

## Chapter 14

### Ageing and loneliness in England, c.1500-1800

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Loneliness ‘is not the state of being alone’ proposes Fay Bound Alberti, ‘it is a conscious, cognitive feeling of estrangement or social separation from meaningful others; an emotional lack that concerns a person’s place in the world’.<sup>2</sup> There are particular times across the life-cycle when people are more likely to feel lonely, with old age being a period of acute loneliness for many in the western world. Yet loneliness as an emotional experience can only be traced from the nineteenth century, Alberti argues, for it was then that the language for expressing loneliness emerged. Before this date, her theory goes, people were alone, and there was ‘oneliness’, but this was a physical state, not an emotional one.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter tests Alberti’s hypothesis by exploring the experiences of older people in England, defined as those aged over fifty, in the period between c.1500 and 1800.<sup>4</sup> Given that life expectancy at birth varied from 31.3 to 44.8 years over this period, this older age group probably represented less than 10 percent of the population.<sup>5</sup> We write on the premise that the conditions for loneliness existed in this period, and the triggers for it in old age were not unique to the modern world. Grief, widowhood, dementia and mental decline, the focus of Alberti’s chapter on old age, were experienced in the early modern period, and had profound emotional consequences for the elderly. Memory loss associated with ageing was a significant barrier to sociability and could be so isolating that suicide could follow.<sup>6</sup> Those on the margins of society, particularly the itinerant poor, whose lives were rarely tied to a particular location with associated community belonging, may have been particularly prone to loneliness.<sup>7</sup>

Loneliness could haunt old age, and people in the early modern period understood that loneliness might bring negative consequences for the mental, physical and material wellbeing of the elderly. Yet it was precisely because of this conceptualisation of loneliness that the elderly, either consciously or unconsciously, took steps to avoid loneliness resulting from social isolation in later life. This was, as Keith Snell has put it, ‘risk-aversion behaviour’.<sup>8</sup> Beginning with an examination of the lives of the elderly poor, and then moving to consider the experiences of the middling sort and elite, this chapter will explore the economic, social and cultural practices that countered the threat of loneliness. In contrast to Alberti, we propose that many older people had a place in their families and communities, which meant that they remained socially integrated and valuable. We argue that a positive view of old age, as a time of opportunity, fulfilment, and as ‘the apogee of life’, as adopted by Peter Laslett in his study of the elderly in the present and recent past, was shared by people in the early modern period.<sup>9</sup> It may be that fear of loneliness produced its opposite: a cohort distinguished by their sociability and contribution to the lives of others, not simply by their advanced age.

## **The poor**

There was no modern understanding of retirement from work in this period: people continued to work until they were too frail to continue. Work was an economic necessity, but it was also central to social and community life. Popular culture, whether it was the seasonal celebrations surrounding May Day or the harvest, or the ballads that were sung to accompany the everyday routines of work, ensured that many types of work were social activities. Tasks were adapted as people aged, and some occupations were particularly associated with the elderly: for example, laundry, household work, childcare and nursing the sick and dying – which could include caring for other older members of the community – as evidenced by the

many surviving lists of payments by parish overseers to the elderly who performed these roles.<sup>10</sup> All of these occupations depended upon social as well as economic interactions with others. Work was important to identity, a sense of worth and belonging to the end of life.<sup>11</sup> As Lynn Botelho has concluded from her study of the elderly in this period, ‘The desire to remain working and their pride in past strength is arguably one of the most consistent character traits of the labouring poor’.<sup>12</sup>

While being economically self-sufficient was a common goal for the elderly, it was recognised that those entering advanced or ‘decrepit’ old age (as it was then termed), or experiencing illness and disability, could not be expected to manage without family and community support. The legal obligation of communities to support the elderly and infirm was enshrined in the Elizabethan poor laws of 1598 to 1601, and across the period there was agreement that the elderly were the most deserving of parochial aid. As a result, the elderly were the largest group of recipients of relief, and although the value of cash payments may have varied by region, and was put under strain and decreased in real terms during the ‘crisis’ faced by the Old Poor Law at the end of the eighteenth century, communities continued their support of the elderly, often for many years.<sup>13</sup>

While parish relief was undoubtedly vital to the economic survival of the elderly poor, its emotional significance, and the part it played in ensuring that ‘a lonely old age’ was not the ‘lot of most of the labouring poor’, as once claimed by Paul Slack, has not been fully appreciated by historians.<sup>14</sup> The very process of applying for relief acted to counter loneliness because it required proving worth and belonging. ‘Community’, as Snell explains, ‘in the sense of those belonging to the parish, was reinforced and perpetuated by the legal networks created by the poor and settlement laws’.<sup>15</sup> The elderly poor were not hesitant about reminding parishes of their duty to support them, as the record of pauper letters shows. Writing to their parishes of settlement, or finding others to write on their behalf, was a way of

reconnecting with their communities, and reminding them of their needs.<sup>16</sup> In turn, case studies of the support provided by rural parishes, have shown how overseers did not simply or mindlessly handout cash payments to the deserving. Instead, they devised individual ‘welfare’ or ‘care packages’, which were ‘highly tailored’, and gave relief in kind as well as pension payments.<sup>17</sup> Such care plans required overseers to have detailed knowledge of the personal and changing needs of the elderly inhabitants of their parish. For the recipients, the supply of fuel, clothing and medical care signalled that they were valued members of their communities who deserved attention, dignity and respect in their old age.

Parish relief formed part of the ‘economy of makeshifts’ that bound the elderly to their families as well as their communities. Although shared residency was no guaranteed protector against loneliness, sharing the costs of housing, fuel and food removed a major cause of anxiety. Around 40 per cent of the elderly in the late eighteenth-century parishes studied by Susannah Ottaway, were living with their children.<sup>18</sup> This was not necessarily a dependent relationship: the elderly could contribute to family life by offering childcare for grandchildren, and by helping with a wide range of domestic tasks. These contributions were not only within the realm of domestic labour and emotional support: older relations of either sex could also be the holders of tenancies or freeholds that enabled younger generations within families to find accommodation and sometimes premises from which to run businesses or incomes from land or rents. The frequency of references to such arrangements are too numerous to mention in eighteenth-century records: one indication of this is in the advertisements section of Georgian newspapers which make passing reference to intergenerational arrangements of this kind. Joseph Trobridge junior, for example, advertised that he sold teas and other goods imported from London ‘At his Father’s house on the Broad Pavement, four Doors below Gandy’s lane, in the High-Street, EXON’.<sup>19</sup> Caution is

therefore needed in assuming ‘maiden aunts’ were necessarily dependent on other kin: they may have been the ones providing accommodation or premises for others.

