

Women Landowners in Gloucestershire, 1660-1810:

Lives, Experiences and Challenges

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Abstract

This study explores the lives of widowed women as landowners during the long eighteenth century. It uses two case studies based in Gloucestershire, Mrs Catherine Bovey of Flaxley Abbey and Lady Elizabeth Guise of Highnam Court to analyse how they operated during a period of time that was dominated by the patriarchy with men appearing predominately as landowners and managers. This is in the context regarding the existence of some societal ideologies that placed the role of women as purely in the domestic sphere. The research, therefore, sets out to challenge whether there was any practical application of private/public dichotomy to women gentry landowners. The study has been conducted through analysing many different aspects of their daily lives in connection to estate management, from the more feminine charitable work to their active involvement in agricultural improvement and industrial projects. All of which contributed to the success of the landed estate and allowed these women agency in decision making and economic independency.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed: Elizabeth Cutter

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Introduction

The study focuses on the lives, experiences, and challenges of women landowners in Gloucestershire during the long eighteenth century (1660-1810). During this period, elite women in particular were not thought to do much except to be decorative and only act in a domestic capacity. This idea supported the notion that these women were not capable of successfully controlling vast landed estates. The purpose of this work is to demonstrate that for women in a position of *feme sole*, which meant they had sole control of property including land, were no less able than their male peers at managing it. I will consider all aspects of their lives, particularly in relation to the concept of separate spheres and whether this accurately applied to women in this position. The study will argue that it was social status and wealth, enhanced with the respectability of widowhood, that gave women freedom to act within the public sphere.

The study will explore the lives of two different women who managed Flaxley Abbey and Highnam estate during the long eighteenth century. In examining the blurred lines between separate spheres, the lives of Mrs Catherine Bovey (1669 – 1726) and Lady Elizabeth Guise (c.1740 – 1808) form the two central case studies. It considers how their actions as landowners and managers allowed them access to the public sphere and put them in control of their own businesses and financial decisions. This contrasts with some previous suggestions that have only analysed actions of women in the domestic or private sphere, ignoring those who were in positions of influence and land ownership.

Mrs Catherine Bovey was married to Mr William Bovey in 1684 until his death in 1692, they had no children, and she was left a widow at the age of twenty-two.¹ It was from Mr Bovey that Mrs Bovey inherited Flaxley Abbey, she was also set to inherit from her father, eventually leaving her a wealthy and propertied woman. Previous work on Mrs Bovey includes research conducted by family members including Arthur Crawley-Bovey (1845-1913) who was a descendant by marriage of Catherine Bovey. The large amount of research he conducted into his family's history reveals more detail about the life of Mrs Bovey. He had direct access to many original papers, portraits, and documents that told the history of the Abbey and the importance that many members of the family put on Mrs Bovey. This is significant, in showing who the family viewed as important to their history and allows a greater understanding of who Mrs Bovey was and how she affected people. Her legacy was also strongly helped by her own descendants viewing her as one of the most important members of the family. *The "Perverse Widow:" Being Passages from the Life of Catharina, Wife of William Boevey, Esq., of Flaxley Abbey, in the County of Gloucestershire. With Genealogical Notes on that Family and Others Connected Therewith* (1898) is used throughout the study due to the amount of knowledge on Flaxley Abbey and the life Mrs Bovey had there.

The title of *The Perverse Widow* is interesting as it draws on work that is potentially based on Mrs Bovey that was conducted when she was alive. The aspect relating to Mrs Bovey was her connection to the politician and writer Sir Richard Steele. The *Spectator* was a daily publication published during 1711 and 1712 and again in 1714, comprising of eight volumes, primarily by Joseph Addison and Steele. Ingrid Tague states that the *Spectator's*

¹ There is variation regarding the spelling of Catherine Bovey, this is the version used in this work. There are other variations of her name including Catherina and Katherine. Bovey is also occasionally spelt Boevey. More detail of this can be found in A.W. Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow': being passages from the life of Catharina, wife of William Bovey, esq., of Flaxley Abbey, in the county of Gloucester. With genealogical notes on the family and others connected therewith.* (London: Longmans, 1898). pp 6-7.

vision included the ‘goal of instructing not just men but women, teaching the latter ‘all the becoming Duties of Virginitv, Marriage and Widowhood.’² This suggests that it was interested in the morals surrounding the conduct of men and women at the time. Mrs Bovey’s connection relates to the general understanding that she is the inspiration for the fictional *Perverse Widow* that appears in some editions of the *Spectator* that were generally credited to be written by Steele.³ A brief synopsis of the storyline of the *Perverse Widow* highlights that it relates to an educated and wealthy widow with a malicious confidante (thought to be based on Mary Pope, her friend and possibly, but no confirmation, romantic companion for forty years) and a fictional aristocratic man known as Sir Roger de Coverley who was in love with her and wanted her to marry him.⁴ She declined, wishing to keep her independence. Furthermore, it was also noted that Coverley was not the only man interested in the widow. There are other features that make it similar to Mrs Bovey’s life and Sir Richard Steele was someone she spent time with, both at Flaxley and in London during the winter season.

It is of note that Steele also dedicated another of his works to Mrs Bovey, *The Ladies Library: Volume Two* (1714), where similarities between Mrs Bovey and the so-called *Perverse Widow* can be made.⁵ Although it is predominantly satire, the entire script of the *Perverse Widow* is not uncomplimentary to women who chose not to remarry. Therefore, the concept of feme sole was not unheard of or unsupported, although it does suggest that rich widows were desirable to marry. Although fictional, it is not dissimilar to the life of Mrs

² Ingrid H. Tague, *Women of Quality: Accepting and Contesting ideals of Femininity in England 1690-1770*. (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2002). P. 19.

³ Crawley-Bovey, *The ‘Perverse Widow’* P. VII, Jason Griffiths *Reading the Forest: A history and analysis of Forest of Dean literature*, (PhD Thesis: University of Gloucestershire, 2019) in, <<https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/9466/>> [accessed 30 August 2023]. P. 192, and *The Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*, ed. C. T. Winchester (digitalised 2015), in, <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/48026/48026-h/48026-h.htm>> [accessed 22 August 2023] P. 233.

⁴ Crawley-Bovey, *The ‘Perverse Widow’* P. 92.

⁵ Jessica Munns, and Penny Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit: Catherine Bovey of Flaxley Abbey, Gloucestershire', in *Woman to Woman: Female Negotiations During the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Mary Waldron (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2010). P. 107. A copy of the dedication can be found in Crawley-Bovey, *The ‘Perverse Widow’*. pp 99-100.

Bovey or other widows of a similar status. The main implications of it in relation to this research is its link to the concept of separate spheres as it portrays the widow as independent in both economic and social matters. In many ways, Mrs Bovey was more unique in the attention she gained and various schemes she was involved in, particularly when considered in relation to her social status as she was not a titled aristocratic.

There is also a more modern work exploring the varied life of Mrs Bovey conducted by Jessica Munns and Penny Richards', titled, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit: Catherine Bovey of Flaxley Abbey, Gloucestershire' found in *Woman to Woman: Female Negotiations During the Long Eighteenth Century* (2010). As stated by Munns and Richards' 'at present, Catherine Bovey is relatively unknown; she was, however, admired by contemporaries,' little has changed, and she is still relatively unknown despite her various contributions to society.⁶ This recent study demonstrates the relevance of Mrs Bovey to the understanding of many key ideas relating to separate spheres and the lives of widowed women within the eighteenth century. This particular work focuses on her life, female friendships and how she was viewed by her peers. There is some exploration of the charities she was involved in, particularly noting the sociability and outward reach of many schemes. It also considers how she funded it through the Flaxley Abbey estate, leading to the authors forming a complementary view on Mrs Bovey's estate management practices. This work also suggests that Mrs Bovey's circumstance regarding social status and wealth allowed her to enjoy life as a widow.

This thesis will also examine the life of Lady Elizabeth Guise, who was based at Highnam estate from her marriage to Sir John Guise in 1770. She appears to have spent the rest of her life there. The majority of Highnam estate after her husband's death (14 October 1794) was under the control of her son, although through her marriage settlement she retained

⁶ Munns and Richards', 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 101.

the house and immediate ground, including the gardens.⁷ She also had land that was hers before marriage, seen through references to the Wright family, that she continued to oversee and receive the rent from. Her involvement with her birth family can also be seen through the charitable work she conducted with her mother.⁸ Her eldest son, Sir Berkely William Guise never married and was active in politics, which strongly implies that Lady Guise also continued to be involved in much of the running of the estate as she continued to live there. When Sir Berkeley Guise died Highnam house and estate went to his younger brother, General Sir John Wright Guise. There is very little existing literature dedicated to Lady Guise or to the Guise's management of Highnam estate.

Aims, Objectives and Separate Spheres

A large part of this research involves exploring the concept of separate spheres and whether it applied to Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise, either during their lifetime or retrospectively. This also has some practical application of what this means for the small group of feme sole women as a whole across Gloucestershire and England during the eighteenth century. At a basic level, the separate spheres are divided into what is public, often relating to business and politics and what is part of the private sphere, sometimes called the domestic sphere and predominantly focused on the home and family. It deals with the human experience as a whole and so it does not apply itself well to more individual circumstances. In this case, through having an unblemished social standing and enough wealth to be financially independent and secure, neither Mrs Bovey nor Lady Guise needed to conform directly to the concept of the spheres. This is all further demonstrated through their successful management of landed estates as they were in the position of making decisions that affected

⁷ Gloucestershire Archives, Gloucester (GA) D326/F23.

⁸ GA D326/F6.

the entirety of the estate. Additional emphasis on this point is made with women being involved in the public sphere through other activities such as charity and philanthropy.

The notion of separate spheres has grown in prominence when related to societal belief regarding the role of women being predominantly in the domestic setting during the eighteenth century. However, there is easily available evidence concerning many different women who were active in the public sphere, including working women doing wage work.⁹ More importantly, it was not uncommon for elite women to run the household and the estate in the absence of the male head of household. Many elite men spent time away from their properties for various reasons and their wives or mothers did not always travel with them, instead remaining behind and in charge of family property. Amanda Vickery has put forward that the ‘public/private dichotomy had multiple applications, which only sometimes mirrored a male/female distinction, and then not always perfectly.’¹⁰ This clearly states that there is ambiguity relating to the role separate spheres had in the eighteenth century and that practical application was limited in some circumstances.

The application of primary material that supports the notion of separate spheres, can be found in some writing during the time. These suggest a potential role of women during the eighteenth century that is in direct contrast to what this research aims to prove. Many of these works were written by men and their titles suggest this, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1766), *Essays upon Several Moral Subjects* (1705) and *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughter* (1774).¹¹ The choice of language in the titles, highlights the importance some

⁹ Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1919), Imogen Dudley, *Evidence of Women’s Waged Work from Household Accounts, 1644-1700: three case studies from Devon, Somerset and Hampshire*. (PhD Thesis: University of Exeter, 2019), in, <<https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/40046/DudleyI.pdf?sequence=1>> [accessed 15 August 2023] and Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian Britain*, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*. P. 288.

¹¹ Jeremy Collier, *Essays upon Several Moral Subjects*, (London: W.B., 1707), John Gregory, *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughter*, (Edinburgh: Strahan and Cadell, 1761) and Wettehal Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*, (London: Hitch, 1746).

men placed on the conduct of women, particularly on those still unmarried. Although on the surface it appears to be advice to the respectable young lady, the content of the sources and tone used implies the need to control the actions of women. Their work considers factors including ensuring appropriate behaviour and advice on fashion to make sure that they did not bring dishonour upon their family. These all give an insight into how some men expected all women to behave within the patriarchal society. One example talks of how silence is a desirable trait and how a woman 'may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable.'¹² Although this is possibly an extreme version, the general belief in these male opinion pieces on female behaviour places women as purely decorative. The three examples given support the view that women were meant to be quiet and subservient to their male superiors and not actively involved in any form of public life. It is this idea that has become central to the role of women during the eighteenth century. This allows the suggestion that there was potential practical application of separate spheres, although whether it was pursued in any detail is being challenged, as demonstrated throughout this study.

The perception of the role of women during the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century has been well documented and supported through a large amount of material that instructed them on how to act, particularly once married. This included conduct books and other essays that documented what made the perfect wife, which would have a fundamental, but underrated, role to the success of family. However, some key literature such as John Ruskin's *Of Queen's Gardens* (1865) is a text credited with outlining the more conventional ideals and values that women should follow. There is a clear focus on 'well-directed moral training' for women to ensure that they upheld appropriate feminine values and supported their husband in appropriate fashion.¹³ The mention of spheres and all that a

¹² Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughter*, (Edinburgh: Strahan and Cadell, 1761). P. 28.

¹³ John Ruskin, *Sesames and Lilies: Of Queen's Gardens*. (1865).

woman could control or had power over was related to providing a suitable household in comparison to the man who was active in the public world. There appears to be a stronger belief put on feminine values connected to child raising and domesticity. However, this imagery of the ideal wife relies on the perfect situation, leading to questions regarding practicality and how much it was implicated. The existence and use of material from the time helps to amplify the position that widowed landowners were coming from when they had the freedom to act individually and be in a position to subtly challenge or ignore separate spheres.

The private/public dichotomy and its application to all women during the eighteenth century has been emphasised by many historians. Martha Vicinus' *Suffer and be Still* (1972) demonstrates how stereotypical feminine behaviours were enforced and suggested the role of women was connected to marriage and procreation and very little life outside of the home. Works such as this highlight how the concept of a domestic and passive woman have become indoctrinated into societal views on culture and gender in the past. However, Vicinus also opens the discussion to, at the time, new societal views on women being involved in their husband's business pursuits. One of the examples given relates to helping to run shops and continuing to do so once widowed, this is proof of women running businesses on various different scales.¹⁴ This is not so different from women inheriting landed property and acknowledges that women were active contributors to various parts of society. This is a direct contrast to Ruskin's source mentioned above. Although separate spheres seemed to exist its exact reach can be questioned and this is further supported by various other scholarship, that focused on smaller groups of often elite status women.

¹⁴ *Suffer and be Still*, ed. Martha Vicinus, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1972). P. VIII.

It allows the suggestion that modern interpretations of validity concerning separate spheres in relation to the role of all women puts forward the proposal that the original definition of the distinct spheres were too fixed. This leaves little room to account for or perceive the manoeuvrability and individuality of women in different social positions.¹⁵ Furthermore, although elite women appeared to respect the role of the gentleman and his position in the public sphere, they were also keen to defend their own rights. Widows in particular gained much more freedom than when they were married and were viewed within the law in a position similar to their male counterparts. Throughout this study, some questions are raised: was there any practical application of separate spheres to women landowners? This is followed up by more inquiries regarding whether women landowners stuck to gender appropriate tasks, or did they involve themselves in all manner of estate management? The case studies used help to demonstrate the limitations of the concept.

The aim of the study is to demonstrate that women landowners had a great deal of independence. The two case studies were chosen as they covered the breadth of the long eighteenth century. Both women also resided within the county of Gloucestershire, with a focus on the area that currently covers the Forest of Dean district. Gloucestershire is not unique in the number of women landowners present in the county, but it can be used to give a representation of the lives, experiences, and challenges of these women. County studies are useful for historical research as they allow depth and greater understanding of particular matters than if a broader geographical area had been decided on. Furthermore, although Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise both had substantial estates, they covered very different land and as such had different agricultural focuses. The variation in practices help us to explore the knowledge these women gained over their lifetime.

¹⁵ Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (Oxon: Routledge, 1998). P. 3, Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 123, and Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. P. 285.

Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise were chosen as they were both active in daily life and left behind a substantial collection of records. Where gaps appear, material from other landed women can be used to suggest similar experiences. Ffiona Swabey discusses in detail how records are often incomplete, yet focusing on specific women is a way to explore their lives and see similarities and differences between them.¹⁶ A large amount of primary material are available for each of them and are particularly relevant to the project of women's involvement in the managing of landed estates. These are generally found within Gloucestershire Archives, Gloucester or in private collections. The sources include accounts, letters, and visual imagery of their respective estates. Taken together, the primary material allows a great deal of insight into the actions of these women regarding managing and improving estates. Furthermore, the fact these women were widows allows a particular window into the ability of women to acquire authority and act independently within a predominantly patriarchal society. They also demonstrate financial understanding that allowed them to make informed decisions regarding choosing to support local charities and other community matters.

There were not many elite women who were landowners in the county during the eighteenth century. Both Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise were elite women in the sense that they owned land, married well and were wealthy in their own right before their respective marriages occurred. They also had favourable marriage contracts that saw them able to control estates through marriage and into widowhood. These were 'women of quality', who were generally from merchant or lower gentry status rather than aristocrats of the highest level, and although they spent time in London, they were usually found at their individual

¹⁶ Ffiona Swabey, *Medieval Gentlewoman: life in a widow's household in the later Middle Ages*, (Stroud: Sutton, 1999). pp 6-7.

rural seats.¹⁷ This possibly gave them a greater understanding of their land and community allowing more positive and beneficial actions to take place. In both cases, their husbands had not bankrupted or left unmanageable debt for them to deal with, meaning they were in a financially stable position when they inherited their respective estates.

Literature Review

There is a considerable amount of literature that relates to women during the eighteenth century suggesting an ongoing interest in their lives and experiences. However, there is a limited amount that is based specifically on women landowners and even less based on the county of Gloucestershire or on any other specific county. Therefore, one of the aims of the study is to help fill the gap in current research which has not explored in detail the reality of the involvement that women had in landownership in Gloucestershire during the eighteenth century. This adds to the growing historiography relating to the national picture of landowning women and is supported by work focusing on the role of women and separate spheres.

Furthermore, a detailed look at some of the literature available on this topic shows how themes and historiography have changed over time. More recent work, such as that by Amy Louise Erickson and Briony McDonagh, takes a more female-centric approach exploring how women were involved in some key decision making. This helps to support the central tenet of this study, which looks at the reality of the situation of female landowners living and managing estates in Gloucestershire rather than fixating on theory which would suggest they did not exist as landowners in a patriarchal society. This helps to demonstrate the many different ways women were capable of challenging gender and social norms and suggests that social status held more importance than gender.

¹⁷ For further exploration surrounding social status of women see Tague, *Women of Quality* and Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*.

The most important property right during the eighteenth century was the right to inherit or succeed a property or landed estate.¹⁸ Although primogeniture meant that the eldest male was the preferred heir, there were various ways women could still inherit allowing them to be in a situation as feme sole over land and property. Erickson's 'Common Law versus Common Practice: the use of marriage settlements in early modern England' (1990) gives a detailed analysis of how women of all social statuses were able to gain property often due to inheritance customs. There is a strong focus on how marriage fits into inheritance, possibly suggesting this was one of the more common ways for a woman to find herself inheriting any form of land or property. It puts forward the argument that marriage was of economic significance for all parties involved, regardless of wealth. Furthermore, women were keen to protect any assets they brought to the marriage and also to ensure the protection of any of their assets in potential widowhood.¹⁹ This helps to emphasise that women were involved and understood legal matters that affected them.

With the concept of separate spheres and the clear agency of women in more unusual circumstances, there is a need to consider how other historians have interpreted the presence of women. A growing theme in more modern scholarship is that the boundaries that define separate spheres are too rigid and do not take into consideration the more individual experiences of women, particularly across different social statuses.²⁰ Here the study is focusing on one social type of woman, those who were landed but not at the height of aristocracy and in doing so the study focuses on more rural locations. The study can then consider whether separate spheres affected these women and the bigger picture relating to women of similar social status and whether separate spheres had an impact on them. This

¹⁸ Eileen Spring, *Law, Land and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300-1800*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1993). P. 12.

¹⁹ Amy Louise Erickson, 'Common Law versus Common Practice: The Use of Marriage Settlements in Early Modern England' *The Economic History Review* 43.1 (1990) 21-39. P. 36.

