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‘My dearest Tussy’: coping with separation during the Napoleonic Wars (the Fremantle Papers, 1800–14)¹

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The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1802, 1803–15) saw thousands of naval and military families separated for extended periods of time. While social scientists and medical practitioners have focused on modern military and naval wives’ responses to their husbands’ lengthy and/or repeated deployments, especially during war time, we still know relatively little about how their counterparts coped with separation in earlier wars.² As now, they experienced the anxiety of parting, loneliness of separation, vicissitudes of communication and fearful uncertainty of outcomes for their loved ones. Moreover, their separations were longer (three-year deployments were not unusual), and communication was much slower and sporadic at best. Many women – particularly sailors’ wives – also struggled with financial insecurity. The Royal Navy’s remittance system, established during the Seven Years’ War (1756–63), enabled sailors to allot a portion of their salaries to their wives or mothers, but it was little used until modified to allow monthly payments in the 1790s.³

N.A.M. Rodger, writing in 2004, deplored the lack of research into the experiences of women ashore and argued that until this ‘enormous void of ignorance’ was filled ‘the social history of the Navy will never be complete’.⁴ The gap is now beginning to be filled. Research by historians such as Margarete Lincoln, Cindy McCreery, Louise Carter, Jennine Hurl-Eamon, Patricia Lin, Helen Doe and Melanie Holihead, among others, has begun to recover the diverse histories of naval women ashore and presents a complicated and diverse picture of naval women’s life experiences.⁵ Taken together, their work suggests that eighteenth-century naval women responded to separation in broadly similar ways to their modern counterparts. Age, class, status, education and financial circumstances all shaped their experiences; so too did personal traits of

intelligence, optimism, resilience and resourcefulness.⁶ Those who coped most effectively, as with their modern counterparts, took problem-solving rather than emotional approaches to their husbands' absences.⁷ Successful eighteenth-century naval officers' wives, such as Frances Boscawen and Henrietta (Henny) Rodney, for instance, accepted their situations, planned ways forward, took action to solve problems and kept themselves busy.⁸

Elizabeth (Betsey) Wynne Fremantle (1778–1857) was one of these, and the Fremantle papers provide us with a case study that illuminates the multiple demands – emotional, practical and socio-political – that separation placed on women in ambitious naval families. A lifelong diarist, Betsey's journals and the Fremantles' letters to each other survive for 1800–14. They serve as a testimony to a working naval marriage carried out largely at one remove against the backdrop of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Thomas Francis Fremantle (1765–1819) returned to sea in 1800 after a prolonged recovery from injuries sustained in 1797. For approximately eleven of the next fourteen years, the Fremantles were separated, leaving Betsey responsible for the running of her house, estate and family, and for forwarding her husband's career and the family's best interests. Their separation only ended in 1814, when Betsey and the children left Swanbourne to join Thomas Francis on Jersey.

As a couple, the Fremantles were representative of many ambitious naval couples of the period: they were energetic, hard-working and committed – committed to each other, to his career and to their family's future advancement. Both shared a firm belief in the need to defeat Napoleon and the rightness of the British cause. Betsey, as the daughter of an Anglo-Italian country gentleman and his French wife who had actively supported the French Royalist cause, had spent her early adolescence with French royalist agents and *émigrés* in Switzerland. Fear of attacks from pro-Revolutionary mobs had then prompted the family to move to safety in the imperial city of Ratisbon in the mid-1790s. Finally, in 1797, the Wynnes fled the advancing French armies, racing from Florence to Livorno, where they were evacuated by the British navy. The Revolution and its subsequent wars had shaped Betsey's life and she had, from early adolescence, sided strongly with the British. For Thomas Francis, as a younger son of an English gentry family, who had been involved in the naval campaigns against the

French since the outbreak of the wars, the struggle against the French was personal as well as national. It offered him unprecedented opportunities for advancement, glory and economic gain. Each of the Fremantles therefore accepted that s/he had a part to play in a joint enterprise that demanded duty, service and sacrifice.⁹ They coped with separation imaginatively and practically. They sustained their relationship through a regular correspondence. Betsey wrote once or twice a week, sending her letters post-paid to Plymouth, or directly via naval connections. Thomas Francis responded in turn. Their letters are thus compendiums of personal and family news, gossip and discussions of shared concerns and plans. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they created a virtual family circle that bound ship to shore, ensuring that Thomas Francis continued to be included in the wider life of the family.

The remainder of this chapter considers the ways that the Fremantles – specifically, but not only, Betsey – coped with separation between 1800 and 1814. It considers the virtual family circle, explores their responses to loneliness and anxiety, and suggests that it was due to the Fremantles' commitment to each other, and especially to Betsey's positive practicality, her drive and social nous that the family was effectively embedded into the Buckinghamshire gentry community and retained its visibility in the naval and social circles, and that the Fremantle children were well prepared for their future roles. As such, it illustrates the multi-layered personal, emotional, practical and socio-political demands that separation placed upon naval officers' wives, and underlines the importance of personal character and social networking to family success.

