



1 – Jean-Etienne Liotard, WILLIAM, 2ND EARL OF BESSBOROUGH
(c.1742-43), oil on canvas, 125 x 100 cm (courtesy Trustees of Stansted Park Foundation; photo: John Cunningham)

The classical taste of William Ponsonby, 2nd Earl of Bessborough (1704-1793)

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CONSIDERING THE ACCLAIM HE RECEIVED DURING AND AFTER HIS LIFE TIME, particularly in artistic circles, we have very little information on the early life of William Ponsonby, Earl of Bessborough,¹ apart from the basic facts printed in the various peerages, on which all subsequent references and biographical accounts are based. He was born in 1704, the eldest surviving son of Brabazon Ponsonby (2nd Viscount Duncannon), and his first wife, Sarah Margetson.² His place of birth is never stated in the records, though we can assume he was born at the family seat of Bessborough,³ in county Kilkenny, an estate bestowed upon his grandfather, Sir John Ponsonby, in recognition of his services to Cromwell.⁴ Since Bessborough House was only completed in the 1740s, and we know nothing about the building that preceded it, we cannot form a picture of the type of home life experienced by William as a child and an adolescent. In fact, no mention is made of his childhood, adolescence or early adulthood in any of the literature or surviving family records.⁵

The question of his education is equally vague, though it is likely that he was educated privately at home, and certain that he did not attend university.⁶ However, as I have argued in another study,⁷ the contents of William's private library show that he was a learned and eager scholar, whose widespread and life-long interests in classical literature, art, antiquities, ancient history and travel rank him high as one of the leading exponents of the Irish classical tradition.

How William occupied himself between the completion of his studies (presumably at around the age of eighteen) and embarking on his travels in 1736 is similarly vague, though it is obvious (despite assertions to the contrary)⁸ that he stayed in Ireland for at least part of this time. Records suggest that he must have been based either at home or in and around Dublin in his early to late twenties. In poli-

tics, he was returned as MP for Newtownards, county Down, from 1725 to 1727, and for Kilkenny from 1727 to 1758, which means that from the age of twenty-one he must have attended at least some of the regular sessions in the House of Commons at the Irish Parliament in Dublin. Similarly, his involvement in the activities of the Dublin and Galway masonic lodges (he was appointed as one of the Senior Grand Wardens of the Dublin Lodge on 7 July 1733)⁹ further establishes his continued presence in Ireland at least up until the year 1733.

However, there is little evidence to indicate how else he might have occupied himself until the end of 1736, when he set out on what is often regarded as his official Grand Tour.¹⁰ Sadly, he left us no record of his sojourn abroad, though it is possible to piece together various phases of his tour from other documentary sources.¹¹ While the first part followed the customary pattern of visiting the main cultural centres of Italy, the second was more unusual for that period, reaching into Greece and Turkey.

As is well documented, the Grand Tour was usually made by a young man as a means of ‘finishing’ his education, and was, therefore, normally taken at around the age of 17 to 20.¹² However, at 32, not only was William far in advance of the traditional age when he set sail for France, but he had just been elected, in 1736, as a Member of the Society of Dilettanti. Such an honour (at least in the early days of the Society) was conferred only upon those who had already made their pilgrimages to the Mediterranean. It seems likely, therefore, that, he must have completed an earlier (undocumented) Grand Tour, perhaps confined to Italy.¹³ However, in the absence of any real evidence to support this, it might also be suggested that his reputation as a connoisseur and collector of antiquities had been sufficiently established by 1736 to warrant his election to that esteemed society. This theory is borne out by the number of relevant books dating from this period in his private library (on, for example, Greek and Roman art, architecture and antiquities, particularly carved gem stones), and from the fact that he was known to (and thirty years later, remembered by) Cardinal Alessandro Albani (1692-1779),¹⁴ reputedly ‘the most enthusiastic and spendthrift of eighteenth-century Roman art patrons’,¹⁵ and probably a spy.¹⁶

Whether or not William visited Italy again is unclear, though he was certainly considering it in later life, as testified by a letter from Thomas Jenkins in 1769, who says he ‘should be very happy if your Lordships trip to Italy takes place’.¹⁷ Again, the number of guidebooks to Italian museums and art galleries listed in his library catalogue suggests a continued link with the country.

Whatever the case, sadly his known travels are undocumented by him (or, at least, no memoirs relating to any trip have survived), though there is evidence, reported in an Irish newspaper, that he got into bad company while in Florence in August, 1737: ‘Private letters from Florence advise that a Quarrell happen’d lately

there, among some English Nobleman and Gentleman, and that Captain Ponsonby, Son to the Earl of Duncanan, and Mr. Wright an English Gentleman, were killed on the Spot...'¹⁸ A week later, when more reports had been received, the same newspaper announced: 'There are Letters in Town which inform us, that Mr. Ponsonby, Son to the Rt. Hon. The Lord Viscount Duncannon, is not dead at Florence, but dangerously ill, and that Mr. Wright died on the Spot.'¹⁹ Thus the story ends, since there is no further reference made to the event (or to the recovery of Ponsonby) in any further issue of the newspaper. There is no doubt that William was present at the time of the incident (as was his friend Lord Middlesex, a constant companion of Denys Wright), but it seems likely that some confusion of identity must have arisen. Local reports note that the victim was killed by a fellow Scotsman, John Fotheringham, in a drunken brawl at a public dinner, over a game of cards. The culprit, who was forgiven by Wright before he expired, was wounded, and attended by Dr James Tyrrell, but there is no record in this source of William's involvement.²⁰

While on his travels, William joined John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, on the latter's first voyage around Greece and Turkey.²¹ In common with others who made such a trip, Montagu wrote an extensive account of his Levantine voyage, posthumously edited and published by Revd J. Cooke, under the title *A Voyage performed by the Late Earl of Sandwich round the Mediterranean in the Years 1738 and 1739, Written by Himself*.²² While no mention is made of William in the original manuscript version,²³ there is a reference to him on page iii of Cooke's introductory biographical sketch, which precedes the account of the actual voyage. Apart from official sources mentioned in Ingamells,²⁴ the only other first-hand source referring to the pair's Levantine expedition is a biographical account of the Swiss painter Jean-Etienne Liotard (Plate 2).²⁵ According to an account dictated to and recorded by the artist's son,²⁶ their chance meeting arose when Liotard came across a group of English gentlemen in a café in Rome admiring a miniature of the Venus de Medici (his own, in fact), which they considered to be the best copy they had ever seen. [This led 'le Chevalier Ponsomby' (*sic*) persuading Liotard, some months later, to accompany them on their Greek and Turkish voyage.²⁷

Ponsonby, Sandwich and company set sail from Naples a month later (on 3 April 1738) in a ship variously named the *Anne Gallery*,²⁸ the *Clifton*²⁹ and the *Cliston*,³⁰ visiting Elba, Corsica, Sardinia, Capri and several ports in Sicily en route to Greece. Here, having explored the major temples and ruins of Athens, they investigated several Greek islands, including Milos, Zephyros, Antiparos (where they climbed 600 feet into a huge cave), Paros and Chios, before arriving at Constantinople. They remained here for some months, throwing themselves enthusiastically into Turkish life by adopting the national costume (including a beard for Liotard) and (at least in Montagu's case) learning to speak the language. They finally returned to Leghorn in October of that year, and while Ponsonby then departed



2 – Thomas Worlidge, *JEAN-ETIENNE LIOTARD*, 1754, included in a collection of prints bound into a copy of *LYSONS'S ENVIRONS OF LONDON* in the Library of Stansted Park, Hampshire. (courtesy Trustees of the Stansted Park Foundation; photo: John Cunningham)

for England on 19 November 1738,³¹ Sandwich continued his travels, making a return visit to the East in July 1739, which included an extended trip to Egypt.

In spite of the regrettable lack of documentation about his travels, William's two years abroad were to have a major impact on many areas of his life, particularly in the acquisition of antiquities and paintings for his famous collection.³² As is well documented, he was to become Liotard's most important patron, accumulating during his lifetime a collection of more than 72 of his works.³³ A spectacular example of these is a portrait of William in Turkish dress (1742-43),³⁴ one of the many family portraits rescued from the devastating fire of Bessborough House in 1923³⁵ (Plate 1). Almost identical to a three-quarter-length portrait of Lord Sandwich (also by Liotard),³⁶ it depicts a jaunty and confident man, looking considerably younger than his forty years, and sporting a turban, an ermine-trimmed jacket of dark green silk, and a bright red silk tunic (matching his headdress) set off by an elaborately decorated cummerbund in which is placed a bejewelled dagger.³⁷

Brian de Breffny, in his study 'Liotard's Irish Patrons', notes the difficulty in dating the artist's sitters portrayed in Turkish costume, and argues that it is wrong to assume they necessarily date from his four-year sojourn in Constantinople. While he believes that Liotard began his portrait of Sandwich during their journey to Turkey, and completed it when based in Constantinople, he maintains that the portrait of

3 – *Spencer Gervase, after Liotard, MINIATURE OF WILLIAM, 2ND EARL OF BESSBOROUGH oval, 3.5 cm, signed with initials (courtesy Sotheby's Picture Library)*



Ponsonby was not executed until Liotard's first trip to London between 1753 and 1755.³⁸ I see no reason to believe that Liotard delayed the portrait of his host for fifteen years, and presume that de Breffny's reluctance to date Ponsonby's portrait to the early 1740s (as is commonly held)³⁹ is because there exists a pendant portrait of his wife Carloline in 'Venetian' dress.⁴⁰ Admittedly, since she did not marry William until 1739, and did not accompany him to the Levant, Liotard could not have painted the portrait at that time, but he could easily have executed this at some later period, such as his first trip to London, when he would have met her for the first time.

