

John Russell, *Martha Gumley*

NEIL JEFFARES



John Russell

Mrs Samuel GUMLEY, née
Martha Launder (1711–
1787)

Pastel on paper, 85.7 x 73.7
cm (oval)

Signed and dated, lower right,
“J. Russell pinxt/1777”.
Inscribed *verso* “Mrs Gumley
Aunt to/Lady Robert
Manners/Painted by
Russell”

Edinburgh, National Galleries
of Scotland, inv. D NG 1525

PROVENANCE: sitter's niece and
heir, Lady Robert Manners, née
Mary Degge (1737–1829); her
daughter Mary, Mrs William
Nisbet of Dirleton; her daughter,
Countess of Elgin, née Mary
Hamilton Nisbet (1777–1855);
her daughter, Lady Mary Nisbet-
Hamilton, née Bruce (–1883); her
daughter, Mrs Henry Thomas
Nisbet Hamilton Ogilvy of Biel,
née Constance Nisbet Hamilton
(1842–1920); legs 1921

EXHIBITED: [Royal Academy
1777, nos. 306, 307, 309 or 311.]
*The intimate portraits: drawings,
miniatures and pastels from Ramsay to
Lawrence*, Edinburgh, Scottish
National Portrait Gallery, 25

October 2008 – 1 February 2009; London, British Museum, 5 March – 31 May 2009. Cat. Stephen Lloyd & Kim Sloan, no. 43

LITERATURE: Stephen Lloyd, *Catalogue of the paintings and sculptures at Duff House*, Edinburgh, 1999, p. 19, not reproduced; Christopher Baker, *English drawings and watercolours 1600–1900: National Gallery of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 2011, p. 272 reproduced; Stephen Lloyd, “English in Edinburgh”, review of Baker, *Apollo*, January 2012, p. 91, fig. 2; Neil Jeffares, “Martha Gumley (1711–1787) and her portrait by John Russell”, *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 2013, LIX/1, II.2013, pp. 3–11, repr. cvr¹; Terry Jenkins, “Mrs Martha Gumley – correcting an identification”, *British art journal*, XV/1, 2014, pp. 95–98; *Dictionary of pastellists online*, J.64.1702

RELATED WORKS: study for head, psrl (London, V&A. Don Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence, Bt)

GENEALOGIES: [Colvill](#); [Degge](#); [Gumley](#); [Manners](#); [Nisbet](#)

A STRIKING PRESENCE at *The Intimate Portrait* exhibition in 2008 was that of the mysterious Mrs Gumley, about whom no information was vouchsafed save that she did not appear to be connected with the glass-making family of Isleworth, and that her connection with the Nisbet family (who gave the pastel to Edinburgh in 1921) was unknown. Also unknown by implication was why the sitter's identity was relevant to the study of John Russell's

¹ The article, which appeared in 2013, is an earlier version of this essay which appeared before Jenkins 2014, which, based on certain new documents, established that Martha Gumley was Mary Degge's aunt on the maternal, not paternal, side. A number of consequential changes are made in this version, revised September 2014. I am most grateful to the editor of the *Proceedings*, Dr David Ceri Jones, for allowing this essay to remain online.

œuvre. Some immediate connections which I suggested led to a partial expansion in Stephen Lloyd's 2012 review, but the full story, and the closing of numerous false leads, needs now to be told,² not least because of Martha Gumley's intimate acquaintance with the Wesleys, founders of the religion of which John Russell was so fervent a supporter.

Almost the only facts about Mrs Gumley that can easily be found is that she befriended the Wesleys and was the aunt of Lady Robert Manners, whose maiden name is usually given as Mary Digges. From this a spurious connection with the Digges family of Chilham Castle has been inferred.³ In fact (as emerges as the only possibility from a thorough review of the documents cited below) the connection is with the Degge⁴ family of Staffordshire, probably completely unrelated (although spellings of both names are so aleatory as to make any such claim hazardous). Martha's brother-in-law was the great-grandson of Sir Simon Degge (1612–1703), a lawyer who had fought on the royalist side in the Civil War. He subsequently became a judge, was high sheriff of Derbyshire in 1674–75 and spent his retirement as an antiquary. His grandson, also Simon, married twice; of the three sons of the first bed,⁵ William concerns us principally, while his half sisters included Dorothy, who was born in Derbyshire in 1710 and married, in 1746, Dr Robert Wilmot. Notwithstanding her advanced years Dorothy produced at least six children, the subject of a series of oil portraits by Joseph Wright of Derby.⁶

