

Christopher Anstey with his Daughter

Parents and Children

Christopher Anstey



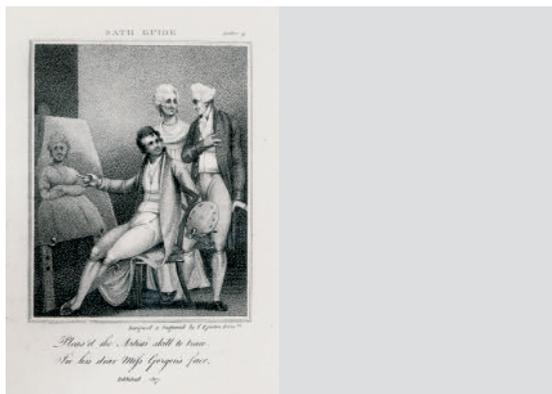
For many years Christopher Anstey (1724–1805) was Member of Parliament for Trumpington, the Cambridgeshire village where he was born. A country gentleman, he lived a quiet life with a large family that eventually totalled thirteen children. His sister's death around 1759 brought on an illness that led him to visit Bath, eighteenth-century Britain's most fashionable health and leisure resort. Following regular visits, in 1766 Anstey wrote *The New Bath Guide* – a satirical poem that was an instant success. Four years later, Anstey moved permanently to Bath where he became a celebrity.

Christopher Anstey with his Daughter

by William Hoare, c.1776–8

NPG 3084

The New Bath Guide



Anstey's poem describes Bath through the eyes of a couple of innocents fresh from the country. It contains witty observations on the customs of Bath and of the amusements, activities and vices of those who went there for health, fashion or social life. One passage, illustrated here, tells of a visit to a portrait painter's studio where Sir Peregrine Hatchet was 'Pleased the Artist's skill to trace/ In his dear Miss Gorgon's face.' Here Anstey was mocking the artist's flattery in painting the ugly 'Miss Gorgon' as a beauty.

The New Bath Guide was a best-seller throughout the eighteenth century. The social commentator Horace Walpole thought that it portrayed life in Bath with 'so much wit, so much humour, fun, and poetry, so much originality, as never met together before.'

Illustration from *The New Bath Guide*

by F. Eginton, 1807

Stipple engraving

Fashion Satire

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

When William Hoare painted his portrait of Anstey, he included a visual link to *The New Bath Guide*. The daughter's doll is dressed in the very latest style complete with an enormous hair-do, decorated with pearls and feathers. This coloured print, also of 1776, ridicules two women with similarly absurd hair-styles. These cause them considerable difficulty in going about their daily lives. The fashion for 'high' hair reached its peak in the mid 1770s. Such extremes of female fashion also gave rise to serious worries about the way modern dress corrupted a woman's natural identity. Anstey had made the same point about make-up and hair-styling:

*Yet Miss at the rooms
Must beware of her plumes;
For if Vulcan her feather embraces,
Like poor Lady Laycock
She'll burn like a haycock,
And roast all the Loves and the Graces.*

The Vis a Vis Bisected. Or the Ladies Coop

by Matthew Darly, 1776

Hand coloured etching

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The Family Line



At the start of the eighteenth century, portraits of parents and children tended to stress the child's importance for the continuation of the family line. This was true in Kneller's portrait of the Stuart Queen Anne with her five-year old son William, which hangs downstairs in the Hall. Although this portrait seems to be about a mother's natural love for her infant, her protective pose also reflects the fact that William was the only one of Anne's seventeen children to live beyond infancy. The future of the Stuart monarchy depended on his survival. But William died at eleven, leaving Parliament to look to Hanover, in Germany, for the successor to the English throne.

Queen Anne (1665–1714)
with William, Duke of Gloucester
 (1689–1700)
 by Sir Godfrey Kneller, c.1694
 NPG 325

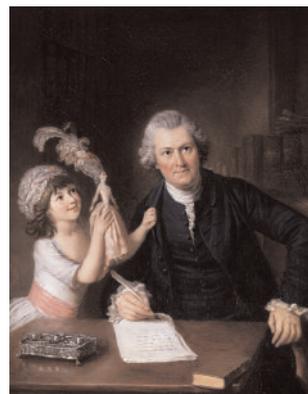
A Fragile State

IMAGE NOT AVAILABLE

The threat of infant mortality encouraged artists to explore the fragility of childhood in their art. Hogarth may have filled this painting with noisy play, but the painting also has a moral and philosophical message about the human condition. The children's future roles are laid out in their formal, adult-style costumes and the parental home in the background. The small boy on the left plays at being a soldier, while the older children on the right act out courtship or marriage. But it is the house of cards, which will collapse at the slightest touch, that is meant to remind us of the fleeting and fragile state of childhood.

The House of Cards
 by William Hogarth, 1730
 National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

The 'Natural' Child



By the later eighteenth century, the depiction of informal relationships and close personal bonds between parents and children became more common. This may have always been true in real life but it had rarely been expressed in portraits before. William Hoare's painting of Christopher Anstey with his daughter was therefore a very modern image. The playful affection between father and daughter was in tune with the latest fashion for 'sensibility'. This had its roots in the novels and theories of the Swiss philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Books such as *Emile* (1762) transformed popular attitudes towards children's education by promoting the importance of play, laughter and self-expression in a child's upbringing.

Christopher Anstey with his Daughter
 by William Hoare, c.1776–8
 NPG 3084