

Fox, (Georgiana) Caroline [*née* Lady (Georgiana) Caroline Lennox], *suo jure* Baroness Holland of Holland

(1723–1774)

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(Georgiana) Caroline Fox [Lady (Georgiana) Caroline Lennox], *suo jure* Baroness Holland of Holland (1723–1774)

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Fox, (Georgiana) Caroline [*née* Lady (Georgiana) Caroline Lennox], *suo jure* Baroness Holland of Holland (1723–1774), noblewoman, was born on 27 March 1723 at Richmond House in Whitehall, London, the eldest child of Charles Lennox, second duke of Richmond and Lennox (1701–1750), and his wife, Lady Sarah Cadogan (1706–1751), daughter of William, first Earl Cadogan. Among Caroline's eleven siblings were Emilia Mary [see Fitzgerald, Emilia Mary, duchess of Leinster], Charles Lennox, third duke of Richmond and Lennox, Lord George Henry Lennox, Sarah (*d.* 1826) [see Napier, Lady Sarah], and Louisa Augusta (*d.* 1805) [see Conolly, Lady Louisa Augusta]. Her upbringing reflected her status as the daughter of one of the country's premier aristocratic families. Often at court, where her father held high office, she was educated partly in French and was allowed to develop a penchant for Roman history, as well as to indulge herself in the lighter and more fashionable reading of the day. Serious in character, she displayed both the early maturity and the insecurity of the firstborn. Though the strength of her parents' marriage provided a certain stability during her adolescence, the rational tone of the Richmond household failed to assuage her deepest anxieties about

the future. Marriage was, inevitably, the issue of her life; and given her position at the apex of society there was the danger that her parents might arrange a union without due regard for her feelings. Ultimately irreligious, and mistrustful of the world, she snatched at love for fear that it would pass her by.

The crucial moment for Caroline seemed to have arrived when Henry Fox (1705–1774), an aspiring politician nearly twenty years her senior, became the focus of her feelings around 1742. A *habitué* of Richmond House for a number of years, he had watched Caroline closely as she emerged into maturity. The sincerity and strength of his passion for her were compelling, and Caroline responded in like measure. But in the eyes of her parents, and in particular of her mother, Fox was simply too much the *parvenu* to be acceptable as a son-in-law. The duchess summarily rejected his approaches on the subject of marriage in March 1744; she believed that her daughter would cool once the family moved to the rural seclusion of Goodwood for the summer. Fox, too, shared this view—he did not trust time, or Caroline, to do his work for him. He pressed her into making an immediate choice between himself and her parents, leaving her no way out but pain in greater or lesser degree. Caught between her fears, she agreed to go through with a clandestine marriage on 2 May 1744, at the home of Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, and was immediately ostracized by her own family and society at large.

Yet the first decade of Caroline's married life seemed, on the whole, to vindicate her choice of evils. Her initial uncertainties about the strength of her husband's commitment to her dissolved as children came and grew. Their illnesses certainly generated anxiety, but three of the four sons she gave birth to between 1745 and 1755 survived (among them Henry Edward Fox), and family life at Holland House, open and casual in tone, appeared to betoken contentment. Fox's career, too, seemed to prosper, and although his ascent towards the highest reaches of government reduced the time that he could give to his family, his good humour was grounded in devotion to his wife and children. There was even a reconciliation with the Richmonds, who could not harden their hearts against a grandchild; in March 1748 Caroline was readmitted, in large measure at least, to the good graces of her parents. This mitigated some of the grief when death removed them both before the end of 1751. Caroline now had her own family, thriving and accepted, to occupy and sustain her.

