

A GEORGIAN COUNTRY GENTLEMAN AND HIS WORLD: THE DIARIES OF JOHN FREWEN TURNER OF COLD OVERTON HALL, 1781–1805

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The diaries of John Frewen Turner (1755–1829), of Cold Overton Hall, Leicestershire, were written between 1781 and 1805. They describe the life of a country gentleman in the later Georgian period, and provide an often intimate insight into his personal life as well as the cultural world he inhabited, the range of his social networks, and the considerations that shaped his view of his role and standing. The diaries also shed light on the nature of landed society and of patterns of inheritance which enabled scattered estates to descend to one junior branch of a family, and so form the basis of considerable wealth in the nineteenth century. Written in pocket notebooks, the diaries have remained unpublished and form part of a large archive of the family's papers from the seventeenth century held in East Sussex Record Office.

At the beginning of the year 1781, John Frewen, the 25-year-old, Oxford-educated son of a Leicestershire rector, began writing a record of all that he had done each day.

On Monday 1 January, he noted that he had:

'Transcribed from Chessher's manuscript.
Inquired of Bracebridge about a horse.
Rode out with sister Mary after dinner.
Read *She Stoops to Conquer*.'

The following day he wrote that he:

'Rode from Orton [Cold Overton] to Oakham with Mary.
Returned to dinner, after, much inclined to sleep.
Read about revolution in Sweden in 1772 – Gustavus ambitious and crafty
Had thoughts about my future management in life.'¹

They were two unremarkable days in the life of a scholarly, well-to-do young man, pursuing a leisurely life in the company of friends and family but uncertain about

¹ *The Diary of John Frewen Turner* (hereafter, *Diary*), 1 & 2 January 1781 (East Sussex Record Office, FRE/745). 'Orton' was an ancient name for Cold Overton (J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, 2, part 1 (London, 1798), p. 137). 'Chessher' was Dr Robert Chessher, a surgeon who lived in Hinckley and a close friend (see below); 'Bracebridge' was probably a local farmer or dealer, and not a member of the landowning family who had property in Witherley and Fenny Drayton and in Warwickshire.



Fig. 1. John Frewen Turner in later life, from a painting by Sir Martin Archer Shee (1769–1850).

Courtesy of Frewen College, Northiam, East Sussex.



Fig. 2. John Frewen Turner's wife, Eleanor (nee Clarke) painted in 1845 by Margaret Carpenter (1793–1872).
Courtesy of Frewen College, Northiam, East Sussex.

what lay ahead. For 21 of the next 25 years, until the end of 1805, he maintained a daily account of his activities. He kept note of the people he met, the places he visited around the country and the extensive estates he was to inherit, the books he read, his religious faith and his reflections on the course of his life, and private thoughts on the state of his health and that of his friends and relatives. The diaries were written in pocket notebooks measuring 16 × 9cm (6¼ inches by 3½), with one page for each week, running from Monday to Sunday, and a facing page which provided for an intermittent account of his routine financial expenditure. He generally used copies of Kearsley's Pocket Ledger, which he bought each year for 1s. 6d., and also contained an almanac including lists of London banks, members of parliament and tables for financial calculations. This format limited on the amount of information that he could set down: a full day's entry contained four or five lines, amounting to approximately 40 words, but often less, and while it was mostly written in full sentences, it sometimes consisted of scribbled jottings in abbreviated form.

The diaries, therefore, have no literary pretensions. Nor are they a record of his direct involvement in major historical events, or of encounters with leading statesmen or thinkers of the time. They have remained unpublished as part of a substantial archive of Frewen family papers held in East Sussex Record Office. What they do describe is the life of a country gentleman of the time, providing an often intimate insight into his personal life as well as the cultural world he inhabited, the range of his social networks, the considerations that shaped his view of his role and standing and, quite simply, the routine of his days, and how a prosperous individual, who followed no profession or occupation, spent his time and money. It is a way of life that would be familiar to any reader of the novels of Jane Austen, which describe a distinct social hierarchy populated by minor gentry and superior aristocrats, military officers, prosperous merchants and poor clergymen. In the reality of Frewen's life as much as in fiction, their sundry social worlds intertwined in a stream of 'calls' and of hospitality given and received, impulsive dashes to London and extended visits to Bath, and of the rise and fall in the fortunes of families determined by the sometimes unforeseen consequences of marriage and inheritance.

The diaries also mark a period of transition in Frewen's life, from John Frewen the rector's son, towards becoming, in his later years, Lt Col John Frewen Turner MP DL JP, the owner of estates in four counties and a property in London. He died in 1829 at the age of 73 and passed his property to his two surviving sons, both of whom became members of parliament.

THE FREWEN INHERITANCE

In many respects the Frewen family may be regarded as representative of the landed gentry, which from the fourteenth century to the early twentieth, and beyond, played a central part in local and national affairs. Standing in the social hierarchy between the peers and the yeomen, the gentry numbered some 10,000 families or so by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and ranged in wealth and status from modest squires with 1,000 acres or less to magnates on a regional and national stage, with land and five-figure incomes that matched the wealthiest peers and merchants. As well as being significant landowners and employers, they provided

many members of parliament, magistrates and county office holders, were patrons of charity and the arts, and permeated walks of life such as the church, the law and the army.²

For the young John Frewen, however, it was not obvious that he would rise to his later heights. He came from a junior branch of a long-established landed family with little immediate expectation of inheriting its estates. He was born on 1 August 1755, the only son of the Rev. Thomas Frewen (1708–91), the Rector of Sapcote from 1732 to 1778, and Esther (1723–1803), the daughter of Benjamin Simkin of Cropston. He had two sisters, Mary (1753–1811) and Selina (1760–84), neither of whom married. Frewen's upbringing was typical of the son of such a family: in January 1774 he was sent to Rugby school and 10 years later attended Queen's College, Oxford, where he was awarded a BA in 1778; then in February 1779 he entered the Middle Temple to train as a barrister.³

His fortunes changed, however, as a result of failure in the latter half of the eighteenth century in the male lines of not one but three gentry families: those of Laton, Turner and the senior branch of Frewen. The background to how this came about provides the context of John Frewen's story and an understanding of how he was able to lead the lifestyle of the wealthy country gentleman, as well as helping explain some of the inner doubts, which, from the evidence of his diaries, continually troubled him. It also serves as an illustration of a more general question in the history of landed families during this period: it demonstrates one of the ways in which previously separate estates came together, not through purchase by wealthy newcomers, for example, but as a result of the accidents of birth and death within existing propertied families and the complexities of the laws of inheritance.

In 1777, when he was aged 69, his father, Thomas, inherited several thousand acres in Leicestershire, Sussex and Kent and a house in London, following the death of his childless cousin, Laton Frewen Turner (1694–1777) of Brafferton Hall, North Yorkshire. These properties descended through three distinct lines.

First, were the Sussex and Kent estates and the London property, which represented the main holdings of the principal Frewen line, with their seat at Brickwall House, in Northiam, 12 miles from Hastings. All the branches of the Frewen family, leading to John the diarist, were descended from Stephen Frewen (1600–79), the Master of the Skinners' Company in London and the younger brother of Accepted Frewen (1588–1664), Archbishop of York from the Reformation in 1660 until his death.⁴ In 1666, Stephen bought Brickwall House, in the village where the family had lived since the late sixteenth century, and soon after

² From a large literature on landed society: J. V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England 1660–1914* (Oxford, 1986); D. Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy* (Yale, 1994); J. Habakkuk, *Marriage, debt and the estates system: English landownership 1650–1950* (Oxford, 1994); P. Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689–1798* (Oxford, 1991); G. E. Mingay, *The Gentry: the Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (London, 1976); L. and J. C. F. Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540–1880* (Oxford, 1986); F. M. L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1963).

³ *Rugby School Register 1675–1857* (Rugby, 1933), 1, p. 74; J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses 1715–1886* (Oxford, 1891), 2, p. 1450; *Middle Temple Admissions Register 1501–1781* (London, 1949), 1, p. 387.

⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter, ODNB) (Oxford, 2004), 21, pp. 16–18.

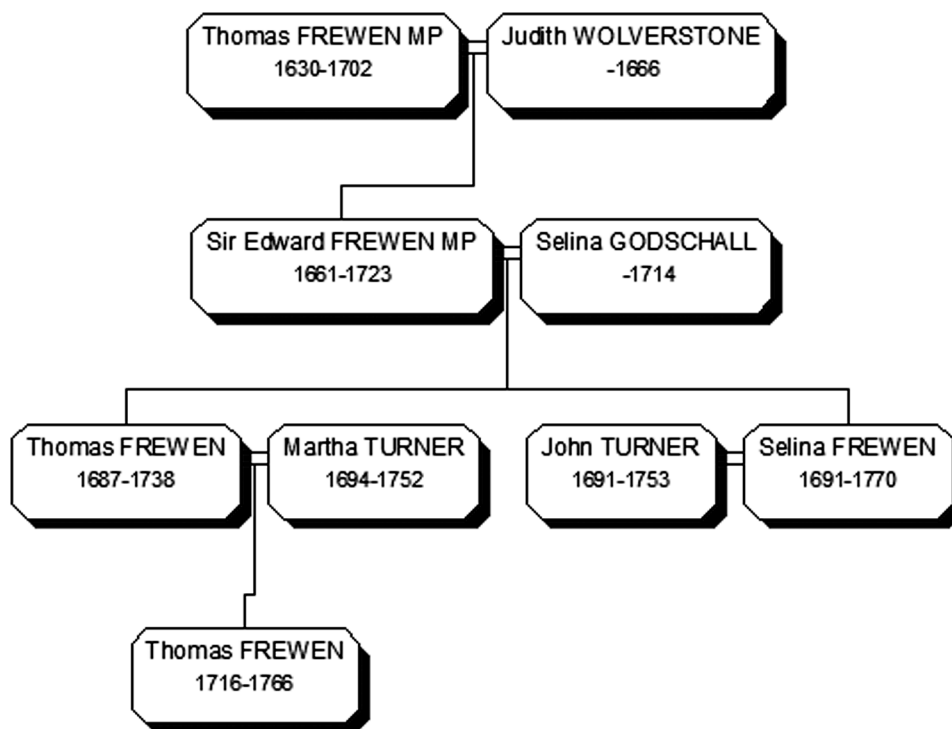


Fig. 3. The descendants of the first marriage of Thomas Frewen MP (1630–1702).

purchased land at Brede and Beckley, a few miles to the south, and at Hawkhurst in west Kent and Bonby Hall, north of Brigg in Lincolnshire.⁵ Stephen's only surviving son, Thomas Frewen (1630–1702), who represented Rye in various parliaments between 1679 and 1698, married three times.⁶ The Kent and Sussex estates were eventually inherited by Thomas Frewen (1716–66), a great-grandson from his first marriage (Fig. 2).