Snapshots of separation

Two snapshots of separation, reconstructed from 1803 and 1812 respectively, set the scene and exemplify the multiplicity of threads that wove the Fremantles' separated lives together. On a quiet evening in December 1803, with *HMS Ganges* finally riding comfortably at anchor, its thirty-eight-year-old captain, Thomas Francis Fremantle, sat down to answer his wife Betsey's last letter. He had been up for the best part of thirty-six hours, most of it on deck, striving to prevent his ship from being driven on to the rocks in the face of a fierce winter gale. Bridging the miles between them with imaginative tenderness, he addressed Betsey by her nickname, his 'dearest Tussy', and commiserated with her on her bad cold:¹⁰ 'I...fancied I saw You suffering in

Your bed, wrapped up with handkerchfs and Night Caps'.¹¹ He teased her light-heartedly, calling her 'Mrs Crimper', before complimenting her on the state of the household accounts, which she sent him monthly. He then turned to their shared projects of family and estate. A domestic man, he was much concerned with the upbringing of their children (especially their sons, aged five, three and two). He was a younger son of a gentry family with a fortune and a reputation to make, and he was realistic about his sons' financial prospects. Consequently he warned Betsey yet again not to mollycoddle them: 'as they have to seek their fortunes in the great world *bring them up hardy*, that their Constitutions may not suffer hereafter.' Moving on to estate affairs, she was right to get Hawkins's cottage rethatched and if the villagers persisted in robbing the new trees of their supports she should threaten to stop donating coals for the poor. Finally, he added a plea of his own: could she please charm their neighbour into getting the new path and bridge completed?

Only then did he turn to his own situation. Betsey had sailed with him into battle in 1797, so he felt secure in confiding in her: 'I was so much Alarmed for the ship that I carried an immense press of Sail the Whole Night and never left the Deck for one minute – All the head was fairly washed away, and I was for a time under great apprehensions for the safety of the Ship'. The letter ended warmly, however, reinforcing the bonds between them:

pray Dearest Betsey do not torment Yourself about Money concerns, I am so satisfied of Your prudence that you many depend on my making up any deficiencies that may arise, and pray do not harass Yourself by thinking too much about it...do You my Dear Betsey go on as You have always done, which will be the greatest possible comfort to me, – peeper my Girls for me [kiss them], whip Charles and Henry, & tell Tom I hope he continues a good boy, that he is Obedient to his Mama and shews a good example to his Brothers and Sisters.

Nearly a decade later, in February 1812, the Fremantle family was complete: of the eight surviving children (five boys and three girls) Tom, the eldest, was thirteen and a highly promising scholar at Eton; Charles, eleven, was back at home briefly from the sea to recover from a fever and improve his French. Thomas Francis had risen to rear

admiral. Based in Sicily, he was in charge of securing the Adriatic. While still fiercely ambitious for himself and his family, he had had a good war. While his naval and diplomatic successes had been lauded and his career was firmly established, he had been at home for little more than three years in the last ten. This had necessitated sharing and delegation on his part, resulting in increased autonomy and independence on Betsey's. Over the years, their relationship had become more complementary. He had grown to trust in and rely upon her unflappability and solid good sense, while she – always his friend and lover – had gained confidence in her own judgment and become his full working partner.

Thus it was on the night of 4 February 1812 that Betsey wrote to her 'Dearest Husband'.¹² The fire in their small country house in Swanbourne, Buckinghamshire, had been lit and six of the children were already in bed. She numbered her letter in case any were lost in transit. This was no. 49.¹³ It had been a long time since August 1810, when Thomas Francis left for sea. She longed for his return and let him know that she missed him, but never whined or complained about his absence. Instead, she used her prose to bring the home and the children that he had not seen for years to life before his eyes.

'Emma & Charles' (then aged eleven and ten), she began, 'are making so intolerable a noise in *conversation* with their Cousin Fanny that I scarcely know what I am writing at this moment, luckily it has struck ten & I shall send them to Bed, when I hope to have a moment's peace.' Emma then interjected, taking the pen from her mother to plead her own case: 'Dear Papa, Indeed we are very agreeable company and I only wish you were here to make more noise but I must go to bed or else Mama will be in a pet.' Betsey then continued, crafting a vivid image of the children's lively antics, calling to mind familiar domestic objects and reminding him of his comfortable, well-worn family home and all who were awaiting him:

I often think that when you first return among us, you will be quite made *nervous* by the children after having been so long unaccustomed to their noise, & am surprised the doors still hold on their hinges & that the old *Green* carpet, which was almost threadbare when you went away still holds together it has many a patch, but I am determined to make it do until you come home. I wish

you could have witnessed my agony yesterday when Charles led in the Shetland Poney into the library I would not allow him to go through, for fear of *my carpet*, & insisted on the poor beast going out the way it came in through your dressing room, Emma almost in tears as she was certain the poney would break his legs, going down the steps, it certainly was a *dangerous leap*, but he went safe out of the House... You will scarcely believe that with all these riots & my eight rude children, I still contrive to keep the *rooms* in high order, but indeed it is the case... Indeed I think you will find everything as you left it, a little the worse for *Age*, neither you or I will look younger after three years absence, but our children improve daily in appearance & looking at them I quite forget that I myself am growing an old woman, I dance & play with them & you would be amused to see me become so active.

Betsey was thirty-three at the time.

After a discussion of local news and national politics, she returned to familial themes, addressing her husband's repeated concerns about his daughters' *tournure*. Thomas Francis feared that his girls, growing up in the country, might not acquire the easy ladylike carriage and elegance of movement that he deemed absolutely necessary for their future social success (and good marriages). Betsey had been brought up in courtly society on the Continent, where she had benefited from Italian and French dancing masters, and was more than capable of inculcating these social skills; however, she was adamant that her girls should be children as long as possible. She was particularly concerned that Emma, who was rapidly approaching menarche, had plenty of outdoor exercise: '[I am] so delighted to see her amuse herself like a perfect child that I let her fly her kite, & brush down her poney, provided she holds herself up like a *Gentlewoman* in the drawing room, & plays upon the Piano Forte, *à ma façon*, if you were here, you would do the same.' And, as with other decisions about the children, Betsey had the last word.