The elderly poor could not afford to be isolated from their neighbours or distanced from their families. As a result, the elderly did all they could to remain socially integrated: it was this form of self-help that bolstered older people’s wellbeing and ensured economic survival. Ann Bowman, an elderly widow who petitioned the parish officers of Kirkoswald and magistrates of Cumberland on seven occasions between 1694 and 1711, relied upon begging as well as poor relief. ‘Being confined to an old ruinous house’, some three miles away from Kirkoswald was objectionable, she argued, because it was ‘beyond the cry of her neighbours’. She demanded not to be cast out and forgotten, but to be heard and seen, for in this way she could help herself by earning the good will and charity of her community.<sup>20</sup>

When family resources were in short supply, it may have been the fear of loneliness that persuaded older people to take residence in workhouses. Yet there is much evidence to support the view that the workhouses built in the eighteenth century were neither the predecessors of the institutions that operated under the New Poor Law in the nineteenth century, nor the modern care homes described by Alberti in her chapter on loneliness and old age.<sup>21</sup> Instead, they were porous institutions, often geographically situated in the heart of villages and towns, funded by the community, and open to visitors.<sup>22</sup> With the majority of workhouses purpose-built in the eighteenth century, many were designed with the needs of the elderly in mind. Those needs were recognised to be social as well as practical. In Newport, Isle of Wight, the workhouse constructed in 1791 had two sitting rooms adjoining the twenty separate rooms provided for elderly couples, so that residents could meet for meals, and not need to go downstairs to the larger common areas.<sup>23</sup> As they aged, those living in workhouses located in north Wales and Chester could look forward to the provision of a better diet than younger residents, with gin as well as ale to drink.<sup>24</sup> Undoubtedly, and

tragically, there were instances of elder abuse in workhouses, but this was not systemic to the institution. As a recent study by Susannah Ottaway on the Leeds township workhouse has demonstrated, workhouses in the eighteenth century were ‘hybrid institutions centred as much on care as control’, which provided a lifeline of food, clothing and shelter for the most vulnerable members of communities, and thus it is ‘critical we take their positive roles seriously’.<sup>25</sup>

Located within, not outside the communities where they had worked, workhouses did not leave the elderly living ‘among strangers’, as Thomas Malthus believed.<sup>26</sup> Instead, given the predominance of older people living within them (in Terling, Essex, over 70 per cent of workhouse residents were aged sixty or over), workhouses created new communities of the elderly.<sup>27</sup> There is no reason to believe that the elderly did not renew and strengthen previous acquaintances, or forge new friendships within workhouses. While mortality could quickly follow admission to workhouses, this may be because the free medical care on offer by a surgeon and apothecary, or an on-site infirmary attracted the sick and dying.<sup>28</sup> But once this critical period was passed, older people could remain resident for many years, and even gain celebrity for their good health and longevity. Three women and one man, aged between sixty-three and eighty-five, and all living in the workhouse of St George, Hanover Square, London, were reported to have died on the same day in 1771.<sup>29</sup> Such was the pride of the keepers of St Margaret’s workhouse in Westminster, at the remarkable long life of their resident Margaret Patten, that they commissioned a portrait of her before she died in 1738, supposedly aged 138 years.<sup>30</sup>

<Insert Figure X.1 around here>

<Margaret Patten, print made by John Cooper, 1737 © The Trustees of the British

Museum/> Figure X.1 Elderly workhouse residents were remembered with pride by their

communities, contributing to their sense of worth, and countering loneliness. The portrait of Margaret Patten was displayed in St Margaret's workhouse, Westminster for all to view.

</Caption>

Margaret was said to be 'very hearty': contemporaries were keen to emphasise that these very old people had long lives not just because they were physically fit, but also because they were happy and social. Isabella Brans, who worked until she was 110 years old, and then lived in the workhouse of St Botolph, Aldersgate, London, for two years, 'is still cheerful and hearty', it was reported in 1759.<sup>31</sup> Just as with the Mrs Norton, who five years before her death at the age of 109, had 'led up a Country dance' at the wedding of one of her great-grandchildren in the County of Kildare, Ireland; or the 130 year-old Welsh woman, Jane Morgan, who in 1677, 'is as mery as a Girl of *Fifteen*, and will sing from Morning till Night'; or the much celebrated Thomas Parr, who was said to have died aged 152 years in 1635, and was a 'good fellow', enjoying ale, laughing, and who 'loves Company', these elderly women and men were remembered fondly for continuing to participate in the pleasures of ordinary life.<sup>32</sup> Their presence created jollity and good humour for others and in turn, this shielded the elderly from loneliness, as well as contributing, as contemporaries believed, to unusual vigour and long life. These examples, though anecdotal, are sufficiently commonplace to support the conclusions reached by Botelho: 'The aged poor of rural, early modern England were not uniformly assigned to the fringes of physical community and to the extremities of its affection ... The indigent elderly were very much part of the village's mental world, as well as within its physical bonds ... They remained an active part of the daily give-and-take, the social exchange of village life'.<sup>33</sup> At the very least, such examples are an important counterpoint to the misperception that premodern elders were resigned to living out dismal, isolated and lonely later years.

## **Fostering wellbeing: the middling sorts and social elite**

Old age saw a continuation of many activities engaged in by the middling sorts and the social elite, and these both sustained and protected them from loneliness. Letter writing was a time-consuming activity that helped to maintain connections between friends and family.<sup>34</sup> The sharing of news, whether familial, local or national, meant older people remained part of the conversation. Geography mattered less when letters kept people in touch. Dorothy Wordsworth, sister of William, was delighted to receive a letter from her 'dear Friend', Henry Crabb Robinson, in November 1828, shortly after she had moved to Whitwick rectory, near Ashby de la Zouche. Aged fifty-six, she was dreading the 'lonely winter', and although she was living with her nephew, and Whitwick was a 'crowded village', it was 'barren of society'. A letter from Henry, and 'the sight of your hand-writing', was 'always welcome'. Henry would reconnect her with the right kind of people:

I beg that whenever you have the inclination to take the pen – whether you have anything new to tell me or not, you will favour me with a letter – of Chitchat or whatever may come into your head ... You can hardly form a notion of the pleasure it will be to me ... to receive tidings of distant Friends.<sup>35</sup>

For Lady Sarah Cowper, who began her diary when she was fifty-six years old, recording her thoughts provided opportunity for reflection. It also allowed her to evaluate what helped to alleviate feelings of loneliness. 'Books every way assist mee', she decided, 'they comfort me in age, and solace me in solitariness'. Contrary to Alberti's assertion that early modern ideas of 'oneliness' did not have negative connotations, here we have an example of an older woman consciously taking steps to avoid 'melancholic' emotions that were associated with solitary living. Keeping her mind active through reading was an important way of alleviating



the troubles of growing old, she thought: 'He that can read and meditate need not think the evening long, or life tedious'.<sup>36</sup>

