

DR JAMES BARRY



DR JAMES BARRY
A Woman Ahead of Her Time

MICHAEL DU PREEZ
&
JEREMY DRONFIELD



ONE WORLD

A Oneworld Book

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To Angela



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Authors' Note

Throughout this book, the gender pronouns used for James Barry vary according to situation, depending on whether he/she is appearing in the persona of the male 'James Barry' or that of her original female identity; between those extremes, Barry is referred to as either 'he' or 'she' depending on whether the viewpoint is 'his' outer persona or 'her' inner self.

The currency in use in the United Kingdom in James Barry's lifetime comprised pounds, shillings and pence (£ s d), divided thus:

£1 = 20s

1s = 12d

In this book, sums are given according to the convention of the time – for example, £1 4s 6d (one pound, four shillings and sixpence).

The modern value of historic sums is impossible to give accurately, due to huge changes in the relative values of labour, commodities, property and retail prices. For instance, £100 in 1800 would now be equivalent to between £7000 (based on retail price inflation) and £120,000 (based on income and GDP), while the labour value (i.e. the amount of labour it could buy) would be about £106,000, and measured as a proportion of the total value of the UK economy it would be worth nearly £500,000.¹ Thus the anticipated value of the estate left by the painter James Barry RA in 1807, for which his relatives contested, would today be worth somewhere between £390,000 and £24 million.



Prologue

London: July 1865

Dr Barry was dying. He knew precisely how the end would be; in a lifetime's medical service, Dr Barry had seen it all, cured some of it, and watched hundreds leave the mortal world along the same ugly, degrading path that he was now treading.

Beyond the open window, London sweltered under a July heatwave. The traffic in Margaret Street racketed past with intolerable noise – iron-shod hoofs pulled iron-shod wheels over the stones, heading for the press of Oxford Market; passers-by and loiterers shouted to make themselves heard, and the shrieks of street-hawkers pierced the whole cacophony. It was hard for a human to bear at the best of times, but for the sick it was an exquisite hell.

The heat and the familiar symptoms of the disease awakened memories of the tropics where he'd spent so much of his working life: the hospital wards filled with groans, and lonely rooms whining with nocturnal mosquitoes. He knew how the disease would progress, like a conductor knows the movements and motifs of a concerto – and what a hideous composition, of pain, dizziness and rushing, watery efflux, as if the body were trying to eject its innards in one frantic torrent; the sagging, blue-tinged skin and sunken eyes. Soon the last dissonant chords; then the shadow must fall.

There was something he had to do before the end – something important. But in the heat and noise, with his mind wandering on the edge of delirium, it eluded his grasp.

At last the old gentleman's chest stopped rising and falling, and the fluttering of his closed eyelids ceased.

★ ★ ★

Sophia Bishop heated a large copper of water on the range, under the supervision of the ill-tempered charwoman. This person, old enough to be the young housemaid's mother, came in once a week to help with the laundry, but today she was here in her other capacity, as layer-out.

The water boiled, and Sophia lifted the steaming copper off the range while the charwoman gathered up cloths, soap and a calico winding-sheet. As had once been common in England, this woman earned part of her living from a dual career as a midwife and layer-out of the dead, usually working among the poorer or more parsimonious members of society (the prosperous days were long gone, the mortal end of the trade having passed into the hands of undertakers). She was a hardened creature who cared mainly for money, and like her literary counterpart Mrs Gamp she 'went to a lying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish'.¹

Sophia carried the copper up to the death room. It was she who had found him dead and reported it to the authorities. That had been as much involvement as she wanted; she set down the copper and left the older woman to her business. The layer-out was an old friend to death; she'd attended the corpses of many a person in her life. One more old fellow was nothing out of the ordinary.

In the heat, the smell in the room was enough to unsettle even her strong stomach. Still, the proper obligations must be taken care of and she must get her due payment; perhaps something extra to cover the unpleasant circumstances and the lack of help.

The old man had been a slight, stooped figure, narrow-shouldered and short; in death, his large nose and pointed chin were accentuated by the sunken flesh, and the dyed red hair had been slicked back from the domed forehead by the sweat of sickness. The layer-out peeled back the bedclothes and raised the body to remove the soiled nightshirt. After dipping a cloth in hot water, she gave the corpse a melancholy glance before beginning to wash it ... and paused.

