

WICKED WILLIAM



and the fall of
WANSTEAD HOUSE

This exhibition charts the life of the once notorious William Wellesley-Pole. A man who married a fortune and lost it. A man whose life was held up to public exposure. A man whose affair with a married woman filled many lurid pages in the national press. A man who was shunned by his own family and many in society.

Yet who remained unrepentant to the end.

Early years

The man who lost Wanstead was born William Wesley-Pole on 22 June 1788 on the family estate of Ballyfin, near Dublin. The family name was changed to Wellesley-Pole the following year.

The Wellesleys were an Anglo-Irish family that had a meteoric rise to fame during William's lifetime. His uncle Richard became Governor-General of India, while uncle Arthur defeated Napoleon, becoming Duke of Wellington and later Prime Minister.

The career of his father, created Lord Maryborough in 1821, was less impressive. Although a Cabinet Minister in the troubled years after Waterloo, his Times obituary in 1845 noted "he was angry at all times....he advanced in years without improving in reputation".

William was an only boy among three sisters. He was a wild child, whom his parents found difficult to control. His sister Mary recalled the revenge he took against nursemaids who had restrained him.

He was privately educated by a tutor, Reverend Gilly. When William reached 16 he told Gilly there was no use in "poring over books and writing like a fat citizen's clerk". The young

playboy was already in huge debt and his father persuaded a close family friend, Charles Arbuthnot, to give him a junior Embassy post in Constantinople.

European adventures

During William's teenage years Britain was involved in an extensive war against Napoleon. Opportunities for travel abroad were limited, so it was a huge adventure to become Private Secretary to the British Ambassador in Constantinople (now Istanbul). Arbuthnot's young wife died in childbirth in May 1806 and the Ambassador was so grief-stricken he could not perform his duties. William took the helm and was promoted to Secretary of the Embassy at the age of just 18.

With typical bravado, William issued ultimatums to the Turkish government. In January 1807 the British Fleet was ordered into action to carry out 'measures of hostility' against well-defended Constantinople. The Fleet (victorious at Trafalgar less than two years earlier) was humiliated and suffered heavy losses.

Arbuthnot and his staff had to abandon the Embassy while many British merchants fled the city. There was an outcry at home, but Arbuthnot took the blame.

William then spent time in Copenhagen and Vienna, where he learnt to waltz. Dancing became a passion for him and added to his appeal among the ladies.

In 1808 he was back in England where he had a fling with a young Ipswich girl, riding round Suffolk in a flash carriage and spending wildly. His father paid all the bills and got William to join the Army. He went to Spain as ADC to his uncle Arthur, but although he fought well in two battles he was insolent and then absconded. Wellington wrote that “he is lamentably ignorant and idle”.

Chasing a fortune

One morning William woke up with an idea. Why not marry Catherine Tylney-Long, the richest non-titled heiress in the country? She came of age in 1811 and had what was then an immense income of some £40,000 a year.

She had numerous suitors, including the Duke of Clarence, the Prince Regent’s brother and later King William IV. The ageing royal thought he was in with a chance, writing to Catherine’s aunt that he had danced with “my lovely little nice angel” all evening.

However, she fell for the charms of Wellesley-Pole. He was a renowned waltzer, the waltz being considered somewhat

racy. It was an argument over a waltz at Wanstead that provoked a well-publicised duel between William and rival suitor Lord Kilworth.

Catherine graduated from amusement to admiration for William's perseverance. She turned him down six times but finally accepted. They became engaged in November 1811.

***Man wants but little
here below, but
wants that little Long***
Contemporary verse

William's family was delighted. His father reminded him against over-spending. "Don't give security for anyone – your good nature is too well known, you were taken in when very young."

Catherine had received a number of letters warning her not to marry that "reptile Pole". "He boasted last summer that when you seemed to have rejected him he prayed his debts should follow you. His only interest is the cash." She ignored the advice.

Marriage

William and Catherine were married in 1812, but not before they had signed a 'pre-nup'. Catherine's family protected her

estates by entail on the first son of the union and she was to receive £13,000 a year pin-money. As long as that was paid, William had a life interest in the estates, on which the couple had a power to raise a mortgage of £100,000, if required.