Loneliness and Anxiety

The Fremantles felt their separations deeply. When Thomas Francis left Swanbourne to take up command of *HMS Ganges* on 24 August 1800, Betsey was only twenty and

had three children under the age of three. Born in Venice, and brought up largely in Italy and Switzerland, she had only returned to England as a young wife in 1798. She knew more about courts than counties and, although a skilled household manager, had little experience of farms and estates. Nor did she have extensive support networks: her parents had died in 1799; her three sisters were still teenagers and living with guardians in London; and her female networks, especially among the local gentry women in Buckinghamshire, were commensurately recent.

It would have been surprising had Betsey not felt anxious and alone under such circumstances. She characteristically refrained from complaining in her letters, however, and had no patience with officers' wives like Mrs Blackwood who bewailed her husband's absence: 'had I begun to lament in the same way we must have sung a dismal *ditty* together.'¹⁴ The emotional wrench of parting was very real, though. Naval officers were often summoned to sea at short notice, and Thomas Francis's departures were no exception. In 1800, he left for sea after only three days' warning, leaving Betsey feeling bereft: 'I need not say I never felt so unhappy during all my life as I did this evening'.¹⁵ It was the first time since their marriage in 1797 that they had been separated. Her words at the end of her first day alone echo across the centuries: 'I feel quite at a loss & wretched alone – poor little Tom distressed me many a time in the course of the day enquiring when his Papa would come home again –'.¹⁶ Never one to mope, Betsey coped by keeping busy. By the end of her second day alone she was already more positive: 'I employed myself in different ways & spent the day better than I expected.'¹⁷

As with their modern counterparts, the Fremantles found repeated deployments difficult. Neither was happy when Fremantle left again for sea in 1803: 'He really goes to sea quite *à contre coeur* as he was now so comfortably settled here, and I feel not a little anxiety at being left alone with five such young children and so much to manage.'¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, they took every possible opportunity to see each other. When Thomas Francis docked in Portsmouth but was unable to return to Swanbourne, Betsey would scoop up several children and post to join him.¹⁹ These precious moments were inevitably followed by renewed separations. Thomas Francis captured the raw emotion of an unexpectedly abruptly ended visit in 1805 in a letter marked 'not to be opened until five or six Miles from Portsmouth':

My feelings are too poignant to suffer me to come near You & those poor Children whose absence from me I shall deplore until we next meet, – think well and seriously how much I am annoyed in every way, and You I am sure will compassionate [*sic*] me, however submit I must, and I live only in the hopes that this accursed War cannot last long or keep me any great length of time from all & every thing I hold dear in this world keep up your spirits and be assured how faithfully and affect^{ly} I remain Your loving husband.²⁰

From their earliest separations, Thomas Francis imagined himself into Betsey's activities at home – 'I suppose Swanbourne is quite gay now and that all your roses are nearly in blossom, I should like to peep in upon You whilst You are perambulating in Your parterre'.²¹ In turn, he sent her details of naval actions and ship life, enlivened by the antics of his pets or servant, the state of his ship band or his ideas for redecorating his cabin. He was always at his most lonely when bored and cruising: 'I do nothing but take snuff and read Shakespeare when I am off the Deck'.²²

The distance between them was the most difficult to bear when there was a family crisis, as there was at the beginning of their last and longest separation in 1810. When Thomas Francis was promoted to rear admiral in early August, both he and Betsey knew that it was his duty to return to active service: 'there is no remedy, & we must get reconciled to an Event, which I trust will lead to future comfort & the welfare of our Family'.²³ By 20 August, he was gone. The timing, however, could hardly have been worse. Betsey was a week away from giving birth to her ninth and last child, and the doctors had ordered their seriously ill five-year-old daughter, Louisa, to Brighton. Not only did Betsey's pregnancy prevented her from accompanying Louisa (she had to send her with a trusted servant), but she also had the added stress of preparing ten-year-old Charles, mentally and materially, to leave home for the first time and join his father at sea. Unsurprisingly, the Fremantles' correspondence reflected these strains. Thomas Francis's relief was palpable when he learned of her safe confinement: 'I need not tell You how much my happiness in life depends on Your doing well, and the horror that appears at the contrary for my poor Children makes me shudder.'²⁴ Believing that Louisa was gradually improving, Betsey sought to reassure him:

‘nothing is wanting but Yourself to make us completely happy’.²⁵ Only a week later, however, she sent him a brief, anguished – and tellingly unnumbered – note informing him that Louisa had suddenly sickened and died.²⁶ By this time, however, Thomas Francis had sailed. When the news reached him nearly three weeks later, he was stunned, even though the doctors had warned him (though pointedly not Betsey) of the gravity of Louisa’s condition. His response, which he knew would take weeks to reach her, captured his impotence and pain; like his sister Marianne, who had recently lost one of her children, he felt dazed:

My Dearest and best of Women, how am I to begin a letter to You in answer to the very melancholy one I received two days ago, naming the death of our poor Louisa? since the arrival of the Hibernia I have not had the courage to put my hand to paper, and the anxiety I feel about You, as well as the distress of mind for our severe loss, has made me at times feel like poor Marianne in a state of stupor.²⁷

Betsey’s own distress over Louisa’s death was exacerbated by her concern that Thomas Francis would only have Charles with him to bear the news: ‘had we been together at such a period, I think we might have better Supported this Severe blow’.²⁸ While she had returned to her estate business, her hobbies and to teaching her daughters French and piano by mid-November, her spirits only really began to revive after she received her first letters from him late that month. They reassured her that he was in good company on his new ship and so busy as to be fully occupied.²⁹

