

= Sabrina Sidney =

Sabrina Bicknell (1757 ? 8 September 1843) , better known as Sabrina Sidney , was a British foundling girl taken in when she was 12 by author Thomas Day , who wanted to mould her into his perfect wife . Day had been struggling to find a wife who would share his ideology and had been rejected by a number of women . He decided to educate two girls in the style of Jean @-@ Jacques Rousseau 's book Emile , or On Education , without any frivolities .

In 1769 , Day and his barrister friend John Bicknell chose Sabrina and another girl , Lucretia , from orphanages and deceitfully declared they would be indentured to Day 's friend Richard Lovell Edgeworth . Day took the girls to France to begin Rousseau 's methods of education in isolation . After a short time he returned to Lichfield with only Sabrina , having deemed Lucretia inappropriate for his experiment . He used unusual techniques to try to increase her fortitude , such as firing blanks at her clothes , dropping hot wax on her arms and having her wade into a lake fully dressed .

When Sabrina reached her teenage years , Day was persuaded by Edgeworth that his ideal wife experiment had failed and he should send her away , as it was inappropriate for Day to live with her unchaperoned . Sabrina then had a number of moves between boarding school , a dressmaker family , before eventually being employed as Day 's housekeeper . Having seen changes in Sabrina , Day proposed marriage , though he soon called this off when she did not follow his strict instructions and again sent her away , this time to a boarding house where she later found work as a lady 's companion .

In 1783 , Bicknell sought her out and proposed marriage , telling her the truth of Day 's experiment . Horrified , she confronted Day in a series of letters ; he admitted the truth but refused to apologise . Sabrina married Bicknell , and the couple had two children before his death in 1787 . Sabrina went on to work with schoolmaster Charles Burney , managing his schools .

In 1804 , Anna Seward published a book about Sabrina 's upbringing . Edgeworth followed up with his memoirs , in which he claimed Sabrina loved Day . Sabrina herself , on the other hand , said she was miserable with Day and that he treated her as a slave .

= = Early life = =

Sabrina was born in 1757 in Clerkenwell , London and was left at the Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children (more commonly known as the Foundling Hospital) in London on 24 May 1757 by an anonymous individual . The individual left a note which explained that her baptismal name was Manima Butler and that she had been baptised in St James 's Church , Clerkenwell . Her name was likely a misspelling of Monimia but there were no baptismal records for any spelling of the name at the parish .

One of the requirements of the Foundling Hospital was that babies were to be less than six months old at time of admittance , but the hospital did not keep more accurate records of age . Another requirement was that foundlings were given a new name and a reference number , so Sabrina became Girl Ann Kingston no . 4759 . She was taken in by a wet nurse , Mary Penfold , who brought her to Wotton , Surrey , where she remained until 1759 , when she was two years old . Although it was usual for foundlings to remain with their wet nurse until the age of 5 or 6 , the Foundling Hospital had received an influx of new babies and moved many children who no longer required nursing , including Sabrina , to the Shrewsbury branch of the Foundling Hospital . The Shrewsbury building was not completed until 1765 , so in the meantime Sabrina and another foundling were cared for by a nurse , Ann Casewell , at Casewell 's home .

= = Day 's experiment = =

Thomas Day was a bachelor who had inherited his fortune from his father when he was an infant . Described as having a pock @-@ marked face through smallpox , a brooding personality and short temper , Day attended Corpus Christi College , Oxford to study philosophy . It was there that he decided to dedicate his life to becoming a virtuous man , shunning luxury and focusing on altruism .

Around the same time , he developed a list of requirements for his future wife , that she should be subservient and pure , but also able to discuss philosophy and live without frivolities . These high standards , combined with his generally unlikeable personality , meant that his advances were rejected by multiple women whilst at university .

He was introduced to the work of Jean @-@ Jacques Rousseau by his friend Richard Lovell Edgeworth and the pair shared a particular affinity for his work on education in the book *Emile , or On Education* . On leaving Oxford , Edgeworth and Day attempted to teach Edgeworth 's first son , Dick , in the style of *Emile* , a learning by doing approach . Accompanying Edgeworth to Ireland as Dick 's tutor , Day fell in love and was spurned first by Edgeworth 's sister and then by at least three further women in quick succession .