The oriental masquerade costumes featured in Liotard's portraits of the two noblemen (Ponsonby and Sandwich) are identical to those in which they were depicted by George Knapton (1743 and 1745), in his role as official portrait painter to the Society of Dilettanti,⁴¹ and it has been suggested that this was the official garb of the short-lived Divan Society, established by Lord Sandwich in 1744.⁴² Interestingly, Knapton's portrait of Bessborough, now in the possession of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of London, is almost a carbon copy of Liotard's piece, depicting Ponsonby not only in exactly the same costume, but also with identical facial features and expression. The only real difference is in the pose. It is possible that, for the sake of expediency (fines were imposed on members for failing to have their official portrait painted), William allowed the artist to make a copy, or near

copy, of Liotard's original, which he had only just received and with which he was clearly very pleased. Eight years later he commissioned Spencer Gervase to paint a miniature of the portrait, displayed in a diamond-set gold frame (Plate 3).

Though Liotard was the only member of the group to talk about the composition of the touring party, all their paths were to cross in later life, particularly in artistic and intellectual circles. With the exception of the artist, all became members of the Divan Club,⁴³ and most were (or had already been) elected as members of the more lasting and influential Society of Dilettanti.⁴⁴ The latter organisation is generally accepted as having been founded earlier, in 1732, though Brewer puts it at 1734.⁴⁵ While the artist Knapton, at the time of his election,⁴⁶ had already spent seven years in Rome (1725-32), William, as we have seen, was only just embarking on his Grand Tour.

When William returned from his travels at the end of 1738, he seems to have taken up permanent residence in England. The following year was a very momentous one for the young nobleman: on 5 July he married Lady Caroline Cavendish, eldest daughter of the 3rd Duke of Devonshire (then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland),⁴⁷ whereupon he began functioning as an assistant to the Chief Secretary,⁴⁸ and in October his father was created Earl of Bessborough, at which point William acquired the title of Viscount Duncannon. Two years later, in the summer of 1741, his father-in-law offered him the appointment as his Chief Secretary (which he accepted), as well as recommending him for a place on the Irish Privy Council.⁴⁹

To judge from details of his surviving correspondence, William had, at least by 1742, taken up residence in a house in the fashionable Cavendish Square in Marylebone.⁵⁰ It is likely, however, that he had gone there earlier, presumably on his marriage. Whether or not this is the same house leased by the Earl in later life, and inherited by his heir Frederick, is uncertain. While correspondence to William between the 1760s and '70s is addressed to him simply as 'Lord Bessborough' at 'Cavendish Square', we know that the precise address was No. 2, a very substantial and comfortable town house with a library.⁵¹ Cavendish Square was clearly a favourite location for generations of Ponsonbys, since No. 17 was also used as an address until the early 1920s.⁵²

In 1748 the couple bought an estate called Ingress Abbey, situated on the banks of the River Thames, and 'commanding a beautiful view of that river'⁵³ (Plate 4). This elegant and picturesque seat, unusually adorned with a domed portico, had originally been the site of Dartford Priory until confiscation by Henry VIII. Ingress was to be William's family home until the untimely death of his wife on 20 January 1760, whereupon he sold it to John Calcraft, MP for Rochester, who, in much the same way as William was to do in his next home, adorned the grounds with 'a valuable collection of Roman altars ... statues, and other specimens of Roman sculpture'.⁵⁴ Although there are no records relating to William's twelve years there,⁵⁵ he is

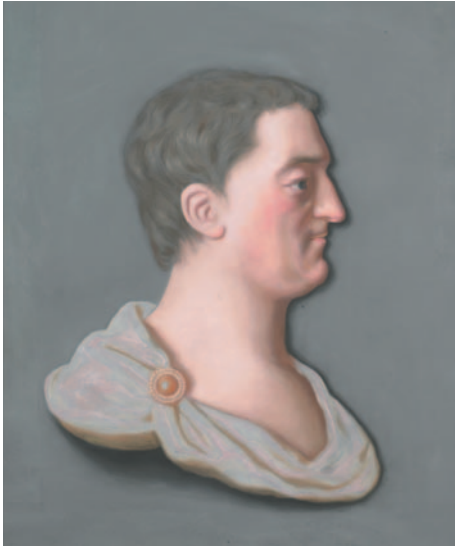
recorded as having ‘greatly improved the Mansion and surrounding grounds’,⁵⁶ including commissioning Capability Brown to landscape the grounds.

During his residence here, William was very active in his political career, but his great passion in life continued to be the collection of antiquities and art. A possible indication that he regarded himself as the embodiment of classical taste is to be found in the pastel portrait he commissioned Liotard to execute between 1750 and 1760 (Plate 5). Still recognisable as the character in the turban from several years earlier, the subject is consciously represented in the typical style of a ‘Roman head’, reminiscent of those from his own extensive collection of carved antique gems (see below).⁵⁷

In 1758 William succeeded his father Brabazon as 2nd Earl of Bessborough, inheriting his estates in Ireland (notably in counties Kilkenny and Carlow) and England. The elaborate memorial sculpture erected by William for his parents in the Bessborough family chapel at Fiddown was executed by William Atkinson in 1758 (Plate 6).⁵⁸ By commissioning a London-based artist (as is clear from a Latin inscription at the base of the monument), the newly elevated Lord Bessborough

4 – *Helen Havelock, INGRESS PARK, KENT, THE SEAT OF WM HAVELock ESQR, engraved by J. Storer for THE BEAUTIES OF ENGLAND AND WALES (1812)*
(courtesy Trustees of the Stansted Park Foundation; photo: John Cunningham)





5 – Jean-Etienne Liotard, SIR WILLIAM PONSONBY
LATER EARL OF BESSBOROUGH
c.1750-60, pastel on paper, 60 x 48 cm
(courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, ref. SK-A-237)

would have been able to oversee the work right up to the end, even if he was never actually to see the finished product *in situ*. The style of this impressive sepulchral monument reflects not only the bereaved son's own classical taste, but clearly that of his father too.⁵⁹ The marble busts of the deceased couple are represented in the style of a Roman grave-relief, with formal pose and classical drapery, and are placed on top of a large classical-style funerary urn with lions' feet, while eight magnificent Ionic columns support an elaborate pediment and cornice incorporating a carved family crest.⁶⁰ The whole marble edifice stands 369cm high and 253cm wide, dominating the small chancel – the only surviving structure from the original private chapel. Given William's life-long obsession with col-

lecting classical statuary (and in particular, from around the 1760s, anything with a funerary theme), it is not surprising that he commissioned for his parents ('not as a necessary Memorial of them, but as a Testimony of Gratitude and Respect owing from their son') a monument in this style.

Two years later Lord Bessborough found himself having to commission another funerary monument, this time for his beloved wife Caroline, who died on 20 January 1760. As suggested in an extract from the family papers (although the word is never actually mentioned), cholera may have been responsible for her death:

The sanitary condition of London must have been at that day frightful, for scarcely a household escaped from the dread visitation of a malignant fever. Twice had it entered Lord Bessborough's house and carried off its victims. The first time four servants; the next two young and lovely daughters. He then fell ill, himself; and his Countess in nursing him caught the horrible disease, and died. For four days they concealed her death from him; and when at last she broke it out, he piteously asked, when his first great agony was over, 'How many children have I left?'⁶¹

The answer was three: his two teenage daughters Catherine and Charlotte,⁶² and his infant son Frederick, born in 1758.



6 – William Atkinson, *Monument to the Earl and Countess of Bessborough, 1758, in the chapel at Fiddown, county Kilkenny* (courtesy Revd George Cliffe; photo: David Kane)

Lady Bessborough was buried in the family vault of the Dukes of Devonshire, in All Saints Church, Derby (not in Fiddown),⁶³ where she was eventually joined by her husband in 1793 (see Plate 15). Her monument (depicted in Plate 8) consists of a ‘bust of the Countess on a bracket, and a figure of a woman reclining on a sarcophagus, a cushion under her left elbow, and holding a book in her right hand’ (Plate 8).⁶⁴ The inscription claims that the monument is ‘only to be considered as an Endeavour to preserve the Memory of a departed Friend, and as an Instance of true Affection and Tribute paid by her most afflicted Husband’.⁶⁵

The sculptor chosen to execute the monument was John Michael Rysback, an

artist from Antwerp (1694-1770), who worked in England from the 1730s onwards. He was noted for his classical style – in, for example, his bust of Sir Robert Walpole as a Roman senator in a toga. We do not know precisely when the sculpture was made, but I would like to suggest that William did not act immediately, and waited until he had found an appropriate Roman model on which to base his memorial. This might help to explain his intense interest, from this date, in such works. In 1763, as discussed and depicted below (see Plate 13), he bought a ‘sepulchral antiquity’ representing Trajan’s widow supporting a bust of her husband. A comparison between the two works shows that the Roman monument was clearly an inspiration for Rysback’s piece, especially in details such as the drapery, the pose, the cushion, and the literary motif, where one lady holds a scroll and the other a book.

