

THE FITZ WILLIAM MUSEUM



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A HISTORY

LUCILLA BURN

Bib. 600005302
Item..... 100006966
Barcode..... 000010007788
Call no. N1217
..... B87
..... 2016
Date 13 Oct. 59

PWP

The
Fitzwilliam
Museum
CAMBRIDGE

For David Scrase, a discerning curator and steadfast friend

Published in 2016
by Philip Wilson Publishers
an imprint of I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
London · New York

www.ibtauris.com

Published for The Fitzwilliam Museum,
Trumpington St, Cambridge CB2 1RB

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References to websites were correct at the time of writing.

FRONTISPIECE: Detail of the entrance hall in the
Founder's Building of the Fitzwilliam Museum

ISBN 978 1 78130 034 3

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Designed and typeset in Monotype Bulmer
by illuminati, Grosmont

Printed and bound by 1010 China



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PREFACE

‘WHAT IS THE BEST WAY of reading up quickly the history of the Fitzwilliam Museum?’ enquired the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner of the Director of the day, Carl Winter, in 1956. ‘I do not know any *quick* way of reading up the history of the Fitzwilliam’ was his reply. ‘I am, as it happens, delving into this in morbid detail at the moment for the introduction to a book about the Museum which I have foolishly engaged to write.’ Winter’s book, when it eventually appeared, was indeed prefaced by a useful historical summary, but is essentially a carefully chosen and elegantly presented set of highlights from the collection, and it is the collection that has been the focus of virtually all other Fitzwilliam Museum publications before and since. There is good reason for this: the collection is the Museum’s *raison d’être* and its growth has been key to the Museum’s evolution. But equally integral to the Museum’s character, and relatively neglected, are the changing appearance of the galleries and displays, the original building and its successive extensions; emerging still more rarely from the shadows of the past are the people who formed the Museum’s history, a series of frequently larger-than-life and highly articulate individuals, from Syndics to Directors and their assistant staff.

The visual record of the early years of the Fitzwilliam is rather sparse and not always easy to interpret; paintings and engravings of the building are more likely to project the artist’s vision of the future than what he might actually be seeing on the ground. While photography was becoming commercially viable from about 1850, it was clearly still expensive, and so not surprisingly photographic coverage of the Museum’s early years is sparse. Nor did the situation greatly improve until late in the twentieth century; no in-house photographer was employed until 1972. There are, however, plenty of written accounts of the Museum, and though these may lack the (near) objective precision of a photograph, they can provide direct insights into people’s views, motives and

reactions, evoking how the Museum was seen at different moments in its history. To a visitor in 1941, for example, the Fitzwilliam seemed like 'one of the few civilised places left in England'.¹

In his brief history of London's National Gallery, Charles Saumarez Smith asserts that 'the culture of the institution and its *modus operandi*, the character of the collection and the relationship to its audience, are all to a considerable extent shaped and determined by its history.'² This applies equally to the Fitzwilliam Museum: understanding its history helps us understand the institution as it is today, and also informs possibilities for the future. The choice of the Trumpington Street site in 1821, for example, has determined and will continue to determine the extent of all subsequent additions to the original building – and also the size of the collection. The historically slow recognition of the need for professional staff is still reflected in the relatively low numbers of curators and other specialists. More positively, especially in the upper galleries, the Museum still endeavours to preserve the attractive and welcoming style of display – the Fitzwilliam 'house style' – pioneered in the early twentieth century by the then Director, Sydney Cockerell.

Throughout the last two hundred years, certain themes have repeatedly resurfaced. Disadvantageous comparisons with the University of Oxford's apparently more generous funding for the Ashmolean Museum are one popular leitmotif: 'It is impossible not to look enviously towards the Ashmolean' sighed the *Annual Report* of 1924.³ But equally ingrained and frequently reiterated is the deep affection felt for the Fitzwilliam by so many of its staff. 'To those of us who work here,' Carl Winter wrote about the Museum in 1958, 'it sometimes seems like an all-too-familiar garment, the worn and shiny parts of which are all that we can see. But when I have been away from it for a while I always have a shock of pleasure on my return.'⁴

It is certainly their affection for the Fitzwilliam that has prompted the wholehearted support for this project that I have received from so many of my colleagues. First and foremost I must thank Nicholas Robinson for helping me explore the Museum's Archives, sharing his own knowledge of the Museum's history and patiently and promptly responding to every request for help. The Museum's photographers, Mike Jones, Andrew Norman and Katie Young, entered with enthusiasm into the task of discovering and identifying nineteenth-century images, copying or scanning plans and documents and ensuring the best possible views of paintings or objects were made available for this publication: the results of their expertise will be clear to all. Victoria Avery, Kate Carreno, Clare Cambridge, Penny Cleobury, Julie Dawson, Craig Hartley, Elenor Ling,

Jane Munro, Adrian Popescu, Suzanne Reynolds, Stella Panayotova and David Scrase all contributed generously of their time and knowledge and bore patiently with my lamentable ignorance of their areas of expertise. Paul Cartledge, Tim Knox, Suzanne Reynolds, David Scrase and Helen Strudwick all read and commented on the complete text; my mother, Sheila Burn, improved the flow and structure of Chapter 6, which covers the period of her own Cambridge wartime experiences. Several former colleagues, including Janine Bourriau, Margaret Greeves, Frances Hazelhurst, Simon Jervis, Julia Poole, Catherine Porteous, David Scrase, Eleni Vassilika and most especially Duncan Robinson, kindly offered their recollections to enrich Chapter 8. All these have saved me from numerous errors of fact or judgement and stylistic idiosyncrasies: but for those that remain I of course bear sole responsibility.

Finally I would like to thank the members of the Marlay Group, the Museum's Patrons' Group, for funding the short period of research leave that enabled me to get the *History* under way in 2012, the Executors of the Estate of the late Sir Paul Mellon for their generous subvention and our current Director, Tim Knox, for encouraging me to pursue the project at intervals over the last two and a half years.

Lucilla Burn
Cambridge, May 2015

NOTES

1. A. John Hugh Smith, writing to Louis Clarke, 2.9.1941, FM Archive 1071.
2. C. Saumarez Smith, *The National Gallery: A Short History* (London 2009), pp. 10–11.
3. AR 1924.1.
4. Carl Winter to Graham Reynolds, 19.6.1958, FM Archive 2582.

COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

FM: Fitzwilliam Museum.

FMSM: Fitzwilliam Museum Syndicate Minutes.

AR: Annual Report of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum (identified by date).

FM Archive: This refers to the (numbered) archive envelope or box in which the document referred to is stored in the Fitzwilliam Museum.

Burn (ed.), *Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum*: L. Burn (ed.), *Greece and Rome at the Fitzwilliam Museum*, *Journal of the History of Collections*, vol. 24.3 (2012).

CUR.30.1–4: *Cambridge University Registry Volume* (compilations of university papers relating to the Fitzwilliam Museum, housed in the University Library).