He had been forced to sell some of the family's property in Kent and Lincolnshire to pay off debts, and when he died, unmarried, the remaining estates, but principally at Northiam, had passed to Laton Frewen. The latter was a descendant of the oldest son of Thomas's second marriage and by 1766 the senior living male member of the family (Fig. 3). On Laton Frewen's death without children, 11 years later, the next in line was the Rev. Thomas Frewen Turner of Sapcote, who was descended from the fourth son of Thomas's second marriage. With little realistic hope of inheriting the family's fortunes, this line had followed the well-trodden path for younger sons of the gentry into the Church and so

⁵ Burke, *Landed Gentry* (1965), 1, pp. 290–2; A. L. Frewen, *A History of Brickwall in Sussex* (London, 1909), p. 59.

⁶ B. D. Henning (ed.), *History of Parliament – The House of Commons 1660–1690* (London, 1983), 2, pp. 368–9; D. W. Hayton, E. Cruickshank and S. Handley (eds), *House of Commons 1690–1715* (Cambridge, 2002), 3, pp. 1121–2.

maintained the family's strong clerical tradition: Thomas Frewen Turner's father, the Rev. John Frewen (1676–1735), was the Rector of Sidbury in Devon, Tysoe, Warwickshire and Walton-on-Trent, Derbyshire.⁷

Second, were the properties in Leicestershire, at Cold Overton and Sapcote, which originated not with the Frewen but the Turner family. They were owned lastly by John Turner (1691–1753), who settled them, for the duration of her life, on his wife, Selina. She was a grand-daughter of Thomas Frewen, through his first marriage, and a cousin of Laton Frewen and the Rev. Thomas Frewen of Sapcote. Following her death in 1770 they passed to Laton Frewen, who added the name of Turner to his own, and when he died they came (with the Sussex and Kent estates) to the Rev. Thomas Frewen, who also assumed the additional, but unhyphenated, surname of Turner.

Third, after the death of Laton Frewen's wife, Mary, in 1786, John Frewen had directly inherited land at Winton and Kirkby Sigston, in the North Riding of Yorkshire near Northallerton. These estates had originally belonged to the family of Laton Frewen's paternal grandmother, Bridget, the daughter of Sir Thomas Laton.⁸

To the Yorkshire property John Frewen added the Sussex, Kent and Leicestershire ones after his father died in November 1791, when he too adopted Turner in addition to his own family name. There were other ties between the Frewens and the Turner family of Sapcote and Cold Overton, which complete this summary of the family's history. The Rev. Thomas Frewen Turner's aunt, Mary Frewen (d. 1735), had married Henry Turner (1657–1724), a serjeant at law. Their son, John Turner (1691–1753), married his cousin, Selina Frewen (1691–1770), while their daughter, Martha Turner (1694–1752), married Selina's brother, Thomas Frewen (1687–1738). Thomas Frewen and Martha were the parents of the Thomas Frewen of Northiam who died in 1766. It was also as a result of these connections that Thomas Frewen Turner was appointed as Rector of Sapcote in 1738, under the patronage of John Turner. In 1778, having inherited the land, and somewhat frail, Thomas resigned the rectory in favour of Stanley Burrough (c.1726–1807), his brother-in-law, and the Headmaster of Rugby since 1759 – during which time John Frewen had been one of his pupils.⁹

Despite his degree from Oxford and his entry to the Middle Temple, it appears that John did not complete his legal studies. Instead, like many young men in similar positions, he chose to follow the life of an only son and heir, as a man of leisure, while assisting his ageing and far-from-well father in the oversight of their newly acquired properties. It was at this stage of his life that he began to write a diary.¹⁰ For 10 years, from the beginning of January 1781 until the end of 1790, he maintained it rigorously, scarcely missing a day. The handwriting suggests that it was for the most part written at the end of each day: there is sometimes an unevenness in the

⁷ Burke, *Landed Gentry*, p. 290.

⁸ Burke, *Landed Gentry*, *op. cit.*; Nichols, *History of Leicester*, 2, part 1, pp. 139–40, and 4, part 2 (1811), pp. 895, 902; Frewen, *History of Brickwall*, p. 63.

⁹ *Rugby School Register*, 1, p. xvii, Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 1, p. 197.

¹⁰ A pocket diary for 1775 survives but has few entries: there are some scribbled appointments in the first half of the year and some record of occasional financial expenditure, but it was mostly left blank (FRE/744).

script and slight variation in the ink from one day to the next, which points to different times of writing, but on occasion they flow in a manner which indicate that he might have written two or three days at once. There are no diaries, however, for 1791 and 1792, and for 1794 and 1796. If he did write any they have not survived. The earlier gaps may partly be explained first by his appointment in January 1791 as the High Sheriff of Leicestershire for the year, which would have placed demands on his time.¹¹ In November that year his father died, an event which would have affected him deeply. The diaries' contents therefore may be considered in two parts, covering first 10 consecutive years from 1781 to 1790 when John was the heir, and the 10 years of diaries between 1793 and 1805, when he was a landowner and head of the Frewen family.

THE DIARIES 1781–90: 'UNCERTAIN IN MIND'

From the 520 pages which make up the first 10 years' entries in John Frewen's diaries, together with the corresponding pages of notes on financial matters, it is possible to extract a number of themes which encapsulate his life. These include his travels around the country, locally and to places such as London and Bath, as well as to his father's various estates; his relations with members of his family and friends and his wider social circle; his leisure time pursuits, from shooting to reading; and his preoccupation with his state of mind and his, and others', health.

Frewen travelled ceaselessly, from one property to another, from friend to friend, relation to relation and town to town, to the point of restlessness. There is no record, however, that he ventured outside Britain, or that he undertook the Grand Tour before continental travel became impeded by the outbreak of war with France in 1793 and increasingly dangerous after 1803.¹² He made frequent local journeys, usually by horse from his main residence, Cold Overton Hall: it was a four-mile ride to Oakham, 20 or so to Leicester, and another 10 to Sapcote. He also frequently visited Hinckley and Rugby, where an aunt lived, conducted business in Melton Mowbray, and paid social calls to friends in other Leicestershire towns and villages. From 1781 to 1790 he visited London at least once a year, in some years twice, and in 1783 and 1790 went on three occasions, travelling by coach from Stamford or Northampton. From 1781 he also journeyed to his Sussex estate at Northiam annually and from 1787 went twice a year to collect the rents from his father's tenants. Yet only in December 1783 did he record that he had slept at Brickwall House for the first time. A stop in London on his return from Sussex would often involve a call to his bank, Glyn's, to deposit cash. He travelled to his Yorkshire property in July 1785 for just under two months, and went again in August 1786 for three weeks, taking the opportunity for sightseeing in York and Harrogate and at Fountains Abbey. These trips had the effect of limiting what had been annual visits to Bath. Although he stayed there twice in 1783 and in 1784, when he combined it with a visit to Devon and Cornwall, after 1785 he did not

¹¹ *London Gazette*, 1 February 1791.

¹² R. Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy c.1690–1820* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 10–11. From 1807–14 there was a 'complete hiatus' in European travel.

return until 1790. A more detailed description of some of these journeys is set out in the next section.

The purpose of these visits was primarily social. Wherever he went he paid calls on friends and relatives in the customary manner of someone of his class and took meals with them or stayed with them as he journeyed from place to place, returning the hospitality at Cold Overton Hall. He attended balls in Bath and elsewhere, and in company indulged in card games, backgammon, music making – he played the violin – and in London especially went to the theatre and opera. In 1786, for example, he attended a performance of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and later saw *Henry VIII*. Early in 1790 he saw Congreve's *Way of the World* and a new play called *The Haunted Tower*.¹³ His more active pastimes were the traditional ones of the country gentleman, in particular riding, shooting (which he would spend a whole week pursuing in the autumn) and fishing, but less so hunting.

It is not possible from the diaries to identify everyone with whom he socialised. In a stay in London over just over three weeks in June and July 1781, he named 27 people that he met, but it was his custom to write down only a surname. Over a two-week period spent in Sapcote and Rugby in September and October 1783 he referred to another 20. On his daily social rounds he could take breakfast with a friend or two, meet another group for dinner (his main meal, taken in the middle of the day) and join another small gathering for tea or an evening's entertainment at home. Some of his closest friends during this opening decade can, however, be identified with confidence.¹⁴ They include the surgeon Robert Chessher (1750–1831), who worked at the Middlesex Hospital until 1778 before returning to live and work in his native Hinckley.¹⁵ Chessher invented several medical devices, one of which, 'his apparatus for holding Miss Dundas's head', he showed to Frewen in 1790.¹⁶ A close friend in Leicester was the Rev. Robert Throsby (1750–1823), like Frewen an Oxford graduate.¹⁷ Throsby visited Cold Overton frequently and Frewen stayed with him on overnight journeys through Leicester, but they fell out in August 1787: Frewen wrote that he was 'sorry that Throsby was desired not to intrude so much at Orton and he left for ever about ten o'clock'.¹⁸ Their friendship resumed, however, and the following year they agreed to go to Scotland, although the idea appears not to have been carried out.¹⁹ Two other friends were also clergymen: the Oxford-educated Rev. Robert Thomlinson (1744–1801), the

¹³ *Diary*, 20 January 1790, FRE/754. This three-act comedy by James Cobb (1756–1818) was first performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, in November 1789 (*ODNB*, 12, 261). Frewen saw it again in 1793 (*Diary*, 9 April 1793, FRE/758).

