“A most ingenious Authress”
Frances Brooke (1724-1789) and her Lincolnshire connections

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On the south wall of the chancel of St Denys’ Church in Sleaford hangs a plain, oval, marble tablet with the following inscription (Fig.1):

Below lie the Remains of / Mrs. FRANCES BROOKE / Relict of / the Revd JOHN BROOKE D.D. / Rector of Colney near Norwich / and Daughter of the Revd. THOS. MOORE / formerly Rector of / Carleton Scrope / in this County. / The Union of Superior Literary / Talents, with goodness of Heart rendered her / Works serviceable / to the Cause of those / Virtues, of which her Life was a shining / Example. / She died, aged 65, Jan’y 23rd 1789 / but two Days after / her Husband / whose Remains lie in / Colney Chancel.

The burial register also hints at a literary disposition with this short, but intriguing, entry: ‘27th January 1789. Mrs Frances Brooke, a most ingenious Authress [sic].’ At 65.1

The history of English literature reveals Frances Brooke to have been a personality of no small standing amongst the literary and theatrical community of eighteenth-century London. The Dictionary of National Biography devotes two and a half columns to her life and works.2 Her circle included the novelist and diarist Fanny Burney (1752-1840) and her father, the music critic and historian Dr Charles Burney (1726-1814), as well as a number of well-known wits and bluestockings. She knew and admired Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-84), and friends included the actress Peg Woffington (1714-60), the writer and philanthropist Hannah More (1745-1833), the poet Anna Seward (known as the Swan of Lichfield, 1747-1809), and the Scottish artist Catherine Read (1723-78) whose portrait of Frances is seen here (Fig.2). Her closest friend was the actress Mary Ann Yates (1728-87) with whom she jointly managed the Haymarket Opera House in the 1770s.3

The literary aspirations of women in the eighteenth century were furthered by a combination of economic and cultural developments, including a growing spirit of individual expression and consciousness, the development of commercial printing and bookselling, an increase in the number of circulating libraries and a rapid increase in literacy. Frances Brooke tried every form of literary endeavour at a time when the emergence of the professional writer signalled the end of an era of private patronage, enabling women writers to compete equitably with their male counterparts. As editor, periodical essayist, playwright, novelist, biographer, librettist, poet and translator, Frances Brooke, although a married woman, wrote for money. Her first foray into the world of literature was Virginia (published 1756), a drama written for the stage in blank verse, with which she broke new ground as a woman writing heroic tragedy. Under the pseudonym Mary Singleton she was editor and contributor of poetry to The Old Maid, a weekly periodical which ran from 1755 to 1756 and dealt with the political, social, literary, religious and moral issues of the day. She also successfully tried her hand at translation from French, starting with the novel Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby (1759) by Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, followed by Nicholas Frémat’s Mémoires de M. le Marquis de Ste Forlais (1770) and Abbé Millot’s Elements of The History of England (1771). Her first novel, The History of Lady Julia Mandeville (1763), was well received and enjoyed popular success. It concerned the affairs of three couples living in the rural idyl of a country estate, a favourite setting for her works. Written in the popular epistolary style and with its theme of noble and sentimental love, this ultimately tragic romance was clearly influenced by Mme Riccoboni’s novels of sensibility and the

Fig.1. Frances Brooke’s memorial in the chancel of St Denys’ Church, Sleaford (W. J. Atkin).

Fig.2. Mrs Frances Brooke, painted c.1771 by her friend, the artist Catherine Read (1723-78) (National Archives of Canada / C-117373).
works of Samuel Richardson (1689-1761). Always at pains to promote moral rectitude in her own works, Frances admired writers such as Richardson for their morality, and a biography appearing in 1786 under the title Memoirs of the Life & Writings of Mr Samuel Richardson, the celebrated Author of Pamela, Clarissa, & Sir Charles Grandison is thought to be that which Frances Brooke was writing in 1779.4

Her first prose novel, The Excursion (1777), made use of the popular eighteenth-century plot of the young, na"ive country girl's entry into society and her encounters with the evils of city life. Although Frances Brooke achieved success as a novelist, her first love was the stage and her ambition to write for the theatre was eventually fulfilled when her play The Siege of Sinope was performed at Covent Garden in 1781. An historical tragedy set in Rome, it adheres to the classical unities of time, place and action, and focuses on a strong and courageous woman who steadfastly refuses to betray her loyalty to husband, father or son. Her comic opera Rosina, the work for which she was perhaps best known and respected in her day, was first performed at the end of 1782 and was an immediate success. With a musical score by William Shield (1748-1829),5 it is set in the idyllic rusticity of harvest time in a village in the north of England where a beautiful, orphaned girl, unaware that she comes from a rich family, is brought up by an old servant. Eventually discovering her true parentage, she marries her equal in class if not in fortune. Rosina was one of the most successful and popular British operas of the eighteenth century, and, when published, it ran to twelve editions within seven years. It is still occasionally performed.6 A second comic opera, Marian, on the theme of courtship and marriage complicated by a lack of money, was staged at Covent Garden in 1788. Similar to Rosina and with music again by Shield, its rustic idyll this time was 'a Village near Lincoln' which is, unfortunately for us, not identified, although Frances and Sarah owned property in the parishes of Thorpe-on-the-Hill and South Hykeham.7

Notwithstanding her place amongst the literati of London and a reasonable success in all her endeavours, Frances Brooke might now have been consigned to the obscurity of the eighteenth century had she not set one of her novels in Quebec, thus achieving the distinction of being the writer of the first Canadian novel, indeed the first to be set in North America.8 The History of Emily Montague, a romance set in the frozen Canadian winter, was published in London in April 1769 after Frances returned to England from Quebec where her husband was chaplain to the British garrison. It has been discussed as an early 'feminist' novel and contains informed comment on contemporary Anglo-French relations during the first few years of British civil rule, becoming required reading for early British travellers to the continent.9 A second Canadian novel, All's Right at Last or the History of Miss West, appeared in 1774, which, although published anonymously, is believed to be the work of Frances Brooke. The History of Charles Mandeville, published posthumously in 1790, was a sequel to Lady Julia, that made further use of her experiences in Quebec. It developed the idea of communal society through the concept of a utopian rural England and a colonial Canada, and revisited the themes of religion, education and materialism.