The ceremony took place on Saturday 14 March 1812 at St James's Church, Piccadilly and was conducted by the Rector of Wanstead, Dr Glasse. The bride wore a robe of real Brussels point lace, over white satin, and a bonnet of the same material, complete with two ostrich feathers. The dress cost 700 guineas and Catherine wore a necklace costing over £25,000. William wore a plain blue coat with yellow buttons, a white waistcoat and buff breeches, and white silk stockings. The couple distributed 800 silver wedding favours worth one and a half guineas each to their friends.

When the priest asked William for the ring he had forgotten to obtain one. A local jeweller was asked to bring along an assortment!

The Prince Regent had already agreed that upon his marriage William should extend his name to William Pole-Tylney-Long-Wellesley. This ridiculous pretension was lampooned but the Royal Licence meant William now had

connection to rights and titles, such as Lord Warden of Waltham Forest (which was hereditary in the Tylneys).

Living the High Life

Like many young married couples William and Catherine did a bit of decorating in their new house. A bit of an understatement - Wanstead House was completely overhauled. The main reception areas were refurbished in red and gold, with £60,000 spent on carpets and curtains.

A newspaper report in 1814 said that William “is fitting up Wanstead House in a style of magnificence exceeding even Carlton House [the Prince Regent’s palace in Pall Mall]. The whole of the interior will present one uniform blaze of burnished gold.”

A spectacular grand fete was held to show off the house. Attended by the Prince Regent and various foreign sovereigns, it went on until 8 am in morning. It was one of many parties held at Wanstead.

William had the finest hounds and horses and had 150 retainers dressed in Lincoln green.

He dressed regally (with a penchant for showy kid-gloves) and kept a box at both the Opera and at Drury Lane Theatre, often entertaining the whole cast.

He employed the fashionable garden designer, Humphrey Repton to help redesign the extensive gardens (although he never paid him) and an American garden was commissioned from Lewis Kennedy.

William and Catherine had three children: William Richard Arthur in 1813, James Fitzroy Henry in 1815 and Victoria Catherine Mary in 1818. But he continued to sow his wild oats, it seems. Maria Kinnaird later begged Wellington for help, saying that as a schoolgirl William had fathered her child, and Catherine had given her an annuity to live at least 50 miles from Wanstead. She got short shrift from the Duke.

Financial woes

William's debts really started to mount up when he fought an election in Wiltshire in early 1818, having given up the safe seat of St Ives. Seen as an outsider, relying upon patronage, he was opposed by a local candidate. A bitter and violent election was fought, possibly the most expensive of the Regency era. Although ridiculed as 'the Dandy', William got elected as one of the two Members but his finances were in tatters. He had borrowed £32,000 at 16% interest to pay for it.

He then raised the £100,000 mortgage on his wife's estates. He executed a Trust deed on 11 May 1819 which transferred

his life interest in Wanstead and its furniture to trustees for the benefit of his creditors. He was granted £600 to keep up the establishment there.

William initially sought re-election for Wiltshire in 1820 but stepped down because of lack of money. Soon afterwards he was “obliged to quit the country with all his family or live in the King’s Bench [debtors’ prison]”. He stayed until spring 1822 in Paris where, sustained by his wife’s separate income, he moved in fashionable circles. He then returned to England to attend to his affairs having obtained, presumably through his father’s political influence, a nominal court appointment to protect him against “personal molestation”.

The sale of Wanstead House

The magnificent contents of Wanstead House were put up for auction in June 1822. Visitors to the sale of the century, which lasted six weeks, were so numerous that rooms were heated to suffocation. The gardens were furnished with refreshments, like a country fair, and people helped themselves to souvenir pieces from the Grotto. The total proceeds were a disappointing £41,000.

Hounded by creditors, William was forced to return to the Continent. He put all his finances in the hands of trustees,

headed by his father, who warned him it would take years to settle his “tremendous and complicated debts”. In September 1822 Maryborough told William that they should sell the house, pull it down and let the Park for farmland, but ultimately as building land. The timber should be felled.