But no aspect of this fulfilment survived intact beyond the mid-1750s. For one thing, Caroline had failed to repair completely her status as the eldest Lennox of her generation. Her act of disobedience in 1744, though formally forgiven, still ensured that her father's will assigned care of his three infant daughters to Caroline's younger sister Emily, now countess of Kildare. This rankled. Despite a deep affection for one another, Caroline and Emily quarrelled bitterly in 1758 and again in 1769 over the upbringing of their siblings—and in between there were reminders enough for Caroline of how her position had been permanently usurped. Even as a matchmaker she could not dominate, as in the negotiations with Gertrude Russell (*née* Leveson-Gower), duchess of Bedford, over the marriage of her eldest son. Then, too, her husband's political fortunes waned sharply after 1756, breeding in him a bitterness that percolated from the public realm into the home. This confirmed Caroline's aversion to the political world. While interested enough in gossip relating to it and ever prepared to listen to her husband's troubles, she had no wish to play the role of political wife, either as hostess or as private adviser. In her eyes politics, and especially Fox's political friends (for most of whom she cared little), simply drew her husband away from home. It was little, if any, consolation that, while paymaster-general in the Newcastle administration, Fox successfully sought a peerage for her, and she was created Lady Holland, baroness of Holland, on 3 May 1762. Some of Fox's enemies thought that her influence was decisive

in Fox's refusal to become first lord of the Treasury in 1763, but he had more than enough reasons of his own to walk away from such a promotion. Caroline was glad enough to see him retreat from front-line politics shortly thereafter, but Fox's elevation to the Lords did nothing to temper the feelings of bitterness and betrayal that had grown steadily since the crisis of 1756 that had wrecked his career.

Ever since that year, Caroline had watched this blight from the political world eat away gradually at the life of her family. Her two eldest sons, Stephen and the precocious Charles James Fox, felt the full effect of their father's disillusion with life. They had already had to contend with his reckless indulgence of them, and now they were further warped by being conscripted into Fox's campaign of hate and revenge against his political enemies. Caroline had not the strength to protect them against such irresponsibility. Having flouted the discipline of her own father and mother, she was in no position to fill the vacuum of parental authority created by her husband. Nor had she any beliefs of her own strong enough to counteract Fox's pervasive cynicism. She had no option but to endure the gradual spoiling of her two elder children.

Despite the foreign excursions that were possible, and indeed necessary, once Fox had retired completely from politics in the mid-1760s, Caroline's last years were a mounting torment. Despite her entreaties Stephen and Charles James could not, or would not, control the gambling that steadily squandered their father's fortune and precipitated his stroke in October 1773. Suffering from cancer, Caroline began to experience increasingly acute physical pain herself, which she tried to fight but in which, for all her intelligence, she could not find the least meaning. Even so she had to watch as her husband passed genially into oblivion, intent only on escaping easily from life while she battled vainly to find a way through her own mortal illness. His death on 1 July 1774 left her stranded, alone and badly frightened on the verge. Her final agony, measured in days, lasted until the 24th of the same month. She died at her London home, Holland House, Kensington, and was buried at Farley in Wiltshire shortly afterwards.

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Likenesses

A. Ramsay, portrait, 1766, priv. coll. [see illus.]

Wealth at Death

estate subject to serious legal action over Lord Holland's pay office accounts: Earl of Ilchester, *Henry Fox*, 2.356–7

See also

Conolly [*née* Lennox], Lady Louisa Augusta (1743–1821), noblewoman and philanthropist

Fitzgerald [*née* Lennox; other married name Ogilvie], Emilia Mary [Emily], duchess of Leinster (1731–1814), political hostess

Fox, Charles James (1749–1806), politician

Fox, Henry Edward (1755–1811), army officer

Fox, Henry, first Baron Holland of Foxley (1705–1774), politician

Lennox, Charles, second duke of Richmond, second duke of Lennox, and duke of Aubigny in the French nobility (1701–1750), politician and sportsman

Lennox, Charles, third duke of Richmond, third duke of Lennox, and duke of Aubigny in the French nobility (1735–1806), politician

Lennox, Lord George Henry (1737–1805), army officer and politician

Napier [*née* Lennox; other married name Bunbury], Lady Sarah (1745–1826), noblewoman and society beauty

External resources

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