Something wasn't right. She glanced again at the hollowed-out face. That was the old gentleman all right – Dr James Barry. The layer-out had seen him about the place before he took sick, and would recognise him anywhere. And yet those were certainly not a gentleman's private parts. Indeed, the gentleman's whole body, though thin and dilapidated by age, was unmistakably female in every way – the genitals, the deflated breasts and the hairless face. And there was more – distinctive striations on the skin of the belly. The layer-out had marks like those herself; they

came from childbearing. Moreover, in all her experience, she had only ever seen them quite as pronounced as that in girls who'd had babies at a very early age.²

How could this be? She knew that Dr Barry had been an Army man, and served a long career. How was it possible for a woman to get away with being a *surgeon*, let alone in the Army? The puzzle was too great and shocking. Suppressing her amazement, she carried on with the laying out. Soon the body was cleaned and enveloped in its shroud, looking the same as any other.

She was so bewildered, she couldn't even speak of it at first; but then her native acumen told her that it might be profitable to hold on to this secret. The body, unexamined by any other person, went off to the undertaker, and it was only when a couple of weeks had gone by and Dr Barry was cold in his grave that the layer-out finally spoke of what she had seen in that deathbed.

The sensational story flew around the Empire, spreading from newspaper to newspaper, and from place to place, reaching the ears of people who'd known James Barry throughout his career and all the way back to his youth more than half a century earlier. Almost everyone seemed to recall that they'd thought him a strange fellow, and even a few claimed they'd always guessed he was female. But not a single one of them could answer the most intriguing question of all: how on earth had a woman managed to perpetrate such an audacious deception? How had she sustained it over so many decades? And if she wasn't 'James Barry' – which she manifestly wasn't – then who the devil *was* she?



PART I

‘Was I Not a Girl’

1789–1815



A Family at War

Cork, Ireland: Saturday 4 February 1797

A little girl with red-gold hair stood on the busy quayside, wrapped up in a muffler and bonnet. She watched, hypnotised, as an elegant Royal Navy cutter eased through the morning mist towards the north channel of the River Lee, the light breeze filling the single sail. Her blue-green eyes followed the line of the bow slicing through the grey river; the cry of an order came faintly across the water, the sail started to furl, the oars came out like the petals of an opening flower and began to propel the boat towards the town quays.

Everyone knew that the cutter came from the man-of-war HMS *Bellerophon*, anchored downstream at Cobh. For two months, terrifying rumours had been reaching Cork of a French fleet that was expected to land in Ireland. Now the French had been dispersed, the threat had lifted, and here was *Bellerophon*, the leader of the English defenders, calling to take on stores before sailing for home.¹ Not every person on the quayside welcomed the sight of the cutter, or what it represented, and a few would have been quite happy to have the French liberate Ireland from British rule. But they wisely kept their silence.

Cork was the nexus of Irish trade, and the beating heart of the city was the long, spear-shaped island, crowded with busy streets, dividing the river in two. Along Merchant's Quay, the ships' masts clustered like a thicket in the mist, moored two deep on both sides of the river. They brought the wide world to Cork: the salt of the Indian Ocean in their sails and the damp of Nova Scotia in their timbers; bottoms barnacled at the Cape and slimed in jungle estuaries. In return they took Ireland to the wide world, in the form of hides and tallow, thick Kerry butter and good Irish soldiers. Cork was one

of the greatest ports of the British Empire, and the British would do anything to defend it.

To the little girl, Cork was both home and the world. Her name was Margaret Anne Bulkley and she was eight years old; she'd been born in this city to parents who had also been born here, and it was all she knew. A vivid, stimulating world for a child to grow up in, a storm of sensations – the noise of carts on the cobbles and the slopping of the water under hundreds of wooden hulls, the creak of mooring ropes straining against the rise and fall of the tide, the squeal of gulls, and the strident talk of men in all the tongues on God's earth; the smells of tarred rope, river weed and brine mingled with the reek of horseflesh, sweaty linen, ripe cheeses, cooking meat and baking bread, and the astringent odours of gin, beer and grog.

Margaret turned away from the sight of the Navy cutter and hurried along the heaving quayside, past the shop windows – vintners, taverns, ironmongers, ships' chandlers, sailmakers, all bustling with trade. She turned in at the familiar doorway of the grocer's shop, with the proprietor's name painted on a board above the doorway: *Jeremiah Bulkley*.

This was Margaret's home and the centre of her universe. Its shelves were stacked, cupboards bulging and the floor piled high with victuals for the marine trade. Over it all presided Margaret's father, Jeremiah, bearing the perpetually anxious air of a man burdened with debts but hopeful for the future. *Bellerophon's* arrival would be welcome news; in Jeremiah's world, war meant ships, and ships meant income; and war was everywhere these days.

