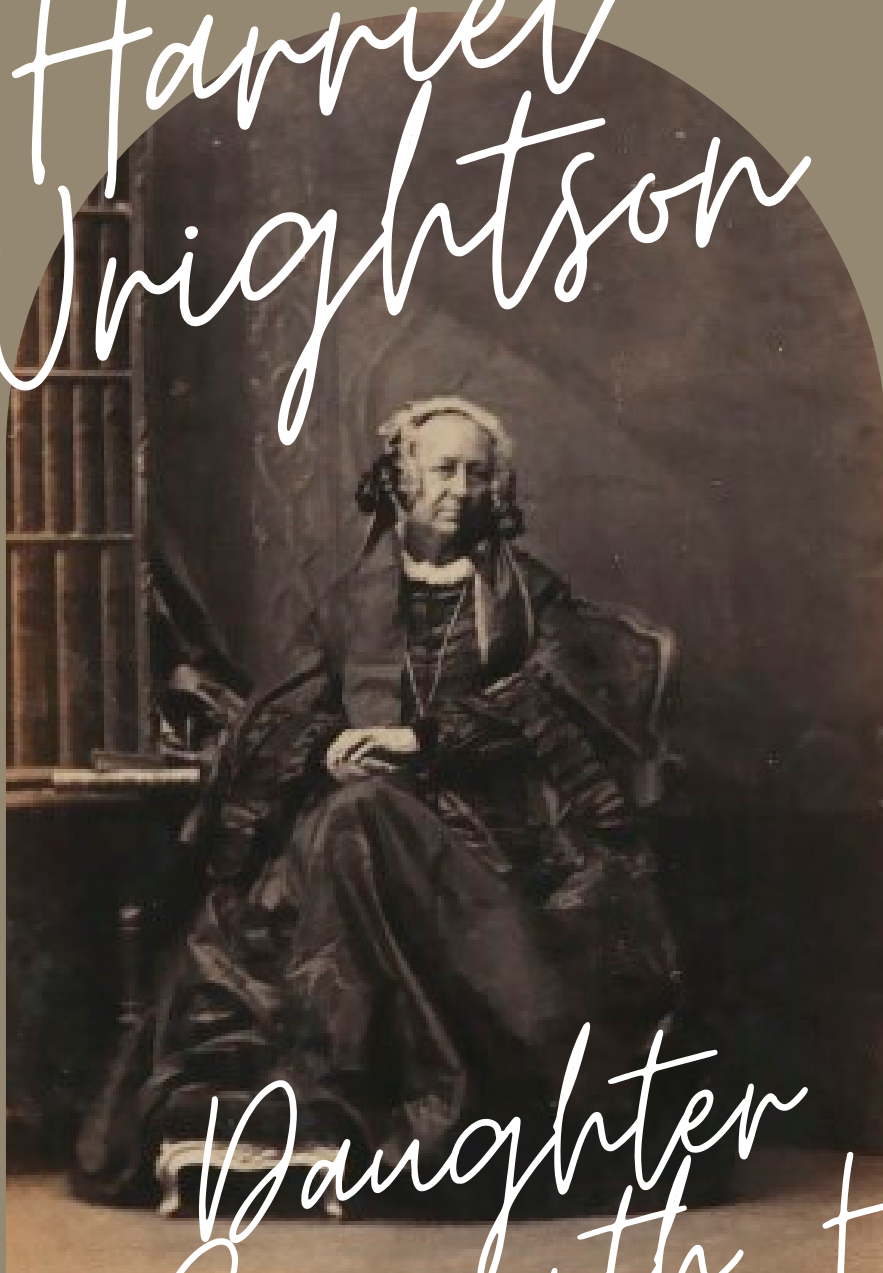


Harriet Wrightson



Daughter of Cusworth Hall

AN INTRODUCTION
BY REBECCA PAYNE
PART OF CHANGING THE RECORD



HERITAGE
DONCASTER



Doncaster
Council



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

HARRIET WRIGHTSON

Daughter of Cusworth Hall

Researching the life of Harriet Wrightson is a crash course in researching the life of any woman from the upper classes throughout history. Even her very name has multiple permutations - Harriet Wrightson, Harriet Douglas, Harriet North Douglas, Miss Wrightson, Mrs Frederick Sylvester North Douglas, Mrs North Douglas, Mrs Douglas, Harriet Hutchinson, Harriet Hely Hutchinson, Mrs Henry Hely Hutchinson, Mrs Hutchinson. Pinning down Harriet is like trying to catch a shadow. We know, thanks to the inordinate amount of letters written to her throughout her life, that she was a prolific correspondent, but we have very few letters actually written by her and, unlike her second husband and her daughters, we have not yet been able to confidently identify her as the author of the many diaries also found in the recently unearthed collection. We similarly know, through comments in a letter written to her by Elizabeth Acland, that she had her likeness taken by Joseph Slater in around 1820 but, unlike the pictures the same artist did of her brother and first husband, the picture's whereabouts are unknown. The only surviving picture of Harriet comes from near the end of her life - an early photograph showing an elderly woman in 1862, only two years before her death - a far cry from the young woman who travelled across mainland Europe 50 years earlier. But in reading how her correspondents speak to her, and of the obvious affection they have for her, we can begin to build a preliminary idea of the woman herself.

The sheer volume of material that makes up the collection would take a dedicated researcher years to work thorough, so for the purposes here I have focused on what appeared to be quite an exciting period in her life - between 1816 and the early 1820s, when Harriet embarked on the Grand Tour with her brother William, married Fredrick Sylvester North Douglas in July 1819, came to terms with his tragic death in the October of the same year, and spent several years as a young widow. The Grand Tour was seen as a rite of passage for upper class men from the mid-seventeenth century until rail travel took off in the mid nineteenth century,

with a typical route taking them first to Paris, then down through Switzerland into Italy where considerable time would often be spent in Rome, Venice and occasionally Naples, before returning back to England through modern-day Germany. It wasn't unknown for women to undertake their own travels, accompanying a male relative (sometimes her husband, more often a brother, as the Grand Tour was primarily taken by men before they married), but it was still fairly uncommon.