Lord Bessborough had been acquiring land in Roehampton, then a small village in Putney, at the other side of London, and decided to build a new home there. With this in mind, he commissioned Sir William Chambers to design a ‘villa’,⁶⁶ built in the English neo-Palladian tradition.⁶⁷ It has been suggested that Bessborough may have met Chambers in Italy,⁶⁸ but records indicate that they could not have overlapped, unless the former had made an undocumented visit to Rome between 1750 and 1755, when the architect was based there.⁶⁹ Another theory, that he may have heard of Chambers through his father-in-law, who had a subscription copy of his *Treatise on Architecture* (1759),⁷⁰ is improbable too, as it is clear from Bessborough’s library catalogue that he actually had his own copy of this book, together with a copy of *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, &c.* (1757). In fact, he continued to collect Chambers’ books, later acquiring, for example, his *Plans, Elevations Sections and Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew* (1763).

The grounds of the estate, as can be seen from the map, were extensive, with the stately entrance gates in keeping with the owner’s taste in antique art (Plate 7). Two large stone lions, which, from this sketch, appear almost in the form of sphinxes, surmount the main pillars, complete with classical motifs in relief (Plate 9). The architectural drawings show Chambers’ original front elevation and plans of Roehampton Villa (Plates 10, 11). The house was later depicted in *Vitruvius Britannicus*, where very slight changes to the detail of the exterior are visible.⁷¹ The resemblance between this house and Bessborough House in county Kilkenny (particularly in its ‘restrained classicism’) (Plate 12) has been noted elsewhere,⁷² and it is clear, both from the overall design of the house, and from certain aspects of its interior decor, that the 1st Earl followed neo-classical fashions almost as rigidly as his son did, with, for example, the original hall containing a ‘screen’ of huge Ionic columns of Kilkenny marble.

First conceived by the architect Francis Bindon before 1733, it appears that work on Bessborough House did not begin until 1744.⁷³ However, even taking into account the aesthetic deterioration it has continued to suffer since the fire in 1923, it

7 – Estate map attached to
the lease

(courtesy London Borough of
Lambeth, Archives Dept, ref. 4765;
photo: Alan Robertson)



was never recognised as being one of Bindon's greatest achievements.⁷⁴ Whether or not William had made any contribution to the overall vision of Bessborough House (or, conversely, whether his father's house had influenced the style of his own) is unclear, but both buildings share the same basic design of a centre block of two storeys over a basement (the basement in both cases being rusticated), a pedimented façade (the essential difference, of course, being the inclusion in Roehampton Villa of a hexastyle portico), and a perron and double stairway leading to the central doorway.⁷⁵ However, it must be remembered that such features are characteristic of architecture from this period.

Roehampton Villa was featured in contemporary books on English topography, such as Lysons's *Environs of London*, where it is mentioned as being 'among those of principal note' in Richmond Park.⁷⁶ It also generated a considerable amount of praise from Lord Bessborough's guests, including his agent in Rome, Thomas Jenkins, who, after visiting him during a trip to England in 1769, wrote a letter in which he referred to his host's 'elegant taste' and his 'Charming Villa'.⁷⁷ More noteworthy, perhaps, than the architecture (and having a more lasting impact on the visitor) was its decor, in particular the impressive collection of classical statuary with which it was adorned, both inside and out. This is reflected in an anonymous poem entitled 'On the Earl of Bessborough's Villa at Roehampton':



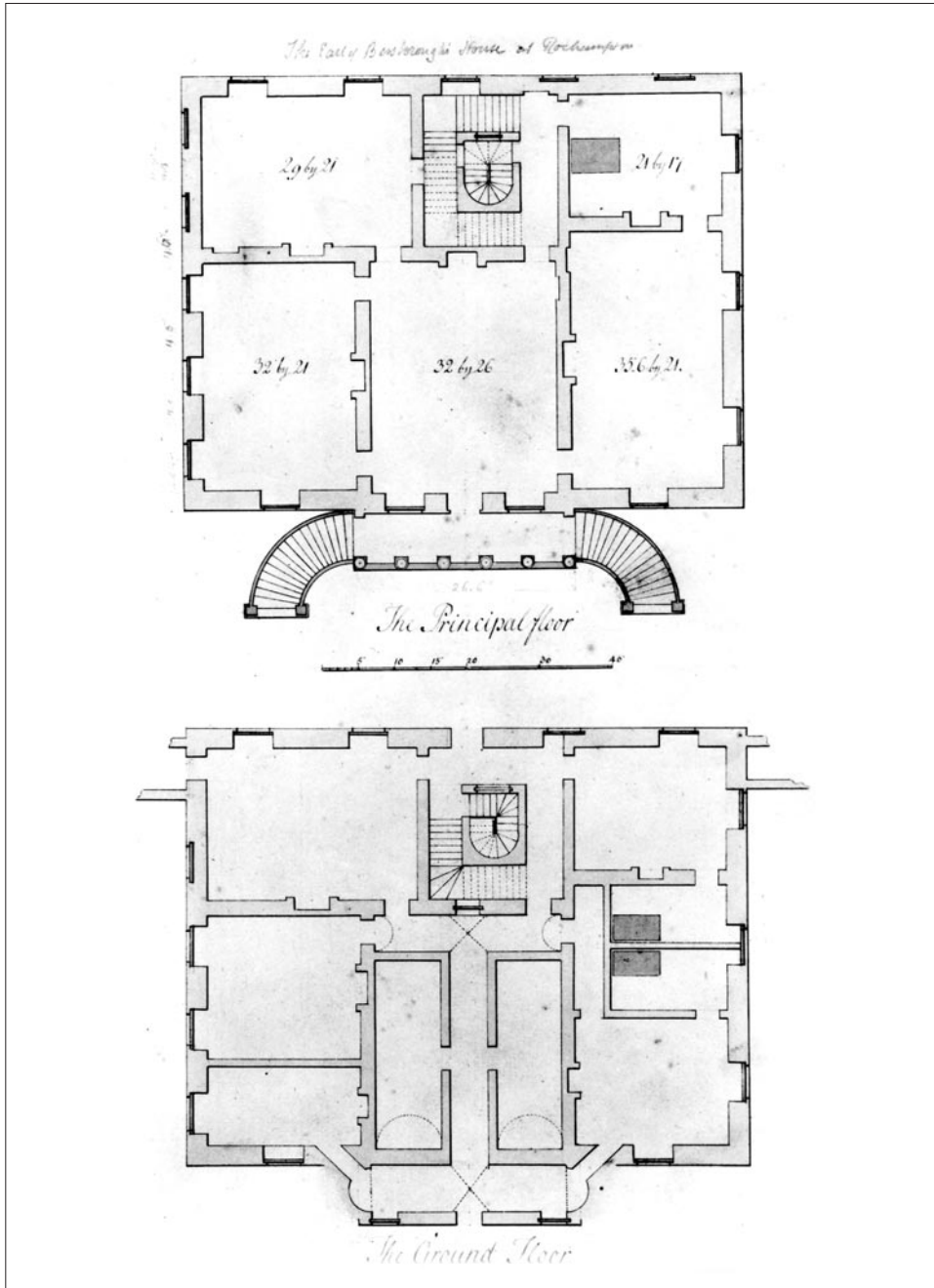
8 – John Joseph Briggs, *Monument to the Countess of Bessborough, All Saints' Church (S.E. corner)*
Watercolour, from a manuscript volume entitled 'The Sepulchral Monuments of Derbyshire'
(courtesy Derbyshire Record Office and Derby Diocesan Record Office, ref. D4626/1 (4))



9 – Unknown artist, *PUTNEY ROEHAMPTON, KINGSTON ROAD, EARL BESSBOROUGH*, sketch in sepia, accompanying the lease map (Plate 8), c.1800
(courtesy London Borough of Lambeth, Archives Department, Ref. SP26/188/BES.1; photo: Alan Robertson)

10 – Sir William Chambers, *Earl of Bessborough's house at Roehampton: front elevation*
(courtesy Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, ref. 43/4/11; photo: Jeremy Butler)





11 – Sir William Chambers, Earl of Bessborough's house at Roehampton: ground plan
(courtesy Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum, ref. 43/4/10; photo: Jeremy Butler)

Here Genius Taste & Science stand confest
 And fill the minds of each transposed Guest ...
 Wheree'r (sic) we turn, where'er we look around
 We seem to breathe & tread on Classic Ground...
 Ask ye, from whence these various Treasures came
 These Scenes of Wonder? Need I Bessborough name?⁷⁸

The extent of his collection can best be gauged from two hitherto unexplored original sources, namely the surviving correspondence between William and his two agents abroad, and the Christie's auction catalogue of 7 April 1801,⁷⁹ at which most of the marbles were sold. While the former gives full descriptions of the antiquities themselves, together with details of their provenance and their price (often including the cost of restoration, the bill of lading, carpenters' fees and the fee charged by the agent), the latter document is a useful source in that it not only describes the individual statues and urns being sold by his son Frederick, but – since the sale took place on the premises, rather than in Christies' own sale rooms – it also indicates their original position in the villa. From this source we learn, for example, that the house contained pleasure grounds, two temples and a greenhouse, all of which were decorated with statues and other pieces of antique statuary. The main area for displaying marbles inside the house was the extensive hall (measuring 32 x 26 feet, see Plate 11 above), which contained 52 lots.