Martha's brother-in-law William was born in 1698 and joined the army as ensign in 1716. He progressed through the ranks to reach, in 1739, the level of lieutenant-colonel of General Nevill's regiment of Dragoons in Ireland, and was aide-de-camp to the Duke of Devonshire, lord-lieutenant of Ireland. He was a founder member of the Society of Dilettanti (he was in Rome in 1732 with George Knapton⁷), being present at the inaugural meeting in the Bedford Head Tavern, Covent Garden on 6 March 1736.⁸ Around this time he was married, to Catherine Meighen, the daughter of Francis Meighen of Berkeley Square⁹ and his wife, also Catherine or Katherine. A daughter, Mary, was born and christened in August 1737 at St James's, Westminster, and plays an important part in this story. Catherine died soon after giving birth, and William Degge was remarried soon after, to Mary Rice of Dublin (in 1739). Two years later William himself died, leaving his daughter an orphan. Mary Rice remarried several times within the Irish aristocracy, and seems to have had nothing to do with her stepdaughter, who was brought up by her aunt Martha.

In an earlier version of this paper, it was inferred from this relationship that Martha was a half-sister of William Degge. But, in the will¹⁰ of Katherine, Mrs Francis Meighen, Martha Gumley was described as her daughter. That she was born c.1711 can be inferred only from the inscription in Grosvenor Chapel noted below. Unfortunately we still know practically nothing

² Even if, as Jenkins 2014 points out, it cannot yet be. The background to the Meighen and Launder families remains obscure – but for reasons that can be inferred from the Charles Macklin passage discussed below, this is unlikely to emerge from further documents. But her relationship with Russell and Wesley are unaffected.

³ Such reliable sources as Alastair Smart, *Allan Ramsay*, 1999, p. 155 identify her as the daughter and heiress of Colonel Thomas Digges. In fact her parents' names, William and Catherine, are given in the baptismal record mentioned below (available online on the International Genealogical Index), and Colonel William Degge left his Irish property to his widow Mary, née Rice, and his English property to his brother John (will, National Archives, PROB 11/724).

⁴ Although Jenkins uses Degg, Degge is the commoner spelling, including for William Degge in the Army list etc.

⁵ Matters concerning the inheritance of the Degge estates after Simon's death in 1717 were complicated by a law suit in 1720 in which his widow Jane sued the executors and the heir, her eldest stepson, also called Simon; he was later declared a lunatic by a commission and inquisition, 13 March 1739 (National Archives, ref C/211/7D30). Under Simon's will (PROB 11/926), made in 1727, his brothers John and William were his heirs and executors; there were complicated rules for the succession between John and William's children; Simon also recorded his "positive Will and Desire being that it may not descend to the posterity of the aforesaid Widow of my late father." However when probate was given, on 17 March 1767, both John and William had predeceased the testator, and Dorothy Wilmot was appointed as executor being next of kin. This family dispute explains why there is no mention of Martha is unsurprising. Simon Degge's will also mentions his friend Thomas Anson with whom he made the Grand Tour (John Ingamells, *A dictionary of British and Irish travellers in Italy*, New Haven, 1997, p. 289)

⁶ See Benedict Nicholson, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, 1968, p. 225.

⁷ Ingamells, *A dictionary of British and Irish travellers in Italy*, New Haven, 1997, p. 981.

⁸ See Lionel Cust, *A history of the Society of Dilettanti*, London, 1898, *passim*.

⁹ The only clue to this I have found is the abstract of Robert Colvill's will, P. Beryl Eustace, ed., *Registry of Deeds Dublin: Abstract of wills*, II, 1956, p. 25; see below, read in the context of the other documents cited here.

¹⁰ Proved 26 April 1753.

about the Meighen family. Jenkins notes that Catherine and Martha had a third sister, Mary, who married a certain Hutchinson Mure (1713–1794), who became a sugar merchant and owner of an estate at Great Saxham.

Martha seems to have married quite late. Her first husband was an Irishman, Robert Colvill (1702–1749), grandson of Sir Robert Colvill (1625–1697), of Newtown, Co. Down. His father Hugh died at the age of 25, his widow marrying Brabazon Ponsonby, later 1st Earl of Bessborough (1679–1758) (father of Liotard's patron). Bessborough managed his stepson's affairs even after his majority, as Colvill seems to have been mentally unstable with suicidal tendencies, “wild and indecent” in his conversation and “disordered in his understanding”.¹¹ This did not prevent him becoming, at the age of 17, MP for Killybegs (a seat he retained until 1727 when he was succeeded by Henry, Earl Conyngham) and Antrim (1727–49). Colvill sold his ancestral property at Newtown¹² to Alexander Stewart¹³ of Belfast, and in 1721 he made a will bequeathing his property in Co. Down to Bessborough's second son John.¹⁴ But by 1744 he had fallen under the influence of a mistress, identified as “Martha Launder” [*recte* Launder], who turned him against the Ponsonby family; he sold the estate he had intended for John, and retreated to London where (it seems) he married Martha (the future Mrs Gumley), and died shortly after, in 1749.¹⁵

