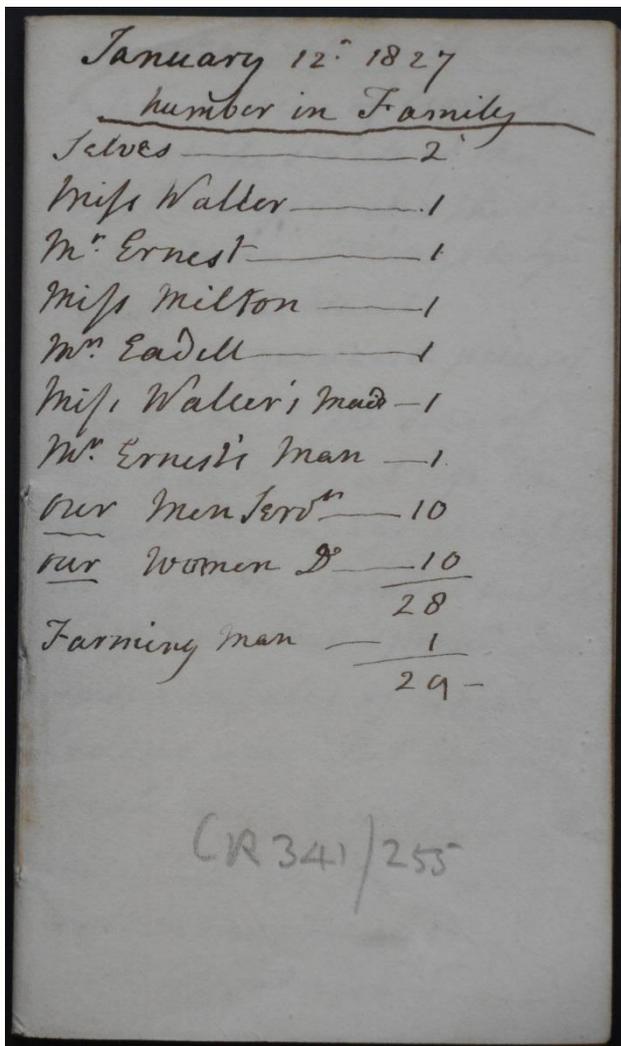


## Baroness Howe's Notebook (CR0341/255)

Have you ever wondered what life was like for a 19<sup>th</sup> century Baroness and wife of the King's orthoptist? July's Document of the Month, Baroness Howe's notebook, offers us an insight into the lives of England's 19<sup>th</sup> century high society. With anecdotes covering various topics, it also gives us an idea of what life was like for a family which would later inherit one of Warwickshire's very important landmarks: Woodcote Estate in Leek Wootton.



The first page of the notebook, Warwickshire County Record Office CR0341/255

## Baroness Howe and Jonathan Wathen Waller

Sophia Charlotte Howe was born to Admiral Earl Howe in 1761 and having no brothers she inherited his title to become Baroness Howe in her own right. She was first married to Penn Assheton Curzon in 1787. The couple had four children although only one survived beyond 29; a son who was known as Penn by his mother. Following the death of her first husband, Baroness Howe married Sir Jonathan Wathen Waller in 1812.

Sir Jonathan Wathen Waller was a renowned eye surgeon who was also a close friend of King George III, and indeed had waited on the King's deathbed. Sir Jonathan Wathen Waller was himself a widower when he married Baroness Howe, having been previously married to Elizabeth Slack. His first marriage had resulted in the birth of his son Sir Thomas Wathen Waller, who in adulthood married Catherine Wise and whose son subsequently inherited Woodcote in 1888. As such, Sir Jonathan was not only a figure of national importance, but also someone whose life had important implications for Warwickshire's history and in particular for the history of Woodcote in Leek Wootton<sup>1</sup>.

## Baroness Howe's Notebook

The notebook provides us with an important insight into Baroness Howe's life, and into the lives of aristocratic women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The notebook includes a variety of anecdotes and notes, from recipes to poetry, gardening hints and holiday plans.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the distinction between men's and women's roles became much more pronounced in society. Rather than contributing to the family business, the primary occupation of most women became

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Eldridge, "A History of Woodcote: The Manors, The Estates, The Houses and Their Owners," (Leek Wootton History Group, 2011).

managing the family home and overseeing the duties of the servants<sup>2</sup>. This aspect of life is certainly clear throughout the Baroness' notebook, the front page of which serves to list the 'Number in Family,' presumably for means of managing the household. The list begins with 'Selves', presumably meaning Baroness Howe and Sir Jonathan Wathen Waller, the various others living in the house, such as Miss Waller, Mr Ernest and then the servants, leaving a total household of 29 individuals. The same exercise is repeated later in the notebook with the total rising to 31 household members.

Besides this, the notebook reveals Baroness Howe's involvement in all other aspects of household management. She includes notes on the best way to grow celery ("Much water given to celery to make it grow fine and large,"<sup>3</sup>), as well as recipes, including for Potage a la Royale, and plans for a holiday spent in Fairlights, Hastings. Here the baroness apparently intended to visit, "3 bays of the sea, 6 castle ruins, 14 market towns, 57 village churches and the Coast of France."<sup>4</sup> Indeed Baroness Howe was adding to the notebook at a time when seaside holidays were becoming increasingly popular for the upper classes,<sup>5</sup> and this gives an indication of the family's social status.