The fact that the original Christie's catalogue has survived in such good order is also invaluable in that it allows us to see who purchased each lot, and for what sum. Interesting and recurring buyers include Sir John Soane, who bought ten lots (including the famous marble statue of the *Ephesian Artemis* or *Diana*;⁸⁰ the 5th Earl of Carlisle (of Castle Howard), who bought five lots (including the *Altar of Taurus*) amounting to £219.9s; the great antiquarian and collector Charles Townley; the architect and collector Thomas Hope; the sculptor Nollekens, for whom the sale must have been a poignant experience, since he had been a close personal friend of the late Earl, as well as having executed his funerary monument (see below); and the Duke of Saint Albans, who was married to William's daughter, Catherine. Space does not permit a full examination of Bessborough's art and antiquities here, but the following examples will serve to give an idea of his classical taste and his method of collecting.

The correspondence between Bessborough and his two agents runs concurrently, with both collections beginning in 1763. The most extensive of these is from the well-known dealer Thomas Jenkins (1722-1798), who, being based in Rome throughout his career, became extremely wealthy through supplying Europe's nobility and gentry with antiquities and art. Bessborough's other agent was his friend and fellow-countryman James Hamilton (1730-1798), 2nd Earl of Clanbrassill (of the



12 – J.P. Neale, *BESSBOROUGH HOUSE*, from an original drawing by Frederick, 3rd Earl of Bessborough (engraved by H. Hobson, London, 1819.) (private collection; photo: David Kane)

second creation), who happened to be based in Paris for a number of years.⁸¹ He had much in common with Lord Bessborough, and regarded him as having ‘more knowledge & taste than anybody’,⁸² both having a considerable collection of antique carved gem stones, many of which were published.⁸³ As with other contemporary collectors of this genre, both Bessborough and Clanbrassill allowed Josiah Wedgwood to model cameos and intaglios for his famous Jasper Ware from their own gems, though Bessborough eventually sold his collection to Lord Marlborough.⁸⁴ In addition, Bessborough is described by Wedgwood as a ‘fine old Gentleman’, who ‘admires our vases & manufacture prodigiously, says he sees we shall exceed the Antients, that friezes & many other things may be made, that I am a very ingenious man ... & that he will do me every service in his power.’ He also noted that Bessborough introduced his vases amongst the Irish nobility, who became enthusiastic patrons.⁸⁵

An interesting item listed in the Earl’s *Catalogue of Books at Roehampton, 1762*⁸⁶ is *Recueil de Sculptures Antiques dans la Collection de Cardinal Polignac*. Clanbrassill had promised Bessborough this prized volume, which was not offered for sale in the library auction of 1848,⁸⁷ as an extra, when supplying him with a

number of marbles from ‘the remains of Cardinal Polignac’s collection’.⁸⁸ In a letter dated 20 January 1768, Lord Clanbrassill states: ‘All the statues, &c, are engraved which makes a small book Cardinal Polignac used to make presents of it is now very rare but the man has one & whatever your Lp may choose to buy I shall take care you shall have the print of.’⁸⁹ Several items which Lord Bessborough bought from Clanbrassill emanated from this collection, which had come onto the Parisian market very cheaply because the owner ‘took them for a bad debt, wants money very much, & understands nothing about them’.⁹⁰ One was a statue of Flora, whose ‘head & arm I believe to be modern but the Drapery is in my opinion very good’,⁹¹ and which he managed to acquire for ten guineas (though the original asking price was sixteen). This was eventually sold to Bessborough’s son-in-law, the Duke of Saint Albans, for £19.19s (lot 85). Another was a statue of Minerva, ‘a good deal restored but far from bad’⁹² (price unknown), also sold to the Duke of Saint Albans (lot 84, £20). A third was a statue of Esculapius (*sic*), ‘not bad or dear’,⁹³ which was also offered to ‘Ld Pl:m’,⁹⁴ who did not take up the offer. Again, we do not know the price originally paid for this piece, but it was sold to Soane (lot 80) for £15.15s. Two other marbles supplied by Clanbrassill were a Pallas and a Venus (together with the Aesclepius they came to 65 guineas), but because they are not specified in the auction catalogue as having come from the Polignac Museum, we cannot distinguish them from the many other statues of that name.

Another book in Bessborough’s library is the *Catalogue of Mr. Lyde Brown’s Collection of Busts, &c*, which is not dated, but could be either of those published in 1768 (depicting 81 pieces) or 1779 (depicting 230 pieces).⁹⁵ The catalogue provides a link with Thomas Jenkins, since it was Lyde Brown who first recommended Lord Bessborough to him as a potential patron. In a letter dated 30 March 1763, Jenkins writes:

Sir, In my last I mentioned to you the sense I had of your kindness in having been so obliging as to recommend to my Lord Bessborough ... If this antiquity should not suit you, if you think it proper to propose it to My Lord Bessborough, I shall be much obliged to you, for I presume his Lordship cannot disapprove [*sic*] of my having made you the first offer of it, as it was you that was so obliging as first to recommend me to him.⁹⁶

We know that Bessborough bought the antiquity in question (a large sepulchral urn with a lid that was not original, but whose ‘bass-relievo’ was ‘the most elegant thing you can imagine, and is the more interesting as it proves the form of an antique carriage’)⁹⁷ from a later letter to Bessborough in which Jenkins is ‘vastly glad of it, hoping it will be very acceptable, and to find so large an antiquity in such preservation would be exceedingly difficult supposing this occasion to have been missed’.⁹⁸ A sketch is included in the original letter (forwarded to Bessborough by Lyde

Browne), where, as can be seen, the hunting scene is clearly discernable (Plate 14). What is not shown in this sketch, however, is the pair of ‘Lyons’ included to serve as supports. While giving advice on how to position these, Jenkins adds, in what must surely be a reference to Chambers, ‘and if you decide to raise them higher to accompany the sphinxes, it may easily be done. Your Lords’s own good taste, and that of your ingenious Architect will doubtless adjust those matters to the most advantage.’⁹⁹

While the whole piece (the urn, the lid and two ‘Lyons’) were originally offered to Mr Lyde Browne for four guineas (presumably Lord Bessborough was charged the same price), the lid alone fetched £105 at the auction, being sold as lot 7 to a Mr Lamoureaux. The description of this piece, located in the pleasure grounds, is as follows: ‘The Top of an Antient Sarcophagus, embellished with beautiful small Basreliefs of Figures returning from a Chase; and the corners ornamented with the Larva and Lotus, the contrasted Emblems of Decay and Reanimation.’¹⁰⁰ Since there is no mention here of the lions (and we may assume from the context of Jenkins’ description that they must have been life-size), it is tempting to imagine that Lord Bessborough used them to adorn the entrance gates of Roehampton Villa, as depicted in Plate 9 above.

Another interesting piece acquired from Jenkins, for which a further sketch is supplied (Plate 13),¹⁰¹ is a ‘sepulchral Antiquity’ described as a ‘Groupe’,¹⁰² which consists of several pieces – a statue of a Roman matron supporting in her right hand a bust of a man, together with two sphinxes and a decorative centre-piece as supports. The total bill for the antiquity (including Jenkins’ commission of £23) was £287. At the end of the letter in which the piece is described, he identifies the figure:

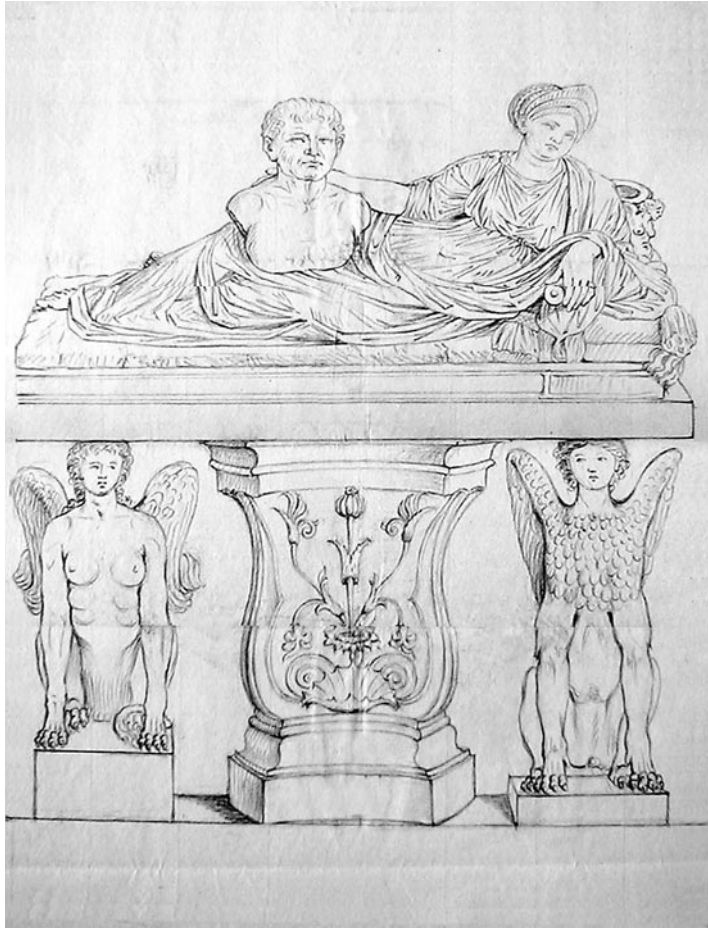
P.S. After the most diligent examination the portrait of the female seems to be Marciana the sister of Trajan, who being left a widow probably she is here represented as supporting the Bust of her Husband, whose ashes I presume were [*sic*] deposited in the small urn that is on the side of the female, and it has the advantage of being very singular.

