

The mystery of the second Lady East¹

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WE ARE TOLD (often enough to believe it) that what you read on the internet cannot be relied upon, while what is printed in books can. We should know better; and sometimes we get to find out which printed authors are unreliable. Thus the standard

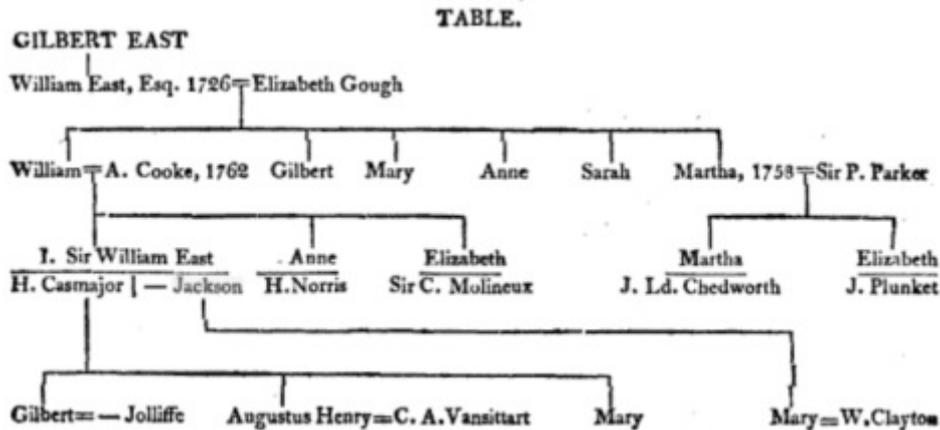


book on *Daniel Gardner* (1921) by G. C. Williamson (who wrote so many monographs that suspicions of his thoroughness must have occurred to the most gullible) tells us that Gardner's marriage took place in 1776 when in fact it was two years earlier; and that he bought his colours mostly from Roberson and Miller (a firm only recorded from 1828 in the NPG database of British artists' suppliers). Perhaps these minor instances prepare us for the fact that although he prints "Dr" before his name on the title pages of this, and many other of his books, Williamson held no such degree.

But we assume this cannot occur with reputable works of reference, such as the Betham's *Baronetage* of 1803, which prints the

following for Sir William East, the subject of a family piece by Gardner (above) which was not known to Williamson at all:

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And you will find the same in *New Baronetage* of 1804:

Sir WILLIAM EAST, Bart. born Feb. 27, 1737-8; married June 29, 1763, Hannah; second daughter of Henry Casmajor, Esq. of Tokington, in Gloucestershire, by whom he had two sons and one daughter: 1, Gilbert born April 17, 1764, (who married, May 10, 1788, the eldest daughter of William Jolliffe, Esq.); 2, Augustus-Henry born Aug. 24, 1766, (married Dec. 22, 1793, Caroline-Anne, eldest daughter of George Vansittart, Esq.) and Mary born Sept. 24, 1765. Sir William married secondly, July 28, 1768, Miss Jackson, by whom he had one daughter, the wife of William Clayton, Esq.

followed in Collins, Burke and all the other standard genealogies since. (You may recall that the *Baronetage* was Sir Walter Elliot's favourite book.) So when we come to Daniel Gardner's wonderful *East family*, we have a problem. The pastel, which is in a private collection (I am most grateful to the owners for letting me reproduce it), was last seen in public in 1980, when the *Burlington Magazine* justly described it as "remarkably ambitious". It is indeed one of Gardner's happiest works: its combination of vibrant colouring, clever, geometrical composition and social interest in the sitters' activities convey a joie de vivre rarely found in the portraiture of the day. It is also remarkably early in Gardner's career (aged 24). The owners have delightfully found a couple of examples of Sir William's amateur painting (miniatures of two of the children) of which there was otherwise no trace (apart from an entry in his wife's diary, noting "Sr Wm begun to paint Abelard" as his first action after recovery from illness: did he base this on Gardner's own gouache, engraved by Watson in 1776?). All this demonstrated a concreteness to Gardner's imaginative choice of accessories. So too does the garden urn, which I think is no longer to be found at Hall Place, now taken over by an agricultural college, much of the gardens having now been built over: but happily a photograph from an old issue of *Country Life* shows the same piece:



Gardner's arabesque was made in 1774, but there is no easy reconciliation of the dates and ages of the children with the *Baronetage*. The girl's age is clearly between her brothers, and if she is the legitimate daughter of the second Lady East (and the daughter who married Sir William Clayton less than 17 years after her own parents' marriage) the discrepancy is beyond the limitations of Gardner's representational skills or any tolerable level of flattery.