Was Martha Launder his future wife? The suggestion was made in the 2013 version of this article, but the evidence was considered inconclusive. But Jenkins 2014 provides a further argument for the identification, based in particular on records of a loan¹⁶ of £8000 made by Martha Launder, a spinster “living in Hanover Square” [sic], to John Rich, the theatrical impresario, in 1742. These provide an early sighting of her, the maiden name suggesting that she was the child of an earlier marriage of her mother, or perhaps had taken a new name from an irregular relationship – perhaps, suggests Jenkins, with the John Launder (–1757) of the Middle Temple who had connections in Chertsey.¹⁷ But to compound the confusion, on a counterpart of one of the 1742 indentures Martha Launder used a seal bearing the arms of Hamilton of Dalziel, a family with which she had no obvious (legitimate) connection.¹⁸

What is clear (and the starting point for establishing her identity) is that Mrs Gumley was accepted as Robert Colvill's wife: the inscription¹⁹ in Grosvenor Chapel provides vital evidence: in a plaque added below the monument to “Robert Colvill, Esq., of the Kingdom of Ireland”, died 20 March 1748/49, “aged 47 Years and 2 Months” we learn “Likewise lyeth the Body of MARTHA, Widow of the said Robert Colvill, who departed this Life April the 4th 1787, aged 76

¹¹ A. P. W. Malcomson, “The Newtown Act of 1748: revision and reconstruction”, *Irish historical studies*, XVIII/71, March 1973, pp. 313–44.

¹² John Wesley called it “dreary Newtown” when he visited it again on 15 June 1773: “Even in Ireland I hardly see anywhere such heaps of ruins as here.” (*The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, London, 1827, III, p. 484)

¹³ Progenitor of the Castlereagh/Londonderry family.

¹⁴ Then an infant. He was to marry the daughter of the 3rd Duke of Devonshire, the lord lieutenant to whom Colonel Degge was aide-de-camp.

¹⁵ “The Colvill family”, *Ulster journal of archaeology*, VI, 1900, p. 14.

¹⁶ One of the indentures Jenkins cites, dated 30 January 1744, between the same parties, and identifying Martha Launder as of the “parish” of St George Hanover Square, in the British Library (Addl. MS 12201, f.30) is discussed in Henry Saxe Wyndham, *Annals of Covent Garden Theatre from 1732 to 1897*, Cambridge, 2013, II, pp. 92f, 309. See also Judith Milhous & Robert Hume, “Receipts at Drury Lane: Richard Cross's diary for 1746–47 Part II”, *Theatre notebook*, XLIX, 1995, pp. 63ff; also Brian Jay Corrigan, “A legal dodge in the business practices of the original Globe and Drury Lane Theatres”, *ibid.*, LI, 1997, pp. 71–74.

¹⁷ John Launder was the brother of Cornelius Launder (1690–1726), a woollen draper of Nottingham, who built the Particular Baptist chapel in Park Street, Nottingham, in 1724. But I can find no specific connection beyond the Chertsey link mentioned by Jenkins.

¹⁸ “Counterpart of Indenture by which John Rich of St. George's Bloomsbury mortgages to Martha Launder of St. George's Hanover Square, Spinster, all his rights and privileges in Letters Patent, &c. licensing the building of play-houses, &c. Dat. 18 June, 1742”, British Library, Add Ch 9314 (manuscript catalogue, not online; Jenkins seems to have consulted only the LMA digests). The seal is described in W. de G. Birch, *Catalogue of seals in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, III, 1887, p. 181, no. 11260. On the basis of sources such as Burke's *General armorie*, the arms and motto can only belong to the Hamilton of Dalziel family, and do not correspond with either armigerous Launder family, or any other family.

¹⁹ “Inscriptions in Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street”, *Notes & queries*, CXXXV, 1917, p. 183, no. 12. The full text of the monument gives a slightly different (although not incompatible) picture of Colvill's character: “He was a Gentleman/Of singular Probity and Justice/Religiously observant of his Word/And in whom was no Guile./A faithful Friend/An agreeable Companion/And a most affectionate, tender/and indulgent Husband/In all which/Few equal'd/None exceeded him.” The failure to mention Mrs Gumley's second marriage was probably a question of available space.

Years.” Further, according to the abstract of Colvill’s will,²⁰ Mrs Martha Colvill of Grosvenor Square is formally made guardian of Mary Degge during her minority.