¹⁴ In addition to internal clues from the diaries, other sources, some cited above, include the *ODNB*, *Burke's Peerage* and *Landed Gentry*, the *History of Parliament*, the *Victoria County History*, school, university and clerical registers, and Nichols's *History of Leicester*.

¹⁵ *ODNB*, 1, 335.

¹⁶ *Diary*, 14 October 1790, FRE/754. The mention of her by name might suggest that she was a member of the family of Henry Dundas (1742–1811), 1st Viscount Melville, who was at that time First Lord of the Admiralty under Pitt, a post he held from 1787 to 1805 (*ODNB*, 17, pp. 274–81). Among Chessher's patients were the sons of Lord Holland and the Prime Minister, George Canning (R. T. Austin, *Robert Chessher of Hinckley 1750–1831* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 43–7).

¹⁷ Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 4, p. 1417.

¹⁸ *Diary*, 17 August 1787, FRE/751.

¹⁹ *Diary*, 27 October 1788, FRE/752.

Rector of Cley in Norfolk, and the Rev. Robert Outlaw (1748–1825), a Cambridge graduate and the Rector of Longford, near Newport in Shropshire.²⁰ Frewen formed a tentative attachment with Outlaw's sister, Ann. They went walking and riding together, went on one occasion with Chessher to Uppingham, and she also rode out with Frewen's sister, Mary. One December day in 1785. Frewen's diary entry read: 'Read a little from Hume – too much romping with Miss Outlaw.'²¹ If he had any expectations they were to be disappointed, for she married the Rev. James Gibbs of Wellingborough in 1793.²² A less likely associate was Edward Lowndes (c.1735–1801), an American citizen who owned property in South Carolina, and who came to live in London, where Frewen often met him. During his stay in London for just over three weeks from 26 June 1781, he met Lowndes on eight occasions and they travelled together to Derbyshire later that summer.²³ Wherever he went, Frewen was a prolific letter writer, and on his journeys corresponded regularly with his friends, as well as members of his family and his estate managers.²⁴ In this phase of his life Frewen seems to have had few intimates among other leading gentry families or the nobility. Socially, he met Clement Winstanley (c.1740–1808) of Braunstone Hall, who was also a product of Rugby and Oxford, and a former High Sheriff, more often than most other major landowners.²⁵

His engagement with public and political spheres was also limited at this time. From the autumn of 1785 to the middle of 1786 he was, however, closely involved in committees to promote canal building in Leicestershire and Rutland. He was invited to chair meetings in Melton Mowbray to consider clauses in a parliamentary bill which would allow the construction of a canal to Leicester, and in 1790 invested £500 in the Oakham canal company. He also went to London in May 1786 to meet the two county members, John Peach Hungerford and William Pochin, and the Earl of Harborough, who was an active supporter of canal building, but the bill was defeated by nine votes.²⁶ During an extended stay at Northiam in 1790 (see below) he was present for the general election campaign that June, and met Thomas Pelham who, with Charles Lennox, was returned unopposed for East Sussex.²⁷

In view of his father's infirmity, Frewen began to take an interest in the management of the estates. In 1782 he started work on creating new plantations

²⁰ Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 4, p. 1409 and H. Longden, *Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy from 1500*, (Northampton, 1940), 9, p. 247; J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses 1752–1900* (Cambridge, 1951), 4, p. 608.

²¹ *Diary*, 5 December 1786, FRE/750.

²² Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 2, 519; Longden, *Northamptonshire Clergy*, 5, pp. 207–9.

²³ *Diary*, 14 August 1781, FRE/745.

²⁴ Frewen noted the names of the people he wrote to, and from whom he received letters, but rarely gave any indication of the contents of his correspondence. Many original items, and copies of his outgoing letters, are contained elsewhere in the Frewen archives.

²⁵ Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 4, p. 1590.

²⁶ *Diary*, A Temple Patterson, 'The Making of the Leicestershire canals 1766–1814', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological & Historical Society*, 27, 1951, pp. 66–99. William Pochin of Barkby Hall (1731–98), often referred to by Frewen as 'Pouchin', represented Leicestershire from 1790 until his death, and John Peach Hungerford, of Dingley Hall, Northants (1719–1819), was a Leicestershire member from 1775 to 1790. Both supported Pitt but neither is known to have spoken in the house (L. Namier and J. Brooke (eds), *House of Commons 1754–90* (London, 1964), 3, pp. 255, 304).

²⁷ R. G. Thorne (ed.), *House of Commons 1790–1820* (London, 1986), 2, pp. 387–90.

at Cold Overton and the next year ordered 100 elm trees. From time to time he supervised workmen, often over a week or more, and his interest in new agricultural equipment could qualify him to be regarded as a ‘modernising’ landlord. On behalf of his father he also prepared the twice-yearly rental accounts and used visits to Northiam to collect the tenants’ payments, sometimes noting, as he did in 1790, that they paid their bills ‘well and cheerfully’.²⁸

It is also clear from the accounts of his London visits that he did not frequent the highest or most fashionable echelons of society, and did not obviously succumb to the temptations which might have ensnared many newly rich young men. In practice, his personal finances were constrained as he was largely dependent on allowances from his parents, which, if regular and generous, did impose some limits: ones that were noted in the diary included the £100 he received from his father in 1783, the £50 two years later – due in April but given a month earlier – and £123 from his mother in October 1788. He also borrowed additional sums, including £100 from his father in 1782, which he repaid five years later, and his aunt, Mrs Rachel Knight of Rugby, gave him £150 in December 1780 and again in September 1782.²⁹ Much of his money was spent on his journeys: on one trip in November 1781 he spent 15 shillings on a chaise to Northiam, 13 shillings for one from Hawkhurst to Woodgate, near Tonbridge with a 2s turnpike charge, another 13s. from Woodgate to Riverhead near Sevenoaks, with 1s. 6d. for the turnpike, 18s. on horses to go from Riverhead to Bromley and from there to London. He also spent another 10s. to send some oysters to Cold Overton and Uppingham and 18s. 6d. on a bill for a term in hall at the Temple, among expenses for the month totalling £5 6s. 9d.³⁰

Above all, he was a serious-minded man who read widely and sought guidance in his Christian faith. He was a member of the established Church and attended services on most Sundays (but sometimes absented himself when he was in London or Bath or travelling). His leanings might be best described as those of a moderate evangelical, evidenced in his moral code, his sense of a constant struggle against sinfulness and his reliance on scripture, but there is nothing in the diaries to suggest that he was drawn to any of the morally reforming campaigns associated with the emerging evangelical movement.³¹ His religion was a very personal one, and provided an intellectual as well as a spiritual and emotional foundation to his life.

His reading was broad but unsystematic. He dipped into weighty volumes of science alongside biographies and travel writing, of which he was especially fond, as

²⁸ *Diary*, 26 November 1790, FRE/754.

²⁹ *Diary*, 19 December 1781, FRE/645 and 3 September 1782, FRE/746. Mrs Knight (1710–94) was the sister of John Frewen’s father and was married to Simon Knight of Rugby (d. 1776). There were other family connections linking the families: James Knight Moor (1767–1810), the son of the Rev. Christopher Moor (1730–1803) and Henrietta Knight, daughter of James Knight, married Selina Frewen (1767–1818) in 1794. James Knight and Simon Knight were related, and Selina was the daughter of the Rev. John Frewen (1715–67) and John Frewen’s cousin (Burke, Gentry, 291, Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 4, pp. 448–9; *Rugby Register*, 1, p. 84; Longden, *Northamptonshire Clergy*, 9, p. 247).

³⁰ *Diary*, week beginning 12 November 1781, FRE/745.

³¹ For a recent summary of evangelicalism: B. Hilton, *A Mad, Bad & Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 174–84.

well as works on history and literature, including many recently published books. In 1783 and 1784, for example, he studied the works of Voltaire. In subsequent years he noted that he was reading, or had finished, a *History of Henry II* by Littleton, and in 1787, Euclid and Captain Cook's account of his voyages. The following year he read Sir John Hawkins's *Life of Johnson* and in January 1789 Johnson's *Letters to Mrs Thrale* and Richardson's *Clarissa*, which he left off after six days as he found 'the hero is becoming a villain'. Later in the year he worked his way through *King Lear*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, the Marquis de Chastellux's *Travels in North America*, Cullen's *Practice of Physic*, Anson's account of his voyage around the world and Gillies's *Life of King Frederick of Prussia*.³²

There was, however, an altogether more reflective side to his character which gave rise to bouts of what he himself called 'melancholy' and to persistent self-doubt. In August 1783, for example, he wrote that he had been 'idle all day, no activity of any sort except a little thought of my future life about which am much divided'.³³ At the end of the year, he was further affected by the illness of Selina, his 23-year-old sister. Day after day in the early months of 1784 he charted her 'good', 'bad' and 'indifferent' nights, and apart from three days in late January when he went to Leicester, Sapcote and Rugby, he remained with her at Cold Overton Hall. Throsby and Chessher came to visit, but in the last week of February, the day after they left, she became 'very weak indeed'. Despite some 'moderate' days and nights, on 21 March he said that 'she grows worse' and she died on the night of 7 April, a little after one in the morning. Chessher was staying with the family at the time and the next morning a servant was sent to Sapcote to bring the Rev. Burrough; he attended the funeral, which Frewen wrote was 'conducted decently & without blunder'.³⁴ Afterwards, Throsby came to stay and, despite snow on the ground, Frewen took long walks with him and his older sister, Mary, and supervised men working in the plantations.