He had borrowed heavily to set up in trade. The house belonged to his wife's family, which was a saving, but to start the business he'd borrowed hundreds of pounds,² which would take long years of graft to pay off. But Jeremiah was slowly building a position for himself in Cork's mercantile community; besides the grocery shop he'd acquired a post at the city's Weigh House – a mark of some distinction, especially for a Catholic in English Ireland. Here the produce of Kerry, Cork and Limerick was brought for grading and weighing. Each year hundreds of thousands of firkins of butter were scrutinised by the inspectors, weighed and branded, before being transported to the quaysides.

History has forgotten what Jeremiah Bulkley's post in the Weigh House was – probably one of the three butter inspectors, drawing a generous salary of £140 per annum.³ Processing goods worth over a

million pounds a year, the Weigh House was rich in lucre to be creamed off; producers and traders paid a fee to have their goods approved and branded, and the Committee of Merchants lapped up two or three thousand pounds' worth of revenue from it each year. Thus, as long as Jeremiah Bulkley kept his job in the Weigh House, there was reason to hope for a bright future.

His wife, Mary Anne, needed as much hope as she could get; she was an anxious, nervy sort of woman. She'd been born into the Barry family, fairly well known in Cork as decayed but respectable former gentry, with interests in several modest businesses and a handful of crumbling properties in the city. Mary Anne's parents, John and Juliana Barry, had raised five children, with Mary Anne the only girl among four wild, tempestuous older brothers. They weren't particularly nice boys, and Mary Anne's only childhood comfort had been her father (her 'only true friend').⁴ By the time she reached womanhood, her brothers had moved on. John had died, Patrick and Redmond had gone to sea, while James – who had shown a prodigious talent for drawing – had become a painter. Acquiring eminent patrons, James Barry had toured Europe and settled in London, where he built up a reputation as a first-rate artist and a volatile personality. He taught at the Royal Academy of Arts, becoming a fellow and professor there. In 1782 Mary Anne Barry was wed to Jeremiah Bulkley,⁵ of no particularly remarkable family, and they produced two surviving children: a son, John, and a daughter, Margaret Anne.⁶

Money would be an abiding worry throughout their marriage. Mary Anne had been left £100 by her dear, departed father, of which she'd had to give £40 to her living, not so dear mother, in order to purchase her life interest in the house on Merchant's Quay.⁷

Jeremiah and Mary Anne raised their two children in the manner of gentlefolk, in expectation of their fortunes improving. John was earmarked for the legal profession, while Margaret's schooling was that of a young lady whose destiny would be marriage; she may have been cleverer, more literate and more industrious than her brother, but she was a girl, and little else was expected of her.

From the shop doorway, Margaret looked back the way she had come, along the teeming waterfront. A column of soldiers marched along the quayside, looking brave and splendid in their scarlet jackets and pipeclayed white crossbelts, the cockades on their hats quivering as they marched. How unfair it was that Margaret couldn't hope to be a soldier! The notion

appealed to her sense of adventure, and would be an abiding daydream in the years to come.⁸

Ruin came gradually to Jeremiah Bulkley, and it began with politics. Trouble between nationalists and loyalists had been fermenting in Ireland for decades, and in 1798 it boiled over. The Society of United Irishmen launched an armed rebellion against British rule. It began in Dublin and spread to other counties. The fighting was vicious; there were rumours of atrocities and massacres on both sides, and for ordinary families like the Bulkleys it was terrifying. In August, Napoleon sent an invasion force to Ireland to help the United Irishmen; a thousand French soldiers landed in County Mayo and fought their way towards Dublin.

The rebellion was short-lived; by the end of September British troops had defeated the French and the United Irishmen. The fighting had not reached as far as Cork, but the city had played a part – the Royal Cork Militia had helped crush the rebels in Dublin with cavalry and cannon-fire.⁹

Although the rebellion was over, the grievances that had caused it remained and intensified. Catholics like the Bulkleys, regardless of whether they had nationalist sympathies or not, came under greater suspicion than ever, and their lives grew more precarious. Yet the shop ledger remained strong on the income side, the debts were secure, and Mr and Mrs Bulkley's anxieties held in check.

