

# Burney Letter

Vol. 2 No. 2

The Burney Society

Fall 1996

## 'Camilla' tea and 'Witlings' banquet are set

Paula L. Stepankowsky

A celebration of the 200th anniversary of *Camilla*, as well as a reading from one of Frances Burney's comic plays, will highlight the second annual general meeting of the Burney Society, scheduled for Oct. 10 and Oct. 11 in Richmond, Va.

Prof. Juliet McMaster of the University of Edmonton in Alberta will deliver the address on *Camilla*, which was published in 1796 and is the third of Frances Burney's novels.

Also displayed will be a first edition of *Camilla*, which contains a subscription list that is a who's who of late 18th-century English society. A Miss J. Austen of Steventon is among the subscribers.

Prof. McMaster's address will be given at a tea to be held between 2

p.m. and 5 p.m. at the Mr. Patrick Henry Inn in Richmond's Historic District on the afternoon of Thursday, Oct. 10. Readings from the comedy *The Witlings*, published last year for the first time, will take place at a dinner meeting scheduled from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. on the evening of Friday, Oct. 11, at the Omni Richmond Hotel.

Price for the tea meeting and talk by Prof. McMaster is \$25 for members and \$28 for non-members. The price includes tax and gratuity. There are two entree options for the Friday dinner at the Omni. Members can choose between London Broil or Chicken Wellington. The price for the dinner, which also includes wine, caesar salad, two vegetables, rolls, tea or coffee and chocolate mousse pie, is \$39 for members and \$42 for non-members. The dinner price

also includes tax and gratuity.

Society members may register for one or both of these events by filling out the registration form contained in this issue and mailing it, along with a check made out to The Burney Society, to Lucy Magruder, Secretary/Treasurer, The Burney Society, P.O. Box 5424, Fullerton, CA 92635.

In her talk, Prof. McMaster will focus on "Body Language in *Camilla*." She will first discuss the Burney/Austen relation and their interchange during Burney's long career. The main subject of the talk is gesture and body language as a means of expression, and the ways in which the girl's body language, like spoken language, is often controlled and censored. As *Camilla* is often silenced, so too she

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## British members have 'A Busy Day' in June

By Jean Bowden

The second annual general meeting of the British branch of the Burney Society was held on June 9 at Juniper Hall, with a talk on *A Busy Day* by Alan Coveney as the highlight.

This year, we were very pleased to be able to hold our meeting in the Templeton room at Juniper Hall, where Fanny Burney first met General Alexandre d'Arblay, her future husband. Unlike last year, the day was fine and sunny, which added to the pleasure.

After welcoming everybody, Jean

Bowden, the secretary/treasurer, passed on greetings from our President, Paula Stepankowsky, with her thanks for support and encouragement over the past year. Maggie Lane, our vice president, also sent greetings, as did Burney family members Charles Burney and Elizabeth Parker, and we were pleased to welcome their cousins, John and Cynthia Comyn. Richard Thrale sent us greetings "from the Johnson set."

We then enjoyed a fascinating talk, "Fanny Burney and the Theatre — *A Busy Day*," by Mr. Coveney, the artistic director of the

Show of Strength Theatre Company of Bristol, who has recently produced *A Busy Day* in Bristol and London. His talk is printed elsewhere in this newsletter. Karin Fernald, last year's speaker, gave the vote of thanks.

We adjourned for tea — this year a sumptuous array of sandwiches and cream cakes — and had time to talk to friends.

The business meeting followed, beginning with apologies for absence, a sadly long list, including

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Prof. Judy Simons, who was to have been our speaker. She unfortunately was in hospital. She hopes to be able to give the talk for 1997. Twenty-nine members attended.

We have 57 paid members, and, combined with members in North America, we have more than 100 members in the society.

Our financial situation was then given. After the meeting is paid for, we will have about £250 in our bank account. Jean Bowden said she had given the Burney Society's thanks to the Jane Austen Memorial Trust for allowing us the use of its photocopying facilities at peppercorn rates. The annual subscription for British members will stay at £6 per person, and £10 for two people at the same address.

Items of news from members were then given. John Macdonald had managed to get a paragraph about the Burney Society published in *The Bath Chronicle* - "a rather insignificant and inaccurate piece . . . however perhaps some people will know that we exist now." Charles Burney wrote, "I suppose that progress vis a vis Westminster Abbey is in the hands of the North American members - space is, of course, the problem from the practical viewpoint."

Michael Wauchope sent the following interesting information from a book called *The Parish Church of Walcot, Bath*, by the Rev. James Silvester (W. & F. Dawson, Printers, 1888). It refers "to the grave of Madame d'Arblay which is unmarked, and also includes the simply dreadful inscription she arranged for her husband in the Church. On an oval slab near the northwest door is a poetical epitaph as coming from the pen of Southey. It is to the memory of Ralph Broome (Dolph) who died April 27, 1817, at the early age of fifteen. He was Fanny Burney's nephew (son of Charlotte Ann Burney by her second husband, Ralph Broome). He apparently died of TB (tuberculosis) whilst visiting his aunt in Bath."

Tim Hatton then told the meeting

about his new booklet (16 pages) *Fanny and Alexandre: Some Notes on the Lives and Times of Frances Burney and General Alexandre d'Arblay*. He said that it was not meant to be a text book but to serve as an introduction to a very

“*John Macdonald managed to get a paragraph about the Burney Society published in 'The Bath Chronicle' — 'a rather insignificant and inaccurate piece . . . however perhaps some people will know that we exist now.'*”

interesting person — “a desperate attempt to tell young people about Fanny Burney!” Jean Bowden added that she has copies of the booklet on sale at Jane Austen's House, Chawton, and that copies could be obtained from her at her home address (Primrose Cottage, Gracious Street, Selborne, Alton, Hants GU34 3JB) for £3.50, including postage and packing.

There followed a discussion on the *Burney Letter*. Members felt that the spring 1996 issue, while interesting, contained little from British members, several of whom had sent in contributions. Jean Bowden said that the editor of the *Burney Letter*, Catalina Hannan, had promised her that Alan Coveney's talk that day would be printed in the fall 1996 number, and that in future, perhaps the spring issue would give mainly North American news, and the fall issue mainly British news and notes. Jean added that though a *Burney Journal* would be highly desirable, it would be very expensive to produce. Alan Coveney then kindly offered his desk-top publishing facility to produce a small publication, rather

like that of Tim Hatton's booklet, and it was agreed that this should be looked into. Jean Bowden said that it may not be possible to get together enough articles for a regular *Journal*, but maybe an occasional one could be published in this way, and that she would bring the subject up at the Burney Society's meeting in Richmond, Va.

The meeting ended with thanks to John Bobbington, Warden of the Juniper Hall Field Studies Centre, for making the Centre available.

The next meeting of the British branch of the Burney Society will be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, June 8, 1997, at Juniper Hall. We hope Prof. Judy Simons will be able to give the talk that illness prevented her from giving this year: “Miss Somebody: The Diary of Fanny Burney.”

Refreshments will be served, followed by a short business meeting. Tickets, £5 including tea, are obtainable from Jean Bowden, Primrose Cottage, Gracious Street, Selborne, Alton, Hants GU34 3JB. Make cheques payable to the Burney Society.

