



*Memories of the Court of
George III,*
Michael Kassler
(London: Pickering and Chatto,
2015).

Review by:
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Memoirs of the Court of George III. 4 vols. General Editor: Michael Kassler. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-8489-3469-6. £385.

Volume 1: *The Memoirs of Charlotte Papendiek (1756-1840)*, Michael Kassler (ed.) xxxvii + 463 pp.; Volume 2: *Mary Delany (1700-1788) and the Court of King George III*, Alain Kerhervé (ed.). lv + 322 pp.; Volume 3: *The Diary of Lucy Kennedy 1790-1816*, Lorna J. Clark (ed.). xlvii + 249 pp.; Volume 4: *The Diary of Queen Charlotte, 1789 and 1794*, Michael Kassler (ed.). xxviii + 422 pp.

Memoirs of the Court of George III is a four volume set which gives the reader an insight into the late-Hanoverian court from four different viewpoints. Each volume presents a privileged viewpoint, from those who saw George III and his court more intimately than most, and the four accounts have subtle differences due to the class and nature of the observer, which ensures that each offers a different perspective.

The first volume is written by a comfortable ‘middling’ observer of events, albeit one whose family was bound up in service to the Royal Family. The second is from the widow of a senior clerical dignitary and friend of the Dowager Duchess of Portland. The third is from a ‘grace and favour’ occupant at Windsor and relative of a prominent politician. Finally, the diary of the queen consort gives the most privileged view of all.

The first volume, the memoirs of Charlotte Papendiek, appeared in print in 1877. The memoirs were written long after the events described, but their style belies their having been completed in the 1830s. Mrs Papendiek’s father, Frederick Albert, was one of Queen Charlotte’s servants who had accompanied her from Mecklenberg-Strelitz. Mrs Papendiek’s marriage to a royal page, Christopher Papendiek, reinforced the bonds of service to the House of Hanover.

The most striking aspect of this volume is the couple’s links to a thriving artistic social circle, notably musicians and painters. Perhaps as importantly, the Papendieks were also a living example of the “Links between Germany and Great Britain” (vol. 1, xvi), and a reminder of the very close relationship between various German Protestant states and Britain’s Hanoverian dynasty through a succession of marriages.

The king, queen, and Royal Family were ever present in Mrs Papendiek’s life. In the summer of 1783, she casually reported on her brother-in-law’s appointment as sub-librarian to the Prince of Wales at a salary of £100 a year (vol. 1, 83). Between 1788 and 1789, she was an anxious witness to George III’s bout of illness, writing in late 1788: “We, who were so intimately connected with the royal household, took these things, perhaps, more entirely home to our hearts” (vol. 1, 158-159). It is possible that Mrs Papendiek had first-hand knowledge on the king’s treatment, as “Mr Papendiek and Dr Thomas Willis found that they had a mutual tie of friendship” (vol. 1, 160). As with much of the nation, Mrs Papendiek was delighted at the king’s recovery. The king though was clearly left shaken, and Mrs Papendiek recounted the fate of a specific dessert service which was never “used in its entirety. Portions of it were constantly put out, but the King never could bear

to see anything relating to or that reminded him of his unfortunate illness” (vol. 1, 190).

The artistic circle around Charlotte Papendiek was remarkable. She records the family’s friendship with Johann Christian Bach, while another member of the circle was Charles Frederick Abel “the celebrated viola-da-gamba player” (vol. 1, 26), this being a late reference to a musical instrument nearing the end of its fashionable existence. Even in their artistic endeavours, the Royal Family was always present. The commission given to the young Thomas Lawrence to paint Queen Charlotte is described in detail, down to the jealousy of the leading painter, and future President of the Royal Academy, Benjamin West, who “did not care to encourage too many of his own art about the King, and the portrait was not quite the success it should have been.” (vol. 1, 192). The portrait can be seen in the National Gallery today.