It is this antiquity that may have inspired Rysback’s monument to Caroline, as argued above.

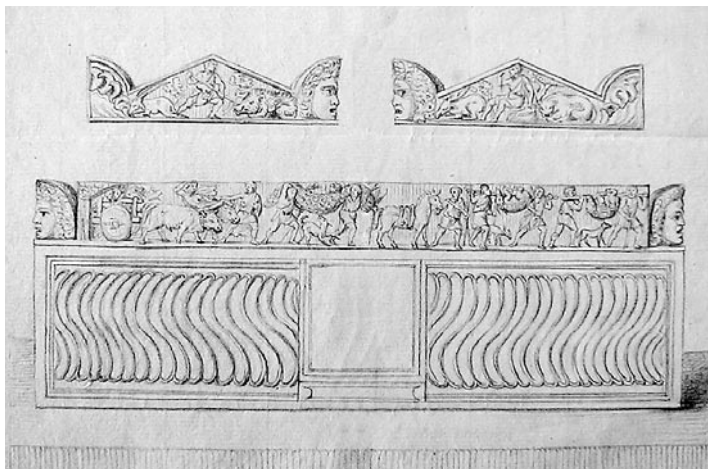
Although there is a gap of six years in the correspondence (from 1763 to 1769), it is likely that Bessborough continued to buy from Jenkins, though if there had been a slowing down, the latter’s visit to Roehampton Villa in December 1769 may have served to prompt a new wave of sales. In his letter of thanks, in which he praises both Lord Bessborough and his home,¹⁰³ Jenkins encourages his client to think about what he really needs for his house, and suggests:

fine Sculpture for your elegant Villa, or Garden ornaments, in the latter are comprehended Urns, fonts of Urns, Columns, Capitols. I think you have no such thing as an antique Column in your Garden it’s a sort of object either in

13 – Thomas
Jenkins, *SEPULCHRAL
ANTIQUITY*, 1763



14 – Thomas
Jenkins, *LARGE
SEPULCHRAL URN
WITH SCENE OF A
CHASE*, 1773



(both illus courtesy of
Myles, 12th Earl of
Bessborough; photos:
the author)

the front of a House or in many parts of a Garden that makes an elegant form, on a Piedestal, with a Vase or other object on it...¹⁰⁴

He then goes on to interest him in a pair of Florentine ‘Granite Columns’ which Bessborough, in his reply, claims would not be worth his while purchasing since they were ill-proportioned and would have cost too much to put right.¹⁰⁵ However, in the same letter, he agrees to the offer of two marbles (Diana and Apollo), which he considers to be a bargain at sixty zechinas. He then explains (picking up on Jenkins’ earlier suggestion):

You know I have not room in my house for many things, it is you know pretty full, so that what I want most, are such as I can put out into my garden, & they should not be of any great price, for it would be wrong to put fine marbles out, in our English air. Pieces ... such as you mention. All these sorts of things, that come cheap.¹⁰⁶

That Jenkins eagerly took him up on his request is clear from the amount of lots of similar description found in the 1801 auction. Subsequent letters also signify this, one announcing that he has just:

sent to the care of Mr. Francis Jermy at Leghorn three Cases of such articles as follows ... four Corinthian capitols found on the Calian [*sic*] Hill ... a piece of ornament in three parts found in the Villa of Lucullus at Frascati the ancient Tusculaon, the Friars who proferred it made use of it as the Back part of a Seat in the gardens – in the same case are a Basso Relievo representing a tree with a Bird, ditto an Eagle with a Serpent, ditto a Cow, or Horse, a Tiger, and the front of a small Urn... and half all those pieces ... ware [*sic*] found in Hadrians Villa ... [and] ten pieces of ornaments chiefly sepulchral ... all found near the Via Appia,¹⁰⁷

and another acknowledging its arrival in London, stating, ‘as in General things of that kind are esteemed in proportion as they are judiciously placed, I am confident those at Roehampton will appear with every advantage.’¹⁰⁸

A piece of sculpture very much desired by Lord Bessborough, but which he eventually failed to acquire, was one of a dog. Though no further details of the piece itself are given (it is not even clear whether it was classical or Renaissance), much was written about it during the course of ten months, thus giving us an insight into Jenkins’ business practices. Bessborough first asked Jenkins to try and buy it for him in the January, for 100 guineas,¹⁰⁹ and up until February was encouraged to believe it would ‘fall to’ him.¹¹⁰ Three months later its fate was still ‘not yet decided ... and must remain in suspense’,¹¹¹ though by August it was suggested that the Pope himself had set his heart on it, for which ‘there is no remedy’ other than increasing his offer to £120.¹¹²

15 – John Joseph Briggs,
Monument to Lord
Bessborough, All Saints'
Church (S.E. corner)

Watercolour, from a manuscript
volume entitled 'The Sepulchral
Monuments of Derbyshire'.
(courtesy Derbyshire Record
Office and Derby Diocesan Record
Office, ref. D4626/1 (3))



Jenkins wrote a week later confirming that the Pope had indeed taken it, together with about ten of the 'Best Antiquities', and intended to display them, together with a number of other pieces, in a gallery in the Vatican.¹¹³ In a subsequent letter, Jenkins still found it necessary to justify to his patron his failure in acquiring the dog, stating that it was no fault of his, but depended on particular circumstances: 'the Pope by granting some indulgences to the Nuns who ware [*sic*] Proprietors, got all their Antiquities for much less than I had offered'.

One of the last lots in the 1801 auction (lot 117, sold to Herd for £37.16s) is described as 'A beautiful Head of a Female Saint in Mosaick, done at the Vatican in the same Manner as the Pictures in St. Peter's'.¹¹⁴ This piece is first mentioned in the letter of 6 December 1769, where Jenkins notes that 'on my arrival here I found the

mosaik carefully packt up'. In his reply, over a month later,¹¹⁵ Lord Bessborough mentions that it has not yet arrived, but hopes that it soon shall. There then follows¹¹⁶ an elaborate and highly convoluted explanation of the delay, apparently caused by a row which had developed over the bill of lading (which Jenkins considered to be a 'downright imposition'), amounting to an extortionate £17. He concludes this section of the letter by admitting that he wished he had simply paid the excess freight rather than having caused Lord Bessborough such trouble. In a letter sent two months later, by which time the mosaic had still not arrived, Jenkins notes, in a postscript, that 'Your Lordp will please to recollect that the picture in Mosaick is to be seen at the distance to have its proper effect.' He also mentions a letter, which was due to arrive in the same post, from Mr Hewetson – 'an ingenious sculptor and your countryman here ... a deserving man [with] considerable merit in his profession'.¹¹⁷

The next mention of the mosaic is in a letter from Jenkins in response to one from Bessborough confirming its eventual arrival.¹¹⁸ He is 'hurt at the accident which befel [*sic*] [it] which presumably must have been ocasioned [*sic*] by some uncommon jolt or tumbling of the Case', and hopes that 'when properly placed the defect will not be visible'. Bessborough is then given a description of the piece (rather belatedly for him, but for us informative), in which Jenkins explains: 'The subject of it is the head of Judith painted by Carlo Maratt[a] for one of the small cupolo's in St Peters, where it is copied in Mosaick, and the original painting is in the great Hall called La Sala Reggio in the Popes Palace at Monte Cavalle.'

The last we hear of the mosaic is at the end of an amusing letter from Lord Clanbrassill to Bessborough, sent after a gap in the surviving correspondence of five years (from 1768 to 1773).¹¹⁹ Clanbrassill had now returned from Paris to Ireland, where he is based at his estate in Dundalk, county Louth.¹²⁰ Bessborough has obviously ordered him to write, and Clanbrassill asks, 'what amusement can you possibly have from any letter I can write from this place?', claiming that 'people retired to a remote corner of a country, not only remote, but thinly inhabited, contract bounded and local ideas'. He continues, 'I do it worse than any body. You know it impossible to pour wine out of a vessell that contains nothing but water,' jokingly offering, once he has received orders, to 'give ... a full account of plows, oxen, turnips, cabbage, pruning & planting, guns and woodcocks'. Turning, at last, to a subject of mutual interest – Bessborough's antiquities – Clanbrassill notes:

I have found out where the white stone is found the same as the white parts of the Antique Mosaic. Hayward told me he had a bit from Ireland but could not say where it came from.¹²¹ I discovered it in the mountains in the County of Derry.¹²² It is a thick, cream, white, when polished, very good for mosaic & I should imagine pretty for inscriptions, if your Lordship cares for some of it

I can very easily send it to London.

