



# The Accomplished Lady

A HISTORY OF GENTEEL  
PURSUITS c. 1660–1860

Hardback, 468 pages, 245 × 172 mm, 415 illustrations, ISBN 978 0 9575992 9 1  
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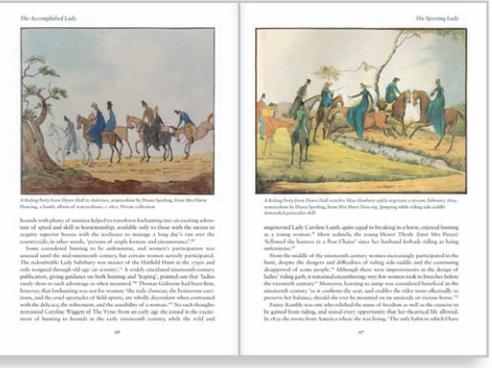
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Noël Riley



# The Accomplish'd Lady

## A HISTORY OF GENTEEL PURSUITS c. 1660–1860

This richly illustrated hardback book is a study of the skills and pastimes of upper-class women and the works they produced during a 200-year period. Their activities included watercolours, printmaking and embroidery, shellwork, wax flower modelling, painting on fabrics and china, featherwork, jannanning, silhouettes, photography and many others, some familiar and others little known.

The context for these pursuits sets the scene: the general position of women in society and the restrictions on their lives, their virtues and values, marriage, domestic life and education. This background is amplified with chapters on other aspects of women's experience, such as sport, reading, music, dancing and card-playing.

While some of the activities discussed appear trivial, others show evidence of great seriousness of purpose and extraordinary artistry. Pursuits of choice rather than for payment could reach levels of excellence as high as any contemporary driven occupations, especially for those with plenty of time to follow their interests. Most of

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these women, because of their social status, were precluded from working for money, but they had time to study and hone their skills, and their creative works were supremely important to them. In some cases, particularly among watercolourists, they enjoyed the very best of teachers. The word 'amateur' in the context of this book is not a term of disparagement but rather a celebration of the fine work produced by those who followed their inclinations with loving care and diligent practice without the pressures of the market place.

The material for this book has been drawn from diaries and journals, biographies and social histories, letters, documents, periodicals, contemporary pastime manuals, domestic guides and conduct books. Above all, it has come from decades of close study, and sometimes collection, of the objects made by gentlewomen over more than two centuries. The illustrations come from a similarly wide range of sources – private collections, museums, galleries, country houses, and dealers in art and antiques.

## THE AUTHOR

Noël Riley has written and lectured extensively on the decorative arts and is a consultant at Sotheby's Institute of Art, London. Her previous books include *Penwork: A Decorative Art, The Victorian Design Source Book, Gifts for Good Children – the History of Children's China 1790–1890*, and pocket guides to *Tea Caddies* and *Visiting Card Cases*. She has written for many art periodicals, both academic and popular, and contributes a regular column to *Historic House*, the journal of the Historic Houses Association. She has been researching the history of ladies' pastimes for many years.