²⁰ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 3.

highlights that they were not passive in the circumstances they found themselves involved in.²¹ It can be used in relation to other work on domesticity and elite women that also suggests they were involved in more than just basic household management. This has become particularly clear when dealing with landed property as wealth and power was often centralised on land and continued to be important during the eighteenth century regardless of gender.²² It emphasises how success for anyone in this period appears to predominantly focus on financial status and ability to succeed rather than gender.

McDonagh's *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape 1700-1830*, (2018) is a central modern text which focuses on landowning women across England, demonstrating their existence in many counties and interspersed between many other male landowners. This is highlighted by her observation that approximately ten percent of land in England during the period was under female ownership.²³ Therefore it is not surprising that there are some in Gloucestershire, seen through the inclusion of Lady Guise and the references to her public work in the *Annals of Agriculture* (c.1806). McDonagh's work gives an insight into the general management and improvement of landed estates that many women developed an interest in, instead of focusing on traditionally feminine aspects such as domestic work. It suggests that many women took a proactive approach that had socio-economic benefits to the local area, which is reinforced through evidence for change at the estates and support for charities, alongside evidence relating to increased profit margins and land productivity.²⁴ This reconsideration of the involvement of the landowning woman through taking a women-centric insight into their experiences during the eighteenth century demonstrates that there is a need to explore the individual experiences of these women in fuller detail.

²¹ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. P. 2.

²² Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 123.

²³ Briony McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape, 1700-1830*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2018). P. 26.

²⁴ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. pp 144-147.

A growing body of scholarship on county studies has focused specifically on women landowners. There is, however, only a limited amount of coverage of the eighteenth century.²⁵ McDonagh's 'Women, enclosure, and estate improvement in eighteenth century Northamptonshire', (2009) is one such study that highlights how women were involved in agriculture, land management and the running of agricultural related businesses. This is particularly noticeable with widows or women independent of any male intervention.²⁶ Sylvia Seeliger's 'Hampshire women as landholders: Common law mediated by Manorial Customs', (1996) demonstrates there was also a desire to keep land within the family for both elites and tenant farmers.²⁷ These articles help to establish the attitudes and ambitions of various women from different social strata in a more rural setting, although emphasis does appear to be on those who made up the elite and their public involvement in local economic, social, and political matters. These could be important contributions to the rural community and emphasise the potential impact that a woman landowner could have.

There are also county studies that focus on the lives of elite women predominantly relating more to the domestic sphere and household management, of which, many are based on the large estates found in Yorkshire. Literature exists that explores both married and single women's experience during the eighteenth century and demonstrates that many of these women were interested in the continual existence and success of their country house. It also considers the amount of responsibility and different tasks – including supervising of household accounts and organising servants – that these women were involved in to ensure

²⁵ County studies including Sandra Dunster, *Women of the Nottinghamshire Elite, c. 1720-1820*, (PhD Thesis: University of Nottingham, 2011), in, <<https://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/12083/>> [accessed 22 August 2023], and Sarah Law, Susanne Seymour and Charles Watkins, 'Women and Estate Management in the early Eighteenth Century: Barbara Savile at Rufford Abbey, Nottinghamshire (1700-34)' *Rural History*, 33.1, (2022) 23-39.

²⁶ Briony McDonagh, 'Women, enclosure and estate improvement in eighteenth-century Northamptonshire,' *Rural History*, 20.2, (2009), 143-162. P. 143.

²⁷ Sylvia Seeliger, 'Hampshire Women as Landholders: Common Law Mediated by Manorial Customs,' *Rural History*, 7.1, (1996), 1-14. P. 2.

the smooth running of a landed estate.²⁸ These county studies provide a detailed insight into the domestic lives of an elite woman who often resided on a landed estate.

Ruth Larsen's 'Dynastic Domesticity: The Role of Elite Women in Yorkshire Country Houses, 1685-1858' (2003) focuses keenly on the function and involvement elite women had within the aristocratic family, whether that be as a single, married, or widowed woman. In particular, she challenges the stereotype of the aristocratic married woman being idle and oppressed. As such, she puts forward the argument that the aristocratic house could not be defined by separate spheres due to how fundamental domesticity was to the continual functioning of the country house. Furthermore, Larsen suggests that 'the domestic aristocrat was not the only role these women played [...] elite women did have an active life beyond the family and the country house.'²⁹ This not only suggests that women were active outside of the domestic sphere, but that it came down to opportunity and wealth that allowed them to be respectively involved in the public sphere. In many ways this is not dissimilar to how women landowners came to be in prominent positions.

This is further supported through research made in additional work focusing directly on elite unmarried women in Yorkshire which states that although femininity was a large part of their identity, they were firstly aristocrats to the wider society.³⁰ Although widows were not included in Larsen's study 'For Want of a Good Fortune: elite single women's experiences in Yorkshire, 1730-1860,' her conclusion has applications to this study; these women were recognised as 'important and respectable' due to the circumstance of their

²⁸ Julie Day, *Elite Women's Household Management: Yorkshire, 1680-1810*, (PhD Thesis: University of Leeds, 2007) in, <<https://core.ac.uk/display/40026075?source=2>> [accessed 1 July 2023].

²⁹ Ruth Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity: The Role of Elite Women in the Yorkshire Country House, 1685-1858*. (PhD Thesis: York, 2003), in, <<https://theses.whiterose.ac.uk/9841/2/401560.pdf>> [accessed 20 August 2023]. P. 270.

³⁰ Ruth Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune: elite single women's experiences in Yorkshire, 1730-1860,' *Women's History Review* 16.3, (2007), 387-401, in, <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09612020601022279?scroll=top&needAccess=true&role=tab&aria-labelledby=full-article>> [accessed 1 July 2023]. P. 391.

lives.³¹ This is useful in developing the argument that social status and wealth had more influence than separate spheres, particularly in relation to the point that women who appear to conform to publicly acceptable feminine traits as defined by the patriarchy were welcomed into society. In many ways this is a point that this study looks at in detail – both Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise retain suitable feminine activities and behaviours even when involved in masculine businesses.

Structure of the Thesis

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the active involvement of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise in the management of their estates. On this basis, the research will explore how these two women used their properties and how this allowed them to make contributions to the wider society with a particular focus on the economic and socio-political impact of their actions. Through this, the study aims to consider whether these women were successful in overcoming the challenges and restrictions imposed by a patriarchal society. In this case, success will be measured through economic actions and partly through how they were viewed by their peers. This is all explored further in the following chapters.

Chapter one focuses on the background context of how these women were able to become landowners during the eighteenth century in a patriarchal society. The most common way was through inheritance from family that left a woman in the position of feme sole, and this is supported through surviving legal documents. Inheritance through widowhood is the most significant and both Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise gained the majority of the property they oversaw in this manner. Both women challenged patriarchal restrictions, particularly through their choices not to remarry so that they could keep control of their land and have financial independence.

³¹ Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune.' P. 397.

Chapter two explores in detail the active involvement these women had with their landed estate, including the management and improvement of it. A broad range of activities are covered including household and estate management; varying from servants to gardens to forestry and iron work to crop production and land improvement. A large part of this covers the socio-economic impact of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise, focusing on their respective rural community. This chapter sets out a detailed discussion regarding the practical application of the concept of separate spheres and this relates to women in control of landed estates. It clearly highlights women acting outside of the domestic sphere and strongly suggests that social hierarchy was more important to people living in the eighteenth century rather than gender.

Chapter three explores the successful running of the estate and how women used this to give back to society through charity and philanthropy. It predominantly analyses the socio-economic contribution to the local population through the funding of Sunday schools and other good works. At the same time, such action allowed female landowners to appear to take part in more traditionally feminine roles seen through the charitable focus often being on children. In many ways, this helped to disguise the amount of work they were successfully contributing to the public sphere, further emphasising that as long as Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise did not act incorrectly, their social status protected them from being controlled by the ideology of separate spheres.

Chapter four focuses on the ongoing legacy of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise, seen through how they are predominantly remembered. In Mrs Bovey's case this relates to the Three Choirs Festival. This aspect overshadows the many years she spent managing Flaxley Abbey estate. In contrast, Lady Guise has little in the way of ongoing legacy, which is remarkably common for many landowning women. Such an observation is underlined through memorial plaques that mention nothing of their dedication to their estates, focusing

on appropriate feminine aspects such as charitable activities. Thorough investigation suggests that separate spheres had little practical application to elite landowning women, yet the notion has risen in prominence and gained attention. This has become particularly noticeable in elite widowed women. At a minimum it raises a question: what was the individual experience of certain landowning women in relation to practical application of the private/public dichotomy?

Taken together, these chapters allow a detailed analysis of the lives, experiences and challenges faced by Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise. In exploring the lives of all women landowners of similar status in England, the study contributes to the recent historiography on female landowners, their lives and impact on their estate. It also adds to a growing literature that suggests separate spheres is not applicable in its most rigid structure to all women in all cases. Although the role of women is still defined by femininity appropriate for the time, there is stronger evidence for women taking an active involvement in many different areas as Mrs Bovey and Lady Guises' actions once widowed demonstrate.

Chapter One: Inheritance

This chapter considers how women came to gain control of landed estates during the long eighteenth century. This is an important question as the restrictions that were imposed by patriarchal society limited what contemporaries believed women should have authority over. This begs the question: why did women come to own or at least hold a large amount of influence over the running of an estate? The most common way for a woman to have ownership of land and property was through inheritance, either from her husband or from other family members. This occurred through various forms of marriage settlements and inheritance, the move away from dower that led to an increase in the use of jointure arrangements and the concept of feme sole. This research centres predominantly on women who came to control estates through widowhood. For Catherine Bovey, this was with a life interest in the landed estate of Flaxley Abbey as well as a large financial inheritance from family members. Elizabeth Guise managed Highnam Court during her widowhood while her son was involved in politics, as well as, in addition to land that she owned outright.

Throughout the chapter, various legal terminology of the period is addressed. The majority of the terms that have been used to describe the legal position that women could find themselves in are explained in detail in Erickson's *Women and Property in early modern England* (1993).¹ These include words such as dower which refers to a widow's claim to one third of the estate under common law often including property. During the eighteenth century, jointure became more popular with marriage settlements occurring before the marriage and setting out what each party had and what any potential children would get. Jointure referred to a widow's right to receive income from specific property/land for the

¹ Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in early modern England*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

entirety of her widowhood or life if she chose not to remarry. Moreover, some consideration must be given to what is meant by patriarchal society and whether these women challenged it. During the eighteenth century, the business and political scene was dominated by men, potentially leading to the popularity of the concept of separate spheres. However, this did not mean there was no place for women within it, nor that they should only operate inside the home. Although society was considered to be patriarchal and women were not about to be found in national government, there were few legal limitations on what they could do on a more local level.

During a time when it was not perceived to be common for women to own or manage landed estates, it is important to consider how and why they came into possession of them. The main way for a woman to gain control of a landed estate was through inheritance, usually either from her father if there were no sons to inherit or more commonly as a widow. Looking at the ways women became the managers and owners of estates helps to answer one of the aims of this research concerning the extent to which these women were successful in overcoming the challenges and restrictions imposed by a patriarchal society. Many genteel women found themselves in a position of managing more than just the immediate household even if only for a short period of time. This could be viewed as a form of temporary control that occurred when a woman's father or her husband was away, which could occur for various reasons such as business in court or visiting other countries, which left her with authority over the landed estate. Vickery states that a woman in a genteel household had administrative power, initially over the house and servants, but this often extended out over the land when they had the opportunity.² This highlights that many elite women were gaining

² Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. P. 129

practical experience of estate management even before they were in the position of having permanent control of a landed estate.

Property Inheritance

The most significant property right was the right to inherit property.³ Therefore, it could be suggested that the fundamental right of property acquisition holds some figurative reference linking to the perceived status of women's property rights during the long eighteenth century. In the period under consideration, authority, property ownership, and titles appear as pertaining to a distinctly male enterprise. This gives the impression that women were not involved in landownership. The most common legal term used regularly to refer to inheritance matters was primogeniture. Primogeniture had been in place since around the thirteenth century.⁴ It meant the eldest son was to inherit first even if there was an older daughter. However, a daughter could inherit over collateral males (for example nephews); but this depended on who was making the will and whether there were titles that could only be passed down the male line. Therefore, it cannot be ignored that women had the right to succeed – they were legally able to inherit, and this often became the case if there were no other available male inheritors.⁵ Any property could also be split between co-heiresses, so unlike men, the eldest daughter might not inherit all of the property if it had to be split between sisters.⁶ This only appears to have occurred when there was a failure of the male line either through no male sons being born or due to infant mortality. The many varied paths to a woman inheriting appear to exist depending on the arrangements a family had made.

While not necessarily common, then, women could inherit. Eileen Spring's idea that 'no property right was more significant than the right to succeed to a landed estate' also

³ Spring, *Law, Land and Family*. P. 9.

⁴ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 15.

⁵ Spring, *Law, Land and Family*. P. 9.

⁶ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 16.

applied to women.⁷ There is evidence from various historians demonstrating that women did inherit landed property in England. This is particularly supported by quantitative data regarding how often women inherited an estate. Spring has come to the conclusion that direct inheritance by daughters combined with indirect inheritance by collateral females meant that twenty-five percent of all possible inheritances by common law had the potential to be a woman.⁸ This data was taken over a substantial time frame covering 1300-1800. However, Spring states herself that it is not based on precision but the potential for female inheritance if common law was followed.⁹ Therefore, this theory of what common law suggests for female inheritance is not necessarily always the reality.

There is a massive discrepancy between the percentage above and the figures Laurence Stone sets out in *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (1986) which places female inheritance at between five and eight percent across England.¹⁰ However, this is based on actual inheritance, therefore, suggesting that in reality, a male inheritance was preferable. Stone's figures are supported by Barbara English in her study *The Great Landowners of East Yorkshire (1530-1919)* (1990) who has discovered that of one hundred and twenty-seven successions relating to elite landowners, only seven were female which is again five percent.¹¹ Although this focuses only on one county, it gives a representation of local history and the involvement women had with the land. A different county study focusing on Hampshire, suggests up to twenty percent of land within the county of Hampshire was held by women during the period 1650-1900.¹² However, it is important to note that this county study is based on landholding not landowning which makes it difficult to compare as it then

⁷ Spring, *Law, Land and Family*. P. 9.

⁸ Spring, *Law, Land and Family*. P. 11.

⁹ Spring, *Law, Land and Family*. P. 11.

¹⁰ Lawrence Stone, *An Open Elite? England, 1540-1880*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). P. 63.

¹¹ Barbara English, *The Great Landowners of East Yorkshire: 1530-1910*, (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1990). pp 99-100.

¹² Seeliger, 'Hampshire Women as Landholders.' P. 12.

includes figures regarding the number of tenants that were female. In this instance, landholding included those who paid rent to the person who owned the land, the tenant did not legally own the land/property and the land was usually part of a larger landed estate. Compared to the county study above, Seeliger's work depicts a different picture regarding women's involvement in land, suggesting that in sixty-eight percent of parishes within Hampshire, there were women who either owned or occupied the land.¹³ This suggests that there were women of various wealth levels who were involved in land management across Hampshire.

These secondary sources vary greatly on how many women inherited or were involved in land management. This is predominantly due to how they all look at slightly different demographics. Two things that stand out here. First, they all agree that there were women who were landholders across England who inherited land. Second, and more significantly for this research, there is a lack of scholarly evidence to demonstrate how often women inherited or were actual tenants of land. This is emphasised through the varied percentages given, although the majority of them are under twenty percent. In relation to this research, it demonstrates that elite women could inherit land during a time of patriarchal society, when women were not supposed to have authority or control over any public facing business.

However, even if a woman was to inherit land from a relative, it did not mean she would necessarily retain control over its daily running if she was married. Under what is sometimes known as *feme covert* or *coverture*, a woman's legal identity became the same as her husband. This indicates that her property or wealth would be under his control and how much authority or influence she could have was his decision. It meant that within the

¹³ Seeliger, 'Hampshire Women as Landholders.' P. 10.

marriage a woman was technically unable to do tasks individually such as purchase land, enter a contract, or make a will. This limitation would remain in place until the Property Acts of 1870 and 1872.¹⁴ Feme covert could also lead to estates going directly to the husband when an heiress married. Yet due to the reality of how complicated family life could be, married women could find themselves in control of landed estates even before widowhood.¹⁵

This suggests that when an elite woman inherited, as much as possible was done to protect her interests. Erickson's main argument concerning the role of marriage settlements was how this was to preserve the property rights of all classes of married women.¹⁶ This also highlights the economic importance and value of what women brought to their families and also to marriage. They were aware of both the economic and legal rights that they had when it came to marriage. Therefore, an argument concerning the main purpose of marriage settlements could be said to be protecting the wife's property. This is in contrast to some older viewpoints and historical assumptions which suggest that the concept of separate estates only affected elite women and families. This idea has most likely persisted due to the fact that the primary sources which have survived are those relating to the families of the aristocracy or gentry.¹⁷

Yet in direct contrast to the above, one way for women to be in a position where landowning might become possible was through an advantageous marriage. This was more noticeable if they were not set to inherit anything from direct relatives. A good marriage was key for elite women and as marriage settlements suggest the requirement to be provided for during matrimony and if necessary, on widowhood. The role that parents or relatives played was key in the arranging of marriages for elite women as seen in various literature from the

¹⁴ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 17.

¹⁵ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 17.

¹⁶ Erickson, 'Common Law versus Common Practice.' P. 22.

¹⁷ Erickson, 'Common Law versus Common Practice.' P. 23.

time. Many authors of the time focused on the role of the man and woman within actual marriage, but of more interest here are those that specified what occurred in the arrangement of elite marriages. It was not unusual for potential happiness in marriage to be overlooked in favour of 'a son-in-law with a vast estate,' as Bernard Mandeville states in *The Virgin Unmask'd* (1709).¹⁸ Often, there was continual desire to improve an aspect of social standing and marriage was one of the easiest and most acceptable ways to achieve this.

Within the patriarchal society, the behaviour and role of women within marriage has been greatly discussed. Although marriage offered an accessible way to move property and land between families, it could potentially come at a price for the woman who would not necessarily know how she would be treated. Emotional treatment was not as valued as potential material or status gain. Mary Astell's treatise titled *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700) draws attention to the numerous inequalities within a marriage, demonstrated through how a husband had absolute authority over his wife and the wife had 'nothing else to do but to please and obey.'¹⁹ Whether this was true for the marriages of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise is unknown, but it does put into perspective their possible position within the household before they were widowed. Furthermore, their potential involvement in matters regarding public life and estate management would have been in the control of their respective husbands. The prospective happiness or success of a marriage appears to have been based on the attitudes and suitability of those involved.

This leads to the suggestion that Tague makes in her book *Women of Quality: Accepting and Contrasting Ideals of Femininity in England, 1690-1760* (2002) regarding elite marriage matches and how they could be referred to as mercenary matches as they were

¹⁸ Bernard Mandeville, *The Virgin Unmask'd, or Female Dialogues, betwixt an elderly maiden Lady, and her Niece, on several diverting discourses, on Love, Marriage, Memoirs and Morals Etc. of all Times.* (1709). pp. 39-40.

¹⁹ Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, (London: Wilkin, 1700). P. 60.

conducted primarily for money not for love or affection.²⁰ Support for this idea comes from marriage being viewed as the foremost way to acquire or move property, land and wealth around.²¹ However, the concept of ‘mercenary matches’ could be viewed as hypocritical as for the elite women who intended to marry. Their main plan was often supported or implemented by their parents, as improving social status and wealth was key for aristocrats and wealthy members of society during the eighteenth century.²²

The focus on potentially increasing status came first, then the character and reputation of both parties. Mutual compatibility was useful but love hardly ever came into a first marriage for an elite woman.²³ Both Astell’s and Mandeville’s treatise on the culture surrounding elite marriages have demonstrated that wealth was desirable and that there were certain expectations on how a woman was to behave within marriage. This emphasises how the signing of a marriage contract was similar to that of a business transaction. In elite marriages it was important for both parties to bring something of economic value to the marriage.²⁴ This was generally related to land, wealth, title, or social status, so demonstrating the ‘financial implication of marriage,’ and what was potentially to gain for both families.²⁵ This emphasises why an heiress or widow with access to either land or wealth were desirable in the marriage market.