Frances Brooke's works were well known and generally esteemed by her contemporaries. She was frequently characterised as 'ingenious' and was described early on in her career as 'remarkable for a quickness of wit, and brilliancy of conversation, which rendered her the delight of all her acquaintance'.10 She was considered by Mrs Barbauld

Fig.3. Map of south Lincolnshire showing places associated with Frances Brooke and her family (P. Mills).
(1743-1824) in her British Novellists series to have been 'about the first who wrote in a polished style'. In France she was among the best known and most highly praised of the English novelists of her day, and, after her death, the European Magazine deemed her 'as remarkable for her gentleness and suavity of manners as for her literary talents'. A reassessment of Frances Brooke's oeuvre began in the 1960s, culminating in Lorraine McMullen's critical exploration An Odd Attempt In A Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke which sought to restore her to her rightful place in literary history. How was it, then, that this 'most ingenious Author' came to be buried in the parish church of a small rural market town in Lincolnshire, and what were her connections with the county?

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One clue lies in the inscription on her memorial plaque in St Denys' Church. Her father Thomas Moore was a cleric, and Frances was thus born and brought up amongst the clergy and gentry of rural Lincolnshire and its borders. Yet her life was to straddle two contrasting eighteenth-century worlds, since, by the age of twenty-four, she had left the peace and obscurity of the countryside for the whirl of London society and the metropolis to try her hand at writing in more stimulating surroundings. Returning to Lincolnshire at intervals and maintaining the link through visits by her sister and friends to London, she appears to have been equally at home in both environments, retiring to her native county towards the end of her life.

Frances was descended from the Moores of Stubton near Grantham (Fig.3) and her genealogy merges with that of several other Lincolnshire clerical families (Fig.4). Her great great grandfather John Moore arrived in this county in 1622 from neighbouring Leicestershire and in 1633 purchased the manor of Stubton and about 300 acres of land, which property remained the focus of the Moore estate for four generations. Whilst the elder sons appear to have lived at the Hall, two of them being rector of the parish as well as squire, the younger sons and their cousins went into business in the nearby towns of Sleaford, Newark and Boston, or went to Cambridge University and took holy orders, as did Frances' father and grandfather.

The eldest of three daughters, Frances was baptised on 24 January 1724 at Claypole, a village two miles west of Stubton, where her father Rev. Thomas Moore (1699-1727) was serving as curate. Thomas was the eldest of three children of Williamson Moore (1664-1724) by his first wife Frances Read. Her mother Mary, whom Thomas had married the previous year, was the daughter of Rev. Richard Knowles (c.1672-1722) who was the Rector of Hougham and Marston from 1704 until his death in 1722. Like Thomas, Rev. Knowles came from a family who had held livings in Lincolnshire for several generations. Thomas and Mary Moore's second daughter, Catherine, was born in 1725, and in 1726 Thomas succeeded his father as Rector of Carlton Scroop, a post he held only a short time until his death the following year at the age of twenty-eight. Shortly after she was widowed, Mary gave birth to a third daughter who was baptised Jane, but was always known as Sarah. In his will, made four days before he was buried, Thomas provided for his then two daughters by a trust on his real estate. His younger brother George Moore (1700-29), who farmed at Carlton Scroop, made provision for his widowed sister-in-law in a will drawn up the day after Thomas was buried, in which he left his modest estate to be divided equally between Mary and his sister Susanna. Susanna (1703-81), the youngest of the three children, had married into the Gardiner family of Anwick and Sleaford, another family of Lincolnshire clerics. Her husband, Rev. Robert Gardiner, was Rector of Anwick and Stubton, and later of Washington, and the Gardiner children and grandchildren were to stay in close contact with their cousins Frances and Sarah Moore.

After the death of her husband, Mary Moore and her daughters were to spend periods living with various relatives in Lincolnshire. Having vacated the Rectory at Carlton Scroop for her husband's successor, they were resident at Caythorpe the day after the burial, but soon went to live at Peterborough with Mary's widowed mother Sarah Knowles, where they stayed for the next ten years. When Mary's death in 1737 rendered the sisters homeless once more, they went to live with their aunt Sarah Steevens and her husband Rev. Roger Steevens at the Rectory of Tydd St Mary in south-east Lincolnshire. Shortly
after, Catherine, the middle sister, died at the age of twelve and was buried at Tydd, leaving Frances and Sarah, then aged thirteen and ten, to continue their studies under the direction of their aunt and uncle. They led a very happy existence at Tydd and their connection with the Steevens remained long after they had left the comfortable and secure surroundings of the Rectory.

The story of Frances Brooke is inextricably linked with that of her sister Sarah, and aspects of their lives and those of their family and friends, which included a series of correspondence gathered together and published by Sir Edmund Royds, one-time owner of Stoughton Hall. The collection of seventy letters, which begin in 1748, spans more than half a century. Although Frances is not one of the writers or recipients, a good many of them are penned by, or to, her sister Sarah, who, along with the other correspondents, makes frequent mention of Frances’s life in London and her visits to Lincolnshire. They are informal, chatty letters which record the minutiae of daily life, snippets of local gossip and the occasional comment on national events. Common concerns include such matters as births, engagements, marriages and deaths, what to wear at the next assembly, the perils of travelling to London by coach, the pleasures of drinking tea and the efficacy of the latest cure for ague. As such, the letters are of interest to the social historian in their own right, as they give a very detailed picture of the leisurely-paced lives of a group of eighteenth-century provincial clergy and their families over the course of fifty-six years.

When the correspondence opens in 1748, the sisters had left the Rectory at Tydd: Frances to pursue her literary ambitions in London, and Sarah to live at Tinwell Rectory near Stamford (Fig.5), the home of their uncle Rev. Richard Knowles, her husband’s Arthur was a close friend of the sisters, and their daughter Kitty Falwater was to remain close friends with the sisters throughout their lives. Never having known their father or either of their grandfathers, it was such male relatives who must have provided Frances and Sarah with the paternal influence otherwise lacking in their formative years.