There is an amusing anecdote of the king’s band requesting permission “to have musical parties of a morning at friends’ houses by subscription, to be presented by Mr Papendiek.” Mr Papendiek approached the queen who in turn raised the subject with the king, who “at once refused, upon the ground that they would not rest here, and said that he would allow them to attend in such cases when His Majesty ordered them to perform.” (vol. 1, 188). The band was clearly in a sulk, and at a benefit concert given at the town hall in Windsor, the musicians “one and all refused” to help “on the plea of His Majesty not having granted their petition.” (vol. 1, 193). So much for artistic temperaments.

The domestic habits of a family in royal service will greatly interest social historians of the period. Mrs Papendiek realised the value of a good education, noting frankly, that for “starting young people in the world” it was vital to have either “a good education or some fortune.” As they did not have a fortune, they were “determined that our children should have as good an education as we could possibly manage to give them”. Looking back in 1838, she remarked: “We have rubbed on through life as friends and with great affection, which as I draw near the end of my life is a source of the greatest comfort and happiness to me.” (vol. 1, 255). This is a wonderful epitaph to Mrs Papendiek.

A very minor criticism of the volume is the almost single continuous text. It was hard to put the book down as there are no obvious points where the reader can pause for breath. Also, a note indicating the year and month alongside the text would have been very useful, as months sometimes appeared to merge into one another.

Volume 2 presents the letters of Mrs Mary Delany (b. 1700), widow of a dean in the Church of Ireland. She was a talented artist, famous for her flower collages. A number of her letters have already been published, and the volume relies on some of these letters where the originals can no longer be found. Mrs Delany moved in the highest social circles, and she came to know George III well through her friendship with the Dowager Duchess of Portland, mother of the prominent Whig politician, William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland.

Mrs Delany's connection to the Royal Family was on a different level to the Papendieks, who, despite their cultural pursuits and comfortable 'middling' existence, were still in service to the House of Hanover. Mrs Delany moved in society, had married well, and became a close friend of a duchess. Her insights are also of a very different nature to Mrs Papendiek, and Mrs Delany sometimes appears as a relic of the earlier Hanoverian period. This is seen in a letter from William Gilpin to Mrs Delany of 9 November 1785 which makes light use of a term once politically dangerous: "For myself, I verily believe, if I had been a Jacobite, their [George III and Queen Charlotte] behaviour to you would have made a convert of me." (vol. 2, 143). The same William Gilpin showed his horror at the morals of Charles II who, "notwithstanding the wonderful work of his restoration" was condemned as "one of the most abandoned, profligate, corrupt, tyrannical irreligious princes that ever sat upon the English throne" (vol. 2, 105-106, 13 January 1785). This is all a bit unfair on Charles II, but again points to Mrs Delaney's longevity. When young, she would have known those who remembered this most merry of monarchs (although the accompanying footnote for some reason states that Charles II was king from 1649 to 1651, and not from 1649 or 1660 to 1685).

Mrs Delany's letters casually show her regular interaction with the Royal Family. For example, on a visit to the Royal Family in company with the Dowager Duchess of Portland in late 1781, we read that Mrs Delany sat next to the young Princess Royal and on "the other side of me was a chair, and His Majesty did me the honour to sit by me." The king's passion for music is apparent: "He [George III] went backwards and forwards between that and the music-room: he was so gracious as to have a good deal of conversation with me, particularly about Handel's music; and ordered those pieces to be played which he found I gave a preference to." Mrs Delany had met Handel as a child, and the king, who greatly admired the composer, would have been delighted to have heard tales of that most famous of Georgian musicians. During the evening, Queen Charlotte "changed places with the Princess Royal, saying, most graciously, she must have a little conversation with Mrs. Delany, which lasted about half an hour." No wonder Mrs Delany could write "Nothing could be more easy and agreeable." (vol. 2, 64, 9 December 1781). Mrs Delany and the Dowager Duchess of Portland were regarded as part of the king and queen's familiar circle, and so felt able to relax in front of them, talk to them as friends, although Mrs Delany never forgot that she was talking to the king and queen. Mrs Delaney also had other important connections, for example, she was on good terms with Francis North, 1st Earl of Guilford, father of the Prime Minister, Lord North (see vol. 2, 99-100, 12 November 1784).