CHAPTER 1

RICHARD, SEVENTH VISCOUNT FITZWILLIAM OF MERRION

‘Lord Fitzwilliam aime Zacharie. Zacharie aime lord Fitzwilliam plus qu’elle même: elle est sa fidelle amie et l’amie la plus tendre et sincere.’¹

WITHOUT LORD FITZWILLIAM, there would be no Fitzwilliam Museum. So who and what sort of person was he? What led him, when drawing up his last will and testament in 1815, to bequeath his entire collection of books, manuscripts, prints, paintings and drawings to the University of Cambridge, along with the sum of £100,000 for a building in which to house them? Lord Fitzwilliam’s life has been described as ‘deeply obscure’,² but in fact there is enough evidence to paint a reasonably vivid image not just of his history but also of his disposition. Many men of his class and period, who courted neither fame nor notoriety through politics or scandal, who wrote and preserved no copious diaries, do not leave a conspicuous record. Yet probably he has left as many traces of himself as did many minor aristocrats of the time – and as many as he wished to leave. His life was a blend of happiness and sorrow, success and disappointment; his later years were clouded not just by advancing age but also by his abhorrence of the political situation of Britain and Europe, which narrowed and closed down the wider horizons, both physical and intellectual, of his youth and early middle age.

FAMILY, CHILDHOOD, EDUCATION

Richard Fitzwilliam was born on 1 August 1745 in Fitzwilliam (later Pembroke) House on Richmond Green, then in Surrey but now a suburb of south-west London. His mother Catherine, eldest daughter of Sir Matthew Decker, would inherit this house from her father on his death in 1749. In 1744 Catherine had married Richard, sixth Viscount Fitzwilliam, from an Anglo-Irish family with an estate at Mount Merrion, on the south side of Dublin Bay, in addition to land

FIG. 1 *The Hon. Richard Fitzwilliam, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam of Merrion*, by Joseph Wright of Derby, 1764.



FIG. 2 *The Daughters of Sir Matthew Decker, Bart.*, by Jan van Meyer, 1718.

and property in the city of Dublin itself and smaller estates in England. From what little is known of this marriage, Catherine brought to it wealth, taste and good sense. Her father was a successful Dutch banker, merchant and political adviser, a former director of the East India Company; he was also a connoisseur and lover of the arts, and from him Catherine, and in his turn the seventh Viscount, inherited a fine collection of mainly Dutch or Flemish paintings, including works by Gerrit Dou and Jan van Meyer.

Richard and Catherine's eldest son was sent to school at the Charterhouse: from his schooldays there survives a pencil drawing, in his hand, of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius at Rome. A portrait of him with his two younger brothers, dated 1759, is preserved at Wilton House, where his father's sister Mary (1707–1769) was married to the ninth Earl of Pembroke, and where the Fitzwilliam

children may have been regular visitors; certainly in later years the seventh Viscount was on good terms with both his cousin, the tenth Earl, and his heir, George Augustus Herbert, to whom he was to bequeath the Fitzwilliam estates. In 1761 Richard entered Trinity Hall, Cambridge, from where in 1763 he contributed a Latin ode, *Ad Pacem*, to a volume of loyal addresses to George III printed by the University of Cambridge. He remained in Cambridge for three years, graduating with the degree of MA in 1764. Of his academic prowess we hear nothing. But he must have done enough work to endear himself to his tutor, the fiercely ambitious Samuel Hallifax,³ who commissioned Joseph Wright to paint the fine graduation portrait of Fitzwilliam that has survived to this day; an ongoing, friendly relationship between the pair is suggested by the fact that in 1777 Fitzwilliam was to stand godfather to Hallifax's son, Robert Fitzwilliam Hallifax, and a number of the older Hallifax's writings on law are in Fitzwilliam's library. When Fitzwilliam left Cambridge it was to study the harpsichord in Paris with Jacques Duphly, an eminent composer, teacher and performer, and he left his own instrument with the poet Thomas Gray (author of 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard') at Pembroke College: we know this from a letter written by one of their mutual friends, Norton Nicholls, to another Trinity Hall scholar, William Johnson Temple:

I have seen Mr Gray several times... He has Fitzwilliam's Harpsichord, and we sing Duetts, Marcello's Psalms, in great privacy, an hour or two; (don't tell Morris, if you do he will discharge it like other secrets into the bosom of his faithful Fitzwilliamos, thence it will stray to Bates, and so get abroad to Mr Gray's mortification and mine too).⁴

'Bates' is Joah Bates, a well-known musician, at that time based at King's College, Cambridge, whom Fitzwilliam must have known until the former's death in 1799. Clearly Richard Fitzwilliam had found a close circle of congenial friends, within his own college and beyond, and what was to be a lifelong talent for and love of music was already well developed.

YOUTH AND MUSIC

From the mid-1760s to the early 1780s Richard Fitzwilliam seems to have travelled extensively in Europe. His library includes a journal-cum-travel-guide penned in 1769–70 for just such young gentlemen as him by his uncle, the Honourable William Fitzwilliam, which includes a satirical 'Receipt to Make a Connoisseur of painting'⁵ – for which, as also for prints, Richard Fitzwilliam was certainly to develop a great passion. But his first enthusiasm seems to have been for music, and one major goal of his European journeys was to track down and purchase musical manuscripts and printed music. Some of his own compositions have survived, including a small volume of harpsichord pieces; and the difficulty of the keyboard music that he collected suggests he himself was most probably a highly competent performer; we know that he also studied the cello with Jean-Pierre Duport and later he owned and played an organ. More significantly for the future Museum, though, the scores and printed music that he acquired on his various travels throughout Europe constituted a collection that on his death was rivalled only by that of the royal family at Windsor. Fitzwilliam visited Italy, the Low Countries and even Spain, where in February 1772 he met Scarlatti's most gifted pupil, Padre Soler, at the Escorial outside Madrid. He developed a particular interest and expertise in French music, of which he bought a great deal between 1765 and 1772, carefully dating all his acquisitions. On the death of his father in 1776 Fitzwilliam succeeded to his titles, and continued to travel and collect.



FIG. 3 Drawing of the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome, by Lord Fitzwilliam, after an engraving by Nicholas Beatrizet, probably 1759.

A TALE OF THREE CITIES

Dublin

In 1806 the principal Fitzwilliam estate at Mount Merrion was sketched and painted by William Ashford, commissioned by Lord Fitzwilliam. His work reveals the beauty of its position and grounds, by which the diarist Horace Walpole had been much impressed when he visited in 1761: 'I was yesterday to see Mont [*sic*] Merion, a villa of Lord Fitzwilliam's. He has built fine stables, and there is to be as fine an house. Nothing near Naples can be more beautiful, with such a view of the sea and Dublin as would even make your Thames blush for Richmond Hill and Isleworth... I can only say I know not how I was charmed, but that I was so.'⁶ The 'fine house' was never built, however, and the existing modest farmhouse on the site was, at least in the seventh Viscount's day, generally occupied by the land agent. It contained very little in the way of furniture or paintings, as his agent, Mrs Verschoyle, explained to his lawyers on his death:

There are at Mount Merrion a few old family Portraits, but so torn and destroyed, that they are not fit to have anywhere – they were in that state when I got possession of Mount Merrion. My good late Lord often saw them – brought three of them – the best – to Richmond – the only ones he said that were worth moving – there is no furniture belonging to my late Lord there, nor any medals – there are no prints – drawings or engravings, or anything in that way there of his Lordship's.⁷

The Irish estates seem to have been a source of considerable trouble to successive generations of Fitzwilliams. The sixth Viscount left their running largely to his younger brother William, whose letters include vociferous complaints about the wretched conditions in which he was expected to live: 'Poor I certainly am,' he wrote in 1753, 'and I fear forgotten by every friend and relation. No matter. I am out of sight, banished among the lowest of mankind, the Spot on earth for wickedness mostly resembling Hell, and must remain content.'⁸ However, the family certainly benefitted financially from the lucrative development of Georgian Dublin, including 'Merrion Square', since by the mid-1780s their land in Dublin, along with an estate in County Wicklow, was producing an income of about £8,000 per year.