Fortunately, both the adult and surviving young Fremantles were generally sturdily healthy, so serious concerns about health seldom arose. What is perhaps significantly more surprising, given that the Fremantles were separated by war, is how little anxiety either she or Thomas Francis expressed about his safety. Whether this was because she/they chose not to share her/their fears, or because Betsey had spent enough time with the fleet at war to understand his situation, or because her Catholic faith sustained her, is impossible to determine. This is not to say that she was unconcerned, or that he did not appreciate the danger he was in. His letters to her after the battle of Copenhagen are a case in point. As a naval officer in the model of Lord Nelson, Thomas Francis knew just how important it was to be his own marketing man: it was

far too easy for a naval officer to be forgotten while he was away at sea, especially if he could not count upon having his praises sung in his admiral's despatches. Thomas Francis consequently wrote Betsey two distinctly different letters for two very different audiences on 5 April 1801. The first was a professional officer's account containing a plan of the attack, the orders given by Nelson and the news that Nelson had made his ship his second in the action. It was manly, martial and matter-of-fact. It was also designed to be copied by Betsey and shared among 'your County acquaintance'.³⁰ Enclosed with this letter was another that was intensely personal, a post-battle outpouring of emotion:

I went through the action without reflecting *much* on those who were so much interested in my wellfare[*sic*] but when every thing was over I could not suppress tears which at this time again flow from my eyes, – You know my regard & attachment to You, which Your very proper Conduct so justly entitles You to, I remain so perfectly satisfied with every thing You have done & am so assured of Your judgement in Whatever relates to Yourself and the Children that I shall not enter into any detail, Whatever I possess in this World is at Your devotion, make Yourself happy & easy, & do not become too parsimonious.³¹

The only time that Betsey appears to have been truly anxious for Thomas Francis's safety was with regard to the Battle of Trafalgar. She knew that the fleet was preparing for battle, as Thomas Francis had written on 1 October 1805 of his preparations and his pleasure that Nelson had promised him 'my old place in the line of battle, which is *his second*'.³² News of the battle reached her after breakfast on the morning of 7 November, when her servant burst in to tell her that there had been a 'most dreadful action' off Cadiz with 'Nelson & several captains killed'. This left her in 'undescribable misery', but only until the arrival of the post later that morning, which brought a reassuring letter from Lord Garlies, an old naval friend at the Admiralty, 'who congratulated me on Fremantle's safety & the conspicuous share he had in the Victory'. The mail also brought congratulatory notes from Lord and Lady Buckingham. Buckingham, who was Thomas Francis's patron, also sent copies of the Gazette so that Betsey could read the latest news of the action.³³

A Virtual Family Circle

Betsey used her accounts of the children and her colourful descriptions of their activities to entice her husband in to her world, making him part of a virtual family circle and letting him know that he was loved and missed: ‘I must say something of my brats, the inexhaustible Subject & certainly the pleasantest to us.’³⁴ She was especially good at depicting intimate scenes in domestic spaces that he knew well, and in capturing the children as characters. Her letters from 1810–11 are illustrative. She was especially pleased with Tom, who was excelling at Eton: ‘Really Tom is perfection if you could see how very attentive he is, to me, full of spirits & fun & still always tractable & obedient, you would be delighted with him, & he grows remarkably handsome.’³⁵ Harry was rather a rough diamond; time at home, away from his Brighton schoolmates, had done wonders for his manners though.³⁶ Talking about Billy, who was rather a handful, gave her the opportunity to remind him that he was needed. Billy was, she wrote, ‘always out & runs away from us all; he wants you much to keep him in order’.³⁷ The baby, Stephen, whom Thomas Francis had never seen, had Billy’s big dark eyes.³⁸ He was much like their other boys in character, too: ‘the boys are all so grave, Stephen seldom laughs, & is Just such another serious looking little man as Billy.’³⁹

Thomas Francis had a decidedly soft spot for his daughters, and Betsey’s depictions of them – especially his favourite, Emma, and hers, Cecilia (Cicey) – were always particularly evocative: ‘I wish you could see Your Daughter [Emma] at this moment, pasting some papers in the inside of her writing desk, where she unfortunately spilt some ink this morn^g[?]. She is *vrai fille de son père* & is working & slaving as you would yourself.’⁴⁰ Betsey was pleased with Emma’s progress: both she and Augusta read French with as much ease as English and both, she told her husband, spoke French with good accents. They were also continuing with their Italian. Moreover, Thomas Francis’s mother had been very taken with Emma at their last visit: ‘She finds her improved in every thing, and the cunning puss, was so *complaisant* & attentive, that she has quite won her GrandMama’s heart.’⁴¹ Most importantly, Emma and Cecilia, who had only been a toddler when he left, were great fun:

I find Cecilia more like Emma in manners & drollery than any of the other Children... Emma is at this moment singing all your vulgar Songs, & regretting you did not leave her the words of the one beginning with, "I that once was a ploughman, a sailor am now." I can[not] [paper torn] say that I regret it much, but I wish you [were] [paper torn] here to sing it to her.⁴²

Cecilia, too, proved to be a singer. Betsey's description of the toddler in bed with her, singing merrily, conjured up the warm intimacy of their bedroom:

Cecilia amused me singing all last night God save the King, Oh What can the Matter be! – & a multitude of Songs, She often keeps me awake for several hours in the night but She is Such a fussy little puss & dear little darling that I cannot Send her back to her own bed. My whole Fremantle tribe send their love to you.⁴³

A year later, Cecilia, then aged three, gave Betsey another excuse to remind him, obliquely, of how much he was missed: 'She cannot understand why you are never at home, & says her Papa must come home *one day*, this day will certainly be a day of happiness to us all.'⁴⁴