On 27 April 1784, after one of his longer stays at Cold Overton in this decade, he rode to Leicester and Hinckley and two weeks later left for London on his way to Sussex. From there he went to Bath, via London, and spent much of the summer in Devon and Cornwall before returning to Cold Overton in mid-September.

However, even during this long excursion, he was anxious and was cast into further gloom when his feelings for a young lady were not reciprocated. On 13 June 1784, when he was in Bath, he wrote that he was 'much troubled in mind thinking of past misfortunes'. In Exeter, he spent much time in the company of a Miss Ann Jeffries, but recorded on 25 July that 'a man who no more need to be offended at being refused than that Lady has at not being accepted by a man she likes, for it should be a mutual liking'. On Saturday 7 August he wrote that 'he was very much distressed in mind from Miss Ann Jeffries' conversation'. He was still 'unsettled in

³² 'Sir John Hawkins (1717–89)', *ODNB*, 25, pp. 927–9; Baron George Anson (1697–1762) was the author of *A Voyage round the world in 1740–1744* (*ODNB*, 2, pp. 260–6); William Cullen (1710–90) was the Professor of the Practice of Physic at the University of Edinburgh (*ODNB*, 14, pp. 581–6); 'Dr John Gillies (1747–1836)', *ODNB*, 22, pp. 275–6.

³³ *Diary*, 19 August 1783, FRE/747.

³⁴ *Diary*, 11 April 1784, FRE/748.

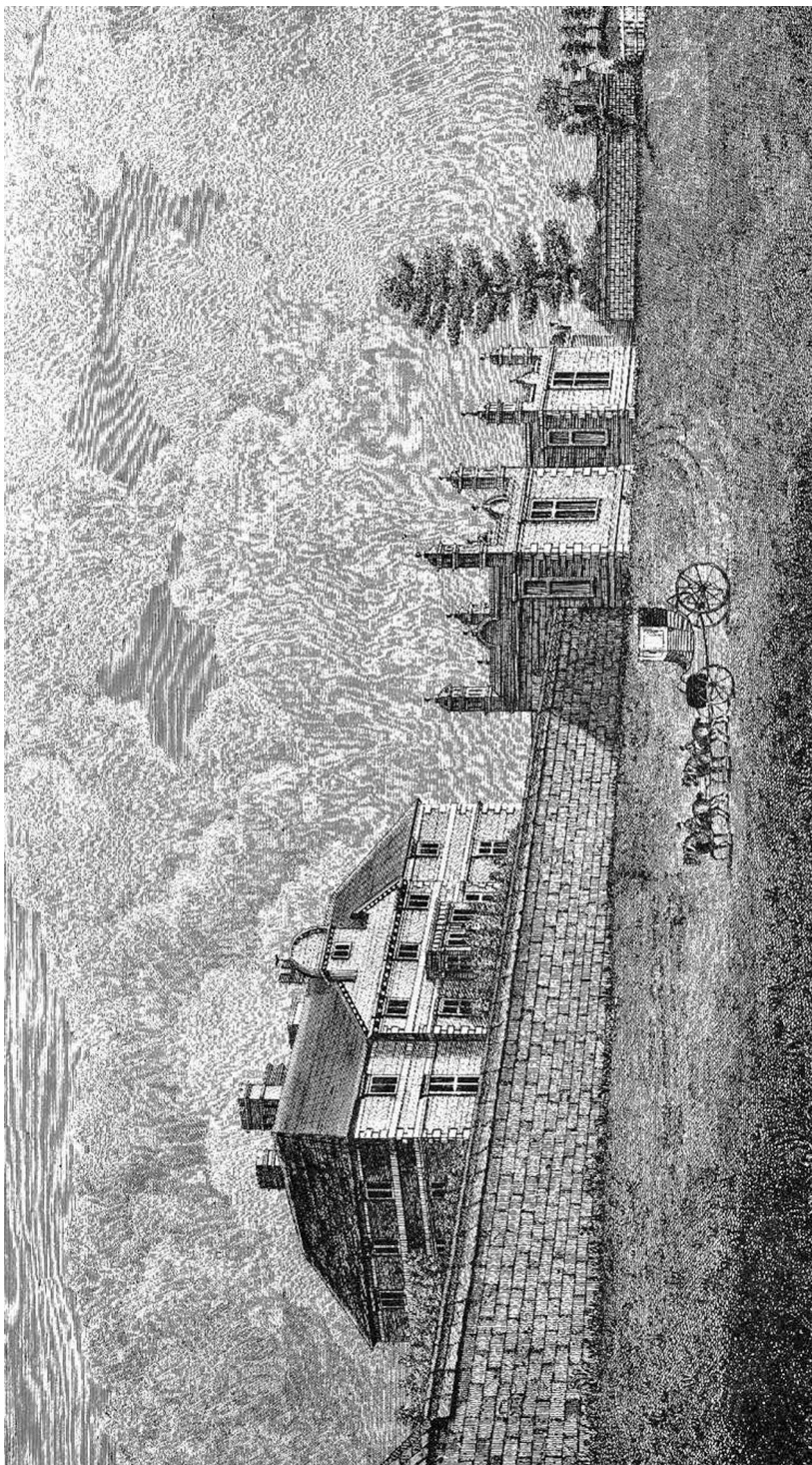


Fig. 5. Cold Overton Hall, from an engraving reproduced in John Nichols's *History of Leicestershire* published in 1795 (vol. 2, part 1, p. 138). The plate was 'respectfully inscribed' to John Frewen Turner 'by his much obliged and very faithful servant, J. Nichols'.

mind' when he had tea with the Jeffries family the next day, was 'out of humour' at not dining with them on the Monday, and 'was unwell in the night, therefore not master over my own mind'. On Thursday 12 August he left Exeter for Bath, in the coach on his own. He had expressed his desire to marry early on in his diaries, as well as making clear his own strict moral code; in August 1781 he had written: 'every good man ought to be married as he is sent in the world to give protection to and receive comfort from a virtuous woman. The gratification of any unlawful passion always has its attendant alloy.'³⁵

In subsequent years, his indecision and doubts became all too evident. On 24 April 1785 he said that he was 'racked to pieces in mind about my future conduct, determined nothing with firmness'. In May the following year, he said he was 'uncomfortable about what to do both for the present as well as in future life'. 'Melancholy' afflicted him in April 1786 and August the following year.³⁶ They were short-lasting spells, however, and he experienced periods of greater optimism: on 31 December 1787, which had been a 'heavy day', during which he had attended to his books, he wrote 'upon a review of the year, in my own judgement think I have spent it better than some of the preceding by improving my mind, my constitution & my finances, hope with a lively sense of our dependence upon providence, thus to continue. Thanks for Health.' This more confident mood did not last. He came to the end of 1788 with a 'very disturbed night indeed' on 20 December, 'nothing but melancholia & resolutions about future acts, in the day'. His annual report on himself that year was mixed: 'my constitution has received much improvement, my mind some, my morals none, owing to a temptation which I pray to be taken away – my finances some – strengthen me in all my troubles with thanks for the health and strength already received – Amen. Ill twice in the year with a pain in my right side.'³⁷ His frame of mind remained mixed, but at the end of July 1789, as he approached his birthday, he wrote: 'my mind discomposed which makes me do what my judgement does not approve – cannot grow better but by returning thanks for all good gifts'. The next day, he said: 'today I finish my 34th year – much of my time has been spent in sickness, much in negligence, some in what is bad, too little has been done for my eternal welfare. At the close of life, religion and good actions are our only comfort.' Six weeks later, still inwardly struggling, he placed 'hope under the divine assistance to command my mind'.³⁸

From his mid-20s onwards, Frewen seems to have felt some guilt at his lack of a profession and of any purpose in his life. He felt this despite the substantial inheritance that would come his way – earlier rather than later given his father's age and state of health – and the task involved in managing far-flung estates which required attention after years of neglect. It was a position whose benefits he appreciated but could not allow himself wholly to enjoy. He also seems to have been unlucky in love. Such an earnest individual, devoted to his books and to self-reflection as well as to the formalities of a well-ordered social milieu and a variety of

³⁵ *Diary*, 7 August 1781, FRE/745.

³⁶ *Diary*, 3 & 4 April 1786, FRE/750 and August 1 1787, FRE/751.

³⁷ *Diary*, 31 December 1788, FRE/752.

³⁸ *Diary*, 31 July, 1 August and 17 September 1789, FRE/753.

uncomplicated pursuits, personified the more restrained qualities of late eighteenth-century society, and he was not likely to waste himself or his resources by throwing himself into a life of abandonment.

JOURNEYS ACROSS ENGLAND

One pursuit he did throw himself into was travel: he spent many weeks at a time crossing England, on horseback or by coach, the accounts of which are the most striking features of his diaries. The coach journeys were made possible by the rapid improvements on the roads in the second half of the eighteenth century: turnpikes were being introduced across the country and journey times were being 'slashed'.³⁹ The time from London to Bristol, which Frewen made on several occasions, was cut from 40 hours in 1750 to less than 24 in 1783.⁴⁰ Despite these improvements a trip to London from Stamford would usually necessitate an overnight stay at somewhere like Biggleswade or St Neots. A journey to Sussex was broken with a night in London and another stop at Riverhead, near Sevenoaks in Kent or at Tonbridge. Thus, a journey from Cold Overton Hall to Northiam would be spread over three or four days.

The importance of Frewen's travels, what they involved and how central they were to him in providing physical and social contexts to his world, can be best illustrated by describing in more detail three different examples: the first a summary from the diary of his journeys in a single year, 1781; the second, an extract of a local trip in 1783, and finally the outline of a four-and-a-half month horse ride across England in 1790.