Day came to the conclusion that he would be unable to find a wife that would meet his high standards and largely blamed women 's education for this . Inspired by Rousseau 's character of Sophie in *Emile , or On Education* , he resolved to " create " his ideal wife by raising her from adolescence , using the techniques laid out in the book . Day was approaching financial independence , where he would have full access to the money left to him , and conspired with his barrister friend , John Bicknell , to find two girls who could be taken into his care to be groomed as a perfect wife .

= = = Choosing the girls = = =

Just after his 21st birthday in June 1769 , Thomas Day and John Bicknell travelled to the Shrewsbury Orphan Hospital to choose the first girl for his experiment . Sabrina was 12 years old at the time , described as " a clear auburn brunette , with darker eyes more glowing bloom and chestnut tresses " . She was slender , had long eyelashes and a melodious voice . Although Day was struggling to choose a girl for the experiment , Bicknell quickly picked her out . The pair did not tell the orphanage secretary , Samuel Magee , about the planned experiment . Instead they told him that she was to be indentured as a servant at Richard Lovell Edgeworth 's country house in Berkshire , waiving the £ 4 fee they would have received for the apprenticeship . In line with the orphanage 's requirements that responsibility would be held by a married man , Edgeworth would hold legal responsibility for Sabrina , despite him not being present nor even aware of the arrangement .

The apprenticeship was approved by the governors of the orphanage on 30 June 1769 , and Sabrina was collected by Day and Bicknell on 17 August . She was brought to lodgings in London , where she met Edgeworth for the first time . Day changed her name to Sabrina Sidney : Sabrina , the Latin name for the River Severn , which her orphanage looked out onto ; and Sidney after Algernon Sidney , one of Day 's heroes . Day became a benefactor , and subsequently governor , of the Foundling Hospital and on 20 September 1769 , he chose another girl for his experiment , whom he renamed Lucretia .

Day had Bicknell draw up a contract to define the terms of his indenture of the girls . Within one year , he would choose which girl he intended to marry , the other would be given as an apprentice to a woman in a trade , along with a fee of £ 100 (equivalent to £ 12 @,@ 514 in 2015) . He would give a further £ 400 (equivalent to £ 50 @,@ 056 in 2015) upon the girl 's marriage or if she were to start her own business . He would marry his intended bride or , if he decided not to , would gift her the sum of £ 500 (equivalent to £ 62 @,@ 570 in 2015) . Bicknell would act as guarantor for the contract .

= = = Education in France = = =

Day wished for the girls to be isolated from external influences while he educated them . As such , at the beginning of November 1769 he decided to move them to France . There is also a possibility that he did this to protect himself from the legal ramifications of his experiment as well as societal gossip . The trio travelled over 600 miles to Avignon , renting a house in le quartier des fusteries . The girls could speak no French and Day employed no English @-@ speaking servants to be sure

that he would be the only person to influence them .

Day focussed on their education , in the style of Emile , or On Education . He expanded on their teachings from the Foundling hospital in reading and basic arithmetic , and he also taught them how to write . He believed that the girls should be able to manage the house , so they were charged with cooking and cleaning as well as other house work . Finally , he wanted to be able to debate complex concepts with them , so he taught them rudimentary theories in physics and geography , tasking them with observing the changing of the seasons and recording details of sunrises and sunsets . He also imparted Rousseau 's philosophy 's contempt for luxury on them .

Edgeworth received correspondence from Day whilst he was in France . He was told that both girls were passionate about their studies , Sabrina more so . He also wrote of anecdotes , such as a boat trip taken by the trio on the Rhone where the boat overturned and Day singlehanded rescued both girls as they could not swim . Day also wrote of an incident where he had challenged a French Army officer to a duel , even bringing out a set of dueling pistols , for simply conversing with the girls . The officer apologised and explained he did not mean any offence , calming the situation .

Accounts by 19th century historians explain that Day eventually became impatient when the girls became bored of their lessons and would squabble ; that he also spent a significant period nursing them through a bout of smallpox . These accounts may have been exaggerated as both girls had been inoculated against smallpox and their strict upbringing would have meant they would not have rebelled excessively .