Reading for Cowper was a silent activity, but for many others, especially in the eighteenth century, it was a social pleasure. Reading aloud, attending book groups, or readings as performances, gave books a 'social life' to which all could participate. Reading bound the elderly to their families, since reading was a collective household activity, and grandparents might teach their grandchildren to read, as well as read to them.<sup>37</sup> Elite women, particularly those in rural areas at a distance from urban centres, such as Elizabeth Rose (1747-1813), the lady laird of Kilravock, near Nairn in north-east Scotland, might find that their private libraries (Elizabeth's held more than 2,000 volumes), became a community meeting point, with clergymen, tenant farmers, as well as friends and family, visiting to borrow books.<sup>38</sup> A network of Literary and Philosophical Societies and lending libraries proliferated among nonconforming religious groups and was a feature of rapidly-growing industrial towns with a growing population of professional families and middling-sort readers keen to have access to knowledge.<sup>39</sup> Clubs, mutual societies and a secular 'associational world' characterised urban life among these groups, and (by the end of the eighteenth century) even further down the social scale, with skilled and semi-skilled artisans and tradespeople forging regular ties of mutual association that for men in particular could provide sociability and a sense of common purpose across generational divides.<sup>40</sup>

Novel reading provided entertainment and diversion and was considered more dangerous for younger than older women as a pastime. According to one censorious male correspondent featured in the *Ladies Magazine* (1770-71), novels were 'noxious trash' that set the [fair] sex into a fit of longing'. The author complained that it was the task of older women and matrons to advise against reading romantic fiction, since novels represented 'persons and things in a false and extravagant light'. Women of all ages discovered, however,

that reading fiction was a useful way of passing what were otherwise idle, unfilled hours.<sup>41</sup>

Correspondence between women exchanged news of the latest publications, and shared opinions about their content and quality. Abbé d'Ancourt must have been the publisher's favourite when he advocated reading in *The Lady's Preceptor* (1743):

Books are a Guide in Youth, and an Entertainment for Age; they relieve us under Solitude, and keep us from being a Burden to ourselves, help us to glide over the Rubs of Life, and lay our Cares and Disappointments asleep; and, in a word, when well managed afford Direction, Discovery and Support.<sup>42</sup>

Barred from the venues associated with men's reading activities in public (such as coffee houses and associational clubs) women were featured reading newspapers and periodicals at home, both silently to themselves for their own instruction and amusement, and to their families as forms of diversion. The exponential growth of advertising in newspapers and periodicals, specifically aimed at female consumers, is just one indication of the high level of engagement with popular print by literate women of different ages, including the marketing of quack remedies, cosmetics, and surgical garments that were designed to mitigate the effects of ailments. Far from being marginal, the aging female body was featured front and centre of a burgeoning consumer society, requiring cossetting, dressing and healing.<sup>43</sup>

Old age also presented new opportunities for activity and social engagement. As the oldest members of their communities, they were the custodians of customary law. Especially at the start of our period, when written records were less common, the elderly could be called upon as community experts during disputes between neighbours, particularly over land usage. Their memory of property ownership and rights put the elderly in a position of authority that demanded attention and respect.<sup>44</sup> In an era when the vast majority of men, and almost no women, were enfranchised, female members of the community could be active participants in

electoral processes, including as important bearers of 'electoral memory' in boroughs where there were disputes over voting rights.<sup>45</sup>

Old age was also the time for putting personal and financial affairs in order. As the most senior members of a household, they were the keepers of family memory, traditions and property. Making wills, listing bequests, and for some, the writing of autobiographies, were all regarded as appropriate occupations for the elderly, and ensured that they remained important to their families, even after death. In these ways, older people were the linchpin in their family's past, present and future.

Becoming a grandparent could provide a chance to form new relationships across the generations. By the eighteenth century around 80 per cent of those over the age of sixty had at least one grandchild.<sup>46</sup> We have seen how poorer families could depend upon grandparents to provide childcare; it is from the middling sort and elite that we learn of the emotional value of these family ties. There is much evidence that parents continued to play a part in the lives of their adult children, and this could intensify with the birth of grandchildren. Daughters might return to the homes of their mothers to give birth, and the habit of offering advice during pregnancy and childbirth, whether in person, or by letter, continued as grandchildren grew. Some grandparents, such as those of Simonds D'Ewes (1602-50), became the sole carers of their grandchildren.<sup>47</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, and influenced by the culture of sensibility, 'the unquestioned assumption' of portrait artists and writers on family life, Joanne Bailey argues, 'was that grandparents were very fond of their grandchildren'. The birth of grandchildren could be greeted with overwhelming happiness: 'Her joy was boundless', remembered Mary Robinson when her mother first met her granddaughter, 'she kissed me a thousand times; she kissed my beautiful infant'.<sup>48</sup> Grandchildren certainly remembered the tenderness and care of their grandparents. Thomas Bewick, born in 1753, was cared for by his aunt and grandmother. He recalled that his grandmother, 'indulged me in

every thing I had a wish for, or in other words made me a great Pet'.<sup>49</sup> Doting grandparents had new demands for their attention and affections, which left little room for loneliness.

Visits from grandchildren were eagerly awaited and could be sustaining in times of ill health. Mrs Smith suffered from gout and stomach complaints for much of 1721, but she was comforted when her grandchildren visited her in Bath at least eight times over a period of nine months, with her two granddaughters, Peggy and Betty staying with her for weeks at a time.<sup>50</sup> Similar evidence of regular contact between the elderly and their children and grandchildren in New England and Pennsylvania, leads Terri Premo to conclude that older people in this period would have been perplexed by our notion of the 'empty nest' syndrome.<sup>51</sup> Yet the absence of the company of grandchildren could cause emotional distress: when Elizabeth Freke's daughter-in-law 'cruelly' refused to let one of her children stay with her, she claimed that this 'turned me to a violentt sickness'. James Yonge recorded that he was afflicted with 'heaviness of heart' following the death of his only grandson in 1708.<sup>52</sup>

There is no doubt that death of loved ones could lead to feelings of grief, despair and isolation, which might never be overcome. There was the 'loneliness of survival'; the 'principal complaint' of Mrs Windimore, aged 106 years in 1770, and living in 'Lady Daere's almshouse', was that 'she has outlived all her friends'.<sup>53</sup> Yet loneliness did not always follow the death of others, or become a permanent condition. During widowhood, elite women provide us with some remarkable examples of resilience. William Cecil, Lord Burghley, was concerned for the four-times widowed Bess of Hardwick when he wrote to her in August 1593:

I wishe to your Ladyship to take more Comfort by stirringe abroad to visit your frendes and children, and not to lyve so solitary as yt semeth yow doe there in Chattesworthe amongst hills and Rockes of Stones.<sup>54</sup>

But the death of her fourth husband, George Talbot, three years earlier was a release from an unhappy marriage, and the spur to her building project at Hardwick. Isolated Chatsworth may have been, but Cecil underestimated the huge pleasure and satisfaction that Elizabeth took in designing her new home. Fully absorbed in her plans, friends and children would need to visit her, for she had no urge to seek their company.