The seventh Viscount appears to have been a reasonably conscientious landlord. So far as we can judge, he visited Mount Merrion quite regularly, if only for short periods: in June 1791, for example, Horace Walpole reported that 'Lord Fitzwilliam ... was to set out the next morning for Dublin, though intending to stay there but four days, and be back in three weeks.'⁹ He was



FIG. 4 *Mount Merrion: View near the Gothic Building of the Bay and Hill of Howth*, by William Ashford, about 1806.

on good terms with his agents, Richard and Barbara Verschoyle, to whom the ‘mansion house’ on the estate, along with all the rents from its farms, was left for their lifetimes in Lord Fitzwilliam’s will. Copies of letters written by the Verschoyles, principally Barbara, to Lord Fitzwilliam from 1796 until his death demonstrate the warmth of their relationship and suggest he was a generous and sympathetic employer. In May 1798, for example, she alludes to a compliment he has paid her on her letter-writing skills: ‘I have this day had the honour of receiving yr Lordship’s kind affectionate letter of the 16 Inst – wherein yr Lordship compares mine to Pamela’s, Clarissa and Grandison. I may indeed be vain.’ Her lengthy letters are full of information about leases, money being transferred to Lord Fitzwilliam’s London bankers, and also of gossip about the fecklessness of his tenants and the dangerous state of the country. But she also makes frequent and anxious references to and enquiries about his health, both physical and mental; it is hard to tell whether she was simply of a caring or worrying disposition, or if he genuinely suffered from both ill-health and depression in this period. In December 1797, for example, she is fretting because – ‘your last letter was written in such bad spirits, your health you said was worse – indeed my dearest lord I am very unhappy about you’. Again in April 1799 she is concerned about his low spirits: ‘bad as this World is I do not like to leave it. I am very sorry you my dearest Lord are so indifferent about

it – I wish you had as affectionate a Wife as I have a husband and you would feel more attached to it, will you Excuse this wish.’ Later that month she confides that ‘when I am longer than usual without a letter from you I always fear that you are ill and yearn to tell you how uneasy I feel.’¹⁰

A letter preserved at Elton Hall suggests that Fitzwilliam had originally planned to do much ‘improving’ in Ireland: in June 1800 the first Earl of Carysfoot wrote to enquire whether Fitzwilliam was interested in buying from him a farm that ‘breaks upon your lordship’s demesne at Merrion’ and was just coming out of lease; to which Lord Fitzwilliam replied with great courtesy that he had ‘formerly indulged [him]self in a variety of schemes for improvement at Mount Merrion’ but ‘years and infirmity’ (he was just fifty-five at the time) and ‘the disastrous situation of that kingdom once so flourishing and happy’ had long since led him to abandon any such projects.¹¹ His lasting affection for Mount Merrion was clear, however. Apart from the 1806 commission to William Ashford to produce a series of drawings and paintings of the estate, as late as 1812–13 he was to fund the construction of a handsome church for his Catholic tenants at Booterstown.

In 1924 and again in 1927, a Mr Francis Dolmage, who claimed to be the great-great-great-grand-nephew of Barbara Verschoyle, wrote to the then Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Sydney Cockerell, to ask whether the Museum was interested in buying what he described as Fitzwilliam family portraits – perhaps the ‘torn and destroyed’ examples referred to by Mrs Verschoyle in 1816. Cockerell was not interested, but he preserved the correspondence, in which Dolmage passed on the rumour that Barbara Verschoyle may have been



FIG. 5 Silver tea and sugar caddies once in the possession of Lord Fitzwilliam and bearing his coat of arms, made in London in 1812–13.

either the half-sister or lover of Lord Fitzwilliam, and quoted from a letter in his possession, supposedly written from Fitzwilliam to Mrs Verschoyle in 1792:

I commend my favourite Mount Merrion to your care; and assure you I am very far from forgetting it or being out of conceit with it, even after seeing Mount Edgecombe. It has charms, and these you have pointed out are very superior ones. Besides I shall have the pleasure of seeing you there, which will always be an additional pleasure to me. Adieu, my dearest Bab [*sic*], continue to be happy and well and believe me ever most truly and affectionately yours, Fitzwilliam. I beg my best compliment to Mr Verschoyle and all your family.¹²

Mr Dolmage also referred to a set of 'Queen Anne' silver tea caddies that had belonged to Lord Fitzwilliam; again Cockerell declined to take an interest, but these were eventually acquired in 1965, purchased by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam.¹³

London

Fitzwilliam played an active part in promoting the musical life of the capital in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. He was one of a small group of nobility and gentlemen who sponsored concerts for charitable causes, mainly under the auspices of the 'Concerts of Ancient Music'. In the summer of 1784 he joined Joah Bates as one of the organisers of a great Handel festival in Westminster Abbey that marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the composer's death (or, as they thought, the centenary of his birth). Fitzwilliam's interest in Handel is confirmed by the fifteen albums of manuscript music in his collection; these were compiled from an original seven in the nineteenth century, the re-ordering and binding making it difficult to establish where and when Fitzwilliam acquired them, but the acquisition of one volume is dated 1778. As well as Westminster Abbey, 'Concerts of Ancient Music' were held in such fashionable London venues as the Pantheon, to the south of Oxford Street, or St Margaret's Church, Westminster. The money raised went to various good causes, including 'decayed musicians', 'distressed families of musicians' or 'sons of the clergy', and the music was usually directed by Joah Bates. The popular and fashionable nature of such entertainments is suggested by the advertisement for a series of four Handel concerts to be held in Westminster Abbey in the summer of 1790,¹⁴ which stipulates that 'No ladies will be admitted with Hats and they are particularly requested to come without Feathers, and very small Hoops, if any. No servants will be allowed to keep places, nor will they be admitted into any part of the Church on any account whatever.' In 1791 Fitzwilliam acquired, most probably in Paris, a large set of scores of Rameau's operas and ballets and in

the same year he sponsored a performance of selections from Rameau's *Castor et Pollux* in London, translated into English by his old college friend, the Rev. Norton Nicholls. Fitzwilliam also promoted the careers of various deserving musicians; a letter from his cousin, the tenth Earl of Pembroke, to his son, Lord Herbert, asks the latter to enlist Fitzwilliam's help in finding employment for a musician named Sperati,¹⁵ while the cellist John Crosdile, whose name features in many of the programmes of the Concerts of Ancient Music, was a long-standing friend to whom a generous annuity was left in Fitzwilliam's will.

Fitzwilliam played no very active role in politics. In 1790 he became MP for Wilton (his cousin the Earl of Pembroke's borough), for which he sat (as a Whig) from 1790 to 1806. His motives in so doing were unclear; if it was from a sense of social obligation, it is strange that there is no record of him ever voting, but he would clearly have had little in common with the likes of Charles James Fox and those Whigs who sympathised with the aims, if not the practices, of the French Revolution. In 1789 he attempted, without success, to obtain a peerage, claiming the titles of 'Earl of Warrington and Baronet of Vaux'. This would have enabled him to sit in the House of Lords; as an Irish peer, he was entitled only to a seat in the Commons.

