



## Mary Delany

Mrs. Mary Delany (née Granville) (14 May 1700 – 15 April 1788) was an English Bluestocking, artist, and letter-writer; equally famous for her "paper-mosaics" and her lively correspondence.

Mary Delany was born at Coulston, Wiltshire, the daughter of Colonel Bernard Granville by his marriage to Mary Westcombe, loyal Tory supporters of the Stuart Crown. She was also a niece of George Granville, 1st Baron Lansdowne, her father's brother. Mary had one older brother, Bernard (1699), known as Bunny; a younger brother Bevil, born between 1702 and 1706, and a sister, Anne (1707). When Mary was young, her parents moved the family to London, and Mary attended a school taught by a French refugee, Mademoiselle Puelle. Mary came into close contact with the Court when she was sent to live with her aunt, Lady Stanley, who was childless, the intention being that she would eventually become a Maid of Honour.

While living with Lady Stanley, Mary became learned in, "English, French, history, music, needlework and dancing...". Mary came in contact with Handel while at the household, listening to music he had composed; this contact with Handel would stay with Mary for the rest of her life. Mary's plans to become a lady in waiting were ruined by Queen Anne's death in 1714, which led to a change in power, and a Hanoverian on the throne, supported by the Whigs. The Granvilles moved to a manor at Buckland in Gloucestershire, where they were quite isolated from English society. However, Mary was able to continue her education and her pursuit of paper cutting, which had developed at an early age.

Near the end of 1717 Mary was invited to stay with her uncle, Lord Lansdowne, in Wiltshire. She was introduced to Alexander Pendarves during this stay, and it soon became clear that her family had an interest in a marriage between the two. Pendarves was Member of Parliament for Launceston and 60 years old, whereas Mary was just 17. In February 1718 she was unhappily married to him, a marriage brought on by her parents' financial dependence on Lord Lansdowne, and Lord Lansdowne's hope to have political influence through the nuptials.

The Pendarveses left for Roscrow Castle near Falmouth in west Cornwall in April; once settled, Mrs. Pendarves was able to enjoy the great views that Roscrow offered, and was able to get in quite a bit of riding. Mr Pendarves's gout grew worse as the year progressed, and in the second year of their marriage, Mrs. Pendarves was forced to nurse her ailing husband. In 1721, the two took a house in London and there, though Mr Pendarves began to drink excessively, Mrs. Pendarves was able to be reunited with many of her old friends. In 1724, Mr Pendarves died suddenly in his sleep, leaving his

young wife a widow. Mr Pendarves had not altered his will after his marriage, and so Mrs. Pendarves did not inherit what remained of his estate. "Mr. Pendarves, concerned with the bottle that allowed him to forget the loss of part of his fortune, had had no time to consider settling the rest of it on his wife."

Despite her lack of resources, widowhood provided new opportunities for Mrs. Pendarves. Widows, unlike unmarried women, were able to move freely in society, and for the first time in her life, Mrs. Pendarves was able to pursue her own interests without the oversight of any man. Perhaps because of her own unhappy marriage, she was not satisfied with the options available to women in the 18th century.

She wrote,

Why must women be driven to the necessity of marrying? a state that should always be a matter of choice! and if a young woman has not fortune sufficient to maintain her in the situation she has been bred to, what can she do, but marry?"

Mrs. Pendarves was a very perceptive woman, "She judged everything and everybody for herself; and, while ridiculing all empty-headed or vain insipidity, whether fashionable or eccentric, was always ready to applaud the unusual, if sincere and worthy. She was eager in the acquisition of knowledge of all kinds to the end of her life..."

Because she had no home of her own, after her first husband's death, Mrs. Pendarves spent time living with various relatives and friends. To begin with, she lived with her aunt and uncle Stanley, and after her aunt's death, she spent time in Ireland with the family of her friend Mrs. Donellan. In Ireland, Mrs. Pendarves made the acquaintance of Dr Patrick Delany, an Irish clergyman who was already married to a rich widow. It was not until 1743 that on a trip to London Dr Delany proposed to Mrs. Pendarves, much to the dismay of her family. She chose to take Dr Delany as her husband, and the two were married in June 1743.