While delving into this I came across a Ph.D. thesis online, [*The effect on family life during the late Georgian period of indisposition, medication, treatments and the resultant outcomes*](#), where some of Lady East's diaries are discussed – in the context of her husband's frequent indispositions from gout (perhaps that should not surprise us: his father had made his fortune as commissioner for wine licences under George I). The diaries examined are the volume (numbered 4 on the cover) dealing with 1791–92, in the Berkshire Record Office, and one covering 1801–3, in a private collection, with 14 on the cover. Dr James had earlier published a paper in which he thought that the Lady East who wrote the diary was Hannah Casamajor; but unfortunately, no doubt having consulted the standard genealogies (was this a supervisory intervention?) the author “corrected” the thesis, resulting in a thorough confusion of the two ladies. He still gives Miss Jackson's forename as Hannah, and her year of birth, 1742, is the same as Hannah Casamajor's: so this looks more like confusion than coincidence. He also mentions the *Gentleman's Magazine* entry in 1768 announcing the marriage of Sir William with “Miss Jackson, of Downing Street”, which seems to be the evidence of the second marriage (with the date 28 July 1768), although of course it is now in all the standard genealogies from Betham on.

This is all somewhat mysterious, the more so since on checking the *Gentleman's Magazine* for that year, the reference is actually to “Sir William Best”:

Marriages, Deaths, &c. 349
Sir Wm Best, bart. — to Miss Jackson, of
Downing-street.

Now that may well be a misprint (I can't locate a Sir William Best, Bt of marriageable age at that date). Nor indeed is there an obvious family of Jacksons in Downing Street at the time, but that is less curious. But combine that with the awkward dates about the second Mary who married Sir William Clayton very young and one wonders what is going on.

One plausible explanation is that Sir William East had a liaison with Miss Jackson before their marriage. The absence of records of births often points to such irregularities.

But the Ph.D. thesis also tells us Lady East refers to Harriet Casamajor as her sister – although it also correctly notes that such terms were often used fairly broadly in the 18th century.

I turned then to Sir William East's own will. It's an extremely long document, and doesn't seem explicitly to mention the Gardner (but I wouldn't expect it to). In it I found references only to one "late dear wife", and I also found the following:

I give to Harriet Casamajor sister of my late dear wife any two of the pictures painted by myself which she shall select out of my whole set...

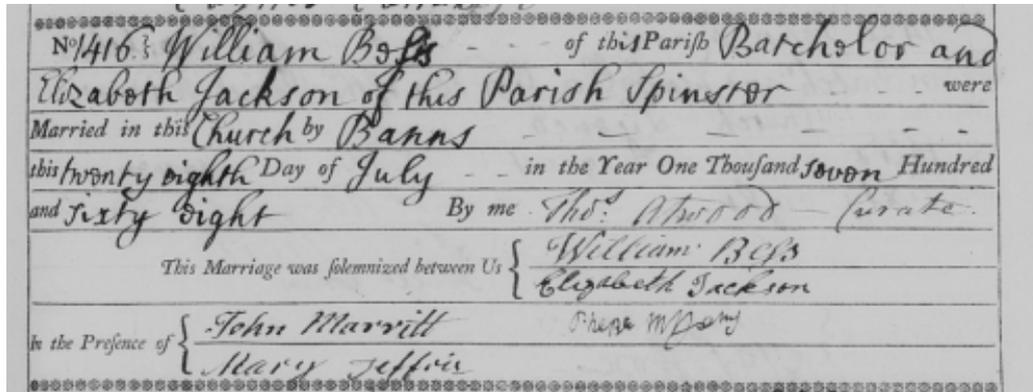
...to the before mentioned Harriet Casamajor for the great kindness and unwearied attention to me and to her sister my late dear wife for upwards of forty years during her and my illness the sum of five thousand pounds in addition to what I have hereinafter bequeathed to her.

There are also smaller bequests to two of Lady East's sisters, Maria Clemenza widow of the late Reverend Mr Bryan and Elizabeth widow of Robert Goodwin: both these turn out to be Casamajor sisters. You can see my [Casamajor](#) genealogy here; remember also that Gardner painted Hannah's relative [Mrs Justinian Casamajor and eight of her twenty-two children](#) in a pastel now in the Yale Center for British Art:



There is also a passage relating to the marriage settlement with his wife and in consequence of her death during Sir William's lifetime provisions for the income from the funds to be paid to his daughter Mary, Lady Clayton.

So I searched diligently for the marriage of any William with a Miss Jackson on 28 July 1768 in parish registers. And I found (and attach) the one which must be the cause of the whole confusion. Plain William Bess [sic] married Elizabeth Jackson on that day in St Margaret's Westminster (she is "of this parish" – and it is where Downing Street is located).



All of this demonstrates that there was no second marriage to a Miss Jackson (at least not for Sir William East), and that Hannah Casamajor was the only Lady East, dying in 1810 after the long illness discussed in the diary and referred to in the will. And so only one Mary too. We simply find it so hard to imagine that Burke and Debrett are wrong, but they are, from time to time. [Here](#) is the correct East genealogy; I trust Sir Walter will annotate his copy accordingly.