Although there is a great deal more to be said about Lord Bessborough and his artistic interests (he was a Trustee of the British Museum, for example, from 1768 until he died), we shall move on swiftly to the subject of his death and subsequent memorials.¹²³ When he died, on 11 March, 1793, at the age of 89, his daughter-in-law Henrietta Spencer (mother of Caroline Lamb), writing to her sons from Rome, referred to ‘the sad loss you have had in your dear grandpapa’, and confessing that, ‘the shock I received from this terrible news made me so ill, I could not write before.’¹²⁴ Dying of natural causes, though almost blind, Lord Bessborough was buried, on 22 March, alongside his wife in All Saint’s Church, Derby. In contrast with the elaborately conceived monuments which he erected for his parents and wife (see Plates 6, 7), the monument dedicated to his memory is simple and unadorned (Plate 15). It consists of a bust placed on a funerary urn, below which is a coat of arms between two ‘feet’ in the form of Corinthian capitols. There is some classical reference in his clothing, too, though nothing as mannered as in the busts of his parents.

The sculptor commissioned to carry out this bust and monument was Nollekens, who was a personal friend of Bessborough.¹²⁵ Coincidentally (though it may have been a common style of the sculptor), the monument itself is almost identical to one made by Nollekens for Richard Barwell, who died at Stansted (later home to the Bessbough family) in 1804.¹²⁶ Presumably, it was Bessborough’s son and heir Frederick (up until then Lord Duncannon) who commissioned this monument, though there is no mention of this in the inscription, which is predominantly factual, the only eulogy being in the two lines: ‘He was beloved and respected by all: In Liberality and Charity He was surpassed by none.’¹²⁷ Ironically, since this is the same son (though himself an avid collector of prints) who regrettably decided to sell off his father’s collections of art and antiquities only eight years after his death, a more fitting eulogy is to be found, perhaps, on the covers of the catalogues for the two Christie’s auctions of 1801,¹²⁸ which describe Lord Bessborough as: ‘A NOBLE EARL, DECEASED (Not less distinguished for his exquisite Taste and Judgement in the Fine Arts, than for his Liberality in Collecting)’.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ In order to avoid confusion, he shall be referred to here simply as William or Lord Bessborough, even though he did not attain this title until 1758. In the sources, he is generally named, up until this date, as Hon Ponsonby or (after 1724) as Lord Duncannon.
- ² She also had family connections with the 3rd Viscount Charlemont, which means that her son was closely related to James Caulfield, 1st Earl of Charlemont, another Anglo-Irish Grand Tourist of note.
- ³ As is well known, in 1662 Baron Ponsonby renamed the Kildalton estate Bessie Borough, or Bessborough, after his second wife Elizabeth Folliott. This was regarded with scorn by later critics, such as Swift; see M. Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses* (rev. ed. 1988) 41.
- ⁴ *The English Peerage*, 1790.
- ⁵ Typically, even the Bessborough Papers in the possession of the present Earl contain only a half-page handwritten list of brief biographical notes, moving speedily from his date of birth and political appointments to the year of his death (File 20). I am most grateful to Myles Ponsonby, 12th Earl of Bessborough, for giving me access to his family papers, and for allowing me to quote and reproduce material from the following three files: File 20 (Biographical Notes on 2nd Earl), File 77 (2nd Earl's Correspondence with Lord Clanbrassill), and File 157 (2nd Earl's Correspondence with Thomas Jenkins). I also wish to acknowledge the kind assistance of Peter Wilkinson, former assistant archivist, and Alison McCann, assistant archivist, of the West Sussex Public Record Office in Chichester, who arranged permission for me.
- ⁶ At least it has been established, from examining the records, that he did not enter the three main universities in these isles: Trinity College, Dublin (attended by his grandfather and his two younger brothers), Cambridge (attended by his only surviving son, Frederick) or Oxford.
- ⁷ See R. Finnegan, 'The Private Library of the 2nd Earl of Bessborough', *Hermathena*, forthcoming. This study is based on an analysis of a manuscript entitled Catalogue of Books at Roehampton, 1762, in the Library of Stansted Park, Hampshire. This house, former home of

- the Bessborough family, who moved there after being burned out of Bessborough House in county Kilkenny in 1923, is now run by the Stansted Park Foundation.
- ⁸ The diarist Thomas Creevey wrongly claims, in relation to a visit to the Ponsonby family in September 1828, that William ‘left Ireland when eighteen years old, and having never seen it more, died in 1792’, quoted in D. FitzGerald, Knight of Glin, D.J. Griffin and N.K. Robinson, *Vanishing Country Houses of Ireland* (Dublin 1989) 24.
- ⁹ See J.H. Lepper and P. Crossle, *History of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ireland* (Dublin 1925) 82.
- ¹⁰ As recorded, for example, by G. O’Brien, *Dictionary of Biography* (Oxford 2004), and the Earl of Bessborough with C. Aslet, *Enchanted Forest: The Story of Stansted in Sussex* (London 1984) 104.
- ¹¹ See, for example, N.A.M. Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl: A Life of John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich 1718-1792* (London 1993) 4ff.
- ¹² For the educational purposes of the Grand Tour, see J. Black, *The British Abroad: the Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (London, paperback edition 2003) 318-21, 327.
- ¹³ It is possible that the Scottish William Ponsonby, recorded in John Ingamells, *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800* (New Haven and London 1997) 781, as being at the University of Padua in 1726, might have been our William Ponsonby. Certainly the age factor (he would have been twenty-two at the time) adds weight to this argument.
- ¹⁴ In a letter to Lord Bessborough, dated 6 December 1769, Thomas Jenkins mentions that this celebrated antiquary ‘remembers you exceedingly well, and was vastly glad to receive your kind compliments, and makes you a thousand offers of his services’ (Bessborough Family Papers, File 157). All subsequent references to the Jenkins-Bessborough correspondence are referred to by the date of the letter.
- ¹⁵ See F. Haskell and N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900* (New Haven and London 1981) 63.
- ¹⁶ For a fascinating study on Albani and the theory that he was a spy (based on his correspondence with, among others, Horace Mann), see L. Lewis, *Connoisseurs and Secret Agents in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (London 1961) *passim*.
- ¹⁷ Jenkins to Bessborough, 6 December 1769. However, the ensuing correspondence does not suggest that such a trip materialised.
- ¹⁸ *Dublin Journal*, no. 1166, 13-17 September 1737.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, no. 1167, 17-20 September 1737.
- ²⁰ See Ingamells, *Dictionary*, 1021. For further details of Wright’s occupation as a spy, see Lewis, *Connoisseurs and Secret Agents*, 96 and 103.
- ²¹ See Ingamells, *Dictionary*, under the entries for William Ponsonby and Lord Sandwich, 781 and 839-40, respectively.
- ²² London, 1799. Given the extent of these memoirs, and the fame he was to achieve in later life, it is surprising that no mention is made of John Montagu in David Constantine’s book, *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal* (Cambridge 1984), in which the author sets out to ‘describe the transmission of facts and enthusiasm among the travellers’.
- ²³ This is in the possession of the present Lord Sandwich (also John Montagu) of Mapperton, and I am grateful to him for verifying the absence of any reference to the names of his ancestor’s travelling companions.
- ²⁴ See Ingamells, *Dictionary*, 781, n.3, and 840, n.10, referring to the fact that the party (consist-

- ing of Lord Sandwich, James Nelthorpe and John Mackye) were reported in the *Florence Newsletter*, 20 October 1738, as having arrived back from Leghorn (where they had performed their quarantine) to Florence.
- ²⁵ I am grateful to James Cooper, Director of the Stansted Park Foundation, for permission to reproduce this illustration, together with other material from the Foundation, as mentioned below. I am also truly indebted to Captain John Cunningham, heritage volunteer at Stansted Park working on behalf of the Portsdown Decorative & Fine Arts Society, whose extreme generosity and expertise have been invaluable to me throughout the duration of my research.
- ²⁶ See L. Geilly, 'La Biographie de Jean-Etienne Liotard, écrite par son fils', *Geneva*, XI, 1933, 195.
- ²⁷ The story is also related by J. Anderson, 'Fixing Pastels: a Letter from Liotard to the 2nd Earl of Bessborough in 1763', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 13, 1996, 23.
- ²⁸ Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl*, 4. The author of this biography, however, uses as his source Lord Sandwich's *A Voyage performed by the Late Earl of Sandwich round the Mediterranean in the Years 1738 and 1739, Written by Himself* (1799), which, according to Ingamells, *Dictionary*, 840, 'seems inaccurate on several counts'.
- ²⁹ As recorded in F. Fosca, *La Vie les Voyages et les Oeuvres de Jean-Etienne Liotard, Citoyen de Geneve, dit Le Peintre Turc* (Paris 1956) 194-96.
- ³⁰ Ingamells, *Dictionary*, 840, and Geilly, 'La Biographie de Jean-Etienne Liotard', 195.
- ³¹ Ingamells, *Dictionary*, 781, n 4.
- ³² That collecting was one of the motives for this (or any subsequent undocumented) trip is illustrated on the cover of a Christie's sale catalogue: *A Catalogue of the Capital, Well-known and Truly Valuable Collection of Antique Statues, Bustos, Aegyptian, and other Vases, Bas-Reliefs, &c. ... the Property of A Noble Earl, Deceased....*, 7 April 1801, in which it is stated that a great part of 'this valuable assemblage' was formed 'during his travels and residence in Italy' (Christie's Archives, London).
- ³³ See Anderson, 'Fixing Pastels', 23, and Fosca, *La Vie les Voyages et les Oeuvres de Jean-Etienne Liotard*, 59-60, for an account of the paintings then (at the date of publication) in the Bessborough family collection.
- ³⁴ If this is indeed the date, as suggested, then Liotard must have begun it in 1739 while travelling with Bessborough, since the artist was to remain in Constantinople for a further five years after the rest of the party had left.
- ³⁵ Vere, 9th Earl, lists a number of works of art which he 'got away from Bessborough before it was burnt, and ... [which] were saved from the flames at the time of the fire by the devoted efforts of Michael Power the Clerk of the works aided by others in the employ of the estate'. See 'Reminiscences', or 'Memoirs', a manuscript in Stansted Park Library.
- ³⁶ The Earl of Sandwich wore similar attire for portraits attributed to Joseph Highmore and James Northcote. See Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl*, figs 1-3.
- ³⁷ This costume is described by Aileen Ribeiro in an article entitled 'Turquerie: Turkish Dress and English Fashion in the Eighteenth Century', *The Connoisseur*, vol. 20, May 1979, 21, as the 'kind of semi-Turkish dress worn by Englishmen travelling in the East'.
- ³⁸ In *Irish Arts Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1987, 31, 32-33.
- ³⁹ See, for example, Bessborough with Aslet, *Enchanted Forest*, 109.
- ⁴⁰ Also in Stansted Park. See Ribeiro, 'Turquerie', n 10. Ribeiro rightly describes her costume as being a version of a Turkish (rather than a Venetian) dress.