A source which was overlooked both in the 2013 version of this article and by Jenkins 2014 offers important clues to the story (and again confirms that Colvill did eventually marry Martha, contrary to Jenkins’s inclination). It comes from the notes Charles Macklin prepared, but which do not seem to have been subsequently written up. They appeared in *The monthly mirror* in 1798:²¹

SCRAPS TOWARDS A HISTORY OF THE STAGE
From the MSS of Mr Charles Macklin.

Rich kept actresses, but he never gave them parts until the time of Mrs Stevens – she was a virago, and did as she pleased. Speak of her art and manner of getting the ascendancy of him, viz. by her sycophancy, and her sanctity – clothing poor children, charities, &c.

Mrs Colwel lent Rich money; made him and her children presents—the reason why Mrs C. did all this—she had been an abandoned woman, without friends or family – was first a parish girl, then a w—e, then an orange wench: Colvin, a madman, took her as a mistress – then married her. Mrs Rich made her a methodist. Gumley met her at chapel – married her – took her out of the Richs’ hands.— Tell all that history.

Mure married Pat Lauder’s sister, who had a child by Colonel D**gg*: this child was left thirty thousand pounds by Colvin. – Mure was an upholsterer; but upon getting seven hundred pounds per annum from Colvin for marrying the woman, he commenced merchant and gentleman in Suffolk. – All that history opened.

As the passage seems to fit such facts as we know, it may well contain much truth (however improbable it may seem that Russell’s matronly sitter was a common prostitute). “Pat Lauder” must be Martha Launder.²² Mrs Stevens was the stage name for Priscilla Wilford, who became Rich’s third wife in 1744. The account of Mure’s progression is rather more compelling than in either of his obituaries: the *Gentleman’s magazine*²³ says he made a handsome fortune in the cabinet and upholstery business before turning to the sugar and rum trade,²⁴ while the *Scottish register*,²⁵ which alone Jenkins cites, says that he “acquired property in Jamaica by marriage”, from which Jenkins understandably but incorrectly inferred that the Meighens were wealthy plantation owners. Mure’s indebtedness to Colvill is further marked also by the fact that, after his first child Alexander (who may or may not have been his), his next two children were christened Robert and Colvill.²⁶ But the passage still leaves significant uncertainties. It seems to suggest that Martha Gumley was an orphan. Macklin conflates Catherine and Mary, and compounds the confusion by calling her Pat’s sister.²⁷ It may be that Katherine, Mrs Francis Meighen simply adopted Martha, with or without a sister (notwithstanding the language of her will, Martha may either have been illegitimate or not even Katherine’s biological daughter). Perhaps her (biological) father was indeed a Hamilton of Dalziel (a family distantly related to Mure): but there is no evidence

²⁰ “COLVILLE, ROBERT, formerly of Newtown, Co. Down, and late of parish of St. George near Hannover Square, Middlesex. Testator was son and heir at law of Hugh Colvill late of Newtown, Esq., deceased, and grandson and heir at law of Sir Robert Colvill, late of Newtown, Knt., deceased. 4 Dec. 1746. Narrate 2J pp. 10 June 1749. Sir Cecil Bishop, Berkeley Square, said parish of St. George, Bart, Hutchison Mure, Saxham, Suffolk, Esq., and George Draper, parish of St. Paul’s, Covent Garden, apothecary, trustees. Mrs Martha Colvill of Grosvenor Square in said parish of St. George to have care during her minority of Miss Mary Degg, daughter of Col. Wm Degg and Catherine his wife both deceased, and grand-daughter of Catherine Meighen of Berkeley Square aforesaid, widow of Francis Meighen, gent., deceased. Said Catherine Meighen. His sister Alice Moore otherwise Colvill then wife of Stephen Moore of Killworth, Co. Cork. Hon. Wm. Ponsonby commonly called Wm. Ponsonby commonly called Lord Viscount Duncannon. Miss Mary Bishop, daughter of Sir Cecil Bishop. His real and personal estate. Witnesses: Robt. Talbot, Peter Hemet, junr., and Samuel Baldwin, all of liberty of Westminster.” – P. Beryl Eustace, ed., *Registry of Deeds Dublin: Abstract of wills*, II, 1956, p. 25.

²¹ *The monthly mirror*, v, 1798, p. 361f, “Mackliniana [no. V]”.

²² “Pat” as a diminutive of Martha recorded in John Ash’s *New and complete dictionary*..., 1775, “in familiar style”.

²³ 1794, p. 771.

²⁴ Mure’s 1757 petition to permit British ships to supply the French with slaves in return for indigo was rejected by Pitt as impolitic, but not immoral. The activities of those involved in the sugar business must have raised interesting issues even at the time for Methodists. Among numerous, more positive facets of Mure’s character is his election to the Society of Arts in 1756, introduced by the astronomer James Short (*Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, November 1970, CXVIII, p. 790).

