

**Maria, Lady Callcott (19 July 1785–21 November 1842)**

Caroline Palmer

Eldest child of Scottish naval officer George Dundas and his wife Ann, Callcott (*Fig. 1*) is best known as a travel writer, and for her highly successful *Little Arthur's History of England* (1835). Through her father's connections in Richmond and Edinburgh, she met painters and collectors, including Thomas Lawrence and Samuel Rogers, as well as the publisher John Murray. In 1809 she married naval lieutenant Thomas Graham, whom she had met on board her father's ship. Their visits to Malta and Italy led to a close friendship with Charles Lock Eastlake and the publication of her *Memoirs of the Life of Nicholas Poussin* in 1820.



*Fig. 1:* David Wilkie, *Maria, Lady Callcott*, late 1830s, oil on panel, 38.1 × 31.5 cm, WA1981.79. © The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford.

Captain Graham died in 1822, and five years later Callcott married the painter Augustus Wall Callcott. Her journal recording their 1827–28 honeymoon travels through Germany, the Austrian Empire, Italy, and France is undoubtedly her most important contribution from an art historical perspective and demonstrates how revolutionary her taste was for the early Italian and Northern Renaissance masters. Callcott also discussed the revival of fresco painting by the Nazarenes. In 1835 the Callcotts published a *Description of the Annunziata dell’Arena; or, Giotto’s Chapel in Padua*, illustrated by Augustus, which was one of the first works to mark a revival of interest in the Primitives.

Prevented by ill health (tuberculosis) from completing her ambitious history of European art, she succeeded in publishing two volumes of *Essays Towards the History of Painting* (1836–38), the most innovative of which discusses artists’ materials and methods. Confined to her Kensington home from 1831, Callcott presided over a lively salon of artists, writers, and musicians, and corresponded with art-world figures across Europe. She was remembered in Augustus Callcott’s *Art Journal* obituary (January 1845) as ‘a lady distinguished not only for her extensive erudition and knowledge of various countries, but for the power of communicating that knowledge to others’.