*Jean Bowden is the secretary/treasurer for the British branch of the Burney Society.*

### *Burney Letter*

The semiannual newsletter of the Burney Society, which includes members in Canada, Great Britain and the United States.

President: Paula L. Stepankowsky  
Editor:.....Catalina Hannan

Address correspondence regarding newsletter articles to Catalina Hannan, 216 Purchase Street, Rye, N.Y. 10580, USA

Membership in The Burney Society is available for \$10 (U.S.) annually in the United States and Canada, and £6 annually in Great Britain. To request membership information, or to notify the society of a change of address, write in the United States and Canada: Lucy Magruder, P.O. Box 5424, Fullerton, Calif., 92635. In Great Britain, write Jean Bowden, Primrose Cottage, Gracious Street, Selborne, Alton, Hampshire, England, GU34 3JB.

# First steps taken toward plaque in Abbey

**T**he Burney Society has taken the first step in its campaign to erect a plaque to Frances Burney d'Arblay in Westminster Abbey.

Burney Society President Paula Stepankowsky wrote a letter inquiring about how to apply for the honor on July 22. In early August, The Very Rev. Michael Mayne, Dean of Westminster Abbey replied.

Rev. Mayne said that while he is retiring in November, he believes his successor will follow the nomination system that has been adopted by all Deans in past years.

This consists of inviting those asking for a memorial to provide the names of up to six "referees who can speak with professional objectivity of the writer in question."

He listed three criteria to be considered for any writer who is nominated for an Abbey memorial: "Is his/her work likely to be

remembered in a hundred years' time? Did his/her writings make a major contribution to the literature of the world? Are there any reasons why the placing of a memorial in a Christian church would offend the integrity of the person in question? In this case one would need to focus on the second question."

Rev. Mayne then wrote, "If you wish to send me a list of names of scholars of renown who could advise my successor on Frances Burney's eligibility for a memorial, please do so."

Burney Society officers are now working on this next step.

In the July 22 letter to Rear Admiral K. Snow, the official

**Frances Burney literally created the comedy of manners in novel form, which Jane Austen would polish to perfection.'**

designated to receive enquiries about the Abbey, Burney Society President Paula Stepankowsky wrote: "With her novels *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, Frances Burney literally created the comedy of manners in novel form, which Jane Austen would polish to perfection. She made novel writing respectable for women and influenced an entire generation of women writers, whose contributions are finally being recognized in the late 20th century. Her diaries chronicled Georgian England, Napoleonic France and the dawn of the Victorian age. Her plays, published for the first time in 1995 after two centuries of neglect, reveal a comic eye that rivals Sheridan's. . .

"We believe a plaque to Frances Burney in the Abbey would not only honor her invaluable contribution to literature and history, but also ... draw attention to other women writers of the period preceding Jane Austen."

## Jane Austen's copy of 'Camilla' traced to Oxford

Jane Austen's enthusiasm for Frances Burney and *Camilla* can be measured by the fact that she became one of the subscribers to the novel, quite an expensive proposition for someone of Jane's slender income.

She is listed, as "Miss J. Austen, Steventon," with other prominent members of the British reading public in the 38-page subscription list that appears at the front of the first volume of the first edition of the novel. This is possibly the only time Jane Austen's name appeared in print in her lifetime.

Those who wonder whatever happened to Jane Austen's copy of *Camilla* can turn to page 357 of Deirdre Le Faye's edition of *Jane Austen's Letters*.

In note No. 13, Le Faye writes that Jane Austen's copy of *Camilla* was presented to the Bodleian Library at Oxford in 1930 by Capt. Ernest Austen,

RN, a grandson of Sir Francis Austen.

In each volume, is the inscription "Cass. Eliz. Austen" in Cassandra's hand, "presumably to mark the change of ownership after JA's death," writes Le Faye.

Each volume also contains the inscription "Given to Lady Austen May 1837" in Cassandra's hand.

Lady Austen's maiden name was Martha Lloyd, the great friend of Jane and Cassandra, who married their brother Francis. He was knighted in 1837 and Le Faye speculates the novel may have been a gift to mark the occasion.

As a subscriber, Jane Austen received the five volumes uncut and in original publisher's boards. There is some speculation that the novel may have been a gift from her father, or that perhaps he helped her pay for it.

## U.S. non-profit status granted

The Burney Society, after achieving non-profit status in the state of Washington, has been granted U.S. federal non-profit status.

U.S. Secretary-Treasurer Lucy Magruder undertook the heroic task of preparing the application documents, which totaled more than 30 pages. She also sent a seven-page letter in response to a six-page letter from the Internal Revenue Service asking for more information about the society and its activities. Thank you Lucy!

Now we know why most organizations hire an attorney to handle non-profit filings like this.

Now that we've achieved federal non-profit status, we hope to design a permanent Burney Society brochure to distribute at the upcoming meeting in Richmond, as well as at the Jane Austen Society of North America conference.

Non-profit status will allow the Burney Society to accept tax-deductible contributions for such projects as raising a plaque to Frances Burney in Westminster Abbey, restoring the d'Arblay grave at Walcot Church in Bath and establishing a literary journal.

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is often physically immobilized, and deprived even of the natural bodily reactions to the agonising circumstances she finds herself in, Prof. McMaster writes.

Prof. McMaster, who teaches the British novel and children's literature, is well known as a scholar and critic of Jane Austen's novels. She has written *Jane Austen on Love* as well as books on Thackeray, Trollope and Dickens. Her most recent book is *Jane Austen The Novelist*, published this year by St. Martin's Press. She is co-editor, with Prof. Bruce Stovel, of *Jane Austen's Business*, a book based on papers given at the 1993 JASNA conference, which she and Prof. Stovel coordinated. She is also co-editor with Edward Copeland of the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion*

## Volunteers needed for 'Witlings' reading

We are looking for volunteers to participate in our readings from the Burney play *The Witlings* at the Burney Society dinner meeting at Richmond, Va., on Friday, Oct. 11, at the Omni Richmond Hotel.

We propose to read in appropriate costume, if possible, or at least in some appropriate period trappings. Rehearsal time will necessarily be limited, since we come from different places; but it would be a help if you were willing to be present for rehearsal on the evening of Thursday, Oct. 10, after our Burney Society tea earlier in the day.

If you are interested, please contact Juliet McMaster, address and phone numbers below, with a list of roles (in order of preference) that you would most like to play.

*The Witlings* is available in Vol. 1 of Peter Sabor's edition of *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney*. (You may need to borrow a copy from your library; but you will enjoy reading this witty comedy.)

Juliet can be reached at: Department of English, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada T6E 2E5. Home phone: 403-436-5284; Fax: (403) 492-8142.

to *Jane Austen*.

She is also the editor/illustrator of Jane Austen's *The Beautifull Cassandra*, and the general editor of the Juvenile Press. Her talk on Frances Burney is part of her current book in progress, *The Body Legible in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*. She has degrees from Oxford and the University of Alberta.