He was a Fellow of the Royal Society from 1789 and he kept a *pied-à-terre* at 34 New Bond Street; in April 1887 Lord Herbert was able to tell his father that their cousin Fitzwilliam was there,¹⁶ and it is where he was eventually to die; it is likely that he held a lease on a property there. But much of his 'London' life was lived in Richmond. Sketches by William Ashford show that Fitzwilliam House on the south side of the Green (demolished in 1840) was a pleasant-looking property; it had been built by Sir Charles Hedges, Secretary of State to Queen Anne, from whom Sir Matthew Decker took it over and created the beautiful garden for which it was chiefly famous. An early-eighteenth-century visitor reported that

The longest, largest, and highest Hedge of Holly I ever saw, is in this garden, with several other Hedges of Ever-Greens, Visto's cut through Woods, Grotto's with Fountains, a fine Canal running up from the River. His [i.e. Sir Matthew's] Duckery, which is an oval Pond brick'd round, and his pretty Summer-House by it to drink a Bottle, his Stove-Houses, which are always kept in an equal heat for his Citrons, and other Indian Plants, with Gardeners brought from foreign Countries to manage them, are very curious and entertaining. The house is also very large a-la-modern, and neatly furnished after the Dutch way.¹⁷

Richmond was a fashionable place to live in the eighteenth century, fully in the country but within an easy journeying distance of the city. Many fine houses

were springing up around the Green and on the Hill at this time; Horace Walpole was not far away, at Strawberry Hill, and in the 1790s the area acquired a very cosmopolitan air as it attracted many of the wealthier noble refugees from the French Revolution – Walpole called it a ‘Petty France’;¹⁸ it is perfectly possible that some of the émigrés were encouraged and helped to settle there by Lord Fitzwilliam, or at least that he and his house were among the attractions of the place. We shall return shortly to Richmond. But Fitzwilliam’s political sympathies, especially his views on the French Revolution, are taking us ahead of the story.

Paris and Mlle Zacharie

It was natural for someone of Richard Fitzwilliam’s musical tastes to feel drawn to Paris. In the eighteenth century London and Paris rivalled each other in their claims to be the capital city of Europe; by the 1770s, London was the undisputed commercial centre, but Paris the cultural Mecca of the civilised world. Besides the Opéra, the theatre and the great collections of paintings and sculpture that might be viewed, there was also a lively and sophisticated social scene. Among the most famous and glamorous of the *salons* was that of Mlle Marie-Madeleine Guimard, star ballerina of the Paris Opéra from the 1760s to the 1780s, who was supported by the Prince de Soubise. Her beautiful house in the Chaussée d’Antin acted as a magnet for visiting English aristocrats and gentlemen, along with the cream of Paris society, who all flocked there to enjoy music and conversation, and to flirt. And the English doubtless made the most of their opportunities; few were as critical as Lord Fitzwilliam’s Uncle William, who opined in his *Journal* that ‘French women in general are plain’;¹⁹ and by 1784 Richard Fitzwilliam appears already to have fathered one illegitimate child, a boy of whom nothing is known except that in the early 1780s he was being looked after in Orléans.²⁰

Mlle Guimard had a younger cousin named Marie Anne Bernard, who used the stage name ‘Zacharie’ and was a fifteen-year-old dancer at the Opéra when in 1784 she first attracted the attention of Lord Fitzwilliam. The name ‘Zacharie’ had been observed by more than one Fitzwilliam Museum curator in the inscription noted at the head of this chapter, which is written inside the cover of Fitzwilliam’s copy of the 1784 almanac *Les Spectacles de Paris* (see FIG. 6). But nothing was known about Zacharie’s identity or her role in Lord Fitzwilliam’s life until the 1980s, when research in the Pembroke family archives at Wilton brought to light no fewer than 299 letters written to Fitzwilliam from Zacharie between 1784 and 1790 and preserved by her lover until his death.²¹

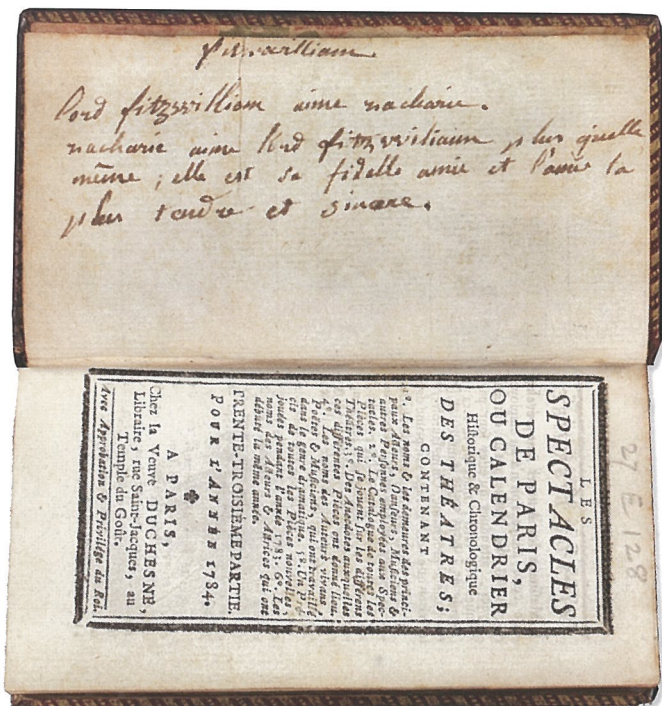
The affectionate yet highly idiosyncratic language of the letters offers direct and poignant evidence for an aspect of Fitzwilliam's life that had hitherto remained concealed, and for the existence of three previously unknown children, two boys and a girl who seems to have died in early infancy. The contents of the letters, and the long gaps when there are none, show that Fitzwilliam travelled frequently to Paris during these years, though not often enough for his mistress, who regularly reproached him for not visiting more often, for constantly putting off his journey, and for staying so short a time when he did arrive. Her letters sent news from her circle of friends, including the parties at the Hôtel Guimard, and reports on her activities, the concerts and opera performances she had been to, and the visitors she received, who included Fitzwilliam's cousin, the Earl of Pembroke, his brother John, and his valet, William Key; though Fitzwilliam's own letters do not survive, it is clear that he wrote back just as often, sometimes more than once a week, and he also sent generous gifts and a regular and ample supply of money, via either Key or M. Perregaux, a well-known Parisian banker.