The one detraction from this volume is the footnotes. The references to the wives of peers, such as Lady Louisa Thynne, who "As a result of her marriage... was styled Countess of Aylesford" (vol. 2, 65n) or Elizabeth Hamilton who "As a result of her marriage... was styled as Countess of Aldborough" (vol. 2, 242n) are completely unnecessary. There are also occasional typographical errors in the footnotes. Perhaps more seriously, one footnote (vol. 2, 77n) states that the 3rd Duke of Portland had replaced Lord Guilford's son, Lord North, as Prime Minister,

which explained Guilford's possible reluctance to visit the Portlands (see letter to Lord Guilford, vol. 2, 76, 11 September 1783). Charles James Fox and Lord North were in a coalition government under Portland at this time. It was the Rockingham administration which had replaced North's in 1782, so the context of the letter is not explained correctly. So this reluctance, if true, stems from other political or personal reasons. Guilford was a loyal courtier, and would have been under no illusions as to how George III felt about the Fox-North government.

While Mrs Delany was a frequent and honoured guest of the Royal Family, the next volume concerns a 'grace and favour' resident of Windsor Castle, who then moved to a house in the town. Lucy Kennedy kept a diary from 1790 to 1816, and lived in the Henry III Tower (then the Store Tower) at Windsor Castle until 1804. George III then asked her to move out of the castle to a house he provided for her in the High Street. As the introduction notes, after that point "Her observation of castle life was thereafter less regular, and her comments would often have depended upon reports from her many acquaintances within the castle walls." (vol. 3, xii).

Lucy Kennedy was particularly close to Queen Charlotte and the princesses. Miss Kennedy had lived at Windsor since the 1770s, and owed her 'grace and favour' apartment to being the sister-in-law of Sir Grey Cooper MP (Secretary to the Treasury 1765-1782 and Lord of the Treasury under Fox-North, April-December 1783). The original diary is in the Royal Archives, and its publication here in an accessible format will be an important source for historians.

From early on, we are left in no doubt as to Miss Kennedy's very privileged position. On 15 October 1793, Princess Elizabeth (George III's third daughter) "came up to me, at Early Prayers, and said, she had a great Favor to beg of me," (which turned out to be helping make artificial flowers to decorate a room, vol. 3, 4). Miss Kennedy was then invited to the Queen's Lodge to be greeted by the Princess Royal, who was painting flowers, and was "very Civil & Gracious to me, asked me What I Choose to do" (vol. 3, 4). The princesses regarded Miss Kennedy as one of the 'castle family', and as a respectable member of polite society, related to a successful and rich lawyer and former government minister, could be accepted as such.

On Friday 18 October 1793, the queen asked Miss Kennedy to accommodate a guest, Harriet Brühl and her maids (vol. 3, 7). This was a very personal favour to ask, and again showed how Miss Kennedy was seen as part of the wider castle family. Later on, the queen thanked her "most graciously for my Guests...She was much obliged to me, for it." (vol. 3, 10).

Outside events inevitably creep into the diary. In France, the Terror was underway, and an entry on 24 October 1793 confirmed that the king had received the news that "the unfortunate Queen of France Suffered Death" and had been "most Cruelly Insulted by a hired Wicked mob". Miss Kennedy reported "Our R.F. [Royal Family] very much Distressed, Sent word to Covent Garden, (where they had ordered the play) they Should not Come" (vol. 3, 8-9). Miss Kennedy also witnessed the courage of George III at the bleakest time. On 26 November 1803, she re-

marked: “God be thanked, the King is quite well, Said, to Me, it is a very Cold Day; his behaviour is very fine, No expression, or Look of Fear, or Doubt, I hear never Talks of the Expected [French] Invation [sic] (which all the Rest of ye World do)” (vol. 3, 36).