It couldn't last; the world was changing, and Margaret's life would be forcibly bent to fit it. The after-shocks of the 1798 rebellion rumbled on for years. Britain tightened its grip on its Irish possession, and in 1800 the Acts of Union were passed. The Parliament of Ireland, stuffed with loyal Britons who took their cue from the Parliament in London, voted itself into extinction. Ireland was absorbed formally into the United Kingdom of Great Britain, the St Patrick's cross was incorporated into the Union flag, and the Irish parliamentary seats were transferred – with their occupants – to Westminster.

They included Colonel Mountfort Longfield, MP for Cork, who happened to be the city's Weigh-Master, with authority over the Weigh House (the institution had been seized from the city corporation by the British government in 1792 and British loyalists put in charge).¹⁰ Eager to enforce the new regime against the background of continuing raids and attacks by rebels,¹¹ Longfield decided to cleanse the public offices of

Catholics. Jeremiah Bulkley was dismissed from his post at the Weigh House.¹²

For a man burdened by debt, the loss of the £140 salary was a painful blow. As well as the credit that kept the grocery business running, Jeremiah had borrowed even more money in his attempt to improve the family's future prospects. In 1801 young John had been apprenticed to an attorney in Dublin, at a premium of around £400.¹³ The ships of life and commerce floated on a sea of credit, but the tides were treacherous, and Jeremiah Bulkley was not a skilled navigator. He loved his only son, had faith in his prospects, and pinned the family's future on him.¹⁴ But John was not a reliable young man; whereas Margaret was bright, imaginative, inclined to dedicate herself to a cause, her elder brother was less intelligent, lived in the moment and gave little thought to the consequences of his actions. Had their sexes been reversed, Margaret might have done well for herself, but in the world she'd been born into the best she could hope for was to marry well – and with no fortune to offer, the chances of that were remote. So off John went to Dublin, to serve, scribe and study.

In the first years of the new century, life on Merchant's Quay continued as normal. The ships' masts clustered as thickly, the wharves were as busy, and the gulls and sailors cried as raucously as ever; but Margaret's childhood would be forever altered by an experience she underwent at some unrecorded moment between 1801 and 1803. Still just a half-grown adolescent between twelve and fourteen years old, Margaret had the hardships of womanhood thrust prematurely upon her.

There had been an addition to the family. Quite how it happened is uncertain – the Bulkleys avoided recording the details, although rumours must have run along the quayside and through the town. As soon as the gravity of the situation was realised within the family, Mrs Bulkley and Margaret probably went away together for a while; when they returned, all that was known publicly was that the Bulkleys had a new baby girl.

It was hardly plausible that Jeremiah and Mary Anne would have a child now – they'd produced only two living children in two decades of marriage, and were both entering middle age. But under the law, if one took a child as one's own, then so it was. Gossips could say what they liked; publicly this infant was Margaret's sister. They called her Juliana after Mary Anne's late mother, as if to confirm the link.¹⁵

For the rest of her life Margaret would carry the physical marks of having borne this child. The marks left on her mind could only be guessed at. Her exact age at the time of the birth is not known,¹⁶ but the child was in existence by 1803, when Margaret turned fourteen.

The identity of the man who raped her would never be revealed. The compass inevitably swings towards her family and their circle.¹⁷ Her father? Her brother? Perhaps some family friend, or a teacher or local priest. There were few relatives remaining in Cork – no known grandparents or cousins. But there was – for a short while – a single uncle on the Barry side of the family, who came to visit at about this time and then left under an extremely dark cloud.

Of Mrs Bulkley's four brothers, Redmond was the worst; he shared the volatile Barry temperament, unleavened by intelligence or talent. He and Patrick had both gone off to seek adventure. Patrick had joined the Royal Navy as a marine; he later deserted, and was believed to have died somewhere in the Orient.¹⁸ Redmond also went to sea, and served more than four decades as an ordinary seaman aboard Royal Navy warships.¹⁹ Wild and uneducated, Redmond was brutalised by life at sea. In 1781, shortly after a period in action, he wrote in his barely literate hand, 'there is no Respect of Persons on Bord of a man of war there are the greatest Vilions I suppose that Could be Found any where', and he admitted that he was one of them.²⁰ By 1789 – the year his mother died – Redmond was on a brief hiatus from the Navy, living with a woman in one of London's slum districts. Patrick, who had also washed up briefly in London, destitute and starving, stayed with them, and even he was dismayed by Redmond's squalid, lawless life. During Patrick's stay, Redmond and his woman got a sailor drunk and robbed him; they then absconded, leaving Patrick terrified of being charged with the crime; 'my poverty prevents me from any place of refuge in safety, so must trust to providence as I am conscious of my innocence, only being at their house to prevent lying in the street or field'.²¹

