

Lady Morley and the “Baron so Bold”

CHRIS VIVEASH

Swindon, England

In December 1815 Jane Austen generously instructed her publisher, John Murray, to forward a presentation copy of *Emma*, her new novel, to Lady Morley at Saltram in the County of Devon. There is no hint in the subsequent polite interchange of letters between these two ladies,² that both were aware of the sensational scandal which had rocked Society six years before, centering around the notorious behaviour of Lord Morley.³ Given Jane Austen’s aversion to meeting Madame de Staël because of that lady’s reputation, and her comments to her niece Fanny concerning the Paget family⁴ who were involved in the Morley scandal, possibly some pressure had been applied to Jane Austen to make this gesture.

Lord Morley, born John Parker, inherited the title of Lord Boringdon when he was sixteen years old. With the title came Saltram, a large country house near Plymouth,⁵ and a considerable hoard of gold coins. His mother had died when he was three, leaving his aunt Anne Robinson to attend to his upbringing. After university, he went abroad to Rome on the Grand Tour, where, instead of devoting himself to the usual pursuits, he apparently met the beautiful Lady Elizabeth Monck and began an affair with her. Lady Elizabeth was married with two daughters of her own and a husband who left her to her own devices, being more interested in gaming and drinking than in his wife. General Dyott called her “one of the prettiest women in England,”⁶ and Lady Holland is said to have thought her “divinely beautiful, and her head is angelic.” Lady Elizabeth bewitched Lord Boringdon; she bore him three illegitimate sons during their affair. Lord Boringdon’s best friend, Lord Granville, is reported as saying of Lady Elizabeth on one occasion that she was “in most flaming beauty,” echoing the *Rejected Addresses*’⁷ lampoon of her as “The Beautiful Incendiary.” Jane Austen and Cassandra enjoyed this book by “the two Mr Smiths of the city” and would have recognized ‘Lady Elizabeth Mugg’ as being Lady Elizabeth Monck!

Saltram was always open to Lady Elizabeth; she lived part of her life with Lord Boringdon and part with Henry Monck. The three sons were looked after and spent their summers with their father, although there was no question of their inheriting Saltram. Eventually Lord Boringdon asked Lady Elizabeth to divorce her husband. “It would be too hard on my daughters and poor Henry,” she replied; the relationship broke down thereafter.

In 1804 Lord Boringdon met and married Lady Augusta Fane, daughter of the Earl of Westmorland; her age at the time of their marriage was just eighteen. The marriage started off happily enough and a son was born in 1806, an heir to the Parker estates. Regrettably Lord Boringdon was soon up to his old tricks, and, having met a ballet dancer in Bristol, he quickly impregnated her. He was nothing if not virile. An engraving of him at this period shows a fine face with slightly hooded eyes and a rather cruel mouth.

It must be said that he was very generous to his illegitimate children and made financial provision for them all.⁸

Lady Elizabeth Monck, who was unable to accept the position of fallen favourite, began to pursue Lord Boringdon again, until the scandal broke that shook Society to its foundations. A university friend of Lord Boringdon, Sir Arthur Paget, began paying attentions to Lady Augusta, and, although warned off, he continued to call on her, while Boringdon was at the House of Lords. One morning Lady Augusta fled to Sir Arthur Paget, confirming adultery by this action. The *Morning Post* of 21st May 1808 recorded the elopement, and close friends blamed Lord Boringdon for keeping up an intimacy with his first mistress Lady Elizabeth, while married to Lady Augusta.⁹

It is interesting to note here that three years previously Sir Arthur Paget's brother Charles had married one of Lady Elizabeth's daughters! Moreover, Charles Paget was Captain of H.M.S. *Endymion* in 1803-4, when Jane Austen's youngest brother Charles was serving on board that vessel.¹⁰ (*Endymion* is mentioned in *Mansfield Park*, along with H.M.S. *Elephant*, two ships sailed in by Jane Austen's sailor brothers.) Jane Austen loathed the Pagets, and, writing to Fanny Knight, fumed, "What can be expected from a Paget, born & brought up in the centre of conjugal Infidelity and Divorces? . . . I abhor all the race of Pagets" (13 March 1817).

Lord Boringdon divorced Lady Augusta in February 1809, and three days later she married Sir Arthur Paget, living happily with him for the rest of her life and producing several children. Lady Augusta Paget (as she now was)



The first Earl and Countess of Morley, by Frederick Say, 1830

was believed by Princess Charlotte to have written "Sence and Sencibility" [*sic*], as a result of the Duke of York's misinterpreting the wording of later advertisements for that novel.¹¹ Lord Boringdon, meanwhile, waited until August 1809 before marrying Frances Talbot,¹² an accomplished but untitled woman, the future Lady Morley, who was about to begin life with a notorious womaniser shunned by most of Society. Wisely, the twenty-seven-year-old Frances had refused to have an affair with Lord Boringdon before their marriage, but after a passionate honeymoon she found herself pregnant with a child (who was to become the second Lord Morley). Frances tamed her husband, and the marriage lasted thirty-one years, producing a daughter, Caroline, to complete the family.

