

‘THE TRIUMPH AND THE GLORY OF WOMANHOOD ... MODEST VIRGIN, FAITHFUL WIFE, STRICT MOTHER’: THE REPUTATION AND ACHIEVEMENT OF MAGDALEN, LADY DANVERS C. 1565 – 1627¹

Scholarly interest in Lady Danvers, formerly Mrs Magdalen Herbert née Newport, has centred principally upon her relationships with the men who surrounded and memorialised her. The inspiration and support she provided to the seventeenth century’s leading poet-clergymen as the patron and friend of John Donne and mother of George Herbert have commanded considerable attention.² Her attentive and generous hospitality, fractious relations with her eldest son, the courtly scholar, duellist and diplomat, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, commissioning of a flamboyant funerary monument for her first husband, Richard Herbert and remarriage to the significantly younger John Danvers have also attracted scrutiny.³ This article positions Magdalen firmly within the canvas of her own life and explores the life opportunities available to, and created by, an able and ambitious woman from the ranks of the county gentry. It explores her ability to navigate the peaks and troughs of marriage, motherhood and widowhood, and the ingenuity with which she manipulated the patriarchal restrictions she encountered as she strove to secure a meaningful and satisfying life for herself and advance the interests of her children. It considers how personal choices made during her widowhood supported her self-realization and, dependent upon the extent to which they accorded with the social norms of her social rank and gender, enhanced or detracted from her reputation and achievement. While the impact of the Renaissance, Reformation and accession of queens regnant upon female expectations and behaviour has been much debated, and the ability of aristocratic women to deploy the patriarchal privilege derived from descent and marriage to enhance their personal authority and make crucial contributions to the day-to-day management, survival and prosperity of their families is well established, studies continue to be limited in number and scope by the relative paucity of women’s letters and writings surviving from the period.⁴ This article moves beyond the account of Magdalen’s life provided in a recent *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry to demonstrate that sparse first-hand testimony can be supplemented with a wide range

¹ Quotation taken from George Herbert’s Latin epitaph ‘Hic sita foeminei laus et victoria sexus/ Virgo pudens, uxor fida, severa parens’ in ‘Memoriae Matris Sacrum’ in *The Latin Poetry of George Herbert, A Bilingual Edition*, transl. by Mark McCloskey and Paul R. Murphy (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1965), pp. 147-49.

² See, for example, H.W. Garrod, ‘Donne and Mrs Herbert,’ *The Review of English Studies*, 21 (1945), 161-73; Amy Charles, *A Life of George Herbert*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Deborah Rubin, ‘The Mourner in the Flesh: George Herbert’s Commemoration of Magdalen Herbert in “Memoriae Matris Sacrum”’ in *Men Writing the Feminine: Literature, Theory and the Question of Genders*, ed. by Thais E. Morgan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Greg Miller, *George Herbert’s Holy Patterns: Reforming individuals in Community* (New York: Continuum, 2007); John Drury, *Music at Midnight: The Life and Poetry of George Herbert* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

³ See, for example, Greg Miller, *Holy Patterns*, pp. 19-38; Mario M. Rossi, *La vita, le opere, i tempi di Edoardo Herbert di Chirbury*, 3 vols (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1947); Amy Charles, ‘Mrs Herbert’s Kitchen Booke’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 4 (1974), 164-73; Jeffrey Powers-Beck, *Writing the Flesh: The Herbert Family Dialogue* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), pp. 33-57.

⁴ See, for example, Joan Kelly, ‘Did Women Have a Renaissance?’ reprinted in *Feminism and Renaissance Studies* ed. by Lorna Hutson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 21-47; *The Paradise of Women, Writings by English Women of the Renaissance*, ed. by Betty Travitsky (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981); Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); J. Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1599-1700* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

of sources to reconstruct the lives of early modern gentry women and broaden our understanding of their complex role within family and society.⁵

Although clearly a dedicated correspondent, only two letters penned by Magdalen survive, one written to a family friend, Sir George More, in March 1608, and the other to her eldest son, Edward, in May 1615.⁶ Six of the letters she received have been preserved in copy form, two written by George and four by Donne.⁷ One of her 'Kitchin Bookes', itemizing the expenses of her London house during the months April to September 1601, and a copy of a memorandum she prepared in 1604, setting out her case in a financial dispute with Edward at the end of his wardship, have also survived.⁸ Following Magdalen's death in June 1627, Donne wept as he preached the sermon at her memorial service on 1 July and George poured out his grief in the Latin and Greek verses of 'Memoriae Matris Sacrum'.⁹ Both were published in a single volume registered with the Stationers' Company on 11 July.¹⁰ During 1642-3, Edward wrote briefly of his mother's contribution to his upbringing in his autobiography, published in 1764.¹¹ The writer, Izaak Walton, wove biographical details about Magdalen into his *Life of Mr George Herbert* published in 1670, and the antiquary, John Aubrey, included anecdotes about her in the mini-biographies he compiled of eminent men between 1680-93.¹² A portrait image of Magdalen, tentatively dated to the late 1580s, has survived at Weston Park, Shropshire. The young Mrs Herbert is painted in a richly embroidered French gown with a cartwheel lace ruff and strings of pearls. She wears a velvet pillbox hat decorated with jewels and a feather atop her auburn hair which is elaborately styled to display her high forehead within a heart-shaped frame.¹³ A later image is captured in the memorial effigy she commissioned c. 1598-9 from the master mason, Walter Hancocks, for her husband's funerary monument at St Nicholas's Church, Montgomery. She is again presented in a richly embroidered gown but her full pleated ruff is plain and her hair is covered with a cap and hood.¹⁴

Born at High Ercall, Shropshire c.1565, Magdalen was the youngest of the six surviving children born to Sir Richard Newport and Margaret Bromley.¹⁵ Newport's father

⁵ Cristina Malcolmson, 'Herbert [née Newport, second married name Lady Danvers], Magdalen (d. 1627)' in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (online edn) [accessed 1 June 2019]

⁶ Guilford, Surrey Record Office (SRO), Loseley Manuscripts, LM/COR/4/23, Magdalen Herbert to Sir George More, 14 Mar. 1608; The National Archives (TNA), PRO 30/53/10, f. 5, Magdalen Herbert to Edward Herbert, 12 May 1615.

⁷ George Herbert to Magdalen Herbert, Undated but c. 1 January 1610 and 25 May 1622; John Donne to Magdalen Herbert, 11 July 1607 (2), 23 July 1607 and 2 August 1607 All published in Izaak Walton, *The Lives of Dr John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr Richard Hooker, Mr George Herbert*, 4th edn (London: Richard Marriott, 1675), pp. 270-71, 285-88, 268-69, 342-45.

⁸ Powis Castle Library, Mrs Herbert's Kitchin Booke, 1601; SRO, Loseley Manuscripts, 6729/13/103, Memorandum: The Case between my sonne and me, c.1603.

⁹ John Donne, 'A Sermon of Commemoration of the Lady Danvers, late Wife of Sir John Danvers', in *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. by G. R. Potter and E.M. Simpson, 10 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953-62), VIII, pp. 61-93; Walton, *Lives*, p. 270; Herbert, 'Memoriae'.

¹⁰ Greg Miller, 'Self-Parody and Pastoral Praise: George Herbert's "Memoriae Matris Sacrum"', *George Herbert Journal*, 26 (2002-3), 15-34 (p. 15).

¹¹ Edward Herbert, *The Life of Edward, first Lord Herbert of Cherbury, written by himself*, ed. by J.M. Shuttleworth (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), xxiv, 7-8, 16-17, 36.

¹² Walton, *Lives*, pp. 262-8, 278-9, 281-3; *Aubrey's Brief Lives* ed. by Oliver Lawson Dick (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949).

¹³ Magdalen Herbert (oil on canvas), 10 1/2 in x 17 in, Flemish School, c. 1585-90, Weston Park Foundation. Its descent through the Newport line suggests her birth family commissioned the portrait.