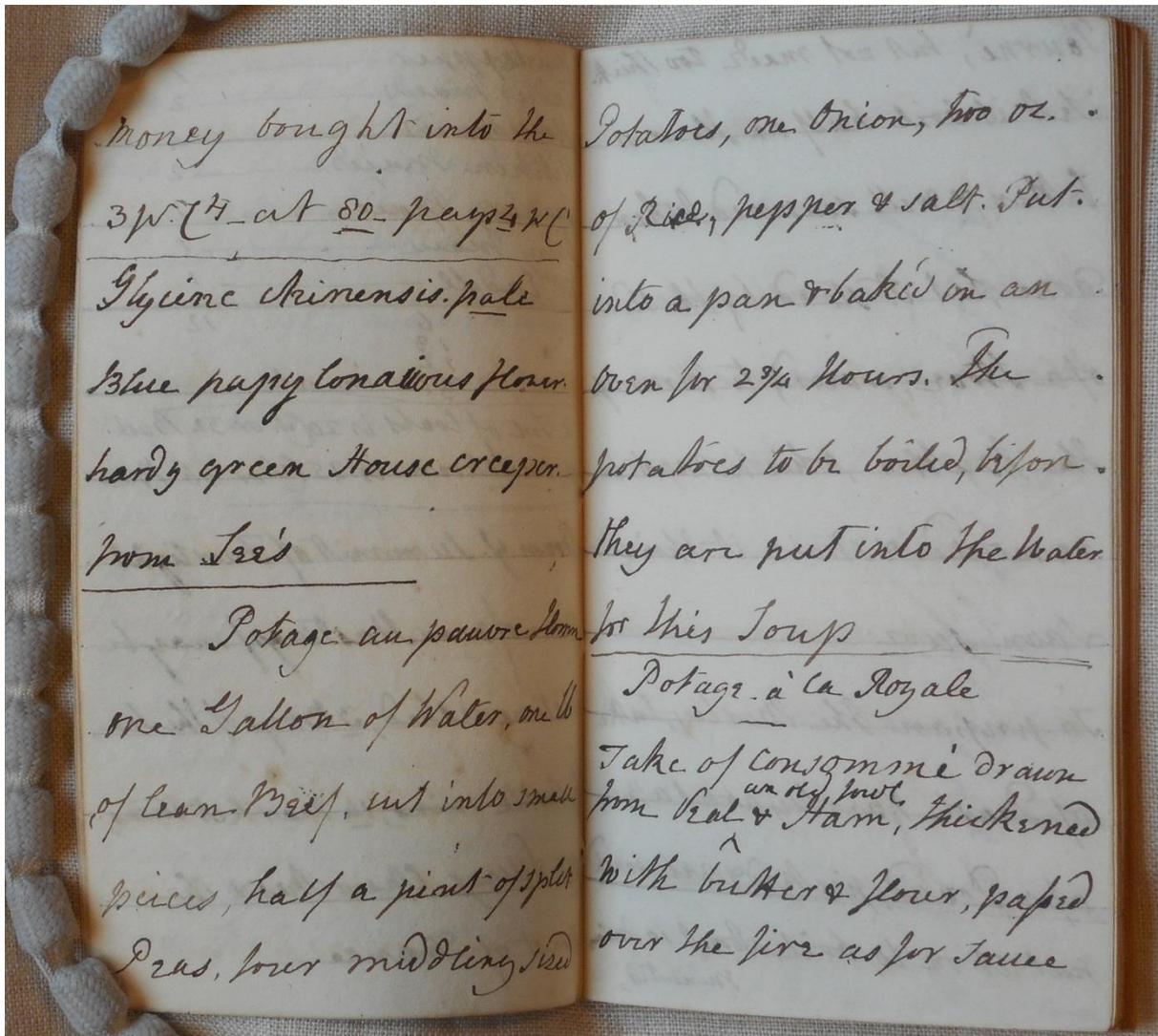
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<sup>2</sup> "Gender Roles in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians, 15 May 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>

<sup>3</sup> Warwickshire County Record Office, CR341/255, Baroness Howe's Notebook.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> "A History of Holidays," Local Histories, 2019, <http://www.localhistories.org/holidays.html>



Recipes, cures for illness and holiday plans, Baroness Howe kept notes on all aspects of household management Warwickshire County Record Office CR0341/255

Medicine and cures for affliction are also included, for example with Baroness Howe's instructions for fighting infection:

"Against Infection

Put half a pint of vinegar with a tin or saucepan & half an ounce of common nitre/salt petre/pounded as soon as it is dissolved apply a red

hot poker to the vinegar it will destroy the infection & refresh the patient. The same vinegar will serve 3 or 4 times.”<sup>6</sup>

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century great advances in medicine took place, especially through Florence Nightingale’s success treating the war wounded of Crimea; however a lot of medical knowledge and treatment relied on care at home and rudimentary medical knowledge including practices such as bloodletting<sup>7</sup>. Treatment often took place at home, and Howe’s notebook includes remedies involving laudanum, a derivative of opium which could be purchased without question from chemists.

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<sup>6</sup> Warwickshire County Record Office, CR341/255, Baroness Howe’s Notebook

<sup>7</sup> “Health and Hygiene in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” Victorian Britain, British Library, 14 Oct 2009, <https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/health-and-hygiene-in-the-19th-century>