Mrs Bovey, Lady Guise, and Inheritance of the Landed Estate

An example of a marriage settlement can be found between Sir John Guise and Lady Guise, dated 27 June 1770 and held at Gloucestershire Archives, which was an ‘indenture in

²⁰ Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 72.

²¹ Christopher Clay, ‘Marriage, Inheritance, and the Rise of Large Estates in England, 1600-1815’ *The Economic History Review* 21.3 (1968) 503-518. P. 504.

²² Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 72.

²³ Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 73.

²⁴ Erickson, ‘Common Law versus Common Practice.’ P. 23.

²⁵ Erickson, ‘Common Law versus Common Practice.’ P. 37.

five parts.’²⁶ This highlights its legal nature and the thoroughness of what was incorporated over nineteen pages of a contract document with five witnesses of elite status, including the Earl of Berkeley.²⁷ A large part of the document was what was included in the ‘manor of the lordship of Highnam over Linton and Lasington.’ This list of land shows how money was made on the estate. This is further confirmed by going on to state some of the tenants of certain areas and the rent this brings in, including the right for fishing in the rivers Severn and Leadon for fifteen pounds per a year.²⁸ This alone would bring in a modern equivalent of £1300.²⁹ It also states that the estate was comprised of many orchards, meadows, kennels, stables, and coppices. The extent of the land is demonstrated through reference to Birdwood coppice which consisted of ninety-four acres of timber.³⁰ This detail regarding land use and the potential income of Highnam estate probably helped to demonstrate that the Guise family could provide for Elizabeth and any future children, so showing how Lady Guise could gain a title and the additional status and wealth that would come with it. Furthermore, it fulfils the example of what Tague suggests was most important to an eighteenth-century marriage regarding similarities to a business contract that was concerned with monetary or social advancement. It also highlights how success can be interpreted in different ways. While Lady Guise was following what society dictated through marriage to Sir John, she was also developing her own potential through taking on control of a larger household that was part of a landed estate.

By the sixteenth century, jointure arrangements were beginning to replace dowager as widowhood arrangements. Arrangements for jointure were made as part of the marriage contract and generally based on real property – either land already owned by their husband or

²⁶ GA D326/F23.

²⁷ GA D326/F23. P. 1.

²⁸ GA D326/F23. P. 4.

²⁹ *Currency Converter: 1270-2017*, in, <<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result>> [accessed 1 September 2023].

³⁰ GA D326/F23. pp 2-3.

land that was brought with the wealth the wife took to the marriage.³¹ If a widow had jointure, she could not claim dower, but an argument could be formed that jointure was progress for women, as the amount was settled prior to marriage and would continue until the woman's death. In comparison, dower was limited to a maximum of one third of her husband's property or wealth. Jointure was often part of the marriage contract, as seen with Elizabeth Guise being able to receive £200 a year for the duration of her life should she become a widow.³² The modern equivalent of this would be approximately £18,000 a year.³³ As jointure became more common, other forms of assets were supplied to make up the required financial amounts including stock, bonds or rent-charges.³⁴ Lady Guise's jointure arrangement also included rent from parts of Highnam estate, therefore giving her more access into what occurred on the estate. Widowhood had become an important way into property and land ownership for genteel and aristocratic women. It is a further reason why some chose not to remarry as they could possibly lose their jointure as a new husband would be able to provide for them. This is emphasised through both Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise choosing to remain as widows for the rest of their lives.

There was the beginning of a movement away from primogeniture proper towards what is known as strict settlement during the late seventeenth century.³⁵ While the oldest son was still the main heir to any titles, strict settlement specified there would be some form of inheritance for younger sons and daughters either in the form of money, property, or land. This was consolidated through it being a part of the marriage contract. Before the landowner would know how many children he would have and if he would have a male heir. It suggests

³¹ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 16 and P. 19.

³² GA D326/F23. P. 6.

³³ *Currency Converter*.

³⁴ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. pp 18-20.

³⁵ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 15.

that both families involved in the marriage contract were to an extent forward thinking on how to provide for children.

From the perspective of an elite woman, the use of settlement possibly gave her more protection; from birth they would know they would have this set amount of money or land. This can be seen in the marriage settlement of Sir John and Lady Guise, approximately six pages are dedicated to providing for any potential children of the marriage.³⁶ A particular concern appears to be providing for any children if Sir John was to die. It sets out that if there was only one child, they would receive £5000; if there were two children it would become £8000; and if there were three or more it would become £10,000 to be divided between them.³⁷ The modern day equivalent would be between approximately £430,000 and £870,000.³⁸ Furthermore, any daughter(s) was to receive a marriage portion which would help to secure their future within society as they would have something to offer towards their own marriage or even to live on if they chose to not marry. This allowed elite women whose parents had used a marriage settlement to be entitled to a steady, fixed income from the estate that would provide independence.³⁹ The evidence provided by the marriage settlement adds support to the ideas earlier in the chapter relating to marriage being predominantly business related. It could also be suggested that since the estate of Highnam was able to provide varied opportunities to yield rent for family expenses, varying from fishing rights to coppices to productive agricultural land, it gave greater stability for providing for potential children of Lady Guise and her husband.

The importance of strict settlement as a form of marriage contract was that it reinforced the patriarchy through using primogeniture. Even though it appears to have some

³⁶ GA D326/F23. pp 10-15.

³⁷ GA D326/F23. pp 10-11.

³⁸ *Currency Converter*.

³⁹ Larsen, 'For Want of a Good Fortune.' P. 389.

benefit for elite women, it does not allow them to inherit unless there are no sons. Marriage and inheritance were the easiest form of land movement. This links to the idea that marriage settlements were a form of business contract. Men who only had daughters did not want the family name or land to be lost. This explains why collateral males would sometimes inherit over daughters.⁴⁰ Or in the case of Catherine Bovey, she had the estate for life, before it went to a cousin of her deceased husband, therefore staying within the male line as she and William Bovey did not have any children.⁴¹ Christopher Clay suggests that marriage settlements became more common and popular during the period due to an active land market that resulted in the rise in big landed estates that were being held by fewer people during the seventeenth and eighteenth century.⁴² This demonstrates how influential any form of inheritance could be and the importance put on ensuring that there was protection for both parties through the form of a marriage contract or settlement.

By the eighteenth century, McDonagh states that approximately twenty-five percent of heiresses did not marry, with the main reason being property inheritance.⁴³ Importantly this figure also applied to widows who chose not to marry after inheriting property. This is particularly interesting as it suggests that for some women having the freedom of making their own choices, strengthened by having their own form of income, meant they would avoid any further marriage. In some cases, this would have been stipulated as part of the will that saw them inherit their land or wealth, again emphasising what appears to be more important to them. It also suggests that they wanted the same as their male counterparts – to be economically secure. Mrs Bovey is a clear example of this, as her husband's will stipulated that the estate would pass to 'his widow Catherine sole executrix and mistress for life of

⁴⁰ Clay, 'Marriage, Inheritance, and the Rise of Large Estates in England, 1600-1815.' P. 504.

⁴¹ The National Archives, London, PROB 11/411/526.

⁴² Clay, 'Marriage, Inheritance, and the Rise of Large Estates in England, 1600-1815.' P. 503.

⁴³ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 18.

Flaxley Abbey and estate, with remainder to Thomas Crawley, Esq., of London, merchant, his kinsman by marriage.’⁴⁴ Not only did this protect the estate from being removed from the Bovey family, it would also secure Mrs Bovey’s future through ensuring she had somewhere to live and provide for her.

This was known as *feme sole*, which meant a woman was without any attachments to a man that could override her decisions. It meant a woman was able to buy and sell property and make contracts regarding the use of their land.⁴⁵ Legally, they could operate in similar ways to men, they had the independence to make their own decisions and was the complete opposite of *feme covert* which applied to married women. The concept of *feme sole* could also apply in instances where a woman controlled an estate for her eldest child until they were of age or in a position to take control themselves such as when they married. This occurred even though she would not necessarily be the legal owner, and this was situation that Lady Guise found herself in. This becomes a point regarding the reality of landownership in the eighteenth century, where the theory and reality do not meet.

There were many varied ways for women to have authority over landed estate, but for complete control to occur, *feme sole* meant there would be limited interference. The nature of *feme sole* meant that a woman had inherited over male relatives. This was often set in the last will and testament of the person from whom she inherited. Furthermore, legal documents are incredibly useful as primary material as they are generally without bias, although they are limited due to the standardised language and layout used. During the period, if a man wrote a will, if he had a wife, she was generally the executor; this was shown above with Mrs Bovey being executrix for her husband. If he was to die intestate, his widow would then automatically become the administrator. This was all conducted under ecclesiastical law

⁴⁴ Crawley-Bovey, *The ‘Perverse Widow.’* P. 75.

⁴⁵ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape.* P. 23.

which had control over all probate procedures.⁴⁶ As already discussed, William Bovey left the Flaxley Abbey estate to his wife for the rest of her natural life. However, Mrs Bovey also inherited from her father and her step-grandfather.

The will of John Riches declared that all ‘real and personal estate in the counties of Kent, Surrey, London, and Middlesex’ was to go to Mrs Catherine Bovey, widow of William Bovey, as his only living child. She was also appointed sole executrix.⁴⁷ This highlights that as the only surviving child, all wealth went to her. It was not split or sent to other male relatives. However, John Riches did not die until 1718 so Mrs Bovey did not have this additional financial support until later on in her life. It is also worth noting that John Riches’ estate became very large due to his inheritance from Sir Bernard de Gomme in 1685. He left to his stepson John Riches the entirety of ‘the manor house, and all lands, premises, ect., in Waltham and Petham, in the county of Kent.’⁴⁸ In many ways this emphasises how unexpected inheritance could be. Furthermore, Sir Bernard de Gomme also left to his step-granddaughter Catherine £1000 in trust with John Riches and James Butler.⁴⁹ When Catherine Bovey gained direct access to the trust money on her husband’s death in 1692, the £1000 would have the modern day equivalent of approximately £200,000.⁵⁰ This emphasises how easily male control could affect financial matters; but it does appear that William Bovey did not use it as it is mentioned in his will that she should have it.

Overall, the matter of inheritance is important to consider when discussing female landowners as it demonstrates how they came to exist within a society that was strongly patriarchal. Therefore, while in many ways it was circumstantial luck to inherit from a relative, it demonstrates women being successful in overcoming the challenges and

⁴⁶ Erickson, ‘Common Law versus Common Practice.’ P. 25.

⁴⁷ Crawley-Bovey, *The ‘Perverse Widow.’* P. 232.

⁴⁸ Crawley-Bovey, *The ‘Perverse Widow.’* P. 231.

⁴⁹ The National Archives, PROB 11/567/268.

⁵⁰ *Currency Converter.*

restrictions imposed by a patriarchal society. Moreover, the fact these women chose to remain as widows with landed estates, suggests that it was not against societal norm. Vickery strongly supports this by suggesting when women had control of a property or estate, they did not want male influence and would use the rights that came with property.⁵¹ Both Bovey and Guise inherited their respective estates from their husbands which is supported by primary material of marriage settlements and last wills and testaments. These legal documents prove how inheritance affected women and gave some elite women the opportunity to have economic independence. While there were stipulations that they would only have control for life if they remained unmarried, they could and did choose to become active land managers.

⁵¹ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. P. 292.

Chapter Two: Estate Management and Improvement

The most important evidence regarding women landowners in Gloucestershire during the long eighteenth century concerns how they managed their land and property. Such evidence therefore allows a discussion surrounding the concept and existence of separate spheres through the consideration of significance regarding the role of gender, social status, and wealth. There are many aspects that will be included in this chapter that relate to: techniques of land improvement, what financial accounts demonstrate regarding the influence of women landowners and whether they acted any differently from their male counterparts. The chapter also focuses on how these women changed the physical landscape of their estates and as such influencing their neighbouring landowners to try new trends. In some cases, engravings visually demonstrate the changes that had been made. This ties into the main aim of the project, looking at the socio-economic impact of women landowners and demonstrating that there were many aspects that women had to consider once they had sole responsibility. Every decision could face public approval or criticism.

The concept of separate spheres involves looking at what was meant by the terms private and public in the context of the eighteenth century. The public sphere was generally deemed to include business and politics. In comparison the private sphere was seen to be predominantly the home and a woman centric place. There is a suggestion that what is viewed as appropriate male and female behaviour came out of nurture over nature.¹ Therefore, women were technically not physically or mentally inferior. This has led to Jacqueline Eales' suggesting that in the broadest sense, patriarchal means the political and

¹ Jacqueline Eales, *Women in early modern England, 1500-1700*, (London: University College London Press, 1998). P. 4.

social dominance of men over women and children.² This suggests that men appeared to have control of the public sphere, yet the extent and influence of patriarchal control remains a key subject of debate.³ It is commonly assumed that during the eighteenth century women of every status did not operate in anything that could be deemed the public sphere. Yet the emphasis on domesticity can be easily criticised through looking at any form of women's work outside of the home regardless of social status.⁴

It was not unusual for a woman to be active outside the so-called private sphere. It was widely acceptable for the elite woman to manage the landed estate in her husband's absence and as discussed in chapter one there were numerous ways for women to gain authority over an estate and a desire to keep it often meant they had control over hundreds of acres. Furthermore, taking care of the home often involved an understanding of financial matters relating to food expenditure, which meant that even women who complied with the private-public dichotomy would have a basic understanding of income and expenditure. That idea can be applied to women across all socio-economic classes, although this research focuses on elite women landowners. This means that the focus of exploring how women behaved in the eighteenth century should be on giving 'an insight into the historical experiences of women,' allowing us to consider the reality of their situation rather than the ideology of the time.⁵ As this chapter will show, women were hardly ever passive. Looking more closely at those women who occupied roles in the public sphere challenges the significance of the concept of separate spheres.

² Eales, *Women in early modern England, 1500-1700*. P. 4.

³ Eales, *Women in early modern England, 1500-1700*. P. 5.

⁴ For women working outside the home see, Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1919), Dudley, *Evidence of Women's Waged Work from Household Accounts, 1644-1700: three case studies from Devon, Somerset and Hampshire* and Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian Britain*.

⁵ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 3.

Those women who were active estate landowners and managers demonstrate the importance of looking at individual experiences regarding the role of women in the public sphere. They had to make decisions that affected more than just the home and were often seen in a domain that was generally viewed as male dominated. An analysis of how far separate spheres potentially went includes looking at whether it was a reality during the eighteenth century or just an idea that was applied to a few that had managed to become a mainstream belief. Swabey is of the opinion that the concept of separate spheres, in their original definition, appear as ‘two completely separate worlds,’ and the boundaries that create this impression are too rigid to have practical application.⁶ Vickery also disagrees with the rigidity of separate spheres; she states that aristocrats were quick to put rank over everything, including gender.⁷ This links with Tague’s point that land continued to be central to wealth and power during the eighteenth century and so property rights and social rank helped to overcome any restrictions due to the gender of the landowner.⁸ While women respected the gentleman and his place in society, they also defended their own right within society. On the one hand, this was particularly true for widows who may have influential roles that they wished to keep for themselves which could be viewed to be in conflict with the ideology of separate spheres. On the other hand, widows were feme sole and so had the same rights as a man, meaning that they had the ‘advantage of complete autonomy and accountability only to themselves,’ as opposed to married women who were not in the position to achieve this.⁹

Hannah Barker’s introduction to *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (1997), explores how most previous research emphasises the increasing confinement of women in the domestic sphere.¹⁰ However, Barker

⁶ Swabey, *Medieval Gentlewoman*. pp 7-8.

⁷ Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*. P. 285.

⁸ Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 123.

⁹ Swabey, *Medieval Gentlewoman*. P. 76.

¹⁰ *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, ed. by Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, (Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997).

goes on to question the validity of previous work that denied women historical agency through a lack of analysis of primary material.¹¹ Robert Shoemaker takes this argument further through stating that women's experiences should be explored to allow an attempt at understanding of their lives.¹² In many ways this then leads to the question: how can research that only places women of all social status in the private sphere be accurate, when there is continual evidence for many women being active in the public spheres? This is seen across the different social ranks through women involved in wage work and as seen in this research those who controlled landed estates. As has been suggested, recent scholarship has begun to focus on gender in the long eighteenth century, much of it revising the perceived role of women.¹³ This has led to scholars such as Shoemaker stating that separate spheres was a belief that has become historically significant to the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Mrs Bovey, Lady Guise and other landowning women in Gloucestershire and nationally in England are clear examples of how different reality was from the beliefs of the time. While focusing on one county, research by other historians would suggest that this has applicability across England.¹⁵ This helps to prove that female landowners often challenged the paradigm of the ideal woman and the concept of separate space during the long eighteenth century.

Women who possessed a landed estate were immediately elevated into a more public position. This was particularly true if they chose to take an active management role in the estate rather than leaving it to other (male) family members. McDonagh establishes that many women in this position chose to be active land managers.¹⁶ This continues to disprove the belief that women could only be part of the domestic sphere. It reveals the experiences of

¹¹ *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*. P. 2.

¹² Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 3.

¹³ Ellen Pollack, 'The Future of Feminist Theory and Eighteenth-Century Studies,' *The Eighteenth Century*, 50.1, (2009), 13-20. pp 13-15.

¹⁴ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 307

¹⁵ For Women landowners see, Seeliger, 'Hampshire Women as Landholders,' and McDonagh, 'Women, enclosure and estate improvement in eighteenth-century Northamptonshire.'

¹⁶ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 1.

these landowning women in aspects further than just their existence within the home. Women such as Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise were active members not only of society but of a limited number of landowning people who could make decisions that had the ability to affect others in the community. Larsen asserts that the opportunity presented to elite women through 'their class and wealth allowed them to be freed of the restriction of their sex, and to deal with the issues and concerns that interested them.'¹⁷ The case studies used in this research underline further the argument that the dichotomy between the spheres was not the practical reality which widowed women landowners experienced in Gloucestershire during the eighteenth century.

Managing the Household and Staff

Women were expected to maintain an orderly home whatever their status.¹⁸ For elite women their house would be grander and there would be more servants to oversee and larger meals to plan. This was considered the private domain and so under the control of the woman of the house. It is interesting to have an account from a servant of Mrs Bovey that highlights what her job was and how she viewed her employer. In many ways, the length of time, approximately twenty years, Mrs Rachel Vergo spent in Mrs Bovey's household is indicative of how she felt about her employer.¹⁹ She did not feel a need to seek different employment, suggesting that Mrs Bovey treated her well and was economically fair. A narrative from Mrs Vergo, who appears to be the only senior member of staff, of her time at Flaxley exists through descending down the Crawley-Bovey family until it was published in H. G. Nicholls's *Forest of Dean* (1858) as well as A.W. Crawley-Bovey's *The Perverse Widow* (1898).²⁰ The document provides an insight into the private and domestic life at the Abbey,

¹⁷ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity*. P. 85.

¹⁸ Tague, *Women of Quality*. pp 97-99.

¹⁹ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow'*. P. 113.

