

LOVE AND MARRIAGE AMONG THE ENGLISH ARISTOCRACY: THE BUCKINGHAM-CHANDOS ALLIANCE OF 1796.

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'In the course of the eighteenth century', writes Professor Beckett, 'aristocratic parents were increasingly inclined to allow their children to marry for love'. In this account of a troubled courtship he shows the working out of this new social code in a match that united two of the greatest fortunes of England.

On 16 April 1796 Richard Grenville, Earl Temple, married Anna Eliza Brydges at Westminster Chapel, Cavendish Square, London. The groom, heir to the Marquess of Buckingham, owner of extensive estates centred on Stowe House in Buckinghamshire, was barely twenty. The bride, just a few months past her sixteenth birthday, was heiress to the estates of the late Duke of Chandos. As was common with aristocratic weddings at this date, the ceremony took place quietly, attended by only a few close members of the couple's families. The bride's mother, who had been certified insane since 1790, was well enough to attend the ceremony, and the newly weds left immediately afterwards for Stowe.¹ The alliance between these two young people was to be of immense importance for the Grenville family,² but the courtship preceding the wedding sheds a good deal of light on the wider question of aristocratic marriage in the eighteenth century. It is also a fascinating tale in itself.

In the course of the eighteenth century aristocratic parents were increasingly inclined to allow their children to marry for love. Parents or guardians, while exhorting their daughters to be prudent, usually gave their consent to the alliance when 'love was proven'.³ Getting to know each other before engagement was probably the major difficulty for any couple. When in 1780 Lady Harriet Spencer accepted a proposal from the future Lord Bessborough she admitted 'I wish I could have known him a little

better first', but since the alliance pleased her family and the prospective groom seemed likely to make her 'reasonably happy' she was ready to go ahead.⁴ Families might 'plan' marriages – and by controlling the social contacts of their children they limited the danger of unsuitable alliances developing – but in the last resort it was no longer acceptable to push children into arrangements they might disdain. Even so, the social conventions of the period certainly favoured the male, giving him greater scope for choice than the female, and whatever the long term changes in these conventions most aristocratic marriages contained elements of both the traditional alliance designed to maintain the family's social position, and the romantic alliance in which personal considerations took precedence.⁵ The Buckingham – Chandos alliance of 1796 contained many of the elements typical of late eighteenth-century aristocratic marriages. The two families had planned the marriage, largely because of the social and financial advantages to each of them. At the same time both parties were allowed freedom of choice; indeed, in the case of Lady Anna Eliza her guardians even attempted to delay or prevent the alliance on the grounds that she was neither old enough, nor sufficiently worldly-wise to make such an important decision at such a tender age. In reality, this was a marriage for love, in which the planning of the parents came to fruition in the romantic attachment which developed between the two young people. The fact that in later years it became a stormy affair, several times nearly break-

ing up altogether, may indicate that Lady Anna Eliza's guardians' instincts were right, but that is another story.

The background to the alliance is indicative of the way in which aristocratic families operated when the marriage market was involved. Many relationships were forged during the London season, or in one of the other regular meeting places such as Bath.

It was while he was at Bath in 1786 that the third Duke of Chandos recorded in his diary on the 3rd and 5th May 'Lord and Lady Buckingham and Lord Nugent came in the evening'.⁶ The Marquess of Buckingham had married Mary Nugent in 1774, and her elderly father Robert, Lord Nugent (1712-88) was frequently in the company of his daughter and son-in-law during his later years. The families were clearly on good terms, yet even so it may have come as a surprise to Buckingham when, on one of these convivial evenings in Bath he was presented with a proposal. As he told his brother (Lord William Wyndham Grenville) on 7 May:

'You will hardly think me serious when I tell you that a match is offered to me for Dick, which in all its circumstances (the lady is only 6 years old) bids fair to be the first in England. The girl is the only daughter of the Duke of Chandos, heiress to £7000 per annum from her mother, and to twice that estate from her father. This seems so ludicrous that nothing but the habit of telling you all I think makes me open it to you. She is a very handsome child, very strong, healthy and lively, and the lady mother has proposed it (but without calling for any answer) as the thing that would make her husband and her most extremely happy. Here then it must remain, with abundant civility on all parts, till the young couple can think a little for themselves.'⁷

Here, for Buckingham, was the prospect of a magnificent match. He had already inherited part of his own wife's paternal estates, and the idea of adding a major aristocratic property to his own through such an alliance was exceptionally tempting. Yet, reflecting the mood of the period, he was prepared to accept that any arrangements had to be subject to a veto from the parties involved. Certainly the suggestion did not alter relations between himself and the Chandos's. The Buckinghams reciprocated the Chandos hospitality by entertaining them on the evening of 21 May. In April 1788 Chandos entertained Lord Nugent to cards, and a few days later he dined at Nugent's house.⁸