But Harriet was an uncommon woman. Aged two she was inoculated against smallpox, and by age fifteen she was learning Latin alongside her brothers. Aged 21 she inherited Weston Hall in Northamptonshire, upon the death of her aunt, Mary Heber (who is said to still haunt the place). This latter development appears to have given Harriet a degree of financial independence, with letters addressed to her in 1812 (not to her father on her behalf) regarding her 'bank stocks'. She didn't marry until she was 31, with the letters she received implying that the match was her choice, with her father writing to her in London to say that 'Your mother and myself concur most entirely in the propriety of your choice and hope nothing will prevent its taking place'. After the death of her first husband Harriet didn't marry again until 1825, having her five daughters - all of whom survived into adulthood - between 1826 and 1832, the youngest, Marianne, being born when Harriet was 44. This was old by modern standards let alone those of the nineteenth century.

To return to her younger days, aged 28, Harriet left England at the start of September 1816 along with her brother William, sailing straight from London to Ostend, Belgium, from where William wrote home on the 7th September 1816. From there they travelled eastwards, missing letters sent by Harriet's friend (and almost sister in law) Mary Pery at Brussels, and reaching Frankfurt from where William sent another letter home on the 23rd September. . The following two weeks comprised a whistle-stop tour of what is now modern-day Germany and Switzerland

travelling south along the east bank of the River Rhine which left Harriet 'so generally tired at night I could only have given a very stupid account of things', visiting Darmstadt, Mannheim, Schwetzingen, Heidelberg, Karlsruhe, Rasnatt, Baden Baden, Strasbourg, Freiberg, Zurich and Zug, a journey of over 300 miles by modern roads. The pair then ascended Mount Rigi, where they spent William's 27th birthday, sleeping in an inn (which is still in business today) at Rigi Kulm, the mountain's highest peak. Harriet tells her mother how 'most women are carried up ... on a chair carried by four men' and that 'very few have the courage to ride'. Of course, Harriet herself rode, although she 'trusted the guide and the horse and never touched the bridle'. After descending the mountain, they travelled to Arth, then by boat to Immensee, on foot to Kussnacht, and then by boat again to Lucerne, from where Harriet wrote a letter home on the 8th October, adding a postscript from Bern on 11th October.

From then on, their journey becomes more typical, with a large amount of time spent in Italy. Their route becomes harder to follow here as they travelled around from city to city. It is likely they went next to Geneva before crossing the Alps to Milan, from where William wrote a letter home on the 30th October. They then visited Florence and reached Rome by the 27th December where they remained until at least the 17th January, with intentions to go to Naples on the 20th.