¹⁴ Miller, *George Herbert's Holy Patterns*, p. 20; J.D.K. Lloyd, 'The Architect of the Herbert Tomb at Montgomery', *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 59 (1965-6), 138-40.

¹⁵ Herbert, *Life*, 7.

had married a daughter from the powerful Corbet family with kinship ties to the Talbots, Devereux and Vernons, and his own marriage to the sole heiress of the Lord Chief Justice and Shropshire landowner, Sir Thomas Bromley, increased his estates and secured him a position among Shropshire's leading gentlemen.¹⁶ He died in 1570, when Magdalen was still of 'tender years', leaving Lady Newport with a rich jointure and naming her joint executor of his will with their eldest son.¹⁷ Details of Magdalen's upbringing can only be pieced together from the competences and preferences she demonstrated in adulthood. The education of gentry daughters was typically supervised by their mothers and, in the aftermath of the Renaissance and Reformation, designed to reinforce religious commitment as well as inculcate virtuous conduct and efficient household management.¹⁸ Contemporary Protestant advice literature recommended that elite girls were taught to read, write and perform basic arithmetic, but, growing up in an educated and ambitious provincial household, Magdalen may have been placed in the care of a governess or tutor and given a grounding in history and other subjects.¹⁹ While she was clearly not provided with the intellectual schooling commended by humanist writers and enjoyed by girls with court connections, she certainly owned books and enjoyed the company of literary and scholarly men in later life.²⁰ She learned to write a well-formed italic script as well as a workaday secretary hand and, as her letters demonstrate, became a confident and skilful correspondent.²¹ Since the Bromley and Corbet families numbered among the earliest and most influential promoters of Protestantism in Shropshire, it is not surprising that Magdalen received a thorough grounding in religion and imbibed her mother's piety, charity and commitment to the composite Protestant church established by Elizabeth I.²² The posthumous testimony of George and Donne suggests that, as in other pious families, she was encouraged from girlhood to control her natural liveliness and avoid excessive pride in her appearance.²³ Evidence from her 'Kitchin Booke' suggests that she was trained to run a large household and provide generous hospitality and that from girlhood she learned to supervise kitchens, oversee house-keeping activities, manage servants, maintain accounts, undertake needlework and treat minor illnesses and injuries.²⁴ Perhaps most importantly of all, she was schooled to embrace an arranged marriage and her future role as an obedient and chaste but competent and hardworking wife and mother.²⁵

¹⁶ Herbert, *Life*, p. 8.

¹⁷ London, The National Archives (TNA), PCC Wills, PROB 11/53/456, Will of Sir Richard Newport, 11 Sep. 1570.

¹⁸ Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women 1450-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 28-29; Travitsky, *Paradise of Women*, pp. 5-8.

¹⁹ Travitsky, *Paradise of Women*, pp. 7-9; Alison Wall, 'Elizabethan Precept and Feminine Practice: The Thynne Family of Longleat,' *History*, 75 (1990), 23-38 (pp. 23-24); Caroline Bowden, 'Women in Educational Spaces', in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. by Laura Lunger Knoppers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 85-96.

²⁰ See, for example, Margaret Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 27-28.

²¹ See, for example, Vivienne Larminie, 'Fighting for Family in a Patronage Society: The Epistolary Armoury of Anne Newdigate (1574-1618),' in *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. by James Daybell (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), pp. 94-108.

²² Barbara Coulton, 'The Establishment of Protestantism in a Provincial Town: A Study of Shrewsbury in the the Sixteenth Century', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 27:2 (1996), 307-35 (pp. 310-14); Donne, 'Sermon', p. 86; Herbert, *Life*, p. 7.

²³ Herbert, 'Memoriae', p. 125; Donne, 'Sermon', pp. 88-89; *With Faith and Physic: The life of a Tudor Gentlewoman*, ed. by Linda Pollock (London: Collins & Brown, 1993), pp. 6-7, 25-28.

²⁴ Kitchin Booke, *passim*; Herbert, 'Memoriae', p. 125-26; Donne, 'Sermon', p. 89; Harris, *Aristocratic Women*, pp. 28-33.

²⁵ Linda Pollock, 'Teach her to Live under Obedience: The Making of Women in the Upper Ranks of Early Modern England', *Continuity and Change*, 4:2 (1989), 231-58 (pp. 244-49).

Magdalen probably married in 1581 around the age of sixteen years. In his will, her father earmarked the sum of £200 for her portion of his estate, payable within one year of her marriage or on the attainment of 20 years provided she 'be ordered and demean herself, as well touching her marriage as otherwise, according to the mind and to the good contentation of my executors and overseers ... or otherwise honestly and decently and according to her degree'.²⁶ It is improbable that Magdalen was allowed much part in the selection of her husband. The marriages of all four Newport sisters were negotiated, like those of other gentry daughters, to cement alliances with prominent regional families and further the political or economic interests of their male relations.²⁷ Magdalen's match with Richard Herbert, the heir of Sir Edward Herbert of Montgomery, was seemingly undertaken to rebuild Newport influence in Shropshire which had declined following her father's death.²⁸ The Herbert family dominated county government in neighbouring Montgomeryshire, owned property in Shropshire and enjoyed powerful kin connections at Court and throughout Wales.²⁹ Though the marriage was based on a business transaction rather than a *coup de foudre*, it is likely that Richard passed muster with his young wife. Some eight years older than Magdalen, he was described by Edward as 'black haired and bearded ... very handsome and well compact in his Limbs, and of a great courage'. He was also, his son claimed, a man of learning and integrity.³⁰ As was customary, the couple appear to have lived for several years with Sir Edward and Lady Herbert at Black Hall in Montgomery before establishing their own household at Llyssin.³¹ Magdalen's move to Wales and absorption within the Herbert family marked a significant staging point in her life and one that many girls approached with apprehension as well as excitement. In Magdalen's case, her marriage required her to adjust to life within a large and old-fashioned Welsh gentry household as well as build a successful and mutually supportive relationship with her husband. Richard had ten siblings and his father openly acknowledged several illegitimate offspring.³² The family had converted from Catholicism with some reluctance and maintained the traditional rituals of lordship with personal service and open hospitality. Despite the fact that Richard had been despatched to London and his brothers to Oxford to be educated, the family continued to communicate in Welsh with many of their servants, tenants and neighbours.³³ Both Richard and his father appear to have combined public service to the crown with political chicanery and family vendettas. Richard was removed from the House of Commons in 1581 for claiming his seat under false pretences and was twice investigated by the Privy Council for using political and social connections to bully his neighbours.³⁴

Magdalen quickly demonstrated her ability to fulfil the principle duty of a gentry wife with the birth of Edward in March 1582. She returned to Eyton to enjoy the support of her mother during her lying-in, labour and early weeks of motherhood, as was common for a first child. More unusually, she entrusted her firstborn son to her mother's care for much of his childhood.³⁵ Between November 1583 and May 1597 she consolidated her position within the Herbert family by bearing six more sons and three daughters, all of whom survived to

²⁶ PROB 11/53/456.

²⁷ Mary married William Gratwood of Adderley. Elizabeth married Francis Lawley of Spoonhill. Isabel married Sir Charles Foxe of Bromfield.

²⁸ *The House of Commons 1558-1603*, ed. by P.W Hasler, 3 vols (London: HMSO, 1981), 2, p. 131.

²⁹ Hasler, *Commons*, 2, pp. 294-95.

³⁰ Herbert, *Life*, pp. 2, 8.

³¹ They moved to Llyssin by 1586. Hasler, *Commons*, 2, p. 299.

³² TNA, PCC Wills, PROB 11/84/21, Will of Sir Edward Herbert, 8 June 1594.

³³ Hasler, *Commons*, 2, pp. 294-95.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 294-95, 299.