Both of the Fremantles were intensely interested in ensuring that their children had the best educations possible. For the girls, this meant schooling at home under Betsey's watchful eye and, c. 1810–11, the direction of a French governess. From 1812 onwards, Betsey took on these duties herself, supplementing her own efforts with specialist dancing masters and trips to London for social polish during the Season. Once Thomas Francis was settled in Sicily, she lobbied him to allow her to join him, arguing that the girls were at a stage when they would benefit immensely from a Continental experience.⁴⁵ Thomas Francis was tempted in 1812, but decided against it, despite encouragement from his brother William. It would have been a major family upheaval for only one year's residence (as he expected to return to England in 1813), but it may also have been because the reputation of the Sicilian court was so bad that he did not wish to expose his daughters to it.⁴⁶

Betsey and Thomas Francis regularly discussed their sons' educations and plans for their futures, but, as the person on the ground, much of the final decision-making was hers. She regularly sought male expertise, though, and over the years had developed strong working relationships with Thomas Francis's childless brother, William, and with the family's patron, Lord Buckingham. William, who was a courtier and politician, and lived near Windsor (thus close to Eton), acted effectively as a surrogate father to the two intellectual, non-naval Fremantle boys, Tom and William (Billy); whereas Lord Buckingham took an active interest in the naval Fremantle boys, especially Charles. When Charles was sent home from the Mediterranean after an illness in the summer of 1811, he arrived while Betsey was in Scotland visiting her married sisters. Lord Buckingham promptly wrote to tell Betsey not to interrupt her visit. He would have Charles brought directly to Stowe, where he and Lady Buckingham would care for him until her return.⁴⁷ Then, in 1812, when Betsey was preparing to send Charles back to sea, she considered sending him with Admiral Sir John Warren, who agreed to take him whenever he was posted, but in the end took Lord Buckingham's advice and sent Charles out with Sir Thomas Hardy. She knew and respected Hardy from her time at sea; moreover, Hardy had the reputation of taking good care of his midshipman. The fact that he was posted to the Halifax station was an added benefit, as Charles had been sent home from the Mediterranean after contracting a fever and the North American climate was deemed healthy.⁴⁸ Betsey was also reassured by Buckingham's promise to recommend Charles to the notice of Lady Warren. She was sailing with the *Ramillies* to join her husband and Buckingham assured Betsey that he would arrange for Charles to be taken to their house ' & attended to very particularly', should he get ill.⁴⁹

Shared Interests

While their children were the largest of the Fremantles shared projects, their correspondence reveals a number of other mutual interests. The family's finances were one of these. Betsey was a good financial manager whose meticulous household accounts survive from shortly after her marriage until only a few years before her death. Thomas Francis teased her repeatedly about her frugality and reluctance to spend money on herself, but he trusted her implicitly with his finances:

You know my Dearest Woman, I donot[sic] want to save Money, that I am not extravagant myself either in my living or in my person, and that if I can maintain You and my Children in the Sphere of life I wish always to see You, I am most happy & Contented and that is only to be done by an unbounded Confidence which I so properly place in Your hands, and anxious at all time to give You the advice and assistance of so many more Years of experience...I tell You in a few words that the Bankers receive annually[sic] from me £1125 – all of which is perfectly at Your Disposal and Command, and if You want more they have my directions to answer your bills to any amount; are You content! *You hateful Creature!*⁵⁰

His ‘advice and assistance’ in their earliest years apart tended to focus upon the children, the estate and how to negotiate the socio-political arena successfully, that is, to the best advantage of his career and their family, and without damage to her/their reputation. This was fully understandable given that he was leaving a very young wife in a country that was new to her, where she still knew few people, but it was also entirely unnecessary. Betsey was scrupulous of her reputation; furthermore, her cosmopolitan upbringing, particularly her adolescence which had been spent with aristocratic French *émigrés* in Switzerland and at the imperial court in Ratisbon, had exposed her early to all sorts of people and honed her socio-political skills. After their second separation in 1803, he gave progressively less advice and came instead to defer increasingly to her judgment, especially when it came to the children, the management of the farm or their dealings with neighbours.

The challenge of managing the estate and making it profitable appealed to Betsey. She was a fast learner and quickly developed a strong working relationship with her factotum, Henley. Her pride in the smooth, prosperous running of the estate was apparent in her letters:

I have Settled this last week my account with the Does to Michaelmas, when they owed me five pounds of the rent, besides for Bullocks, hay, & every thing else they bought. Henley is a *treasure* & helped me to make out their Book, which he understood much better than I did. I have also deducted in the accounts the 10 Guineas of the poor’s Coals for this year, so that I hope I shall

manage with them very well, & I only take Seven pounds of[f] Butler
Weekley[*sic*].⁵¹

Networks and Social Politics

As this chapter has already intimated, strong support networks played an important part in helping Betsey cope with separation. They provided her with emotional support and distraction, and gave her opportunities to raise the family's visibility in the social arena with people who mattered. For Betsey personally, the importance of strong female support networks cannot not be underestimated. While she was close to her three younger sisters, especially Eugenia who was next to her in age, their contact was almost entirely limited to correspondence after they all made Scottish marriages by 1810. Similarly, Betsey was fond of her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law, but they lived near London and she usually only saw them for short periods every year. It was female society in Buckinghamshire which provided her with her greatest support while Thomas Francis was away. Her social world was very much that of Jane Austen's heroines: it was dominated by walks, visits, dinners, trips to the big house in the area (in this case, Stowe), and the occasional house party or ball in Buckingham. It is a testimony to Betsey's ability to make friends and to the way that women stepped in to support each other that Thomas Francis's absences were swiftly followed by visits and invitations from female neighbours. Thus, the day after Thomas Francis left for sea in 1800, the Miss Hislops from nearby Adstock called to invite her and the children to stay for several days.⁵² Betsey met them again at a large dinner party the next evening at another neighbour's, Mrs Howard's. Mrs Howard, 'very friendly & kind', asked Betsey to stay over night, presumably to save her the return trip home alone in the dark. The following morning Betsey took her two boys to Adstock for five days, returning home with the promise that Miss Hislop would come to stay with her the next Friday.⁵³