= = = Return to England = = =

Whilst in France , Day struggled over which girl to choose to bring forward with the experiment . Both were beautiful ; Lucretia was more cheerful although Sabrina was more reserved and studious . The group returned to England in spring 1770 , by which time Day had finally decided that he would carry on with Sabrina 's training . Edgeworth explained that each of Day 's projects with Sabrina had been successful , however he had come to the conclusion that Lucretia was " invincibly stupid " . Day apprenticed Lucretia to a milliner in Ludgate Hill and took Sabrina to Stowe House in Lichfield , where her training could continue . The household would have had no more than a couple of servants , leaving Sabrina to maintain the four floors of the house . Her tutoring continued at the same time , with one @-@ to @-@ one lessons from Day on a variety of subjects .

Day also extended his tutoring to fortify Sabrina against hardship , inspired by Rousseau 's Emile , or On Education . The book explains the concept of ' negative education ' , i.e. protecting a person from vices rather than teaching them virtues . Day interpreted this to mean that submitting Sabrina to tests of endurance would help to create a woman with hardened nerves . One example given by Rousseau was helping Emile become accustomed to explosions such as fireworks by firing pistols with small amounts of powder near him , gradually increasing the amount of powder . Day , on the other hand , fired a pistol loaded only with powder directly at Sabrina 's petticoat , without her knowledge that there was no shot in it .

In an attempt to increase her resistance to pain he would drop hot sealing wax on her back and arms or stick pins in her , commanding her not to cry out . He would test her ability to keep secrets by telling her that his life was in danger and she should tell no one . To increase her resistance to the cold , Day instructed Sabrina to wade into Stowe Pool until the water reached her neck , then lie in the nearby meadow until her clothes and hair had dried in the sun . Finally , to test her resistance to luxury , he gave her a big box of handmade silk clothes and had her throw them in the fire . Day had limited success with these techniques . It seems that she could voluntarily have hot wax on her arm without flinching , but she told others of his secrets and screamed whenever he shot his gun at her .

During their time at Stowe House , Day introduced Sabrina to the local members of the intellectual circle , including the priest at Lichfield Cathedral , Thomas Seward . Seward and his wife hoped that Day might be a suitor for their daughter , Anna , and Anna 's writings of the time show her interest in Day . Anna was also enchanted by Sabrina , who became the link between Day and the Seward family . Anna also took a keen interest in Sabrina 's story , as her father had taken in Honora Sneyd

when Sneyd 's mother had died .

= = Moving away from Day = =

By 1770 , Sabrina began to question Day 's techniques and complain about the chores she had to perform . In December , the propriety of Day 's arrangement with Sabrina was being questioned by the local community , especially Anna Seward . Edgeworth joined Day for Christmas at Stowe , and convinced Day that his experiment had been unsuccessful . He also persuaded Day that Sabrina was too old to remain living with him without a chaperone . Day appeared to accept Edgeworth 's point of view , as he paid for Sabrina to attend Sutton Coldfield boarding school in Warwickshire early in 1771 . She remained at the boarding school for three years , including weekends and holidays , with infrequent visits from Day . The school normally focused on preparing high society daughters for marriage , with subjects such as needlework and the arts . Day , however , stipulated that she was to be taught academic subjects but should not dance or learn music .

In 1774 , Day visited Sabrina to inform her that she would be apprenticed to the Parkinsons , a family of dressmakers , as Day believed the profession would not expose her to temptation . She was delivered to the family under the stipulation that she should work hard at chores and be denied luxuries . The Parkinsons , however , treated Sabrina well , to the extent that Day later chastised them for not instilling ' industry and frugality ' in her . Less than a year later the Parkinsons ' business went bankrupt , leaving Sabrina without an apprenticeship and without anywhere to live . Day arranged for her to stay with his friends , the Keir family , and implied that she could take on the role of housekeeper at his own home . Day again considered Sabrina , who was now 18 , as a potential wife , but did not let her know of his intentions , nor that her upbringing was part of his experiment .

= = Broken engagement = = =

Over the next few months , Day returned to moulding Sabrina to meet his requirements for the ideal woman , choosing what she would wear and pushing his ideas of frugality upon her . Sabrina took on all the ideas willingly and Day believed he had finally created a woman that would meet all his requirements . Day was so confident that he talked openly of marrying Sabrina , despite the fact that she was unaware of his intentions and eventually one of Day 's friends let her know that he hoped to marry her . Sabrina confronted Day about the rumours and he admitted they were true , neglecting to mention that he had hoped to marry her since the day he met her .

