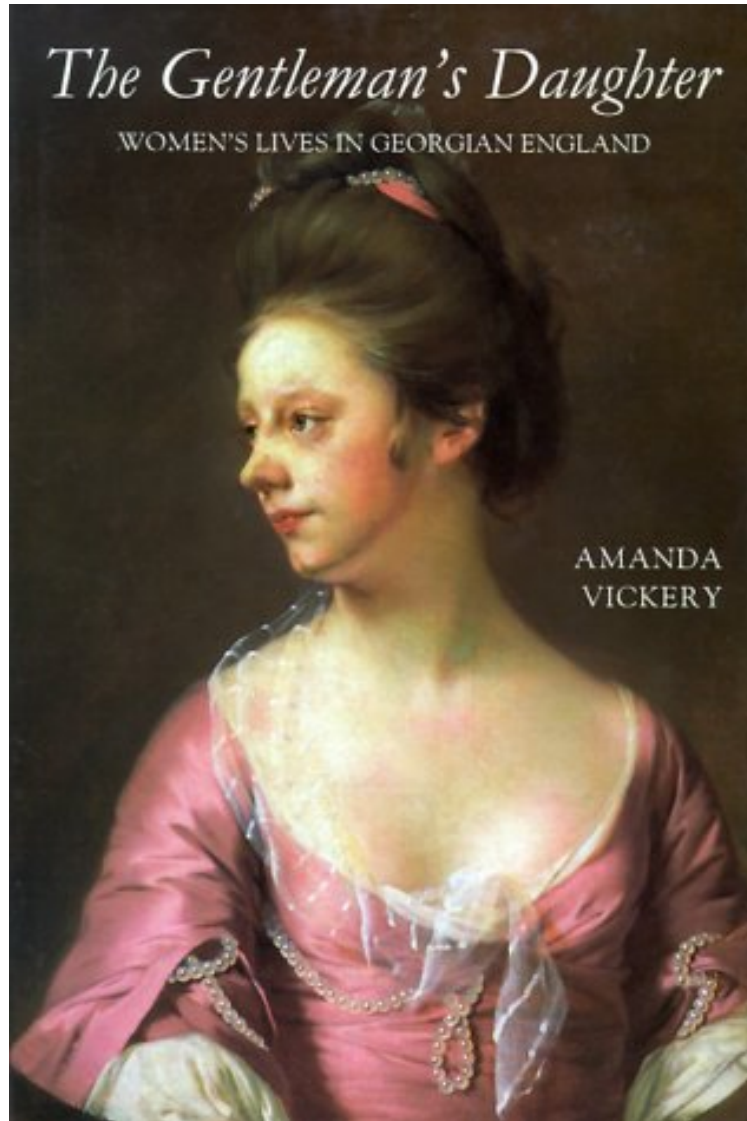


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The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England

Amanda Vickery

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Amanda Vickery : The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Brilliantly written, poor print quality By PJ Royal This book is gorgeously written. Ms. Vickery has a beautiful turn of phrase - exhaustively researched and an utter delight to read. Highest possible points go to the author. As other reviewers have commented upon, however, the print quality is not of the highest. The binding has cracked and the pages have come apart in the new copy I purchased, despite taking the

usual care of a book when I am reading. I would absolutely read all of Amanda Vickery's work, but would be wary of another by this particular publishing house, which of course is very surprising given the fact that it is published by Yale University Press. They need to rethink their printing partner methinks!

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. The Gentleman's Daughter

By Chapati

Amanda Vickery's book is about the life of genteel (note that genteel does not equal aristocratic) women in the 18th and early part of the 19th century. It is divided into seven chapters that roughly coincide with major events and duties in a lady's life (courtship, marriage, motherhood, householding, shopping and entertainment). Vickery's thesis is that women were not marginalized in society during the 18th century, and did not operate in separate spheres leading up to the Victorian era. (She does not touch the Victorian era at all.) She proves this point well by sharing anecdotes from letters and books, newspapers and prints. But the book is also littered with jewels of information about all aspects of female life.

My favorite chapter was that on childbirth and motherhood. There is a really fascinating excerpt on how midwives were slowly replaced by "male midwives," and then by physicians. "Ladies of quality" in the 18th and 19th centuries are given the short end of the stick as mothers. The belief persists that they were rarely invested in their children's lives; this is based mainly on the fact that many did not breast feed and apparently were too busy leading very busy lives to bother with their children. (If that is the criteria, then God only knows how mothers today would rate.) Vickery proves this completely wrong, which is gratifying, to say the least.

Vickery's book can be slow-going at times due to the large number of citations that she makes in it, but that is the nature of an academic work. It is also full of interesting tidbits; for example, there was a ladies' debating society in the late 1700s which, among other things, debated whether a woman pledging obedience to her husband in her wedding vows required her to always follow his orders. It is definitely more in-depth in its material than many other books, so if you enjoy delving into history, this is for you.

