

Adventurous Wives  
IN THE  
Long Eighteenth Century:  
OR,  
*Virtue Reconfider'd*

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Being a Day Conference hosted by  
CHAWTON HOUSE.

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*Call for Papers*

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14-15 May  
MMXXI



Chawton  
House



In Charlotte Lennox's 1752 novel, *The Female Quixote*, an eighteenth-century Countess is horrified when she is asked by the romance-obsessed heroine to relate her 'adventures', professing:

*'The word adventures carries in it so free and licentious a sound in the apprehensions of people at this period of time, that it can hardly with propriety be applied to those few and natural incidents which compose the history of a woman of honour.'*

The idea that during the long eighteenth century virtuous wives were increasingly relegated to the domestic/private sphere, their legal and economic identities subsumed into that of their husbands, is a long-standing one. However, recent and ongoing research is challenging the orthodoxy of this narrative and demonstrating that the roles available to married women were more complex, nuanced and dynamic than mainstream assumptions have generally allowed. For example, Elaine Chalus has explored women's engagement with politics and the electoral process; Joanne Begiato's examination of the divorce process has shed light on the lived experience of married women; Amy Louise Erikson has interrogated the laws relating to women's property ownership; and Briony McDonagh has examined inter alia how landowning wives managed the combined duties of married life and estate management.

However, research specifically relating to 'wives' is often buried amongst the wider topic of 'women', and cross-disciplinary patterns and conclusions relating purely to married women may be lost or go unrecognised.

On Friday 14th and Saturday 15th May, Chawton House will host a two-day digital conference to bring these revisionist narratives together and examine the role(s) of the wife as seen through the fields of literature, social and economic history, law, art history and material culture.

Papers are invited on the following topics:

- ☞ The economic and financial autonomy of women following marriage
- ☞ Feme sole traders
- ☞ The visibility of single versus married women in the literature of the period
- ☞ Wives' involvement in politics and public life
- ☞ Working wives
- ☞ Women and the divorce process
- ☞ Inheritance and the transmission of property through the female line
- ☞ Trusts, property ownership and separate estate
- ☞ Wives as educators
- ☞ Conduct literature and wives
- ☞ The married woman as literary heroine
- ☞ Quasi-marriages and kept Mistresses
- ☞ The married female body
- ☞ Material culture, fashion and taste
- ☞ Housewifery
- ☞ Wives as guardians of morality and social order
- ☞ The historiography of the wife: change or continuity?

Please submit abstracts of up to 500 words with a short bio to the conference organisers Kim Simpson & Alison Daniell [adventurousc18wives@gmail.com](mailto:adventurousc18wives@gmail.com) by 1 MARCH 2021.



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