Lady Rachel Russell (1637-1723) was widowed in 1683, following the execution of her husband for his involvement in the Rye House Plot. Yet she capitalized upon her husband's reputation as a Whig martyr, as well as her considerable wealth and social connections, to exercise 'exceptional political influence' following the Glorious Revolution. Dying when she was eighty-six years old, her correspondence shows that her opinion and favour was sought by leaders of church and state, particularly when she was in her fifties and sixties.<sup>55</sup> Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi (1741-1821), who was widowed first in 1781, then again in 1809, had none of the wealth or family support experienced by Bess of Hardwick or Lady Russell. She had angered her family when her second choice of husband was an Italian musician, and when this love match ended in his death, she was left grief-stricken. Yet in each period of widowhood, she turned to writing for comfort, publishing works that secured her reputation, and connected her to wider literary circles.<sup>56</sup> The celebrated Mary Delany ('Mrs Delany') moved in the most elevated cultural circles of her day and made intricate and vivid embroidered flower pictures. A keen gardener and botanist, as she entered her seventies, her eyesight no longer allowed her to sew, so she switched to producing exquisite compositions using vividly coloured cut paper on dramatic black backgrounds, a new technique of her own devising that she continued to perfect until her death in her late-eighties.<sup>57</sup> For each of these women of high social status, being intellectually active and socially engaged shielded them from loneliness. They were independently minded, and

refused to submit to contemporary stereotypes of widows. For them, old age was not a time just to be endured, but to be enjoyed creatively.

### **Prescriptions for sociability**

The eighteenth century saw an explosion of publications aimed at the middling sorts that encouraged them to believe that good health and a long life could be obtained through self-care. As Marie Mulvey Roberts has argued, the Enlightenment saw ‘the commercialization of life-extension’.<sup>58</sup> Care of the body, through attention to diet, fresh air, exercise and sleep, had long been advocated as promoting longevity, but in the eighteenth century this advice was extended to include more attention to the mind. As Helen Yallop has proposed, ‘what we might now refer to as positive mental attitude’, was added to the mix of healthy life stimulating qualities, and this left no room for loneliness.<sup>59</sup> Numerous guides for health recommended avoiding being governed by the violent passions, of which grief was most damaging to the health of the elderly. Eleazar Duncon wrote in 1606 that grief had a devastating effect on the body and mind, leading to, ‘wasting, torment, vexation, deformity; it teareth, it eateth, and utterly consumeth the mind, and body also’. By the eighteenth century, the message that grief was damaging to health had not changed, even if it was now explained through the pathology of nervous illness. Grief joined other negative emotions, such as fear, envy and hatred to be ‘known by experience to weaken the nerves’, the physician James Mackenzie wrote, and ‘often’ led to ‘spasms, obstructions, and hypochondrical disorders’.<sup>60</sup>

Loss of loved ones could not be avoided, but the passions or emotions it provoked could be managed. This might involve spiritual preparation: in 1650 the physician Humphrey Brooke advised that reading the scriptures would ‘arm thy mind against the day of need; that so when affliction comes, thou mayest be provided for it’. Brooke’s work also anticipated the

advice of eighteenth-century writers with his remedy for sadness. It was important, he argued, ‘to give our Sadness *vent*, for so it spends it self and the sooner forsakes us, whereas *cooped* up and *stifled*, it takes deeper hold upon us’. The key to releasing sadness was to find a ‘*Bosome Friend*’ with whom a person could express their feelings. ‘Restrain not thy tears, but give them away, and it will ease thee’: the cure for unhappiness was not to hide it from others, but to find a trusted and understanding friend. Suffering alone would never bring relief.<sup>61</sup>

By the eighteenth century, being social was regarded not just as a solution to personal crisis, but as essential to wellbeing throughout later life. Medical practitioners prescribed sociability and ‘cheerfulness’ as a way to preserve good health in old age. As William Buchan told his readers:

whoever would live to a good old age, must be good humoured and cheerful ... We can either associate with cheerful or melancholy companions, mingle in the amusements and offices of life, or sit still and brook over our calamities, as we chuse.

Being happy required a person to ‘mix with friends of a cheerful and social temper’.<sup>62</sup> For the middle classes, such advice was perfectly aligned with their notions of politeness. As Yallop has shown, ‘Cheerfulness and politeness had much in common’.<sup>63</sup> It also gave license to mixing with younger people. Mackenzie’s sixth rule for health in old age, was ‘to be of a contented, chearful mind, and endeavour to render ... behaviour and conversation agreeable to, and courted by young people, and to be frequently in their company’.<sup>64</sup> Richard ‘Beau’ Nash, as Bath’s Master of Ceremonies, regulated the conduct, dress and deportment of fashionable assembly-goers for nearly half a century until his death, aged eighty-six, in 1761. ‘Such longevity in office was a remarkable achievement’, observes his biographer Philip

Carter, ‘in a society prone to celebrate the fashionable and the contemporary. He was, in his own words, “a beau of three generations”’.<sup>65</sup>

Certainly, there is evidence of older people having important roles in polite venues. Following Nash’s example, men might be called upon to manage the sociability of the young as masters of ceremonies in assembly rooms, or like Miss Bates in Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1815) act as chaperones for younger women. Yallop raises the possibility that coffeehouses were young men’s spaces, but this neglects the contemporary evidence from visual sources, literary evidence and first-hand reports, that there was considerable diversity in age (if not gender) in the composition of coffee house clientele, depending upon the character of different venues. From the time of the Restoration, London’s coffee houses, and their provincial counterparts, were prime venue for older men with time on their hands to meet, read newspapers and (if contemporary satires are to be believed), to hold forth before captive audiences about their younger days and opinions on contemporary politics. By the end of the seventeenth century, this had become a familiar aspect of coffee house sociability, and a cornerstone of Grub Street journalist Edward ‘Ned’ Ward’s most well-known doggerel satires. According to Ward, an old soldier was typically ‘One of the loudest of the *prating Crew*’ to be found in a London coffee house:

Who after spitting thrice began,  
Stroaking his Beard,—Quoth he, *Here sits the Man*  
*Who Thirty several Campaigns has seen,*  
*At five and forty Sieges been,*  
*And in both foreign and domestick Wars*  
*Receiv'd as many Scars...*<sup>66</sup>



These were more than literary tropes: older men were not just the stalwarts of coffee-house custom, they were often the proprietors of some of the more long-established meeting-places in the City of London and its surrounding parishes. Mr Davis, who reputedly died at the age of 110 years in 1740, was the keeper of Harry's Coffee House in Fleet Street, London, and 'retained all his senses to his death', an elderly man at the hub of London social life.<sup>67</sup>

Polite sociability was also located in the home. Social visits continued: older people might be the visited rather than the visitors, but mixing was an important part of the social round. Indeed, the number of social events might increase in later age, as Amanda Vickery demonstrated from quantitative analysis of the records left in Elizabeth Shackleton's journals between 1773 and 1780.<sup>68</sup> Being a host and offering hospitality provided purpose, structure to time, and required planning and budgeting. Anne Kugler makes the valid point that 'retirement' for gentlewomen was not a realistic possibility when there were households to manage, and her case study of the widowed Lady Sarah Cowper demonstrates the pride that older women could take in performing this role. 'It is work well: becoming our elder years to put our families in due order', Lady Sarah told herself in her diary, 'ffor nothing is more usefull or more beautiful than good order'.<sup>69</sup>

Staying occupied and mixing with others, whether at home or beyond, older people in this period did not have the 'fear of a social death' that Alberti describes in more recent times.<sup>70</sup> Expectations of sociability and politeness did not cease with old age, and friendships had no time limit. Indeed, older people could gain a reputation for being especially gregarious. The popular belief that the old could be extra talkative, because their mouth and tongue were least affected as the rest of their body decayed, indicates that the elderly were not regarded as likely to be withdrawn or lonely figures in this society.<sup>71</sup> The 'disinhibition' of speaking one's mind as age evoked a 'devil-may-care' attitude to social niceties was featured routinely, often to comic effect, in eighteenth-century culture. The intrigues among

the key protagonists of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* centre upon Mrs Malaprop as a broker of information and gossip, sometimes extracted by bribery (one central female character, Lucy, notes she has been paid by Mrs Malaprop 'for betraying the young people to her').<sup>72</sup> Though of indeterminate age, the comical 'malapropisms' to which Sheridan's most popular and enduring character lent her name could be attributed to her character's post-menopausal 'mind fog'. Throughout the eighteenth century, private correspondence indicates the central role that older family members, women in particular, played in brokering family relationships, forging new alliances, consolidating or destroying reputations, and making marriages.