²⁰ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow'* and H.G. Nicholls, *Nicholls's Forest of Dean*, (Devon: David & Charles, 1966).

which shows Mrs Bovey's interest in keeping up with fashion, highlighted through visiting London during the winter season, staying at her house in Duke Street, Westminster.²¹ Importantly this also helps to confirm that she spent the majority of the rest of the year at the more rural location of her country estate, Flaxley Abbey.²² Mrs Vergo's primary job in the household was as a milliner and mantua maker (dress-making), due to her talent and Mrs Bovey's interest in fashion seen at the highest levels of society.²³

The narrative states that Mrs Bovey had a number of maids, although no reference is given to how many were in her service at one time. It does state that at a charity feast for the poor children of the village of Flaxley, two of the housemaids waited on the table.²⁴ This indicates that there were more servants than just Mrs Vergo and two housemaids. Vickery suggests that the genteel household averaged at around seven live-in servants, as this was enough to uphold status without having too many.²⁵ However, this was unlikely to include those who worked outside on the estate. Moreover, while the exact number of servants is not known for Mrs Bovey, her household was small enough that it would have been necessary for her to take an active role in the daily running although it would be unlikely that any women of her status would have been involved in actual labour.²⁶

It is also worth considering who was included within household staff compared to the public world of estate staff, which was not normally under a woman's domain unless like Mrs Bovey they had gained the position of *feme sole*. With the mentions of a buttery in the inventory of 1692, there would have been a dairy and it would have been likely that there was more than one dairymaid or equivalent due to the labour involved.²⁷ Dairy work was however

²¹ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 115.

²² Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 111.

²³ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 115.

²⁴ Nicholls, *Nicholls's Forest of Dean.* P. 187.

²⁵ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter.* P. 134.

²⁶ Tague, *Women of Quality.* P. 123.

²⁷ GA D14194/1.

often considered an element of feminine, household work, part of ensuring there was enough food for the household to eat and drink and enough supplies for the kitchen throughout the year.²⁸ Anthony Fletcher suggests that all tasks involved in the running of a dairy were considered an ‘extension of a woman’s good husbandry in the household and yard, [and] was everywhere still women’s work.’²⁹ Although a component of the private life and not something that was unexpected of women to be in charge or involved in, it does demonstrate what Mrs Bovey was involved in and how her character would include the ability to competently run the more demanding aspects of an estate. It starts to show the importance of the household and where the line begins to be blurred into estate management and the need for economic security.

Agricultural Activity on the Estate

The eighteenth century is often understood to include the agricultural revolution. It is frequently stated to have started the previous century and witnessed many new ideas developing and a massive increase in food production before the industrial revolution occurred. The ideas were built on earlier medieval practices that saw the land only producing food for a subsistence lifestyle with limited excess and land often left fallow.³⁰ The agricultural revolution saw the development of techniques which were to become the forefront to modern farming, with ideas that are still key to agricultural success today: including enclosure, land drainage, crop rotation and nitrogen fixing. These were all related to increasing the production and quality of produce, allowing a more intensive form of agriculture, so that the landed estate could create a potentially thriving business related to food production. Furthermore, the spread of these ideas occurred through keen landowners

²⁸ Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 129.

²⁹ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500 – 1800*, (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999). P. 246.

³⁰ Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The transformation of the Agrarian economy 1500-1850*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). pp 1-2.

who tried ideas and wrote about their success or failures to agricultural publications, helping to spread the ideas across England. As the evidence analysed below reveals, it could be suggested that Lady Guise was involved in the trialling and spreading of emerging agricultural techniques. Mark Overton states that the technical innovations occurred in the period 1760-1840.³¹ Lady Guise was acting independently from 1794 until her death in 1808 and it becomes noticeable how involved she was in attempts to improve the agricultural land at Highnam estate.

The engraving seen in figure one depicts Highnam estate as it was in 1779 by T. Bonner and was published in Samuel Rudder's *A New History of Gloucestershire* (1779).³² It highlights the Great Pool at the front that had been there since the land was held by the abbots of Gloucester and reportedly was once eleven acres, suggesting the large scale of the estate.³³ The main evidence for this is Rudder's description of Highnam while Sir John Guise was alive being a place with 'large gardens, fish-ponds and extensive grounds.'³⁴ Such evidence suggests that even though the pool of water appears to be used for leisure in the engraving, it was also used for practical purposes which would ensure that costs relating to milling were kept low due to it being in-house. This is through it being used both as a fishery and running the estates' main mill.

³¹ Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England*. P. 4.

³² Samuel Rudder, *A New History of Gloucestershire*, (Cirencester, 1779). pp 342-343.

³³ Nicholas Herbert, *Highnam under the Guises: the management of a Vale estate, 1755-1838*. (Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological society, 2016). P. 15.

³⁴ Rudder, *A New History of Gloucestershire*, P. 342.

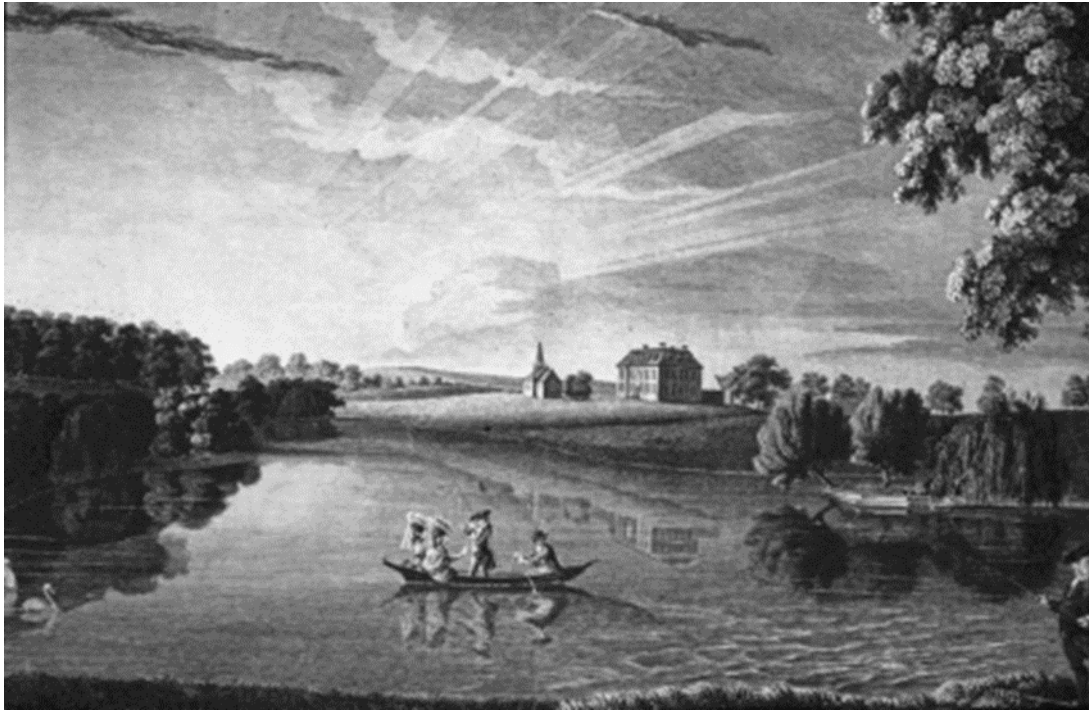


Figure 2-1 Highnam Court with Great Pool c. 1779.

An informative and useful type of source from the time is financial accounts for the estate which demonstrates income and expenditure. They are not often complete but offer detailed records over a set period of time on what exactly occurred financially on the estate. This also allows inference to be made regarding what agricultural activity must have been occurring for certain crops to have been sold. There are various surviving accounts from the Guises' control of Highnam estate that demonstrate that it was a sizeable estate that would require careful managing. All of these accounts are held at Gloucestershire Archives. The main set of estate accounts of interest are from Sir John Guise (16th January 1791 – 18th May 1794), Elizabeth Guise (19th May 1794 – 18th October 1794) and then Sir Berkely William Guise (24 October 1794 – 15 October 1800), which show there was continuation of the accounts as the property passed through the family.³⁵ This implies that there was no great

³⁵ GA D326/F2, GA D326/F4, GA D326/F6 and GA D326/F7.

change to how the estate operated as it went from one person to the next; this included when Lady Guise took over. The first purchase Lady Guise made after her husband's death was of eleven chickens costing ten shillings.³⁶ This would be equivalent to thirty-eight pounds today.³⁷ Business carried on and she would have authorised the purchase even if she took advice from someone else. Furthermore, there was always the possibility she had been doing the accounts before her husband's death, so already had experience in estate accounts.³⁸ The many detailed accounts of household and estate expenditure and income are suggestive of Lady Guise taking a central role in the economic management of the estate. This was often true for widows and women involved in smaller estates where careful financial administration was required.³⁹

The importance of the agricultural calendar can be seen through the accounts demonstrating how the same agricultural produce was planted, harvested, and sold at roughly the same time each year. Furthermore, it was clear that women understood this pattern of agricultural life as part of country estate management.⁴⁰ There was a method to estate management, meaning that it was easy to follow and highlights tradition in management practice. Furthermore, choosing stock and crops that suited the land helped to ensure productivity and profit.⁴¹ Vickery shows examples of this in her work *The Gentleman's Daughter*, (1998), which focuses on genteel women in Yorkshire; she notes that in the surviving diaries of these women they make notes on the 'rhythm of the farming year' from ploughing to haymaking to lambing and shearing.⁴² Therefore, often what worked for an estate would stay the same, underpinning traditional agricultural practices that were

³⁶ GA D326/F4

³⁷ *Currency Converter*.

³⁸ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 40.

³⁹ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity*. pp 51-53

⁴⁰ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. pp 151 – 153.

⁴¹ Swabey, *Medieval Gentlewoman*. P. 64.

⁴² Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. P. 152.

considered suggestive of good estate management. This would include producing food for themselves. For example, at Highnam estate various vegetables were planted, as illustrated through three sacks of potatoes planted in a grove in August 1794. Moreover, with thirty gallons of vinegar also purchased on 5th September 1794, preparation was taken for winter.⁴³ Although this demonstrates Lady Guise's understanding of the agricultural calendar, it also implies that the line between household management and estate management for an elite woman during the eighteenth century was easily very blurred.

The other consideration to be made when women were running the estate concerns any improvements. Developments to the estate took many forms, particularly regarding agricultural land seen through drainage or change in production method. These were not necessarily massive changes, but they were forward thinking in relation to how to make an estate more profitable which shows economic awareness and understanding that decision making was required. It suggests there was very little difference between estate management when a woman was active in her role as estate manager compared to an active male counterpart. The account records from Highnam estate, when Elizabeth Guise was in charge demonstrate that there was always something happening to the land that fitted with the agricultural calendar. For example, mowing for hay appears to have generally cost two shillings an acre, the modern day equivalent being approximately seven pounds and sixty pence.⁴⁴ The accounts also show that actions were taken for land improvement, clover was put in on seventeen and a half acres on 13th July 1794 costing one pound, six shilling and three pence in the hope of producing a better grazing and mowing crop.⁴⁵ Today, that would be equivalent to £100.⁴⁶ Combined with this occurring during the agricultural revolution, it

⁴³ GA D326/F4.

⁴⁴ GA D326/F4.

⁴⁵ GA D326/F4.

⁴⁶ *Currency Converter*.

strongly suggests that Lady Guise was part of a group of landowners and managers at the forefront of newly developed agricultural improvement measures. It is not clear how much understanding Lady Guise and others had compared to modern interpretations which would link clover to increasing nitrogen levels in the soil and so increasing productivity, but it does demonstrate an understanding of how to improve crop quality. Therefore, her actions regarding land improvement would potentially have economic benefits.

Further patterns that imply Lady Guise's economic success can be seen in an example from her personal daybook covering the period 9 November 1805 – 14 June 1808. Daybooks were generally used by the lady of the house and focused on their personal financial status, so included her expenditure and income. A particular highlight in this daybook is her continual involvement with agricultural matters, suggesting that to Lady Guise it was part of her personal responsibility rather than all being part of the main estate accounts. Many landowning women across England kept detailed accounts, ledgers and rentals, suggesting a need to keep control over every aspect of finance.⁴⁷ Economic success for Lady Guise can be seen through the 'six beasts' (cattle) she sold in June 1806 which made a profit of £121 (approximately £5300 in today's money).⁴⁸ Occurrences such as these demonstrate that Lady Guise had confidence in her abilities to produce a product that was fit to sell.

Further personal accounts of Lady Guise cover the period between 14 October 1794 – 22 February 1808.⁴⁹ These appear to focus on belongings that were outright hers, including revealing what land and property she had before her marriage and continued to receive rent and other income from until her death. There were at least three sets of agricultural land mentioned where rent of a minimum of twenty pounds per annum was due on Michaelmas.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 40.

⁴⁸ GA D326/F7.

⁴⁹ GA D326/F6.

⁵⁰ GA D326/F6.

This would be equivalent to approximately £1500 today.⁵¹ Using the evidence supplied within the accounts, it suggests that through her estate management and improvement schemes she was making economic contributions to both Highnam estate and wider society as well as maintaining her own economic freedom.

The above land improvements at Highnam estate link into a letter by Elizabeth Guise that she wrote to Arthur Young's *Annals of Agriculture* titled 'Grass Improvement, and on Fern' (c. 1806).⁵² This publication was one of the most popular agricultural journals of its time with a national audience. It could be suggested that Lady Guise had familiarity with Young's publication, as it would be unlikely for her to correspond with a publication she did not know or respect. Her familiarity with some of the agricultural methods discussed by Young's may imply that this was where she was discovering modern farming techniques. Moreover, although the letter was signed via the initials EG, there would not have been many people in Gloucestershire with those initials conducting the same improvements as her. Her gender is confirmed via Arthur Young calling her a 'fair correspondent'.⁵³ Therefore, in many ways this was not a letter designed to be hidden – others had signed off with initials and less information than Guise had given about her identity and agricultural activities.

The correspondence between Guise and Young demonstrates the interest Guise had in agriculture and the improvement of land, this places her at the forefront of the agricultural revolution that was occurring. This is particularly key as Young was a prominent person pushing for agricultural improvement during Guise's lifetime, with a specific focus on crop rotation.⁵⁴ It is unfortunate that there does not appear to be any further correspondence between the two individuals which could be used to explore Lady Guise's understanding of

⁵¹ *Currency Converter*.

⁵² Elizabeth Guise, 'Grass Improvement, and on Fern' *Annals of Agriculture and Other Useful Arts* Vol. 44 ed. Arthur Young, (1806).

⁵³ Guise, 'Grass Improvement, and on Fern.' P. 418.

⁵⁴ Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England*. P. 128.

improvement within agriculture or even if Young had visited the estate. Furthermore, as will be discussed, her involvement was successful as confirmed through the improvement in both crop quality and quantity. This demonstrates her acting in the public sphere and her keen participation in both agriculture and estate improvement.

The letter contains two separate purposes. The first relates to her success as an estate owner and manager, suggesting she was proud of her achievements considering the state of the land that was ‘so full of weeds, rushes and mint.’⁵⁵ She writes, ‘I have succeeded in improving pasture land in so short a period of time, as to surprise my neighbourhood, which consists of very slovenly farmers.’⁵⁶ Land improvement was achieved by putting in a new drainage system throughout the land with additional ditches on the boundary and the re-establishment of hedges. Soil productivity was increased through the spreading of manure. She also used explosives to blow up rocks so that they did not interfere with the management of the land. Lady Guise provides proof that this method was a success by describing an increase in production in yield of twenty-one tons of hay in just over a year of proactive land management. Again, it adds support to the point that gender was not necessarily the limiting factor, but determination to ensure success of the task she had undertaken. Her thoughts on her neighbouring male farmers are also of interest, perhaps implying that standards within the area had slipped. As she states in the letter, ‘the gentlemen of the county have now complimented me so much on having set so good an example to farmers.’⁵⁷ The ‘gentlemen of the county’ would be her direct peers and having their support for the venture suggests that she was not unwelcome and perhaps she was giving those who worked the land some competition regarding what methods were best.

⁵⁵ Guise, ‘Grass Improvement, and on Fern.’ P. 417.

⁵⁶ Guise, ‘Grass Improvement, and on Fern.’ P. 417

⁵⁷ Guise, ‘Grass Improvement, and on Fern.’ P. 418.

This then leads on to the second, and main, purpose of the letter, a polite request for advice on dealing with invasive fern. The request gives a clear insight into her character, that she was open to ideas and suggestions regarding how to deal with complicated issues surrounding land improvement. Enhancing the land should mean that profits were also improved; the land was viewed as a business and a way for her to remain financially secure and independent in widowhood. Through the existence of the letter, it highlights that Lady Guise was taking a direct involvement and interest in different agricultural methods for land improvement. She does not appear to be relying on an agent acting on her behalf.

One area of importance that this letter confirms is how separate spheres did not appear to apply, or at least were not a reality for women of landowning status. There is a possibility this links to how these women were widows and so had status as *feme sole*, meaning they were treated and acted more like their male counterparts than women who were married or younger unmarried women. Gender does not appear to be an issue and did not prevent women such as Elizabeth Guise from participating in what was viewed as part of the public sphere. Although Lady Guise does suggest that ‘a woman undertaking to farm is generally a subject of ridicule,’ this is more likely to do with the uniqueness of *feme sole* and that this was not something that occurred often.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the ‘ridicule’ disappeared once it was proven she was serious and successful in agricultural methods that could gain further production from the land as seen through the support from neighbouring gentlemen.

The example of Guise, then, supports the argument concerning social status and how it allowed a woman more freedom than gender. A widow who had control of a landed estate was treated similarly to a direct male counterpart. This implies that there was a degree of flexibility regarding the nature and boundaries of patriarchy that to an extent could be crossed

⁵⁸ Guise, ‘Grass Improvement, and on Fern.’ P. 418.

by a woman in the correct circumstance. It could be considered as a challenge to patriarchal society within a rural area. In the managing of a landed estate, it was through the necessity of having to be proactive in business arrangements. This is a significant point of the thesis as it strongly implies that the challenges that women faced once they had control of their estates were not necessarily gender based.

Arthur Young replied to the letter Elizabeth sent to his publication as the editor and offered advice. The fact that her letter was included and received a reply demonstrates that she was taken seriously by Young. It compliments her on her actions and desire to see improvements in the agricultural methods used on her estate. Furthermore, through following the advice he gives she should have ‘a certainty of success,’ with the land in the future.⁵⁹ Although this is the opinion of only one man, it does demonstrate positive acceptance and inclusion of female landowners within the public sphere of a leading agricultural journal and respected research publication. This is emphasised further by him looking forward to further communications from her, suggesting he is interested in how she deals with the issue she has and whether she is successful.

Unfortunately, there do not appear to be any accounts or public letters relating to Mrs Bovey’s time as estate manager at Flaxley Abbey. The only available inventory for the Abbey that Mrs Bovey would have been involved in, is from 1692, which incidentally is the same year her husband William Bovey died.⁶⁰ It is likely that the inventory was completed soon after his death.⁶¹ Yet it still has worth as a primary material as the inventory demonstrates exactly what was at the Abbey in the year Mrs Bovey took control, therefore highlighting that the estate was in a healthy place and she had both money and physical assets

⁵⁹ Guise, ‘Grass Improvement, and on Fern.’ P. 418.

⁶⁰ GA D14194/1.

⁶¹ Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*. P. 238.

of value. This is important for looking at the aim that links to seeing if women were successful at being landowners as in this case the inventory demonstrates how the estate worked which in turn shows how it supported Mrs Bovey to maintain her lifestyle as a widow. She actively and successfully kept her independence as she had financial security.

Bovey's effective management of her estate can be viewed through a consideration of the items which made up her household, including furniture for various rooms, dairy items and equipment, a variety of different grain including wheat and rye, the number of livestock including young cattle and ewes with lambs at foot.⁶² As proved when discussing household staff, inventories can tell us more than just the number of physical items. For example, the fact that there are livestock, suggests that Mrs Bovey had someone to take care of them. It would also be practical for her to sell and potentially make a profit from the various animals, similar to what Lady Guise had achieved with her cattle. One inventory gives an insight into what could potentially be used for financial gain for a landed estate. It is unfortunate that there are no further inventories from Mrs Bovey's time to see if she changed the scale of livestock production. An unfortunate limitation of historical sources is that they are not always complete and can raise more questions than they answer.