The Mr. Patrick Henry Inn is located in Richmond's Church Hill neighborhood, one block west of historic St. John's Church (Circa 1741), site of Patrick Henry's famous "Liberty or Death" speech. The address is 2300-02 East Broad St. The toll-free phone number for people who need directions or information is 1-800-932-2654.

The inn's owners, James and Lynn News, began renovating the 1855 building in 1986. The pre-Civil War buildings that make up the inn include a patio in a formal garden setting, an original carriage house, and a bridle pony path.

Other historic locations within a

few blocks of the inn include the National Civil War Battlefield Headquarters, the Edgar Allen Poe Museum, the State Capital, and the Museum of The Confederacy.

The Burney Society meeting coincides with the annual general meeting of the Jane Austen Society of North America, which is being held in at the Omni Richmond Oct. 11-13.

Both the Burney Society tea and the Friday dinner have been scheduled as much as possible during times when there are no official JASNA activities so Burney and JASNA members can attend both meetings.

The tea will be held before the JASNA conference officially opens and the dinner will be held between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m., after most daytime JASNA activities are concluded and before a talk for JASNA by George Hobert Tucker.

For further information about the society or the meeting, contact Paula L. Stepankowsky, 360-636-3763.

## Burney Society Richmond Conference Registration

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

State/Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Tea at Mr. Patrick Henry Inn Thursday, Oct. 10

☐ \$25 member ☐ \$28 non-member

Dinner at OMNI Richmond Hotel Friday, Oct. 11

☐ \$39 member ☐ \$42 non-member

Dinner choice: ☐ London Broil ☐ Chick. Wellington

Total amount enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

*Society members may register for one or both of these events by filling out the registration form above and mailing it, along with a check made out to The Burney Society in U.S. dollars, to Lucy Magruder, Secretary/Treasurer, The Burney Society, P.O. Box 5424, Fullerton, CA 92635*



# Burney and the Theatre — 'A Busy Day'

**Ed note:** Adapted from a talk given by Alan Coveney, artistic director of the Show of Strength Theatre Company to The Burney Society (British Branch) on June 9, 1996, at Juniper Hall.

Most of you here today will probably know more about Fanny Burney than I ever will, so I don't have a paper to read to you this afternoon or any thesis to propose. My connection with Fanny Burney is more practical than academic — and the reason I'm here is that more than two years ago, and I have to say I'm very proud of this — I directed the first-ever professional production of Fanny Burney's comedy *A Busy Day*.

What I intend to do is talk a little bit about the play for those of you who may not know it, and I'll tell you something of its background. But what I want to concentrate on this afternoon are some of the more practical problems we had to face when actually translating the script into a stage performance.

I first came across a copy of *A Busy Day* in a remainder bookshop in Bristol. It was a paperback edition of the text edited by Tara Ghoshal Wallace and published by Rutgers University Press. My first thought was "I never knew Fanny Burney wrote plays!" I vaguely remembered her as a footnote to Jane Austen, and that Austen had admired her work. I knew she'd written novels sometime around the end of the 18th century, although I had never read one. I had read quotes from her diaries in history books — but that was about it.

I read the play one sunny day and was completely won over. The next day I read it again. And that's when I started to get excited. Amazed that I had never heard of such a wonderful play before, but excited by the thought that here was something remarkable for the theatre company, I decided to do some research in the theatre archive at Bristol University. To my surprise not only was there no record of *A Busy Day* or of any performance of the play, but even more surprising there was no reference to Fanny Burney as a

playwright at all!

Of course, since working on the play, I've filled in some of the vast gaps in my knowledge. I now know about her cantankerous father's disapproval of her writing for the stage. I've read about her one-and-only production in her own lifetime of the ill-fated *Edwy and Elgiva*. I've read some of her novels, sections of her diaries and letters, and even extracts from the other plays — although until this year when Peter Sabor's edition of her complete theatre works was published, these were very difficult to get hold of.

Before I go any further, I'll just outline the story for those of you who haven't read or seen the play. Its full title is *A Busy Day or, An Arrival from India*, and the mainspring of the action is the return from India of a rich young heiress, Eliza, and her fiancé, Cleveland. The setting is London at the end of the 18th century. The couple want to announce their engagement to their respective families. But that's not as easy as it sounds. Her family are merchant class, his are landed gentry. Although now well-to-do, Eliza's family have all the style and selfless generosity of a flock of vultures, while Cleveland's snobbish upper class relations have called him home to secure a financial arrangement which involves his

marrying quite another girl. The result of these conflicting interests and the young couple's attempts to declare their engagement is a witty tale of frustrated love, mistaken identity, class snobbery, confusion, and downright vulgar bad manners. Fanny Burney creates a host of marvelous comic characters observed with the sharp eye of a superbly skilled satirist.

As a director and producer, I've waded through a lot of 'forgotten' scripts over the past seven years, and I can tell you there are usually very good reasons why they've been 'forgotten'! So what's so special about *A Busy Day*? Well, its theme is as relevant today as ever and can best be summed up by a line from one of the

## Play copy available

Hilary Newman has very kindly given her copy of *A Busy Day* by Fanny Burney (ed. by Tara Ghoshal Wallace, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1984) to the Burney Society for members to borrow. Please contact Jean Bowden, Primrose Cottage, Gracious Street, Selborne, Alton, Hants GU34 3JB, or call 01420-511432 for details.

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## Burney Society joins the Literary Alliance

The Burney Society has joined the Jane Austen Society, The George Eliot Fellowship, and the Bronte Society, among others, as members of the Alliance of Literary Societies, based in Great Britain.

Burney Society officers applied for membership, which has an annual fee of £10, in order to further publicize our society, as

well benefit from the contacts and programs the Alliance has to offer.

The Alliance acts as a liason between member societies and assists, where desirable and practicable, in preserving buildings, places and objects with literary connections.

Since the Burney Society has as a goal the restoration and preservation of the d'Arblay graves

at Walcot Church in Bath, the Alliance may offer us some assistance with the effort.

In a letter to Burney Society President Paula Stepankowsky, the Alliance's acting secretary, Bill Adams, wrote: "The place held in English literature by your famous author ensures that your Society is welcome to our ranks!"

# 'A Busy Day'

characters in the play: "merit is limited to no spot, and confined to no Class."

Burney exposes the snobbery, greed and arrogance rife in English society at all social levels. But apart from the theme and the social and historical interest of the piece, the reason we put it on is because it's still very funny — it works on stage. Here are some quotations from the reviews to give you an idea of how the play was received:

*... a fizzing production of a very funny play.*

**Financial Times**

*... how such a splendid and lively play could have escaped an audience until now is as much a mystery as it is a crime.*

**Daily Mail**

*... there is a gaiety and a spirit about this play that shines through... here is a playwright who might, after a sex change, have thrived 40 years earlier or 90 years later.*

**The Observer**

And so on. I thought you'd be as pleased as I was to see Fanny Burney get such superb press — especially after the fiasco of *Edwy and Elgiva*.