²⁵ 1795, p. 350.

²⁶ In 1742 and 1744 respectively. They were both admitted to Bury School in 1751, but Colcill may have died early. Robert was one of the sons who took Mure’s business into bankruptcy long after he had retired from trade, but before removing his name from the firm. Thus Hutchinson Mure ended his days miserably, according to his obituaries.

²⁷ If several of the girls were called Launder it suggests Katherine was married before she became Mrs Francis Meighen. But the birth of a Richard Meighen to Francis and Catherine, baptised at St Ann, Blackfriars 25 January 1713, would seem to make that improbable.

that Martha was ever called Meighen or (apart from Colvill and Gumley) anything other than Launder (indeed that is the name she gives in the Chancery proceedings which as Jenkins notes “caused her to be honest”; it seems unlikely that she would resort to another alias as Jenkins believes). This probably takes us as far as we can go on Martha’s origins: Jenkins is right that the story is incomplete, but now we know why.

The house at Grosvenor Square²⁸ mentioned in Colvill’s will was no. 37 (subsequently no. 42), later recorded in the name of Martha’s second husband. Although John Gilbert, Archbishop of York, is recorded as living there 1758–61, Mrs Gumley retained the property, allowing her niece and her husband to live there until they inherited after her death. Many years later (1858–72) Lord Londonderry lived there, but this is unlikely to have any connection with the Newtownards sale.

Two and a half years after Robert Colvill’s death, on 10 September 1751 Martha married Samuel Gumley (c.1698–1763), lieutenant-colonel, 1st Foot Guards, MP for Hedon 1746–47.²⁹ The *Craftsman, or country journal* (14 September 1751) reported that she was “an agreeable lady, wuth a large fortune.” Samuel was indeed connected with the plate glass factory at Isleworth, being the third son of the proprietor John Gumley. His grandfather was a cabinet-maker at St Clement Danes (a trade initially practised by Martha’s brother-in-law, Hutchinson Mure), but Samuel’s sister Anna Maria (c.1696–1758) attracted the eye of William Pulteney, later 1st Earl of Bath who married her in 1714 and promoted her family relentlessly.³⁰ John Gumley became commissary-general to the army as well as supplying furniture, mirrors etc. to the royal household, often at inflated prices. A letter from Scrope to the Duke of Montagu (23 December 1729) notified him that Gumley would not in future be employed as cabinet-maker for the Wardrobe on account of his “notorious impositions”.³¹ This enabled him to accumulate wealth on a scale that trumped his origins in trade. Thus Samuel pursued an army career normally reserved for the aristocracy: commissioned in 1718, becoming captain-lieutenant in the Coldstream Guards in 1721, rising to be lieutenant-colonel in the 1st Foot Guards in 1742 and an army colonel in 1749. He took part in the battles of Dettingen and Fontenoy, and fought a duel with General Braddock in which his good humour attracted the notice of Horace Walpole,³² although we may detect arrogance mixed with undeniable sang-froid. “Braddock,” he is reputed to have said before they engaged, “you are a poor dog! Here, take my purse; if you kill me, you will be forced to run away, and then you will not have a shilling to support you.”

The Earl of Bath arranged for his brother-in-law to be elected MP for Hedon in 1746, but he was unseated for bribery (the petition³³ alleged that Gumley employed “illegal, arbitrary and



Fig. 1

²⁸ See *Survey of London*.

²⁹ R. Sedgwick, *House of Commons 1715–1754*, 1970 provides an epitome of his career.

³⁰ Pope’s *The looking-glass* satirises “charming Gumley’s” arrogance, reminding us of her origins in wishing that her father could produce “one faithful mirror for his daughter’s use”. She was previously the mistress of Lord Bolingbroke, and was described by Oliver Goldsmith in his *Life of Bolingbroke* (1770) as “the most expensive prostitute in the kingdom”.

³¹ “Declared accounts: Civil List”, *Calendar of Treasury books*, XXXII: 1718, 1962, pp. CLXXXVIII–CCXLI.

³² Letters to Montagu, 3 September 1748; Mann, 28 August 1755.

³³ Laid by Luke Robinson, who was elected instead; *Journal of the House of Commons*, 11 December 1746.

corrupt methods" to secure a majority of one vote), and failed to win the seat at the elections of 1747 and 1754.