In 1786 Zacharie gave birth to their first son: in the letters the little boy is always known as ‘Fitz’, but his godfather was Henry, tenth Earl of Pembroke, and his full name, as later becomes clear, was Henry Fitzwilliam Bernard. Fitz features regularly in the letters, and clearly both parents were very proud of him as he cut his teeth, learned to climb up stairs and to talk about ‘milord papa’ and daily grew more handsome and more mischievous; in June 1787 Zacharie teased her

absent lover by telling him that ‘little Fitz came this morning and took your place. I had him quite naked in my bed.’²² We hear little about the second baby, a girl whose breathing caused concern and who most probably died in infancy, but in 1788 Fitz was joined by a healthy little brother ‘Bily’ (*sic*); the boys appear to have divided their time between Paris and Triel in the Île de France, where Fitzwilliam had provided a house. Vivid descriptions of Fitz and Bily at Triel in the summer of 1790 report that they were brown as little monkeys, and that ‘They run about and eat all day long; and at night they sleep like little dormice.’²³

Zacharie was less than half Fitzwilliam's age when their affair began, his inferior in terms of both education and social status, but her letters demonstrate, besides the strength of her affection, her intelligence and the maturity that she acquired

FIG. 6 Note inscribed on the flyleaf in Fitzwilliam's copy of the almanac *Les spectacles de Paris, ou calendrier historique et chronologique des théâtres ... pour l'année 1784*.



as their affair progressed. Their politics were radically opposed – while at times she claims not to understand what is going on, and abhors the violence of the Revolution, she was clearly not unsympathetic to its aims, while he, like her Guimard cousin and others who frequented that house, was a royalist through and through. Music and the society of la Guimard’s mansion may be what brought them together, but clearly their passionate affair developed into warm affection, strengthened by their love for their children. Apart from their fascination as an eyewitness account of the early years of the Revolution, and of the life of a perhaps fairly typical Parisian mistress of the time, Zacharie’s letters offer shrewd insights into her lover’s character. Although she repeatedly thanks him for his generosity and for his charming letters, which seem to reassure her of his love, she also expresses her impatience for his visits and cannot understand why he promises to come over to Paris and then repeatedly procrastinates. Why does he take so long to get through whatever business he claims is delaying him? On 8 June 1785 she complains that ‘there is idleness in him. He puts off doing things until the next day and this is why nothing gets finished. What one man would do in two weeks, he takes two months over’; and again eleven days later, ‘One would think you had all the affairs of the kingdom on your hands ... Why should it take you six weeks to do nothing in particular?’ On 13 June 1787 she points out that ‘London is your first mistress. Your love for her always makes you late for me.’ She returns to the same subject on 28 May the following year: ‘You are not interested in the Court or in Parliament and yet you spend six months on end going round London.’ At some point, Fitzwilliam appears to have entertained the idea of building a house in Paris, or its environs: in 1788 there are references in Zacharie’s letters to architectural plans that her brother Pierre is drawing up for him, and the Pembroke Archives preserve drawings,²⁴ labelled ‘Lord Fitzwilliam’s French House’ and annotated in French, for an elegant villa with a columned portico and rooms for both entertaining and private life (FIG. 8). But the Revolution put paid to this idea.

The letters also express from time to time the anxieties natural to someone in Zacharie’s situation as to her future and that of their children; her fears and worries were obviously exacerbated by the Revolution. In 1789, for example, she waited in vain to receive Fitzwilliam’s

FIG. 7 The first surviving letter from Zacharie to Lord Fitzwilliam, dated 6 November 1784; in it she regrets her inability to talk to him because her hairdresser was with her.

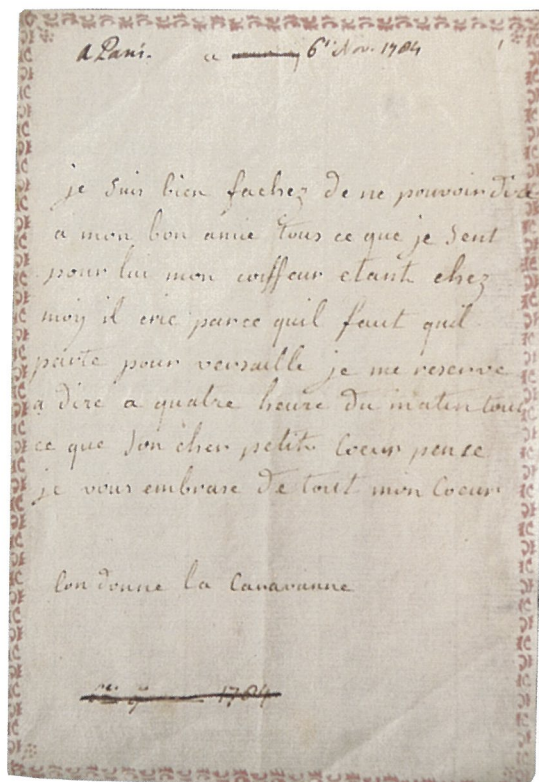
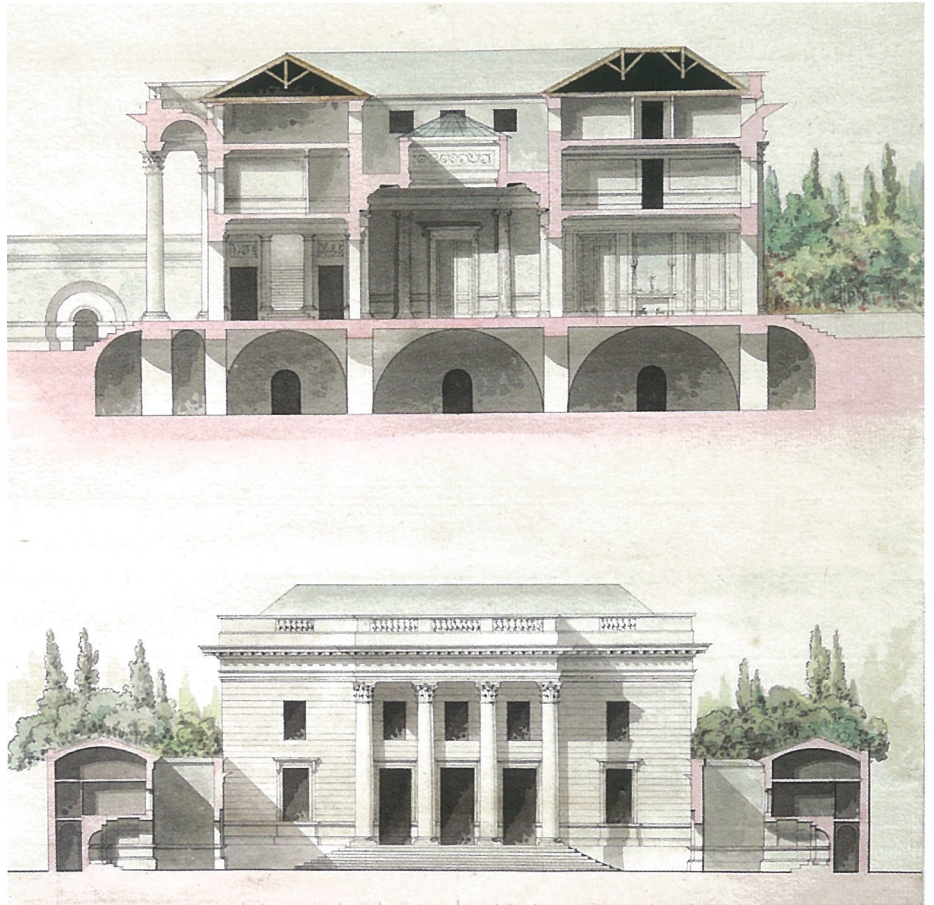


FIG. 8 One of several projected designs for 'Lord Fitzwilliam's French House', attributed to Zacharie's brother, the architect Pierre Bernard.



instructions to leave Paris for somewhere safer. On three occasions during the period of the letters she crossed the Channel and spent time in England, but she meekly acknowledged the need to be discreet and accepted that he did not want her to settle there. At times she suspected that his ardour was cooling, that he had found another woman, or – unjustly, as she declares – believed that his Zacharie had been unfaithful. But had this been the case, it seems unlikely that he would have preserved her letters to the end of his life.