So why did *A Busy Day* get lost in the first place? Burney was a successful professional writer. Any theatre manager would have been overjoyed to get his hands on such a script. It's time for a little bit of history — some of it may be fanciful, because in places the facts are few and far between. The play seems to have been written in the late 1790s, as part of a burst of play writing activity. At the time she was probably writing both *A Busy Day* and another comedy, *The Woman Hater*. She was also negotiating to have an earlier comedy, *Love and Fashion*, produced in London. It was withdrawn due to pressure from her father. So we must assume she wasn't just writing for personal pleasure. She probably did intend to get at least one of the plays performed to earn money to keep her new family.

Then international events intervened. During a lull in the Napoleonic Wars, Burney's husband, General d'Arblay, returned to France to try to sort out his financial affairs. In 1802, Fanny joined him with their son, Alexander, probably taking with her the manuscript of *A Busy Day*. Almost immediately, war between England and France started up again and the family were trapped there for the next 10 years. By the time Burney returned to England, she had written her fourth novel, she was caring for a mortally sick husband, and had a growing son to provide for. The last thing she had time for was a play she wrote 15 years before. The play, which I always like to think was proudly transcribed by her husband during their time in France, was consigned to the bottom of her trunk. She must have come across it again when she began to edit her papers, but luckily for us, she decided to leave it alone.

After her death, her "immense Mass of Manuscripts," as she called them, were divided up, bought and sold, and *A Busy Day* ended up in the Berg Collection in New York. In 1984, Tara Wallace produced her edition. Luckily for me, no one seems to have taken it up. I read

it in Easter 1992, and at the end of that year, in an effort to raise funds to mount a worthy first production, the script was put forward for the London Weekend Television Plays on Stage Awards. Unlike most other drama awards, which are rather ugly, unsaleable statuettes, this award is actual cash to put plays on. *A Busy Day* won the second of three awards, and we received a very useful cheque for £16,000.

The production in Bristol opened on Sept. 29, 1993, at the Hen & Chicken Pub Theatre for a run of three and a half weeks and within seven days was completely sold out. As a follow up, in the summer of 1994, the play had a short run at the King's Head in London with most of the same cast. This was supposed to be a showcase to attract producers for a play I think should be part of the English theatre repertoire. So far, none of them has taken up the challenge.

But that's enough history. Let's get on to the play. The first problem is that *A Busy Day* is too long. The first reading took over four hours. Few new plays are performed exactly as written. Most go through changes in rehearsals and as a result of seeing the play performed. As a director and an actor, I could see that *A Busy Day* was a play in need of the hurly burly of the rehearsal process to bring it into a workable shape. Fanny Burney never had the benefit of a friendly director or the experience of working with actors to streamline her script. So here was my first problem — how do I cut the play? I wanted to keep as much of the original as possible. And I didn't want to have anything Burney hadn't written herself in the final performance. In the end, the play ran for nearly three hours with the interval, and that's a long time for a comedy.

To show you the kind of process involved in cutting the play, I'm going to take a short scene from the beginning of Act II. This takes place at the house of Sir Marmaduke Tylney and is the first time in the play we meet these characters, so you don't need to know anything more about them for the moment. Let's just read the scene as it was written by Fanny Burney.

## ACT II

*A drawing room at SIR MARMADUKE TYLNEY'S*

SIR MARMADUKE is discovered at a Table reading a News Paper, and MISS CLEVELAND at work.

SIR MARMADUKE. Now what an unfortunate thing is this! Stocks risen one per cent!

MISS CLEVELAND. How glad I am for poor Mrs. Summers! She is obliged to sell all she is worth this very day, to settle with her husband's creditors. Why should you be sorry, Uncle?

SIR MARMADUKE. Pish! What is Mrs. Summers to me? 'Tis the very D—I. I had an odd fifty pounds lying by me, that I told Jacobs to buy in this very morning...

MISS CLEVELAND. But what, my dear Uncle, is fifty

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pounds to you, compared with a stake so important to Mrs. Summers and her children?

SIR MARMADUKE. Pho, pho, don't make such an ado about her. What are her children to me? I may lose between thirteen and fourteen shillings by this unlucky rise.

MISS CLEVELAND. Forget it, at least, for the present, to think of the near approach of my Brother. We may now reasonably hope to see him in a day or two. The wind is so delightfully fair—

SIR MARMADUKE. Fair? and be hanged to it! It's so rough and harsh, it cuts me off from my ride.

MISS CLEVELAND. But if it facilitates his return, after a voyage so long, so dangerous, so painful—

SIR MARMADUKE. Pish! What's his voyage to my ride?

MISS CLEVELAND. I thought you were quite anxious to see him?

SIR MARMADUKE. Well, so I am: but there's no need I should lose my ride to hurry him home.

MISS CLEVELAND. O shocking! to have him tost to and fro' on that immense Ocean!—

SIR MARMADUKE. Pho, pho, don't make such a fuss about nothing. You know I can't bear to lose my ride. And what harm can it do a young man to be a week or two more or less in a warm comfortable Cabin?

MISS CLEVELAND. Prays sir, has Aaron told you of poor Tomson's death?

SIR MARMADUKE. Death?

MISS CLEVELAND. Yes. He died last night. I was sure you would be much concerned.

SIR MARMADUKE. Concerned? why, I hope it is not really true?

MISS CLEVELAND. Aaron saw his Mother this morning.

SIR MARMADUKE. The D—l! why, it is but two days ago that I lent him half a Guinea!

MISS CLEVELAND. Poor worthy man!

SIR MARMADUKE. And I have no note for it!

MISS CLEVELAND. And his Mother, my dear Uncle—

SIR MARMADUKE. Pho, pho, what's his mother to me! I shall never recover that half Guinea!

*Enter AARON.*

AARON. I am sorry, sir, to be the bearer of ill news, but Robert is just returned from Tylney Hall, and he says —

SIR MARMADUKE. Why what's the matter now? Are any of my tenants run away?

AARON. No, sir; but there broke out such a dreadful Fire in the village yesterday morning—

SIR MARMADUKE. You don't say so? Has it done any mischief to Tylney Hall?

AARON. No, sir, not to Tylney Hall; but—

SIR MARMADUKE. You make me tremble! are any of the houses burnt belonging to my Estate?

AARON. No, sir, not one: but—

SIR MARMADUKE. Why then, what do you put on such a long face for? I hate a long face for nothing. Would you have just that single village in the whole world, exempt from mischief, lest that blockhead Robert should be frightened?

AARON. No, sir; but there are so many sufferers !—

SIR MARMADUKE. Well, don't make such a pother if there are. Every body must submit to accident.

AARON. Poor old Mr. Walters, sir, threw himself from his chamber window, and broke both his legs.

MISS CLEVELAND. O!

SIR MARMADUKE. Well, well, well, who can help it? What's the use of repining? I hate repining.

AARON. And that i'n't all, sir; Mrs. Mark was overturned in her chaise by her horses taking fright in trying to pass the crowd.

MISS CLEVELAND. O poor Mrs. Mark.

SIR MARMADUKE. Well, well, if people can't bear to risk an overturn, they have no business to keep carriages.

AARON. And Lord Garman has had the narrowest escape of all. A flake of fire fell upon his head, just as he was getting into his carriage, and one whole side of his Hair has been singed off.

MISS CLEVELAND. How terrible !