News quickly spread. The Manchester Iris reported that “the residence of the modern Sardanapalus [the decadent last king of Assyria who spent his life in self indulgence and dies in an orgy of destruction] is about to be razed”. William was by now living at a hotel in Calais - “from tokay to vin ordinaire”. In 1823 Wanstead was sold for demolition for £10,000 and virtually all trace of it was removed.

William ignored his father’s advice for financial restraint. They were to fall out irrevocably in early 1825 when William accused Lord Maryborough of mismanagement and removed him from the Trust.

Enter Mrs Bligh

Having disgraced the family name by squandering his wife’s fortune and sinking into debt, William fled with Catherine to Italy. At first they were happy. Early in 1823, when her mother died, Catherine wrote to her sisters that William had been very supportive. “No human creature could have been more kind, or shown greater feeling”.

But six months later he seduced Helena, the wife of Captain Bligh, a Guards officer. The Pole-Tylney-Long-Wellesleys already knew the Blighs. The husband was in ill-health and had moved to southern Europe. In the summer of 1823 he and his wife came to Naples, where Catherine and William were staying.

In July 1823 Mrs Bligh left her husband because of her affair with William, who filed an affidavit of denial before the British Vice-Consul, and persuaded Catherine to offer the injured lady the protection of her roof. This she did, but when the three moved to Florence at the end of 1823 Catherine had had enough and asked Mrs Bligh to leave. She apparently did so, but unknown to Catherine stayed in an apartment in the same hotel, carrying on with William. In May 1824 William and Catherine moved to Paris, where Mrs Bligh had already settled.

Catherine appealed to William's parents to intervene. She wrote that she would forgive William if he gave up Mrs Bligh, whom she would provide for out of her own income. His parents came to Paris immediately but couldn't persuade William. He told Catherine he was only acting out of kindness – the poor woman was deranged (with passion for him) and she had escaped from her mad doctors and come to him having taken poison – he had to take care of her!

Separation

He stayed on the Continent and lived with Mrs Bligh at Paris, Dieppe, the Hague and other places.

Once Catherine discovered that he had renewed his affair with Mrs Bligh she let him know any reconciliation was impossible and that if he came to England to bother her, she would start divorce proceedings.

William's father told him "The whole world approves of your wife's separation from you... If you do not separate yourself from this abandoned, profligate wretch, you must share her fate".

By the summer of 1825 Catherine was writing to Colonel Shawe, William's friend, that because William had lied about his relationship with Mrs Bligh she wanted nothing more to do with him.

Death of Catherine

On her return to England Catherine had found refuge with her two unmarried sisters, the Misses Long but by June 1825 was living with her daughter Victoria in Clarges Street, London. Here on 7 July William - who had secretly been in London for a fortnight with the heavily pregnant Mrs Bligh -

suddenly burst in. Catherine heard his voice and managed to escape with Victoria by the kitchen door.

She immediately served him with a citation for divorce and filed a Bill in Chancery to make her children wards of Court. Meanwhile, William left again for France with Mrs Bligh, who gave birth to his illegitimate son, William Wellesley-Bligh, on 22 August 1825.

On 7 September the distraught Catherine, now suffering with a bowel complaint, moved with her sisters and her children to a house in the Paragon, Richmond. That evening she was seized with spasms. Fearing them to be fatal she decided to revoke a will she had made under William's direction several years before. The next day she had another fit, having received a letter from William which she decided not to open - it demanded the return of his children. She died on 12 September.

William threatened to attend the funeral, but in the end stayed away. Nevertheless Catherine's sisters posted a police guard at their house in Richmond while at the funeral to prevent him taking the children.

Catherine's remains were taken to the Long family home at Draycot, Wiltshire where her coffin was drawn by six horses.

The chief mourners included her sisters, Lord Maryborough and the Duke of Wellington.

Looking after the children

As their sister had instructed on her deathbed, the Misses Long made William's three children wards in Chancery, with the Duke of Wellington as temporary guardian. William was refused custody as he was living in France. He meanwhile petitioned the Court to set up a proper scheme of education for the children and for formal appointment of guardians.

William then returned to England, keeping clear of his creditors and buying a large house in Regent's Park. He now asked the Court for full custody of his children.