Richmond again

Disappointingly, as with Barbara Verschoyle's letters, we do not possess Fitzwilliam's side of the correspondence. Nor do we know what happened to Zacharie after the last letter she wrote to him late in December 1790. As the Revolution grew ever bloodier, and more and more refugees poured across the Channel into England, it must have been increasingly difficult for Fitzwilliam

to keep up his visits; the last occasion that we know of was noted by Horace Walpole, in June 1791.²⁵ It is highly unlikely that Fitzwilliam returned to France after the execution of Louis XVI early in 1793, an event closely followed by the declaration of war between Britain and France. We can only speculate over what happened to Zacharie. Her health was poor throughout 1790, so it is possible that she died in France in that decade. A more optimistic hypothesis for the ending of the correspondence would be that she came to live in England, perhaps in or near Richmond, in 1791. But there is no evidence that she did so, and all we can be certain of is that in August 1815, when Lord Fitzwilliam made his will, there were three younger Bernards alive and living in Richmond – Henry Fitzwilliam Bernard, his wife Frances²⁶ and their daughter Catherine. Henry is surely Fitzwilliam and Zacharie's elder son, the 'Fitz' of Zacharie's letters; although these never refer to him as Henry it would have been normal practice for him to have received the Christian name of his godfather, Henry Herbert.

Many of the wealthier French émigrés, fleeing the Revolution, chose to settle in Richmond. In March 1791 Horace Walpole wrote that 'Mesdames de Biron and Cambis have taken houses on Richmond Green as well as les Boufflers and Mme de Roncherolles.'²⁷ In June that year he offers a glimpse of Richmond Green society, in which Lord Fitzwilliam was clearly playing his part: 'I confine myself strictly to those [exiles] I knew formerly at Paris, who are all quartered at Richmond-Green. I went to them on Sunday evening, but found them gone to Lord Fitzwilliam's, the next house to Madame de Boufflers', to hear his organ; whither I followed them, and returned with them. The Comtesse Emilie played on her harp; then we all united at lotto.'²⁸ The participants in these pleasant, musical parties must have received a rude awakening in 1794, when this same 'Comtesse Emilie' (Amélie de Biron, daughter-in-law of Mme de Boufflers, renowned for playing the harp more proficiently than Orpheus) was guillotined on returning to France to try to retrieve some of her family possessions.

Walpole's account confirms Fitzwilliam's enduring enthusiasm for music, and also his sociability. His charitable nature and also his generosity in providing access to his collections in the early nineteenth century were both thought worthy of comment: in *British Family Antiquity*, published in 1810, William Playfair wrote that 'His lordship possesses ... feelings alive to the sufferings of his fellow beings, with a warmth of sincerity which an excellent heart alone could dictate ... with a liberality which we would gladly see more generally imitated [he] readily permits every respectable person to view his noble library and capital collection of valuable pictures: setting a good example to those connoisseurs who, like misers, hoard their curiosities for their own private

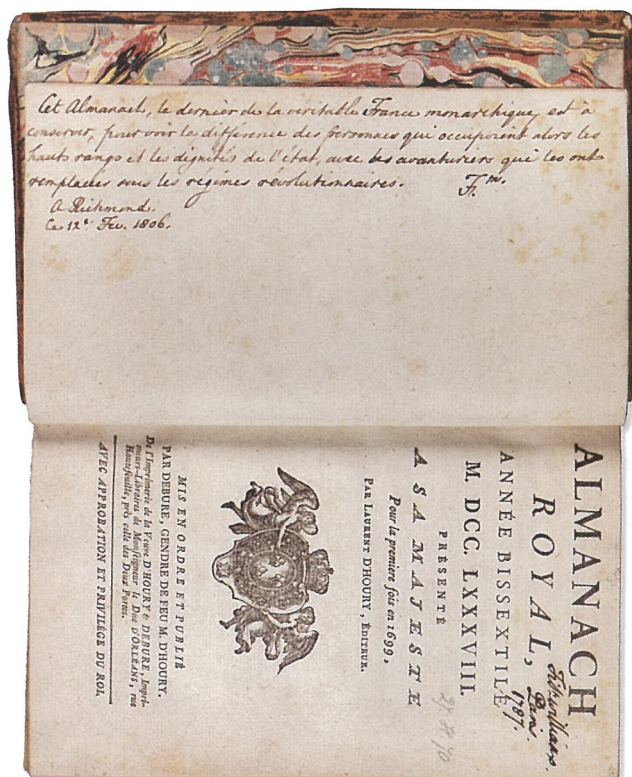


FIG. 9 Lord Fitzwilliam purchased this almanac for 1788 in Paris in 1787. Looking back some eighteen years later, he lamented the loss of the *ancien régime*.

amusement, without benefitting or enlightening the public in any shape whatever!²⁹

After the immediacy with which Zacharie's letters conjure up aspects of his private passions, however, Lord Fitzwilliam's occupations and personality become slightly less vivid in the last twenty-five years of his life. Whatever its impact on his love affair, it is clear that the French Revolution and its aftermath had a profound and saddening effect upon him. On the flyleaf of his copy of the *Almanac Royal* for 1788 he wrote, in a note dated 12 February 1806: 'Cet Almanac le dernier de la véritable France monarchique, est à conserver pour voir la différence des personnes qui occupaient alors les hauts rangs et les dignités de l'état, avec les aventuriers qui les ont remplacés sous les régimes révolutionnaires.'³⁰ In the 1790s he may have played a role in assisting the French clergy and other less affluent refugees from the Revolution who ended up in London, but, in the absence of his name from the various committees known to have been active in this endeavour, it

is not possible to be certain. Certainly he numbered among his émigré friends the so-called Comte de Caumont, a staunch royalist who went into exile in 1791, arrived in London in 1796 and ran a bookbinding business in Soho for the next seventeen years, returning to France with Louis XVIII in 1814. The Comte's journal and account ledgers show that Fitzwilliam was a frequent customer and that the Comte himself dined regularly at Fitzwilliam's house in Richmond; his bindings are still preserved on many of Fitzwilliam's books.³¹

It was said of Lord Fitzwilliam in 1832 that 'For the last twenty years of his life he lived in almost complete seclusion, not even seeing his former most intimate friends, and absorbed in the pursuits of high taste and learning.'³² In the last ten years or so of his life he certainly spent a great deal of time composing, polishing, having printed and privately distributing various editions of his collected thoughts, the *Lettres et Pensées d'Atticus* and *Le Concordat Expliqué*: these are deeply conservative tracts, extolling the virtues for all societies of the Roman Catholic Church and monarchic government, scarcely veiled apologies and elegies for the fate of the *ancien régime* of France. They breathe an air of regret for human society, for man's stubborn refusal to see what is best for him,

perhaps also for the author's lost youth, as well as for the fate of those once fortunate Catholic countries where he had spent 'les plus beaux jours de ma vie'. Unsurprisingly such sentiments found many admirers among the refugee French clergy and other royalists to whom they were largely distributed, and Fitzwilliam devoted a letter book to copies of letters he sent and received concerning them between 1805 and 1815.³³