The latter half of Harriet's trip was marred by the death of her friend Mary Pery. Harriet had received, and kept, a letter from Mary that had been sent at the end of October, and another from both her brother Arthur and Mary that was sent on the 8th December and reached Harriet in Naples. Both these letters speak of a strong friendship between the two women, and of a strong connection between Mary and Arthur, with an optimism for the future despite Mary's persistent ill health. Though it is never stated explicitly, it seems likely that Mary and Arthur were to be married, with Mary speaking of 'when I have the right to the delightful name of sister to the friend I love best'. The final letter, one from Arthur that Mary has 'begged a little space to write to you in', ends with a postscript from Arthur saying 'Mary really is much better'. In her letter from Rome on the 20th January Harriet asks after Mary. Her letter was received at Cusworth on the 10th February but by then it was too late. Mary had already died on the 26th January 1817.

Harriet was informed of the news in a letter written on the 30th January from Arthur, obviously heartbroken that his 'poor dear Mary is no more'. He writes again a couple of days later pondering if he should have 'given William the task of acquainting you with our incalculable loss in dearest Mary's removal from this world' instead of her 'hearing the sad account so abruptly' in the letter from him. He tells her 'do not resent that you were at such a distance, it was as impossible for me to see her last moments as for you'. Despite the 'severe affliction' of the death of her close friend, Harriet continued her trip, writing home from Venice on Easter Sunday (which in 1817 fell on 6th April).

It is likely the pair returned to England via Paris, and were home by August, with a letter from Thomas Spring Rice being sent to her at Weston Hall on 19th August 1817, having previously spent a few days with her in 'town' (presumably London).

This was not to be the end of Harriet's travels, however. She later returned to Paris in 1819 along with her father-in-law, Lord Glenbervie, following the death of her husband Frederick North Douglas. Even once back in England she proceeded to move around, spending time in both Brighton and Bath with Lord Glenbervie, as well as in London, at Cusworth and at Weston.

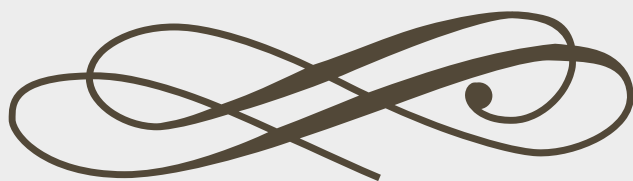


Frederick Sylvester North Douglas
by Frederick Christian Lewis Sr, after Joseph Slater
stipple engraving, 1826 or after
NPG D20579 © National Portrait Gallery, London

Both of Harriet's husbands also travelled in Europe in the 1810s. Harriet's first husband, Frederick, eschewed the standard tour and instead visited Greece and the near east from 1810 to 1812; her second husband, Henry Hely Hutchinson, spent his time in Europe more conventionally, exploring Western Europe from 1817 to 1820, during which time he kept a diary of his experiences.

Harriet and Henry appear to have passed their love of travelling onto at least one of their children. A letter from Fredericka, the second of their five daughters, sent to her Aunt Georgiana (William's wife), suggests her following in the footsteps of both her parents, as she travelled through Europe with her husband, Arthur Reynell Pack. Her letter describes many of the same sights her mother saw travelling south from Frankfurt east of the Rhine, visiting places such as the ruined castle at Heidelberg, Zurich, Zug, and ascending Mount Rigi, although much of her journey was by train rather than in a carriage.

All of this has barely scratched the surface of Harriet's life. Other than spending time in London we've yet to establish what she was up to between returning from her tour and marrying Frederick. We know she spent a lot of time with Lord Glenbervie following Frederick's death, during which time she also cultivated many strong, passionate friendships. That she doesn't remarry until after the death Lord Glenbervie cannot be dismissed as a coincidence, but her life from there until her death in 1864 remains a story yet to be discovered, no doubt sitting waiting amongst the boxes of letters that have been kept safe for all these years.



My feelings overcame me so completely this morning that I was quite unable to speak to you upon the real object of my visit. I am fully convinced that it depends upon you to make me happy during all the rest of my life. God grant you may think my happiness not incompatible with your own. I hope that you will not annoy yourself to answer this letter as your

manner. I am at Mrs. Abbott's (whether you shake hands with me or not) will be sufficient to determine. I shew with what favour you receive this letter. If I have been too rash I hope at all events you will believe that I have wished to act in the most delicate & respectful manner to you. A.
Friday 12th Sept 3
27 Regent Street