After this incident, Redmond returned to the Navy. But then, early in 1802, he reappeared in Cork – the city of his birth, which he hadn't seen for nearly thirty years – seeking charity from his sister and her husband. In middle age, Redmond Barry was lean and muscular, looking every inch the 'Vilion': a lantern-jawed face with deep, close-set eyes and an immensely long, blade-sharp nose; his thin, fair hair fell back from a knobbly, domed forehead, and a lank moustache drooped over

his mouth, whose lower lip had a tendency to slump into a discontented glower.²²

He'd always regarded himself as hard done by – his brother James had got all the success in life, while Mary Anne had received an unfair share of their parents' legacy. (Patrick was the same – he claimed that Mary Anne had 'entirely deprived me of every means of life'²³ in inheriting her portion.) And so, when Redmond, hardened and embittered, arrived in Cork in 1802, he regarded it as the bounden duty of his pampered sister and her seemingly well-off husband to give him alms and accommodation. Redmond felt sorry for himself; he had been 'hampered About in the Service of the Country Untill I am Scarcely Able to render Any degree of Labour to procure a living for Myself'.²⁴ Jeremiah and Mary Anne, whose financial situation was growing more precarious by the month, gave Redmond what he asked for – but grudgingly.

And then something had happened that had caused Mary Anne and Jeremiah to take against Redmond with a vehement loathing. According to Redmond they used 'every means in their power to prevent me from getting bread', until at last, in desperation, he rejoined the Navy, 'never to come to pay Ireland a visit Again, let the Consequence be as it will'.²⁵ Jeremiah and Mary Anne had, in effect, run Redmond out of town on a rail. When he called on James in London that summer, he was rebuffed, and suspected that James had heard damning reports from their 'Infernal Sister' about what had happened in Cork. Redmond asked James to 'look back and Consider if you weare in My Situation and I in yours how you would Approve of my behaviour'.²⁶

It is more than possible that the 'behaviour' that had caused his expulsion was the rape of his niece, Margaret. The Bulkleys had no choice but to bear the burden and the social shame with which they'd been left.

Trouble is a faithful companion, and rarely content with visiting only once. Between them, Jeremiah Bulkley and his beloved son brought about the family's downfall with a reckless precision that could hardly have been exceeded.

Two years into his legal apprenticeship, John's prospects must have seemed fair. He had met a Miss Ward, 'a young Lady of genteel connexions', who fell in love with him.²⁷ She had a small fortune of her own amounting to some £1200, which would more than enable John to complete his training, and her family connections would become priceless

when he set out on his own account as an attorney. But there was an obstacle. Although Miss Ward's parents were dead, she was protected by 'an infamous set of Brothers'²⁸ who wouldn't agree to a marriage settlement unless John could match her fortune. As neither he nor his father had anything approaching £1200, the engagement seemed doomed. John wrote that he would be 'very unhappy ... if all the family would be distressed on my acct',²⁹ but the emotional pressure he applied was great – if he didn't obtain Miss Ward's advantages, his hopes of being an attorney would be shattered.

Jeremiah didn't have the cash, but he did own some valuable properties. A marriage settlement was drawn up, under which Jeremiah signed over to John a farm (presumably tenanted), a dwelling house and offices in which he had previously invested £1200. He topped off this gift with £300 in cash.³⁰ The matter was settled, and the couple were married. Jeremiah had, in effect, wagered the family's financial security on John's future career.

Word soon spread among the traders and money-men of Cork that Jeremiah Bulkley had disposed of the properties that secured his debts, which stood at £700. His creditors 'immediately became importunate', and he had to cease paying his instalments;³¹ thereafter, demands for repayment in full began to arrive at the shop. This clatter of small stones turned into a landslide, and soon creditors were hammering at Jeremiah's door. When that failed to elicit payment, they pursued legal recourse. Jeremiah still had goods and property worth more than his debts, and he offered to turn them over to his creditors, but they refused – they wanted cash. Given the impossibility of selling anything for a fair price in the circumstances (for what sensible person would pay the going rate to a man desperate to sell?), the Bulkleys were doomed. Jeremiah considered sailing for the West Indies (where great fortunes could be made) and sending back his earnings. Meanwhile, he prolonged negotiations with his creditors, hoping to gain time to raise the money.