Numerous affidavits were filed for and against his claim. The case attracted great public interest and dragged on throughout 1826.

Meanwhile, Mrs Bligh came to London in February, settling near to William and resuming their affair. In May her husband sued William for having assaulted and debauched his wife, and when this 'crim. con.' case was eventually heard it created further sensation.

Captain Bligh's Italian servants maintained William's seduction of his wife had taken place on the slopes of Mount

Vesuvius during a midnight excursion of 50 persons in carriages, and that he had rented a villa next door to their Naples home so he could climb into her bedroom.

To tumultuous applause, the Jury decided for the plaintiff, with £6,000 damages. Arrested for non-payment of the damages, William was escorted by two sheriff's men to the office of his solicitor, where the necessary security was lodged. Three weeks later Bligh filed for divorce from his wife which was granted in May 1827.

In Chancery

The affidavits, many published in the press, were full of salacious details and created a furore at the time. The case when heard played to packed houses and William was hooted at.

William maintained his family did not want him deprived of custody but there were counter-affidavits from his father, and his uncles Arthur and Richard.

William was painted as profligate and immoral, a man who had treated his wife without kindness or affection. Most damning was the testimony of Dr Southcote. He said William was laid up in 1824 with secondary symptoms of VD, had had a relapse in December 1825 and whilst in Paris took

mercury for a carious jaw. He said William wanted his sons to associate with low-life people to get a knowledge of the world, and took them to cock-fights so they could hear foul language.

Southcote said William had written “A man and his children ought to be allowed to go to the devil their own way, if he pleases”.

The Lord Chancellor Eldon pronounced judgment. William stood condemned by the failure of his family to testify in his favour; by his “most shameful” adultery with Mrs Bligh “a common whore”; and his “most grossly improper conduct” towards his children, teaching them to swear. He was deemed unfit to have custody of his own children.

Falling out with the family

William decided to appeal to the House of Lords, but to strengthen his hand he wanted his family behind him. He pestered his uncle Wellington to bring his father round but Wellington said a reconciliation was impossible unless William withdrew a threat to attack and ‘expose’ his whole family in the press. William seriously contemplated murdering his uncle, but then plumped for defamation.

In summer 1827 William published his *Two Letters to Lord Eldon*. This excused his adultery and dismissed the affidavits against him as lies. The Misses Long were, he said, fanatical Methodists and so not fit to look after his daughter.

More damning was his pamphlet portraying his family as vicious and immoral, which he now thought would help his appeal. Wellington had a reputation for womanising, and he said the Duke was living in a deviant relationship with the second Mrs Arbuthnot and her husband Charles.

His final flourish was an affidavit against the Misses Long and their relatives that he laid before the Lord Chancellor.

William claimed they had picked a governess for his daughter who was a prostitute that lived with the Misses Long's uncle; that the younger Miss Long had committed incest with this same uncle; that all the rest of the Long family were drunken blasphemers and finally that the children's two aunts had 'a libidinous relationship' with one another. The pamphlet and the affidavit were published in a bawdy magazine that became widely circulated, not least because Wellington was now Prime Minister.

William was shunned by society after these publications. Indeed, Baron William de Crespigny, a relative of the Misses

Long, challenged William to a duel. It was fought in Calais as William was bound over to keep the peace in Britain.

Fighting the Judgement

William's pamphleteering had little effect. His appeal was duly heard in the House of Lords and he lost. Lord Redesdale said a father has no absolute right to the care of his children if he abuses that right, while Lord Manners said William was a reprobate with vicious habits, who had encouraged his children's habit of profane swearing. The Chancery judgment was confirmed.

In July 1829 William personally conducted before the new Lord Chancellor his case against an order forbidding him to see his children except in the presence of a third party. The order was upheld but William was given the right to reply and stated he had "established, to the satisfaction of all impartial minds, that the false evidence by which I have been traduced, and robbed of my parental rights, was the offspring of malice".

Early in 1830 William published a report of the recent court proceedings as an appendix to *A View of the Court of Chancery*. Although it set out the case for reform of Chancery procedure, it was actually further defence of his conduct.