The pattern of frenetic travel was set from the very beginning of 1781.⁴¹ On Wednesday 3 January, he rode from Cold Overton Hall to Leicester, where he stayed with Robert Throsby before riding with him the next day to Sapcote. After one night there, where 'all was well', he rode the next afternoon to Hinckley. In the evening he attended the assembly, which he found 'very agreeable', and partnered Miss Burnaby, the sister of Dr Burnaby [of Baggrave Hall].⁴² He returned to Sapcote on 6 January and stayed for three nights before riding to Rugby via Lutterworth in weather turning colder each day. After one night with his relations in Rugby he journeyed on to Birdingbury in Warwickshire, where, a family friend, the Rev Henry Homer, and his son, Arthur, lived.⁴³ After one night in Birdingbury, he spent a week

³⁹ P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 391–408.

⁴⁰ Hilton, *England 1783–1846*, p. 15.

⁴¹ *Diary*, 1781 (FRE/745) for this and subsequent paragraphs.

⁴² Dr Andrew Burnaby (1732–1812), who wrote two books about his earlier travels in North America, was appointed the Vicar of Greenwich in 1769, and from 1786 until his death was the Archdeacon of Leicester (ODNB, 8, pp. 885–6).

⁴³ The Rev. Henry Homer (c.1720–91), the Rector of Birdingbury, was a commissioner of enclosure and conducted the enclosure of Sapcote in 1778–9. His fourth son (among 17 children), the Rev. Dr Arthur Homer (1759–1802), was educated at Rugby and Oxford University, and was an assistant master at Rugby from 1782 to 1787, a fellow of Magdalen College and Dean of Divinity from 1801–2, as well as the holder of several benefices. He was John Frewen's main friend in the family (ODNB, 27, pp. 890–1; *Victoria County History, Warwickshire* (London, 1951), 6, p. 37; Nichols, *Leicestershire*, 4, part 2, p. 895; Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 2, p. 683).

between Rugby, Hinckley and Sapcote before returning to Cold Overton by horse on Friday 19 January via Leicester. He stayed for 12 days. Bad weather prevented his intended departure for London on 26 January, and as a result wrote that he was 'unsettled' and 'spending time not as useful as I would wish'.

By Wednesday 31 January he was able to ride to Market Harborough, where he caught a chaise – a horse-drawn coach for two or three passengers – to Northampton for an overnight stay with friends. The following morning he boarded a coach to 'Town' – he never referred to 'London' – in what he said was good company 'except a child whose mother appeared to be in an unfortunate [but unspecified] circumstance'. On his first morning in London he attended to the cleaning of his Chambers; perhaps these were his rooms in the Middle Temple. On Monday 5 February he walked to Westminster to hear the Protestant campaigner, Lord George Gordon, speak, but for some reason did not succeed.⁴⁴ He continued with a round of meals and social encounters, and sent a barrel of oysters to Cold Overton. Towards the end of the week his mood darkened and he commented that 'to spend one's time that it will bear reflection is better than in Idleness or Vice'. After several days of illness, which started with a sore gum which confined him to his room, he later spent many days 'usefully and innocently' but others 'idly', and sometimes did not see anyone all day.⁴⁵ It is not clear, however, what he did on the 'useful' days: he may have been continuing his legal studies, but he did not mention any of the books he studied or any tuition he received.

He remained in London until mid-May, when he went to Sussex for 10 days. On leaving London on 14 May he saw King George and the Queen as they left a review at Blackheath. He returned to London on 24 May and stayed for a week before taking a coach to Bath, where he arrived at around 9.30 in the evening. He passed time in the Pump Room, but after two days went to Bristol by coach for 3s. with the 'pretty Miss Watts' for the hot wells. He shared a room in the New Inn with a 'Manchester tradesman', who on further acquaintance turned out to be a cotton manufacturer. Frewen also fell into the company of an 'Irish gambler', drinking wine and supping with him: 'Oh fool that I am' he wrote at the end of the evening. He spent 2s. 10d. on dinner and strawberries and 7s. 6d. for his supper, bed and for a maid. On Saturday 9 June he went back to Bath, but had lost his room at the Castle and found unsatisfactory lodgings which he changed three nights later for a more 'elegant and genteel' room.⁴⁶ By the 15th he was on the move once more, by coach to Reading to call on a Mrs Stevens at Bradfield, west of the town, and go angling, a favourite pastime. He stayed with the Stevens overnight and took a chaise back to Reading on the morning of Monday 17 June. He then appears to have been joined by his younger sister, Selina

⁴⁴ Lord George Gordon (1751–93) was a leader of the Protestant Association and opposed Catholic relief (*ODNB*, 22, pp. 894–7). The week-long disturbances in London known as the Gordon Riots, which left much property damaged and more than 200 people dead, had occurred the previous June.

⁴⁵ On Friday 30 March 1781, for example, he wrote: 'Unwell with the cold. Saw nobody nor received any letter. Spent my time usefully & innocently' (*Diary*, FRE/745).

⁴⁶ Finding acceptable accommodation in Bath at busy times of the year could not be taken for granted: in 1804, Frewen lodged at no. 7 South Parade, Bath, in a 'bad Bed Room'. His encounters with the manufacturer and the gambler also illustrate Bath's appeal for a wide range of people (*Diary*, 15 February 1804 (FRE/764)).

Frewen, and spent more time at Bradfield. After 10 days in Reading he was in a coach again on 26 June, bound for London, where he stayed until 18 July, after which he travelled to Kent for several days before his return once more to 'Town'.

Frewen left London for Leicester on 3 August. After spending the night at the Three Crowns Inn he rode to Cold Overton, his first visit there for more than six months. A week later he set out to Sapcote, only to return to Cold Overton the following day, after a six-hour ride which began at 3 in the afternoon. Two days later, on Monday 13 August he took a 'pleasant ride' to Nottingham, where he stayed the night at the Blackamoor's Head. The next day he journeyed by coach to Chesterfield, and on the 15th continued to Sheffield. Frewen was unwell with 'cholic' for some days, but resumed his journey carrying on to Bakewell and visited Rowtor Rocks, near Matlock, which he noted 'has either been the residence of druids or hermits'. By 10 September he was back in Cold Overton. Throughout the autumn he continued, though, to venture out, to Leicester, Sapcote and Rugby, as well as to Oakham, Uppingham and Stamford. His next long-distance journey came on 4 November when he rode to Stamford, and rose at 3 the next morning for the next leg of a three-day journey to Hawkhurst via London. On 7 November he was up at 6am for the coach to Tonbridge and completed his journey by chaise. After nine days he returned to London by coach from Hawkhurst and left there on 26 November. He stayed overnight at Stamford before reaching Orton by chaise at about 3pm on Wednesday 28 November. After a day's visit to Uppingham, he was away from 13 to 22 December in Leicester, Sapcote, Hinckley and Rugby. The last 10 days of the year he spent at Cold Overton Hall. Christmas was uneventful and does not at any time appear to have been marked in the Frewen household by what could be described as festivities or merry-making: on Christmas Eve he lit a fire in his study and looked over some papers, on Christmas Day attended church and returned to his papers, before resuming social calls and receiving visitors on 27 December.

Extracts from Frewen's diary for two weeks from late September 1783, when he was at Sapcote and Rugby, provide an example of how he used his shorter journeys to visit friends and family:

Monday, September 22, 1783: 'To Evington, ordered a pair of half boots & shoes – Dined at Throsby's, Tomlinson came, rode together to Sapcote'.

Tuesday, September 23: 'Tomlinson left for Rugby, Throsby came. Afternoon a long walk a shooting, killed a brace of birds. Well both in body and Mind...'

Thursday, September 25: 'Mr Bur, Throsby & self breakfasted with Chessher. Called on Mrs Brown, Iliff, Dickenson & Galloway – all pretty well'.

Friday, September 26: 'one bird – Mr Copper & Miss T? with us. Dr Clare & Tomlinson came after. Phlogistic Air is 9 times lighter than common air – the rope and pumps with a Wheel at Top and Bottom are practical'.

Saturday, September 27: 'Dr Clare, Tomlinson & Throsby left. John Bray agrees to give up his land this Michaelmas. Beans & Bacon for dinner. To Hinckley – saw Dickenson, Iliff's, Foster, Chessher & Mrs Brown – returned about 9 o'clock'.

Sunday, September 28: 'as usual with the Sacrament – sermon on the vanity of Riches... a short walk with Mr Bur'.