SIR MARMADUKE. A mighty matter, truly! as if his barber could not furnish him with another. Learn to make light of little evils, Niece. If every trifling misfortune is to be aggravated in this manner—

AARON. And another Flake, sir, light just upon our

# 'A Busy Day'

little hay-rick near the Barn, and burnt it to the ground.

SIR MARMADUKE. What, what do you say?

AARON. A Flake of fire, sir, light upon our little Hay-rick and consumed it in a minute.

SIR MARMADUKE. The D—I it did?

AARON. Yes, sir; but it's only the little one.

SIR MARMADUKE. Only? I wish it had been your own house, with all my heart! Only? There is not a thing I had a more particular value for. I had rather by half the whole village had been burnt!

AARON. Sir, the great stack is quite safe; and we have fared better than any body else in all the neighbourhood, for Squire Pollard has lost three of his Horses by the fall of a stack of Chimneys; Squire Milton two of his Cows, by—

SIR MARMADUKE. And pray what do I care for that? what are their Horses and Cows to me? My little Hay-rick! There was never so unfortunate a thing since the World was formed! This year, too, of all others—My little Hay-rick!—

*Exit, followed by AARON*

Now since we are a small theatre company, a scene like this immediately throws up major problems. And the first problem is servants. I can't afford to cast an actor in a part like Aaron, who appears only very briefly in the play. If we use a modern convention we could double some of the parts so that the same actor plays a number of different characters. But there are 23 characters in *A Busy Day*, eight of whom are servants, some of whom have only one or two lines. In the first act, for example, there is a character called Deborah, a wonderful part and absolutely essential to the development of the plot, who doesn't appear in the rest of the play. This wouldn't have been a problem in Burney's day, but it was a very practical problem we had to deal with as creatively as we could. Our solution in the end was to cut some of the smaller servant parts and to have one actor playing a number of male servant characters as a kind of running gag. We doubled the part of Deborah with Lady Wilhelmina Tylney who doesn't appear in Act I. And in this scene we gave Aaron's lines to Miss Cleveland. In the end we performed the play with 13 actors. But this isn't just a matter of reducing the cast list. We had to make cuts, and the reason I wanted to read this scene is because it's a good example of the way I went about it.

In Act I the play opens very dramatically. A carriage crashes outside and the characters tumble onto the stage in disarray. From then on, the dynamic of the play is fast and furious as the audience are whisked through the extraordinary events of this very busy day. I didn't want to lose the comic energy so carefully developed in

Act I. There was an opportunity with the start of Act II to keep up the momentum by making the irrepressible Jemima Cleveland drive the action, rather than having her listening sympathetically but passively. Secondly, and this is one of the major problems with the script, there's too much repetition. In the scene as we've just read it, the joke about Sir Marmaduke's meanness is repeated four, five, six times. It gets boring. And all through the play it is repeated again and again. We can do it more succinctly. Finally there are obscure references — the stocks and shares business which opens the scene — which certainly even now I find pretty confusing and could very easily confuse a theatre audience hearing it for the first time. I didn't want to start a new act, introducing new characters, and have the audience worrying about understanding what the characters were talking about. Comedy of this sort needs to be clear and direct. A theatre audience can't go back over a bit it doesn't catch first time.

So let's read the same scene as it was performed in Bristol. Aaron has gone, and the scene starts with Sir Marmaduke seated at a table reading a newspaper. From off stage we hear the excited voice of Jemima Cleveland:

MISS CLEVELAND. Sir Marmaduke! Sir Marmaduke! ill news! Robert is just returned from Tylney Hall, and he says —

SIR MARMADUKE. Why what's the matter now'? Are any of my tenants run away?

MISS CLEVELAND. No, but there broke out such a dreadful fire in the village yesterday morning

SIR MARMADUKE. You don't say so? Has it done any mischief to Tylney Hall?

MISS CLEVELAND. No, Sir Marmaduke, not to Tylney Hall; but —

SIR MARMADUKE. Why then, what do you put on such a long face for? I hate a long face for nothing. Would you have just that single village in the whole World, exempt from mischief, lest that blockhead Robert should be frightened?

MISS CLEVELAND. No, but there are so many sufferers!

SIR MARMADUKE. Well, don't make such a pother if there are. Everybody must submit to accident.

MISS CLEVELAND. Poor old Mr. Walters threw himself from his chamber window, and broke both his legs.

SIR MARMADUKE. Well, well, well, who can help it? What's the use of repining? I hate repining.

MISS CLEVELAND. And Lord Garman has had a narrow escape. A flake of fire fell upon his head just as he was getting into his carriage, and one whole side of

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his hair has been singed off.

SIR MARMADUKE. A mighty matter, truly! as if his barber could not furnish him with another. Learn to make light of little evils, Niece. If every trifling misfortune is to be aggravated in this manner

MISS CLEVELAND. And another flake lighted upon our little Hay-rick near the Barn and burnt it to the ground.

SIR MARMADUKE. What, what do you say?

MISS CLEVELAND. A flake of fire lighted upon our little Hay-rick, and consumed it in a minute.

SIR MARMADUKE. The D—I it did?

MISS CLEVELAND. Yes, Sir Marmaduke; but it's only the little one.

SIR MARMADUKE. Only? Only? There is not a thing I had a more particular value for. I had rather by half the whole village had been hourly!

MISS CLEVELAND. The great stack appears quite safe; and we have fared better than anybody else in all the neighbourhood, for Squire Pollard and Squire Milton have lost —

SIR MARMADUKE. And pray what do I care for them? My little Hay-rick! — There was never so unfortunate a thing since the World was formed This year, too, of all others — My little Hay-rick!

I know I've dealt rather briefly with the text, but I can only give you a taste of some of the choices we made. On a couple of occasions in the play, I moved a whole section of a scene and placed it elsewhere. In the scene we've just read, the exchange in the original about Cleveland's return voyage was transposed to later in the same scene. At other times, large sections were left completely intact because they were just so good I didn't want to lose a word of them. I love quoting one critic who wrote, "I suspect that such astonishingly Wildean remarks as 'One has no chance with a young girl till her family are all against one' owe more to the adaptor than Miss Burney." In fact I didn't change a single word of the scene he quotes from because to me, it is Fanny Burney at her very best. I always find it so annoying that most critics assume their opinions must be right. It would have been much more interesting for this critic to check his facts and instead of disparaging the play he could have celebrated Burney's wit as being equal to Oscar Wilde's.