Industrial Activity on the Estate

Furthermore, a lease and release agreement from 16th and 17th October 1719 illustrates what was included in the Flaxley Abbey estate and the land Mrs Bovey inherited and controlled.⁶³ The document holds importance as it helps us to understand the extent of the property and land she had, based solely on what was connected to the main Flaxley Abbey estate and the Home Farm that directly supplied the Abbey. This does not, therefore, include land or property that came via her father John Riches or land such as Littledean Manor and

⁶² GA D14194/1.

⁶³ GA D5895/1.

various farms attached such as St Whites and the Grange which were not directly connected to Flaxley. The source includes the ‘mansion house called Flaxley with all and every barn, stable, edifices, buildings, outhouses, yards, gardens and orchards,’ and mentions an extensive number of fields, meadows, coppices, and groves by name.⁶⁴ There are also listings marking the existence of a furnace, forges, and mills which would help support the internal management of the estate. In addition, the owner of the estate also held the rights to fishing and hunting within the area, although unfortunately no tenants or rent amounts are listed to give an idea of how much income this would produce for the estate.⁶⁵

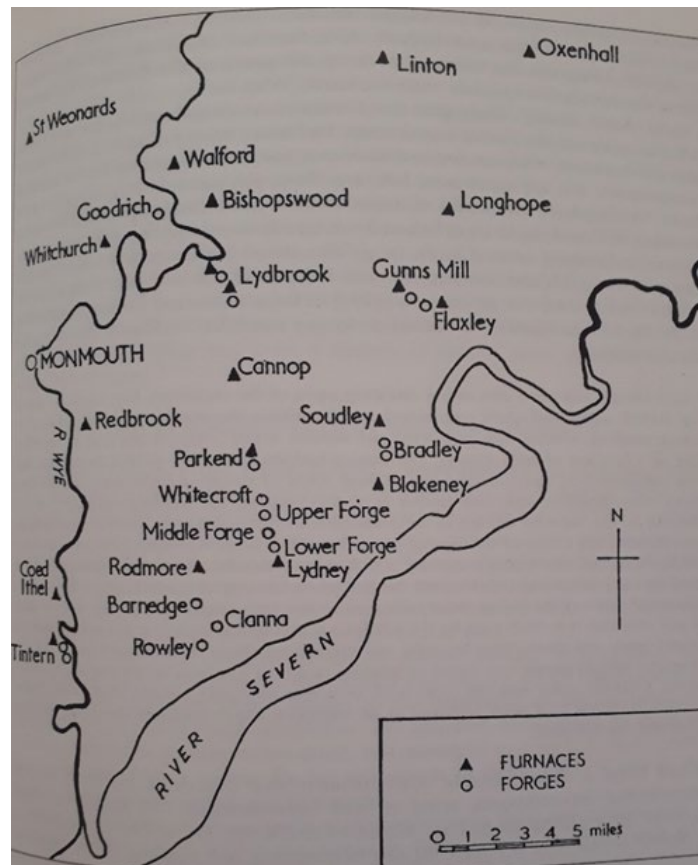


Figure 2-2 Location of Furnaces and Forges within the Forest of Dean.

⁶⁴ GA D5895/1.

⁶⁵ GA D5895/1.

The map above shows the furnaces and forges across the whole of the Forest of Dean which had important links to iron making through the use of charcoal in blast furnaces.⁶⁶ It is known that Mrs Bovey owned and ran at least one furnace and two forges; this was most likely the Flaxley furnace shown below the Abbey with two forges above it, all situated close to Westbury Brook. It is unknown who was running or owned Gunns Mill furnace at the time, but it has on occasions been linked to the Abbey and may not have been included in the lease and release document that stated the location of Mrs Bovey's main furnace. For many centuries iron making had been a large part of industry in the Forest of Dean, with Flaxley Abbey having been given the rights to specific woodland to harvest timber for the running of furnaces when it was a monastery.⁶⁷ Still, it is important to note that Flaxley Abbey had a small part in this business compared to estates such as Lydney Park owned by the Winter family that had a strong hold on the Forest iron casting industry.⁶⁸

Mrs Bovey's involvement in the industry is shown through her use of Edward Wilcox who was the surveyor-general of woods from 1703. Mrs Bovey contracted him for '852 cords for her ironworks at Flaxley.'⁶⁹ Cordwood was used in the making of charcoal to make and smelt iron-ore. A cord was a stack of sticks that was approximately 128 cubic feet.⁷⁰ Therefore, this amount of cordwood would have been a respectable amount for one furnace and suggests that it was an essential part of business for the estate. In general, depending on a variety of different factors, including availability of workers and the weather, the average furnace within the Forest of Dean would make no more than twenty-five tonnes of pig iron

⁶⁶ Cyril Hart, *The Forest of Dean: New History, 1550-1818*, (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1995). P. 141.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Townley, *The Medieval Landscape and Economy of the Forest of Dean*, (PhD Thesis: Bristol, 2004), in, <<https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/34499551/411102.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2023]. P. 143.

⁶⁸ Hart, *The Forest of Dean*. pp 1-24.

⁶⁹ Hart, *The Forest of Dean*. P. 203.

⁷⁰ Hart, *The Forest of Dean*. P. 292.

per a week.⁷¹ This ties in with Flaxley furnace appearing to have the potential to produce a maximum of twenty tonnes of pig iron a week, which when taken to the forges would produce approximately eight tonnes a week of usable iron for a blacksmith to use for various purposes, such as the making of ploughs and other machinery.⁷²

Nicholls's *Iron Making in the Olden Times* (1866) suggests that even the owning of one furnace producing the average of twenty-five tonnes in a week had the potential to make an annual profit of approximately £700 in the earlier period of 1635 (equivalent to approximately £80,000 today).⁷³ Even if a furnace was not in continual, intensive firing and so not producing the maximum amount or required greater maintenance costs, a furnace had the potential to earn for the estate. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any surviving evidence directly on production at the Flaxley furnace. Moreover, Mrs Bovey likely used the number of coppices and groves mentioned in the lease and release agreement as well as Abbotswood that covered approximately 900 acres, to keep it running.⁷⁴ She had ownership of the trees and a furnace that could produce iron-ore, so it made financial sense to use them to improve the chance of profit for the estate.

Mrs Bovey also made gamekeeper appointments that can be found within the Gloucestershire Quarter Sessions held at Gloucestershire Archives.⁷⁵ There is limited detail apart from stating the name of the gamekeeper and the date of employment, linking in with the existence of a Deer Park at the Abbey. However, the most notable aspect relating to the gamekeeper appointments are that they all refer to Mrs Bovey as Lord of the Manor. This is

⁷¹ George Frederick Hammersley, *The History of Iron making in the Forest of Dean Region 1562-1660*, (PhD thesis: Queen Mary University of London, 1972) in, <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30695816.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2023]. P. 444.

⁷² Nicholls, *Nicholls's Forest of Dean*. P. 190.

⁷³ H.G. Nicholls *Iron Making in the Olden Times as Instanced in the Ancient Mines, Forges, and Furnaces of the Forest of Dean*, (1866). pp 44-45.

⁷⁴ Hammersley, *The History of Iron making in the Forest of Dean Region 1562-1660*. P. 518.

⁷⁵ GA Q/SO/3 and GA Q/SO/4.

currently the only place Mrs Bovey has been seen to be referred to as Lord of the Manor. This links back to the concept of separate spheres. As a widow she could act in a public role with a similar legal status as a man so had become in the eyes of the law and court a Lord rather than Lady. Both the gamekeeper appointments and the references to the furnaces being used demonstrate that Mrs Bovey was keen to take an active role in estate management. Further support for this comes from Munns and Richards' account of Mrs Bovey, which describes her as an 'energetic and capable estate manager.'⁷⁶ This demonstrates that Mrs Bovey did not completely rely on an estate manager or steward for making decisions relating to the business. This emphasises that there was very little change from William Bovey's management of the estate. Estate management was in many ways about tradition. There were no drastic changes unless needed for financial reasons.

A further overview of all land relating to Flaxley Abbey is made possible through an analysis of the schedule of documents titled, *Flaxley Abbey Estate, 1870, annotated to 1886, (1490)-1886*, held in Gloucestershire Archives.⁷⁷ The document covers information regarding the land that was purchased by the Abbey estate including the date it was acquired, purchase price and whether it was farmed by the estate or rented out to tenants. It gives an insight into the management of the estate including how the land was distributed among tenants and how this links to financial control and understanding. With the schedule of documents being predominantly compiled by Sir Thomas Crawley-Bovey (1837-1912), it implies that he put together previously separate documents into one place.⁷⁸ This leads to some uncertainty and potential limitation of the source regarding whether there is anything missing. However, generally the source contains a positive outlook on the financial strengths of the estate under the family, seen through the many land purchases made over time. Obviously, the dates show

⁷⁶ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 101.

⁷⁷ GA D4543/2/2/1.

⁷⁸ GA D4543/2/2/1.

that most of the history of landownership of the Abbey is covered, and only certain parts are relevant to Mrs Bovey and her impact on the estate. It is worth noting that there is an overview of how the ownership of the Abbey changed over time, including how Mrs Bovey had a life interest following the death of her husband. That this is included in the document suggests that having the estate run by a woman for over thirty years was not seen as shameful or something to hide by the family. She was viewed as successful by those in her family that followed after her, implying her management of the estate had been approved of.

Fashionable Gardening

There were also changes made to country estates that did not come under agricultural improvement or industrial enterprise which were predominantly conducted for potential profit. Some changes were visual, produced to demonstrate the status of the person who owned the land and to some extent for enjoyment or pleasure. This is emphasised through Larsen's statement that elite women 'could, and did, have an impact on the country-house exterior and the landscape too, expressing their views regarding the gardens, lakes and follies.'⁷⁹ Actions such as landscaping blurred the lines between public and private spheres. Gardening was seen as a feminine activity, but to change the landscape of a country home could be viewed as crossing the boundary, yet many elite women had a role in changing the design of the house and grounds.

A clear example of this can be seen with the work Mrs Bovey oversaw on the landscape of Flaxley Abbey, particularly with the Dutch Water gardens that connected directly to the Abbey. Although the works began while her husband was still alive, she chose to continue them. This can be viewed in the engraving of *Flaxley the Seat of Mrs Bovey*, created by Johannes Kip, which was produced as part of *the ancient and present state of*

⁷⁹ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity*. P. 64

Gloucestershire (Sir Robert Atkyns, 1768).⁸⁰ Atkyns also gave an overview of the estate, noting that ‘she had an handsome house and pleasant gardens, and a great estate, a furnace for casting iron, and three forges.’⁸¹ Although the number of forges differs to the lease and release agreement, the comment by Atkyns gives a clear insight into how Flaxley estate was viewed by the public. It is worth noting that in Atkyns’ publication, Mrs Bovey was the only woman mentioned with no living connection to a man and as such was the only woman holding land in her own right.

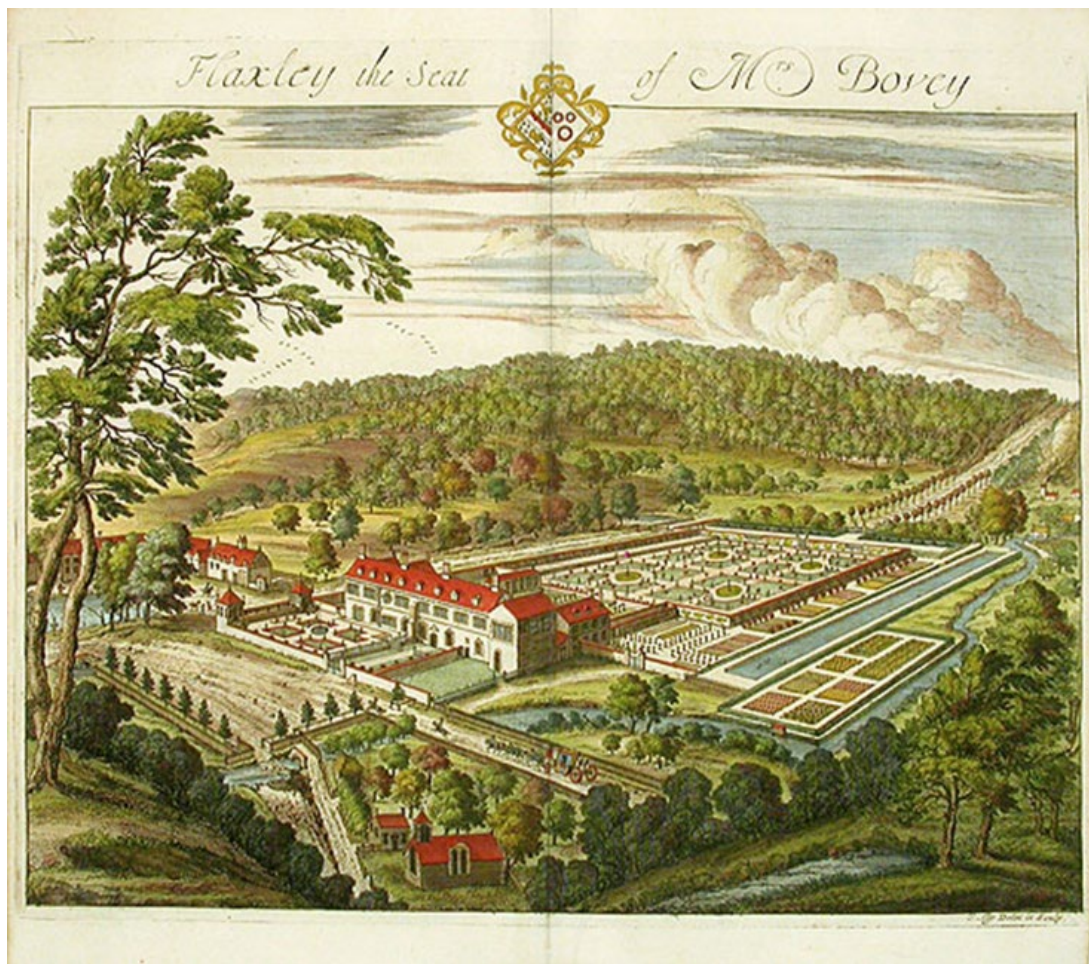


Figure 2-3 Flaxley the Seat of Mrs Bovey c. 1712.

⁸⁰ Sir Robert Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present state of Gloucestershire*, (Gloucester: 1768).

⁸¹ Atkyns, *The Ancient and Present state of Gloucestershire*. P. 228.

There are some concerns surrounding the reliability of the source. This is predominantly due to it being produced for the public and, as such, would need to have been the best possible view of the Abbey. To ensure the estate looked good, the book was designed to show off not only the county of Gloucestershire but also the people who lived there.⁸² Furthermore, it would have had to have met Mrs Bovey's approval, suggesting the artist would have done his best to present the most favourable view. At the same time, it could suggest potential agency of Mrs Bovey with the chosen presentation of the view that emphasises the grandeur of the Abbey and the newly completed gardens. The engraving is primarily useful for demonstrating how the Abbey, gardens, outbuildings, and grounds in the immediate surroundings looked during Mrs Bovey's time as estate owner. In particular this engraving indicates that there was care given to the appearance of the estate. This is useful in conjunction with the lease and release agreement which listed many of the buildings that Mrs Bovey had use of. It implies that she was going against the concept of separate spheres through taking active interest in the matters of estate management and combined with the title of the engraving stating that Mrs Bovey had sole control.

The engraving demonstrates key features that make a Dutch garden recognisable, with space used as efficiently as possible that included avenues, parterres, topiaries and most importantly water features, in particular canal-like structures that went the whole length of the garden.⁸³ While the garden was first planned when she was married, after William Bovey's death Mrs Bovey continued with the planned work for an elaborate and fashionable garden. This potentially has deeper political meanings through being a Dutch Water Garden, linking it to the political climate within England and the Protestant monarchy of William and

⁸² Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 114.

⁸³ Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*. (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1995). P. 24.

Mary and the increase of Dutch influence within the country following 1688.⁸⁴ A further argument that complements this idea regarding gardens having deeper political significance states that following the end of the English Civil Wars, that ultimately led to rapid changes regarding religion and the monarchy, the style of garden chosen could indicate who a landowner supported. It suggests those who followed the Dutch style of gardens were potential Protestant sympathisers compared to those who supported the French style of gardens who were possibly more in favour of Catholicism.⁸⁵ The Dutch style, although elaborate, was known for being less ornate and extensive than its French counterpart, with the key difference relating to the use of canals.⁸⁶ Considering both Mrs Bovey and her late husband had strong familial connections to many influential Dutch merchants, it is easy to see that in this instance, the stylistic choice of garden was significant and supports the point made above. This strongly suggests that gardens were not only used to improve the aesthetics of an estate, but they could also be used to blur the line between public and private spheres. Gardening was thought of as an acceptable feminine activity yet here has connotations that were related to politics.

Continuing with gardens being public and women operating outside of their immediate home, it is believed that Mrs Bovey was also involved in the design of the Dutch water gardens at Westbury Court, Westbury-on-Severn for Colonel Maynard Colchester.⁸⁷ This supports the idea that gardening styles could be political, yet still fashionable and several other large country houses across England also adopted the Dutch style at the turn of the eighteenth century.⁸⁸ As seen with figure four, also engraved by Johannes Kip, there are similarities between the symmetrical nature of both gardens of Flaxley and Westbury which

⁸⁴ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 102.

⁸⁵ Tom Turner, *English Garden Design: History and Styles since 1650*. (Suffolk: Antiques Collectors Club, 1986). P. 54.

⁸⁶ Williamson, *Polite Landscapes*. P. 25.

⁸⁷ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 102.

⁸⁸ Turner, *English Garden Design*. pp 63-73.

help to support this claim.⁸⁹ The obvious recurring feature is the water structures which at Westbury are respected as one of the best surviving examples of Dutch canals.⁹⁰

Furthermore, it suggests that her opinion was valued by men of the same social class, suggesting that status appears to have mattered more than gender.



Figure 2-4 Westbury Court the Seat of Maynard Colchester c. 1712.

Overall, this is probably the most important section regarding female landowners as it demonstrates their lives, experiences, and challenges in relation to estate management. It explores what these women did with their landed estates with a focus on the economic and socio-political impact of their actions seen through the business ventures their respective

⁸⁹ Atkyns, *The ancient and present state of Gloucestershire*. pp 420-421.

⁹⁰ Tom Turner, *English Garden Design*. P. 73.

estates were involved in. Through links to any agricultural or garden improvements that were made by them, it demonstrates they were no different to any other male landowner. It highlights how they operated in a patriarchal society and how they navigated the ideology of separate spheres that was thought to exist during the period. Yet the actions of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise provide evidence against the existence of public-private dichotomy which has often been thought to be an important and influential concept of the eighteenth century. These examples indicate that social hierarchy held more importance than gender. Munns and Richards state that Mrs Bovey had ‘wealth and widowhood enabled a gentlewoman to live an active and public life,’ which could also apply to Lady Guise and so raises the question as to whether it could be applicable to elite women landowners on a more national scale during the long eighteenth century.⁹¹ The statement has been supported by other historians of the period and broadly links into the aim of looking at success regarding overcoming challenges and restrictions that were in place due to living in a patriarchal society.⁹² This notion has been primarily proven through both women choosing to remain unmarried and in-control of their respective landed estate demonstrating financial independence.

⁹¹ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 112.

⁹² For arguments on social status over gender see, Tague, *Women of Quality* and Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*.

Chapter Three: Involvement in Charity

This chapter investigates the charitable and philanthropic work of women landowners through exploring how they were active in their local community. The aim in this part of the thesis is to examine the lives and experiences of Bovey and Guise through their involvement in charity and the part the landed estate contributed to it. With a specific focus on the economic and socio-political impact of their actions. In particular regarding the numerous contributions they made to wider society that occurred through their own independent decisions. Charity adds another layer to the concept and potential application of separate spheres and the act of appearing suitably feminine during the long eighteenth century. Women in this era appear to have chosen to be actively involved in many different forms of charity. This leads to exploration of the concept of fashionable benevolence and how charitable contributions may have occurred to help increase the popularity of a person. That may be a large factor in why landowning women appear to be prominent in acts of charity or philanthropy and there are many examples across Gloucestershire, including Bovey and Guise. In the case of these two women, both were involved in various schemes and ideas that focused especially on helping children, specifically in education. The chapter aims to place an emphasis on why charity is important, examined through the impact and importance that dedicated landowners had on their local community.