The first documented connection with Methodism³⁴ arises in a letter 7 May 1748, when Dr John Byrom reported³⁵ "I dined yesterday with Colonel Gumley and Charles Wesley [(1707–1788)], and went with them to the Methodist church, English Common Prayers." On 19 June 1748, John Wesley (1703–1791) preached at Moorfields; not having recovered his strength by the evening, "Colonel Gumley carried me in his chair to Brentford."³⁶ Several months later, as Gumley set off for Eindhoven (13 October 1748, the rendezvous³⁷ for his regiment and the Dutch and Hanoverian forces planning to combat Löwendahl at Maastricht), he wrote to John Wesley a deeply religious letter, in terms so extravagant that a cynic might suspect insincerity; another in similar vein was annotated by Wesley "A pattern of Christian simplicity!"³⁸ Soon after Gumley's safe return (the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle which brought an end to hostilities was signed days after his departure³⁹), Charles Wesley (then in London) writing to his future wife Sarah Gwynne on 28 March 1749⁴⁰ was able to record that Colonel Gumley "was admitted & filled with the presence of divine love". Some, such as Doddridge, were astonished by the conversion of this "man notorious for his profligate character".⁴¹ Independently⁴² Martha Colvill had become involved with the movement: in addition to Grosvenor Square, Mrs Colvill owned a house on St Ann's Hill, Chertsey, Surrey, and it was thither on 14 June 1750 that a letter was directed to Sarah Wesley staying with Mrs Colvill by James Waller (who was engaged to her sister, Elizabeth Gwynne). On 17 July 1750 Charles Wesley wrote to Sarah, then at her father's house in Ludlow, to tell her that "Mrs Colvill expects a call to Bristol in about a fortnight. I must, & you may, meet her there. Perhaps you may, but I could not promise her, only for myself. Mrs Rich and Miss Degg come with her." On 23 February 1751 Marmaduke Gwynne, Sarah's father, writes to Charles Wesley who is staying at Mrs Colvill's house in London. There follows an extensive correspondence over many years which it is not necessary to itemise in full.

Martha's niece Mary Degge also engaged in the correspondence, writing to Charles Wesley on 31 August 1752 asking when he expected to arrive at Chertsey, and discussing also her grandmother's (Mrs Meighen) health. Her aunt, by now Mrs Gumley, was evidently something of a hypochondriac, benefitting from the waters at Scarborough although Mary felt "her distemper



Fig. 2

³⁴ There is no mention of Mrs. Gumley in the Wesley Historical Society's *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, 2000 or the online version consulted 3 April 2012.

³⁵ John Telford, *Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, London, 1900, p. 167.

³⁶ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, London, n.d. [1916], III, p. 356.

³⁷ See Sir F. W. Hamilton, *The origin and history of the First or Grenadier guards*, London, 1874, II, pp. 146ff.

³⁸ *The works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, Oxford, 1981, XXVI: Letters II, 1740–1755, pp. 334f.

³⁹ The British troops faced greater hazard from the storm on the return journey to England: see Lee McCardell, *Ill-starred general: Braddock of the Coldstream Guards*, Pittsburgh, 1958, p. 105.

⁴⁰ Part of the invaluable collection of Wesley correspondence kept at The John Rylands University Library, a full index of which is available online at archives.li.man.ac.uk. The remaining letters cited here will readily be found through the ELGAR system without further codes.

⁴¹ James Macauley, *Whitefield anecdotes*, 1886, p. 106.

⁴² Quite probably, as Macklin states, through Priscilla, John Rich's third wife, who was a devotee of Wesley from 1745 as Jenkins points out.

IS MORE IN HER MIND than is suspected.” Mary became the particular friend of Sarah Wesley, enjoying the sort of intimacy in which an unfortunately worded letter required counsel from Charles Wesley as to its likely effects (1 May 1753).

On 1 January 1756, at Roehampton in Surrey, Charles Wesley married Mary Degge to Lord Robert Manners (1718–1782), a son of the 2nd Duke of Rutland and colonel in Gumley’s regiment of the 1st Foot Guards since 1747. He had a distinguished career,⁴³ serving in Flanders during the war of the Austrian succession, becoming a general officer in 1771. Perhaps through the influence of his brother-in-law Pelham, he was elected MP for Kingston upon Hull, a seat he retained for some 35 years. There were to be three sons as well as two daughters, Lucy and Mary, the latter marrying the officer, MP and collector William Nisbet (1747–1822)⁴⁴ of Dirleton, one of the wealthiest lairds in Scotland. The Russell pastel descended through the Nisbet family, passing to the Countess of Elgin, wife of the collector of the marbles (until their divorce in 1808), before being left by her granddaughter to the National Gallery of Scotland in 1921. The provenance is shared by the gorgeous painting by Allan Ramsay⁴⁵ of Lady Robert Manners, executed probably c.1767 (fig. 1), as well as by the distinguished Sir Thomas Lawrence portrait⁴⁶ of a much older Lady Robert Manners (1826, fig. 2): separated by half a century, there is nevertheless an unmistakable echo of the Russell portrait of her aunt.