Soon afterwards he published *Illustrations of Chancery Practice*, which purported to be “a practical illustration of the evils of that secret system of judicature” prevailing in Chancery, but was also a renewed attempt to discredit those whose evidence had condemned him.

Guardians of the children

After the failure of William’s appeal two permanent guardians of the children were now appointed: Kitty, Duchess of Wellington and Sir William Courtenay, who shielded the Duke from further contact with William.

The oldest boy William, undisciplined and not interested in learning, was removed from Eton to a private tutor in Cheshire. Here he began to settle down, except for an open addiction to ale-houses and a secret one to cock-pits.

Little Victoria lived mostly with aunts, the Misses Long, and grew up as pious as they. Once a year she was taken to Apsley House, where, under the care of the Duchess of Wellington, her father was permitted to see her. As she grew older he saw even less of her, although they corresponded from time to time. On her 25th birthday in May 1843 he sent her a bracelet composed of Catherine’s hair as a “memorial of one of the best and most virtuous of women, your dear and incomparable mother”.

William had more success with his middle child, James. When he was 14, William managed to entice him away from Eton and together they enjoyed the delights of London. Courtenay tried to retrieve James from William's house but eventually gave up and James was left with his father. James tried to persuade his brother to join him with promises of cigars and jewellery but to no avail. He grew up as profligate as his father, addicted to clothes and high living and running up mountains of debts. He eventually quit England to escape his creditors and to seek medical help for his mental instability. He died at the end of 1851.

The second Mrs Pole-Tylney-Long-Wellesley

Having secured her divorce from Captain Bligh, Helena pressed William to marry her. The wedding took place on 10 November 1828 in the parish of Hartley Wintney, Hants, where they set up their first marital home. In 1832 they moved to Brussels, where William began an affair with Helena's Belgian maid. Helena took him to court for adultery. William told the Belgian court they were not legally married, but this was overturned at a court of Appeal.

For the remainder of her life Helena tried to get some money out of William. Formal articles of separation were drawn up between them in 1834 in which he agreed to give

her an annuity of £1,000. He never paid this and by the 1840s she was a pauper, albeit that she enjoyed the title Countess of Mornington after William was ennobled on the death of his father.

Where's My Money?

In 1847 Helena returned to England to take up her case. She lodged at Hatchett's Hotel, whose proprietor approached William for payment to be rebuffed by our hero saying he would only pay the bill if she was dead. Helena was asked to leave and ended up the workhouse of St George's, Hanover Square.

William was called to the local police court to explain why he was not supporting his wife. He claimed she was extravagant and he had spent enormous amounts for her support, but did not want to go into details to spare "pain to the distinguished members of my own family". The magistrate ordered him to maintain her.

Helena then pursued William through the Chancery courts. This took decades. Her cause was repeatedly upheld but William refused to execute a deed as ordered. Both William and his son opposed payment to her saying there were more pressing calls on their heavily-mortgaged estates. It was not

until after William junior died in 1863 that Helena got any money, but then a fraction of what she was due.

She retired to a 10-bedroomed marine villa in the polite resort of West Cowes on the Isle of Wight where she died aged 75 in April 1869.

William Jerdan, the editor of the Literary Gazette in his autobiography wrote that Helena Bligh was a fascinating woman. "I saw her sorrows in the midst of luxury and gaiety. The public censured her but she was amiable and good."

Politics

During the Regency William had been MP for St Ives and in 1830 he was returned for the pocket borough once more. He used the opportunity to vote against his uncle's government and to bring it down in on 15 November 1830.

The following year was the height of the struggle for the Reform of Parliament but William managed to create a diversion for the public: he abducted his daughter from her aunts' residence near Godalming (see next panel).

William became MP for Essex later that year. In his election speech he declared: "Now gentlemen, all of you that are husbands, go home and be as a good a husband to your wife as I am to mine." In the first election after the Great Reform

Act in 1832, he left his campaign in the hands of his wife and his agent as he was hiding from his creditors in Calais. He was beaten into third place.