Charity, Religion and Separate Spheres

There is a common and well-documented link between women and religious piety during the eighteenth century that suggest those who were strongly involved in the Christian faith were often involved in some form of charity.¹ This was frequently stated in reference to

¹ Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 198.

elite married women with a suggestion that poverty attracted Christian charity from those who were wealthy particularly in rural areas where the landowner was often more active and involved.² In the seventeenth century there was often a more personal element to charity, especially demonstrated by affluent women who aided their neighbours with medical treatment and providing food and clothing.³ Shoemaker states that, ‘charity was a quasi-public religious activity engaged in by both sexes, but it was often dominated by women.’⁴ These activities allowed women to not only enhance their reputation within the neighbourhood and wider society but also gave them some form of authority over those in need. Catherine Hall elaborates on this by suggesting charitable work was a way to appropriately escape the private life of domesticity, insisting it appeared as ‘a reflection of virtue and a relief from a life bounded by the home.’⁵ This suggests that being seen to be pious within the elite household was a way to also act within the public sphere. It comes across as appropriate behaviour and links to some form of attempt at moral improvement of both the elite women and the poor they were helping.

Elite women’s involvement in charitable societies grew during the early eighteenth century and charity began to become more recognisable to the modern eye as an important venture to help those who were thought to be in need of assistance. It started to become organised as large numbers of volunteer societies were formed to help the sick and needy, suggesting a clear focus on the infirm and children of society.⁶ As mentioned above, many

² *Women in early modern England: 1550-1720*, ed. by Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). P. 289.

³ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 247

⁴ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850* P. 225.

⁵ Catherine Hall, ‘The early formation of Victorian domestic ideology’ in *Gender and History in Western Europe*, ed. by Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent, (London: Arnold, 1998). P. 193.

⁶ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 226.

elite women were actively involved in this, possibly motivated by religious ideals and the desire to be doing good and moral work.⁷

However, a question was raised about how far women's involvement should go with their growing participation in charitable efforts. Visiting and meeting individuals at their home was seen as acceptable as it was technically still within the private sphere. Visiting incarcerated people and being involved in organising these societies was not viewed as appropriate, partly due to it being outside the home and may have given them less time to focus on domestic activities for the benefit of their own home.⁸ Yet during the course of the eighteenth century women took more and more control of charitable societies with many men becoming secondary to the role women had within charities.⁹ It could be considered that this was a way for elite women to have some form of agency through taking charge of aspects of life that were already seen as partially feminine. This suggests that although there is importance and significance surrounding the private-public dichotomy, in certain areas it lacks practical application to some groups of elite women.

Regarding the connection between religion and charity there had been a longstanding tradition for those who held landed estates to offer, on occasions, charity to those who worked for them; this included female landowners.¹⁰ Both Shoemaker and Vickery have acknowledged that there is historiographical importance in emphasising that avid female participation occurred in the public sphere.¹¹ This supports the argument being made throughout that it was the status of the women in question that allowed them to be positively involved in a public setting. Charity work does appear to be taken as being part of the public sphere and as such allowed women to be recognised for their actions. For women who were

⁷ *Women in early modern England: 1550-1720*, ed. by Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford. pp 229-230.

⁸ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 226.

⁹ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. pp 226-227.

¹⁰ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. P. 10 and P. 155.

¹¹ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. pp 293-294.

also landowners and managers it takes away from the effort and improvements that went into the estates themselves. This was possibly due to religion and charity appearing a more suitable and feminine aspect of societal work for them to be involved in. Furthermore, it highlights that elite landowning women were capable of successfully acting outside of the domestic sphere.

Charity, Philanthropy and Separate Spheres

Charity and philanthropy are often used interchangeably within this period and by various scholars engaged with the topic, yet the definition of the two words in focus are slightly different. Charity was generally viewed as a one-off event or something that happened yearly with money or food commonly donated to a set group of people in need. Philanthropy was something that happened more regularly often with a clear, strategic aim to help a set group within society. People involved in philanthropy were generally more engaged with their target audience and had an overall aim and reason for their participation. During the eighteenth century there was a key difference that more recent historians such as McDonagh have acknowledged. The difference has become known as reactive charity where there was a basic issue the landowner could address and help with through a gift of a needed essential such as food. In comparison, proactive philanthropy consisted of considerable involvement in the lives of the rural poor in an effort to ensure the improvement of living conditions through the implementation of more permanent help, which often took the form of education opportunities for children.¹² Many women were involved in both and often made a difference or at least helped the lives of those who required the use of benevolent help. There were some women who were more interested and proactive in their approach to improve the community they were based in. Mrs Bovey was one of these women and was often referred to as a philanthropist as she created opportunities for people, especially children who lived on

¹² McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 118.

her estate through various schemes that will be discussed later in this chapter. However, overall, the small difference between charity and philanthropy only appears noticeable when analysing the involvement and literature relating to various women.

With there being marginal differences between charity and philanthropy it does potentially add to the debate surrounding separate spheres and the concept of private versus public. Charity often occurred only when required philanthropy, as stated, was more thought out and often strategic in the type of people it targeted, such as children or women. Through the more proactive approach, it leads to the suggestion that the actions of providing philanthropy would gain more attention. In these terms, the title of philanthropist existed, and philanthropy was seen to be more active in the public sphere. However, with the rise of organised efforts by women combined with the religious aspects discussed above it can be argued that contributions to both charity and philanthropy permits an elite woman access to more public spheres in a way that would not see her criticised.¹³

The concept of separate spheres connects with the depiction of Lady Bountiful which also has a strong connection to the notion of fashionable benevolence.¹⁴ Lady Bountiful had been around since the Middle Ages and was viewed as a set of moral responsibilities a landowner (often conducted by his wife or daughters) had to their tenants. Some historians such as Vickery see this as a blending of charity and sociability, so sharing similarities to older forms of hospitality such as medieval lordships.¹⁵ The concept included visiting the sick and supplying food and medicine to the poor.¹⁶ Forms of charity such as gifting food to the poor was part of being a member of the elite in 1690 and in many ways was used to

¹³ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 226, and Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. pp 293-294.

¹⁴ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 111.

¹⁵ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. pp 195-196.

¹⁶ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. pp 115-116.

consolidate rank and power.¹⁷ There is a suggestion that charity to the poor in the form of giving food was more common in rural areas making the concept more applicable to those who had authority over large amounts of land. This appears to be particularly noticeable following a bad harvest or famine years when starvation was more likely to occur.¹⁸ It shares connections to the more religious aspect relating to upholding moral behaviour of Christian citizens. However, sometimes the title of Lady Bountiful was seen as controversial and compared to fashionable benevolence.¹⁹ Larsen describes how elite women involved in charity could be portrayed as playing ‘Lady Bountiful for her own benefit, but really cared little for anything other than herself and her frivolous social circle.’²⁰ This was the act of making charity and philanthropic involvement a purely public activity, with the belief that contributors only acted so that they could be seen to be benevolent and not consider the impact on those they donated to. Yet arguably any form of charity that helped the local community was viewed as a positive addition to society, even if it was done only for publicity.²¹

In this regard, some elites, including land owning women, recognised that they were required to help the poor on their estates as they needed them. McDonagh states that ‘agricultural labourers were the “nerves and sinew” of rural society,’ as they were the people working long hours and doing physical labour.²² Agricultural commentators from the eighteenth century made it very clear that the relationship between landowner and tenants was reciprocal with the landowners providing stewardship and leadership, the tenants offered rents, labour, and deference.²³ While this is an historian’s perspective, many estate owners

¹⁷ Tague, *Women of Quality*. P. 137.

¹⁸ Swabey, *Medieval Gentlewoman*. P. 151.

¹⁹ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 111.

²⁰ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity*. P. 12.

²¹ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 29.

²² McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 118.

²³ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 115.

knew they needed people to work the land and they wanted loyal and dependable people. Widowed women, especially, were aware of this due to their legal status of only being feme sole if they had inherited. They needed their labourers to be onside to help ensure the success of the business. The contributions they made to wider society through what could be perceived as either charitable or philanthropic actions emphasises a particular focus on the economic and socio-political impact of their actions seen through the perceived relationship between landowner and tenant.

Elite women who had a keen interest in providing charity to the poor, as mentioned above, often did so in the form of contributions of money, clothing, or food. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford refer to these actions as ‘casual gifts,’ due to the ease with which they could be given out.²⁴ The amount and type of charitable contribution varied from estate to estate and woman to woman. For example, the Duchess of Beaufort often gave gifts of bread and beef to the poor of Stoke Gifford and Stableton.²⁵ While this is another example in Gloucestershire, it was also happening at various estates across England, with many choosing to give out some form of food at various significant religious dates in the year, usually Christmas. It also meant that the landowner was seen to be active in the local community by those subservient, which would help the social standing of the landowner, particularly important when they were a woman. Atkyns commented on charity as a whole in Gloucestershire, stating, ‘it appears by examining the particular charities in several parishes, that this latter age has been as fruitful in good works as any of the former.’²⁶

This illustrates how time, money and energy were contributed towards the rural poor by some female landowners during the eighteenth century.²⁷ It is not known if they

²⁴ *Women in early modern England: 1550-1720*, ed. by Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford. P. 291.

²⁵ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 116.

²⁶ Atkyns, *The ancient and present state of Gloucestershire*. P. 9.

²⁷ Hall, ‘The early formation of Victorian domestic ideology.’ P. 125.

contributed more than their male counterparts, however, it does appear that they were more directly involved with a hands-on approach to charitable and philanthropic endeavours particularly in the rural environment. Further support for this comes from Shoemaker's assertion that 'a number of women were involved in the planning, running, and funding of charity schools in the early eighteenth century.'²⁸ Education through charitable means appeared to be a key area for rural elite women to be involved in. McDonagh also confirms this through her statement that the 'building and patronage of schools and alms-houses was an acknowledged female contribution to landed estate economies.'²⁹ This appears to be the case either when the woman was dependent on a male landowner or a propertied woman in her own right.

Further evidence can be seen through other women who were involved in the funding of schools across England. During the 1770s, a Mrs Prowse from Somerset, was paying thirty pounds per annum in school master wages and additional supplies for a day school.³⁰ The modern-day equivalent would be approximately £2600.³¹ Through continual support, a form of philanthropy due to its proactive nature, it would have helped support the school and meant that children within the area had a chance for education. Examples such as this, along with the actions of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise, emphasise that there was a growing national movement towards ensuring there was basic education available in some communities. This allows exploration and analysis of what form of socio-economic influence female landowners could have within the local area and how their status as a landowner could have positive effects on the poor of the parish.

²⁸ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 245.

²⁹ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 115.

³⁰ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. pp 118-119.

³¹ *Currency Converter*.

Mrs Bovey, Lady Guise, and their Charitable Activities

Following on from the strong interest in supporting children and the starting of Sunday or charity schools in various parishes shown in the section above, it is worth noting that both Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise took a keen interest in the education of children. Mrs Bovey in particular is a key example of a woman using her estate and name for the benefit of those who lived on her land and worked for her. Her main interest in regard to her philanthropical work was in improving the education and religious understanding of her tenants. Through her interest in providing education to the children of the parish of Flaxley, records appear on a charity school in the area. In the early 1700s the school in Flaxley supported by Mrs Bovey was teaching thirty children.³² According to Atkyns in his work *The ancient and present state of Gloucestershire* (1768), Flaxley Abbey covered approximately eight miles of land and comprised of forty houses with two hundred inhabitants across the whole of the estate, with a yearly average of five births and four deaths.³³ This would imply that a large portion of children in the village of Flaxley from the 1700s were in a position to gain a rudimentary education that would be highly beneficial for them. The school continued to be popular as one hundred years later it was regularly supporting forty children and still had funding from the ladies of the Crawley-Bovey family.³⁴ This demonstrates that there was a continuation of the work started by Mrs Bovey.

Crawley-Bovey also writes of Mrs Bovey's involvement in charitable work, including her involvement in the Sunday school in Flaxley, which he notes as one of the first of its kind.³⁵ Sunday schools were beginning to become established and more prominent during the 1700s. Although it is suggestive of fashionable benevolence, Mrs Bovey's early involvement

³² A. P. Baggs, and A. R. J. Jurica, 'Flaxley', in *A History of the County of Gloucester: Volume 5, Bledisloe Hundred, St. Briavels Hundred, the Forest of Dean*, ed. C R J Currie and N M Herbert (London, 1996).

³³ Atkyns, *The ancient and present state of Gloucestershire*. P. 228.

³⁴ Baggs and Jurica, 'Flaxley.'

³⁵ A. W. Crawley-Bovey, *A brief account of the antiquities, family pictures and other notables at Flaxley Abbey co. Gloucester*. (Bristol: 1912). P. 9.

implies she was certainly keen to ensure Flaxley was involved in improving life for young people.³⁶ Crawley-Bovey also mentions it in his other work, *The Perverse Widow* (1897), stating Mrs Bovey's name was 'mentioned in connection with the Sunday School Centenary Commemoration in 1880.'³⁷ It is important to include that Mrs Bovey, 'founded and maintained one of the earliest of them at her own cost,' as it directly relates to her business decisions regarding ensuring her estate was making a profit for her to use and it was her choice to use it for proactive philanthropy.³⁸

Lady Guise was also actively involved in charitable work linked to education and the running of a school. This is most apparent with records regarding a school in Fulham, which would have been where she grew up before marrying Sir John Guise of Highnam. In particular, her interest in this school may have been due to her mother also being involved and a sense of duty to continue it following her mother's death. Even though she spent much of her time at Highnam, she remained in contact and often visited her family in Fulham – helped by the land she held and collected rent from.³⁹ She made a conscious choice to continue charitable support, a sense of duty that may also link to moral connotations. She possibly wanted to be involved in some form of charity endeavours that honoured commitments made prior to marriage and her mother's legacy.

Mrs Bovey went further than just educating via the Sunday school. She was also involved in providing funding for apprenticeships for those who lived on her estate. The funding and idea for the apprenticeship started with her husband William Bovey leaving £100 (approximately £11,900 in today's value) for apprenticing the children of the parish in his last will and testament to be carried out by his executor, Mrs Bovey.⁴⁰ She continued this with a

³⁶ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 107.

³⁷ Crawley Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 116.

³⁸ Crawley Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 79.

³⁹ GA D326/F6 and GA D326/F7.

⁴⁰ *Currency Converter.*

gift in her will of £240 (approximately £27,800 in today's value) in 1727 to the capital of the fund.⁴¹ The children for the apprenticeship were to be chosen by the lord or lady of the manor.⁴² She also ensured that the church at Flaxley had enough religious books, including Bibles through a book fund which was overseen by the vicar or curator of Flaxley Church, with the majority of the books being distributed among the parishioners.⁴³ Further capital for the book fund was again provided at Mrs Bovey's death with a donation of £200, which would be approximately £23,200 in today's value.⁴⁴

Through adding to the funds at her death and putting it in the control of trustees, Mrs Bovey attempted to ensure that at least for a while she could continue to support those who had benefited from her being the landowner of Flaxley Abbey. The Sunday school, the apprenticeship fund and book fund were started in her lifetime and continued after her death by the Crawley-Bovey's who succeeded her. These were philanthropical activities for the potential benefit of those on her estate and parish who probably required it the most. Through using some of their profit from their business of the management of a landed estate for the benefit of their local community, it suggests active involvement in the public sphere through showing involvement and awareness of the status of the people under them.

Furthermore, Mrs Bovey was actively involved with the children who were benefitting from her philanthropical activities. On various instances she invited a small number of children into her home to have dinner and on special occasions such as Christmas, sent them home with sixpence. This is mentioned by Rachel Vergo, a senior member of her staff, in her own memoirs of her time working for Mrs Bovey.⁴⁵ The details mentioned by Mrs Vergo emphasised Mrs Bovey's dedication to supporting children and that there was a

⁴¹ Baggs and Jurica, 'Flaxley.'

⁴² Baggs and Jurica, 'Flaxley.'

⁴³ Baggs and Jurica, 'Flaxley.'

⁴⁴ Baggs and Jurica, 'Flaxley,' and *Currency Converter*.

⁴⁵ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* pp 113-115.

genuine interest in ensuring the people on her estate were well supported. However, Mrs Bovey never forgot her status as an elite widow, which is reflected in her dress and mannerism. Although, within Mrs Vergo's account Vergo states Mrs Bovey kept a close eye on her charity account book to 'see if it kept pace with expenses in dress.'⁴⁶ In this instance 'pace' appears to mean that her expenditure on charity and fashion should be similar. This had the added benefit of ensuring she was not too indulgent in fashionable clothing, although, she does appear to ensure she was appropriately dressed for every occasion. Therefore, it gives some insight into the amount of money she dedicated to charitable activities. It could also link to an argument put forward by some historians that stated elite women should be involved in charitable efforts due to their desirable appearance and manner.⁴⁷ In some ways elite women could be seen to be leading through example to others not as well off as themselves and this was seen as an appropriate way for women to be active in the public sphere. The implication here is that through inheritance of property and land, elite women could gain freedom of movement in social and economic matters.

The involvement of elite women in charitable activities was supported by conduct books that were produced and printed during the eighteenth century. Some conduct books believed benevolent efforts were appropriate for elite women especially when helping poor women.⁴⁸ It suggests that helping the poor was seen as a suitably feminine role, although to an extent it does dictate what type of charity was acceptable. Predominantly it had to help women and children. In a meandering way this implies that the dichotomy of separate spheres was not applicable as long as the woman herself was of impeccable behaviour and was seen to be acting for the benefit of society that needed help. Through potential moral superiority, it

⁴⁶ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 114 and Nicholls, *Nicholls's Forest of Dean.* P. 187.

⁴⁷ For work on charity and morality see: Hall, 'The early formation of Victorian domestic ideology.' pp 192-194, Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850.* pp 226-227 and *Women in early modern England: 1550-1720*, ed. by Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford. pp 229-230 and P. 289.

⁴⁸ Alice Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind*, (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1987). P. 162.

is possible that it helped to secure a woman's claim to their landownership and land management. It could be viewed as an appropriate way for a woman with a landed estate to demonstrate stewardship of the local community and justify a 'right to rule.'⁴⁹ It was a way for elite women to act in the public sphere that did not automatically draw negative attention. McDonagh agrees with this stating that 'philanthropy also provided upper and middle-class women with an arena in which they could contribute to public life.'⁵⁰ This could be a reason for why single or widowed women were keen to be involved in charitable events, where those who wanted to be more active in the public sphere chose proactive philanthropy.

Alice Browne is among those who have suggested that it was more socially acceptable for poor women to receive charity from respectable elite women.⁵¹ It also relates to what was being raised by conduct books of the period regarding how elite women should lead by example; good manners, education, and dress were all important. This point helps to explain why many of women's charitable actions were predominantly focused on poor women and children.⁵² Elite women's charitable actions were based partly on moral and religious reasons. It could also be stated that moral issues can be used to hide the real reasons for doing it such as social status and acting in the public sphere. Support for this comes from Hall's statement regarding philanthropical activity as the one public area that was easily accessible to women and was seen as the true profession of a lady, particularly when it concerned women and children. This offers further support for the argument that social status allowed women much more freedom of action and movement.

Both Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise were, therefore, involved in charity work. There seems to be particular interest in providing charity for children often in the form of supplying

⁴⁹ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 126.

⁵⁰ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 126.

⁵¹ Browne, *The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind*. P. 138.