Insofar as this was a planned marriage, all parties respected the right of the children, as they grew and matured, to reject the parental schemes. It made sense, however, for the two children to enjoy each other's company: the groom was later to write of his prospective bride as 'the friend and choice of my earliest days when my heart did not even know the passion of love'.⁹

Childhood friendship blossomed into love just as the families clearly hoped. In 1794 when Temple was at Oxford, and still only eighteen, he told a friend that Anna Eliza (just fourteen) had made an open declaration in his favour.¹⁰ Since his father's views on the advantages of the alliance had not changed there seemed every reason to believe that the long planned marriage would take place at the earliest opportunity (i.e. when Lady Anna Eliza reached sixteen). The obstacles which arose came entirely from Lady Anna's family.

Since the sociable days in Bath back in 1786 much had changed in Lady Anna's family situation. Her father, the third Duke of Chandos, died in 1789. The cause of death is unknown, although contemporary rumours, since repeated, suggested that his demise was precipitated by a practical joke in which the duchess removed a chair on which he was about to sit.¹¹ She was said to have been so distraught at the accident that the memory of it drove her mad.¹² Whether or not this was true, there is no doubt that two years after his death the widowed duchess was certified as a lunatic and placed in the hands of her relatives. She lived until 1813, but from 1791 was unable to take charge of her daughter's upbringing. Lady Anna Eliza, as a ward of court, was placed in the hands of guardians, Lady Caroline (Brydges) Leigh, the third duke's sister, and Sir Francis Buller. Anna Eliza went to live with Lady Caroline.

It was clear by 1794 that whatever Lady Anna Eliza's personal disposition towards Temple, the guardians believed her to be too young to take binding decisions about marriage. In May 1794 Lady Caroline put an embargo on Anna Eliza to prevent her, in Temple's words, 'walking anywhere but in the streets by way of avoiding me'.¹³ Sir Francis Buller told Buckingham on 3 July that Lady Caroline had taken this step because of her anxieties about Temple's conduct:

'Lady C[aroline] says that Lord T[emple] is always

following her carriage and contrives to place himself in Lady Anna Eliza's way wherever she goes, and she complains of some rudeness. The age of the young people hardly permits of any serious consideration of the business, further than if such measures are pursued they may breed a dislike which ... may interrupt the education of the young people.¹⁴

Buckingham wrote to his son asking for an explanation of his conduct.¹⁵ Temple's view, mockingly expressed in a letter to his friend and confidant William Fremantle, was to give short shrift to the accusations, but he noted with some regret that 'in the meantime they have removed Lady A.E.B. to Twickenham and confine her closely'.¹⁶ To Temple the guardians were 'the dragons', and his favourite epithet for Lady Caroline was 'the old woman'.

During the summer of 1794 an agreement was hammered out between the various parties, but Lady Anna Eliza's guardians still refused to allow private meetings between the two young people. Lady Caroline did allow them a brief meeting – in her presence – in November 1794, when Temple managed to slip a note into Lady Anna Eliza's hand. Her response was not quite what he anticipated since it was written 'in a style much colder than any I had been accustomed to', and declaring her intention of staying with Lady Caroline until she reached the age of twenty-one. Temple immediately protested,¹⁷ and then spent several months trying to find a way of changing her mind. In February 1795 Buckingham proposed to the Lord Chancellor that the marriage should take place when Anna Eliza reached the age of sixteen. Lady Caroline provisionally agreed to this arrangement, but relations remained cool.¹⁸ By the spring, however, Lady Anna Eliza was again resolved to go through with the marriage.

The Marquess of Buckingham, convinced of his son's real affection for Lady Anna Eliza, and of her reciprocation, was anxious to see the arrangements of 1786 brought to fruition as soon as possible. He was also keen to have the engagement publicly recognized, and to this end he proposed holding a ball in Lady Anna Eliza's honour at Buckingham House, his London residence on Pall Mall, on 25 May. This evidently triggered off all Lady Caroline's anxieties for her niece. There was what Temple called a 'scene', and she refused the young suitor entry to her house. Temple, in despair, wrote to James Leigh, Lady Caroline's son and Lady Anna Eliza's cousin,