- ⁴¹ For a general discussion of the Dilettanti portraits (though the author does not actually refer to those of Lords Bessborough and Sandwich), see A. Shearer West, 'Libertinism and the Ideology of Male Friendship in the Portraits of the Society of Dilettanti', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, no. 16, May 1992, 76-104.
- ⁴² See B. Redford, "'Seria Ludo": George Knapton's Portraits of the Society of Dilettanti', *British Art Journal*, vol 3, no. 1, 2001, 66, and Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl*, 7 and 118. Lysons' *Environs of London* notes that in the breakfast room of Bessborough's Roehampton Villa 'are several [portraits] in crayons of English gentlemen, principally in Turkish dresses, by Liotard', quoted in the Earl of Bessborough in collaboration with A. Aspinall, *Lady Bessborough and her Family Circle* (London 1940) 292.
- ⁴³ Bessborough was a founder member of the Divan Society, among whose other members were Frolich, Mackye and Nelthorpe. Membership to this exclusive dining club was open only to those who could prove they had travelled to Turkey. The only surviving record of this society is the Minute Book ('Al-Koran') in the possession of Lord Sandwich of Mapperton, and I am grateful to him for allowing me to quote from this and for kindly transcribing part of the rules, or 'Laws' for my work on a related study (forthcoming). A copy of the manuscript is in the National Maritime Museum, London, ref. NMM, SAN/V/113.
- ⁴⁴ According to the appendix of L. Cust and S. Colvin, *History of the Society of Dilettanti* (London 1914), Bessborough was elected in 1736 (as was Lord Middlesex), the Earl of Sandwich in 1740 (and re-elected in 1775), Mr Nelthorpe in 1740, and Mr Mackye in 1740/41. (Nelthorpe was re-elected in 1744.)
- ⁴⁵ J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London 1997) 256.
- ⁴⁶ As with Bessborough, he was elected in 1736, see appendix of Cust and Colvin, *History of the Society of Dilettanti*.
- ⁴⁷ Caroline was born on 22 May 1719, and was goddaughter of George II. See *The Complete Peerage of England Scotland Ireland Great Britain and the United Kingdom Extant Extinct or Dormant*, II (London 1912).
- ⁴⁸ See R.E. Burns, *Irish Parliamentary Politics in the Eighteenth Century*, II (Washington 1989) 42-43, for an account of the political consequences of this marriage.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 53, and *The English Peerage*, 1790.
- ⁵⁰ See, for example, the postal address given on letters dated from 4 May 1742 to 13 July 1744, in the Wilmon-Horton of Osmaston and Catton collection, Derbyshire Record Office, ref. D3155/C590 to C650.
- ⁵¹ See D. Howell-Thomas, *Duncannon: Reformer and Reconciler, 1781-1847* (London 1992) 17-18.
- ⁵² The house was sold in October 1920 by Edward, 8th Earl, because it had 'now become too big & cheerless', as described by Vere, 9th Earl of Bessborough, in 'Reminiscences', or 'Memoirs', a manuscript in Stansted Park Library.
- ⁵³ This mansion is described and illustrated in E.W. Brayley, *The Beauties of England and Wales; or Original Delineations, Topographical, Historical, and Descriptive, of Each County*, VII (London 1808) 575-76.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 576.
- ⁵⁵ Apart from the births and untimely deaths of many of the eleven children born to the couple between their marriage and Caroline's death in 1760. According to the family tree ('A

Genealogical Table of the Noble Family of PONSONBY, Baron Ponsonby, &c.', a manuscript pasted into a scrapbook, in the Library of Stansted Park), four of their six daughters (Caroline, Sarah and two unnamed) died young, while the first four boys (William Brabazon, William John, Henry, and one unnamed) also died young. The only surviving son was Frederick, born in 1758, who succeeded his father in 1793.

- ⁵⁶ See Brayley, *The Beauties of England and Wales*, 576.
- ⁵⁷ According to a catalogue of pictures compiled by C. Fairfax Murray in 1893 (Nottingham Archives: Portland of Welbeck, 6th Deposit, ref. DD/P6/19/1/3), the original portrait (held at Welbeck Abbey) was presented by Lord William Bentinck to Madame Adelaide of France who, by her will, bequeathed it to the Duke of Portland. To judge from the surviving family correspondence (particularly between him and his wife Dorothy), William Bentinck was on very friendly terms with Lord Bessborough. Further evidence of the relations between the two families is provided in a letter from Lord Clanbrassill to Bessborough, dated 28 March 1768, when it is suggested that the latter should visit him in Paris: 'We might then make Mr Bentinck a visit together which I have promised to do in [*sic*] my way home.' Fairfax Murray's catalogue further states that a duplicate portrait was bequeathed by Maddell Listard to the 'Amsterdam Gallery, Catalogue No. 858', and it is this that it depicted in Plate 5.
- ⁵⁸ Members of the Irish Georgian Society will know that the preservation of the 'Mausoleum' in which this monument is housed has continued to be of great interest and concern to the Society since the 1960s. See, for example, *Quarterly Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, IX, nos 3 and 4, 103, where a photograph of the monument is published.
- ⁵⁹ As is apparent from the architectural and interior design of Bessborough House, see below.
- ⁶⁰ The richness of this monument is described in S. Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (London 1837), in the entry for Fiddown, as 'consisting of half length figures of the earl and his countess, on a sarcophagus of Egyptian marble, under a pediment supported by four Corinthian columns and four pilasters of Sienna marble'.
- ⁶¹ Extract made by Lady Charlotte Schreiber, mother of Blanche Vere Guest (wife of the 8th Earl), from Walpole's Letters (Cunningham, ed.), II, 281, in the Bessborough Family Papers, File 20.
- ⁶² Charlotte (1742-1789) married the Duke of Saint Albans, while Catherine (1747-1822) married William, Earl Fitzwilliam.
- ⁶³ As erroneously stated in many sources, including the family tree in Stansted Park (see n.55, above). The last input to this document is William's resignation from the position of Joint Postmaster General in 1766. It is curious, since this is only six years after the death of his wife, that such an error should have been made.
- ⁶⁴ As described by Revd J. Charles Cox and W.H. St John Hope, *The Chronicles of the Collegiate Church of All Saints, Derby* (London and Derby 1881) 129.
- ⁶⁵ A mark of his true affection for Caroline is apparent in the fact that Lord Bessborough had worn his wife's diamond buckles ever since her death. See J.T. Smith, 's scathing biography of his master, *Nollekens and His Times* (1828; reprinted London 1949) 57.
- ⁶⁶ J. Summerson, *Architecture in Britain, 1530-1830* (New Haven and London 1953; 9th ed., 1993) 386, places it as the first of Chambers' 'classical country houses' in the 'villa revival'.
- ⁶⁷ See G. Worsley, *Classical Architecture in Britain: the Heroic Age* (New Haven and London 1995) 245, for a discussion of the influences on this house, which is described as a 'reinterpretation without the dome of Campbell's Mereworth, Kent, or as an adaptation of Isaac Ware's