There were some who achieved the idyll of contentment and cheerfulness prescribed by medics. In a letter to his cousin in September 1787, the poet William Cowper wrote of the 'pleasure' he had learning of the good health of his eighty-six-year-old uncle:

his snug and calm way of living, the neatness of his little person, and the cheerfulness of his spirit. How happy is he at so advanced an age, to have those with him whose chief delight is to entertain him, and to be susceptible as he is of being amused.

Longevity, that in general either deprives a man of his friends, or if not of the power of enjoying their conversation, deals with him more gently, and still indulges him in the possession of those privileges which alone make life desirable.<sup>73</sup>

As Cowper recognised, attempts to be social could be frustrated by the death of friends, physical frailty that might confine them to their homes, or deafness preventing full participation in conversation.<sup>74</sup> But the resourcefulness of the elderly meant that loneliness was not necessarily the consequence. Keeping pets first became widespread in the eighteenth century, as Ingrid Tague has shown. For Lady Isabella Wentworth (c.1646-1733), who died when she was eighty-seven-years old, her pets, which included a number of dogs, a parrot and a monkey, were 'surrogate' family and 'provided a crucial source of emotional fulfilment

in her life', especially in widowhood and when her favourite son married. As Lady Isabella explained to her son, she was not the only elderly woman who had affection for her pets:

I hate cards and tables, and old people must have some diversion. Mistress Godfrey has a monkey, and Lady Duchess of Southampton, and they are fonder, if possible than I am.

Not wanting to participate in the usual polite activity of card playing, if she had only the company of her son, she would have been perfectly content. Describing one day's activities to her son, she began,

I live like a nun, see nobody. Miss Pug [her monkey], tubs [her dog] and I, sat two hours this morning ... and my boy [a servant] played of his viol, and set all the birds a-singing, had you but been there I should not have envied the Queen.<sup>75</sup>

Susanna Montgomerie, countess of Eglinton (1689/90-1780), retained her reputation for wit well into old age, while finding new company in the rats that lived in the dower house to which she retired in her eighties. She summoned and then dismissed the rats for scraps of food by banging on the walls. According to her biographer, 'when friends shuddered at her strange pets, she would say defiantly that the rats were better than many of her human guests, for at least they knew when the time had come to leave'.<sup>76</sup> Such fondness for animals was not just a habit for the wealthy: Margaret Finch (who died in 1740 aged 108), and was popularly known as the 'Queen of the gypsies', was depicted with her pet dogs in contemporary prints. A century earlier, poor women like this might have been associated with witchcraft, with their animals serving as imps. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, pet-keeping had become so normalised that the eccentricity of Margaret Finch was likely to have focused on her itinerant lifestyle, and her smoking two pipes, rather than upon her harmless (and in one case, fawning) dogs.

<Insert Figure X.2 around here>

<Margaret Finch, Queen of the Norwood Gypsies, died 1740, aged 108 years. Engraved by Jack Sharp, published 1793. © The Trustees of the British Museum/>Figure X.2 Remarkable for her eccentricity, as well as her longevity, pet dogs were the constant companions for Margaret Finch in her old age. </Caption>

### **Contented solitude**

The assumption has often been made in relation to the history of aging that solitude was inherently damaging and freighted with negative connotations. There is certainly a long association between ‘want of company’ and a melancholy or depressive condition. Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) regarded involuntary solitariness as damaging to what today would be called mental health, but when an individual in later life chose to be alone, the results could be very different.<sup>77</sup> Being old and solitary, and to retire from the bustle of life could be regarded positively, particularly in relation to the opportunity it afforded for quiet contemplation and spiritual reflection. This was regarded in the Protestant (Anglican and nonconforming) traditions as necessary for spiritual health and cultivating a peaceful, resigned and cheerful disposition at all life stages, but particularly in old age. Providential wisdom, articulated concerns about aging and mortality in the correspondence and personal diary entries of people facing life’s challenges.<sup>78</sup> It is almost impossible (and perhaps a rather futile exercise) to attempt to separate out sincere inward faith from outward religious practice in the fragmentary and subjective historical sources available.<sup>79</sup> However, it is certainly the case that the adoption of rhetorical language of Christian belief provided an enduring and socially recognised form of comfort, particularly for those of advanced years. The remarkably long-lived former diplomat, Sir Richard Bulstrode, made it his business in

old age to reflect upon happiness and the human lifespan. Famous for his vigour and fitness (he fathered children over a period of five decades, including in his seventies), Bulstrode proposed that it was important to balance being in company with withdrawal from society, since ‘the more we converse with Men, the less we confer with God’.<sup>80</sup>

We need to be cautious about over-generalisation in relation to questions of devotional practice since the assumed benefits of (for example) personal prayer and communal worship as a mitigation against loneliness were not straightforward. The various enduring conflicts over liturgy and theology, interdenominational differences and neighbours’ disputes among laity and clergy illustrate that living in harmony as the church dictated was seldom guaranteed, and never complete. However, church services did provide a common and enduring weekly ritual that offered the elderly social contact and cemented intergenerational communal bonds. The new Methodist movement, which grew out of eighteenth-century Anglicanism, also emphasised the communal nature of Christianity as an essentially social religion, one that necessitated being part of a congregation of all ages, which offered a countermeasure against ‘contented solitude’ tipping into social isolation.<sup>81</sup>

Scriptural precedent could be cited in sermons which embedded the idea culturally that older people were valued for their wisdom and respected for their established place in their families and communities. Respect for elders was enshrined in the Ten Commandments (‘Honour Thy Father and Thy Mother’), although early modern contemporaries complained this was not always observed. The Old Testament provided numerous examples of men and women chosen by God to undertake remarkable deeds in old age. According to the Book of Genesis, Sarai/Sarah and her husband Abram/Abraham became parents as they both reached their centenary. Moses, the greatest of all Jewish prophets, according to the Book of Deuteronomy, lived to the great age of 120. A long tradition of regarding age as conferring wisdom, gave the right (for older men especially) to assume positions of spiritual leadership

and authority. Furthermore, the Judaeo-Christian tradition of respect for elders gave cultural credence to the idea that older people in general should command respect, in theory if not always in practice. It was deemed suitable for older parishioners, who were considered to be particularly dedicated to turning their minds heavenward, to pass on devotional practices through shared knowledge of rituals and the familiar ties of communal worship through the generations. This phenomenon continued, though in different cultural formations, in larger towns and cities, including London, where parish loyalties and community identity persisted, even though the metropolis grew rapidly during the course of the early modern period.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the injunction to honour and care for older parishioners had the character not just of Christian charity but of moral obligation. While we should be rightly sceptical of claiming a ‘golden age’ of care and social integration at the senior end of the age spectrum in early modern times, the longevity of the Elizabethan Poor Laws through to the nineteenth century was just one indication of the practical means through which parishes, as units of administration as well as expressions of ecclesiastical and communal identity, put those principles into action and ensured a ‘safety net’ for the vulnerable old.