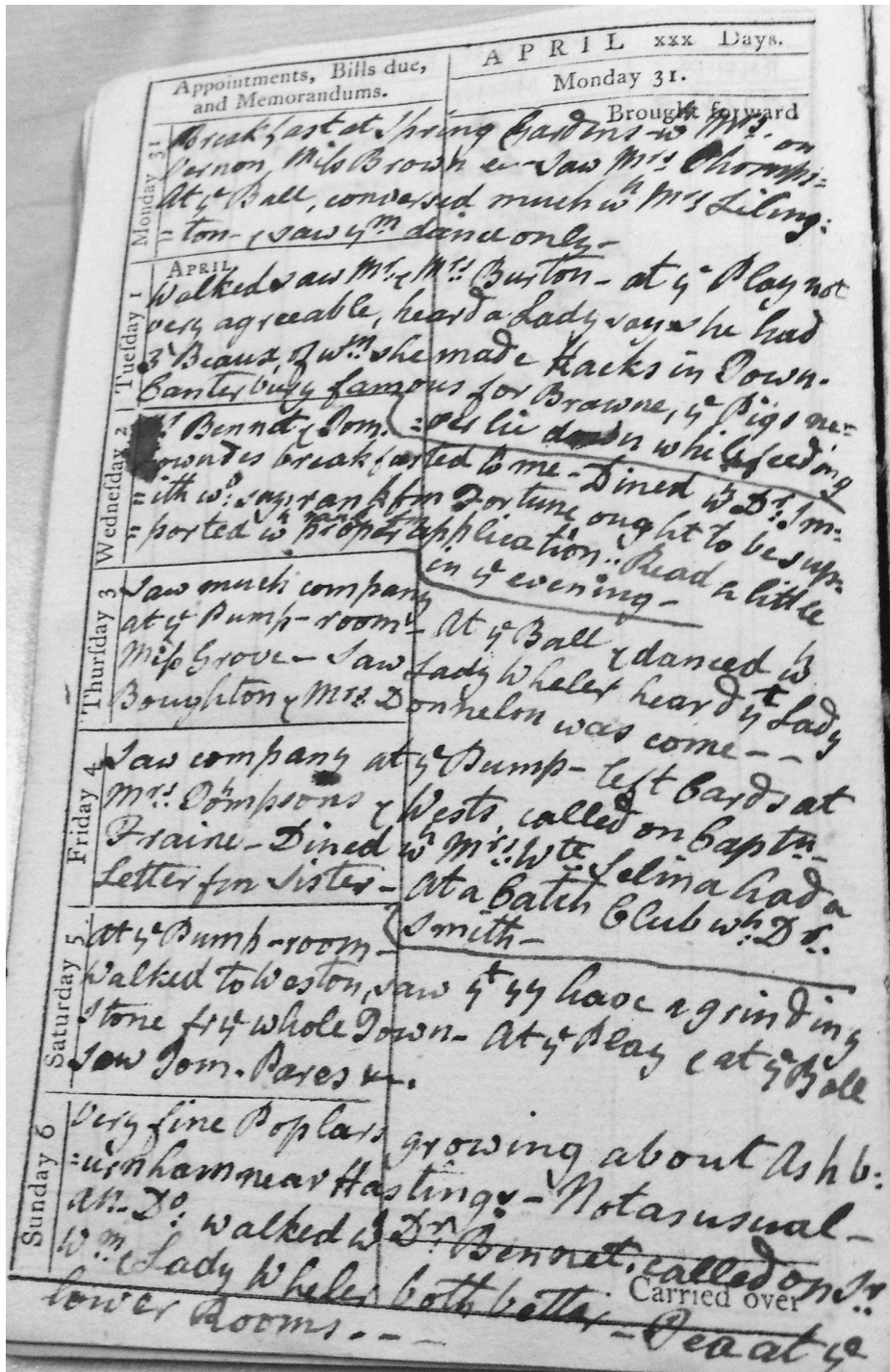


Fig. 6. A week from Frewen's diary in April 1783, during a two-month visit to Bath.

Monday, September 29: 'one bird – a letter from father.... Heard a bad account of Aunt Knight'.

Tuesday, September 30: 'With Mr Bur to Rugby – found Aunt better – Heard lecture on Astronomy – saw Biddulph & the Rugby folks – returned with [Biddulph] to Tea'.

Thursday, October 2: 'With Mr Bur to Normanton saw Mrs Smith & two daughters – returned to dinner. Afternoon – shooting – one bird. Mr Holed Smith called while I was out. Willson... with Chessher supped with us'.

Friday, October 3: 'Willson breakfasted with us. To Rugby – saw lady Biddulph & family at lecture. Called on Mr Moore & Caldecote – Tea with James's – some pye & wine with the Biddulph's & Babington. To Aunt after 8 o'clock'.

Saturday, October 4: 'To Birbury [Birdingbury, Warwickshire] with Arthur Homer...'.⁴⁷

In 1790, Frewen embarked on one of his most extensive journeys around the south and west of England, which lasted for four and a half months and much of which was undertaken by horse.⁴⁸ He began the year in London, and travelled to Sapcote on 23 February 1790, before departing for Cold Overton on 15 April. Nine days later he departed the Hall before midday and reached Sapcote at about 10 o'clock in the evening, at the start of his tour, during which he appears to have been unaccompanied without servants or friends. After three days in Sapcote he rode to Birmingham via Nuneaton and Coleshill, and then to Droitwich and Bromsgrove. At Worcester, on 29 April, he saw the cathedral and 'china manufacturing' before heading through the Malvern Hills to Gloucester, whose cathedral he also noted. In early May, Frewen was at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire, and, after calling on a cousin, rode over Durdham Down near Bristol and saw a shipbuilding wharf, before spending the night of 7 May in Bath. He did not linger there, and the next day rode east, passed Stonehenge on the way to Amesbury and spent two days in Hampshire, when he called at Winchester, Portsmouth, Havant and Chichester, with a night at Arundel. On Monday 11 May he breakfasted at Shoreham and had 'a sort of dinner' at the White Lion, in North Street, Brighton. He stayed the night at the White Hart in Newhaven after 'a very blustering ride over the downs'. Frewen ate breakfast the next morning at Eastbourne, and after seeing a new drilling machine and taking dinner at Battle, reached Brickwall House at 9 on the evening of 12 May. For the next three months it served as his base for further visits to Brede, Battle, Brighton, Newhaven, Rye and Hawkhurst (where he attended a ball and had a 'merry day' at its Venison Feast on 19 August), as well as making a short visit to London on 22–23 June. He spent his time on a mixture of business matters, supervising workmen, examining the estate accounts, and on calls and meals with his relations and acquaintances.

On Monday 23 August Frewen began a long and circuitous journey back to Leicestershire. He rode to Arundel and then on to Chichester, Portsmouth and Southampton, and through the New Forest to Salisbury, whose cathedral he was unable to see inside as it was under repair. From there he continued to Bridport,

⁴⁷ *Diary*, 22 September–4 October 1783, FRE/747.

⁴⁸ *Diary*, 1790, FRE/754, and for the following paragraphs.

Lyme, Sidmouth, Honiton, Taunton and Glastonbury, and reached Bath at 7 o'clock on the evening of Wednesday 1 September, when he 'smoked with some tradesmen'. After three days of socialising, he departed Bath on 4 September by horse for Newport, Gloucester, Tewkesbury, Worcester, Stourport, with its canal locks into the River Severn, Bridgnorth and Coalbrookdale in Shropshire, where he saw works belonging to the pioneer chemical manufacturer, the Earl of Dundonald.⁴⁹ From there, he passed four days with his friend, the Rev. Robert Outlaw, near Newport in Shropshire, and continued his observations of new industrial developments by noting a 'pump to go by water'.

On Saturday 11 September he breakfasted in Hinckley and continued on to Sapcote for dinner. He stayed there for a month, much of his time spent shooting, before going to Rugby on Monday 11 October, followed by a visit to Hinckley and, finally, on 20 October through Leicester to Cold Overton. After two short visits to Melton in the last week of the month, on 27 October to put his name down for £500 for the Navigation Company, he set out on his next longer journey on 15 November. He went via Leicester back to Sapcote and at about 10 o'clock on 17 November set off for Banbury and on through Brackley, Buckingham, Aylesbury, Berkhamstead and Watford to London, where he arrived at 5pm on 20 November and spent the evening at the theatre. He left London between 11 and 12 o'clock on 22 November for Brickwall, which he reached the next day at 5 in the afternoon. He stayed there until the end of a year in which he had spent only five weeks at Cold Overton Hall. Despite all his travels, his closing note in his diary on 31 December was that it had been 'a melancholy year indeed'.

THE DIARIES 1793–1805: LANDOWNER & PUBLIC FIGURE

When the diaries resumed in January 1793, Frewen's circumstances had changed. His father had died 14 months earlier, and on inheriting his widespread estates, had added Turner to his own surname.⁵⁰ The 10 diaries which survive between 1793 and 1805 show that many aspects of his earlier life continued – his fondness for travel, though in a less hectic manner, and the company of friends as well as his voracious reading. As a middle-aged man with new responsibilities as a landowner, however, he acquired a greater maturity, which became evident in particular in his more extensive involvement in public life, following his year as a Sheriff in 1791. He also recognised that the wider world was changing: while the events of 1789 did not merit a mention in his diary, on 19 January 1793 he noted: 'bad news in Paris – the King condemned'. In April, when allied forces were on the offensive against the revolutionary armies, he wrote of 'good news from France', but by June noted that there were 'very bad doings in Paris'. Two months later took a wager that the allied army would not reach Paris by Christmas Day.⁵¹

His evident distaste for the French revolution prompted him to become an officer in the Leicestershire Yeomanry Cavalry. In 1794 he became a Major in the regiment

⁴⁹ 'Archibald Cochrane, ninth earl of Dundonald (1748–1831)', *ODNB*, 12, pp. 323–4.

⁵⁰ For consistency and simplicity, he is referred to as Frewen throughout.

⁵¹ *Diary*, 19 January, 7 April, 4 June and 24 August 1793, FRE/755.

and three years later was promoted to Lt Col.⁵² He attended exercises with his troops near Melton, which took place over a day and were sometimes followed by dinners, and were on occasion observed by the Duchess of Rutland, with whom he became acquainted.⁵³ In the year he became a colonel he donated £40 to the regiment.⁵⁴

Frewen also became an active magistrate and Deputy Lieutenant for the county, and attended the quarter sessions and assizes at Leicester Castle. These duties also had a social dimension: in August 1803, for example, he dined with a judge, and the next day recorded that after the Grand Jury went 'with the Duke, thence to Town Hall where Moira made a most excellent speech, thence to the concert'.⁵⁵ His role as a justice may also explain references to disturbances in the county during the 1790s, when the government was gripped by a fear of revolutionary Jacobinism: as a magistrate he was qualified to read the Riot Act. In July 1795 he wrote that riots were threatened in Melton Mowbray, and he was there one day at 8 in the morning to see troops marching through town with five rounds of ball each to deter rioters, who in the event 'molested no-one'.⁵⁶ Just under two years later, in June 1797, he signed a letter to the Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland, about unlawful assemblies near Leicester.⁵⁷

His interest in canals also increased. He attended numerous meetings in Melton and Oakham on canal development, and was at parliament to follow the course of legislation and discuss the matter with the county's MPs.⁵⁸ He regularly chaired meetings of the Oakham canal committee and in December 1798 agreed to advance £1,750 for construction; he hoped that 'others will do the same with sums that together will be sufficient to complete the works'.⁵⁹

The record of the two weeks before Easter 1798 illustrate how his various public duties in Leicestershire and Rutland intertwined with his social life: he began the week on Monday 26 March with a committee meeting in Oakham before going on Wednesday from Cold Overton to Leicester for the assizes, at which the MP Hungerford was chairman of the Grand Jury. Afterwards he had dinner with the judge and was occupied at the Castle until 10 o'clock. The next morning he was back at the Castle by 9 and after being discharged at 12 went to a cavalry meeting where new jackets were handed out, before having dinner with the sheriff. On the Friday he rode to Sapcote to visit his uncle and aunt, and after two nights there returned to Leicester, where he saw his mother and sister Mary, who lived in the

⁵² *London Gazette*, 14 June 1794; Thorne, *House of Commons 1790–1820*, 3, p. 842.