34 of 34 people found the following review helpful. Academic but interesting and enlightening

By marylandmom

This book reminds me of reading someone's doctoral dissertation--but that isn't meant to be an insult, just a comment on the writing style (academic). We are introduced to real women and their real situations by way of their letters and diaries. It is full of very interesting stories of a few related women in 18th century England. My only wish would be that the book could have been written to include women from other areas in England--really just more women in general. I appreciate the author's work in this under-researched area and hope it inspires more research in the future.

I have long wished that I could have lived in Jane Austen's world (with epidurals). But after reading this I realize that I would rather keep my appliances and modern medicine and my legal rights. I appreciated this book because it broke me of my misconceptions about any kind of "romantic" life of the women of this "almost leisure" class, as another reviewer called it. They were at the mercy of their husbands, their social situation and fate. Very thought provoking for a Jane Austen fan like myself.

Eighteenth-century women have long been presented as the heroines of traditional biographies, or as the faceless victims of vast historical processes, but rarely have they been deemed worthy of historical enquiry. "The Gentleman's Daughter" provides an account of the lives of genteel women - the daughters of merchants, the wives of lawyers and the sisters of gentlemen. Based on a study of the letters, diaries and account books of over 100 women from commercial, professional and gentry families, mainly in provincial England, "The Gentleman's Daughter" challenges the view that the period witnessed a new division of the everyday worlds of privileged men and women into the separate spheres of home and work. Amanda Vickery invokes the women's own accounts of their lives to argue that in the course of the 18th and early 19th centuries the scope of female experience did not diminish - in fact, quite the reverse. Contrary to orthodoxy, in the 18th century there was neither a loss of female freedoms, nor a novel retreat into the home. In their own writing, genteel women throughout the Georgian era singled out their social and their emotional roles: kinswoman, wife, mother, housekeeper, consumer, hostess and member of polite society. To make sense of their existence, they invoked notions of family destiny, love and duty, regularity and economy, gentility and propriety, fortitude, resignation and fate. At the same time, as Vickery demonstrates, their social and intellectual horizons rolled outward: in their writing no less than in their reading, genteel women embraced a world far beyond the boundaries of their parish, while an array of new public arenas emerged for the entertainment of the proper and the prosperous - assembly rooms, concert series, theatre seasons, circulating libraries, day-time lectures, urban walks and pleasure gardens, as well as regular sporting fixtures and the assizes. This often humorous study offers an insight into the intimate and everyday lives of genteel women and aims to transform our understanding of the position of women in this period.

.com Winner of the Longman History Today Prize in 1998, Amanda Vickery's *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* is an outstanding study of a crucial period in modern women's history. Roy Porter described this book as "the most important thing in English feminist history in the last ten years." Readers familiar with the feminist analysis of women's lives in the late 18th to mid-19th century will find some of the commonplaces of that viewpoint called into question: the rise of "separate spheres" of male and female experience, for example, or the social construction of motherhood in the 18th century. At once scholarly and readable, *The Gentleman's Daughter* takes its readers on a vivid and well-illustrated tour of "genteel" Georgian society, bringing that world to life through

what Vickery identifies as the "terms set out in their own letters by genteel women." Those terms structure the seven sections of the book: "Gentility", "Love and Duty", "Fortitude and Resignation" (which includes a notable discussion of the experience of pregnancy), "Prudent Economy", "Elegance", "Civility and Vulgarity", and "Propriety". "Our battles were not necessarily theirs," Vickery reminds us, striking her convincing balance between a feminist interest in the restriction and rebellion of women's lives and their own ways of finding meaning and pleasure in the gender distinctions of Georgian culture. --Vicky Lebeau, .co.ukFrom Library JournalThis meticulously researched social history should be welcomed by specialists in British and European women's history. Vickery (British women's history, Univ. of London) challenges the standard argument that once the industrial revolution took production out of the home, women's lives were marginalized in the domestic sphere. Using the letters, diaries, and account books of more than 100 women from the "genteel" classes, she theorizes that women's activities actually expanded as they involved themselves in new areas of community life. Indeed, she concludes that the struggles of the Victorian suffragettes may have stemmed not from a sense of oppression but from a desire to expand the gains of their Georgian predecessors. Unfortunately, Vickery's insistence on proving her provocative thesis overwhelms the richness of the descriptive material she presents: there is good information here on household management, servants, material culture, shopping and consumption, and female attitudes on courtship, pregnancy, motherhood, and child rearing. Recommended for academic libraries.?Marie Marmo Mullaney, Caldwell Coll., Livingston, NJCopyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. "The most important thing in English feminist history in the last ten years." Roy Porter; "The Gentleman's Daughter is the most important work of social history since Lawrence Stone's Family, Sex and Marriage. From now on, any historian writing about 18th-century women will have to address the arguments in Vickery's book... It is the first book to bring out into the open the debate about separate spheres. It succeeds on two levels, first as an academic argument of the highest order, and second as a fascinating and enjoyable read. Serious history is rarely this fun." Amanda Foreman, The Times; "Innovative, expertly researched and luminous in style." Linda Colley, London of Books; "Amanda Vickery's new history of women in Georgian England offers a revolutionary reinterpretation of the accepted script, both an academic triumph and a spell-binding read" Julie Wheelwright, The Independent