- Foots Cray, Kent’.
- ⁶⁸ J.P. Alcock, ‘Sir William Chambers and the Building of Parkstead House’, *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, LXXII, 1980, 198.
- ⁶⁹ See Ingamells, *Dictionary*, 194-95.
- ⁷⁰ See Alcock, ‘Sir William Chambers and the Building of Parkstead House’, 198. Alcock mistakenly refers to the Duke as William’s ‘brother-in-law’, rather than his father-in-law.
- ⁷¹ C. Campbell, J. Woolfe and J. Gandon, *Vitruvius Britannicus, or the British Architect, containing the Plans, Elevations and Sections of Buildings in Great Britain (1715-71)* 11-13.
- ⁷² See Howell-Thomas, *Duncannon*, 110.
- ⁷³ D. FitzGerald, Knight of Glin, ‘Francis Bindon: His Life and Works’, *Quarterly Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, X, 2, 1967, 11, n 26.
- ⁷⁴ Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses*, 41, and M. Craig, *The Architecture of Ireland from the Earliest Times to 1880* (Dublin 1982; rev. ed. 1997) 189.
- ⁷⁵ Neither of these two features (the pediment or the stairway) is evident in Plate 12, since this is a rear view of the house. However, they are present in photographs from the early twentieth century, for example, Glin, ‘Francis Bindon’, pl 4, and the National Library of Ireland, ref. PI199A (c.1900-10).
- ⁷⁶ Rev. D. Lysons, *Environs of London*, 1, part 3 (London 1791-96) 433-34.
- ⁷⁷ Jenkins to Bessborough, 6 December 1769.
- ⁷⁸ Bessborough Papers, File 20.
- ⁷⁹ Reproduced by permission of Christie’s Archives, London.
- ⁸⁰ For further details on this piece, see P. Thornton and H. Dorey, *A Miscellany of Objects from Sir John Soane’s Museum* (London 1992) 71.
- ⁸¹ Clanbrassill was elected Member of the Society of Dilettanti in 1760; B. de Breffny, ‘Liotard’s Irish Patrons’, *Irish Arts Review*, vol 4, no. 2, 1987, 38, tentatively suggests that ‘the 2nd Earl of Bessborough would have been acquainted with’ Clanbrassill, but was obviously unaware of the actual extent of their friendship.
- ⁸² Letter from Lord Clanbrassill to Lord Bessborough, dated 14 June 1763 (Bessborough Papers, File 57). All subsequent references to the Clanbrassill-Bessborough correspondence are referred to by the date of the letter.
- ⁸³ In, for example, L. Natter, *Treatise on the Ancient Method of Engraving on Precious Stones* (London 1754); L. Natter, *Catalogue des Pierres Gravees de Comte de Bessborough* (printed by J. Haberdorn, London 1761), and T. Worlidge, *A Select Collection of Drawings from Curious Antique Gems, most of them in the possession of the Nobility and Gentry of this Kingdom, etched after the Manner of Rembrandt* (London 1768-70).
- ⁸⁴ See C. Macht, *Classical Wedgwood Designs: The Sources and Their Use and the Relationship of Wedgwood Jasper Ware to the Classical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (New York 1957) 11.
- ⁸⁵ E. Meteyard, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood from his Private Correspondence and Family Papers with an Introductory Sketch of the Art of Poetry in England*, 2 vols (London 1866), quoted in the Bessborough Family Papers, File 20.
- ⁸⁶ Manuscript in the Library of Stansted Park, see n.7, above.
- ⁸⁷ A five-day auction at Christie’s, from 3 April 1848, see *Catalogue of the Valuable Library of the Late Right Hon. Frederick Earl of Bessborough*, Christie’s Archives, London.
- ⁸⁸ Cardinal Melchior de Polignac (1661-1742) was French Ambassador to Rome for eight years,

from 1732 to 1740, during which time he added to his collection of antiquities, including the famous statue of the *Nymph with a Shell* (now in the Louvre). See Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 280 and fig 148.

⁸⁹ Clanbrassill to Bessborough, 20 January 1768.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Clanbrassill to Bessborough, 19 May 1768.

⁹² Clanbrassill to Bessborough, 20 January 1768.

⁹³ Clanbrassill to Bessborough, 19 May 1768.

⁹⁴ Clanbrassill to Bessborough, 6 July 1768.

⁹⁵ This gentleman was Director of the Bank of England from 1768, but in 1784, when he sold off part of his collection to Catherine the Great in St Petersburg, the bankruptcy of his agent meant that he received less than half the sum they sold for.

⁹⁶ Jenkins to Lyde-Brown, 30 March 1763, the first letter in the collection of Bessborough-Jenkins correspondence.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Jenkins to Bessborough, 7 May 1763.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Christie's catalogue, 1801, 1.

¹⁰¹ There is talk in the correspondence of two separate sketches: one designed to interest Bessborough (sent some time in March or April, 1763 – probably the one shown in Plate 14), and the other to illustrate how the final product would look, following restoration (sent on 7 May 1763). Whatever the case, Jenkins apologises for the quality of the sketch, assuring him that it is nothing like the real thing, which is already in transit.

¹⁰² Jenkins to Bessborough, 23 April 1763.

¹⁰³ Jenkins to Bessborough, 6 December 1769.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Bessborough to Jenkins, 15 January 1770.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Jenkins to Bessborough, 19 May 1770. In his previous letter (15 January 1770), he mentions that 'your friend' Cardinal Albani 'has adopted numbers of them in his Villa, by setting them into the walls, he avoids the expence [*sic*] of restoring them and well disposed have an excellent effect...'

¹⁰⁸ Jenkins to Bessborough, 1 August 1770.

¹⁰⁹ Bessborough to Jenkins, 15 January 1770.

¹¹⁰ Jenkins to Bessborough, 3 February 1770.

¹¹¹ Jenkins to Bessborough, 19 May 1770.

¹¹² Jenkins to Bessborough, 1 August 1770. This was Pope Clement XIV, for whom Jenkins purchased antiquities. He is described by Jenkins as having a great 'love for the Arts ... [and being] a man of too much honor to touch the publick money even in his acts of munificence, what purchases he makes tho' for the use of the State is all done out of his Privy Purse'. At the time of writing this to Bessborough (19 May 1770), Jenkins' position as a supplier of antiquities had become somewhat precarious, owing to the enforcement of more stringent regulations concerning the exportation of Italy's heritage. Interestingly, Jenkins confides in his correspondent, explaining his rather questionable business dealings with the Pope, as follows: 'my convention with him being, to give him the refusal of such antiquities as I purchase at the first

- count, in confirmation of which he assures [*sic*] me the liberty of sending away what he does not take, by this means I gain such points as it would be otherwise impossible to surmount’.
- ¹¹³ Jenkins to Bessborough, 8 August 1770. By placing these in the more spacious Vatican, rather than in the Capitol, from which he was moving other famous pieces, like the *Laocoön*, the Pope was ensuring that they would be viewed to their best advantage.
- ¹¹⁴ Christie’s sale catalogue, 7 April 1801, 8.
- ¹¹⁵ Bessborough to Jenkins, 15 January 1770.
- ¹¹⁶ Jenkins to Bessborough, 3 February 1770.
- ¹¹⁷ Jenkins to Bessborough, 19 May 1770. Christopher Hewetson, from Thomastown, county Kilkenny (1737-98), was in Rome from 1765 until his death, during which time he befriended Jenkins and had a very successful career. See Ingamells, *Dictionary*, 494-95.
- ¹¹⁸ Jenkins to Bessborough, 1 August 1770.
- ¹¹⁹ Clanbrassill to Bessborough, 9 December 1772.
- ¹²⁰ His other estate was at Tollymore, county Down.
- ¹²¹ Presumably Richard Hayward the sculptor (1728-1800), described by Jenkins, who had met him on his Grand Tour of 1753-54, as ‘a deserving young man ... [who] behaved well’. Ingamells, *Dictionary*, 478.
- ¹²² He gives no further details of the location of this stone. There is, however, a townland in Derry called An Chloch Fhionn (Cloughfin), which means ‘the white stone’.
- ¹²³ A shorter study on the engraved prints executed in memory of Lord Bessborough is in progress.
- ¹²⁴ Letter dated 10 April 1793, quoted in Bessborough with Aspinall, *Lady Bessborough*, 80.
- ¹²⁵ It is recorded by his pupil, T.J. Smith, *Nollekens and His Times*, 56, that Bessborough was such a frequent visitor at his house that the dog ‘immediately welcomed the visitor, who always brought a French-roll in his blue great-coat-pocket purposely for him, with which his Lordship took great pleasure in feeding him’. Other anecdotes about Bessborough’s generosity, in particular, are recorded in this work. See also n.127, below.
- ¹²⁶ This monument, erected in his memory in Westbourne parish church, is depicted in Bessborough with Aslet, *Enchanted Forest*, 65.
- ¹²⁷ His father’s generosity is testified elsewhere (see n.125, above), but is most obvious from his personal correspondence. In a letter to Lord Bessborough dated 6 December 1769, for instance, Thomas Jenkins praises the ‘curious and elegant Derbyshire vase’ recently sent by Bessborough and promises to show it first to Cardinal Albani, ‘tho’ I am pretty confident he will keep it’. In his reply of 13 January 1770, Lord Bessborough notes, ‘In case he likes the alabaster vase, I gave you, I will send him one of the best I can get, or should his Eminence like our English thorny [?] Beer, I will send him a Hogshead for his acceptance.’ Clearly both gifts arrived safely, as several months later (1 August 1770 and 24 October 1770, respectively), Jenkins encloses letters of thanks and gratitude from the Cardinal’s Secretary. Bessborough was reimbursed by the Cardinal for the transportation costs of the beer.
- ¹²⁸ The three-day sale of paintings, on 6 February, and the one-day sale of marbles, on 7 April 1801.