Betsey's female network was also particularly helpful during the stressful period surrounding Thomas Francis's departure in 1810. Her concerns about sending Louisa to Brighton were eased when one of her neighbours, then in Brighton with a sick husband, volunteered to house the little girl and her maid, and to keep Betsey regularly informed. Nor was Betsey allowed to be alone for long. The day after

Thomas Francis's departure, her closest friends, the Poulett sisters, drove over to spend the evening with her. Varying combinations of these four unmarried sisters called another three times before Betsey gave birth the following week. They then rapidly resumed visiting as soon as she could see company.⁵⁴ Other female friends and acquaintances also called and/or sent invitations to teas, dinners and visits. Even Betsey's mother-in-law paid her a flying visit, going miles out of her way to stay overnight at Swanbourne.⁵⁵

With her husband away, Betsey immediately became head of the household and her intangible duties in the socio-political arena took on added importance. A good naval wife publicized her husband's exploits and reminded the people who mattered of his existence; an accomplished naval wife advanced her husband's and the family's best interests in elite society, not least by constructing a public image of the family as polite, cultured and worthy of advancement. Betsey took her responsibilities seriously. Although she had been charitably involved in the lives of the villagers, especially the old and the poor, since moving to Swanbourne, she now stepped in to her husband's position as head of the household. Despite being a practicing Catholic, she frequently had the local vicar, the pitiable Mr Haddock, over for dinner. When it became known that Haddock was actually starving himself in order to support his two sons, she joined in the subscription that the local farmers raised to help him. Moreover, she made a point of underlining the family's status by giving more than the leading farmer: 'I was a little at a loss what to give but as I understood M^r. Biscoe would pay a Guinea, I gave *two*.'⁵⁶

Betsey enjoyed society and immersed herself in the local gentry community, using regular visits and teas, and occasional dinners and assemblies, to build and maintain her networks. Usually these were small-scale affairs; the large assembly that she gave in January 1812, to celebrate a visit from her in-laws and their children, was the largest she held:

All the neighbourhood assembled by nine o'clock & the dancing began early, & was kept up with great Spirit till six in the morning. We Supp'd at one, & sat down Sixty people, Woodward & four of the Band, played, the whole went

off uncommonly well, John Poulett was one of the best Beaux, & a supply from Stowe.⁵⁷

The fact that she had Woodward, who led the county's most sought-after band, and that the Grenvilles of Stowe had shown their support for the event by despatching some of their house-party guests to the event, was a mark of the Fremantle's standing and would not have been missed by her guests.

Maintaining the Fremantles' connexion with the Grenvilles of Stowe was of central importance, as George Nugent-Temple-Grenville, marquess of Buckingham, had long been both William and Thomas Francis's patron and their political leader.⁵⁸ In this, Betsey shone. While her Catholicism gave her an immediate connection with Lady Buckingham, who was herself a Catholic convert, Betsey genuinely liked the Buckinghams and her musical ability, cosmopolitan past and personal charm appealed to them. She became a frequent guest at Stowe, invited for such special events such as the grand visit of the Prince of Wales and his brothers in 1805, and for the elaborate entertainment given for Louis XVIII and his brothers in 1808. The fact that she had been given away in marriage by Prince Augustus, and that she had met and played for the French king when he was in exile in Italy, would only have added to her cachet. She also usually attended the extended Stowe Christmas party, which ended with Lady Buckingham's birthday celebrations in early January. Her comment from near the end of the 1801 house party could stand for her experience over many years: 'I am almost tired of accompanying *catches* & *Glees* of an even^e. but L^d. Temple [Buckingham's heir] is so civil to us, tht I must do it, as he likes no other music, & is only fond of hearing himself sing.'⁵⁹ Much as she might have been tired of playing music she disliked, she knew that maintaining good relations with the next generation of the family would be of benefit to the family's future.

Whenever possible, Betsey travelled to London for the Season. While these sojourns gave her children the benefit of specialist masters and allowed her to catch up with music and plays, they also served distinctly socio-political familial ends. She represented her husband, and her visiting reflected Thomas Francis's connexions and obligations. Thomas Francis attached great importance to this sort of socializing, and sent her specific instructions prior to her first solo London Season in 1801. She was to

avoid naval cliques and any open association with the leading Catholic families, make the most of her musical skills, and pay a careful round of visits to the womenfolk of influential naval families.⁶⁰ Music was Betsey's *entrée* into London society. An outstanding pianist who had been tutored as a child by musicians such as Dragonetti, who was very popular in London at the turn of the century, she used her musical abilities and contacts to advantage over the years. It is telling that by 1813, when both of the Fremantles were longing for their separation to end, Betsey summed up her London season, which had included two private concerts, one of which was certainly in a naval household, by saying, 'I think that I have now done my duty'.⁶¹

Conclusion

In 1814, when the Fremantles were finally reunited, Betsey was thirty-six and Thomas Francis was forty-nine. That they emerged from these years of separation with their relationship intact, their estate well cared for and their family embedded in the local and national elite, was as much a testimony to Betsey's ability to cope effectively with separation as it was to Thomas Francis's skills as an admiral. Their letters over these years apart demonstrate the ways that they used intimacy and sharing to span distance and forward their shared interests and ambitions. They reflected Thomas Francis's growing trust in Betsey, and her own growing confidence and competence.