For the next 12 years William lived mainly in Brussels, where he published *Un Mot aux Belges* in 1839 and a sequel, on Europe and the Eastern question, the following year. In *A Fourth Political Word* (1842) he surveyed British politics since 1828 and confirmed that he had “become a convert” to Peelite Conservatism. His *Fifth Political Word* (1843) dealt with foreign policy, and in two editions of *The Irish Question* (1844) he advocated a concordat with Rome to keep Catholic agitators in check. When his father died in 1845 William became the 4th Earl of Mornington, returned to England and took his seat in the House of Lords.

During the 1840s he spoke on the abolition of the Corn Laws and on Irish affairs although his attendance fell off during the 1850s. Hansard reports show he spoke very softly, to the extent of being inaudible.

Abduction

In 1831 William decided to abduct his daughter from her aunts' residence near Godalming. On 15 July, attended by four men armed with pistols, he surrounded the house at dawn and carried off the 12 year old girl to France.

Summoned to appear before Lord Chancellor Brougham William admitted the deed but refused to surrender the child, and was placed under house arrest for contempt of court. Brougham informed the Speaker, as did William, who claimed the immunity of parliamentary privilege. The matter was referred to Committee, before which a “tearful, perfumed” William appeared on 19 July.

A week later the Committee decided that privilege did not apply. William was not released from The Fleet prison until 22 August, after Victoria had been retrieved from France and restored to her aunts.

He continued to dispute the question of his access to the children but to no avail.

An absentee landlord

William owned extensive estates in Ireland, which suffered the terrible potato famine in the mid-1840s. Like many other absentee landlords he was strongly criticised in the press for his response to the crisis. Facing starvation in 1846 many tenants refused to pay rent arrears. William thought the Government should act to uphold the rights of property.

A local vicar and a JP of King’s County wrote that William’s tenants only knew their landlord from his agents who issue

six-monthly demands. He had never subscribed any money to local charities. William responded that he had already directed his agent not to collect rent arrears because of the failure of the potato crop.

A Times editorial mocked William, saying he was a typical absentee landlord. He had made no improvements to his estate, his tenants were bankrupt and he ought to help the poor. William retorted that the Government should act to prevent starvation by stopping the export of food from Ireland.

In the 1850s William's mortgaged estates in Ireland were sold off at auction. Those close to Dublin were sold for building land.

Father against son

When William junior reached the age of 21 William persuaded him to cut off the entail on the estates so they could be sold. Together they signed a Trust deed in December 1834 which combined all the various charges on the estates in England and Ireland, amounting to £462,000. The Trust was intended to allow William and his son some income.

William himself was permitted to manage the estates, his son having little interest in business. By 1845 William junior was becoming concerned (William paid him very little) and went to law to prevent William from receiving rents, granting leases and cutting down timber. The injunction was granted (although largely ignored by William) and eventually a Receiver was appointed.

Litigation between father and son over management of the estates continued until William died. William tried repeatedly and unsuccessfully to have the Receiver removed, William junior arguing that his father had let tenements get dilapidated and that he owed him at least £140,000, which William junior had had to raise on the estates left him by his mother. Among these were Aldersbrook, which William junior sold to the City of London to create its cemetery. William opposed the sale – if he'd been successful, the future of Epping Forest might have been very different.

In June 1855, in despair at the interminable court cases, William wrote to his daughter rather dramatically “of all the turmoils I have had in my life and I have had Lord many this is the worst for it has come to this my Son must ruin me! Or to defend myself I must do so to him”.

The final years

William was forced to live relatively frugally in London in his final years. The 1851 census shows him a “Peer of the Realm” lodging at 26 Green Street in Mayfair, the other lodger a commercial traveller.

He drew up his will in 1854. It is full of bitterness to his family for “leaving me to starve after having derived immense benefit from my prosperity”. The entailed estates had to pass to his son but anything left goes to Miss Anna Eliza Frances Temple “for the unvarying kindness in supporting me in my present state of destitution”. A lawyer and old friend Major Richardson, one-time neighbour at Oak Hall, Wanstead, are named executors.