Nominally Fitzwilliam himself remained an Anglican, but his sympathies were clearly Roman Catholic; his correspondence with one French émigré priest in particular, the Abbé Vinson, suggests they enjoyed both written and verbal discussions of doctrine as well as affectionate social discourse, and one may speculate that the Abbé served as his personal chaplain. Vinson may also have assisted with the translation of *Atticus* for revised editions, since he comments on the stylistic infelicities in the French language of the original version, a criticism that Fitzwilliam acknowledges as just; he considers his French is pretty good for an Englishman, but also good enough to recognise his limitations. Later letters between the two develop an informal, affectionate tone on both sides: on one occasion Fitzwilliam cheerily explains that he has not been in touch recently because he has not needed the Abbé's services, and like most men, when he has sucked an orange he throws away the skin; in August 1815 the Abbé hears that Fitzwilliam has broken his knee and writes with some concern to find out how he is, but also to reprimand him for his carelessness or stupidity if the report that he had fallen off a ladder in his library is really true. Fitzwilliam writes back to confirm this was the case, but jokes that if it had been the Abbé he would certainly have broken his neck.³⁴ The Comte de Caumont also mentions Fitzwilliam's accident, visiting Richmond to dine and finding his lordship 'in bed where he lay with a broken knee due to a fall from the steps in his library'.³⁵

Fitzwilliam may have made light of the accident to his friends, but a broken knee is a serious injury for anyone, at any time, and in 1815 for a man of seventy it could well have resulted in permanent disability. It is not impossible that the accident even contributed to his death the following spring. At all events, three days after writing to the Abbé Vinson, on 18 August 1815, Lord Fitzwilliam and his lawyers drew up his last will and testament. The principal heir to Fitzwilliam's lands and fortune was his cousin Henry's son, George Augustus Herbert, eleventh Earl of Pembroke and eighth Earl of Montgomery. Like Fitzwilliam himself, neither of his two younger brothers had produced legitimate heirs: the older, John, received by the terms of the will a modest annuity of £300, which reverted on his own death to the third brother, Thomas; John's

and Thomas's wives were each given an annuity of £150. The Verschoyles were more generously treated, receiving annuities of £600 each, in addition to Mount Merrion and its estate revenue for the duration of their lives. They had been told about this by Fitzwilliam before 1816: 'I thanked him with true gratitude, as I now lament him with sincere sorrow', wrote Mrs Verschoyle to the lawyers.³⁶ Fitzwilliam's illegitimate son, Henry Fitzwilliam Bernard, received an annuity of £300, as did Henry's daughter Catherine, while his wife Frances received one of £1,500. The Abbé Vinson had an annuity of £200, while the musician John Crosdile, the print-dealer Samuel Woodburn, Fitzwilliam's valet William Key, and Key's three children, Thomas, Susanna and Mary Ann, were each given £100 a year for life.

The provisions regarding the founding and management of the Fitzwilliam Museum are found near the end of the document:

And I give and bequeath unto the Chancellor Masters and Scholars of the University of Cambridge all my capital stock in the New South Sea Annuities to be had and held by them the said Chancellor Master and Scholars and their Successors for ever upon the trusts and to and for the intents and purposes hereinafter expressed and declared touching and concerning the same.

And as to all my Pictures Portraits Prints Drawings and Engravings whether framed glazed or otherwise and also the frames and glass thereof respectively

All my Books printed engraved or manuscript bound or unbound

All my Music bound and unbound

All my Busts Statues Medals Gems precious Stones and Bronzes whatsoever which shall belong to me at the time of my decease

I give and bequeath the same unto the said Chancellor Masters and Scholars of the said University of Cambridge and their successors for ever upon the trusts and for the intents and purposes hereinafter expressed declared and contained touching and concerning the same.

And I do hereby declare my will to be and hereby direct that the said Chancellor Masters and Scholars so shall with all convenient speed after my death by and out of the dividends and annual proceeds of my said New South Sea Annuities ... cause to be erected and built a good substantial Museum Repository or other Building within the precincts of the said University for the reception and preservation of the said Pictures Books and other articles.

Or to purchase one or more erections or buildings for that purpose.

And in the mean time until such a Museum Repository or other Building shall be erected built or purchased as aforesaid to procure a proper building for their temporary reception and to pay rent and taxes for the same and also to pay and defray all the costs charges and expenses attending the removing and depositing the said respective articles.

...And it is my will and I hereby direct that none of my said Pictures Books or other articles before mentioned shall be taken or removed from the Museum or Repository for the time being by any person or persons whomsoever or on any

account or upon any pretence whatsoever except only in the case of fire happening and then only during the time the necessity continues.

And I do hereby declare my will to be and hereby direct that the expense of keeping such Pictures Books and other articles before mentioned and the salaries of officers and other persons to be employed in or about the same shall be discharged with and out of the dividends and annual proceeds of the said New South Sea Annuities so given and bequeathed as aforesaid.

And I do hereby declare that the bequests so by me made to the said Chancellor Masters and Scholars of the said University are so made to them for the purpose of promoting the Increase of Learning and the other great objects of that Noble Foundation but the particular arrangement economy and disposition of the property comprised in the said legacies and bequests made and given I commit... to the direction and management of the said Chancellor Masters and Scholars in such manner as is provided by the laws and usages of the University.

Lord Fitzwilliam was buried in the grounds of Richmond Parish Church (now the Church of St Mary Magdalene), joining the remains of his mother, Catherine, and her parents, Sir Matthew and Lady Decker, in the vault below a once handsome but now sadly weathered monument: the original inscription was replaced in 1920 by the Fitzwilliam Director of the day, Sydney Cockerell, and his Syndics, who added a sentence to commemorate the seventh Viscount's munificence: 'He died on the 4th of February in the seventy-first year of his age and by his will founded and endowed the Museum at Cambridge that bears his name.'³⁷

THE COLLECTIONS

So what was in the Founding Collection (as it is sometimes known)? It includes a small number of miscellaneous items, such as an eighteenth-century bust of Agrippina, another of Virgil by Rysbrack, and a third of Fitzwilliam's cousin, Henry Herbert; also a death mask of the Earl of Shrewsbury, and a marble statuette by Rysbrack of the reclining Hercules, which Lord Fitzwilliam had inherited from his Uncle John.³⁸ But of much greater importance were the books, manuscripts, paintings and prints.