The relationship between Martha and her niece Mary was evidently extremely close: Charles Wesley, in a letter of 3 January 1760, has dinner with Mrs Gumley and “her daughter” [sic], although he found the conversation trifling and tedious. However, when Lady Robert had a miscarriage, “it was pity that Mrs Gumley was not in attendance” (15 February 1760). She was not above matchmaking, and Wesley wrote to his wife on 2 March 1760 describing the unsuccessful courtship between Samuel Lloyd and Miss Darby: “[Mrs Gumley] is a clever woman but quite overreached herself on that particular occasion and spoiled her own plan with her intriguing.”

It may have been Samuel’s “good humour and wit” that attracted Martha, but at some stage relations between the couple strained.⁴⁷ Acting through Lord Robert Manners, she issued proceedings in February 1761 against “Samuel Gumley, Esq. and others”, reported in the *London gazette*.⁴⁸ The multiplicity of defendants suggests that this was not merely a divorce petition, but we have found no sequel.⁴⁹ Two years later Gumley died at Spa, apparently having evaded justice, but under even more mysterious circumstances: according to the *London chronicle*, 29–31 March 1763, p. 310, “An account is come from the German Spa [sic], of the death of Colonel Gumley, by assassination, as he was returning to his lodgings from an entertainment.” According to Philip Thicknesse,⁵⁰ writing



Fig. 3

⁴³ Sedgwick, *op. cit.*, again provides a useful summary.

⁴⁴ Sedgwick, *op. cit.* Apart from the 28 paintings bequeathed by his descendant to the National Gallery of Scotland, Nisbet owned the Caravaggio *Taking of Christ* now in the National Gallery of Ireland.

⁴⁵ Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, inv. NG 1523; Smart, *op. cit.*, no. 351, fig. 595.

⁴⁶ Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland, inv. NG 1522; Discussed beautifully by Sir Michael Levey, *Thomas Lawrence*, New Haven & London, 2005, p. 269ff, fig. 145.

⁴⁷ Perhaps his suddenly acquired piety lapsed into the behaviour for which he had earlier been known. No explanation is found in Samuel’s will (PRO 11/887), a very brief affair made in 1753 in which he bequeathes everything to his “dear wife Martha”. It was proved on 7 May 1763.

⁴⁸ “Monday the 16th Day of February, in the First Year of the Reign of His Majesty King George the Third, 1761, between Martha Gumley, Wife of Samuel Gumley, by the Right Honourable Lord Robert Manners, her next Friend, Plaintiff; the said Samuel Gumley, Esq; and others, Defendants: upon the humble Petition of the Plaintiff Martha Gumley, this Day preferred to the Right Hon. the Master of the Rolls, for the Reasons therein, and in the Certificate and Affidavit therein mentioned contained; and upon reading the said Certificate and Affidavit, it is ordered, That the said Defendant Samuel Gumley do appear to the Plaintiff’s Bill on or before the first Day of the next Term.”

⁴⁹ Jenkins 2014 summarises documents indicating the financial nature of this dispute.

⁵⁰ Philip Thicknesse, *A year’s journey through the Pais Bas: or, Austrian Netherlands*, London, 1786, p. 271. Jenkins 2014 found a report of 12 March 1765 in the *London evening post* stating that Gumley’s murdere had been caught and executed.

from Liège, “assassinations are very common, particularly in and about Liege, a city as replete with vice as it is with inhabitants. You cannot remember, (but I can) when a villain there murdered Colonel Gumley; and though he was known to be the murderer, he neither fled, nor was he prosecuted.”

Mrs Gumley nevertheless continued to use her married name, and maintained her support for the Wesleys.⁵¹ A letter of 27 July 1766 records Charles Wesley’s meeting with Dr Martin Madan of the Lock Hospital;⁵² Wesley spent an hour with the singers, and the next day breakfasted with Mrs Gumley who renewed her offer of the living of Drayton in Oxfordshire. The manor of Drayton Beauchamp had belonged to the Cheynes, but was acquired about 1730 by John Gumley, passed to his son and remained with Mrs Gumley, passing to her niece and then her daughter Lucy Manners.⁵³ Here, around 1777, Mrs Gumley built the Terret, or Turret House, a property that was subsequently occupied by General, later Viscount Lake, Colonel Gumley’s nephew, and was temporarily home to the future George IV during his minority.⁵⁴

By 1771 the offer of the house at 1 Chesterfield Street, Marylebone⁵⁵ was under discussion in the correspondence. She insisted on the Wesleys taking the property, which remained their London residence until Charles Wesley’s death and for some years after. They were responsible only for the ground rent payable to the Duke of Portland on the remaining 20 years of the lease; Mrs Gumley’s largesse included furniture, all the essentials for housekeeping and even a supply of small beer. The house had a music room, equipped with two organs, a harpsichord and sufficient room for the Wesleys to be able to hold a series of concerts there. Mrs Gumley subscribed to the first season in 1779, but did not attend.⁵⁶

Martha Gumley died in her house at Grosvenor Square on 4 April 1787, aged 76. In her will,⁵⁷ made on 4 January 1786 and proved 9 May 1788, apart from a couple of minor bequests to servants she left everything to her niece, by now a widow.