³⁵ Herbert, *Life*, pp. 11, 14.

adulthood. Most were born and baptised in Montgomery and brought up under her own supervision until the boys were boarded with tutors.³⁶ Although she recruited nurses to look after her growing family, it is possible that she breastfed some of her babies and she clearly took a close interest in their everyday care and household training.³⁷ Like other gentry women of her generation she benefited from the new model of educated, pious and responsible motherhood promoted by Protestant reformers which enhanced women's role, status and reputation within the family.³⁸ She taught her children to pray, examine their consciences, and to read and study the bible and instilled in them through example and instruction the moral qualities and courteous behaviour that underpinned the social superiority of provincial gentry families.³⁹ Despite employing tutors, she contributed directly to her children's education. George claims in 'Memoriae Matris Sacrum' that his mother taught him to form his letters and encouraged him to write.⁴⁰ Edward's autobiography indicates that she participated in selecting tutors and schools for her sons even before the death of her first husband.⁴¹ The survival of a skilfully assertive letter from her widowed daughter, Frances, suggests that she carefully oversaw the education and training of her daughters.⁴²

Richard succeeded his father as head of the Montgomery branch of the Herbert family in April 1593. His inheritance was substantial but his brothers, Matthew and Charles, were gifted land, property and livestock and it is likely that he struggled to meet the cash bequests payable to his sisters and other legatees under the terms of his father's will.⁴³ Magdalen's reign as chatelaine of Black Hall and opportunity to establish herself as a county hostess ended abruptly. Her husband died intestate and in debt in October 1596 following a short illness described as a 'Lethargie Caros or Coma Vigilans'.⁴⁴ We know little about Magdalen's personal relationship with her husband beyond Edward's assertion that his mother lived 'most vertuosly and lovingly' with his father for many years.⁴⁵ His autobiographical reminiscences suggest that the couple enjoyed a companionate marriage but whether, like some contemporaries, she contributed to the management of her husband's estates during his lifetime is not known.⁴⁶ The flamboyant Renaissance funerary monument Magdalen erected in St Nicholas's Church, Montgomery in 1600 depicts the couple recumbent on their marital bed beneath a triumphal arch with Richard Herbert in full armour. Eight of their children kneel in prayer behind them. Beneath the tableau, there is an effigy of Richard's corpse wrapped in a winding sheet. The tomb is framed by Corinthian columns supporting an elaborate pediment bearing Richard's blazon with the seventeen heraldic crests associated with the two families mounted beneath. By commissioning and bearing the cost of the monument, Magdalen secured control of its iconography and of the English and Latin inscriptions that memorialised her husband as a warrior, faithful partner, father and Calvinist believer but also emphasised her own contribution to the successful marriage partnership by

³⁶ Charles, *George Herbert*, pp. 25-28; Kitchin book, ff. 59v-60r.

³⁷ Herbert, 'Memoriae', p. 139.

³⁸ Travitsky, *Paradise of Women*, pp. 7-10.

³⁹ Herbert, *Life*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Herbert, 'Memoriae', p. 129.

⁴¹ Herbert, *Life*, pp. 14-15.

⁴² Frances Brown to Henry Herbert, 28 June 1647, cited in Powers- Beck, *Writing the Flesh*, p. 31.

⁴³ PROB 11/84/21.

⁴⁴ Herbert *Life*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ See for example Wall, 'Elizabethan Precept', pp. 31-37.

foregrounding her prolific childbearing and exalted Newport and Bromley lineage with her descent from the Welsh Princes of Powys Wenwynwyn.⁴⁷

Widowhood presented Magdalen with one of the sharpest vicissitudes of fortune faced by a gentry wife, but, having observed the independence and authority discreetly exercised by her widely admired mother, she also knew that it freed her from the restrictions of coverture and offered opportunities for asserting her independence and determining the future course of her own life. At little more than thirty years of age, she was demonstrably a confident and capable household manager and family organizer who possessed the beauty, charm, intelligence and ambition to capitalise upon the patriarchal privileges available to her as the daughter, widow and sister of leading county gentlemen. She was clearly determined from the outset to exercise personal authority over her husband's heir and property and to assume responsibility for the education, upbringing, vocations and marriages of her children. She acted quickly to secure custody of her eldest son and control of the Herbert estates and turned to her mother and eldest brother for advice and assistance. She applied to the Prerogative Court of Canterbury for letters of administration for her husband's estates and to the Court of Wards to secure her dower rights to lands in Montgomeryshire, Shropshire and Merioneth and her son's wardship. With the help of Sir George More of Loseley Park, Surrey, Francis Newport negotiated the complex process of 'begging' his nephew's wardship and lent his sister the £800 expended in the process.⁴⁸ The queen's grant of the custody, wardship and marriage of Edward was secured in February 1597 and in May Magdalen was granted joint authority with her fifteen-year old son to administer her deceased husband's estates and pay his debts of £400.⁴⁹ She moved to England with her family after giving birth to a posthumous son.⁵⁰ Thereafter, for the duration of her son's minority, and with the assistance of her brother, Francis, and brother-in-law, Charles Herbert, she oversaw from a distance the running and financial management of her son's estates, together with her own dower lands, by local stewards, legal officers and bailiffs, and controlled the income derived from both.⁵¹

The account Magdalen prepared in 1604 of the expenses she had incurred during Edward's minority demonstrates the authority and responsibility she bore as his principle guardian. She robustly defended spending £500 per annum on his education and maintenance rather than the £10 permitted by the Court of Wards on the grounds that 'his so great advancem[en]t in marriage' necessitated the 'increase of port' and emphasised that she had successfully 'bredd him in such sort as he now is' without him 'runninge in debt whiles he was under age'.⁵² In February 1598, Edward had married the heiress, Mary Herbert, who stood to inherit extensive estates in Wales and Ireland from her father, Sir William Herbert of St Julians, Monmouthshire, provided she wed a Herbert and ensured the continuation of the family name.⁵³ Mary's estimated fortune of £30,000 was considerably more than the portion of £3,000 Magdalen would normally have expected to secure for Edward and the match promised to increase not only his wealth and landed estate but the political and social standing of the entire family. She admitted proceeding with 'much care of ... [her] ... mynde and trouble of ... [her] ... friendes' to invest £1,000 borrowed from her brother in the

⁴⁷ Miller, *Holy Patterns*, pp. 20-32.

⁴⁸ Loseley MSS, 6729/13/103.

⁴⁹ TNA, Court of Wards, Miscellaneous Books, WARD 9/348, ff. 38v-39r, Grant of Wardship, 14 Feb. 1597; PCC Administration Act Books, PROB 6/5, f. 206, Letters of Administration, 3 May 1597.

⁵⁰ Herbert, *Life*, p. 16.

⁵¹ Powers-Beck, *Writing the Flesh*, p. 46.

⁵² Loseley MSS, 6729/13/103.

⁵³ Herbert, *Life*, p. 16.

marriage negotiations and celebrations but received a setback when she discovered that her daughter-in-law's inheritance was 'intangled with great debts, and upon such extreame forfeitures as the brech of one might have byn the ov[er]throwe of her whole estate'. Plagued 'with much grief of mynde' she was left with no choice, she explained, but to invest at least £2,500 of her own money to safeguard Mary's estates.⁵⁴ At this point it became imperative that the couple produce an heir because under common law she would have lost this investment as well as the estates she had secured for her son and descendants if her daughter-in-law died without producing a living child. It was perhaps for this reason, as much as to oversee Edward's education and behaviour (a task normally delegated to a carefully selected college tutor) that she took the unusual step of moving her household to Oxford.⁵⁵ The couple struggled to produce a live heir, finally producing two daughters and two sons who survived infancy during the years 1604-9.⁵⁶