Sabrina did not refuse the proposal , so Day planned the wedding whilst she considered it further and eventually agreed . During the preparations Day left Sabrina with friends for a few days , giving her strict instructions on what she should wear . When he returned to find her in an outfit which did not meet his requirements , he flew into a rage and Sabrina fled for a few hours , so Day called off the engagement . Sabrina was sent to a boarding house in Birmingham and given a stipend of £ 50 per annum (equivalent to £ 5 @ , @ 674 in 2015) , resolving to never see her again .

= = Marriage = =

After her engagement to Day ended , Sabrina spent 8 years at boarding houses around Birmingham . Day met and went on to marry an heiress , Esther Milnes in 1778 . Sabrina met an apothecary , Jarvis Wardley , who proposed marriage in an acrostic poem . Sabrina contacted Day for advice , and he told her in absolute terms not to marry Wardley , even writing an acrostic poem for her to use in turning him down . In 1783 , she had become a lady 's companion in Newport , Shropshire It was there that she was approached by Day 's friend , the man who helped choose her at the foundling hospital : John Bicknell . Bicknell was single and had spent the majority of his earnings from his law career in gambling dens . He had not paid much attention to Sabrina since selecting her with Day , but immediately proposed marriage .

Sabrina again consulted with Day on the prospective engagement . Day did not approve , claiming

the age difference was too great , despite the fact that Bicknell was just two years older than Day . Bicknell , however , decided to tell Sabrina the truth about the experiment , that she was hand @-@ picked to be Day 's wife from childhood , and that all of Day 's actions were designed to further his goal of turning her into the ideal bride . Horrified , Sabrina wrote to Day to confront him on the accusations , Day admitted the truth but refused to apologise . After a series of letters , Day gave his consent to the marriage , telling her that the letter would be his final communication with her .

Bicknell and Sabrina married on 16 April 1784 at St Philip 's Cathedral , Birmingham . On the same day , Day paid the £ 500 wedding dowry he had stipulated in the contract he had set up with Bicknell , ending his £ 50 per year stipend . The couple bought a house in Shenfield and had two children , John Laurens Bicknell and Henry Edgeworth Bicknell . Bicknell carried on with his gambling habits , squandering the remaining money over the following three years . On 27 March 1787 , after just three years of marriage , John Bicknell died of a paralytic stroke .

Sabrina and her two children were now left without an income . Day sent her a new stipend of £ 30 per year , which was matched by Edgeworth . In addition , her husband 's barrister friends raised £ 800 for the widow and her children . Sabrina found a role as housekeeper for Charles Burney , as well as general manager of his schools in Chiswick , Hammersmith and Greenwich . It was at his Greenwich school that Sabrina 's own children were educated .

Day 's widow , Esther , carried on paying Sabrina 's allowance after his death in 1789 , and Sabrina carried on her work with Burney until she was 68 . By this time she was living in a four storey house in Gloucester Circus , Greenwich , with her own servants . On 8 September 1843 , Sabrina died at her home of a severe asthma attack . She was buried at Kensal Green cemetery .

= = Legacy = =

Sabrina asked her friends to not discuss her past as she believed her humble beginnings and Day 's treatment of her would tarnish her reputation . Anna Seward , however , wrote about Sabrina 's upbringing in her 1804 work , *Memoirs on the Life of Dr. Darwin* . As Seward publicly identified Sabrina in the book , it was criticised by the press and Sabrina 's son John was very angry to learn of his mother 's past . In his 1820 memoirs , Edgeworth stated his belief that Sabrina and Day made a good match and that she loved him . Sabrina , however , disagreed with these accounts , stating that she never loved Day , that he had made her miserable and she was effectively a slave .

Sabrina 's education has been compared to George Bernard Shaw 's story of *Pygmalion* , and strong parallels are drawn to two books in 1871 , Henry James 's *Watch and Ward* and Anthony Trollope 's *Orley Farm* . Wendy Moore 's 2013 book *How to Create the Perfect Wife* and the 2015 BBC Radio 4 staged drama *The Imperfect Education of Sabrina Sidney* tell the story of her life .