For the Fremantles, and for hundreds of other naval families during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, extended separations were a fact of life. They posed the women left ashore with a range of personal, emotional, economic and practical challenges. The need to cope with anxiety and loneliness affected women at all levels of the social scale; so too did the need to step into husbands' shoes and assume the mantle of heads of households, with whatever responsibilities that entailed at different levels of society. While elite women like Betsey Fremantle did not share the financial uncertainties and struggles that blighted the lives of some sailors' wives, they too often had to assume new financial duties and learn new skills, including responsibilities for estate management. Those women who coped most successfully appear to have approached separations in much the same way as their modern counterparts: they took problem-solving approaches to the situations in which they

found themselves, worked hard to maintain their relationships with their husbands and sustain their family units, developed and/or drew upon pre-established male and female networks to provide emotional as well as practical support, and kept themselves busy. In this, in a time of war, they were not exceptional: the expectation that women could and would fill both their own traditional roles as wives and mothers, and those of their menfolk in time of need, was not new. What bears further study is how this elasticity of gender roles reacted to peace — and what implications the experience of extended wartime separations had on both the development of more equal, complementary, relationships among couples and, on a societal level, on how the experience of so many women over such a long period of time fed into changing assumptions about women's capabilities in the first half of the nineteenth century.

¹ Special thanks to Betsy and Iain Duncan Smith, Lord Cottesloe and the Fremantle Trust for permission to consult Elizabeth Wynne Fremantle's journals. Extracts from the early journals were published as Anne Fremantle (ed.), *The Wynne Diaries*, 3 vols. (London, 1935–40). All references here are to the original letters and manuscript journals which are now in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies [hereafter CBS]: Spellings in the quotations are as given in the sources. Unless otherwise specified, Betsey's letters are taken from D/FR38/11–12.

² See, for instance, Evelyn Millis Duvall, 'Loneliness and the Serviceman's Wife', *Marriage and Family Living*, 7:4 (1945), 77–81; R. Hill, *Families under Stress: Adjustment to Crises of War Separation and Reunion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949); Hamilton I. McCubbin et al., 'Coping Repertoires of Families Adapting to Prolonged War-Induced Separations', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 38:3 (1976), 461–71; Diane L. Padden, Rebecca A. Connors and Janice G. Agazio, 'Stress, Well-being and Coping in Military Spouses during Deployment Separation', *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 33:2 (2011), 247–67; Brian Cafferky and Lin Shi, 'Military Wives Emotionally Coping During Deployment: Balancing Dependence and Independence', *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 43:3 (2015), 283–95: DOI: 10.1080/01926187.2015.1034633.

³ N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), 134–5;

⁴ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649–1815* (London: Penguin, 2005), 407.

⁵ N.A.M. Rodger 'Recent Books on the Royal Navy of the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Military History*, 63:3 (1999), 694. See Cindy McCreery, 'True Blue and Black, Brown and Fair: Prints of British Sailors and their Women during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 23 (2000), 135–52; Louise Carter, 'British women during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815: Responses, Roles and Representations' (University of Cambridge, PhD, 2005); Margarette Lincoln, *Naval Wives and Mistresses, 1750–1850* (London: National Maritime Museum Publishing, 2007); Jennine Hurl-Eamon, 'The Fiction of Dependence and the Makeshift Economy of Soldiers, Sailors, and their Wives in Eighteenth-Century London', *Labor History*, 49:4 (2008), 481–501; Patricia Y. C. E. Lin, 'Caring for the Nation's Families: British Soldiers' and Sailors' Families and the State, 1793–1815', in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann, and Jane Rendall (eds), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790–1820* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 99–117; Helen Doe, *Enterprising Women and Shipping in the Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009); Melanie Holihead, 'Melanie Holihead. 'Cut Adrift or Towed Astern: Sailors' Wives in Mid-Nineteenth Century Portsea Island Considered in Perspective', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 17:2, 155–68 [accessed

13/07/2016] DOI: 10.1080/21533369.2015.1094985. Similar concerns and economies of makeshift can be found among sailors' wives in Brittany as well: see Emmanuelle Charpentier's 'Incertitude et stratégies de (sur)vie: Le quotidien des femmes des «partis en voyage sur mer» des côtes nord de la Bretagne au xviii^e siècle', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 117:3 (2010): 39–54 [accessed 13/07/2016] URL : <http://abpo.revues.org/1812>. Amy Lynn Smallwood's unpublished MA thesis, 'Shore Wives: The Lives of British Naval Officers' Wives and Widows, 1750–1815' (Wright State University, MA diss., 2008) also bears note for its focus on women of higher status.

⁶ Hurl-Eamon, 'The Fiction of Female Dependence', 482; Lin, 'Caring for the Nation's Families', in Forrest, Hagemann, and Rendall (eds), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians*, 100–3. For modern studies identifying similar factors, see Padden, Connors and Agazio, 'Stress, Well-being and Coping in Military Spouses during Deployment Separation', 255–60; Helen Mederer and Laurie Weinstein, 'Choices and Constraints in a Two-Person Career: Ideology, Division of Labour, and Well-Being among Submarine Officers' Wives', *Journal of Family Issues*, 13:3 (1992): 334–50.

⁷ Erin E. Dimiceli, Mary A. Steinhart, and Shanna E. Smith, 'Stressful Experiences, Coping Strategies and Predictors of Health-Related Outcomes among Wives of Deployed Military Servicemen', *Armed Forces & Society*, 36 (2) (2010): 352–373; DOI: 10.1177/0095327x08324765 [accessed 20/07/16]; Cherie Blank, et al, 'Coping Behaviours used by Army Wives during Deployment Separation and their Perceived Effectiveness', *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*, 24 (2012), 661: DOI: 10.1111/j.1745-7599.2012.00766.x [accessed 20/07/16].