However, once Miss Kennedy left the castle in 1804 her intimacy with the Royal Family was reduced. The circumstances of her move are significant in the history of Windsor Castle, as occupants were moved out to allow the king and his family to take up residence. Miss Kennedy wrote that when the Royal Family set out for Weymouth on 24 August 1804, they would return in November “to Reside in the Castle”. She further noted that the architect, James Wyatt, had promised the work would be completed on the king’s return, so that the castle now had “above 200, Workman, of Different Sorts, & the uproar, the Whole Place is in”. With some sadness she confided to the diary “the Day his Majesty Went, Mr Wyat, acquainted, Miss Egerton and myself, that we must quit, our apartments, but that his Majesty would provide us with other Houses”. For Miss Egerton the move came swiftly as she “was to go Directly, as her apartments adjoined those preparing for Her Majesty”. Miss Kennedy was allowed a little more time: “We both, were a Little Harried, at first, have both Lived so many years in them, but the Kings goodness, in providing Houses for us, my Gratitude, very, Soon, overpower[e]d my Re-gret.” (vol. 3, 41).

The rest, and vast bulk, of the volume covers life as seen by Miss Kennedy from this less privileged position. It is the first part of the diary to 1804 which sees the life of the Royal Family witnessed first-hand, but Miss Kennedy was still an observer to royal and national events. On 27 November 1810, she documented the deterioration in the king’s health, following the death of Princess Amelia: “his Majesty Continues Very Ill” (vol. 3, 113), and on 12 December 1810: “his Majesty is Gradually getting better, he has often Bad nights, and very nervous”. (vol. 3, 115). On 21 December, she reported that a Regency Bill was to be introduced by Spencer Perceval’s Government.

Her journal post-1804 remains a lively and very readable account detailing her reactions to world events, especially the last years of the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon himself was dismissed as “The Tyrant” and “this monster” (vol. 3, 119). She wrote of the Battle of Leipzig, the Restoration of the French monarchy, and the celebrations held in London by the Prince Regent. All of these come off the page as fresh as the day they were written. Still, Miss Kennedy was never far from the Royal Family’s thoughts, and it is very pleasing to note that on 25 April 1816 she went to Princess Mary’s birthday, and there “the Prince Regent ...Spoke most Graciously to me”. (vol. 3, 205).

The fourth volume comes from the most intimate observer of George III’s family, Queen Charlotte. The queen’s diary for the period 1789 to 1794 is published here for the first time. As the introduction states: “They constitute almost certainly only a small amount of the diaries that Queen Charlotte kept, but no trace of other volumes has been found.” (vol. 4, xv). This is a great loss for historians, but this fragment is an important addition to the sources available for the period.

As the introduction also states, the diaries reveal the confidences shared between the king and queen, especially on German affairs. The queen frequently met with George Best, the king's German Secretary. There are numerous examples of the queen's noting: "Then I saw Mr Best [], the Kg []'s German Secretary, & we left London" (vol. 4, 40, 6 August 1789); "went into my Closet with the Princesses, saw Mr Best..." (vol. 4, 97, 24 January 1794). Of course, the queen would have her own German affairs to concern her, in the shape of her home country, the Duchy of Mecklenberg-Strelitz, as seen on 14 June 1794: "after Breakfast the Kg acquainted me that Mr Best the German Secretary had brought the account of my Brother the Duke[]'s Death." (vol. 4, 205). There are also other references to German advisers throughout in addition to Mr Best (see vol. 4, 83, 12 January 1794 and vol. 4, 229, 1 August 1794).