⁵² Hall, 'The early formation of Victorian domestic ideology.' P. 193.

a school or some form of education. It does become obvious that Mrs Bovey was more interested in it than Lady Guise, which is highlighted through descriptions of her as a philanthropist. Arguably Lady Guise shows more interest in land improvement schemes, suggesting that landed women could have their own diverse and not traditionally feminine interests. However, the evidence shown above regarding education does highlight that this was a continual interest for many landed women. They felt a need to give or provide some form of charity for children.

Philanthropic activities both confirmed and challenged the accepted role of women during the long eighteenth century. The focus of women's participation in philanthropy was often on women, children and moral issues which could be seen to fit in with traditional gender roles. Yet women's involvement in charity was increasingly associated with taking part within the public sphere, possibly suggesting a claim or even an assertion of their right to be active participants in public life.⁵³ This is further emphasised by contemporaries of Mrs Bovey making positive note of her activities regarding philanthropy. George Ballard in his *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) comments positively on 'the distribution of her great riches [...] to various works of piety, to different kinds of charity, to hospitality and to the encouragement and advancement of learning.'⁵⁴ Such comments illustrate the two key types of charity Mrs Bovey was interested in, education and religion, with further proof given that details her personal involvement in creating and financing various forms of charity. The significance with Ballard's commentary is that he had noticed her involvement in proactive philanthropy and given it a more public platform even though the book itself was not published until shortly after Mrs Bovey's death. In an era when the maintenance of separate sphere is thought of as near absolute, this is further proof that it was exemplary

⁵³ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 227.

⁵⁴ George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain: who have been celebrated for their writing or skills in the learned languages, arts or sciences*. (Oxford: 1752). P. 378.

behaviour, economic security and social status that mattered more than gender. This demonstration of her being mentioned acting in the public sphere is particularly useful as there are no negative comments or connotations surrounding any of her actions.

Moreover, Mrs Bovey's acts of charity have a lasting legacy in the parish of Flaxley. The apprenticeship fund is still available under Mrs Bovey's name and is specifically for people under the age of twenty-five who live within the parish boundary for the purpose of furthering education opportunities.⁵⁵ The book fund also still exists in its original function to supply the parish church with relevant material.⁵⁶ It allows confirmation of the longevity and support for what Mrs Bovey had put in place. Firstly, it highlights the backing from her own family to keep charitable funds going following her death. It suggests support for her actions as a female landowner, which is further supported by the Crawley-Bovey's naming her their most successful and notable member of their family.⁵⁷ Secondly, Mrs Bovey's actions regarding her philanthropic attitude would have been beneficial to helping the economic growth of an area as its main purpose was to help poor children have an apprenticeship and learn a skill. Munns and Richards describe her life as one of 'public charitable activity.'⁵⁸ This links to the legacy and the historical impact of these female landowners which will be discussed in more detail within the next chapter.

Financing Charitable Involvement

The relationship between women's involvement in charity and their status as landowners can be seen through how they used their businesses to help fund charitable donations. In the case of the women mentioned, these female landowners contributed to

⁵⁵ *Mrs Catherina Bovey Fund for Apprenticing*, <<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/311477/charity-overview>> [accessed 1 July 2023].

⁵⁶ *The Charity of Mrs Catherine Bovey for the distribution of Bibles and other books in the ancient parish of Flaxley, in the county of Gloucestershire*, <<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/236296/charity-overview>> [accessed 1 July 2023].

⁵⁷ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'*

⁵⁸ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 105.

charity with money that mostly came from them and was often part of any estate profit. This is in contrast to married women who may have also been involved in charity who would most likely have been using money that came from an allowance, often called pin money, set up by their closest male relative, such as father or husband. Women landowners involved in charitable activities provide further evidence in support of women making their own financial decisions. These were decisions that would have an impact on the socioeconomics of the local community or whoever the charity supported. Through proactive philanthropy and having apprenticeship funds Mrs Bovey helped to ensure the children on her estate had employable skills and jobs and could support themselves and their families better than if they did not have an opportunity for an apprenticeship. The purpose of an apprenticeship was to learn through hands on experience, encouraging and creating a skilled labour force. This could suggest that charitable help to provide an education for the local community could help to promote long term economic growth for the local area and landed estate. Any landed estate needed workers and possibly through offering education in either a school or apprenticeship setting could make them more loyal as the landowner had supported them to gain some form of education.

In Bovey's case there are clear records that demonstrate the majority of the money available for charity came from her estate. This highlights her agency as *feme sole*, allowing her to make her own business choices, seen predominantly through land whose rent went straight to charity funds. This links to chapter two and the importance of clear estate management which would help to support a woman's ambition to be financially involved with charitable matters. The following information is primarily drawn from remaining legal documents stating the charitable purpose of this land and also purchased dates which are enclosed within the main *schedule of documents relating to the Flaxley Abbey Estate*.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁹ GA D4543/2/2/1 and GA D134/T19.

information contained states there was messuage (house with outbuilds and land) and additional land at Elton, part of the Flaxley Abbey estate, that totalled approximately forty-four acres. It is interesting that at the time of purchase, the majority of the messuage and land was only small plots, with the largest being Great Broughton totalling six acres, others were predominantly three or four acres. This suggests that it was rented to ordinary tenants, and that the income from the rent may then have been used to help out the poor community in the parish of Flaxley. There is a possibility this included the children of those who were renting the land mentioned at Elton attending the Sunday school or benefiting from some form of charity where the funds were raised from the land they lived on.

Of particular note regarding the source relating to the messuage at Elton is the writing at the bottom dated March 1734, after Mrs Bovey's death and so the responsibility of her successor.⁶⁰ The note stated that the lord or lady of the manor of Flaxley was to give two thirds of the yearly rent from the land mentioned above to the benefit of charity within the parish of Flaxley. This amount was to be split, with two thirds to the apprenticeship fund and one third to the book fund.⁶¹ It is interesting that it was lord or lady, implying that the family would not have been surprised or perturbed if another woman ended up inheriting the estate, again supporting the suggestion that Mrs Bovey had conducted herself well in all aspects of estate management. The support of the family also suggests they wanted to continue Mrs Bovey's good work and help the community that was near to their rural home. It could imply that they saw philanthropical work as beneficial to the estate. This source is also confirmed and supported by legal documents signed 1732 and 1734 by Thomas Crawley-Bovey her successor and Mary Pope her executrix with witnesses including William Lloyd and Peter Senhouse.⁶² This all links to demonstrating the use that these women made of their properties

⁶⁰ GA D134/T19.

⁶¹ GA D134/T19.

⁶² GA D134/T19.

and the contributions they made to wider society with a particular focus on the economic and socio-political impact of their actions.

Although Mrs Bovey invested a significant amount of time and money into her philanthropical works, it did not mean she was alone or unusual in doing so. While Lady Guise did not participate in as many philanthropical activities as Mrs Bovey, she still ensured that she had adequate funds to provide for the school she supported in Fulham. The main record for this funding that remains is contained within Lady Guise's personal accounts, held in Gloucestershire Archives. It relates to herself, and her mother, being involved in financially supporting the school at Fulham and states that a contribution of just over three pounds was given annually.⁶³ This would have been equivalent to approximately £250 today.⁶⁴ Although there are no records of Lady Guise being involved in charitable work near Highnam, it does not prove she was not.

As previously discussed, many landed families often gave bread or gifts of some form as a hospitality gesture to those who worked their land, and it may not have been noted down in records or survived to modern times. For Lady Guise there is one record of an Easter offering in 1805 that amounted to two pounds and two shillings, and a similar amount was given regarding food for the poor (equivalent to ninety pounds today).⁶⁵ The nature of these sources meant that only the expense was recorded, and it lacks detail regarding motive. This is emphasised through it not stating the location that was benefiting from the donation; Highnam, Fulham or both. With this being included in her accounts it suggests there was thought given to how much she should give for each occasion. Therefore, she is still an example that supports and proves the idea that landed estate owners were involved in charity.

⁶³ GA D326/F6.

⁶⁴ *Currency Converter*.

⁶⁵ GA D326/F6 and *Currency Converter*.

This is a further indication of the attempts of female landowners to have a positive impact on their estate and community.

In conclusion, through analysing these women's role in charity it becomes clear that they were active in their local community. Charity had a social and political use and often took place in the public sphere. It illustrates how women were able to use their estates to make contributions to wider society seen through economic support. This all helps to demonstrate McDonagh's point that 'elite women's attitude to farming, improvement and the poor' were often interlinked, with the main focus being on their own economic survival.⁶⁶ Both Bovey and Guise would have been aware that taking part in philanthropic activities was useful for their public image and how others would have viewed them considering their status as feme sole. This is further strengthened by Munns and Richards stating Bovey's interest in 'religion, education, charity, and benevolence fitted with contemporary ideas of appropriate female behaviour.'⁶⁷ These actions as landowners during this period generally had a positive impact on the people of the area. Although some charitable work was done out of an interest in helping people and possibly due to some form of religious motivation, there are also strong connections to broader economic, social, and political motivation that these women would have been aware of due to the link to the success of their estates. It gives further insight into the lives, experiences and challenges these landowning women faced. With charity predominantly seen as a feminine activity it helps to disguise the fact that there were women that had become successful in the male-dominated public sphere. It further supports the observation that for elite landowning women, separate spheres had little influence over their actions. It was social rank and continual success that allowed them to operate freely during the eighteenth century.

⁶⁶ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 118.

⁶⁷ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 113.

Chapter Four – Legacy and Funeral Monuments

In exploring the actions of women landowners in Gloucestershire during the eighteenth century, it raises the query of why this group of people mattered. It has become apparent that how these women are remembered has potentially reinforced the notion of separate spheres which is so often applied to women of all classes and their actions during the eighteenth century. Therefore, we need to look behind such obvious memorialisation and legacy and consider the reality of the posthumous reputation of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise. In the context of this chapter, legacy has been taken to mean what their long-term impact was and if their involvement as landowners has altered this. The initial evidence suggests that women landowners were not remembered for their actions regarding the management of the landed estate. Yet on an individual level, some women were remembered for charitable contributions to society. An understanding of their legacies helps to emphasise the significance of individual actions and adds to the claim of this thesis, that these women landowners deserve more recognition.

The lasting impact of these women is not always obvious. In particular there is little evidence surrounding the immediate end of their lives. Larsen comments that many aristocratic people had a strong desire to ensure their legacy continued after death.¹ This has a broad range of meanings from continuation of family lines and also being celebrated for their most successful ideas or works. There is an argument being made that these women were being celebrated only for their most obvious and appropriately feminine contribution to society. The other important factor relating to legacy is how they were remembered in various funeral monuments and plaques. This will allow an insight into what possibly gave

¹ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity*. P. 246.

the concept of separate sphere such prominence in relation to gender roles in the eighteenth century. While these women achieved successful fame in their lifetimes, their posthumous reputation was more complicated, predominantly due to the lack of exploration of their achievements.

Throughout various stages of their lives, women have continually used economic skills on various scales, however, this has rarely been explored or mentioned. This is particularly noticeable in connection to what Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise achieved in the running of the landed estate. The support for this idea comes from the omission of skills relating to estate management on many women landowners' memorials. This connects to earlier work in chapter two, that suggests women were not known for their ability to manage and improve landed estates, although the work there proves they were successful in navigating a range of issues. The significance regarding the legacy of landed women comes out of the fact that until more recent studies, there has been little work exploring the impact of their lives and actions. As discussed, the public/private dichotomy is an important part of this research, demonstrated through exploring why the legacy of landed women mattered. This can be seen in how it has retrospectively been applied to some women so that their more public, and potentially masculine, roles have been ignored.

Ongoing Legacies

A part of Mrs Bovey's legacy that is rarely discussed is her contribution to the Three Choirs Festival which takes place annually moving between Gloucester, Hereford, and Worcester Cathedrals. Both Mrs Bovey and her neighbour Colonel Maynard Colchester of Westbury-on-Severn, were early supporters and involved in the foundation of the Three Choirs Festival that is still popular today.² This demonstrates a strong lasting legacy that has

² Anthony Boden and Paul Hedley, *The Three Choirs Festival*, (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2017). P. 18 and Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 117 and 121.

continued to be a popular occasion each year, even if the original contributors are rarely mentioned apart from in their historical context. Although Anthony Boden and Paul Hedley's work focuses on the music festival, rather than specific detail regarding the intricacies of separate spheres and how Mrs Bovey's involvement challenged that concept, it is clear that Mrs Bovey is regarded as a philanthropist for her involvement in the founding of the festival in 1718.

Further evidence for Mrs Bovey being a principal founder and supporter of the Three Choirs Festival for the county of Gloucestershire is from a sermon written after her death in 1727 by the Reverend Peter Senhouse that has been found within *Gloucestershire notes and queries volume II* (1884). The work comprised of nine volumes and focused on historical occasions within the county of Gloucestershire. In relation to the foundation of the Three Choirs Festival, it describes Mrs Bovey as a 'kind and memorable patroness [...] who laid the foundation of this good work.'³ It gives further insight into her character which suggests she was interested in all she was involved in, implying that she was remembered fondly by all that knew her. In conjunction with Ballard's and Vergo's account of Mrs Bovey, explored in chapter two and three respectively, this builds a detailed image of the type of person Mrs Bovey was. The mention of good work links to her key involvement in the creation and support for various charitable organisations. Combined together, these accounts primarily provide support for her being referred to as a dedicated philanthropist.

Munns and Richards discuss Mrs Bovey as an 'active patroness of the Three Choirs Festival and the charitable activities associated with it.'⁴ Once again this demonstrates support for Mrs Bovey's involvement in charitable activities. Further evidence is provided

³ *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries Volume II*, ed. Rev Beaver H. Blacker (Gloucester: Davies and Sons, 1884). P. 130.

⁴ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 104.

through the festival's original aim being to provide support for 'widows and orphans of the poorer clergy of the three dioceses'.⁵ In many ways, Mrs Bovey's involvement in a music festival, even one based on religious ideology and taking place within cathedrals, shows her acting outside of the domestic sphere. Her contribution to the local community, both economically and socially was viewed positively, although there has been a lack of recognition regarding her involvement in an event that now has international appreciation. There is no obvious criticism for Mrs Bovey by those who acknowledge her involvement, only admiration for her actions, suggesting further evidence for separate spheres not necessarily applying to wealthy, landed widows.

Lady Guise leaves less of an obvious lasting legacy than Mrs Bovey. This was not uncommon for elite landed women who were predominantly involved only in agricultural experiments and improvements. It demonstrates how their contribution to society could be easily ignored.⁶ Yet, this makes her more comparable to other women who were also in the position of *feme sole*. Lady Guise typically fits in more with other women who did their duty to family and land. As Vickery suggests, the amount of work published during the eighteenth century regarding appropriate female behaviour supports the suggestion that there was some notion of separate spheres.⁷ This furthers the ongoing argument that this thesis discusses regarding separate spheres and how it was more complicated for elite widows.

Lady Guise explored her own interests, which were not traditionally feminine, and she was dedicated and successful in her pursuit of improving land management for her estate. It allows a comment to be made on Guise's character and how separate spheres never prevented her from expressing her own opinion on what could be viewed as masculine matters.

⁵ Boden and Hedley, *The Three Choirs Festival*. P. 433.

⁶ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 2.

⁷ Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*. P. 288.

Therefore, although her immediate legacy appears non-existent, her contribution and surviving sources relating to estate management, in particular her potential involvement in the agricultural revolution, have allowed an exploration of what her life consisted of as someone invested in land improvement. She has the potential to become an important figure in the history of landowning women during the eighteenth century.

Funeral Monuments

The posthumous reputation of women landowners can be viewed in obituaries and funeral memorials. The death of an elite woman was followed by mourning but also a chance to celebrate the deceased's life, which further emphasised a need to idealise the woman's life.⁸ Larsen asserts that 'the way that women were represented following their death can be seen as their extension to their lifelong performativity, as their femininity and aristocratic status were not only celebrated, but confirmed and assured future prosperity.'⁹ Funeral monuments, therefore, give a great deal of insight into how women were generally viewed in the eighteenth-century. This possibly explains why there is a rising interest in the individual experiences of women, including landowners and how the legacy of these women is now being explored in a different way, focusing on their more public actions. With women landowners only making up a small part of the population, the focus in their death was on acts that other women of similar status would also be remembered for – acts of charity or philanthropy. The memorials fit the narrative of feminine behaviour, but at the same time it is feasible that it was these memorials that allowed the concept of private versus public spheres to become so prominent when discussing women's roles for the period. It is possible that this set the precedent for how propertied women of the eighteenth century were remembered by the majority.

⁸ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity*. P. 259 and P. 264.

⁹ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity*. P. 260.

Commonly, in memorials of many female landowners who had ran landed estates the fact of them being in a position of individual control and any of the ambitious business projects or land improvements they undertook to improve profits were never mentioned. McDonagh states that of the women she surveyed in *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape, 1700-1830* (2018), ‘grave monuments and other related memorials provide little in the way of explicit recognition of individual women’s achievements as landowners and improvers.’¹⁰ Considering that her work covers elite landowning women across England, her findings demonstrate that funeral monuments and obituaries predominantly focus on traditional feminine aspects of life relating to domesticity through being wives and mothers.

McDonagh goes on to state that memorials for male landowning peers, ‘not infrequently commemorated building and landscaping works.’¹¹ It is possible that from these memorials to the past the culture surrounding domesticity and femininity has arisen. Within the funeral monuments that exist for elite women, there is a clear emphasis on them being good wives and mothers. The only form of business that was acceptable to mention related to charity work but not how they were able to manage finances and other requirements of estate or household management. This skews the perception of how the past has been interpreted and reconfirms the belief in private versus public spheres even if it is not necessarily true. The form and manner which memorials took underlines the need to take a more feminist approach. In looking at the role of women and their actual lived experiences, using sources they produced, it becomes possible to step beyond those forms of memorialisation which support a narrative of domesticity and separate spheres.¹²

¹⁰ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 147.

¹¹ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 147.

¹² *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*. P. 2.



Figure 4-1 Catherine Bovey's Westminister Memorial

The failure to acknowledge female success in non-domestic spheres has led to a neglect of their roles as land managers who controlled estates and made important economic decisions. This is a problem which is further exacerbated by the fact there is limited information relating to their other contributions to society outside of the home. This can clearly be seen with Catherine Bovey's memorial that is located within the south aisle of the nave in Westminister Abbey that describes how a large portion of her income was given to various charities that predominantly supported education.¹³ This focus on philanthropical

¹³ *Katherine Bovey: Philanthropist*, in, <<https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/katherine-bovey>> [accessed 30 May 2023].

actions, which were obviously very valuable to those who benefitted, highlights the focus on correct, appropriate, and feminine behaviour for a woman of her status. Although this shows clear recognition and support for her dedication to charitable work it ignores any work that she put into estate management or improvement. However, with her actions being written down for everyone to read, it adds more evidence to the lack of real-life application of public versus private sphere. Even though the focus is on the more feminine attributes of charity to the poor, it still suggests that she was comfortable in taking part in activities outside of the private sphere. It gives more weight, therefore, to the argument that the separate spheres held little meaning for women who were able to be independent both economically and socially.

