I was delighted to read such an extensive, engaged, careful and crafted review of my book. The piquant style gave me as much gratification as the content.

Inevitably, there are many themes about Georgian domestic life and space which did not get an airing in *Behind Closed Doors*. Even at a whopping 140,000 words in length, I was well aware how much had to be excluded.

My book was not conceived as a history of the family per se, nor straightforwardly of domesticity. There is much innovative new work on models of family, relationships and authority, such as Naomi Tadmor both on kinship and on reimagining the family in the Stuart translations of the bible from Hebrew, Nicola Phillips on ‘Parenting the Profligate Son’ in *Gender and History*, and Helen Berry herself in an important co-authored essay on the patriarchal difficulties and solutions of childless men in Berry and Foyster’s *The Family in Early Modern England*. But my approach was different. I was attempting to open up a space between architectural history, economic history and family and gender history. Therefore I only included discussions of intimate family life in so far as they bore on my central themes of the geography of home, power and space, architecture, design and objects.

I was determined not to trespass too much on the themes and interventions of my first book the *Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England*. Above all, I wanted to challenge myself with new sources – account books, ledgers, inventories, surviving furniture, textiles etc – to see if I could wrest a narrative from numbers, bare details and inanimate objects.

Interiors do not easily offer up their secrets. When I began this project I imagined it would involve a straightforward harvest of domestic commentary from an array of local archives. However for every afternoon turning up archival gold, I spent a week or more sifting family papers which had nothing whatsoever to say on space. The backdrop of a life is rarely the fodder of diaries and letters, just as routines are less interesting to record than events. They were taken as read at the time, and so remain elusive in surviving written records today.

Some important issues had to be shelved for lack of sources. I searched in vain for fulsome evidence of the domestic frustrations of non-patriarchal men at home. (I am still intrigued by grumbling references to irritable and churlish younger brothers and difficult old uncles who resisted being house-broken). Similarly the furnishing decisions of second wives would deserve fuller investigation – remarriage being a common crisis which required fundamental domestic reassessment. How far did a new emotional climate demand a new style of management or refurbishment? Widowers certainly showed a customary willingness to refurbish as a sign of goodwill. Did the second wife chuck out the first wife’s chintz? Surely she would have found it troubling to sleep beneath quilts laboriously embroidered by her predecessor. Sadly I am still looking for the answer.
Other exclusions were driven by the shape of the field. Church court cases are a colourful source for gender
dynamics at home and bear directly on my core themes, but I was conscious that these have been used
already for related purposes in Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in
recently Junko Akamatsu’s London University thesis on the court of arches. (3)

I was especially convinced by Foyster’s critique of the received over-arching narrative in the history of
domestic violence. Foyster found no evidence to support the traditional story that a privatization of the
family combined with a collapse of community separated the marital couple from their neighbours, driving
abuse indoors and out of sight. ‘Community intervention was not guaranteed, but the factors that governed
and limited it were not related to a lack of knowledge or concern about the married lives of others which
increased over time’. What did change by the 1850s, Foyster convincingly argues, was a sense of who
exactly within a community was empowered to intervene. The introduction of a Peelite police force, the
professionalization of medicine, and the enactment of legislation that increased the power of magistrates all
contributed to a sense that marital violence fell within the remit of experts to resolve. ‘In short, when marital
violence became somebody’s problem, in terms of it lying within their professional expertise it ceased to be
everybody’s problem. It is this change in attitudes which has cost so many women their lives’.

The issue of spatial and physical privacy is an important one for *Behind Closed Doors*. I argue that the
enjoyment of personal, inviolate space was an index of power, while life with no vestiges of privacy was
understood to be a sorry degradation, which stripped away the defences of the spirit. I looked at the claim to
and defence of private property and personal possession, but also the capacity and mechanisms to achieve
seclusion and withdrawal, refuge, security and secrecy – some of the less concrete associations of privacy in
the OED. My book offers an exploration of some of the lived meanings, practices and technologies of
privacy broadly defined.

Nevertheless, I am certainly not arguing that the Georgians witnessed the creation of modern privacy – an
appreciation of the multiple meanings of privacy seems entrenched at all social levels by the seventeenth
century, if not before. The received story of the march of architectural privacy (Ariès, Stone, Girouard, Heyl)
centres on the houses and privileges of a tiny elite – as the preoccupation with servants’ wings, back stairs,
bell pulls and visiting cards makes abundantly clear. However a concern with personal space can be found
throughout the social pyramid, even if its enjoyment was unequally distributed.

I do not take this to mean that a desire for personal privacy was a biological given or a temporal and cultural
constant. There is a tendency in the literature on closets, private devotion and private writing to link the
achievement of physical and psychological privacy with the birth of the modern, expressive self. And yes, I
am suspicious of the romantic idea of authentic identity on which this tale is predicated and sceptical that
 burgeoning sensitive individuality is waiting on only a private desk to unscroll its sorrows. Closet time for
religious devotion (and surreptitious letter writing) was the only spatial privilege which was sacrosanct for
the tyrannized Ann Dormer of Rousham, but it would be a distortion to shackle her story to a larger
whiggish narrative based on a reductive and anachronistic concept of identity.

Helen Berry is quite right about the absence of any sustained discussion of childhood or domestic music
making, both themes with a bearing on the uses of space and the orchestration of people at home. The rise
of the nursery and the suggestive concept of ‘harmony’ deserve book length studies in their own right. For a
later period, see Jane Hamlett’s ‘Tiresome Trips Downstairs’: Middle-Class Domestic Space and Family
Relationships in England, 1850-1910’. (4)
I assuaged my twinges about these topics a little by having an episode on musical harmony in courtship and marriage and on domestic education in my 30-part History of Private Life for BBC Radio 4. My radio producer Elizabeth Burke at Loftus Productions, was herself disappointed that I had not had more to say about domestic pets and pests! As birds and beasts supplied the added bonus of sound effects I searched out commentary on animals for the radio, from wolves and chickens, to budgies, kittens and lapdogs.

Behind Closed Doors aimed to stimulate debate on physical and psychological interiors. Clearly different stories could be told about Georgian interiors using different sources or asking different questions. There is much work still appearing inspired in part by the AHRC Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior, 2001–6 (a collaboration between Royal Holloway, the V&A and the Royal College of Art). See the special issue of the Journal of Design History (2007) on ‘Eighteenth-Century Interiors’ edited by Hannah Greig and Giorgio Riello; Karen Harvey on Masculinity at Home (forthcoming); Hannah Greig, The Fashionables: London’s Beau Monde in the Eighteenth Century (forthcoming) and for a later period, Jane Hamlett, Material Relations: Families and Middle-Class Domestic Interiors in England, 1850-1910. The history of space, the history of objects, the history of interior design and the history of power and emotion are large specialisms engaging a new generation of researchers. I look forward to their findings.

Notes


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