Lord Fitzwilliam's library consisted of some ten thousand printed books and manuscripts. From their dates of publication and the dates of acquisition that he inscribed inside their covers, it is clear that he bought or was presented with the great majority himself, rather than inheriting them; his very first acquisition, at the age of nine, was a copy of *The historie of the most renowned and victorious Princess Elizabeth, late Queen of England* (London 1635). The inventory of the books that was made upon his death records a library of printed volumes arranged in twenty-five cases of various sizes, where, much

in the manner of the Founder's Library in the Museum today, large numbers of small books ('octavo & infra') crowded the upper shelves, with space for the larger volumes below.³⁹ Its contents, which were not arranged according to any discernible system, testify to the lively intellectual curiosity of an educated and intelligent Enlightenment gentleman; the high proportion of works in French is doubtless typical of the currency of the French language in educated English society of the time, but perhaps also underlines Fitzwilliam's own facility in the language. Numerous classical texts, including several editions of the same works – from Virgil, Horace and Catullus to Pliny, Cicero and Aulus Gellius – are perhaps reminders of his student days. There are later classics too, from Dante and Boccaccio to such English poets, novelists, dramatists, satirists and diarists as Milton, Pope, Marvell, Dryden, Cowper, Bunyan, Smollet, Fielding, Samuel Johnson and Isaac Walton's *The Compleat Angler*. Many of the great series of folio volumes contain engravings, principally of the great French collections of the eighteenth century or earlier; but others show Fitzwilliam's interest in history and in the antiquarian discoveries of his age, from Camden's *Britannia* to the four volumes of Hamilton's *Antiquities* or the *Antichità di Ercolano* and Chandler's *Travels in Asia Minor and Greece*. The subject range extends to English topography and works on foreign travel and exploration, from Cook's *Voyages* to contemporary accounts of travellers to Africa. Natural history is also represented: Pennant's *History of Quadrupeds*

FIG. 10 White marble figure of the reclining Hercules by J.M. Rysbrack, about 1720–70.



rub shoulders with Martin's *English Spiders* and the four volumes of Darwin's *Zoonomia*. More predictable, perhaps, are the several books on musical theory and history: a musical dictionary, several histories of music and biographies and appreciations of Handel. Neither is it surprising, given Fitzwilliam's own writings, to find both philosophy and religion well represented. Pascal, Burke and Locke are all there, alongside numerous volumes expounding the doctrines of the Catholic Church, including the works of Thomas à Kempis and Ignatius Loyola (founder of the Jesuit Order), and contemporary Catholic tracts. Unlike most of his bibliophile contemporaries, or indeed the creators of the Herbert library at Wilton House, which he would certainly have known, Fitzwilliam seems to have remained steadfastly uninterested in books from the earliest years of printing, and in the pursuit of the first edition that came to define the book market in his later years.⁴⁰ Only one incunable edition – that is, a book printed before 1501 – is listed in the inventory, an undistinguished copy of the 1493 edition of Hartmann Schedel's *Nuremberg Chronicle*, acquired in 1806.

It is likely that Fitzwilliam considered his 130 illuminated manuscripts as a distinct and separate element within his library, as they are listed as a category of their own in the inventory. They reveal three aspects of him as a collector: his conformity with the tastes of his generation, his Francophile bias and his passion for manuscripts as works of art rather than historic texts of antiquarian interest. Apart from a Missal (MS 34) that was made for a fifteenth-century ancestor and must have remained in the family until Fitzwilliam inherited it, the manuscripts were acquired between 1789 and 1815 from sources that remain to be discovered, though he may well have benefitted from the dispersal of major French aristocratic libraries after the Revolution. The majority of his manuscripts were probably purchased, but some may have been received as gifts, perhaps from French aristocrats or other devout Catholic émigrés grateful for Fitzwilliam's support and friendship.

As was the case with his printed books and music, Fitzwilliam's habit of writing the date he acquired a volume inside its cover enables us to establish the chronology of his manuscript-collecting activities. His first four volumes came in 1789, just one joined them in 1801, two in 1803, one in 1805, and three more in 1806. In his last decade the pace quickens: the eight volumes acquired in 1807 were followed by eighteen in 1808, just five in 1809, but twenty-one in 1810, eleven in 1811, twenty-three in 1812, only four in 1813, up to twenty-two in 1814, and six in the last year of his life.

All the volumes are either bespoke commissions or deluxe objects produced on speculation at the highest end of the market. Over two-thirds of

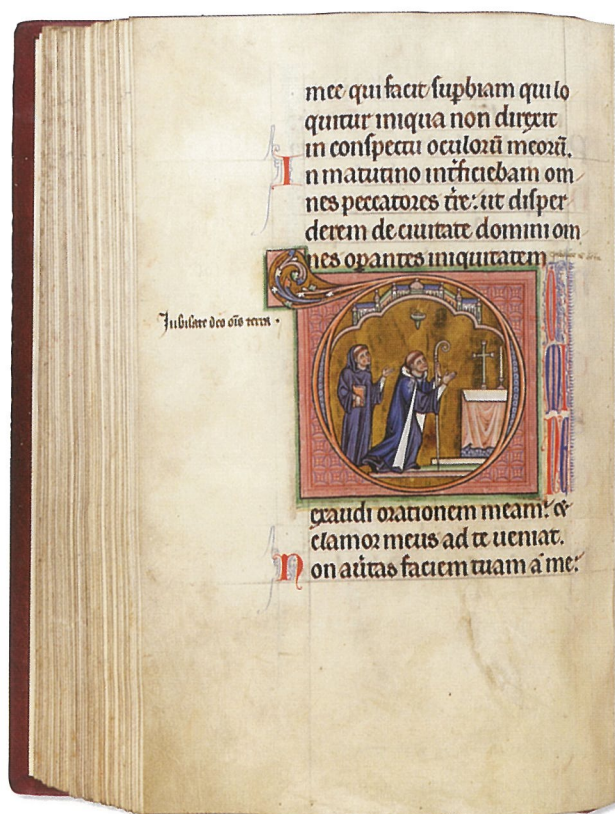


FIG. 11 A page from the *Peterborough Psalter*, English, 1220–30.

the manuscripts, ninety-seven volumes, are Books of Hours, the standard manuscripts for private devotion during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which outstripped in popularity even the Bible. By the early nineteenth century, Books of Hours were the staples of the art market in illuminated manuscripts. It was their rich imagery, often pristine condition and relatively low prices when compared to paintings that made them particularly desirable to modern collectors. While a standard Book of Hours may contain around ten miniatures, the most sumptuous volumes boast hundreds of images in gold and resplendent colours. Protected between their covers, these images formed portable galleries of art, and would have been highly prized by Fitzwilliam and his contemporaries as examples of the 'lost art of painting'. There was a strong preference for late medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, and Fitzwilliam's collection is dominated by fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Books of Hours. The majority of them were made in France,

but there are also ten Dutch examples, either inherited from his mother's family or purchased in deference to his Dutch ancestry. The small number of Italian Books of Hours – six in all – may seem surprising, given Fitzwilliam's passion for Italian paintings, but he did not live long enough to see the impact Napoleon's campaigns had in releasing Italian artworks on to the international market. There are, however, a few other types of Italian manuscript in the collection that may indicate Fitzwilliam's interest in Italian illumination. They include an outstanding Florentine Missal of c.1404 (MS 30), an imposing Milanese Pontifical of c.1440 (MS 28) and a collection of Venetian Ducal commissions dating from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (MS 188).

Despite Fitzwilliam's lack of interest in historical texts, he acquired two outstanding historic documents; the appeal of both may have been their august provenance. His copy of the statutes and ordinances of the Order of the Golden Fleece, made in 1563, contains a portrait of the Order's founder, Philip the Good of Burgundy, and had belonged to Julius Chifflet (c.1610–1676), the Order's official historian (MS 187). The manuscript of Donato Acciaiuoli's *Life of Charlemagne*, penned by Piero di Benedetto Strozzi, and illuminated by Lorenzo