This brings us to the second major consideration for the director and producer. The set design. Once again, it's a matter of finding an elegant and flexible solution within the strictures of a very rigid budget. The play has five acts, and for each one Burney specifies a different location — and the locations are both inside

and out. Going through the play act by act, they go like this: a gentleman's club, a smart drawing room in a London house, outside in Kensington Gardens, a dressing room, and finally, "an elegantly fitted-up apartment ... splendidly illuminated" in a large mansion house in Piccadilly. Now we actually put the play on in a less-than-elegant upstairs room in a pub in a working class area of Bristol. There were no facilities for flying in scenery, very little space to store props and furniture, a small stage crew, and the performance area was only twenty by twenty feet. So it wasn't splendid. But like all such problems, restrictions can spur the imagination. My inspiration for a solution to the decor came from a description of a room in Norbury Park:

*The drawing room was painted from floor to ceiling with landscapes and the ceiling was painted to represent the sky. With a green carpet stretching from wall to wall the room resembled a trellised pergola opening on all sides to ideal English scenery, with the perfect views from the windows completing the circle."*

This seemed to answer the problem of shifting scenes from rooms to gardens and back again. The designer, Elizabeth Bowden, transformed the whole theatre space into a beautiful 18th-century room with wall panels painted with rural scenes, separated by classical columns and framed with stucco mouldings. The whole effect was set off by a striking floor design, which was a cross between a clock face and the points of the compass. Both the audience, and during the play the actors, entered the room through large mahogany double doors. Place was indicated by a minimum of furniture — a small writing table and chair, a chaise longue, garden benches and a sundial, and so on. So the whole feel was simple, classical and elegant. It was important to me not to present the play as just a period piece, and in this production, we had the audience sitting within the set as it were, in the same room as the action.

The set was both echoed and matched by the beautiful costumes. We could only afford minor changes of costume during the action, so we concentrated our resources on period accuracy and detail. But once again we were able to benefit from our limited resources. For example, we couldn't afford wigs for all the characters who would strictly have needed them, so we limited their use to the older generation, while the younger men and women dressed their hair in the more natural style then prevalent on the continent, but probably not really common in England until 1810.

A final production element was music. It would have been easy enough to find a bit of Haydn or some other classical composer to give colour and period to the play, but since Fanny Burney came from such a musical household, I didn't want the music to be just wallpaper. I wanted it to have some prominence. We were lucky to find Alan Charlton, a young composer living in Bristol, who wrote some very attractive musical interludes which were used as overture and during scene changes. I describe it to people as a cross between Mozart and neoclassical Stravinsky. Alan may not agree, but



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however you describe it, it worked very well.

Like everything about the production we were trying to get the right ingredients for that very difficult mix of old and modern. Whatever you do, you can't pretend we aren't in the 1990's. We couldn't pretend we were presenting the play as Burney would have seen it. Acting styles, setting, modern theatre-going habits, everything is different. I made no attempt to do a reverential period piece. I wanted to bring out the liveliness and fun that excited me when I first read the play. Like Burney, I wanted to make people laugh. *A Busy Day* has a feeling of great happiness and freedom. Even the most selfish and vulgar characters have an attractive vigour and energy, and there is a real optimism for the future that I think reflects her own mood at the time she wrote it — in love, newly married, a mother, freed from her father's narrow prejudices. She

brings a sharp satirical insight to her writing, but she also takes a real pleasure in displaying the idiosyncrasies of her characters as they reveal their arrogance and their snobbery, their small mindedness and their bad manners — even parents don't merit respect and reverence. Respect has to be earned.

For nearly 200 years, this wonderful play has lain dormant, waiting for the theatre to discover it and for actors to release its laughter and bring its marvelously rich characters to life. I hope Fanny Burney would have been pleased with the results. There is no reason why this play and some of her other comedies are not part of the English theatre repertoire. It's about time a new female voice joined the list of great English comic playwrights, and whatever happens, it's up to people like us to make sure Fanny Burney's theatre work doesn't get lost for another 200 years.

## Play subtitle invites a 'Rival' from India

By Hilary Newman

Those of us who attended the British branch's Burney Society meeting in June were privileged to hear Alan Coveney talk of his production of *A Busy Day*.

He drew attention to the play's subtitle, "An Arrival From India," but omitted the indefinite article when he referred to it in his talk. However, Alan Coveney's omission of the indefinite article leads to a consideration of the possible double meaning or pun behind the word "arrival." The words "arrival" and "a rival" sound the same when they are heard and not seen, so that the auditor cannot be sure without visual evidence which form of spelling it actually takes.

The word "arrival" means the appearance on the scene of someone who has reached their destination at the end of the journey. As in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and E. M. Forester's *A Passage to India*, the ideas of journal and arrival are symbolic. Eliza and Cleveland have already "arrived" as people who are far superior to the other characters in the play.

Another meaning of the word "arrive" is the establishing of one's repute or position, and both Eliza and Cleveland must do this after a long absence in India. Their main task is to establish their position with regard to one another, despite

the obstacles presented by the vulgarity of the heroine's biological mother, father and sister, and the intolerant snobbishness of the hero's relatives.

The other pronunciation is "a rival," by which we mean a person or thing that competes for love or favour or success or some other quality. In this play of Frances Burney's, the word "rival" refers to competition in love relationships.

Sir Marmaduke has summoned his nephew home from India, presumably to make him his heir. The young man's position seems to depend upon his entering into a matrimonial contract arranged in his absence by his uncle. Sir Marmaduke has realized that the wealthy Miss Percival is in love with his nephew. The uncle believes that Miss Percival can financially assist the family.

Miss Percival is comically coy, indirect and falsely modest and shy in her expressions of love for Cleveland. At first Miss Percival does not realize that Eliza, arriving on the same boat from India as her beloved, is her successful rival for the love of Cleveland. Miss Percival produces a good deal of comedy and complicates the relationship between Eliza and Cleveland by her piqued machinations.

Not only is Eliza a rival to Miss Percival, but Cleveland himself is a rival to his younger brother, Frank, who would like to make a

financially advantageous marriage with Eliza. Thus Cleveland is another rival from India. Of course, there is never a doubt that Eliza will succumb to the advances of the uncouth and grasping Frank, but his mercenary plotting, like that of Miss Percival's, helps complicate the plot and postpone the happy denouement of Burney's comedy. When the two schemers join forces, both the hero and the heroine's families are revealed with all their faults as they are brought together to confront one another.

A further meaning of the word "rival" is also significant for the themes and characters of Frances Burney's play. "Rival" also means to vie with, to be comparable or to seem or to claim to be as good as. This is important in *A Busy Day*, one of whose major themes is that the upwardly socially mobile Watts family and the established aristocrats Sir Marmaduke and Lady Wilhelmina are indeed comparable and are in fact equally worthless in terms of their values and the way in which they interact with each other.

In conclusion, the word "arrival" is rich in connotations and has several different interpretations which are all relevant to the comedy of Frances Burney.

Hilary Newman is a Burney Society member from Epsom, Surrey, in England.

# The Burneys in Poland Street, 1760-1770

By Elizabeth Warburton

**D**ear, dear Poland Street," Fanny Burney sighed in retrospect, "where we were all so happy together."

Most of the Burney children were born in King's Lynn, Norfolk, and came down to London in 1760 when their father resumed his musical career in the great city. They were young and even more exuberant than in their harvest time of the next decade, when Dr. Charles Burney was producing histories of European music and James, the eldest son, was sailing round the globe with Captain Cook. Charles the Younger was an unusual, but highly promising, classical scholar and book collector. Marriages took place, for better and for worse, and the next Burney generation was being born. Dr. Burney himself was enjoying the social rewards of his musical talent and great personal charm. But most glittering of all was the sudden emergence of their shy little Fanny as a best-selling author and social lion.

Nevertheless, the '60's were a high point for the family in Poland Street, absorbed as they were in one another's lives and in London's cultural life.