Just before Christmas 1748, Rev. Steevens wrote to his niece Sarah concerning the deeds to property in Lincolnshire that she and Frances had inherited from their father. Sarah had come of age that year and wished to take stock of her title with a view to selling. The property, which had been settled by Williamson Moore on his son Thomas three days before his marriage to Mary Knowles in 1723, comprised a half share of the manor of Hagworthingham and 118 acres of land there, together with houses and land at Thorpe-on-the-Hill and the neighbouring parish of South Hykeham. In his will Thomas charged his trustees to raise £1000 on his estate for when his daughters came of age, and to maintain them from the income until they did so. Frances and Sarah eventually sold the Hagorthingham properties to Frances Amcotts of the Palace of Lincoln in 1751. The following year, Frances sold her half of the property at Thorpe-on-the-Hill and South Hykeham to Sarah, and in 1753 Sarah sold the lot to Thomas Milnes of Newark.

Her half-share of the £1000 no doubt eased the way for Frances to leave home for London, and the subsequent sale of her share of property would have allowed her to continue to live there until she could achieve financial security through her writing. In her first few years in town, she seems to have changed address several times and may even have returned temporarily to Lincolnshire: in September 1751 she was described as ‘of the parish of St. Ammon Soho, Westminster’, but by December 1752 both she and Sarah were living in the parish of Waltham Holy Cross in Essex. In October of the following year they were both resident at Tinwell with their uncle Rev. Knowles, but Frances appears to have returned to London before his death on 16 January 1754.

Around 1755, at the age of thirty-one, Frances married the Rev. John Brooke D.D. (1709-89) who, like Frances, seems to have been drawn to London and the theatrical world. The couple perhaps met at the Savoy Chapel Royal in the Strand where many of the theatrical community worshipped and where Rev. Brooke was temporarily officiating as curate. He was the son of a Suffolk family whose estate was long established at Nacton. Although he lived in London, Rev. Brooke held many livings, including two in Norwich, but his chief responsibility appears to have been as Rector of Colney in Norfolk and St Augustine’s in Norwich. He was fourteen years older than Frances, had previously been married and had at least one daughter. Soon after his marriage to Frances, he took up a post in America as acting chaplain to the British Army, either shortly before or after their only surviving child, John Brooke, was born on 10 June 1757. This period entailed a lengthy separation until she was able to join her husband, but, in the meantime, she continued to write and was by now beginning to be known outside her immediate London circle. In 1756 her stage play Virginia was published, but was never performed as she and her friends were unsuccessful in trying to persuade either David Garrick at Drury Lane or John Rich at Covent Garden to produce it. A similar fate for her pastoral, The Shepherd’s Wedding, and a farce, both written in 1757, marked the need for more pressing, and led her to try the more commercial avenue of translation. Her rendering into English of Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni’s novel Lettres de milady Juliette Catesby (1759) generally pleased the author, and greatly influenced the developing cult of sensibility in England.

When the hostilities in Canada finally ceased, and it was safe for Frances and her son to travel to Quebec, she bade farewell to her friends in London and, accompanied by her sister Sarah, set sail on 6 July 1763 on the passenger ship Beverley. On the three-month voyage Sarah kept a journal of the trip, recording their arrival on 5 October when there was an emotional reunion with Dr Brooke. Their arrival coincided with the proclamation which gave Quebec its first civil constitution under British rule, to which General James Murray, a long-time friend of Dr Brooke, was appointed Governor. The Brookes and Sarah lived comfortably for much of their time in Quebec City in the suburb of Sillery, which later provided the setting for Frances’s two Canadian novels. Among their English friends were an army surgeon, Lt Samuel Collier, and his wife Jane, and when Sarah returned to England for good in September 1765, she was accompanied by Jane Collier who had been a very dear friend of the sisters. The Brookes finally returned to England in 1768, having unsuccessfully tried to establish the Anglican Church as the national church in Quebec. They arrived in plenty of time for Sarah’s wedding to Rev. Joseph Digby. A widower aged fifty, Rev. Digby had been Rector of Tinwell since the death in 1754 of Rev. Knowles. He had three grown-up children by his first wife, but he and Sarah, although she was forty-one, had a child of their own in 1769 whom they named Edward Moore Digby.
Edward’s persistent waywardness and unsettled nature were to be a constant source of anxiety for Sarah, not least of which he eventually fled the country, abandoning his wife and children. Following the publication in London in 1769 of Frances’ first Canadian novel, The History of Emily Montague, she and Dr Brooke took the living of North Ockendon in Essex to get out of London for a while but by 1770 they were back in town and living in Covent Garden. Their married life became a series of separations, with Dr Brooke attending his living in Norfolk while Frances remained in London. Although their partnership was said to have been a very happy one, his absences must have been welcome at times for she often complained that he interfered in her work: ‘When Mr. B. is here he spoils my projects’ and ‘I must not let Mr. B. know, for he always ruins me with wanting to help me’ are two comments made in a letter to her friend and literary mentor, Rev. Richard Gifford (1725-1807). Meanwhile, she continued to pursue her career, and resumed those friendships which she had made before leaving England. She also widened her circle of friends—in 1774, Fanny Burney recorded their first meeting:

Thursday Mama took us with her to Miss [Catherine] Reid, the celebrated Painteress, to meet Mrs Brooke, the celebrated Auctress ... Mrs Brooke is very short & fat, & squints, but has the art of shewing Agonis & Willingness. She is very well bred, & expresses herself with much modesty, upon all subjects. - which in an Auctress, a Woman of known understanding, is extremely pleasing.

As well as Catherine Read, the Burneys, Dr Johnson, Anna Seward and Hannah More, Frances’ London circle included the actor-manager Samuel Foote (1720-77) and the actor-dramatist Arthur Murphy (1727-1805). She and Sarah also had friends outside the artistic community, including Dr Richard Roberts (the High Master of St Paul’s School, Westminster) and his sister Elizabeth. The Roberts were also friends of the Gardiners, Lincolnshire relatives of Frances and Sarah.