Domestic and international politics also pervade the diary. The first mention of the French Revolution comes early on, in an entry for 28 October 1789: "To Day the Kg gave an audience to the Duke of Orleans, who is not come in a public Capacity but brought only a Private Letter from the French Kg." (vol. 4, 31). We read of French émigrés being presented at court on 27 November 1794 (vol. 4, 310). There is even a bizarre entry for 7 September 1794 of a report heard by the king's brother, the Duke of Gloucester: "of Louis XVII having Drunk himself to Death" (although the footnote erroneously refers to "Prince Louis XVII" rather than to the Dauphin or King Louis XVII (vol. 4, 253 and 253n).

The war with France is present from 1793 onwards. On 1 January 1794 the queen noted: "This Day the Kg received advice from Ld Elgin His Minister at Brussels of Toulon being evacuated after having burned the Arsenal & all the French Ships in the Harbour." (vol. 4, 72). There is also the news of the recall of Frederick, Duke of York, the king's second (and favourite) son from active command, with this entry of 27 November 1794: "This Morning the Kg wrote the D. of York ordering him to come to England. The Dispatches from the Ministers were to the same purpose & the Messenger set off at 5 this Afternoon. The P.[rince of] W[ales]. told me as a piece of News that the Duke[]'s recall was talked of in the World[.]" (vol. 4, 310). The queen proposed how to break the news to the Duchess of York: "The Kg came up Stairs at my return from London[] & I proposed to him of inviting the Duchess of York, to tell her of the Duke[]'s being ordered to come, & He agreed to it." (vol. 4, 313, 28 November 1794).

For historians of the Hanoverians themselves, we have the queen's diary entry on Prince Augustus's illegal marriage in 1794. Prince Augustus, the king and queen's sixth son, married Lady Augusta Murray, in strict contravention of the terms of the 1772 Royal Marriages Act. She wrote on 25 January 1794: "To Day the Kg told me that the Ld Chancellor had acquainted Him after the Levé...with the disagree[e]able News of Augustus's Marriage with Ldy Augusta Murray...The Archbishop of Canterbury & other Ministers to proceed in this Unpleasant business as the Law directs...Also orders are given to Stop Ldy Dunmore & Her Daughter joining Him, or leaving England." (vol. 4, 98). The investigation into the marriage is recorded in detail on 28 January 1794:

Ldy Dunmore who Confirmed the Marriage of the 5th Decbr, but was not present. She also acknowledged a prior Marriage of Her Daughter & Augustus at Rome...the Ceremony performed by an English Clergyman...& that She was informed of the Event by a Letter from P. Augustus which She refused to Shew...when asked...what reason there was a second... Marriage in England, She answered, not to make the Child a Bastard & recollecting herself immediately & onwards said that it could not be looked upon in the light of a Bastard after the Marriage at Rome (vol. 4, 102).

George III's brothers had made unsuitable matches, which had led to the Royal Marriages Act being passed in the first place. George III's sons would continue the Hanoverian tradition of illegal marriages (as with The Prince of Wales and Mrs Fitzherbert) while others would enter into long term unmarried relationships.

The diaries also give personal glimpses into the life of Royal Family. On 21 January 1794, the queen accompanied the king and Princess Augusta to Kew, and then on to the cottage in Richmond Gardens to see the "Young Cangaroo". (vol. 4, 92). However, it is the political, national and international references which are of interest, from the lists of those attending court and the changing nature of those in attendance: from French exiles to some of the leading military figures of the day. These all show a queen consort intimately aware of affairs at home and abroad (and of course especially in Germany).

Taken as a group, the four volumes are an important addition for any historian of late-Hanoverian Britain. Each provides a unique perspective on court life, and on the private life of George III, perhaps the most domestic and certainly one of the most popular monarchs in modern British history. One volume is from a family in service, two are from members of polite society (one a well-connected widow, the other a well-connected 'grace and favour' resident) and finally from the queen. There are minor occasional criticisms, mostly with footnotes, which have been mentioned in the review, but overall these do not detract from the pleasure of reading these four volumes. Each volume is essential reading to anyone who wishes to study the history of George III's court, the later Hanoverian Royal Family, or late Georgian social and political history.

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