This was the Martha Gumley of whom in 1777 Russell was to make his portrait. The scale of it, and ambition of the composition, emphasize its importance in his œuvre. The rural setting may well be St Ann’s Hill, Chertsey. Russell was still at the early stage of his career, and it is evident that he took every possible care in preparing this work. It is therefore not surprising that he made a preparatory study (fig. 3), which survives, hitherto unidentified, in the group of drawings collected by Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence and now in the V&A.

In 1770 Russell went to hear Wesley preach Whitfield’s funeral sermon, “very fine and impressive” according to his diary.⁵⁸ In 1771 he did an oil bust of Charles Wesley with his hand on the Bible (Mrs Gumley too holds a book, perhaps a volume of sermons or even verse). In 1776 Russell executed a set of four pastels of musicians (Boyce, Corelli, Handel and Kelway) to be presented by George III to Samuel Wesley,⁵⁹ but these had been made by copying existing oil portraits (that of Kelway, harpsichord master to Queen Charlotte and a particular friend of Wesley, was copied after Andrea Soldi). According to a letter of Charles Wesley (30 March 1770), “The last time Charles junior [(1757–1834)] was with [Joseph Kelway], the boy played one of his

⁵¹ Among her charitable donations, 5 guineas is recorded for the Magdalen Charity in 1766.

⁵² An institution with which numerous Russell subjects were associated; Russell himself was converted by Madan, recording in his diary, written in the third person, “John Russell converted September 30, 1764, ætat. 19, about half an hour after seven in the evening.”

⁵³ “Parishes: Drayton Beauchamp”, *A history of the County of Buckingham*, 1925, III, pp. 341–45.

⁵⁴ George Lipscomb, *The history and antiquities of the county of Buckingham*, London, 1847, III, p. 333. It was subsequently occupied by Lady Robert Manners, and was later known as Drayton Lodge.

⁵⁵ Subsequently renamed Wheatley Street; the house has since been demolished.

⁵⁶ Alyson McLamore, “‘By the will and order of Providence’: the Wesley family concerts, 1779–1787”, *Royal Musical Association research chronicle*, 37, 2004, pp. 75, 103.

⁵⁷ PRO 11/1152.

⁵⁸ Cited G. C. Williamson, *John Russell RA*, London, 1894, p. 44, where more details (but by no means a complete account) will be found of Russell’s methodist connections. see also Antje Matthews, “John Russell’s mysterious moon: An emblem of the church”, *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, LV/6, 2006, pp. 252–58, as well as the various entries in my *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*, 2006, print edition and online.

⁵⁹ See John Ingamells, *National Portrait Gallery. Mid-Georgian portraits 1760–1790*, London, 2004, pp. 66 & *passim*, and the *Dictionary* (two of the pastels are in the NPG; the remaining two were located in a private collection in 2014).

Kelway's sonatas so perfectly that the older man bowed and declared that no music master in London could have played it better." Mrs Gumley was the boy's godmother, and gave him a handsome sum of money for a new harpsichord.⁶⁰ Russell was engaged now to portray Charles's brother Samuel (1766–1837), as a boy, standing by an organ holding his oratorio *Ruth* (written at the age of 8; Dr Boyce nevertheless considered the airs "some of the prettiest I have seen"⁶¹); the large oil⁶² was exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1777. Dr Boyce, in crayons, was also shown (no. 310).

It is perfectly possible, and satisfying to believe, that *Mrs Gumley* was also in the 1777 Royal Academy exhibition, as one of the four oval pastels of unnamed ladies. If so one wonders how many of the visitors were as ignorant of her origins as those who saw her in 2008–09. But was Russell himself any wiser? Macklin has "opened...all that history", but it cannot easily be closed.

Neil Jeffares

⁶⁰ John Telford, *Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*, London, 1900, p. 262.

⁶¹ Cited James Thomas Lightwood, *Samuel Wesley, musician*, 1937, p. 22. Twelve years Russell's Royal Academy diploma piece was on the same theme, *Ruth and Naomi*.

⁶² 175x114 cm. It is curious that the Wesleys seem to have preferred Russell to work in oils. Perhaps they shared the common prejudice that pastel was too ephemeral or frivolous a medium for the serious purpose of recording their faces.