⁵³ *Diary*, 9 March and 23 March 1797, FRE/757. The exercise in October that year was attended by only 10 men (*Diary*, 12 October 1797, FRE/757).

⁵⁴ *Diary*, 21 September 1797, FRE/757.

⁵⁵ *Diary*, 4 and 5 August 1803, FRE/763. The Duke was John Henry Manners (1778–1857), 5th Duke of Rutland, and Moira was Gen Francis Rawdon Hastings (1754–1826), 2nd Earl of Moira, who a month later was appointed commander-in-chief in Scotland and in 1812 became Governor General of India (ODNB, 25, 743–9). He was also a vocal supporter of canal development in Leicestershire (Temple Patterson, 'Leicestershire canals', *TLAHS*, 74).

⁵⁶ *Diary*, 27 and 28 July 1795, FRE/756.

⁵⁷ *Diary*, 10 June 1797, FRE/757.

⁵⁸ In 1800 he was in London from 22 April to 17 June, and in May went to the House for the Committee stages of bills for the Oakham and Melton canals (FRE/760).

⁵⁹ *Diary*, 6 April 1797, FRE/757, 4 October and 31 December 1798, FRE/758, and 9 January 1800, FRE/760.

borough at that time, as well as his old friend Throsby, and headed back to Cold Overton via Belgrave on Tuesday 3 April. On Thursday he chaired the general meeting of the Oakham canal committee and the next day, Good Friday, attended church at Cold Overton.⁶⁰

His interest in canals and his duties in the magistracy and the yeomanry saw the growth not just of a working relationship with peers such as the Duke of Rutland and the Earls of Harborough and Winchelsea, but a widening of his social circle among leading Leicestershire landowners. They included three whose families were also involved in name changes on inheriting property: Sir Charles Hudson of Wanlip Hall; Sir William Skeffington of Skeffington Hall, the colonel commandant of the yeomanry; and Sir Edmund Cradock Hartopp, a county member.⁶¹ His old friends Throsby and Thomlinson were still much in evidence, and other guests at Cold Overton Hall included the Rev. Dudley and Miss Watts: the former was the Rev. Dr John Dudley, the Vicar of Humberstone from 1794 until his death in 1856; the latter was probably Miss Susanna Watts, the writer and anti-slavery campaigner, who in 1804 produced the first 'guide book' to Leicester.⁶² When they visited Frewen in June 1802 she 'caught a fish, the first in her life'.⁶³

Frewen continued to travel but less frantically, and was capable of remaining in one place for longer periods. In 1793 he began the year in London, when he saw the celebrated actress, Mrs Siddons, as Lady Macbeth.⁶⁴ He spent from the end of January to the beginning of May in Bath, before heading for Sussex via London. He stayed at Northiam until the middle of August when he went back to London, and in early October came to Cold Overton, his first visit there for at least nine months. He was to stay in Leicestershire for just six weeks and by mid-November was on his way to London via Northampton. He remained in 'Town' until 3 December, when he travelled to Northiam for the rest of the year. In contrast, in 1799 and 1801, apart from one short trip to Stamford in 1799 and a summer trip to Skegness two years later (Fig. 7), he did not visit London, Sussex or Bath, passing the whole year in Leicestershire and Rutland. Indeed, his diaries record only two further visits to

⁶⁰ *Diary*, 29 March–6 April 1798, FRE/758. The High Sheriff in 1798 was Renee Payne, Lord of the Manor and the main landowner at Dunton Bassett (Nichols, *Leicestershire*, 4, part 1 (1807), p. 155).

⁶¹ P. Shipley, 'The Illusion of Continuity: Change of Surname among the Leicestershire Landed Classes c.1775–1875', *Genealogists' Magazine*, June 2011, pp. 197–204. Sir Charles Grave Hudson (1730–1813) inherited the Palmer's estate through his wife, Catherine, the daughter of Henry Palmer, and was made a baronet in 1791. His son, also Charles, changed his name to Palmer on Sir Charles' death in 1813 when he also inherited the baronetcy (Nichols, *Leicestershire*, 3, part 2 (1804), pp. 1096–7 and Burke's *Peerage & Baronetage*, 2003, 3, p. 3054). In February 1797, Frewen dined with the Hudson family and had an 'agreeable' time with 'some music and singing' (*Diary*, 18 February 1797, FRE/757); Sir William Farrell Skeffington (1742–1815) added Skeffington to his name in 1772 when he inherited their property and was created a baronet in 1786 (Nichols, *Leicestershire*, 4, part 1, 406 and 3, part 1 (1800), pp. 439–40); Sir Edmund Cradock Hartopp (1749–1833) was born Edmund Bunney and changed his name on inhering property mainly through his mother's family. He was made a baronet in 1796 and served as a Leicestershire MP from 1798 to 1806 (Thorne, *Commons 1790–1820*, 3, p. 520).

⁶² Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 2, p. 347 and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1856, pp. 197–8; 'Susanna Watts (bap 1768–1842)', *ODNB*, 57, p. 738.

⁶³ *Diary*, 19 June 1802, FRE/762. Fishing was one of Frewen's favourite pastimes: a few weeks later he caught 52 fish in one day (*Diary*, 8 July 1802, FRE/762).

⁶⁴ 'Sarah Siddons, nee Kemble (1755–1832)', *ODNB*, 50, pp. 515–22.

Appointments, Bills due, and Memorandums.		JANUARY xxxi Days. Monday 18.
Monday 18		Brought forward Check on Glynns by Bentley & Buston for £20. Sister's Bible - Frewen & Bus- stons Melton - walked thro' y ^e Fishponds.
Tuesday 19		Letter from Buston & they rec ^d y ^e above safe - Mr. Barfoot of Layston set here an hour - some rain, wind mostly y ^e day.
Wednesday 20		Took bonds twice, letter from y ^e Deas of Smith Crossfield died on y ^e 11 th - y ^e was buried on y ^e 18 th instant - she has been my pastor in y ^e same more than once - such y ^e world.
Thursday 21		Violent high wind all night and all day - drawing plans abt. my House.
Friday 22		Wind ceased before morning - wrote to sister Biff & Tomlinson - a little from y ^e Bible - D. D. & me called for an hour & promised to take a turn by Din ^g : heron
Saturday 23		a little in y ^e Bible - Mr. Thomlinson abt. 12 o'clock - Din ^g : heron was taken with a cold - Miss G. & I used till her death - a agreeable evening - Thomlinson came.
Sunday 24		Thomlinson off to his Church - Heil called upon Grants wife & here - 20 Harmon upon y ^e certainty of a future life - Carried over

Fig. 7. An extract from the diaries for a week in January 1802, when Frewen was at Cold Overton.

Bath – in 1795 and 1804. Visits to Warwickshire fell away after the death of his aunt, Mrs Rachel Knight, in 1794, and the deaths of Henry and Arthur Homer of Birdingbury. Brickwall House remained rented out, as it had been since 1766, in the 1780s to a Dr Marriot and later to Admiral Charles Buckner, who had married Anne Frewen, the great-granddaughter of an older brother of Stephen Frewen, the seventeenth-century purchaser of the house.⁶⁵

In 1802, he spent the first part of the year at Cold Overton Hall, and for over a month, between 3 April and 10 May, he was ill, with shivering fits, not eating and enduring sleepless nights. When he had fully recovered, he began his most extensive tour for some years, to Wales and the West Midlands, which lasted from 21 July until 28 August.⁶⁶ He proceeded from Bromsgrove to Worcester, Monmouth, Chepstow, Newport, Pontypridd, Cardiff, Swansea, Carmarthen and Tenby, where he arrived on 31 July; he described the latter as ‘a curious place mostly of one street to the castle and a fine view of the bay from it’. In August he travelled on to Milford, Haverfordwest, and Cardigan, where ‘cows come into the street to be milked’, Aberystwyth, Dolgelly, Barmouth, Caernarvon, Bangor, Beaumaris, over the water to Anglesea, to Conway and St Asaph’s, where he noted the cathedral. On 21 August he began his journey home through Chester, Newport, Shropshire, to visit the ‘very kind’ Outlaw family, and Lichfield, where he saw the cathedral and the house where Dr Johnson was born. He reached Sapcote on the evening of 28 August and finally came to Cold Overton at 9 o’clock on Wednesday 1 September. Later in the month he began a two-week journey by horse around Lincolnshire, which took him to Ancaster, Grimsby, Horncastle and Bourne. The last three months of the year were spent at Cold Overton, apart from short visits to Oakham for canal business, and to Sapcote, mainly engaged on supervising estate business and his usual round of social calls.