Poland Street was close to the musical and artistic centre of Soho, running off Oxford Street (nowadays between the Tottenham Court and Oxford Circus tube stations). It was opened up in 1689 during the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire. The King of Poland public house at the Oxford Street corner commemorated the victory of Polish forces in 1683 over a Turkish army that threatened Europe. By the Burneys' time, the district was on the edge of northwest development out beyond Bloomsbury, and residents were paying a pavement tax. A small street came in from the east directly opposite today's No. 50 where the Burneys lived, and was re-named d'Arblay Street in 1909.

The Burneys leased a house big enough for their growing family — Esther (Hetty) aged 12, James, 10, Frances, Susan and Charles. Charlotte was born there. All of them were attractive, lively and talented. Before long, Mrs. Burney died of consumption and child-bearing, and was replaced in 1768 by a friend from King's Lynn, Elizabeth Allen, widow of a well-to-do merchant. This marriage added to the family her son Stephen Allen, and daughters Maria and Bessy, followed by the birth of two Burneys — Richard or "Beautiful Dick," a pink-and-white, curly haired child, and "Bengal Dick," named for the place where he eventually made his living; and Sarah Harriet, who had the curls but no other mark of beauty.

Although Mrs. Allen had lost part of her capital from poor investments, she still had an income from her husband's estate, and her children's inheritance allowed all three to embark on runaway marriages. In fact, Mrs. Allen herself married Dr. Burney secretly, afraid of her fearsome mother and her trustees at home. He was not a robust man and worked long and hard... nine children between them and more to come... Risky, they thought in Lynn.

Dr. Burney's unmarried sisters, Ann and Rebecca lived in York Street, Soho, with their mother. The authors of a recent scholarly account of Fanny Burney

think that he might have inherited Gregg's Coffee House there, and that they ran it for him, living above or behind the shop. Neither he nor Fanny disclosed this connection with trade, though they dearly loved the three ladies and saw a good deal of them, as well as made use of the coffee house as an address for his initial advertisements as a music master and for Fanny's secret negotiations with *Evelina's* publisher.

Poland Street is something of a hell-hole these days — choked with trucks, vans and taxis, the uneven footpath awkward to walk on, the buildings given over to commerce. Noise and petrol smells replace those of horse-drawn traffic and coal fires. Nevertheless, at 17, coming back from a holiday in Norfolk, Hetty enthused, "I love the smook of London." As for noise, Fanny did not complain in her journal about clattering hooves and rattling carts, but of the call of the "frightful old Watchman." "Past 11 o'clock," she imitated him. "Bless you friend, don't bawl so loud!"

Many of the buildings had shops and small workrooms on the street level — not the Asian cafes and restaurants of today, nor anything else that the Burneys would recognize. Their ground-floor room on the street was the front parlour, which allowed them to see and be seen. A young Lord Pigot who stood on the opposite footpath one day looking in for Hetty mistook Fanny for her sister and took courage to walk over and ring the bell. Any sudden social demand sent Fanny into a fit of embarrassment, but luckily her father was at home and able to make polite conversation. Some of the old facades are left in Poland Street and rather more in d'Arblay Street — yellow London stock bricks, regular three floors above ground, and kitchen quarters below.

**T**he site of No. 50 now holds a tall narrow modern building that offers a slight link with the past in being owned by a publishing company. The old parish poor-rate records in the Westminster Archives show the Burney dwelling standing at one end of a row of four whose ratable value was £30 each, higher than most others in the street. In 1762/63, stables were added along the back to the middle pair, whose site is now translated into the Poland Street Car Park. The fourth house, then occupied by Lady Augusta Bridges, is replaced by the Coach and Horses Tavern.

Towards Oxford Street, where Marks & Spencer's Great Marlborough store covers most of the western side with a blank side wall, there were cheap dwellings in the 1760s, mainly occupied by women ratepayers. Widows, perhaps, or unmarried women claiming widow status to dignify them in business? Were they milliners... dressmakers... landladies... or down the line to streetsellers of milk, bread, cherries or hot cross buns? According to later gossip, other more personal female sales were commonly made around here — but not in the Burneys' time, certainly.

The more salubrious Great Marlborough Street lifted the tone of the neighbourhood, with Lord Charles Cavendish at its western corner on today's Regent Street in a house valued at £90, next to dwellings of lessening value occupied in proper order by several

# Poland Street

colonels, an alderman, some esquires, and Lady Augusta at the corner of Poland Street.

All in all, the place suited a family man of middling means, and with the absences of James in the navy, Charles at the Charterhouse school, Hetty and Susanna at school in Paris, there was room enough for whoever chanced to be at home. Fanny was nearly always there, endlessly "scribbling" as she called it, unconsciously in training for the famous novelist and diarist that she became. Who knows – some of the Poland-street dwellers might have inspired the speech of the lower-class Branghtons who add so much life and interest to *Evelina*. 'Where did the minx hear it?', marveled a friend of the family. Right there at the lesser end of Poland Street, might be the answer. Sailor's talk and rough humour came from James, very conveniently for the Captain Mirvan character who so shocked Evelina and amused contemporary readers; and jokes with Susanna in their language-lessons were likely sources for the fractured French of Madame Duval that became the rage in London salons. "Ma foi!", they exclaimed to one another.

Apart from the death of the first Mrs. Burney and the installation of the second, several important events occurred in this decade.

One was the beginning of a lifelong friendship with Samuel Crisp, described by Dr. Burney as a man of learning and exquisite taste in all the fine arts. Having gambled away a fortune in his youth and written a tragedy that failed at Drury Lane, he retired to remote Chesington Hall beyond Epsom, but luckily for him, it was after he became a friend of the household in Poland Street." Fanny kept him in touch with the social events he loved by writing long, evocative letters. A pair of related events were crucial to Fanny's development – first a bonfire of all her childhood stories and diaries, and within a few months, a determined start on another set. From now on she obeyed the rules for females – but firmly decided that she would continue writing privately, despite discouragement even from her loving father. Journal-keeping, novel-writing and reading, were not proper activities for young ladies. Other people in the household might see the journals and find embarrassing remarks about themselves; and as for novels, they might exhibit details of men's behaviour that young ladies should not read, much less write.

Crowning all other family achievements of the '60s, Charles Burney gained the reward of long hard labour towards a degree in music from Oxford University. Now it was Doctor Burney whom everyone delighted to know, and who could ease his teaching load and concentrate more on his histories and studies of European music.

A minor experience of the same time, useful to Fanny all the same, was a visit with her father to Bristol Hot Wells, where Evelina acquired in one glorious coup, father, fortune and husband. But usually life centered on the family. There was brother Charles, displaying in his holidays the spirits that made him "the sweetest-tempered Joy" in the Charterhouse school. Fanny, without any tutor or formal schooling, was reading Greek and Roman classics, struggling with the best French writers and reading widely in English. Hetty and Susan came home from Paris, Susan ready to help Fanny with the French language and Hetty in full beauty and high spirits. The new Mrs. Burney's daughter, Maria Allen, was an old friend of the girls, as full of laughter as they, but more romantic and reckless.