I have now managed to track down an earlier volume in the sequence of Lady East's diaries, which is now in the Lewis Walpole Library whose staff have most generously provided me with access to it. Numbered 2 on the cover, this volume covers the period from 1776 to 1785 (presumably No. 1 covers the date of the pastel, but is sadly still missing). Their [account of its contents](#), which has now been corrected, previously catalogued the author of the diary as the former Miss Jackson. There are indeed copious references not just to Hannah's sister Harriet, but a number of other siblings in terms which put her identity beyond doubt.

For the most part the diary is of mainly domestic significance and its content factual (if not matter-of-factual) rather than discursive. As with the volumes analysed by Dr James, health is a major consideration: Lady East's concern for her husband's gout is amply demonstrated, as with the later volumes, consistent with Benjamin Franklin's rather antiquated "Rules & maxims for promoting matrimonial happiness" which have been painstakingly copied out in full (presumably from the reprint in the *Lady's Magazine* for 1770). The document also contains a full transcription (I think from the *London Magazine* for 1767) of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's refutation of La Rochefoucauld's cynical maxim, "That Marriage is sometimes convenient, but never delightful." The overwhelming impression from the pages of diary 2 is one of a happy marriage, and even when noting Sir William's long walks with Lady East's sister, there is plainly no inkling of the conspiracy between Sir William and Harriet to control and disempower Lady East as develops in the later volumes analysed by Dr James and reinforced by the terms of his will: Sir William every bit the Bad Baronet of a Gothic novel. Perhaps further volumes of Lady East's diary will emerge to complete the narrative (or is this a challenge for a new Wilkie Collins?).

Apart from medicine and marriage, the document mainly concerns the round of social visits at Hall Place following the sale (by Mr Christie) of the house in Leicester Fields; their subsequent visits to London include staying in lodgings in Bond Street they dislike enough to move from

immediately. But the lure of sights such as Mr Lunardi's balloon at the Pantheon cannot be ignored, even if Mrs Casamajor's lateness at breakfast meant that they missed the start of Blanchard's ascent a few days later. Back home in Hall Place, precipitation is recorded with frequency, if not meteorological precision; much tea is drunk, and the odd ball is held (arriving home at 6 am after one of these). The London theatre plays a big role: they see Henderson as Falstaff, and return a few days late to see him in Hamlet, supping with him afterwards. Mrs Siddons is noted, while Mrs Wells imitates her to perfection. Back in Berkshire, it is amateur dramatics: Lady East "acted Jane Shore to the common people", with five subsequent performances over the next days to various social groups: the shopkeepers, some servants and the neighbours.

If all this conjures up the world of Jane Austen, that may not be so surprising – the elder son, Gilbert East, was sent to board with Jane's father, the Rev. George Austen: so we know quite a lot about the boy's dislike of Latin and preference for dancing (perhaps that is already evident in the Gardner, where the boy's feet take up a classic fourth position pose), and that Sir William was sufficiently grateful for the Austens' care of his heir that he presented the tutor with a portrait of himself (was it too by Gardner, or could it have been a self-portrait?; we do not know, although, according to her letter to Cassandra of 3 January 1801, it was to be given to Jane's eldest brother James when the family left Steventon for Bath; but it is not mentioned in James's will).

The diary has plenty of material for the social historian about the servants. Several times in diary 2 the arrival of new liveries was recorded. We learn that a new butler was engaged, one William Lambert, at £30 per annum. The housekeeper's wages were £20. The cook and the coachman got married. Some of others are mentioned – a postillion received a mere £5 10s. a year. The job was not without risk: one fell while accompanying their carriage, and broke his spine. When he died some months later, Lady East recorded the misfortune – along with a more detailed account of the latest episode of Sir William's gout.

This brings us to the sixth person in the pastel: the black servant in the background, wearing the smart black and red livery with silver lace. The family were able to tell me only that his name was York, and that he arrived in Hall Place in 1767 and died in 1783. Indeed Lady East's diary does have these entries:

Thu 8th May 1783. York, the Black Servant died in the night or rather morning at two o'clock of a consumption

Sun 11th. York bury'd at Hurly in the afternoon

But while I was reviewing the entries in the parish records for Hurley, Berkshire (which are in fact complete for the East family), I found three entries for the surname "York": they are for the baptism of a "Fitz-William York" on 6 April 1782; of a daughter, Mary Anne York on 19 June 1783, the parents being Fitz-William York and Elizabeth York; and, just a month later, on 13 July 1783, a "John York or Hancock" with the parents Fitz-William York and Elizabeth Hancock. These entries are, to say the least, curious. While "Fitzwilliam" is most memorably the Christian name of Jane Austen's Mr Darcy, its appearance here suggests not so much the inheritance of a vast estate but the euphemism for illegitimacy consistent with the presumably adult baptism preparatory to the registration of two irregular births which were presumably not of twins as they were a month apart. Pure speculation of course, for now at least.

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