The Delanys passed a year in London before moving to Dublin, where Dr Delany had a home. Both husband and wife were very interested in botany and gardening:

"Their mutual pleasure in their garden at Delville near Dublin in particular, his encouragement of her gardening, painting, shell-work and needlework resulted in a surge of activity in a variety of media in all of which the basic theme was the flower, whether in stocking the Delville garden, painting garden landscapes, decorating interiors with shells, or working embroideries."

After twenty-five years of marriage, most of it spent in Ireland, Dr Delany died in Bath, England, on 6 May 1768 at the age of eighty-four, and Mrs. Delany found herself, once again, a widow.

As a widow, Mary Delany spent even more of her time at Bulstrode, the home of her close friend, Margaret Bentinck, Dowager Duchess of Portland. The two shared a kinship in botany, often going out to look for specific specimens. It was during her frequent stays at Bulstrode with the Duchess that Mary became acquainted with two well-known botanists of the time Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander. This contact with the botanists only encouraged Mary's interest in botany and also encouraged the knowledge on which many of her flower paper-cuttings are based.

Mary had always been an avid artist, but it was during her marriage to Dr Delany that she finally had the time to hone her skills. She was an avid gardener, something that she shared with Dr Delany, and was also good at needlework, drawing, painting, and cutting paper. Mary is most known for her paper-cutting, "For these 'mosaicks' are coloured paper representing not only conspicuous details but also contrasting colours or shades of the same colour so that every effect of light is caught"

In 1771 in her early 70s and as a way of dealing with her grief, Mary began to create cut out paper artworks (decoupage) as was the fashion for ladies of the court. Her works were exceptionally detailed and botanically accurate depictions of plants. She used tissue paper and hand colouration to produce these pieces. She created 1,700 of these works, calling them her "Paper Mosaiks", from

the age of 71 to 88, when her eyesight failed her. During this time, Mary made nearly 1,000 of the paper flowers.

"With the plant specimen set before her she cut minute particles of coloured paper to represent the petals, stamens, calyx, leaves, veins, stalk and other parts of the plant, and, using lighter and darker paper to form the shading, she stuck them on a black background. By placing one piece of paper upon another she sometimes built up several layers and in a complete picture there might be hundreds of pieces to form one plant. It is thought she first dissected each plant so that she might examine it carefully for accurate portrayal..."

Mary took great care to make sure that each of her flowers were correct, in number of stamens and petals. She also became so well known that many donors began to send her flowers to cut. They can still be seen in the Enlightenment Gallery at the British Museum today. Upon her death, "The ten volumes of Mrs. Delany's Flora were inherited by Lady Llanover, the daughter of Georgina Mary Ann Port. Lady Llanover, who died in 1896 at the age of ninety-four, bequeathed these volumes to the British Museum..."

When the Dowager Duchess died, King George III and Queen Charlotte gave her a small house at Windsor and a pension of 300 pounds a year. Mary had become familiar with Queen Charlotte during her time paper-cutting, and while living in the house at Windsor, became an important part within the King and Queen's lives. The King and Queen were great supporters of Mary's paper-cutting, "The King and Queen...always desired that any curious or beautiful plants should be transmitted to Mrs. Delany when in blossom."

Frances Burney (Madame D'Arblay) was introduced to her in 1783, and frequently visited her at her London home and at Windsor, and owed to her friendship her court appointment. Delany, in her eighties at this time, had a reputation for cutting out and making the intricate paper mosaics (collages) now in the British Museum. She had known many of the luminaries of her day, had corresponded with Jonathan Swift, Sir Joseph Banks, and Young, and left a detailed picture of polite English society of the 18th century in her six volumes of Autobiography and Letters (ed. Lady Llanover, 1861–1862). Burke calls her "a real fine lady, the model of an accomplished woman of former times".

In the year 1980, a descendant of Mary Delany's sister Anne, Ruth Hayden, published a book on Delany's work: Mrs. Delany and Her Flower Collages, which was reissued in 2000 as Mrs. Delany: Her Life and Her Flowers (British Museum Press).

**Source Unknown**