Frances’ son Johnnny studied at St Paul’s School in the 1770s as an exhibitioner, and his wish was to follow his father into the Church, but Frances, ever sensible of the practicalities of life, would have preferred him to enter the law. In a letter to Richard Gifford she writes:

My wish is that he might be educated to the bar, the Church is his inclination but ‘tis a sterile field; however I say nothing, because it must depend on circumstances, but if we should get forward in the world, I should try to turn his inclinations."

On the occasion of his graduation from St Paul’s in March 1776, Frances wrote some poetry for him to recite, as was customary. It was later published, and includes the lines ‘Whoe’er has tasted wisdom’s store, May deeper drink, and still have more... Still let me find thee on the flowery banks of silver Cam, still hear thy potent voice Re-echo through the glade...’ Persisting in his childhood ambition of joining the clergy, Johnny was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1776 at the age of eighteen. He received his B.A. in 1780. On 21 May that year, he was ordained deacon at Norwich, was made a priest on 4 June 1781, and gained an M.A. two years later. Maintaining the family tradition, he eventually took up a post in Lincolnshire, becoming Vicar of Helpringham in 1784. His appointment was, no doubt, facilitated by his mother, whose aunt Elizabeth Lomax held the advowson through her first husband Thomas Andrews. Frances was very attached to Johnny, or Jack as he was sometimes called, but she was realistic as to his capabilities. When he was fourteen, she described him to Richard Gifford as not a lively boy, but he will be a good scholar, has sense, & an excellent heart, & I am not sure won’t have greatness, but that I say only to you. He has a good nature, & an integrity of mind, that are astonishing: he is in no danger but from women, on which score I tremble for him. He’s tall of his age, & has a very handsome face, & I think will be a not bad figure, tho’ naturally awkward, which I do all I can to correct."

In 1773, Frances came a step nearer to her ambition of working in the theatre, though not through the performance of her own works. She and her close friend Mary Ann Yates, acknowledged to be the greatest tragic actress of her day on the London stage, became joint managers of the Opera House in the Haymarket when it was bought by Mary Ann’s husband, the actor Richard Yates, and Frances’ brother-in-law James Brooke. They had purchased the Opera House, also known as the King’s Theatre, with the intention of producing plays and operas, but the requisite permission to perform plays could not be obtained and so they staged operas and ballets instead. Whilst carrying out her managerial duties, Frances wrote her second Canadian novel, All’s Right at Last, which was published in 1774, and followed by her first prose novel, The Excursion, in 1777. In its narration of the picareseque adventures of a young woman from a rural background who journeys alone to London to experience the excitement of the beau monde and to attempt to publish her novel and play, The Excursion contains potent autobiographical elements.

Frances was often visited in London by her sister Sarah and their friend Jane Collier. Jane, now a widow, also spent a great deal of time with Sarah. Time still remaining, she spent it at the Rectory for many years. Lincolnshire friends and relatives also made visits to the Brookes in London, including Miss Cooper, eldest daughter of Benjamin Cooper, apothecary of Sleaford. In a letter to Sarah, dated 29 November 1776, Jane Collier writes

Miss Cooper is in town, and call’d on me on Wednesday morning. We had a word of gossip about our Lincolnshire friends. She brought an invitation from your sister and the doctor for me to dine with them to morrow with herself; and in the evening to go to the Opera - all which I have agree’d to do.

Visits then were often lengthy affairs and Miss Cooper remained in London for several months. A further letter from Jane to Sarah, dated 21 February 1777, begins

Did I tell you that Miss Cooper dined with me on Sunday ‘s/night - she talks of leaving town very soon - she is going to make a visit of a few weeks to a friend on the Cambridge road before she goes to Sleaford ... I ask’d her if she should go through Stamford on her return to Lincolnshire - she said she was not determined, but if she did, she would give you a call of a day or two.

Miss Cooper was distantly related to the sisters through their aunt Elizabeth Lomax (1712-93) who, through her marriage to William Lomax, apothecary of Sleaford, was stepmother of Miss Cooper’s mother Anne. Elizabeth was the eldest of three children of Williamson Moore by his second wife Jane Secker, and so was Johnny’s and her two brother’s half-sister. Edward (1714-84) and Richard (1715-71), resided in Sleaford and were buried in St Denys’ Church alongside their mother. Richard Moore was a mercer with commercial interests in Spalding and Castor (Northamptonshire). He owned a house in Sleaford Market Place, which made him one of the ‘market place gentry’ frequently referred to in the Royds correspondence. On his death in 1771, he left the house to his widow Anne, as well as property in Swineshead, Heckington and Great Hale to his brother and sister. There were also securities for £250 in Sleaford Turnpike Trust. Not forgetting its allegiance he left Frances and Sarah £100 apiece. His memorial in St Denys’ attests to a successful business career: ‘Joining Application to Integrity, He considerably Improved his paternal Fortune, by those Commercial pursuits so justly honor’d in every free State.’ Edward Moore Esq, the middle of the three children, died in 1784, leaving property in Sleaford, Navenby, Swineshead and Wigtoft to his sister Elizabeth. Frances Brooke is said to have drawn up the epitaph to her uncle Edward in St Denys’ Church, in which she describes him as ‘esteemed and beloved through life for every moral, social and Christian virtue’."

In the late 1770s, Frances began to experience the ill health which was to remain with her until her death. In a letter of 1779 to her publisher, Thomas Cadell, she writes ‘I am generally at home, as I am not well enough to make visits; till 1/2 past 12 I am never out; & shall be very glad to have the pleasure of seeing you, if you walk this way.’ However, she managed to continue writing and her biography of Samuel Richardson...
appeared that year. In 1781, her first stage production - the classical tragedy The Siege of Sinepe - received its debut at Covent Garden, but gained mixed reviews of which the best appeared in Universal Magazine:

This tragedy is the production of Mrs Brookes [sic], author of Lady Julia Mandeville and Emily Montague, two works of deservedly established reputation, and which sufficiently prove Mrs. Brookes to possess an ingenious and elegant mind, and to hold a powerful pen as a Novelist ... whilst others deemed the plot as 'too barren of incidents and variety for theatrical exhibition'.