⁸ *Admiral's Wife: Being the Life and Letters of the Hon. Mrs. Edward Boscawen from 1719 to 1761* ed. Cecil Aspinall-Oglander (Longmans, Green and Company, 1940); Godfrey Mundy, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of the late Admiral Lord Rodney*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1830).

⁹ Hurl-Eamon, 'The Fiction of Female Dependence', 482; Lin, 'Caring for the Nation's Families', in Forrest, Hagemann, and Rendall (eds), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians*, 100–3.

¹⁰ 'Tussy', a nickname derived from Thusnelda, the patriotic German heroine whose romanticised tragic love story with Arminius (Germanicised to Hermann) was popular in plays, poetry and operas through the eighteenth century. Special thanks to Professors Matthew Philpott and Stuart Parkes for their assistance on tracing the nickname. See also Lauren Nossett, 'Changing Ideals of Femininity: Representations of Thusnelda in Klopstock, Kleist and Grabbe' (unpubl. MA, University of Georgia, 2010).

¹¹ Thomas Francis Fremantle [hereafter TFF] to Elizabeth 'Betsey' Wynne Fremantle [hereafter EWF], *HMS Ganges*, Bearhaven, 14 Dec. 1803. Unless otherwise specified, the quotations in this snapshot are taken from this letter.

¹² The reconstruction of this scene is based upon EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 4 Feb. 1812.

¹³ The practice of numbering letters continued in naval families into the late twentieth century.

¹⁴ EWF, Journal, Sunbury, 23 Nov. 1811.

¹⁵ EWF, Journal, 23 Aug. 1800.

¹⁶ EWF, Journal, 24 Aug. 1800.

¹⁷ EWF, Journal, 25 Aug. 1800.

¹⁸ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 20 July 1803.

¹⁹ See for instance, EWF, Journal, Liphook, 1 Nov. 1804.

²⁰ TFF to EWF, [Portsmouth] ??? 1805.

²¹ TFF to EWF, *HMS Ganges*, off Moon Island, 19, 23 Apr. 1801.

²² TFF to EWF, *HMS Neptune*, off Ushant, 23 May 1805.

²³ EWF, Journal, 20, 22 Aug. 1810.

²⁴ TFF to EWF, Portsmouth, 4 Sept. 1810.

²⁵ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne 21 Oct. 1810.

²⁶ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 30 Oct. [1810].

²⁷ TFF to EWF, 18 Nov. [1810]

²⁸ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 11 Nov. 1810.

²⁹ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 25 Nov., 16 Dec. 1810, 18 Jan. 1811.

³⁰ TFF to EWF, *HMS Ganges*, Copenhagen, 5 Apr. 1801.

³¹ Ibid.

³² TFF to EWF, *HMS Neptune*, off Cadiz, 1 Oct. 1805.

³³ EWF, Journal, 7 Nov. 1805; Garlies to EWF, Admiralty, 6 Nov. 1805; Buckingham to EWF, 7 Nov. 1805.

³⁴ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 29 Dec. 1810.

³⁵ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 16 Dec. 1810.

³⁶ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 29 Dec. 1810.

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- ³⁷ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 1811.
- ³⁸ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 18 Nov. 1810.
- ³⁹ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 16 Nov. 1810.
- ⁴⁰ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 18 Nov. 1810.
- ⁴¹ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 2 Dec. [1810].
- ⁴² EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 16 Dec. 1810.
- ⁴³ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne [1811].
- ⁴⁴ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne [1812].
- ⁴⁵ EWF to TFF, Englefield Green, 2 Nov. 1812.
- ⁴⁶ D/FR/31/1/11/1–2, William Fremantle to TFF, Englefield Green 15 Aug. 1811; D/FR/31/1/23, William Fremantle to TFF, Englefield Green, 1 Nov. 1812.
- ⁴⁷ D/FR/42/1/18, Buckingham to EWF, Stowe, 2 Aug. 1811.
- ⁴⁸ The Halifax station was naval shorthand for the Royal Navy's North American Station. The squadron was based at the Naval Dockyard in Halifax and active in the waters along the American East Coast and down to Bermuda.
- ⁴⁹ EWF to TFF, Swanage, 17 Oct. 1812; Englefield Green 2 Nov. 1812; Stowe, 28 Nov. 1812.
- ⁵⁰ TFF to EWF, *HMS Ganges*, 7 leagues due south of Elsinore, 21, 22 Mar. 1801.
- ⁵¹ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 18 Nov. 1810.
- ⁵² EWF, Journal, 26 Aug. 1800.
- ⁵³ EWF, Journal, 28 Aug. – 2 Sept. 1800.
- ⁵⁴ EWF, Journal, 2–22, 27 Aug. 1810.
- ⁵⁵ EWF, Journal, 12–13 Oct. 1810.
- ⁵⁶ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 9 Dec. [1810].
- ⁵⁷ EWF to TFF, Swanbourne, 19 Jan. [1812].
- ⁵⁸ Connexion: in 18C usage this word reflected close ties and interdependence between people, but, most relevantly here, it had a specific political meaning, indicating a group of people connected by shared interests, especially political, religious or commercial. See *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* 2 vols (Oxford: OUP, 1987), i., 839.
- ⁵⁹ EWF, January 1801.
- ⁶⁰ TFF to EWF, 1801.
- ⁶¹ EWF to TFF, Brook St, 3 June 1813.