We know little of Magdalen's life in Oxford beyond Walton's claims that she maintained daily contact with her eldest son and cultivated the acquaintance and friendship of men of 'eminent worth or learning' through her '*great and harmless wit, her cheerful gravity, and her obliging behaviour*'.⁵⁷ When Edward completed his studies, Magdalen took the even more adventurous and unusual step for a gentry widow and single mother of moving her household to London. By the turn of the seventeenth century a growing number of gentry families were renting or purchasing property to spend a winter season in the capital, but determined to escape provincial isolation in Montgomeryshire, Magdalen created a permanent base there in the expanding residential area between the cities of London and Westminster.⁵⁸ She took up residence at Charing Cross in a substantial house with garden and outbuildings in Spring 1601 and recreated the wealthy provincial gentry life-style she had enjoyed in Shropshire and Montgomeryshire.⁵⁹ Her 'Kitchin Booke', titled in her own hand, and meticulously maintained by her steward, John Gorse, provides evidence of her domestic objectives, household circumstances and daily routines during her early months in the capital. It lists the members of her household, the monies allocated for domestic expenditure, the amounts spent on food and drink together with sundry items such as clothes and equipment for her school-age sons, as well as recording the names of guests attending dinner and supper each day. It demonstrates that, with the assistance of ten serving men, three chamber maids and one nurse, Magdalen maintained a well-ordered house with a rich and varied table, paid careful attention to the education and socialization of her large family and provided liberal hospitality to a constant stream of visitors.⁶⁰ The presence of Walmsley the tailor, an unnamed embroiderer and a 'dyer that brought some stockings for my mistriss' among those taking meals in the house in June and July suggests that Magdalen, Edward and Mary seized an early opportunity to replenish their wardrobes with fashionable bespoke outfits.⁶¹

Like aristocratic contemporaries such as Barbara Sidney, Countess of Leicester, Magdalen excelled at 'high-housewifery' and was admired for her gracious hospitality.⁶² Her

⁵⁴ Loseley MSS, 6729/13/103.

⁵⁵ Herbert, *Life*, p. 16; Walton, *Lives*, p. 266.

⁵⁶ Herbert, *Life*, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁷ Walton, *Lives*, pp. 266-67.

⁵⁸ J.E. Merritt, *The Social World of Early Modern Westminster: Abbey, Court and Community 1525-1640* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 6-7.

⁵⁹ Herbert, *Life*, p. 36; Charles, *George Herbert*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ Kitchin Booke, ff. 1r-2v, *passim*.

⁶¹ Charles, 'Mrs. Herbert's Kitchin Booke', p. 169. In August Gorse recorded the purchase of 'a ii payer of ollyffe collar sylke stockinges' for Magdalen at a cost of 24s. Kitchin Booke, ff. 54r, 67v.

⁶² Margaret, P. Hannay, "'High Housewifery': The Duties and Letters of Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of Leicester," *Early Modern Women*, 1 (2006), 7-35 (p. 7).

'Kitchin Booke' reveals that she celebrated moving into the house at Charing Cross with a 'Drincking' for a party of twenty-eight on Saturday 11 April, and that on Easter Sunday, 12 April, twenty-nine sat down to dinner and supper. Two days later, eight guests joined the household for dinner. The family rarely ate meals alone and by Monday 6 July 1601, when she left London to spend two months in the country, some 100 guests had eaten one or more meals at her table while some 20 of their servants had been fed 'below stairs'.⁶³ Her nephew, Richard Newport and a Shropshire gentle-women, Elizabeth Detton, lived with the family during these months, and other kinsmen regularly appeared for meals.⁶⁴ Magdalen ensured that her family and visitors were well fed. Gorse's accounts reveal that beef, veal, lamb, mutton, pork, rabbit, poultry, pigeon and meat pies were served at her table, with lobster, crab, sole, carp, pike, plaice, flounders and other fish on Fridays and other fast days. A range of vegetables was consumed including peas, beans, carrots, parsnips, turnips, artichokes, radishes and salad leaves. Apple pies, syllabub, cherries, sugared strawberries and a 'special' spiced prune and currant pudding with a Malmsey cream were enjoyed for dessert.⁶⁵ Magdalen clearly relied heavily upon Gorse and allowed him considerable discretion in running the household but she checked and signed his accounts regularly and, according to George, inspected the house and discussed meal arrangements daily and took a personal interest in the work and welfare of her servants.⁶⁶

Magdalen patently used her relocation to London to indulge her sociability and display her skills as a hostess but both were carefully directed to further the courtly and provincial career of her eldest son, secure educational and career opportunities for her younger sons, and find suitable husbands for her daughters. She appears to have reciprocated the provincial hospitality of family and friends by creating a metropolitan base at Charing Cross where they could be boarded and fed when they visited London and where their teenage children could join her household for periods of 'social training'. Entertaining her husband's Herbert, Lloyd, Price and Powell relations from Montgomeryshire and her daughter-in-law's Herbert and Morgan relations from Monmouthshire together with her own Newport, Lawley, Barker and Bromley relations and other gentry from Shropshire at Charing Cross enabled her to keep in touch with provincial family and friends and to preserve and reinforce the local networks her eldest son needed to establish himself effectively in his Welsh and English estates and in county government and society.⁶⁷ Drawing upon family contacts and connections forged in her neighbourhood and at her local parish church, St Martin-in-the-Fields, she also built a metropolitan social network encompassing distant kin within the Herbert affinity and members of the More, Cooke, Bacon and Egerton families, who were well-placed to support her eldest son as he took his first steps at Court and in Parliament and her younger sons in their pursuit of independent careers.⁶⁸ As in Oxford, the guests Magdalen welcomed to her London house included men who could further the educational needs and social breeding of her children. They included: William Heather, a chorister at Westminster Abbey who tutored and boarded Richard and George during the summer of 1601, Mr Ireland of Croyden who tutored and boarded William and Charles

⁶³ Powers-Beck, *Writing the Flesh*, pp. 44, 223-27. Charles, *George Herbert*, pp. 38, 41; Kitchin Booke, ff. 5r-5v.

⁶⁴ Kitchin Booke, f. 1r, passim.

⁶⁵ Ibid., passim.

⁶⁶ Herbert, 'Memoriae,' p. 125; Kitchin Booke, ff. 2r, 3r, 7v, 34v, 43v, 57r, 59r, 72v. The book is clearly part of a series because Gorse carries money and provisions forward.

⁶⁷ Powers-Beck, *Writing the Flesh*, pp. 44-46.

⁶⁸ J.V. Kitto, *St Martin-in-the-Fields, The Accounts of the Churchwardens, 1525-1603* (London: Simkin, Marshall, Kent, Hamilton & Co., 1901), pp. 534, 577; Daniel W. Doerksen, *Conforming to the Word: Herbert, Donne, and the English Church Before Laud* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997), p. 52.

during the same period, Gabriel Goodman, Dean of Westminster, who took a close interest in Westminster School where George secured admission in 1604 and Mr Williams from the Queen's Stables, who may have been consulted about riding lessons.⁶⁹

Magdalen's 'Kitchin Booke', read in conjunction with Donne's sermon and George's 'Memoriae Matris Sacrum', reconstructs a busy and noisy but well-mannered and pious household teeming with boisterous and argumentative children and teenagers. The family played cards, sometimes for money, engaged in competitive games involving the exercise of wit, imagination and memory, and enjoyed entertainments from street musicians and morris dancers, but music-making, poetry reading and the exchange of proverbs clearly featured strongly among the household's activities.⁷⁰ At a modest level, Magdalen appears to have echoed the example of her celebrated kinswoman, Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, by extending hospitality and patronage to men of musical and literary talent. William Byrd and John Bull, for instance, gentlemen of the Chapel Royal and leading musicians and composers, both ate supper at her table twice between April and June 1601.⁷¹ The antiquarian, William Camden, and lawyer and intellectual, Francis Bacon, became family friends.⁷² Donne was a regular visitor to the household and recipient of Magdalen's patronage by 1607. Whether, as some authors suggest, Magdalen first met Donne in Oxford and sought to mitigate Sir George More's wrath and vengeance after he secretly married Ann More in 1601 remains uncertain, but one of the four letters Donne sent to Magdalen in 1607 thanked her for the support she provided to his impoverished wife and children in Mitcham and enclosed some *Holy Hymns and Sonnets* for her judgement.⁷³ Donne cultivated a number of wealthy patrons in his efforts to re-establish his career but developed a long-lasting friendship with Magdalen which valued her religious commitment and intelligence as well as her beauty and existed alongside friendships he established with Edward and George.⁷⁴ His assertion that other 'noble ambitious wits' competed for Magdalen's patronage is supported by a letter Sir Philip Mainwaring wrote to Edward in August 1638 which acknowledged the 'obligations and lively memory' he held of Magdalen 'his thrice-noble patroness'.⁷⁵

Magdalen embraced those aspects of urban sociability available to her as a widowed mother with numerous offspring and commanded respect and reputation for her good neighbourliness, piety and charity.⁷⁶ Her 'Kitchin Booke' indicates that she established friendly relations with local gentry families and extended hospitality to friends of her eldest son such as Robert Harley and Francis Wolley.⁷⁷ She occasionally accompanied Edward and his wife or other family members to dinner or supper with friends and on 23 April 1601 took

⁶⁹ Kitchin Booke, ff. 45v, 59v, 5v, 60r, 24r, 58v.