Frances Brooke's most celebrated work, the comic opera Rosina, written in collaboration with the composer William Shield, opened at Covent Garden on 31 December 1782 and was an immediate hit, hailed by critics and audience alike. In March 1784, it was performed at Stamford Theatre, advertised in the Stamford Mercury as 'a new musical entertainment as performed fifty nights at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden with universal applause'. Loosely based on the Book of Ruth, it was a moral work performed in a moral age and was full of the sensibility and sentiment that had come to characterise her writing, reflecting the current taste of audiences both in England and America.

Ill health and a lessening of financial pressures in the 1780s meant a slower pace of work, enabling Frances to spend more time in Sleaford with members of her family. However, she managed to make the occasional trip to London for professional reasons and to seek medical treatment. One project at this time was to co-edit a periodical with Fanny Burney, but it eventually appeared under Frances' sole name, as Burney, though honoured by the proposition, declined the offer as she was not then disposed to writing. 1784 saw the first of several deaths of close friends of Frances and Sarah, starting with their cousin Susanna Lovett of Nottingham. She left property in Leicestershire and the residue of her estate to be divided between the sisters, and, after their deaths, to their respective sons. They were with her at the end of her illness. The following year, their friend Jane Collier died, and in 1787 Frances lost her friend Mary Ann Yates, a double blow in so short a time. When Sarah's husband died in 1786, she and Edward moved to Sleaford, but in August of the following year they spent some time living in Horncastle while Edward was being privately tutored. Frances stayed with them for a while, but Sarah could not afford to keep them both in Horncastle, so, after attending to her affairs on a visit to London, Frances returned to live in Sleaford. It was evident that Sarah was also concerned that Miss Yates, Mary Ann Yates' daughter who was also staying with them, might unsettle the easily distracted Edward.

By the end of 1788, Frances and Sarah were living in Sleaford at the house of their cousin, Capt. William Gardiner, in Northgate (Fig.6) - a fine, late eighteenth-century stone building, crammed between Lloyds Bank and the Sessions House. Johnny Brooke, who had become Rector of Fotherby the previous year, was also living with them. Frances was now aged sixty-four and had written Marian, another comic opera, but its production was delayed by ill health. Dick Knowles wrote to his daughter in London on 25 February 1788, saying 'I have reason to think Mrs Brooke's piece (if her illness does not prevent it) will be out shortly, how soon I can't say. If the papers should announce its coming on before you leave Town, there can be no harm in staying a day or two to see it.' In fact, Marian opened at Covent Garden on 22 May 1788 and, although its plot was acknowledged to be rather too simple, Shill's music was again much praised.

It was to be her last theatrical production. On 23 January 1789, Frances Brooke succumbed to her long-standing illness, dying at the age of sixty-five. She was buried in the chancel of St Denys' on 27 January and a memorial plaque was hung high on the wall above the altar rails, to be flanked a few years later by those of her own son John and Aunt Lomax. Frances' death in Sleaford followed that of her husband in Colney by just two days, and their obituary notices appeared together in Stamford Mercury on 30 January. Just as they had spent a deal of their married life apart, so they died and were buried. Neither left a will and so it remained to their son to administer their respective estates, which, in the case of his mother, included the supervision of the publication in 1790 of The History of Charles Mandeville, a sequel to Lady Julia.

Frances Brooke had become one of a number of successful women writers to contribute to the early years of the English novel. In attempting, and ultimately succeeding in, the wide range of traditional media available to her, she reflected her age. Yet her life and work went beyond some of its precepts and traditions. Her need to pursue her literary ambitions against the stimulus of London society had removed her from a gentle upbringing in remote, rural Lincolnshire to an audacious, cosmopolitan lifestyle, but the nostalgia of those early years was worked heavily into her novels and stage productions in the form of endless pastoral motifs and Arcadian imagery. Her marriage to Dr Brooke, though conventional at the outset, allowed her a degree of freedom to carve out a career of her own. Likewise, in her work, having created the conventional settings, her characters go on to discover that intelligence, wit and practicality are the keys to success and happiness, not the submissiveness, modesty and self-effacement of the traditional eighteenth-century heroine. Frances' awareness of the trend of the sentimental towards the macabre and the supernatural of the Gothic novel, was a reflection of her own independence of mind and spirit, and in this too she transcended her age, heralding the approach of the Romantic movement.

As a postscript, one of the last social occasions that Frances attended was the New Year's Eve Ball at Sleaford a few weeks
before her death. On 8 December 1788, Sarah Digby wrote to Kitty Knowles with an invitation:

We expect there will be a very good dance. We were in hopes the Capt & Mrs Bellamy’s word would have made; if they had it would have been a very good one for all to have popp’d into a chaise together — I hope your business is not quite rid of your bad cold; it is quite a fashionable complaint; I have been very bad with it, & so has Mrs Brooke, but we are all better. Eliza has just sent me word that she is afraid she can’t get time to write this morning; she has lost one of her Brothers & is very busy making up mourning... 

Eliza Mary Ellis, aged seventeen, was the daughter of a cousin of Frances and Sarah. She was being courted by this time by thirty-one-year-old Johnny Brooke, but the match was not to be, for in 1790 she married John Hutton Cooper, Miss Cooper’s younger brother. But her life was to be short-lived, as she died in 1793 of ‘a lingering disease’ at the age of twenty-two. She had gone to the Hot Wells at Bristol to seek a cure. Four of her letters written from Seaford between 1789 and 1792 are included in the Royds collection and contain details of events taking place in the town and mention many of its inhabitants.

After the death of her mother, Johnny Brooke returned to the quiet, provincial life of a Lincolnshire clergeon attending his livings, and in the early 1790s he moved to the Rectory at Folkingham where he was joined by his aunt Sarah who lived with him for some years. In 1795 he married Robiana Judl, a granddaughter of Sarah’s husband from his first marriage, but theirs was also a short union when he died at his home in Leasingham three years later at the age of forty-one. His memorial in St Denys’, Seaford hangs next to that of his mother to whom he was so close in life. Sarah, who had moved to the south of the country to live with relatives, died suddenly at Market Deeping Rectory on 16 June 1804, following the shock of her son Edward’s violent death in a drunken brawl. She was seventy-six years old and had outlived her husband, sister, nephew and son.