You have been my witness how much I have borne

from the unkindness of Lady C and how steadily I have persevered in my determination of not being hurried. My unbounded love for one deservedly most dear to me has enabled me to adhere steadily to this rule, and whatever it may have cost my feelings I would have persisted in it had I not been told in direct terms I was to have been 'turned out of the house' into which Lady C herself had once given me the most unlimited invitation and the most affectionate reception. I feel so much for your situation that I will not even ask you to give my most affectionate love to Lady Anna, but as you know how truly my heart feels for her it will be kindness in you to tell me how she is after the painful scene of last night.¹⁹

Lady Caroline told Buckingham she would not allow Lady Anna Eliza to attend the ball, and she asked him 'to prevent Lord Temple's visits' to her house.²⁰ To make matters worse she infuriated Buckingham by insinuating that the ball was simply a cover for his efforts to 'entangle her niece into a connexion with Lord Temple and to endeavour to do so by a ball which is stated to be given in her name'.²¹ As he told Lady Caroline in no uncertain terms the 'entanglement . . . originated in the most explicit declaration and encouragement of her father and mother some years since'. With Temple denied access to Lady Caroline's house, communications between the young people were reduced almost to a farce. In several undated notes, probably from about this time, Anna Eliza suggested covert arrangements:

'we cannot meet you in Portland Place – be this evening at half past six in Hyde Park in the walk where we first met by the ride in Rotten Row, or tomorrow or the next day if it should rain this evening and we be prevented'.

Temple twice tried to gain access to the house, before committing his thoughts to paper in a long letter to his fiancée:

our situation is every moment more critical and it is become absolutely necessary to the affections and hopes which we entertain in common, that I should have an opportunity of conversing with you . . . you know how tenderly I love you . . . write me word where we may meet even for a few minutes.

Since there was no sure way of passing letters, or even scribbled notes to each other, he suggested alternative signals. If she was likely to be walking in Hyde Park he asked her to 'shut one of the window shutters or the curtain of any one of the three windows towards the street over the front drawing room'. He would be sure to walk along the street between 11

a.m. and midday 'every day for the next three months', and whenever she posted the signal he would attempt to meet her in the park.²²

When Lady Anna Eliza managed to reply to this letter, Temple sent further. If she was going to the theatre he proposed closing a shutter on either of the side windows, so that 'we shall have the satisfaction of meeting in spite of every precaution'. He asked her to suggest similar signs 'for the opera, concert or any other amusement'.²³ Lady Caroline soon got wind of their correspondence and, as a result, Anna Eliza sent Temple a hurried note on 17 July to tell him her aunt was opening all her letters and had told the servants 'that if any of them take any letter or message for you or I that they shall be sent to Newgate'. Despite such threats other letters were also smuggled out, presumably with the connivance of the servants.²⁴

This was hardly a dignified way for an affianced aristocratic couple to behave, but to Lady Caroline's intense annoyance Buckingham refused to shackle his son. He let her family know of his support for Temple's intention 'of following Lady Anna Eliza Brydges wherever she may accompany [Lady Caroline] this summer'. If Temple persevered in such action, Lady Caroline warned Buckingham, 'I shall in that case be under the necessity of applying to the Court of Chancery'.²⁵

To his lawyer Buckingham reiterated his desire 'to complete an arrangement which our valued friend the Duke of Chandos had proposed to me with the greatest eagerness and which received an additional interest in my mind from the character manners and affection of one whom I have so long considered as my own daughter and whom I love as well'.²⁶ To his son Buckingham wrote reassuring him that 'when she is 16 I shall claim the completion of the engagements held out to me', and 'the assurances which she has given you of her confidence and affection sanctioned by her father and by a constancy of so many years'.²⁷ He tried to conciliate Lady Caroline by reference to Temple as Lady Anna Eliza's 'intended husband', but to little avail.²⁸

The dispute dragged on inconclusively through the summer of 1795, with the two chief players physically far apart. Lady Anna Eliza was in Bath and later Cheltenham, and Temple with the Buckinghamshire Militia in Weymouth. They managed occa-

sionally to exchange letters,²⁹ but such was Temple's frustration that by September he was suggesting they might elope – a proposal she turned down.³⁰ With Lady Anna Eliza's sixteenth birthday fast approaching on 22 October some measure was needed to try to break the impasse, and Temple and his father enlisted the help of James Leigh. Writing to Buckingham, Leigh offered to 'mitigate in the best manner I was able, the very unpleasant circumstances that have arisen between your Lordship, Lord Temple and my own family'.³¹

Leigh travelled to meet his mother on 6 October, where he insisted on a full and frank discussion 'respecting the unpleasant misunderstanding which at present subsists between [you] and Lord Temple'. He had already talked to Temple at Winchester, where he had ascertained that he had an 'anxious desire for a reconciliation upon terms that would not derogate from his honour'.