⁷⁰ Ibid., ff. 27r, 40v; Donne, 'Sermon', pp. 90-91; Herbert, 'Memoriae', p. 128; Powers-Beck, *Writing the Flesh*, pp. 43-47.

⁷¹ Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix*, pp. 106-42; Kitchin Booke, ff. 5v, 22v, 45r, 45v, 51v.

⁷² William Boswell to William Camden, 15 July 1619 in *Viri clarissimi. Gulielmi Camdeni et illustrium virorum ad G. Camdenum epistolae*, ed. by Thomas Smith (London: [n.pub.], 1691), p. 280; Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, p. 12.

⁷³ See, for example, Malcolmson, 'Magdalen Herbert'; Donne to Magdalen Herbert, 11 July 1607 in Walton, *Lives*, pp. 267-69.

⁷⁴ R.C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 172-9, 184-5, 237-62, 271-4, 475-6.

⁷⁵ John Donne, 'To Mrs. M.H.' in *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by A.J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 219; Mainwaring to Edward Herbert, 7 Aug. 1638 in *Herbert Correspondence* ed. by W.J. Smith (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1969), p. 97.

⁷⁶ Donne, 'Sermon', pp. 85-89; Tim Reinke Williams, *Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), pp. 128, 162.

⁷⁷ Kitchin Booke, *passim*; Powers-Beck, *Writing the Flesh*, pp. 224-47.

Mary, Richard Newport and Elizabeth Detton to dine ‘at Courte’.⁷⁸ Magdalen’s religious faith remained central to her life in London and is captured by Donne in his poem ‘To Mrs Magdalen Herbert: of St Mary Magdalen’ and in his memorial sermon where he bore witness that she had ‘dedicated her soule to God’ and emphasised her ‘*holy cheerfulness*’ and ‘*Religious alacrity*’.⁷⁹ He recalled the piety of her household with its twice-daily communal prayers and weekly psalm-singing and vividly described her attending ‘*God’s house of Prayer*, duly, not onely every Sabbath, ... but even in those *weeke-dayes*, when it was onely a house of *Prayer*’ and collecting together and hurrying her *family*, visitors and servants to church with the ‘cheerful provocation, *For God’s sake let’s go, For God’s sake let’s bee there at the Confession*’.⁸⁰ The only direct expression of her faith survives in her letter to Sir George More when she reflected upon the transitoriness of human happiness and comfort and asserted that her present ‘misery’ reinforced her determination to ‘place my contentment in that I hope, and looke for, and in nothing I have or injoy’.⁸¹ The Calvinist beliefs which had shaped her character, morality and femininity clearly provided meaning to her life, comfort in her suffering and hope of salvation, but unlike her brothers, Francis and Andrew Newport, who had been educated in the strongly continental Reformed tradition of Shrewsbury School, she appears to have been a moderate Calvinist who commanded respect for her godliness and for nurturing the religious commitment of her children and household but avoided the Calvinist religiosity recorded by contemporary gentlewomen such as Margaret, Lady Hoby and Grace, Lady Mildmay, in their autobiographical and religious writings.⁸² It is noticeable that Donne’s sermon commended Magdalen’s commitment to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, never diverting ‘towards the Papist, in undervaluing the Scripture; nor towards the Separatist, in undervaluing the Church’ but made no mention of her private devotions.⁸³

Despite the support she received from her household, siblings and friends, Magdalen clearly found being a single-parent demanding. It was not unusual for an aristocratic widow to find that her relationship with her eldest son became fractious as he grew older.⁸⁴ At Oxford, Walton recounts that Magdalen kept Edward in ‘a moderate awe of herself’ but managed to do so with ‘such a sweetness and compliance with the recreations and pleasures of youth’ that she ‘endeared him to her own company’.⁸⁵ In London, financial disagreements caused friction. Edward resented the burden his mother’s dower settlement placed upon his estates and begrudged maintaining his siblings and providing portions and annuities for them from his inheritance. In his autobiography he complained, with some justification, that his mother lived beyond her means in London, and ‘took house and kepte a greater Family then became either ... [her] ... widows estate or such young beginners as we were’.⁸⁶ In the absence of legally enforceable instructions and penalties for non-compliance from her husband, it fell to Magdalen to ensure that her daughters and younger sons received the portions and annuities he had intended for them. Primogeniture protected and preserved

⁷⁸ Kitchin Booke, ff. 6r, 11r, 22v, 37v, 42r.

⁷⁹ Donne, *Complete Poems*, p. 305; Donne, ‘Sermon’, p. 86.

⁸⁰ Donne, ‘Sermon’, pp. 90-91.

⁸¹ LM/COR/4/23.

⁸² Coulton, ‘Protestantism in a Provincial Town’, pp. 312-20; Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1993), pp. 92-97; *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605*, ed. Joanna Moody (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. xviii-ix, xxxvii-xxxix, passim; Pollock, ‘With Faith and Physic’, pp. 29-30, 34-39, 53-91.

⁸³ Donne, ‘Sermon’, p. 86.

⁸⁴ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994), pp. 84-85.

⁸⁵ Walton, *Lives*, pp. 266-7.

⁸⁶ Herbert, *Life*, p. 36.

family estates by favouring the eldest son at the expense of his siblings but parental love and family honour demanded that daughters secured marriages and younger brothers were educated and established in careers commensurate with their gentry status. Magdalen claimed portions of £1,000 apiece for her daughters and annuities of £40 apiece per annum for her sons, including her posthumous son.⁸⁷ Edward appears to have been torn between gratifying his mother and restricting the drain on his estates.⁸⁸ At arbitration in June 1604, the marriage portions were upheld but the annuities were reduced to £30 per annum for life from age 17, with twenty marks payable annually to each brother below that age.⁸⁹

In his autobiography, Edward described his brothers' careers with pride and praised his mother for bringing up 'her children carefully' and putting them 'in good courses for making their fortunes'.⁹⁰ Like other gentry widows, Magdalen drew upon the advice and patronage of family and friends to secure educational, social and career opportunities for her sons.⁹¹ She ensured that her sons received the solid classical education considered *de rigueur* in early modern gentry families by boarding them with a succession of schoolmasters and placed Charles at Winchester College and George at Westminster School.⁹² Four sons – Edward, William, Charles and George – attended Oxford and Cambridge universities and Henry was sent to study in France.⁹³ With the exception of Edward, who was encouraged to take up his allotted role as a county governor and courtier, but later, became a soldier, diplomat and gentleman scholar, there is no evidence that Magdalen sought to impose a predetermined career pattern upon her sons.⁹⁴ She appears to have steered them towards employment suited to their individual talents and preferences and with a careful eye to cost, opportunity and family honour. It is noticeable that none took advantage of family connections to pursue legal or commercial careers and that three opted to earn their living and forge their reputation in the military professions favoured by their Herbert ancestors.⁹⁵ It seems likely that she utilised family connections to place Thomas, her unruly youngest son, as page to the military commander, Sir Edward Cecil in 1610 and that she encouraged Edward's efforts to further Henry's career in 1615 by providing an introduction to the duke of Montmorency and William's military advancement by arranging a commission.⁹⁶ Walton claims that she persuaded George to continue his studies at Cambridge when he suffered illness and supported his clerical vocation despite reservations about his health.⁹⁷ The marriages of Magdalen's daughters drew upon pre-existing connections to secure alliances that furthered Herbert interests in Wales and Ireland. While financial pressures clearly played a part, it is noticeable that none of her daughters married before the age of twenty. It seems likely that Magdalen, conscious of her own youth at marriage and long child-bearing years,

⁸⁷ Loseley Manuscripts, 6729/13/103.