All dates are given in New Style and those appearing in brackets are biographical, indicating years of birth and death. All document references are those of Lincolnshire Archives, unless otherwise stated.

Notes
1. New Seaford burial register "F" 1783-1812 p.10.
2. The entry for Frances Brooke (pp.1328-29) contains several genealogical inaccuracies and errors which have since been repeated in biographical dictionaries.
3. The writer’s extensive use of Lorraine McMullen’s An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke (Vancouver, 1983) is hereby gravely acknowledged. St rinching much of the narrative framework of the account of Frances Brooke.
4. It appeared in Universal Magazine, 78 (January 1786), pp.16-21 and (February 1786), pp.73-77, and was authorised by her daughters.
5. William Shield, along with Charles Dibdin, dominated the English musical stage in the early 1800s, leading towards a school of British light opera. Shield was a musician at the Haymarket Opera House from 1771, and was principal viola there at the time of Frances Brooke’s management. He was later appointed composer to Covent Garden and wrote music for more than thirty dramatic pieces, of which Rosina was the most popular. The fame and impact of his songs earned him the title of ‘the most original composer since Purcell’ (Peter Gammond, Oxford Companion to Popular Music (Oxford, 1991), p.526).
6. Highlights of Rosina, including the songs Light as a Thistlewood, When William at Eve and White With Village Maids, are available on compact disc: Decca 445 832 and 20DM2 by John Grant, conducted by Richard Bonynge (originally recorded 1963; re-recorded Nov 1996); Decca 440 426 20DM2 conducted by Granville Jones (originally recorded 1959).
7. See n.32 below.
8. J.B. James Hume-Potter’s The Last of the Mohicans, although set in the year 1757, was published in 1826.
13. The title comes from the introductory text of the first edition of The Old Maid No.1, dated 15 November 1755, in which Frances Brooke writes

‘Amidst the present glut of essay papers, it may seem an odd attempt in a woman, to think of adding to the number; but as most of them, like summer insects, just make their appearance, and are gone, I see no reason why I may not buckle amongst them...’

14. The Stubton estate was sold by Christopher Moore (1697-1752) to Anthony Mapleton, gent. of Fenton in 1748, the advowson having been sold in 1747.
16. Thomas Moore married Mary Knowles on 26 March 1723 at Hougham, Rev. Richard Knowles (c.1672-1722) was born at Peterborough and educated at Oundle School (admitted 4 June 1678 aged six), and went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge (admitted 12 December 1678), where he gained a B.A. in 1691/2. He was probably ordained deacon at Peterborough on 22 May 1692, and was made a priest on 10 June 1693. He married Sarah Bradshaw in London, and their six children - Mary (mother of Frances and Sarah Moore), Richard, Nathaniel, Catherine, Sarah and Elizabeth - were all born at Hougham, Rev. Knowles was also Vicar of Brittoke, Northamptonshire from 1699 to 1705. J.A. Venn, Alumni Cantabrigienses, III, 320.
17. Catherine Moore was baptised at Claypole on 24 August 1725.
18. William Moore was Rector of Carston from 1690 until his death in 1724, following which there was a short period before Thomas took up the post in 1725. Rev. Thomas Moore was buried at Carston on 26 October 1727.
19. The parish register of Carston records gives ‘Jane daughter of Mary Moore baptised 10 December 1727.’ Her baptismal name is used in the will of her aunt Ann C. (c.1676-1753), widow of Richard Moore of Sheffield, thus: ‘Jane ad e Moore, spin, the present wife of Rev. Mr Digby of Timwell, Rutland.’ (PCC Will of Ann Moore dated 5 July 1775, proved 30 May 1776, further grant 11 January 1776 - Public Record Office, T.B.1/110, 46-50). It was proved 15 July 1775.
20. William of Thomas Moore, clerk of Carston, dated 22 October 1727, proved at Carston 22 October 1727 (Stubton I/B/5). No provision was made for his widow but she may have already received a settlement during her lifetime. She was appointed sole executor.
21. viz. sheep and bea and all money upon Bond and whatsoever I have.
22. No property was mentioned (will of George Moore, yeoman of Carston, dated 27 October 1727 - LCC 1727/92/268).
23. Rev. Robert Gardner, L.L.B. (c.1703-63) was educated at Lincoln and admitted to St John’s College, Cambridge on 5 October 1720 aged seventeen. He gained a B.A. in 1720/1, was ordained deacon at Lincoln on 5 June 1728, and became a priest on 22 September 1728. He was Rector of Bancroft cum Averick 1730-60, Rector of Stuton 1723-60 and Rector of Timwell 1751-63. He died and was buried at Bath in 1763 (Venn, Alumni Cantabrigienses, p.193).
24. my sister Moore of Catbrop [sic], Linca’s (will of George Moore, yeoman of Carston, dated 27 October 1727 - LCC 1727/92/268).
25. Their grandfather, Rev. John Ashley, Rector of Timwell, and had two sons: Richard, who was fluent in French and Italian, and widely read in English literature, later noted that he was indebted to her mother ‘for a most excellent education’ (Mrs Brooke), British Magazine and Review, 2 (February 1783), p.101, as quoted in McMullen, An Odd Attempt, p.3.
28. Correspondence relating directly to Frances Brooke has been located in the archives of Lorraine McMullen in a variety of sources and is featured in An Odd Attempt.
29. Richard Knowles (?1754), brother of their mother Mary, was admitted to Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1709 and gained an MA in 1716. He married Mary, daughter of Richard Knowles of Timwell, and had four children: Eleanor (b.1718), Elizabeth (b.1720), Richard (b.1721) and Mary (b.1722). Rev. Knowles succeeded his father-in-law as Rector of Timwell in 1717, and held the post until his death in 1754 when he was succeeded by Rev. Joseph Digby, Sarah Moore’s future husband (Venn, Alumni Cantabrigienses, III, p.32; Royds, Two Sisters, Knowles Pedigree).
30. Richard Arthur (Dick) Knowles (1721-1796) was admitted to St John's College, Cambridge in 1741, ordained deacon at Norwich in 1746, and made a priest at Peterborough in 1749. He was curate at Thistleton (a village ten miles north-west of Winchelsea) to the Rector, Rev. Joseph Digby, from 1745 to 1750, Rector of St George's Stamford 1752-36, and was made Vicar of Thirleby in 1755. He was Rector of Carby and chaplain to Lord Exeter (the Earls of Exeter were patrons of Winchelsea). Upon Rev. Digby's death in 1786, Dick Knowles became Rector of Thirleby and held the living for ten years until his death on 19 December 1796. He was buried at Thirleby along with his wife Catherine (c.1731-92), daughter of John Pepiatt of Bedford. Their only child, Catherine Lutitia (Kitty) Knowles (1786-1829), married Dr William Pavasarsky and resided in London (Yates, Annals Castanbrigenses, III, p.32; Rows, Thirleby). Dick Knowles Pedigree.