Though none could hope to reach the age of Methuselah (at 969 years, the oldest person in the Bible), there were plenty of examples of positive associations between age and divine favour to give elderly parishioners succour that they were treasured members of godly society. Biblical precedent and religious faith provided narratives and gave meaning, hope and instruction on how to be guided by spiritual principles during the trials of older years. As the Methodist Darcy Brisbane Maxwell reflected in a letter dated January 1793:

‘I do dwell alone.’ These words, one day, lately, came very seasonably to my mind, as being the case with God’s Israel of old, when tried with various temptations, and among others, that of standing alone. I seem to have none with me. I have indeed a lonely path: but blessed by my heavenly Father, I have the Sacred Three with me.<sup>83</sup>

Talking to God through prayer was one means of finding what Keith Snell has called ‘other-directed conversation’, though this is a secular interpretation of the utility of what could have been a sincerely-held religious conviction that a two-way conversation was both possible and a source of reassurance and comfort, even in solitude.<sup>84</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Assuming the elderly were lonely in the past is part of the way in which historians have contributed to the stigmatization of older people.<sup>85</sup> We need to get away from the stereotype of the lonely old man, or more often, woman. This chapter has shown how we should take a more positive view of old age in the early modern period. Old age could be an enriching period of life, when the elderly, their families and communities took positive steps to ensure that most people did not end their lives in loneliness. We have seen how, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, older people were not seen as marginal to everyday life. Instead, those who achieved remarkable longevity were celebrated and remembered.

The ability to achieve old age without loneliness did vary, of course, and was especially dependent upon a person’s state of health and economic circumstances. Old age was recognised as having two stages: ‘green old age’, followed by ‘decrepit old age’.<sup>86</sup> It is plausible that loneliness was easier to avoid in the first (or ‘green’) phase when physical fitness and activity were still possible, including the means, if necessary, to continue to be economically active and (lower down the social scale) to make the most of the economy of makeshifts. The impact of loss of mobility upon the labouring poor, compounded sometimes by disabilities, should not be underestimated.<sup>87</sup> For the middle and upper classes, economic hardship may have been less likely as a result of decrepitude, but being ‘housebound’ made sociability more difficult. As one diarist, Katherine Austen, expressed it, ‘when age comes

with infirmities, that paynes are unpleasant. [what] poure peevish dispositions ariseth in the temper of men and women'.<sup>88</sup>

In the early modern period, as today, women of all social ranks tended to live longer than men and were forced to become adept at developing strategies for avoiding loneliness. Gendered expectations made it culturally acceptable for women, throughout their lives, to exist in relation to others and to build networks of affect and mutual help, which safeguarded many from involuntary alone-ness. It may be that the increasing number of medical guides to health in old age, which prescribed good company and the control of the passions, were written by men for whom these forms of advice were not second-nature.<sup>89</sup> Unlike their aged female counterparts, ageing men who had spent a life largely outside of the domestic realm of responsibility, needed to be taught the value of sober sociability, good conversation and friendship in old age, in a way that their female peers, who had long been obliged to develop sociability as a survival strategy, did not.

In the period c.1500 to 1800, being lonely was viewed as potentially unhealthy for body, mind and soul, especially in old age. For the poor, social isolation endangered economic survival. For those further up the social scale, being alone could be beneficial, as Bulstrode explained, in life, occasionally, 'it is necessary, that we retire into our Selves, to gather the Fruit of our Experience, otherwise we shall be but ill Husbands of the Wealth we have gotten.' Yet solitude needed to be a condition of choice, and time-limited, if melancholy and 'uneasie' thoughts were to be kept in check. Solitude required a special degree of self-control, Bulstrode continued, for 'it is most dangerous for those to be alone that are not Masters of themselves...for many Men, who have well preserv'd themselves in Company, have been lost in Solitude.'<sup>90</sup> For the majority of the elderly, for most of their old age, a key to ageing well was believed to rest with others – whether from being in their company or receiving support, in both emotional and practical ways. This connectedness



acted to counter loneliness, and meant that in the early modern period, old age was not commonly associated with loneliness. As this chapter has demonstrated, most people managed to avoid loneliness because they were open to learning new ways of living, and could even embrace their last life-stage with creativity and pleasure.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Naomi Pullin for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this chapter, Samantha Williams for references to the elderly poor, and the editors for their helpful advice and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness: The History of an Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Alberti, *Biography of Loneliness*, 10, chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> Historians debate the age at which ‘old age’ was thought to begin in the past: here we adopt the age determined by Lynn Botelho, whose study focused on the visual and physical determinants of old age in post-menopausal women: ‘Old Age and Menopause in Rural Women of Early Modern Suffolk’, in *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500*, ed. L. Botelho and P. Thane (Harlow: Routledge, 2001), 43-65; see also Keith Thomas, ‘Age and Authority in Early Modern England’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 (1976): 240; P. Thane, ‘Social Histories of Old Age and Aging’, *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 98.

<sup>5</sup> E.A. Wrigley, R.S. Davies, J. Oeppen and R. Schofield, *English Population History from Family Reconstitution, 1580-1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 295.

<sup>6</sup> Alberti, *Biography of Loneliness*, chapter 6; R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chapter 8; D. Schäfer, ‘No Old Man Ever Forgot Where He Buried his Treasure: Concepts of Cognitive

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Impairment in Old Age circa 1700', *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 53, no. 11 (2005): 2023-37; Ella Sbaraini, 'The Ageing Body, Memory-Loss and Suicide in Georgian England', *Social History of Medicine*, forthcoming.

<sup>7</sup> Katie Barclay, *Caritas: Neighbourly Love and the Early Modern Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 166-71.