⁸⁸ Herbert, *Life*, p. 36.

⁸⁹ SRO, Loseley Manuscripts, LM/349/7, Arbitration award by Sir George More, Sir Herbert Crofte and Sir John Morice, in dispute between Magdalen Herbert, widow and Sir Edward Herbert, her son, 14 June 1604.

⁹⁰ Herbert, *Life*, p. 8.

⁹¹ See, for example, Larminie, 'Fighting for Family', pp. 102-04.

⁹² Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 258; Kitchin Booke, ff. 59v-70v; Charles, *George Herbert*, p. 45.

⁹³ Charles, *George Herbert*, p. 45; Herbert *Life*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Herbert, *Life*, passim; Heal and Holmes, *The Gentry*, p. 255; I. K. Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 63-67.

⁹⁵ Herbert, *Life*, pp. 3-10.

⁹⁶ Herbert, *Life*, p. 9; *The House of Commons 1604-1629*, ed. by John P. Ferris and Andrew Thrush, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4, pp. 641-43; PRO, 30/53/10 f. 5.

⁹⁷ Walton, *Lives*, pp. 278-83.

followed changing social norms in allowing her daughters an extended maidenhood. Elizabeth bore four living children, Margaret three and Frances, seven.⁹⁸

Although spared the heartbreak of burying any of her children before 1617 when Charles (aged 25 years) and William (aged 27 years) died in quick succession, and George suffered life-threatening illness, Magdalen can be glimpsed encountering adolescent truculence and defiance and enduring motherly anguish as her children faced the dangers of childbirth, overseas travel, war and duelling, and suffered sickness, injury, bereavement and marital difficulties.⁹⁹ Her letter to Sir George More on 14 March 1608 apologised for the troublesome and wearisome behaviour of Charles and shared her concerns about Edward's deteriorating relationship with his wife.¹⁰⁰ It is possible that her eldest son had recently engaged in an extramarital liaison but he was also angered at this time by his wife's refusal to entail her estates on their son, Richard, and took advantage of the marital discord to travel abroad.¹⁰¹ Magdalen's concern is visible also in 1614 to 1615 when he abandoned his wife, children and estates for more than eighteen months to travel and fight in wars on the continent. Her letter of 12 May 1615 reassured him of her love and concern for his welfare but also demonstrated her skill as a family mediator. She drew his attention firmly to the neglect of his estates, non-payment of his brothers' allowances and plight of his family, and attempted to draw him home by enclosing 'little Florence letter to see what comfort you may have of your deare children'.¹⁰² Magdalen's worries were multiplying rapidly around this time. During the same year, Henry was briefly arrested as a spy in France, Elizabeth nearly died in childbirth and Margaret was widowed and her daughters disinherited by the male entail on her husband's estates.¹⁰³ Richard constantly suffered injuries as a soldier and duellist and Thomas narrowly escaped being executed for mutiny in 1618 when the crew of a ship he was serving on demanded higher wages.¹⁰⁴

It was perhaps the relentless pressures and loneliness of single-parenthood, as much as the mutual recognition of attraction and affection, that prompted Magdalen in February 1609, after nearly twelve years of widowhood, to marry John Danvers, a man at least twenty years her junior, and abandon the model of independent womanhood demonstrated by her mother. Although little social pressure was exerted upon a widow to preserve her husband's reputation and children's inheritance by remaining single, and marriages with significant age differences remained relatively common among the gentry for financial reasons, the marriage was perceived to transgress social norms and reflect poorly upon Herbert honour.¹⁰⁵ No-one could deny that Magdalen was an attractive widow, celebrated a few years earlier by Donne for her 'gold oft tried and ever new' beauty in his elegy, *The Autumnal*, but it is clear that many considered the age gap between the couple excessive.¹⁰⁶ John Chamberlain's titbit in a letter to Sir Dudley Carleton that 'Young Danvers' was 'wedged to the widow Herbert ... of

⁹⁸ Lewys Dwnn, *Heraldic Visitations of Wales and Part of the Marches: between the years 1586 and 1613*, ed. by Samuel Rush Meyrick, 2 vols (Llandovery: William Rees, 1846), 1, p. 189; Herbert, *Life*, p. 11; Powers-Beck, *Writing the Flesh*, p. 206.

⁹⁹ Charles, *George Herbert*, p. 15; George Herbert to Danvers, 18 Mar. 1617 in Walton, *Lives*, pp. 335-36.

¹⁰⁰ LM/COR/4/23.

¹⁰¹ Herbert, *Life*, pp. 39-41.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 68-87; PRO 30/53/10 f. 5.

¹⁰³ Ferris and Thrush, *Commons*, 4, pp. 641-43; PRO 30/53/10, f. 5; PRO, 30/53/10, f. 8, Francis Newport to Edward Herbert, 16 June 1615.

¹⁰⁴ *Life*, pp. 9-10; Charles, *George Herbert*, pp. 224-27.

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *Aristocratic Women*, pp. 160-67.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, *Complete Poems*, pp. 105-6.

more than twice his age' probably represented the tamer gossip.¹⁰⁷ Some may have recalled the scandal two decades earlier when Lettice Dudley, countess of Leicester, took her son's friend, Sir Christopher Blount, twelve years her junior, as her third husband.¹⁰⁸ Magdalen's known piety notwithstanding, her decision to marry a handsome younger man inevitably laid her open to salacious gossip about her sexual appetite.¹⁰⁹ Gossipmongers feasted a few years later on the countess of Pembroke's relationship with her doctor, Sir Matthew Lister, a man ten years her junior and quipped after her death to be 'well worne in her service'.¹¹⁰ In his funeral sermon, Donne clearly felt obliged to emphasise Magdalen's long widowhood and Danver's lifelong commitment and to challenge the 'daughters of Jerusalem' not to wake her with '*halfe calumnies*' and '*whisperings*' but with active imitation of her moral and holy virtues.¹¹¹

There is no suggestion that Magdalen's decision to remarry was hasty or lacked pre-thought. The couple appear merely to have misjudged or disregarded the social reception of their age gap. Donne's pseudo-filial courtly flattery of Magdalen in letter and verse in 1607, and particularly his verse-epistle 'To Mrs. M.H.', suggests that she was not short of admirers.¹¹² Danvers had much to commend him. A well-bred younger son and heir to his childless brother, Henry, Baron Danvers of Dauntsey, he was widely respected for his intellectual interests, charm of manner and genial disposition. He enjoyed royal favour and was knighted by James I five days after his marriage and admitted to the court of Prince Henry as gentleman of the privy chamber in 1610.¹¹³ Already financially secure, and experienced in running her own affairs, Magdalen, like many aristocratic widows, appears to have sought love, appreciation and support in her second marriage and to have valued Danvers' willingness to accept a more equally balanced partnership and to use his personal resources and aristocratic connections to further the interests of her children.¹¹⁴ Dauntsey, according to Aubrey, expressed disapproval of his brother's marriage, perhaps because he feared it would prevent him from siring an heir, but Magdalen enjoyed a warm relationship with at least one of Danvers' three sisters.¹¹⁵ Whether she had reached the menopause is not known, but the fact that she bore no late children suggests this is possible. The reaction of Magdalen's own family to the marriage appears to have been mixed. Edward seems to have resented the match as a stain on his father's name and threat to his financial prospects and standing, but family correspondence suggests that he found it convenient to accept it with poor grace. Writing to him in 1615, Magdalen firmly reminded him of Danver's considerable (and well-documented) efforts to ensure he remained solvent during his travels abroad, urging that 'there was never a tenderer hart or a lovinge minde in any man then is in him

¹⁰⁷ Chamberlain to Carleton, 3 Mar. 1609 in Norman Egbert McClure, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1939), 1, p. 280.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Adams, 'Lettice Dudley [née Knollys ...] countess of Essex and countess of Leicester (1543-1634)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online edn) [accessed 3 September 2018]. Mother of Robert Devereux, earl of Essex.