Frewen remained a voracious reader and while his tastes were as broad as ever, he increasingly studied the Bible and theological works. He spent Christmas Day 1798 reading dissertations by Thomas Newton, the late Bishop of Bristol.⁶⁷ In January 1801 he made notes on the Bible, in January 1802 on the Book of Genesis, in 1804 he read the Bishop of London’s lectures on St Matthew and in January 1805 spent several days reading the Bible. He was also impressed with the writings of the evangelical author, Hannah More, on education, which he found ‘very good indeed’.⁶⁸ Among the many other books he read were *Don Quixote* in English and French, the French novel, *Gil Blas*, Richardson’s *Pamela*, Mallett’s *Life of Bacon*, Sandys’s *Travels*, which were written in 1610, a history of Catherine the Great of Russia, who he considered was ‘dreadful indeed’, accounts of the French revolution, and Boswell’s *Tour*.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Dr Marriot may have been the Rev. Dr Robert Marriot (c.1743–1818), who was the Rector of Cotesbach and later of Gilmorton, in Leicestershire. He owned land in Cotesbach and succeeded John Frewen’s uncle, Rev Stanley Burrough (see above and fn 72 below), as its rector in 1768 (Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 3, p. 914; Nichols, *Leicestershire*, 4, part 1, pp. 148–50).

⁶⁶ *Diary*, 1802, FRE/762 and for subsequent information in this paragraph.

⁶⁷ *Diary*, 25 December 1798, FRE/758; ‘Thomas Newton (1704–82)’, *ODNB*, 40, pp. 737–9.

⁶⁸ *Diary*, 6 December 1799, FRE/759; ‘Hannah More (1745–1833)’, *ODNB*, 3, pp. 39–46.

⁶⁹ ‘David Mallet (formerly Malloch (1701 or 1702–65)’, *ODNB*, 36, pp. 328–31; George Sandys’s (1578–1644) book on his travels in Europe and the Levant was published in 1615 (*ODNB*, 48, pp. 929–32).

G. PIGOT,
White Inn,
SKEGNESS.

	£.	s.	d.
Eating, - - - - -	1	16	-
Wine, - - - - -	1	0	-
Rum, - - - - -			
Brandy, <i>2 Tobacco</i> - - - - -		7	6
Geneva, - - - - -			
Cyder, - - - - -			
Punch, - - - - -			
Negus, - - - - -			
Tea & Coffee, - - - - -			
Ale & Porter, - - - - -		3	3
Rooms & Bathing , - - - - -		3	
Caravan, <i>Washing</i> - - - - -			6
Fire, - - - - -			
Chaise, - - - - -			
Servants' Eating, & Ale, - - - - -		14	
Hay & Corn, - - - - -	7	10	
Letters & Parcels, - - - - -			

Printed by Keese, Boston.			
<i>£ 6 2 6</i>			

Fig. 8. A hotel bill from a visit to Skegness in August 1801, folded inside the pocket note-book in which Frewen wrote his diary for that year.

He continued to be afflicted by periods of melancholia and was as concerned as ever to improve himself morally. Increasingly these personal outpourings in his diary were expressed in religious terms. Frewen also still hoped to marry: at the end of 1793 he wrote he 'may grow better with marriage and with my own and God's assistance - God help me'. In the middle of December 1798, he said that 'my mind much better than I have felt for months', but he was not satisfied, for on New Years' Eve, a few days after he finished Newton's dissertations, he wrote that he hoped in the year ahead 'to improve in Religion and Wisdom and as such become more happy'.⁷⁰ His birthday was often the occasion of self-criticism and reflection. In 1801 he wrote: 'O God improve my mind with the holy spirit that I may so fulfil my duties here for the remainder of my life', and four years later, when he was 50, 'O Lord excite my mind to the practice of what is good'.⁷¹ His short

⁷⁰ *Diary*, 13 and 31 December 1798, FRE/758.

⁷¹ *Diary*, 1 August 1801, FRE/761 and 1 August 1805, FRE/765.

year-end reviews of the previous 12 months and his hopes for those coming were often mixed: on 31 December 1801 he recorded that 'I have finished this year God knows with some better habits & resolutions for the remainder of my uncertain life – suffered two heavy losses in the death of my Father last and Sister, Aunt Mary Burrough and Edwd Lowndes'.⁷² He suffered another loss in October 1803, when his mother, Esther, died at the age of 80. She fell ill at the beginning of the month and doctors were called; she was leeches and bled and given two laudanum pills, but died at 6 o'clock on the evening of Thursday 6 October. 'May she receive mercy – Amen', wrote Frewen.⁷³ In the final entry in his diaries, on 31 December 1805, Frewen made a brief observation on his personal conduct, which characterises his view of the previous quarter of a century: 'I fear this year has not been better spent than former though I hope my resolutions are good.'

In these diaries many different facets of the character of John Frewen are revealed: his scholarly nature and the inner anxieties contrasted with his sociability and his sometimes undirected energy. The examples cited here also epitomise more broadly the world of the Georgian country gentleman, his social and cultural networks, and both his public and his private life. Yet, so much in them is fragmentary, the fullness of their meaning tantalisingly elusive. There are other aspects which have not been touched on here: the financial information given is sporadic and incomplete, and can only be fully understood in the context of his estates and the rental income they provided, areas beyond the scope of this article.

AFTER THE DIARIES

It might have been expected that Frewen would pass his later years as a model of the benign, ageing bachelor, surrounded by his books and friends, benefiting from his good fortune, and able to enjoy occasional visits to London or Sussex. It did not happen that way. Some of the most significant events in Frewen's life occurred after 1805 and are not covered by any surviving diaries. From 1807 to 1812 he was an MP, the member for Athlone, a supporter of the government, but was not known to have spoken in debate.⁷⁴ In 1808 he married Eleanor Clarke (1786–1879), the daughter of Charles Clarke, a Westminster architect, 31 years his junior: they had three sons and a daughter.

His paternalistic acts of charity, which he did not always record in his diaries, also continued. In 1811, John Nichols wrote in his *History of Leicestershire* that it was principally under Frewen's auspices that Sapcote had so rapidly improved in recent years: a public schoolroom was built at his expense in 1792, a house for the master in 1799 and a granary for the use of the parish in 1800.⁷⁵ He was also responsible in 1805–6 for a House of Industry in Sapcote, a mill and a bath house, at the cost of £600, and in 1819 an endowed school, for which in the following year

⁷² 'Aunt Mary Burrough' was the former Mary Frewen (c.1715–1801), his father's sister, and the wife of the Rev. Stanley Burrough, Rector of Sapcote (see above).

⁷³ *Diary*, 2–6 October 1803, FRE/763.

⁷⁴ Thorne, *House of Commons 1790–1820*, 3, pp. 842–3.

⁷⁵ Nichols, *History of Leicestershire*, 4, part 2, p. 898.

he made an additional investment of £1,500 in 3 per cent consols in trust.⁷⁶ He died a wealthy man, leaving cash of £140,000, in addition to his land.⁷⁷

His eldest son, John, died in 1844 at the age of 34, and his property passed to his two surviving sons – Thomas Frewen Turner (1811–70), a Tory member for Leicestershire from 1835 to 1836, and Charles Hay Frewen (1813–78), who sat for East Sussex from 1846 to 1857.⁷⁸ Their sister, Selina (1809–52), married the Rev. Robert Martin of Anstey. The main Leicestershire and Sussex estates went to Thomas, and Charles inherited the land in Yorkshire and most of the Kent property.⁷⁹ After his father's death Thomas abandoned the added name of Turner, reverting to Frewen alone, and went to live at Brickwall House. Their mother, the widowed Eleanor, remained at Cold Overton Hall until her death in 1878.⁸⁰ On John's death in 1870, the main estates were inherited by Thomas's eldest son, Col Edward Frewen (1850–1919). By 1883 they amounted to 7,892 acres with a gross annual value of £13,431, of which 4,218 acres were in Leicestershire, worth £7,869 a year, making him one of the 20 leading landowners in the county.⁸¹ The third of his four sons, Moreton Frewen (1853–1924), was a cattle rancher in the USA between 1878 and 1885, and subsequently the MP for NE Cork from 1910 to 1911. He married Clara Jerome, the aunt of Winston Churchill (whom he later came to know).⁸²

The final word on John Frewen can be left to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which summed up his qualities in its obituary in 1829:

In Mr Frewen Turner that admirable character, the *English gentleman*, was faithfully exhibited; his ample income was not appropriated to the unworthy purposes of ostentatious luxury; hospitality pervaded his establishment, and his dwelling was a temple of benevolence. His memory will be gratefully registered in the hearts of the unfortunate, the widow, and the fatherless; when the flimsy embellishments of fashion, and the boisterous usurpations of popularity, shall have faded into forgetfulness.⁸³

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⁷⁶ H. Whitley, *History of the Parish of Sapcote* (Leicester, 1853), pp. 13, 25. His sister, Mary, had presented a clock to the church in 1793 and seven years later a silver plate service (Nichols, *History of Leicestershire*, 2, part 1, p. 142; Whitley, *Sapcote*, p. 20).

⁷⁷ *Death Duty Registers*, National Archives, IR/26/1208/130–2, 1829.

⁷⁸ M. Stenton, *A Who's Who of British Members of Parliament* (Hassocks, 1976), pp. 151, 386; Charles Hay Frewen unsuccessfully contested Leicester in 1839, Rye in 1841, and North Leicestershire in 1857, 1859, 1865 and 1868.

⁷⁹ 'Return of Owners of Land 1873', *Parliamentary Papers*, c.1097, p. 1875. Charles Hay Frewen owned 634 acres in North Yorkshire, 252 acres in Kent, 80 acres in Sussex and one acre in Leicestershire.

⁸⁰ Frewen, *Brickwall*, pp. 66–7.

⁸¹ J. Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1883 edition), p. 177. The Sussex estates totalled 3,590 acres, worth £5,400 annually, with 55 acres in Rutland and 29 in Kent.

⁸² M. Frewen, *Melton Mowbray and other memories* (London, 1924); M. Stenton and S. Lees, *A Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, 2, 1896–1918 (Hassocks, 1978), p. 129; A. Andrews, *The Splendid Pauper* (London, 1968).

⁸³ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1829, p. 182.

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