<sup>8</sup> K.D.M. Snell, 'Agendas for the Historical Study of Loneliness and Lone Living', *The Open Psychology Journal* 8 (2015): 65.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Laslett, *A Fresh Map of Life: the Emergence of the Third Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Sokoll, 'Old Age in Poverty: the Record of Essex Pauper Letters, 1780-1834', in *Chronicling Poverty: The Voices and Strategies of the English Poor, 1640-1840*, ed. T. Hitchcock, P. King and P. Sharpe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 136-37; Margaret Pelling, 'Old Age, Poverty and Disability', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed. Paul Johnson and Pat Thane (London: Routledge, 1998), 82-83; Pat Thane, *Old Age in English History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 91, 93; Claire S. Schen, 'Strategies of the Poor Aged Women and Widows in Sixteenth-Century London', in *Women and Ageing*, ed. Botelho and Thane, 16; L.A. Botelho, *Old Age and the English Poor Law, 1500-1700* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 120-1, 128-32; S.R. Ottaway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chapter 2; Deborah Simonton, 'Birds of passage' or 'career' women? Thoughts on the life cycle of the eighteenth-century European servant', *Women History Review* vol.20: 2 (2011), 214-17, 219-220.

<sup>11</sup> Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), particularly ch. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Botelho, *Old Age*, 128; see also Sokoll, 'Old Age', 147.

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<sup>13</sup> S. Ottaway, 'Providing for the Elderly in Eighteenth-Century England', *Continuity and Change*, 13, no. 3 (1998): 391-418; Smith, 'Ageing and Well-being', 64-95; Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, chapter 5; S. King, 'Reconstructing Lives: the Poor, the Poor Law and Welfare in Calverley 1650-1820', *Social History* 22, no. 3 (1997): 318-38; Samantha Williams, 'Support for the Elderly during the 'Crisis' of the English Old Poor Law', in *Population, Welfare and Economic Change in Britain, 1290-1834*, ed. C. Briggs, P.M. Kitson and S.J. Thompson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 129-52.

<sup>14</sup> P. Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988), 85.

<sup>15</sup> K. Snell, *Spirits of Community: English Senses of Belonging and Loss, 1750-2000* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 50.

<sup>16</sup> Sokoll, 'Old Age in Poverty'; S. King, *Writing the Lives of the English Poor 1750s-1830s* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), chapter 11; Jake Ladlow, 'Unsettled minds in England and Wales, 1800-1834' (University of Cambridge, PhD thesis, 2021), chapter 6.

<sup>17</sup> Ottaway, *Decline of Life*, 189-90, 232-7; Williams, 'Support for the Elderly', 145-9.

<sup>18</sup> Ottaway, 'Providing for the Elderly', 395.

<sup>19</sup> *Brice's Weekly Journal*, no. 73 (3 November, 1727).

<sup>20</sup> Steve Hindle, "'Without the Cry of any Neighbours": A Cumbrian Family and the Poor Law Authorities, c.1690-1730', in *The Family in Early Modern England*, ed. H. Berry and E. Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 133-50.

<sup>21</sup> Alberti, *Biography of Loneliness*, chapter 6.

<sup>22</sup> Thane, *Old Age*, 106-7; Botelho, *Old Age*, 126; Jeremy Boulton, Ramola Davenport and Leonard Schwarz, 'These Ante-Chambers of the Grave? Mortality, Medicine, and the Workhouse in Georgian London, 1725-1824', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. J. Reinharz and L. Schwarz (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 58.

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- <sup>23</sup> S. Ottaway, 'The Elderly in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. J. Renharz and L. Schwarz (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2013), 49.
- <sup>24</sup> J. Roebuck, 'When does 'Old Age' Begin? The Evolution of the English Definition', *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 3 (1979): 418-9.
- <sup>25</sup> S. Ottaway, "'A Very Bad Presidente in the House": Workhouse Masters, Care, and Discipline in the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse', *Journal of Social History*, 54 (2020), 2.
- <sup>26</sup> As quoted in Smith, 'Ageing and Wellbeing', 90.
- <sup>27</sup> Ottaway, 'The Elderly', 42.
- <sup>28</sup> Kevin Siena, 'Contagion, Exclusion, and the Unique Medical World of the Eighteenth-Century Workhouse: London Infirmaries in their Widest Relief', in *Medicine and the Workhouse*, ed. J. Renharz and L. Schwarz, 19-39; Boulton, Davenport and Schwarz, 'These Antechambers', 69; Ottaway, "'A Very Bad Presidente'", 7.
- <sup>29</sup> Christian Hoffman, *Longevity: Being an Account of Various Persons, who have Lived to an Extraordinary Age* (New York, 1798), 51.
- <sup>30</sup> Hoffman, *Longevity*, 16 (Hoffman mistakenly calls Margaret Patten, Mary); Bernard Lynch, *A Guide to Health Through the Various Stages of Life* (London, 1744), 55.
- <sup>31</sup> Hoffman, *Longevity*, 23.
- <sup>32</sup> Hoffman, *Longevity*, 31; *Wonderful News from Wales* (London, 1677), 5; John Taylor, *The Old, Old, Very Old Man* (London, 1635).
- <sup>33</sup> Botelho, *Old Age*, 153.
- <sup>34</sup> Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 4.

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<sup>35</sup> E. De Selincourt and A.G. Hill, eds, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, vol.4: The Later Years: Part I: 1821-1828*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), Letter 379.

<sup>36</sup> A. Kugler, ‘I Feel Myself Decay Apace’: Old Age in the Diary of Lady Sarah Cowper (1644-1720)’, in *Women and Ageing*, ed. Botelho and Thane, 79, 80. See Alberti, *Biography of Loneliness*, ch. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (London: Yale University Press, 2017); see also, Naomi Tadmor, ‘In the Even my Wife Read to Me’: Women, Reading and Household Life in the Eighteenth Century’, in *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, ed. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 9, pp. 162-174.

<sup>38</sup> Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* (London: Brill, 2010), particularly chs. 2-4, 56-159.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Jon Mee and Jennifer Wilkes, ‘Transpennine Enlightenment: The Literary and Philosophical Societies and Knowledge Networks in the North, 1781-1830’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 599-612. The geographical extent of this phenomenon across provincial England is illustrated by Keith A. Manley, ‘Lounging Places and Frivolous Literature: Subscription and Circulating Libraries in the West Country to 1825’, in *Printing Places: Locations of Book Production & Distribution since 1500*, ed. John Hinks and Catherine Armstrong (London: British Library, 2005), 107-20.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies c.1580-1800: the Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> *Ladies’ Magazine; or, Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* (1770-71), 1: 364-65. On the association between women readers, the novel and family life in this period, see Ruth

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Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> As quoted in Williams, *Social Life*, 64.

<sup>43</sup> Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 271-72; Amanda Vickery, ‘Mutton Dressed as Lamb? Fashioning Age in Georgian England’, *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 4 (2013): 858-86.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas, ‘Age and Authority’, 233-4; Adam Fox, ‘Custom, Memory and the Authority of Writing’, in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 89-116.

<sup>45</sup> Elaine Chalus, ‘Gender, place and power: controverted elections in late Georgian England’, in *Gender and political culture in early modern Europe, 1400-1800*, ed. by James Daybell and Svante Norrhem (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 179-196, particularly p. 181.

<sup>46</sup> Ottaway, *Decline*, 157.

<sup>47</sup> E. Foyster, ‘Parenting was for Life, Not Just for Childhood: the Role of Parents in the Married Lives of their Children in Early Modern England’, *History* 86 (2001): 313-27.