¹⁰⁹ Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 153.

¹¹⁰ Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix*, 201; Chamberlain to Carleton, 13 Oct. 1621 in McClure, *Letters of John Chamberlain*, 2, pp. 398-41.

¹¹¹ Donne, 'Sermon', pp. 92-93.

¹¹² Garrod, 'Donne and Mrs Herbert', pp. 166-68; Smith, *Complete Poems*, p. 219.

¹¹³ Ferris and Thrush, *Commons*, 4, pp. 17-20.

¹¹⁴ Harris, *Aristocratic Women*, pp. 166-67. Danvers was related to the Somerset, Latimer, Percy, Cecil and Carey families.

¹¹⁵ *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, p. 81; TNA, PCC Wills, PROB 11/139/77, Will of Lucy Baynton, Widow of Bremhill, Wiltshire, 28 Jan. 1622.

towards you who have power to comaund him and all that is his'.¹¹⁶ Danvers' affection, generosity and willingness to utilise his courtly contacts quickly won over Edward's siblings. George developed a close relationship with his stepfather and drew readily upon his advice, encouragement and support throughout his university and church career.¹¹⁷ There is similarly evidence that Danvers enjoyed the respect of Henry and was warmly accepted by Magdalen's daughters.¹¹⁸

Contemporaries anxious to protect Magdalen's posthumous reputation vigorously emphasised the success of her second marriage. Donne claimed in his sermon that 'as the well tuning of an *Instrument*, makes *higher* and *lower* strings, of one sound, so the inequality of their yeeres, was thus reduc't to an evennesse, that shee had a *cheerfulnesses*, agreeable to his youth, and he a *sober staidnesse*, conformable to her *more yeeres*'.¹¹⁹ Walton recorded that Danvers highly valued 'both her person and the most excellent endowments of her mind'.¹²⁰ Aubrey asserted that his kinsman married a woman old enough to be his mother 'for love of her Witt'.¹²¹ The change to Magdalen's status occurred at a time when her five older children were already married or established in careers, George was poised to join Charles at university, Henry and Thomas were likely boarding with schoolmasters, and only Frances remained under her sole care. She continued to support her children in adulthood and took delight in her grandchildren but had time to develop a companionable relationship with her new husband and to support his career and interests. She was careful though, as Donne pointed out, to secure the permission of Danvers to retain the stewardship of her dower income and to use it for the benefit of her children and charitable purposes.¹²² During their marriage, Danvers pursued a parliamentary career and became increasingly involved in colonial expansion through his investment in the Virginia and Somers Island Companies.¹²³ From 1622, he devoted time and money to building a substantial country house for the couple at Chelsea, then a small rural riverside community favoured by courtiers seeking a rural residence with convenient access to Westminster. Both the house, with its elegant façade and generous reception rooms, and the garden, with its pavilions, gravelled paths and expert planting, were much admired.¹²⁴ It seems highly likely that Magdalen provided hospitality for Danvers' political and commercial allies and played an active and enthusiastic role in his building and garden projects. To what extent she offered advice on non-domestic matters, joined him in attending masques, tournaments and other events at court or accompanied him to informal supper parties and entertainments hosted by his aristocratic allies and patrons is not known but the couple certainly continued Magdalen's established practice of making long summer peregrinations to Shropshire and Wales to visit family and friends.¹²⁵

Reading Donne's sermon and George's 'Memoriae Matris Sacrum' as sources for Magdalen's life suggests that in adult-hood she was able to develop a personal life-style and

¹¹⁶ PRO 30/53/10 f. 5. For example, TNA, PRO 30/53/10, f. 2, Danvers to Edward Herbert, 8 Apr. 1615. Magdalen's remarriage is never mentioned in Edward's autobiography.

¹¹⁷ For example, George Herbert to Danvers, 18 Mar. 1617, 6 Oct. 1619, in Walton, *Lives*, pp. 335-36.

¹¹⁸ George Herbert to Danvers, 19 Jan. 1619, in Walton, *Lives*, pp. 331-32; Ferris and Thrush, *Commons*, 4, pp. 641-43; TNA, PCC Wills, PROB 11/142/229, Will of Margaret Vaughan, Widow of Llyssin, Montgomeryshire, 13 August 1623.

¹¹⁹ Donne, 'Sermon', p. 88.

¹²⁰ Walton, *Lives*, p. 266.

¹²¹ Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, 80-81.

¹²² Donne, 'Sermon', p. 89.

¹²³ Ferris and Thrush, *Commons*, 4, pp. 17-20.

¹²⁴ 'Nos. 7-15, Danvers Street' in *Survey of London, Chelsea Part II*, ed. by Walter H Godfrey, 53 vols (London, London County Council, 1900-2020), 4, pp. 9-14.

¹²⁵ Danvers to Herbert, 24 June 1615 in Smith, *Herbert Correspondence*, pp. 69-70.

routine that largely satisfied her hopes and needs. They positioned her securely within the domestic arena over which her family, friends and neighbours had witnessed her reign supreme during her widowhood and second marriage and emphasised her femininity, altruism, organisational skills and practical expertise. Donne, who was a frequent visitor at Charing Cross and spent six months at Chelsea during the plague of 1625, described her home as a court ‘in the conversation of the best’, an almshouse ‘in feeding the *poore*’ and a hospital ‘in ministering releefe to the *sicke*’, stressing particularly her daily support for beggars and the working poor and her willingness to provide relief to plague victims.¹²⁶ A minor example of her medical expertise can be gleaned from Aubrey who described her rubbing the face of Francis Bacon, Lord Verrulam and giving him cordial water when he collapsed in the garden at Chelsea.¹²⁷ George praised his mother’s careful time-management and tireless domestic activity and described her pleasure in her garden, skill in needlework and love of music. Like Donne, he applauded her efforts to meet the needs of the poor within her neighbourhood and emphasised her gracious hospitality and her confidence and ability to deal with ‘the coming of a person of importance’.¹²⁸ He presented his mother as an inveterate correspondent, with polished and accurate prose and elegant penmanship, whose ‘letters, talked of everywhere, wing through the world’.¹²⁹ Thanks to Donne, we can picture Magdalen reading and writing letters in the privacy of her cabinet at Charing Cross whilst family correspondence suggests that writing and reading letters was often a shared activity during her second marriage.¹³⁰

Magdalen’s letter to Edward in 1615 asserted that she or Danvers wrote to him with every post and she doubtless despatched regular missives to all of her adult children in which she offered encouragement and advice, passed on news of family and friends and reminded them of her love and concern. In addition to chiding Edward for his familial shortcomings in 1615, she sent news of Elizabeth’s difficult delivery, the arrival of William’s military commission and the approaching death of Lady Vachell. As with her letter to Sir George More, she displayed skill in broaching difficult matters and expressed her points clearly without literary or religious allusions.¹³¹ George’s evidence suggests that Magdalen, like other women of aristocratic status, sat at the centre of an extensive family correspondence network, which, extended beyond those able to enjoy her hospitality and embraced friends, patrons and useful contacts as well as her siblings, cousins and wider kin.¹³² The available evidence suggests that Magdalen forged her closest and most supportive and gainful associations with male relatives and friends but the picture is probably skewed because, unlike diarists such as Lady Hoby, little information about her relationship with cherished and mutually sympathetic female relatives has survived. Magdalen headed the list of women remembered in her daughter Margaret’s will in 1623 and was bequeathed money for a ring and named joint guardian of her three granddaughters.¹³³ The bequest she received from Danvers’ sister Lucy, widow of Sir Henry Bayntum of Bromham, Wiltshire, who died in June 1621, of ‘one piece of plate to the value of Ten Pounds and my ash colour wrought velvet

¹²⁶ Donne, ‘Sermon’, p. 89.

