

McGill–ASECS Fellowship Report (September–October 2011)

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My one-month Fellowship project at the Burney Centre at McGill University had a double purpose. First, I intended to use the research resources available at the Burney Centre in order to study a series of previously untapped documents held in French archives relating to the Burney family which I had identified during the course of my doctoral research. More generally, I planned to work on my larger current book project on British links with France during the late eighteenth century. Both of these purposes were successful, and I was also able to identify a number of additional research avenues during the course of the Fellowship. This report will briefly summarize some of the main areas of interest in the work I was able to undertake.

Successive generations of the Burney family engaged upon a remarkable — and particularly well-documented — series of cross-Channel activities during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Dr Charles Burney travelled extensively on the Continent while undertaking the research into music which sealed his reputation; he also sent a number of his children abroad for the purposes of education. Frances Burney married a Frenchman, Alexandre d'Arblay, and subsequently lived in France for more than a decade; exile became an important theme in her later literary work. Other members of the extended family also had notable cross-Channel careers, and offer considerable scope for further research.

Because of this extensive web of foreign travel and residence, significant documentary traces can be found in Continental archives relating to various members of the Burney family. During the course of research in France for my PhD, 'British Communities in Late Eighteenth-Century Paris' (University of Cambridge, 2011), I located an important unpublished letter by Frances Burney d'Arblay, together with some other records of Burney's career in France, which have not yet received scholarly attention. I was also able to identify a series of papers relating to Samuel Meeke, a long-term expatriate on the Continent during the late eighteenth century who was related by marriage to the Burney family.

The initial focus of my attention at the Burney Centre, accordingly, was to prepare a transcription of the Frances Burney letter, and an introduction to it, with a view to publication. In doing this, I was able to use the Centre's resources in order to contextualize the letter within Burney's literary career and personal history. I also benefited greatly from being able to draw on the expertise of several Burney scholars working at the Centre, especially Professor Peter Sabor, Sarah Skoronski, and Hilary Havens.

Similarly, my research into the career of Samuel Meeke was also considerably advanced by access to the Burney Centre's collections. My initial findings on Meeke's career, highlighting his involvement with the newspaper trade in Paris during the French Revolution, are due to be published in a forthcoming academic journal article (Simon Macdonald, 'English-Language Newspapers in Revolutionary France', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, forthcoming 2012). I plan to continue working on this area

of research, partly on the basis of the rich new material I was able to draw on at the Burney Centre.

McGill's wider collections of rare books and manuscripts were also an invaluable research tool. In particular, I was fortunate to have the chance to consult recent McGill manuscript acquisitions relating to Frances Burney's residence in France and her social milieu there. Additionally, McGill's especially strong collections of David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau material, which includes a number of previously unpublished items, was of considerable utility to my wider research work.

As an historian by training, I particularly welcomed the opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange with literary specialists working in and around the Burney Centre. Furthermore, through being based at McGill for a month, I was also able to meet a series of scholars, both within the university and in other institutions in Quebec, who are working on aspects of eighteenth-century studies across a range of academic disciplines. These included professors such as Brian Cowan, Laurent Turcot, and Susan Dalton, and fellow postdoctoral researchers such as Dr Laurence Williams.

Finally, I should like to record my especial gratitude to Professor Peter Sabor, Director of the Burney Centre, for his very generous assistance with my research, and also to Dr Richard Virr, head and curator of manuscripts at the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the McGill University Library.

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