The result was, My mother confessed to me that she thought herself ill used by Lord Temple during the time that the affair was in agitation from several unguarded expressions he made use of during their altercations such as his declaring she should not dictate to him with respect to his treatment of Lady Anna Eliza which she thought she had a right to do.

Lady Caroline was prepared to forgive and forget so long as she had an apology from Temple: 'she never had opposed nor ever would oppose the match taking place' once Lady Anna Eliza reached the age of 16 and the lawyers had drawn up the settlements 'being persuaded that the young people were attached to each other'. On the other hand if Temple did not apologize she threatened to resign her guardianship on Lady Anna Eliza's sixteenth birthday, which would mean the whole issue going back into the Court of Chancery.³²

The solution lay with Temple; whatever the cost to his pride he had no alternative but to apologize to Lady Caroline. On 10 October he sat down and wrote a letter to her referring to the misunderstandings of the previous five months which had 'pressed so materially upon my present happiness and upon every prospect to which for years I have looked forward for the happiness of my future life'. He asked Lady Caroline to understand 'the misery I felt in seeing the period of our union protracted beyond the time which my anxious hopes had fixed for it', and

asked for her forgiveness.³³ It was a letter framed, according to Buckingham, in such a way that 'he trusts will put an end to any uneasiness upon her mind'.³⁴ To James Leigh Buckingham added that

in facilitating my son's wishes for his union with Lady A[nna] I sought to place his pretensions neither below nor above their proper level. I was ready to sacrifice my fortune to promote his union with the woman he loves. I would not have stirred one step to induce him to think of a marriage with any other view or with a person of whose affections he was less confident. I will fairly own that in the last three months I have frequently tried the feelings of his mind and if they had been less steady and less earnest towards this union and if he had been less confident of Lady A's attachment to him I should not have been indisposed to have considered this matter at an end.³⁵

Temple had eaten sufficient humble pie, and Lady Caroline relented.

On 11 October Buckingham told a correspondent: 'Lady C[aroline] promises that Lady A[nna] shall marry as soon after the 22nd as the lawyers can draw the settlements'.³⁶ Temple, elated at the news, told his old friend William Fremantle:

It will I am sure give you great pleasure to hear that a reconciliation has taken place between Lady Caroline and me. She has pledged herself in the strongest manner that the marriage shall take place as soon as the lawyers can arrange the settlements after Lady Anna is 16.³⁷

On the following day, 12 October, Leigh wrote to Buckingham to express his pleasure at 'a thorough reconciliation being about to take place between parties', and Lady Anna Eliza told her prospective mother-in-law 'I am much obliged to Lord Temple for having put an end to a misunderstanding that has given us all great uneasiness'.³⁸ On 13 October Temple wrote again to Lady Caroline, this time to aid the healing process:

I am sure my dear madam that it will always be the source of the highest satisfaction to you to know that you have by your kindness ensured the happiness of two young people who have loved each other from their infancy and who will value that happiness the more when they recollect that they owe it to you.³⁹

In a separate note to Lady Anna Eliza he expressed his contentment that they would shortly meet again after an interval of five months 'so painful to us all'.⁴⁰

Of course there needed to be a public as well as a private reconciliation, and it was soon agreed that the Marquess and Marchioness of Buckingham and

Temple should pay a courtesy visit to Addlestrop in Gloucestershire.⁴¹ This was the Leigh family seat, to which James Leigh had succeeded on his father's death in 1774.⁴² Temple wrote from Addlestrop to Fremantle on 29 October to say that Lady Caroline was now doing all she could to promote the marriage, but that her fellow guardian Sir Francis Buller 'is very sulky' because she had not consulted him. He expected Buller to 'throw many legal difficulties in the way', with the result that the marriage was unlikely to take place before the spring.⁴³ Whether or not Buller was the guilty party, Temple was correct when he predicted endless legal complications. It was not until February 1796 that all the details were finally worked out, and then an Act of Parliament had to be passed to enable the young couple (both of them still under age) to make settlements.⁴⁴ Sir Francis Buller was named as a trustee of the marriage settlement and, with the details finally sorted out, the couple were married on 16 April 1796.