¹²⁷ *Aubrey’s Brief Lives*, p. 12.

¹²⁸ Herbert, ‘Memoriae’, pp. 125-26.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹³⁰ Donne, ‘To Mrs. M.H.’ in Smith, *Complete Poems*, 219.

¹³¹ PRO 30/53/10 f. 5.

¹³² See, for example, Larminie, ‘Fighting for Family’, pp. 96-97.

¹³³ PROB 11/142/229.

gown and my ash colour satin waistcoat and personal belongings to the same' similarly offers a tantalising peek into Magdalen's wider female network.¹³⁴

A solicitous letter from George to his mother dated 25 May 1622 reveals that Magdalen suffered periods of depression as well as physical decline during her final years, exacerbated, he suggests, by unwarranted concerns about her adult children and motherly failings.¹³⁵ In his sermon, Donne characterised her depression as an 'overflowing of *Melancholie*' suffered in 'high tides' which dampened her natural cheerfulness and caused 'darke and sad apprehensions' but never eclipsed her Christian faith.¹³⁶ She may have found herself more isolated at Chelsea than Charing Cross and doubtless worried about the continuing crises Danvers faced as a leading member of the Virginia Company, which was forcibly dissolved in 1624, and his growing debts.¹³⁷ Edward's diplomatic career suffered a setback in 1622 and ground to a halt in 1624 but she at least saw him appointed to the Council of War, elevated to the nobility and build a prestigious country house at Montgomery.¹³⁸ The fact that Henry secured a knighthood in 1623, married a rich widow in 1625 and produced a son, to whom she stood godparent in 1626, doubtless also raised her spirits, but her state of mind cannot have been helped by Elizabeth's relentless deterioration with consumption and the deaths of Richard in 1622 and Margaret in 1623.¹³⁹ Family and friends gathered to support Magdalen in her final days. According to Donne, she embraced a Christian death quietly and without fear or questioning of God's will.¹⁴⁰ She was buried at Chelsea on 8 June 1627.¹⁴¹ Danvers waited a respectable year before marrying a wealthy heiress to pay his debts and produce a son for the earldom and estates he stood to inherit.¹⁴²

Though valuable, the memorials provided by Donne and George demonstrate the need for caution in using second-hand testimony. It is evident that both discreetly tailored their intimate representations of Magdalen's life and death to reflect the cultural norms of her gender and rank and their own male sensibilities and literary intentions. Both focused on her modesty, piety and charity and highlighted her domestic pre-occupations and competence. Although recipients of Magdalen's confidences, they tended to skim over her personal ambitions, interests and concerns. They acknowledged, for example, her beauty but stressed that her Calvinist upbringing and natural modesty discouraged her from taking pride in her appearance or enhancing it artificially. George described his mother 'doing up her hair in a simple style, the way that decent women do' while Donne praised her for dressing according to her quality and company and avoiding sumptuousness or priding herself upon her indifference.¹⁴³ Her portrait, admittedly painted four decades earlier, captures her delicate fresh-faced beauty but hints at a greater interest and investment in her clothing and coiffure than they recognise or admit. Similarly, both men described an intelligent and capable woman who enjoyed male company and conversation but denied her any interest in the turbulent politics of court, government and church. George emphasised her unwillingness to engage in 'idle gossip' and commended her conversational dexterity as a hostess, merely

¹³⁴ PROB 11/139/77.

¹³⁵ George Herbert to Magdalen Herbert, 25 May 1622, in Walton, *Lives*, pp. 285-88.

¹³⁶ Donne, 'Sermon', pp. 86-87.

¹³⁷ Ferris and Thrush, *Commons*, 4, pp. 17-20.

¹³⁸ Rossi, *La Vita*, 2, pp. 245-52, 363, 402, 417; Rvd. Robert Scourfield and Richard Haslam, *Powys: Pevsner Architectural Guide to the Buildings of Wales* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 169.

¹³⁹ Ferris and Thrush, *Commons*, 4, pp. 641-43; Herbert, *Life*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴⁰ Donne, 'Sermon', p. 87.

¹⁴¹ Miller, 'Self-Parody', p. 15.

¹⁴² Ferris and Thrush, *Commons*, 4, pp. 17-20. Since the marriage was childless, he had no claim on Magdalen's dower.

¹⁴³ Herbert, 'Memoriae', p. 125; Donne, 'Sermon', pp. 88-89.

hinting at her unconventionality in her willingness to ‘discourse on hunting and the care of cattle’ which were considered indelicate topics for a woman.¹⁴⁴ Donne credited her with being naturally cheerful and merry in conversation and carefully defended her less feminine love of facetiousness and sharp wit.¹⁴⁵ There is no evidence in her letters that Magdalen displayed the keen, and to some contemporaries, decidedly unwomanly, appetite for news shown by some women in this period but it is unconvincing that a London hostess with sons pursuing political and military careers and provincial correspondents anxious to keep abreast of events in the capital lacked any interest in current affairs.¹⁴⁶

Examination of Magdalen’s life demonstrates the extent to which intelligent and ambitious women from the ranks of the county gentry profited from the patriarchal privileges they derived from their positions as the daughters, sisters, wives and widows of men with power and influence. Like leading noblewomen, they were able to enjoy full and satisfying lives and were well placed, particularly when they deployed beauty and charm, to assert a degree of personal independence and to navigate patriarchal restrictions resourcefully. While some aristocratic women privately or publicly protested and questioned their subordinate position, there is no evidence that Magdalen sought to challenge or disrupt the patriarchal hierarchy that underpinned and framed her progression from cradle to grave.¹⁴⁷ She had been raised to accept male authority, view matrimony as the best career option for a gentry daughter and recognise that competent household management, responsible motherhood and religious piety commanded respect and reputation. Widowhood opened financial, legal and social opportunities for loosening patriarchal norms and enabled her to create a fulfilling life for herself that revolved around her family, friends, faith and household. When she chose to remarry, she was able to choose her own partner and to decide whether to marry for money, security, status or love. There were limits, however, to how far she could evade convention and defy societal expectation without incurring significant and long-lasting threats to her reputation. Moving her family to Oxford, establishing a permanent household base in London and befriending influential male supporters and clients clearly raised patriarchal eye-brows and required some posthumous explanation in a period when unattached women were perceived as a potential threat to social order.¹⁴⁸ Marrying a considerably younger and highly eligible second husband provoked immediate and long-lasting disapproval and gossip, and although her behaviour was considered conventional and praise-worthy in other respects, necessitated significant damage control by Donne and Walton.¹⁴⁹

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¹⁴⁴ Herbert, ‘Memoriae’, pp. 125-26.

¹⁴⁵ Donne, ‘Sermon’, p. 86.

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, James Daybell, ‘“Suche newes as on the Quenes hyewayes we have mett’: The News and intelligence Networks of Elizabeth Talbot countess of Shrewsbury (c.1527-1608)’ in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700* ed. by James Daybell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004), 114-31.

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Wall, ‘Elizabethan Precept’, pp. 30-37; Richard T. Spence, *Lady Anne Clifford* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), pp. 40-58.

¹⁴⁸ Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 3-29.

¹⁴⁹ Donne, ‘Sermon’, pp. 86, 92-93; Walton, *Lives*, pp. 267-68.