Trouble took up residence in Mrs Bulkley's home; always a nervous, highly strung woman, she grew ill with worry. In theory, the females of the family should be safe; John's marriage carried the condition that the properties he acquired must be used for the assistance of Mrs Bulkley, Margaret and Juliana 'if Ocasion required his doing so'.³² By early 1804, occasion required it urgently, and Mrs Bulkley wrote to her son to tell him so. In April she received a letter from him that bewildered and wounded her; she didn't preserve it, nor describe what John had done, but whatever

it was, she attributed it to 'his youth and want of experience', as well as to bad advice. Given Mrs Bulkley's distress and the events that followed, it seems that John had sold the properties and invested (or spent) the money. He had left his mother, Margaret and Juliana without a lifeline; if Jeremiah fell, they would be destitute.

Mary Anne had only one person left to whom she might turn for help – her eldest brother, James Barry. As a famous painter, a professor at the Royal Academy, celebrated in London society, he must undoubtedly be wealthy. And he must, with equal certainty, be willing to help his unfortunate sister. Mary Anne hadn't seen James since he left Ireland, when she was a young girl and he was a keen, ambitious man in his early twenties. He'd always had a mercurial spirit, but was as intelligent and talented as his brothers were wayward and reckless. And in his youth, James had kept his family in his thoughts, hoping to make up for the lack of a legacy from their father:

I have that reliance on God, my profession, and my friends, that in such a place as London is, where art is so caressed, I shall bring such a portion of it with me there, as will not only put me out of the want of any thing else, but will further enable me on my own part to make some little additions to any thing my father may have to leave them. I am then, thank God ... provided for, and the greatest part of my anxiety is only how I may provide still better for the poor people at home.³³

Thirty-five years had passed since then, but Mary Anne hoped the generous sentiment still held. She couldn't write the letter herself; the distress she'd been through had caused a constant tremor in her hands, so Margaret wrote for her, and no doubt helped with the composition. She was growing up – at fifteen, adulthood and responsibility were encroaching on what was left of her adolescence. Yet the prospect of communicating with her famous uncle – whom she had neither met nor seen, but of whom she had heard much – must have been exciting.

Looking across the table at her daughter, quill in hand, the implements of writing laid out – fresh white paper, penknife for repairing the nib, pot of ink, the bar of sealing wax beside the candle – Mary Anne might have recalled her last memories of James, when he was a young man and she a child. His features were discernible in Margaret's maturing face; she was most certainly a Barry rather than a Bulkley.³⁴ She had the same fine,

fair, reddish hair as the young James, the same large blue-green eyes and arched eyebrows; she was developing the long, curved nose of the Barrys (the one feature James did not share) and the protruding chin; and last of all Margaret had the Barry mouth, with a plump underlip that could give an impression of sullenness, and the Cupid's bow that had prettified the face of James in his youth.

'My Dear brother,' Mary Anne commenced; Margaret's goose quill twitched as she carefully inscribed her mother's words in her best handwriting. 'I have been always very unwilling to trouble you, knowing the multiplicity of your avocations, or you shou'd have oftener heard from me, while things were going on prosperously with me.'³⁵ She related her tale of woe in detail: John's marriage, the ruinous settlement, the loss of Jeremiah's job at the Weigh House, and the onslaught of the creditors. She delicately refrained from asking outright for help, or even hinting at it; it was plain enough from the story she told that she was in need. She concluded her dictation: 'With the greatest deference I remain Most truly & sincerely your most Affectionate &ca &ca Sister', and trusted to her brother to do his duty.

Looking over what she'd written in her neat but unsophisticated hand, Margaret quickly added a postscript of her own: 'Sir, My Mother is not able to write legible on account of a tremour in her hand, desired me to write for her, My inexperience and so much unaccustomed to letter writing I hope will be accepted by you as an Apology [for] the length, the many faults & Errors in this letter by Sir, by yours Most Affectionate &ca &ca &ca Marg^f Margaret Anne Bulkley.'³⁶ Evidently Margaret's education had been neither as full nor as thorough as her wit deserved.

They were unable to find out his address, and simply directed it to 'James Barry Esq., R.A. & Professor of Painting to the Royal Academy'.³⁷ The letter was sealed and sent. April passed into May, June approached and still no reply came; the situation grew more tense by the week. The creditors were threatening to seize the premises on Merchant's Quay, and Jeremiah was intending to protect it by putting it in John's name – a sure way to lose it entirely. Mary Anne was indignant. The legal right to occupy the house had been hers – acquired from her mother – and had become Jeremiah's when she married him, but full title to the property still belonged to James Barry. Only he, by asserting his legal rights, could now save Mary Anne, Margaret and Juliana from eviction. There was nothing for it but to go and seek him out in London.