Most women would object to bringing up and accommodating five children from a husband's liaisons, as well as looking after their own, but Frances took it all in her stride. Boringdon became respectable again, and neighbours who had avoided Saltram during the "Monckish and Augustan"¹³ eras returned calls and became firm friends. He had a copy painted of Opie's 1802 portrait of Frances aged 20 (as Lavinia from Thomson's *Seasons*), which hangs at Saltram to this day, showing a fresh and lovely girl then about to set off for Paris to receive tuition in drawing.¹⁴ Frances was in Paris at the same time as Boringdon, Henry Monck and Lady Elizabeth Monck; one wonders if she saw the threesome and admired young Boringdon from afar! Coincidentally, 1802 had seen Henry and Eliza Austen also in France, trying to regain the property of the latter's first husband, the Comte de Feuillide.¹⁵

Lord Boringdon was created Earl of Morley, for services rendered to the monarch, in November 1815, just when Henry Austen's health was breaking down in consequence of business worries concerning the bank in which he was a partner. Bankruptcy was facing Henry, as it did many, after the Battle of Waterloo and the economic depression following in its wake. Did he apply brotherly pressure on Jane Austen to forward a copy of *Emma* to the new Countess of Morley with an eye to his future and a change of career? Certainly he entitled himself "Domestic Chaplain to the Earl of Morley" in 1820,¹⁶ although no trace exists of his ever having been at Saltram. Henry was, however, in Berlin as Chaplain to the British Embassy when John Stapleton, Lord Morley's eldest natural son, was in the city unable to manage on his allowance from his father and, like his father, having woman trouble.¹⁷ Did Henry give wise counsel and support to this volunteer in the Prussian Army?

Lord and Lady Morley suffered a terrible blow in 1817 when little Lord Boringdon (Augusta's child) choked to death on an ear of rye plucked in a cornfield near Paris, thus allowing Frances' son to become Lord Boringdon and ultimately the second Lord Morley. In 1818 Frances' daughter Caroline died at the age of four, to complete their misery.

Lady Elizabeth Monck died in 1841 at Hampton Court Palace, confessing to Augustus Stapleton, her youngest illegitimate son, her liaison with Lord Morley, and begging forgiveness for her "sad misconduct."¹⁸ Lord Morley had died in 1840, leaving debts of £258,000 for his family to clear.¹⁹ Since *Sense and Sensibility*, together with *Pride and Prejudice*, had also been

attributed to Frances, Lady Morley,²⁰ Lord Morley will be remembered as the only man to have had two wives, each of whom is credited with having written one or more of Jane Austen's novels.

Frances, Countess of Morley, lived on at Saltram, where she died in 1857 after a short painful illness. *The Times'* obituary (on Wednesday 16th December 1857) said "she was original without affectation, brilliant without display, kind without condescension," words that could so easily have been applied to the authoress who had sent *Emma* to her forty-two years earlier.

NOTES

- ¹ *Lord Granville Leveson Gower (first Earl Granville): Private Correspondence, 1781 to 1821*, edited by Castalia, Countess Granville (London: John Murray, 1916), I, 498.
- ² William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, *Life and Letters of Jane Austen*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1913), p. 326.
- ³ *The Jerningham Letters (1780-1843)* edited by Egerton Castle (London: Richard Bentley, 1896), I, 308.
- ⁴ *Jane Austen's Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others*, edited by R. W. Chapman, second edition (London: O.U.P., 1952, reprinted 1959), p. 485.
- ⁵ *Saltram* (The National Trust, 1990), p. 58.
- ⁶ *Dyott's Diary: a Selection from the Journal of William Dyott*, edited by Reginald W. Jeffery, (London: Archibald Constable, 1907), I, 127.
- ⁷ *Rejected Addresses*, edited by Andrew Boyle, after James Smith and Horace Smith (London: Constable & Co., 1929), p. 83.
- ⁸ Henry Stapleton, *Heirs Without Title* (1974), pp. 5-10.
- ⁹ As No. 3, above.
- ¹⁰ J. H. Hubback and Edith C. Hubback, *Jane Austen's Sailor Brothers* (London: John Lane, 1906), p. 122. See also entry for Sir Charles Paget, *Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by Sidney Lee (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1895), XLIII, 49.
- ¹¹ Deidre Le Faye, *Jane Austen: a Family Record* (London: The British Library, 1989), p. 168.
- ¹² *Dictionary of National Biography*, XLIII, 248-50, entry for John Parker (1772-1840).
- ¹³ *Heirs Without Title*, p. 13.
- ¹⁴ *Saltram* (The National Trust, 1990), p. 76.
- ¹⁵ Maggie Lane, *Jane Austen's Family* (London: Robert Hale, 1984), p. 133.
- ¹⁶ George Holbert Tucker, *A Goodly Heritage* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1983), p. 147.
- ¹⁷ *Heirs Without Title*, pp. 20 and 21.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1 and 2.
- ¹⁹ *Saltram* (The National Trust, 1990), p. 61.
- ²⁰ *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford*, edited by A. G. L'Estrange (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), I, 241. See also Deirdre Le Fay (No. 11, above), p. 168.