<sup>48</sup> Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 200, 201.

<sup>49</sup> Bailey, *Parenting*, 202.

<sup>50</sup> Ottaway, *Decline*, 161.

<sup>51</sup> Terri L. Premo, *Winter Friends: Women Growing Old in the New Republic, 1785-1835* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 73-5.

<sup>52</sup> Ottaway, *Decline*, 159.

<sup>53</sup> Premo, *Winter Friends*, 158-61; Hoffman, *Longevity*, 44.

<sup>54</sup> Bess of Hardwick’s Letters: The Complete Correspondence c.1550-1608, <http://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=108>, accessed 29 June 2021.

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<sup>55</sup> Anne Kugler, ‘Women and Aging in Transatlantic Perspective’, in *Power and Poverty: Old Age in the Pre-Industrial Past*, ed. S.R. Ottaway, L.A. Botelho and K. Kittridge (Westport: Greenwood, 2002), 74-5.

<sup>56</sup> Kugler, ‘Women and Aging’, 78-80.

<sup>57</sup> Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts, eds, *Mrs. Delany & Her Circle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> M.M. Roberts, ‘“A Physic Against Death”: Eternal Life and the Enlightenment – Gender and Gerontology’, in *Literature and Medicine During the Eighteenth Century*, ed. M.M. Roberts and R. Porter (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 154-5.

<sup>59</sup> Helen Yallop, *Age and Identity in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002), 2.

<sup>60</sup> E. Duncon, *Rules for the Preservation of Health* (London, 1606), 14; J. Mackenzie, *The History of Health, and the Art of Preserving It* (Edinburgh, 1758), 389; see also, H. Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life* (London, 1640), 159,166-8; R. Steele, *A Discourse Concerning Old-Age* (London, 1688), 29-30; G. Cheyne, *An Essay of Health and Long Life* (London, 1724), chapter 6; and J. Easton, *Human Longevity* (Salisbury, 1799), xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>61</sup> H. Brooke, *Ugieine or A Conservatory of Health* (London, 1650), 245, 246-7.

<sup>62</sup> W. Buchan, *Domestic Medicine* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London, 1772), 146-7; see also, J. Hill, *The Old Man’s Guide to Health and Longer Life* 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, 1775), 29.

<sup>63</sup> Yallop, *Age and Identity*, p88.

<sup>64</sup> Mackenzie, *History of Health*, 414.

<sup>65</sup> Philip Carter, ‘Nash, Richard [known as Beau Nash] (1674–1761), Master of Ceremonies and Social Celebrity’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (May, 2008),

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<sup>66</sup> Yallop, *Age and Identity*, 114; Edward Ward, *The School of Politicks, or, The Humours of a Coffee-House, A Poem* (London, 1690), 5-6.

<sup>67</sup> Hoffman, *Longevity*, 16.

<sup>68</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 205-6.

<sup>69</sup> Kugler, 'I Feel Myself Decay Apace', 70-1, 77.

<sup>70</sup> Alberti, *Biography of Loneliness*, 141.

<sup>71</sup> Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life*, 208.

<sup>72</sup> Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1776), Act 1, Scene 1.

<sup>73</sup> William Cowper, 'William Cowper to Harriot Hesketh, Lady Hesketh [née Cowper]: Thursday, 20 September 1787', in *Electronic Enlightenment Scholarly Edition of Correspondence*, ed. Robert McNamee et al (University of Oxford), <https://doi-org.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/10.13051/ee:doc/cowpwiOU0030030a1c>.

<sup>74</sup> Sarah Savage (1664-1752) lamented her deafness in old age, see S.R. Ottaway and I. Tague, eds, *The History of Old Age in England, 1600-1800*, 8: 263; for further examples of how deafness impeded sociability see, Emily Cockayne, 'Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England', *Historical Journal* 46, no. 3 (2003): 499, 501-2, and David Turner, *Disability in Eighteenth-Century England: Imagining Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 112.

<sup>75</sup> I. H. Tague, *Animal Companions: Pets and Social Change in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2015), 174-6, 200-6.

<sup>76</sup> Rosalind K. Marshall, 'Montgomerie [née Kennedy], Susanna, countess of Eglinton (1689/90–1780), Literary Patron and Society Hostess', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, <https://www-oxforddnb->



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<sup>77</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621), 115.

<sup>78</sup> Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, 132-57; Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, particularly ch.3.

<sup>79</sup> Alberti does not explore this difficulty with generic expression and rhetoric used in sources, in her assertion that fewer people felt 'alone' before the nineteenth century because more people believed in God. See for example her use of the case study of widower Thomas Turner, whose religious rhetoric is conflated with belief in God. *Loneliness*, 98-99.

<sup>80</sup> Sir Richard Bulstrode, *Miscellaneous Essays* (1715), 96. See also his 'Of Solitariness and Retirement', J. D. Davies, 'Bulstrode, Sir Richard (1617–1711), Diplomat and Writer', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 23 September 2004, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3930>, accessed 9 March 2021.

<sup>81</sup> David R. Wilson, 'Anglicanism and Methodism', in *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Vol. II, Establishment and Empire, 1662-1829*, ed. Jeremy Gregory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 480-81.

<sup>82</sup> Jeremy Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society. A London Suburb in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For recent research, see Kate Gibson, 'Faith and Urban Domestic Sociability in Northern England, 1760-1835', *Historical Journal* 64, no. 2 (2021): 255-80.

<sup>83</sup> *The Life of Darcy, Lady Maxwell, of Pollock; late of Edinburgh* [further details upon publication – Covid impacted archive access]

<sup>84</sup> Snell, 'Agendas for the Historical Study of Loneliness', 65.

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<sup>85</sup> Yallop, *Age and Identity*, 6. Even Susannah Ottaway has adopted an overly negative approach with the title of her otherwise splendid book, *The Decline of Life*.

<sup>86</sup> Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Man*, 192-3; Steele, *Discourse concerning Old-Age*, 11-12; J. Smith, *The Portrait of Old Age* (London, 1752), 16. Interestingly, this distinction parallels terms adopted by modern gerontologists and epidemiologists: see for example Annette Baudisch and James W. Vaupel, 'Why do Patterns of Aging Differ Widely across the Tree of Life?', *Science* 338, no. 6617 (2012): 618-19.

<sup>87</sup> The importance of physical mobility for the elderly poor has been highlighted by Jonathan Healey. See, for example, "'By the Charitie of Good People": Poverty and Neighbourly Support in Seventeenth-Century Lancashire', *Family and Community History* 19, no. 2 (2016): 89-90.

<sup>88</sup> As cited in Aki C.L. Beam, "'Should I as Yet Call You Old?'" Testing the Boundaries of Female Old Age in Early Modern England', in *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe*, ed. E. Campbell (Aldershot: Farnham, 2006), 108.

<sup>89</sup> Yallop, *Age and Identity*, chapter 5; H. Yallop, 'Representing Aged Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century England: the 'Old Man' of Medical Advice', *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 2 (2013): 191-210.

<sup>90</sup> Bulstrode, *Miscellaneous Essays*, 88, 90.