefficiency exasperated Crick's successor at Holkham, Francis Blaikie, who wrote in 1817, '...the only business I have been able to draw thro' the mazes of your office ... business hanging so long upon the anvil pray let us set seriously to work and make up for lost time.' William Stokes died shortly afterwards and it was left to his son Henry to sort out the muddle.

By 1819 Charlotte Crick Edwards had married and was now Charlotte Crick Wall. A note in the Holkham Archives of 4 January 1819 states 'Mrs Crick Wall: Mr Stokes shewed Mr Blaikie a letter received from the Comptroller of the Stamp Office in Norwich who advises the Executors not to pay the Duty until Mrs Wall is of age.' Several letters concerning Charlotte Crick Wall's inheritance are preserved in the Letter Books 1820–1822 and in F/TWC 5. These show that Henry Stokes was an improvement on his father, but not a marked one.

The first letter from Charlotte Crick Wall is addressed to Mr Hanrott, Coke's London lawyer, suggesting she had had a poor response from Henry Stokes. She wrote on 13 April 1821:

... As you mentioned your intention of sending some papers for my signature before the 6 instant, I think it right to tell you none have been received by me, I will be obliged to you to inform me the cause of the delay; and I regret I give you any additional trouble in this business. Charlotte Crick Wall.

Hanrott wrote immediately to Henry Stokes, who replied on 21 April 1821:

... upon my return I found a letter from the party stating that the payment of the money must be deferred till Midsummer as he was informed that if he sold out of the funds before the Dividends were due he should be a great loser ... I am afraid I must request you to write to Mrs Wall to wait until Midsummer at which time she shall certainly not be disappointed ... I am going to Norwich next week when I will try what I can with Mrs Crick [the widow]. I hope two months won't cause much inconvenience to Mrs Wall, I only wish we had fixed Midsummer at first ...

An example of Charlotte's difficulties is shown in her letter to Mr Hanrott of 25 April 1821:

Sir, I am most vexed at the purport of Mr Stokes's letter than perhaps you, who are unacquainted with the many reasons I have to dread delay from that quarter, can well imagine. I am so unacquainted with business that I cannot even form an opinion, much less return to you one, on the subject and must depend upon you, to act as you judge best in this business, if the delay ... but when I recollect the many very many letters I have formerly written to Mr Stokes (the Father) merely to request information to which I very rarely received any ... answer ... the Son ... should now be prepared for payment as it is more than a year since I informed him I was of age in January 1820. ... Do you recommend me to draw on Messrs Hammersley and Co for the £25 which I was to have on the 6th April, but which I deferred till this business is settled, or is it best left till 1st July at which time, and the 1st January I have been accustomed to draw on them. Do you know whether Mr Coke is aware of Mr Stokes's inability to settle this business now? I regret to intrude so long on your time and attention, on a subject, which probably to you will appear but of small importance but my life has series of ruses [?] and suspence that I cannot but be anxious for a final arrangement with Mr Stokes; and feel perhaps more than the occasion warrents at the disappointment, the part in Mr Stokes's letter in which he mentions Mrs Crick I suppose relates to business in which you are concerned on her account. I shall be in London at midsummer when, if you cannot induce Mr Stokes to make an earlier settlement I trust at least it may be done, though confess my fears are much greater than my hopes. I shall be anxious to know what an arrangement you make with Mr Stokes, and I shall await your opinion as to the Draft on Hammersleys and trusting you will excuse the trouble I give you, I am Sir your ob Servt Charlotte Wall.

Charlotte Crick Wall never mentions her mother in the course of this correspondence; while that might seem unremarkable, when coupled with other evidence it could suggest that her mother was no longer living. The address her letters were written from are College House Arundel, Sussex and Worthing. In a letter dated some years later (1837) we learn that the child Charlotte Crick Edwards had been bought up by a Miss Maria Parker of College House, Arundel, 'whom she regarded almost as a mother' and was so fond of that she choose later to live near to her at Worthing. There is no indication who her husband Mr Wall might have been, but possibly he was a relation of her father's: in Mrs Crick's will of 1822 she left £250 to a John Wall of Holt, farmer, 'the nephew of my husband' [NRO MF 463].

The financial complexities both touching Charlotte Crick Wall's inheritance and Mrs Crick's fill many pages of the Holkham Letter Books and Bundle F/TWC 5, and were not resolved until 1822, the process being complicated by the death of Mrs Crick. In the penultimate letter from this period, written by Charlotte Crick Wall to the London lawyer Hanrott and dated 16 December 1821, Charlotte says that she is at College House but about to go to Devon where 'my address for the next four weeks will be Captain A.J. Griffiths, R.N., Torquay, Newton Abbots, Devon'. Captain, later Admiral, Griffiths was Miss Maria Parker's brother-in-law. No more is heard from Charlotte Crick Wall until 1837 when a letter addressed to Thomas William Coke (by now the Earl of Leicester) is received from Mr James Ridgeway of 169 Piccadilly. Ridgeway states that Charlotte is too distressed to write herself having just lost a dear friend Miss Maria Parker, and that he is acting on the instructions of Admiral Griffiths who has asked him to see to Charlotte's affairs. By this date Mr Wall is no longer, and Charlotte has married again: she is now Charlotte Crick Cuff. Ridgeway writes to enquire about the non-payment of Charlotte's annuity of £30. It is duly paid, and from that date onwards until at least 1848 her name appears each December in the account books. It remains to be discovered who Miss Maria Parker was, and how Charlotte Crick Edwards came into her care.