

Oxfordshire

THE POWYSES' SOCIAL ROUND

1788

August 20th: We went to my mother's at Reading for the race-time. Miss Ewer met us there. The races not good, the balls tolerably full, considering how many families at this season leave their seats in the country for the different watering-places now in vogue. The middle day went to the play, Thornton's Company being then in town.

August 29th: Returned to Fawley, where Mr Ewer met us; we went to see the Druid's Temple that General Conway has just put up at Park Place; it was brought from Jersey, being a present to the General from the people of that island [*where Conway was Governor*] Went to pay a visit to the Birch's, St Leonard's Hill near Windsor, a place they had purchas'd this summer. An excellent house and pretty situation ... saw the castle, where are great improvements since I was last there

19th October: On Friday began our Winter Henley ball, and was a very full one, the whole neighbouring families making it a point to attend. Got home about four, as there is always a supper and dancing after.

We were very gay this autumn, having a very tolerable set of strollers [*actors*] at Henley; most of the ladies bespoke plays, as Lady Ailesbury, Mrs Damer, both Mrs Freemans, Mrs Fanshawe [*of Shiplake*], Miss Grote [*of Badgemore House*], myself etc, and as all the families attended each other's nights, we had very crowded houses, which lasted all that moon.

December 12th: Our fourth and last winter assembly (Henley), which ended very brilliantly.

1795

May 10th: the weather again very cold. The last day of our stay in London with our kind friends London life now is every evening from card-party to card-party, where the heat of the room is hardly bearable, which, with the terrible late hours of the present time, makes one not the least wonder that most people are complaining of bad health.

Mr Powys and I return'd to Fawley, I cannot say (tho' in the country), to still life, for except in the most important point of late hours, our most agreeable and social neighbourhood never suffer their friends to pass a day solo.

June 9th: At the course at Ascot Races. The Royal family there, but being indifferent weather, did not get out of their carriages.

July 29th: We had a water-party with the Freemans of Fawley Court, who have a delightful boat, with awning, and every convenience of curtains etc, to secure one from bad weather. We set off for Clifden Spring. Took up Mr and Mrs Law from Culham

Court. It was too cold to dine as usual on the turf, so got out and walk'd while everything in the boat was got ready for dinner. We had all a curiosity to see the ruins of the once magnificent Clifden House, so we set off, and mounted a very steep hill; the whole fabric, except one wing, a scene of ruin The fire at Clifden was on May 20th. We din'd at Mrs Freeman's at Henley Park that night ... On returning to Fawley Rectory, we saw the roof fall in

August 28th: A fishing party with the Coopers. Took a cold dinner to Mr Freeman's island [*Temple Island, in the Thames*].

1799

January 3rd: On this evening, Lady Malmesbury gave a ball at Park Place. The company was to be there at nine. There were seventy-five of us, about seventeen couple of dancers; twenty-one in the house, Lord Grantham and his mother, Lord and Lady Lavington, etc; cards in one room, and the dancing in the library; tea, orgeat, lemonade, cakes etc brought round every half hour. At one, supper was announced in the room out of the library

February 1st: It continued snowing, and was so deep we were much alarmed for Cooper on his journey, as he had promised to write; but the Oxford mail had been stopped that day, a circumstance that had not happened for thirteen years.

February 3rd: Snow continued, but we were happy in having a letter from Cooper to say he was got safe back to Oxford, having been forced to walk many miles ... There was no church on the Sunday at Harpsden or Fawley, as no one could get to either. The icicles on the trees hanging down was a most beautiful sight, when the sun shone on them.

February 4th: A hard frost. Cooper came by the Oxford stage On the 19th the floods on the Thames, and Loddon, from our windows, was quite astonishing.

March 28th: Mr Powys and I went to Hardwick on our way to Bath. Reached Bath on the 29th.

April 29th: The Prince of Wales was at Bath when we were. He was not very popular, from the company he brought with him – Mr Sheridan's son, and Mr Day. The latter's great merit seem'd to be that he could drink at a sitting two bottles more than anyone The amiable Lady Nelson, who as usual was at Bath with her father-in-law, had some music sent her from Russia endeavouring to be expressive of her lord's victories. She sent it to Ranzini, and some of the opera musicians came from London to perform it. The great ballroom was the place fixed upon, and there were about one thousand three hundred people

May 4th: We left Bath. We wished to return home, as we had receiv'd a letter lately from our son Thomas to inform us he was going to add another daughter to our family...

August 26th: Dined at Fawley Court, to hear the two famous musicians, the Leanders, play on the French horn, who Mrs Freeman had down for a week, and invited the neighbouring families round, in different parties every day. It certainly was a very high entertainment.

November 11th: The Gentleman's Club, at Dixon's [*the Red Lion*], Henley. (First meeting of the year.)

Extracted from Emily Climenson (ed.), Passages from the Diaries of Mrs Philip Lybbe Powys of Hardwick House, Oxon, AD 1756 to 1808 (1899)

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