By now William was living in another lodging house in Thayer Street, Marylebone. Here on 1 July 1857 he choked on an egg and died suddenly, aged 69. There was an inquest - cause of death, heart attack. The Earl’s doctor suggested William had been in “pecuniary want”, but Major Richardson disagreed, saying he did not consider William that badly off because his cousin, the 2nd Duke of Wellington, had allowed him 19 shillings (£0.95) a week.

The End

Obituary notices were not kind. The worst appeared in the Morning Chronicle (whose proprietor William had once taken to Court). "A spendthrift, a profligate, a gambler in his youth – he became a debauchee in his manhood. Redeemed by no single virtue, adorned by no single grace, his life has gone out, even without a flicker of repentance."

One year later his legatee, Miss Anna Temple, married a rich bachelor born in the same year as William, she being 23 years his junior. They lived in some splendour close to Kensington Palace.

The estates passed to his surviving son William, who died just six years later in Paris. William junior left all his property, not to his sister Victoria, but to his cousin, the 1st Earl Cowley. It was Cowley who sold Wanstead Park to the City of London.

William's body was buried in grand style in the catacombs at the new Kensal Green cemetery. Here his coffin, covered in faded crimson velvet, still rests behind an iron grille.

The Dandy

What are we to make of William? Was he really as black as others painted him?

Quite possibly, but he was not so unusual. Like many of his class, he lived his life on his own terms. He survived into an age with very different values to that of his youth. He was the quintessential dandy and he no doubt subscribed to this creed:

The Dandy's Creed

I believe that a gentleman is any person with a tolerable suit of clothes, and a watch and a snuff-box in his pocket,

I believe that honour means standing fire well; that advice means affront, and conviction a leaden pill.

I believe that adoration is only due to a fine woman, or her purse: and that woman can keep but one secret; namely, her age.

I believe that my character would be lost beyond redemption, if I did not change my dress four times a day, bilk my Schneider, wear a Petersham tie, and patronize Hoby for boots.

[Cont.]

The Dandy's Creed (continued)

I believe that playing at rouge et noir is the only honourable way of getting a livelihood; that a man of honour never pays his tradesmen, because "they are a pack of scoundrels"; and that buying goods means ordering them without the purpose of paying.

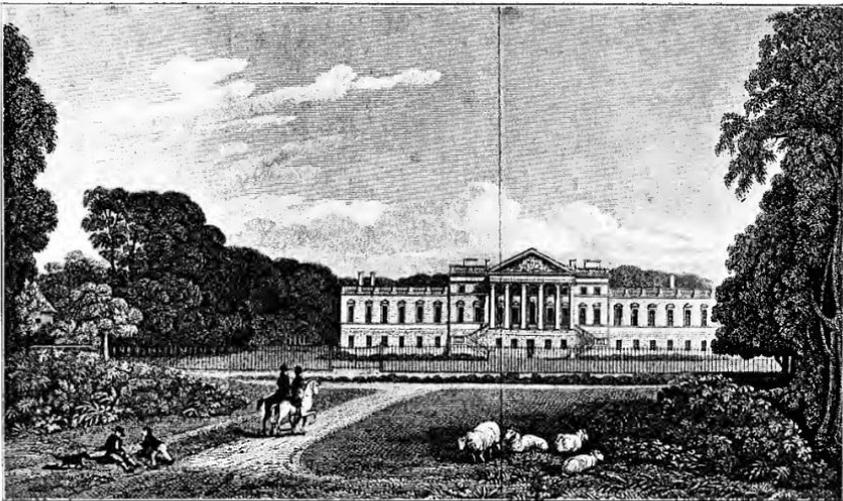
I believe that the word dress means nakedness in females; that husband is a person engaged to pay a woman's debts; that economy means pusillanimity; that a coachman is an accomplished nobleman; and that any person talking about decency is a bore.

I believe that there is not a cleverer or prettier fellow on the town than myself; and that, as far as regards women, I am altogether irresistible.

From: The Gentleman's Pocket Magazine. 1828

This booklet reproduces the text of an exhibition which appeared at The Temple, Wanstead Park, between September and November 2012, and was curated by Steven Denford. As there were copyright issues with the numerous illustrations, it was sadly not possible to include these.

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WANSTEAD HOUSE, ESSEX.