32. This property came to Williamson Moore through his first wife Frances (née Read) who inherited it from her brother George Read, merchant of Boston (Massachusetts) and fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge (SIS 3/7/2/1-4). It was devised by Williamson to his son Thomas by will dated 28 April 1722 (LCC Will 1722/221), but, as Thomas was about to marry, it was in fact settled upon him during his father's lifetime by deed dated 23 December 1722 (Stubbon IB/B).

33. The passage of the property can be traced through a series of nine deeds between 1722 and 1753. A letter from Rev. Steevens, dated 17 January 1754, is addressed solely to Sarah at Winchelsea (Roids, Two Sisters p.219). Memorial to Rev. Richard Knowles in the chancel of All Saints, Winchelsea, Rye.

34. The writer of this will, Thomas Williamson Moore, was a member of the minor colleges of the Savoy Chapel Royal where they might have been married, or to locate the marriage in the International Genealogical Index for England, Boys' London Marriage Index, Lincolnshire Marriage Index, and Essex Marriage Index, (which includes Walsham Holy Cross). Frances signed the will as 'B's servant' and was certainly married by the time of the publication of Virginia in 1756 which gives the author as 'Mrs Brooke' (McMullen, An Odd Attempt p.30).

35. John Brooke was baptised on 29 December 1709 at Nacton in Suffolk, the son of Robert Brooke and Hannah Elveden, daughter of John Elveden, of Perchborough College, Cambridge in 1726 and gained an L.L.B in 1732. He was Rector of St Augustine's, Norwich 1733-89, admitted a minor canon of the Norwich Chapter 1735, and was Rector of Gosbeek, Suffolk 1737, Bucklesham, Suffolk 1738-9, Colney, Suffolk 1749-54, and St Peter's Southgate, Norwich 1746-89 and permanent curate at St Ethelred's, Norwich 1746-89 (Venn, Alumni Castanbrigenses, I, p.226; J. H. Lambert, Dictionary of Canadian Biography (1979); International Genealogical Index for Canada (1983)).

36. His first marriage may have been Ann Pilgrim who married a John Brooke at Norwich Cathedral on 22 July 1741 (McMullen, An Odd Attempt p.9). John Brooke's granddaughter Frances Lucy Johnson joined the Brooke family in 1749. Dick Knowles's baptism has not been found, but his godparents were Michael Moore (Frances's uncle) and Rev. Richard Gifford (McMullen, An Odd Attempt p.122).

37. John and Frances Brooke are thought to have had a daughter born shortly after their marriage but who died in infancy (British Magazine and Review, II (February 1783), p.101; Letter from Frances Brooke to her friend Rev. Richard Gifford written 1757-58 Houghton Library, Harvard University MS. ENG 1310, 16, as quoted in McMullen, An Odd Attempt p.49). John Brooke Moore's baptism has not been found, but his godparents were Michael Moore (Frances's uncle) and Rev. Richard Gifford (McMullen, An Odd Attempt p.122).

38. These were the only two theatres in London whose managers held personal patents. Lord Chamberlain (Robert Cawdron of Great Hale) and Lord Controller (Rober Cawdron of Great Hale) (28 January 1727 at Rosown and (2) Elizabeth (daughter of Williamson and Jane Moore nee Secker). He died 25 April 1761 aged sixty-four, and was buried on 28 April in St. Marylebone. Will dated 25 December 1759, proved Stowe 6 July 1761 (Stowefold Will, 241). When she died on 10 December 1793 aged eighty-five, Elizabeth Lomax left her niece Sarah Digby and her great nephew John Moore Brooke £200 each (PCC Will dated 13 December 1790 - Public Record Office PROB11/1239 f.349-52). She owned property in Southgate, Stalfield (map of Stalfield f.1770-265). Her memorial plaque hangs on the south wall of the chancel of St Denys', Stalfield.

39. Jane Secker was the daughter of Edward Secker who was alderman and mayor of Grantham in 1739. He was buried at St Wulfram's, Grantham aged fifty. His widow Elizabeth (née Crayle) was buried at St Wulfram's in 1756 aged eighty-seven (Edmund Turner, History of Grantham (1806), p.48; Lincolnshire Notes & Queries, IX (1906-7), p.52). All three of Williamson's children were...
baptised at Carlton Scoop: Elizabeth on 19 June 1712, Edward on 3 January 1714 and Richard on 21 April 1715 (born 27 March). Their memorials hang beside that of their niece Frances Brooke. A fourth child, Jane, was baptised on 20 May 1718 (born 18 April) and buried at Carlton Scoop on 5 December 1723.

65. Letter from Miss Eliza M. Ellis of Sleaford to Miss Knowles, Tinwell c.1789 (Ryords, Two Sisters p.257).

66. PCC Will of Richard Moore, merchant of New Sleaford, dated 21 December 1762, proved 12 June 1771 (Public Record Office - PROB11/688 f.257): ‘I give and devise my house in the Market Place in New Sleaford aforesaid with the appurtenances which I lately purchased of The Reverend Mr Robert Gardener of Washingtonborough in the said County of Lincoln unto my loving Wife Ann Moore ... during the natural life of the said Robert Gardener and from and immediately after his decease then I give and devise the same unto my Sister Mrs Ann Gardener Wife of the said Robert Gardener.