The memorial was made mostly of marble and designed by James Gibbs and sculpted by John Michael Rysbrack (c. 1726-27). There is limited knowledge on how the monument came to exist and who was involved in its creation, only the inscription below the main memorial mentions Mrs Pope's involvement. Pope had been a close friend of Bovey and they had lived together for forty years, so she would have wanted to present a favourable view of Mrs Bovey for a memorial that was in such a prominent and public space. There are two religious figures depicted on the memorial. One is a representation of Faith. This is fitting considering the work Mrs Bovey did relating to religious charities and the teaching of Christianity. There is some conflict over who the other figure depicts, with suggestions being either a representation of Prudence or Wisdom. Although both would fit the character of Mrs Bovey, current scholarship leans towards Prudence.¹⁴ The language within the memorial demonstrates her interest in learning and spreading education to people who did not necessarily have the opportunity. It also suggests a connection to the ideology of many conduct books of the period that were clear in stating that the ideal behaviour of an elite woman in public was through leading by example. This is emphasised in the funeral

¹⁴ *Katherine Bovey: Philanthropist.*

monument by the numerous lists of positive Christian virtues, including truth, conduct, piety, wisdom, compassion.¹⁵

It has been documented that Mrs Bovey was highly religious. This is strengthened by both the imagery on the memorial and the language used to emphasise her dedication to religious work. Through having this large, ornate memorial at Westminster Abbey, it is suggestive of a lifetime of achievement that had been recognisable to many. As indicated by the description of her leading an ‘exemplary Christian life.’¹⁶ This highlights that she was being remembered for her actions in life that had seen her in contact, through philanthropical actions, with many people of differing social status. It supports the idea of cultivating a socially acceptable persona that presented her as a public image even after death. This implies that to many people she acted in an appropriate manner as *feme sole*. She was proactive in attempting to meet the needs of groups of people, but she also knew the money had to come from the estate, demonstrating financial understanding seen in chapters two and three.

The monument found in Mrs Bovey’s home church of Flaxley is a plain tablet of white marble with no imagery. Like the Westminster memorial the key focus of the inscription is on Mrs Bovey’s philanthropical nature, and this is further highlighted through the list of bequests made in her will that were made public on this plaque. This included a reference to international philanthropic work, with £500 towards the founding of a college in the Islands of Bermuda. Today’s equivalent would be approximately £58,000.¹⁷ This appears to be in connection with a missionary scheme that aimed to bring Christianity to foreign countries created by Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753), based on his work titled *a*

¹⁵ *Katherine Bovey: Philanthropist.*

¹⁶ *Katherine Bovey: Philanthropist.*

¹⁷ *Currency Converter.*

proposal for the better supplying of churches in our foreign plantations, (1725).¹⁸ The aim appears to have been the funding of a college to provide education to children with a key focus on spreading the Christian faith, although it is not clear whether Bishop Berkeley succeeded. Mrs Bovey's involvement appears to be purely financial, and she was one of a number of contributors from across England including other women philanthropists such as Lady Betty Hastings, although it does establish some involvement with the British empire.

As previously mentioned in chapter three she provided further funds to an apprenticeship fund for the poor children of Flaxley. Other notable inclusion of charitable work on the Flaxley plaque relate to Grey Coat Hospital and Blue Coat Hospital, both in Westminster and both receiving a £500 donation following Mrs Bovey's death (equivalent to £58,000). Further donations went for educational requirements outside the parish of Flaxley. The charity school of Christchurch in the parish of Southwark benefited from £400 (today's equivalent would be approximately £46,400).¹⁹ The confirmation of numerous bequests to different organisations confirms Mrs Bovey's philanthropical nature and consolidates her two primary interests for charity being education and religion.

A government report, titled *Reports from the Commissioners (Charity)*, (1828), confirms the amounts Mrs Bovey bequeathed to various people and organisations.²⁰ It also establishes that land, known as Peglar's Farm during this time, was bought for the purpose of continuing to supply the charitable funds for Flaxley Abbey. It is likely that this is the same land mentioned in chapter three, that totalled forty-four acres but at this date it has become one farm that brings in fifty pounds worth of rent, (approximately £2900 today) which is then distributed among the charities Mrs Bovey set up.²¹ This form of legacy through charitable

¹⁸ George Berkeley, *A proposal for the better supplying of churches in our foreign plantations*, (London: Elzevir's Head, 1725).

¹⁹ Crawley-Bovey. *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 139.

²⁰ *Reports from the Commissioners (Charities) Volume Eleven*, (Oxford, 1828). P. 91

²¹ *Reports from the Commissioners* pp 91-92, GA D134/T19 and *Currency Converter*.

actions would have helped the rural community she patronised throughout her life to remember her actions that benefited them. Through bequests to various organisations, it could be viewed as a typically feminine action from the time, suggesting that even actions after death could be considered to be gendered.²²



Figure 4-2 Flaxley Church, by Blanche Crawley, 1840

The point is further established when considering the redesign of the local church that was situated on the Flaxley estate as a legacy that is depicted in the sketch, by Blanche Gibbs nee Crawley in 1840.²³ There is limited knowledge regarding this church that only survived for approximately one hundred years before being replaced by the current and much larger one built in 1856. The Flaxley memorial plaque simply states, ‘lastly she designed the rebuilding of this Chapel, which pious design of hers was speedily executed.’²⁴ Although Bovey did not live to see the finished church, she was involved in the idea and plans for the

²² Amanda L. Capern, ‘The Landed Woman in Early Modern England’ *Parergon*, 19.1. (2002) 185-214. P. 210.

²³ Blanche Crawley, *Sketch of Flaxley Church (1840)*, from the private collection of Miss M. A. J. Swinley.

²⁴ Crawley-Bovey, *The ‘Perverse Widow.’* P. 139.

new one. It suggests she left behind a religious legacy for the benefit of the parish and parishioners of Flaxley in a more physical form than any monetary donations.

Furthermore, the language used in the Flaxley plaque is very similar to the Westminster memorial. The main point of both memorials is to emphasise public, charitable actions of Mrs Bovey. Although she and her close friend Mrs Pope, who oversaw the creation of both monuments, would have wanted to present the work of Mrs Bovey in the most favourable way possible, it does show that they believed her philanthropic work was important for public knowledge. This has also been noted in other monuments for elite women, which portray and celebrate feminine and domestic qualities.²⁵ The Flaxley memorial notes Mrs Bovey's 'disposition to do good,' suggesting that her character was one that wanted to help, connecting to her involvement in organisations such as the Three Choirs Festival.²⁶ This focus on her character and public actions within the charitable sphere links into what appeared to be an acceptable form of commemoration for a woman of the era. To be in a position to donate vast amounts of money surely demonstrates her economic skills, in particular relating to her chosen business involvements. It was her choice to spend so much on charitable causes in life and in death.

The existence of two substantial public memorials and various other funeral memorabilia including the work conducted by her family demonstrates the posthumous reputation of Mrs Bovey. It can also be used to emphasise success through having a physical memorial in a high-profile place that existed due to her various contributions for the benefit of society. Having analysed various key points relating to the life of Mrs Bovey, it is easy to understand and suggest that she took an active involvement in the running and improvements of her estate and through this made many contributions to wider society. This is emphasised

²⁵ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity*. P. 264.

²⁶ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 139.

through Munns and Richards statement regarding Mrs Bovey's intention to be remembered as a gentlewoman and benefactor.²⁷ It also demonstrates that she was financially successful as she had left money to pay for it and for the memorial to be executed to her standards by her friend and long-time companion Mary Pope.²⁸ The success through economic actions for social reasons are demonstrated through the amount spent on various philanthropical causes. It also highlights why her peers were so impressed by her and continued to admire her after she died.²⁹ Her main legacy was the positive contributions to her local community, amplified by her own family continually remembering, respecting, and progressing her charitable ambitions.

In relation to Lady Guise, there is little remaining evidence relating to her death other than her will and burial being amongst the family of Guise at Elmore Church, Gloucester. Nevertheless, this suggests the positive involvement of Lady Guise within the Guise family due to her inclusion within the family burial plot. The importance of this is due to the belief that 'the burial of family members at a single location meant that the importance of dynasty during life continued after death.'³⁰ This implies that her contributions to the continuing success of the Guise family were acknowledged, meaning she was part of her marital family rather than her birth family. Furthermore, there is some surviving funeral memorabilia relating to her family and the involvement she potentially had that can be useful in showing her character and insight into how the family and landed estate operated.

Lady Guise was involved in the creation of her husband Sir John Guise's memorial that can easily be found within the South aisle of Gloucester Cathedral, not far from the main entrance. It takes the form of a marble plaque with the Guise coat of arms engraved in colour,

²⁷ Munns and Richards, 'A Woman of Extraordinary Merit.' P. 113.

²⁸ Crawley-Bovey, *The 'Perverse Widow.'* P. 139.

²⁹ Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain.* pp 377-381.

³⁰ Larsen, *Dynastic Domesticity.* P. 260.

as shown below.³¹ There is a brief line that states Lady Guise was responsible for the existence of the plaque, ‘the sorrow of Her who has erected this memorial of Conjugal Happiness,’ implying that it was a happy marriage.³² Nicholas Herbert confirms that the monument was erected by Sir Guise’s widow, Lady Guise and with the portrayal of Sir Guise as the ‘ideal country gentleman.’³³ More importantly, through Lady Guise’s confirmed contribution, it suggests that she was involved in deciding how her husband was to be remembered. It allows an insight into how the Guises’ ran Highnam estate and how they were viewed by others. This emphasises the importance of the successful running of a landed estate as it can also help to ease the line of succession and set them up for future success.

Moreover, Lady Guise’s involvement in the creation of the memorial was important as it would ensure it presented a favourable view of the family. There is likely to be some truth in the description on the plaque listing Lord Guise’s qualities including, manner, judgement, hospitality, and good sense.³⁴ Although the Guise financial accounts are factual, they allow little interpretation of character, they are clearly written to demonstrate good economic sense.³⁵ The memorial plaque suggests that Sir Guise was popular as a landowner, his wife would have been aware of how he gained a positive reputation which would have helped her when she took over the running of the estate. Lady Guise could capitalise on this good position in society for her own benefit as she continued to run and make improvements to the landed estate.³⁶

³¹ Memorial Plaque to Sir John Guise in Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucestershire erected by Lady Guise. Taken by the author.

³² Memorial Plaque to Sir John Guise.

³³ Nicholas Herbert, *Highnam under the Guises*. pp 12-13.

³⁴ Memorial Plaque to Sir John Guise.

³⁵ GA D326/F4.

³⁶ GA D326/F6, GA D326/F7.



Figure 4-3 Sir John Guise's memorial in Gloucester Cathedral.

However, it is worth noting that a memorial for a male relative, in this case Lady Guise's husband, highlights his success in running the landed estate, yet there is no mention of the help Lady Guise would have given. Through being involved in the erection of the monument she has gained some agency. This is an example of public/private spheres at work and helps to confirm McDonagh's statement about male landowners often being praised for their work on funeral memorials in direct contrast to their woman counterparts who often chose to be remembered for appropriately female actions.³⁷ It shows a real-life comparison to

³⁷ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 147.

the difference between male and female monuments and how in some cases the desire for correctness and femininity in the public sphere overrode any need to be remembered for all the things a woman achieved. This helps to explain why there is little representation of landowning women after death and consequently why they have been neglected by scholars until recently.

The posthumous reputation of widowed landowning women can be explored through the case studies of the two women. It becomes clear that although they had acted as successful landowners and improvers during their lifetime, this was not something valued enough to be included in their obituaries. McDonagh also suggests this was a deliberate choice for landed women to be 'written out of history' by both peers and later by historians.³⁸ This is particularly noticeable in the case of Lady Guise, whose primary contribution to the economy and society was through non-traditionally feminine means of estate improvement. It adds to the argument surrounding separate spheres and that more recent historiography is attempting to make the definition less rigid and look more at the individual experiences.³⁹ Mrs Bovey is very clearly in a position to gain more prominence for her philanthropical actions than her ability to successfully manage a landed estate. Yet in many ways she could not have done that without successfully managing an estate that could support her ideas.

To conclude, through analysing various sources that relate to the legacy of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise, it becomes clear that the focus is predominantly on charitable deeds and actions that appear suitably feminine rather than their actions regarding land ownership and management. This complicates the argument and concept surrounding separate spheres that puts all women in a place of domesticity. The memorials contribute to the narrative of how the posthumous reputation of elite propertied women was created and gives an insight into

³⁸ McDonagh, *Elite Women and the Agricultural Landscape*. P. 164.

³⁹ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society, 1650-1850*. P. 3.

how other women of similar social status were treated after death across England. Generally, it ignores how they had to manage their estates and how this helped them to be independent and able to make their own decisions regarding actions in the public sphere. However, their economic and social contributions to society in the form of charity are generally well received. This supports the ongoing argument relating to separate spheres not necessarily controlling financially independent elite widowed women as much as married women.

Conclusion

The study has sought to demonstrate that women were capable and successful landowners during a period of time when the perceived role of women was confined to the domestic sphere. Although there was a great deal of power to be had through household management for elite women in that position, estate management allowed women to act within the public sphere where their choices had the potential to affect the financial security of the estate and their own wellbeing. The study has focused on and clearly demonstrates how two women, Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise, were active in estate management and improvement across the eighteenth century. In conjunction with work conducted by other scholars it is suggestive of a wider point – that elite landowning women across England were active and involved in what could be considered various non-traditional occupations.

To an extent, there was some choice involved, if they did not want to keep and manage the land they could have remarried and potentially forfeited any property right they had. Therefore, through choosing to keep control of the landed estate, such action suggests these women had confidence in their ability and a desire to learn to ensure independence and financial stability. The study has used the format of two case studies to allow a detailed analysis of the lives and experiences of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise. The evidence provided has led to the question of whether there was practical application of separate spheres. This is especially noticeable when women were actively involved in the daily running of their estates, as opposed to leaving it to a steward or land agent.

In focusing on the county of Gloucestershire and two specific women the study provides a direct, detailed insight and allows analysis to be conducted on how landed women made their lives work in a patriarchal society. It demonstrates that they learned to manage the

landed estates through experience and also any challenges they had faced over the years. This varied from how to improve crop production to what form of charity would be most appreciated in their local area. Through conducting a localised study on two elite landed women during the long eighteenth century, we gain a greater insight and understanding into how women were able to operate during a period of time when women in general were often viewed as inferior and passive in relation to their male counterparts.

Moreover, these landed women were not outliers or part of a strange phenomenon happening only in Gloucestershire. *Feme sole* was in practice across England before and during the long eighteenth century. This underlines how focusing on a narrow example or case study, allows the nuances in the exercise of agency to be recovered, often seen in variation within estate management techniques. In turn, this has a wider application involving the role of women during the eighteenth century although the focus is clearly on gentry widows with a landed estate. This has been supported by other work on elite women landowners, particularly through county studies. However, due to the limited scholarship available on women as landowners during the period, it is not possible to suggest that the experience and success of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise is applicable to all women that were in the same landowning position.

As widows, landowning women had the legal right to property through the existence of *feme sole*, which put them in a similar position as their male peers. As is seen throughout the study, both Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise used their legal right to control their property as they thought best, placing prominence on the importance of property rights and inheritance. Although a male heir was preferred for continuity of the family name and line and a man could act more easily in public and political spheres, there was no definite legal reason for a woman not to inherit in many cases. Therefore, it was not unheard of for women to inherit and a pattern has begun to appear that as long as they were successful and kept the estate

together or potentially improved it, they were not criticised or ridiculed by their male contemporaries.

In particular this is seen when these women make the deliberate decision to move into the more masculine world of estate management. In the case of Lady Guise, her plans for drainage and eradication of fern ensured better quality and quantity of crop growth. To an extent, her agricultural activities must be looked at within the context of the agricultural revolution and so Guise can be placed at the forefront of modern farming practices. Furthermore, her detailed account records demonstrate the capability she had in agricultural matters and an ability to continually make a profit. Similarly, Mrs Bovey's decision-making regarding the production of iron ore and how much timber she required for it, emphasises the need for understanding intricate matters regarding their respective estates. The knowledge and understanding these women had allowed them to continue to create a position of financial security.

The discussion surrounding women landowners throughout the four chapters are all linked through engaging and analysing the concept of separate spheres. This primarily takes place through thorough exploration of how the concept in its truest and most common definition does not appear to apply to either Mrs Bovey or Lady Guise once they were widowed. Therefore, the study in conjunction with other research, has focused on women's active involvement in various matters linked to public life, including estate management, emphasising how Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise were successful in their chosen pursuits. This is particularly highlighted through the discussion regarding the socio-economic impact Bovey and Guise had on their respective land and local community, either through the work they provide for local people on the estate and also through their acts of charity. It reveals the complexities surrounding the concept of separate spheres in regard to the role of women through analysing the significant part female sole women had in the eighteenth century.

Through a focus on the application of the concept of separate spheres to the specific situation of elite women landowners, it becomes evident that previous definitions that emphasised the inflexibility of separate spheres does not allow the more individual experience to fit in. This is not only supported by wider intervention by McDonagh, Shoemaker and Vickery but through looking at the individual experience of two women of similar social and economic status that details their experiences regarding separate spheres and how it applied to them. These women were able to act as landowners in a male dominated area, thus suggesting that an idea of separate spheres did not necessarily apply in its entirety to wealthy widowed landowners. It becomes particularly noticeable in their success with economic matters that ensured they could afford to keep the landed estate and the standards they were used to living in. Moreover, these women received little criticism from male peers, implying that although not a common occurrence, women landowners were not a complete anomaly. The implications that these case studies have explored demonstrate anomalies in the blanket application of private/public dichotomy. As raised throughout the study, social status, and wealth in conjunction with success was more important than gender in the eighteenth century.

There is, however, for further research, an opening to see whether women with female sole over a landed estate ever failed and what consequences this had on the ideology of separate spheres. Both this research and the large amount of other literature available on women with landed estates, has only focused on those who were successful in their endeavours relating to the management of their property. The study does not ignore that it could be difficult to go against what was expected of an elite woman during the eighteenth century, but part of the limitations of this research is that it does not consider anything other than potential success, either financially or in status. This leads to a consideration that additional research may suggest or find that if a woman landowner failed to run a landed

estate she may not be viewed as favourably and the concept of separate spheres more harshly applied so that a woman went back to domesticity possibly through remarriage, but that is not something that has occurred or been explored in any detail here. Furthermore, the majority of women had gained experience at managing more than just the household before they became landowners in their own right with many men choosing to leave either wives or nearest female relative in charge of the estate if they were to be called away on business. If a woman had failed at managing the financial side of an estate, it would be likely that there would be a cause such as previous bad management or debt, rather than failure due to gender.

Over the course of four chapters the study has demonstrated the wide range of choices and challenges faced by Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise and how this may have affected other women in a similar position. It has explored the many different factors during different stages of their lives, from their inheritance to death and remembrance and what occurred in between that was relevant to their life experience as landholders. Furthermore, it becomes apparent throughout, in the cases under consideration, that once a woman was in clear control of a landed estate there was very little opposition to her authority to run it how she saw fit. Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise were both successful at what they chose to do, emphasised by how they were viewed by their male peers. Furthermore, their effective involvement in charity and philanthropical activities outside of land management demonstrates a keen understanding of socio-economic issues that affected the local rural area. Moreover, this understanding would have helped them to be viewed favourably by those who lived on the estate and other contemporaries. This is particularly apparent in their charitable work that was beneficial for children who would become the workers of the future and possibly be working on their estate. Therefore, this helps to make it a mutually beneficial arrangement, although in favour of the landowner and a positive addition to their reputation. This is confirmed by the way in which their philanthropical work was remembered in death rather than the contributions made

to their landed estate, which took up much of their time. It adds to the more traditional narrative of how separate spheres have come to be viewed, which on closer inspection does not appear to stand up to scrutiny.

Overall, the study has allowed the lives of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise, and their nuanced expression of agency, to be documented in a more coherent manner. They were independent and financially secure with ideas for improvement to home, estate, and the local community. Although there are many other landowning women across England, including the county of Gloucestershire, these two women covered the breadth of the long eighteenth century as well as being of similar socio-economic background, which has allowed for an easier comparison to be made between them and various other actions that they took. Furthermore, between them, Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise, explored many different forms of agricultural practices from livestock to crop production to forestry. The study has sought to demonstrate how elite landowning widows were welcomed in the community and were keen to ensure their own success. This insight into the daily lives of Mrs Bovey and Lady Guise reveals how landed women took part in both public and private spheres, which strongly suggests that the rigid application of the concept of separate spheres provides a myopic lens which ignores the agency of these women and their lived experience once widowed.

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