

2019 McGill-ASECS Fellow: Final Report

Lorna J. Clark

I was grateful to have been awarded the 2018 McGill-ASECS Fellowship, offered by the Burney Centre in conjunction with the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the McGill University Library. I was especially pleased to win the award in the first year that the two Burney Societies, UK and North America, together with ASECS, have helped to fund it. As a member of all three organisations, I do appreciate their support.

My project is an edition, one volume in the six-volume series of *The Letters of Dr. Charles Burney*, under the general editorship of Professor Peter Sabor, Director of the Centre. I am responsible for the second volume, which picks up where the first volume (published in 1991 by the late Alvaro Ribeiro) left off, in late 1784. My volume covers the next decade, up to 1793, a decade in which Burney was at the peak of his profession. In these years, he published the last two volumes of his *A General History of Music* (1776-89), and his *Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon . . . in Commemoration of Handel* (1785).

Family matters are of interest, for volume 2 contains the period of Frances Burney's association with the court of George III, from the initial invitation to her reluctant acceptance of it, increasing discontent in her situation, and appeal to her father to allow her to resign. It also contains the whirlwind courtship of Alexandre d'Arblay, who wrote a dignified request to his prospective father-in-law for permission to marry his daughter Frances, to which Charles Burney sent a discouraging response. Burney was less uncomfortable about the marriage in 1786, of another daughter, Charlotte, whom he visits in Norfolk; he also spends time with Susanna at Mickleham, and "takes the waters" in Bath.

Many letters do not concern family events. In long letters written to his godchild, Elizabeth Ann Crewe (the glamorous Whig socialite), Burney deplures political radicalism in France and England. He mingles with his cronies at The Club, encourages Boswell to write Johnson's life, and contributes some anecdotes of his own. He corresponds with Edmund Burke and agriculturist Arthur Young whose tour of Europe prompts memories of his own travels. He remarks on the sad decline of Sir Joshua Reynolds, terminating in Reynolds's death.

Charles Burney's professional life is represented by his exchanges of information with other musicians, his involvement with the Handel concerts, and his inspection of a harpsichord being custom-built for Thomas Jefferson. Burney's social life is seen in his exchange of letters with bluestockings and writers, such as Charlotte Smith.

Charles Burney's letters (1784-93) are full of interesting material which has been illuminated by a month spent at the Burney Centre and McGill University Library, with their abundance of resources.

Primary Material

The first task in any edition is to establish the text. Although I did have a working transcript, I needed to ensure that it was complete and accurate, and that nothing had been overlooked. The Burney Centre has copies of the complete run of the correspondence of Charles Burney (letters to and from) from 1751 until the year of his death. I carefully compared their files with my own, to make sure that I was not missing anything. I managed to track down a few letters which were eluding me, and revised the dates of others. Much can be learned from the other side of the correspondence, and I was able to peruse letters to Burney written in earlier years, which illuminated the subjects to which later letters refer.

I also explored ancillary material, such as letters between third parties, which will be helpful for the annotation. For instance, in one letter, Burney asks for a favour for a member of his family. I knew that Burney's request had produced no results, and that no response from his friend is known to have survived. I did not know, however, that the friend had indeed tried to exert his influence on Burney's behalf, which I discovered in a letter from a third party, a copy of which is held at the centre. I also explored other manuscripts of Burney's which remain unpublished: for instance, memoranda for music articles, or notes on ancient Greece and Rome. While perhaps not directly relevant, these efforts show the range of his talents and ambition.

It has long been known that Burney fancied himself a poet and (somewhat dubious) examples of his versifying can be found in various collections. The Burney Centre conveniently gathers copies of these in one place. Many were written to mark special events, and these may be usefully cited in the notes to my years or possibly placed in an appendix.

The letters of other Burney family members were also helpful, particularly those of Susanna, whose lengthy accounts often shed light on family occurrences mentioned in the letters. The Centre's microfilm collection is invaluable in that it offers easy access to manuscript holdings in archives around the world (the challenge is mastering the rather daunting microfilm reader.)

Secondary Material

Over the years, the Burney Centre has gathered in one place a large number of secondary sources essential for an eighteenth-century scholar, many from the McLennan Library. While the collection of books gathered on the shelves was in flux, awaiting relocation to the library stacks, I found it enlightening simply to browse the shelves, appreciating the "open shelf access" to books which are fairly rare, such as the (privately printed) *Annals of The Club*, which contains lists of members and records of meetings that Burney attended. (I have previously had to request this book from the Bodleian stacks, to consult for limited periods.) Other books that were useful to have on hand were the letters of Burney's friends, such as Thomas Twining, or useful studies such as Ian Woodfield's *Salomon and the Burneys* (2012). There were also articles on specific subjects, such as Burney's relations with the Royal Hospital, Chelsea; his involvement with the new opera house; or his views on the foundling hospital, which were helpful to have on hand.

It was wonderful to have first editions of Burney's publications on shelves just by my elbow: for instance, his account of the *Commemoration of Handel*, a complete set of Rees's *Cyclopaedia*, and several editions of his tours (I usually consult the first two only in electronic form). I looked up early reviews of his works in the *Monthly Review*, and examined a copy of the subscription list to his *A General History of Music*. It was also helpful to have access to the McGill Library system, which subscribes to electronic resources, such as the Burney Collection of Early English Newspapers, which are not available at my home institution.

Rare Book and Special Collections

As the four weeks flew by, I was so completely absorbed by the wealth of material found at the Burney Centre that I did not have time to explore recent acquisitions in the Rare Book and Special Collections department. I know that they have enhanced their Burney holdings and purchased letters of other family members that I have not yet seen. However, this could be viewed as a plus, for it gives me a reason to return.

Soft Resources

Lastly, there are the "soft resources," people. An edition is a collaborative venture accomplished through team work. In the temporary absence of the director, Peter Sabor (whose generous and hospitable spirit could nevertheless, be felt, hovering over the centre), I was graciously hosted by Catherine Nygren, and learned much through interactions with well-informed research assistants, Nathan Richards-Velinou, Mathieu Bouchard (Willow White was overseas). I enjoyed meeting Christopher Lyons and members of the library staff who help to administer the ASECS award. North American Burney Society President Elaine Bander also dropped by. Above all, the Associate Director of the Centre and fellow editor, Stewart Cooke, shared his considerable expertise; I enjoyed comparing notes with Stewart on everything from the larger overarching questions to the minutiae of formatting. All of these fruitful discussions will leave their mark on the edition.

Conclusion

As the month drew to a close, I felt that I had found and done all that I could, and that I was ready to return home. At the end of my time at McGill, I left with a new understanding of a wealth of material, a sense of security that the volume was indeed on solid ground, and a fresh burst of energy to help me see it through to completion.

I would like to reiterate my thanks to all those who helped to create and support this opportunity; in the resulting publication, I hope that I shall prove worthy of their trust, and I shall take great pleasure in acknowledging their contribution.