68. Edward Moore, Esq. of Sleaford, died 18 August 1784 aged seventy (memorial plaque on the north wall of the chancel of St Denys', Sleaford; Obituary in Gentleman's Magazine bxx p.823). He owned property in Westgate, now the site of Riverside Clinic (Map of Sleaford c.1770 - Cragg 2/265). PCC Will dated 12 July 1784, proved in London on 6 December 1784 - Public Record Office PROB 1/1124 f.247.


72. William Shield's score made use of an early version of Auld Lang Syne in the overture, prior to Robert Burns' later association with this popular song (Hammond, Oxford Companion to Popular Music, p.526). Shield and his wife may have been friends of Frances Brooke's family as a Mrs Shields [sic] is mentioned in a letter from Kitty Knowles to her aunt Sarah Digby c.1792 as making a visit to the Knowles family at Tinwell (Ryords, Two Sisters p.262).

73. Lincoln, Rutland & Stamford Mercury 19 March 1784, p.4

74. It was produced in Philadelphia in 1787 and 1791, and Boston in 1795.

75. Letter from Penny Burney to Frances Brooke dated 1783 (Berg Collection, New York Public Library as quoted in McMullen, An Odd Attempt p.204).

76. One undated moiety half part ... in my real estate in Claxton otherwise Long Clawson, Leics to my cousin Mrs Brooks [sic] of Castle Street near Newman Street, London ... and the other moiety half part to Mrs Digby ... of Tinwell ... (attested copy will of Susanna Lovett, spinner of Nottingham, dated 13 November 1783, proved 1784 - Staton 1/B/5).

77. Rev. Joseph Digby died on 23 April 1786.

78. Letter from Mrs Digby, Horncastle to Rev. Mr Knowles, Tinwell dated 7 August 1787 (Ryords, Two Sisters p.236).

79. No.2 Northgate was built by William Alvey Esq. of Sleaford, whose initials are carved above the doorway, and was inherited by his descendant William Alvey Darwin (1726-83). It is described in a schedule of 1773 as ‘also all that Messuage or Tenement with the Appurtenances situate lying & being at Sleaford aforesaid in the said County of Lincoln in a certain Street or place there called Northgate in the tenure or occupation of Win. Gardener ...' (Schedule of Property of William Hill Esq. (1699-1732) of Sleaford, dated 1773 - BRA15359/1 p.19). Capt. William Gardiner was baptised on 28 July 1735 in New Sleaford, the son of Rev. Robert and Susanna Gardiner (née Moee). He appears to have moved to Stamford by the early 1790s (has a captain in the militia at the outbreak of the wars with France) but was obliged to vacate the Barracks in 1802 at the time of the Peace (Letter from Mrs Digby to Mrs Falwasser dated 18 August 1793 - Ryords, Two Sisters p.278).


81. Todd, Dictionary of British Women Writers p.98.

82. Dr Brooke died at Colney on 21 January 1789 and was buried there in the chancel.

83. PCC Administrations of the estates of Frances Brooke and Dr John Brooke were granted to John Moore Brooke in March 1779 (Public Record Office PROB 1/165 5/185).

84. Capt. John Belkire (a Major in the Rutland Regiment of Fencible Cavalry) and his wife Jane née Judd (sister of Johnny Brooke's future wife, Robiana Judd).

85. Letter from Mrs Digby, Sleaford to Miss Knowles, Tinwell (Ryords, Two Sisters p.245).

86. Elizabethe Mary Ellis (c.1771-93) was the daughter of William and Mary Ellis (née Gardiner) of Anwick. Mary Gardiner, baptised on 16 July 1742 at New Sleaford, was the youngest daughter of Frances and Sarah's aunt and uncle, Rev. Robert Gardener and Susannah (née Moore). She married William Ellis in 1766 in Washingham.

87. Elizabeth Mary Ellis married John Hutton Cooper, surgeon, on 16 December 1790 at New Sleaford. The officiating minister was J. H. Cooper's brother, Rev. William Cooper, Rector of Hardingham, Norfolk. J. H. Cooper was elected MP for Clifton, Dartmouth on 24 March 1825 and again on 12 June 1826 (Return of MPs II, pp.286, 302). He was created a baronet in 1828, but died later that year and the baronetcy expired (Burke's Extinct Baronetcies, 1838), p.130. He was also a governor of the bedchamber to the Duke of Clarence (later George IV) and a Fellow of both the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries. His entry under 'Cooper of Walcot, Somerset' in Burke's contains several genealogical inaccuracies.

88. Elizabeth Mary Cooper was buried in Sleaford on 19 July 1793. A memorial in St Hugh's Chapel, St Denys', erected by her husband, includes the name of their only child Edward Moore Cooper who died in infancy in 1792.

89. Letters from E. M. Ellis of Sleaford to Miss Knowles of Tinwell, dated 22 April 1789 (Ryords, Two Sisters p.240), c.1789 (p.257), c.1790 (p.259) and one written pre 1792 (p.261).

90. John Moore Brooke married Robiana Frances Judd, daughter of Capt. William and Mrs Jane Judd (née Digby), at Stamford St Mary on 6 January 1795. Rev. John Moore Brooke of Leasingham died childless on 24 September 1798, and was buried at St Denys', Sleaford on 28 September 1798. His memorial reads: Sacred / to the memory of / the Revd J. M. BROOKE, / clerk, A.M. / Rector of Balkingham / and vicar of Helpingham, / in this county. / He was son / of the late Revd. / Dr BROOKE / Rector of Colney in Norfolk / and FRANCES his wife. / He died XXIVth September, / MDCXCIV, in the XXXIIIrd year of his age. / WALLIS, Newark. His will was dated 27 July 1795, proved 21 March 1799 (Public Record Office PROB11/1320 f.163-64).

91. Letter from I. M. F. Marvin to Col. Ryords dated 12 January 1921 (Stobson 1/C/2 as quoted in McMullen, An Odd Attempt p.218). Sarah died very suddenly while washing her feet, according to a letter from Rev. Joseph Monkhouse (a friend of the family) to Mrs W. Falwasser (formerly Kitty Knowles) dated 19 June 1804 (Ryords, Two Sisters p.312).