Few aristocratic courtships were quite as tortuous as this one, yet it is indicative of contemporary thinking that the feelings of the parties involved were taken into account throughout. The die having been cast in 1786 the two young people were brought up to enjoy each other's company, and eventually friendship turned into love. Buckingham, who had himself married for love and enjoyed an affectionate relationship with his wife throughout their lives, was always anxious to stress that he had never pushed either party into the relationship. Lady Caroline, although she had doubts about the marriage on the grounds of Lady Anna Eliza's age, and more personal objections to Temple himself, conceded the point when she was sure that her ward really was committed to the alliance. Yet from another perspective the romantic affection of Lady Anna Eliza and Temple was fortuitous. Their respective families welcomed the marriage because of its financial implications. As an heiress, Lady Anna Eliza carried the vast estates of her family into those of her husband and, although there may have been some hopes of it passing eventually to a younger child of the marriage – and Lady Anna Eliza objected strongly to attempts by her husband to claim the right to nominate an heir to the property – in the event there was only one child. As a result, the Chandos estates were, with the death of the dowager duchess in 1813, incorporated within the Buckingham properties to produce an estate of more than 50,000 acres. For the Marquess of Buckingham it was a most satisfactory outcome in every way.

REFERENCES

1. *Gentlemen Magazine*, LXVI (1796), p. 351.
2. For the full story of the family financial tragedy see J.V. Beckett, *The Rise and Fall of the Grenvilles: Dukes of Buckingham and Chandos, 1710 – 1921* (Manchester University Press, 1994). I should like to acknowledge financial support for the research on which this paper is based from the Huntington Library and the British Academy.
3. R. Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family* (1978), pp. 105, 111–12.
4. Quoted in J.S. Lewis, *In the Family Way: Childbearing in the British Aristocracy, 1760 – 1860* (1986), pp. 18 – 19.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
6. H[untington] L[ibrary, San Marino, California, Stowe Papers], ST 109, vol. 3
7. Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Fortescue MSS*, I (1892), p. 259.
8. HL ST 109, vol. 4.
9. HL STG Correspondence, box 7/19, Earl Temple to Anna Eliza Brydges, 26 November 1795(?)
10. B[uckinghamshire] R[ecord] O[ffice, *Fremantle MSS*], D/FR/46/8/11.
11. Anna Eliza Gamon was Chandos's second wife. She was the daughter of Richard Gamon of Datchworthbury, Hertfordshire by Elizabeth, daughter of John Grace of the Grange, Queen's County. Her brother was Sir Richard Grace Gamon, Bt., and her first husband was Roger Hope Elletson, through whom she inherited plantations in the West Indies. Such was her character that according to one contemporary commentator, 'from the vanity and extravagance of this woman, and the uncertain contingencies of her property, the Hampshire people think that the poor duke is completely taken in': G.E.C. *Complete Peerage*, III (1913), p. 133n.
12. J.A. Temple, *The Temple Memoirs* (London, 1925), p. 126.
13. BRO D/FR/46/8/12.
14. HL STG Correspondence, box 30/46.
15. *Ibid.*
16. BRO D/FR/46/8/18.
17. BRO D/FR/46/8/17; HL STG Correspondence, box 7/19, Temple to Lady Anna Eliza, 26 November 1794.
18. HL STG Correspondence, box 74/54.
19. HL STG Correspondence, box 94/1.
20. HL STG Correspondence, box 74/54
21. *Ibid.*
22. HL STG Correspondence, box 7/19, Temple to Lady Anna Eliza, c. 23 May 1795
23. HL STG Correspondence, box 7/19, Temple to Lady Anna Eliza, c. 28 May 1795
24. HL STG Correspondence, box 74/35.
25. HL STG Correspondence, box 43/35.
26. HL STG Correspondence, box 74/54.
27. HL STG Correspondence, box 74/53.
28. HL STG Correspondence, box 43/35.
29. HL STG Correspondence, box 7/19, Temple to Lady Anna Eliza, 19 July, 9 September 1795
30. This is the implication of her note to him on 25 September 1795: HL STG Correspondence, box 74/35.
31. HL STG Correspondence, box 43/36.
32. HL STG Correspondence, box 43/36.
33. HL STG Correspondence, box 94/2.
34. HL STG Correspondence, box 46/16.
35. HL STG Correspondence, box 46/17.
36. *Ibid.*
37. BRO D/FR/46/8/22.
38. HL STG Correspondence, box 47/6.
39. HL STG Correspondence, box 94/2.
40. HL STG Correspondence, box 7/19, Temple to Lady Anna Eliza, 13 October 1795.
41. HL STG Correspondence, box 43/36.
42. Lady Caroline married James Leigh (1721 – 74) in 1755. Their only son was James Henry Leigh (1765 – 1823) the mediator in these negotiations. The Leighs later succeeded to Stonleigh Abbey in Warwickshire, and their papers are now in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office.
43. BRO D/FR/46/8/25.
44. 36 George III 1796; HL STG Personal, box 11/9–11.