All the time there were gay outings – to Vauxhall Gardens, the Pantheon, local assemblies and other places that would shortly be visited by shy little Evelina Anvill. From a very early age they went round the corner to the opera at Covent Garden and the theatre at Drury Lane, where David Garrick often lent them his box near the stage.

As manager and chief actor at Drury Lane, Garrick was acutely busy, but often made time to call at Poland Street, as much to see the Burney children as their father. Sometimes he acted Punch for them, as if on wires, and did his marvelous face-changing mimicry. They screamed with pleasure, taking part in his spontaneous playacting, and devising their own lively theatricals. Their talented cousins in Worcester loved the same thing, and holidays together with them were endlessly

happy – and endlessly fruitful for the budding novelist among them.

Downstairs also, excitement brewed. Betty Langley, the Burney's old cook, was courted by John Hatton, footman, and married in the month of May. Bridesmaids were the Misses Ann Burney and her nieces Hetty and Fanny; while the Father giving away the bride was young Charles Burney, home from school. Fifteen-year-old Fanny found it all very amusing. The bride, dressed in white linen, was "a maiden of about fifty... blithe as the month; if one can compare a weed of December with the fragrance of May." The bridegroom, "a good, modest, sober and decent youth," was dressed in blue trimmed with red. As Fanny observed, "Not merely her husband, but her father too was young enough to own her for a mother." Some of the party went to the church in the Burneys' coach, while appropriately enough, Fanny thought, the footman and friends walked.

Even the evenings spent at home were exciting. Here, taken almost at random, is one of the young Fanny's

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*All in all, the place suited a family man of middling means, and with the absences of James in the navy, Charles at the Charterhouse school, Hetty and Susanna at school in Paris, there was room enough for whoever chanced to be at home.*  
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# Poland Street

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gushing diary-entries:

"Last night, to my great satisfaction, Mama prevail'd on Mr. Young to promise to be of our party to-day to Greenwich. Well, he slept here. For my part. I could not sleep all night, I was up before five o'clock — Hetty and Susette were before six — each at a looking glass admiring the enchanting object it presented to our view, who should rap at the chamber door but — (my cheeks are crimsoned with the blush of indignation while I write it!) — Mr. Young! I ran into a closet, and lock't myself up — however he did not pollute my chamber with his unhallowed feet."

Dr. Burney's famous London parties flourished in Poland Street, where streams of notables were happy to come for the enjoyment of good music and good conversation. Even when she was a child in King's Lynn, Hetty had played brilliantly on the harpsichord for similar gatherings. By the Poland Street era she and her cousin Charles Rousseau Burney were amazing the company with their duets.

Behind the scenes Fanny was writing it all down for "Daddy Crisp". "We had a charming concert," she tells him. "Hetty played the piano forte and Charles [Rousseau] the violin, the two Cervetos, the base, and papa the organ. Afterwards we had two solos on the violoncello by young Cerveto, who plays delightfully, and my cousin shone in a Lesson of papa's on his harpsichord."

**H**ow musicians and audience could fit into the small Poland Street rooms, is hard to imagine. But what can easily be imagined is the benefit to Fanny of having someone clamouring for the next episode. It is a young writer's dream. Even more, Daddy Crisp encouraged a natural, conversational writing style, one that was the best she ever found. Dr. Johnson, another old man who loved her, was not nearly so useful to her literary career, except in telling everyone how splendid *Evelina* was. In fact his model as a writer and weighty moralist was outright bad for her.

One evening Fanny and Hetty dressed for a masquerade to be held at the house of Mr. Laluze, a French dancing master. "Hetty had for months thought of nothing else — no more had I." Chaperoned by Aunt Becky, off they went, Hetty as a brightly-dressed Savoyard musician with a hurdy-gurdy fastened round her waist, and Fanny simply in a pretty dress "with a close pink Persian vest" covered with gauze and flowers, and a little garland of flowers on her head.

Masked like everyone else, they entered Mr. Laluze's large room, Hetty playing on the hurdy-gurdy and the company flocking about her. There was a Witch with a broomstick telling fortunes, a Shepherd stupid enough to suit the part (thought Fanny at the unmasking), two or three Turks, a Nun and a Quaker, also a Harlequin, a Huntsman, a Merlin who spoke of magic charms, and a Dutchman who secured Fanny for a supper partner. A hilarious unmasking showed a young face where an old was expected, or vice versa or an ugly one where good looks had been expected — "Nothing could be more droll" . . . The Dutchman promptly followed the evening's encounter with calls of serious intent at 50

Poland Street. Fanny never blushed so deeply in her life, she says, as when a formal letter came with a pressing request for an introduction to her father. Fanny replied to this impudence by presenting her compliments and forbidding any further approaches. So ended the Dutchman's hopes.

**L**ife spun along for the Burney girls — an evening at an atrocious play given privately in Leicester Square, followed by another dancing at the Rev. Mr. Pugh's, he who had married Dr. Burney to Mrs. Allen. After her marriage the new Mrs. Burney still made use of her house in King's Lynn, taking her own daughters and the younger Burneys with her for the winter. Dr. Burney and two older daughters were often alone in Poland Street, Fanny industriously helping her father with his writing and Hetty at work on her music. Aunts Ann and Becky were usually available as chaperones for outings, but right next door was Mrs. Pringle, a chatty, hospitable, very agreeable Scottish widow who could act as hostess and chaperone combined. Social occasions, impromptu or formal, were her delight. Often they danced in her parlour until two or three in the morning.

Mrs. Pringle's circle came mainly from her own country, including her neighbour the one-time Earl of Cromartie, who lost his estates and title for taking part in the Great Rebellion. But many of them were ambitious men who had taken what Dr. Johnson called "the fairest prospect a Scotsman ever sees," the highroad leading to England. One of these was Robert Adam, who was Royal Architect and MP for Kinross at this time, when he and his brother, James, were building the Adelphi in the Strand.

Caledonians cram these pages of Fanny's journal — but those of most interest to the two Burneys were the inter-related Seatons and Debiegs, especially young Alexander Seaton.

Written in high excitement, the journal first describes him as "a very sensible and clever man, and a prodigious admirer of Hetty's." A day or two later, Fanny had a delightful chat with him and very nearly fell in love herself, so charming was his conversation. But her shrewd eye began to notice his manner with several of his "old flames" at Mrs. Seaton's parties and in time she saw that he was as artful as agreeable. What an unworthy trifler he was, playing with the affections of "so sweet, so amiable a girl as Hetty." For two years, Hetty put up with the attentions of this male flirt, giving rise to gossip expectations of something permanent brewing. Night after night she went out with high hopes of a proposal, only to come home downcast.

For girls without dowries, marriage was not easy to achieve. This was a time when Hetty needed a protective family chaperone to keep an eye on the teasing youth and very likely to spur Dr. Burney to enquire into his intentions. But Hetty had to bear the uncertainty alone, except for Fanny's deep, though powerless, sympathy. "Poor Hetty," she writes at last, "passed an uneasy night, racked with uncertainty about this Seaton, this eternal destroyer of her peace! Were he sincere, she owned she could be happier with him

# Poland Street

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than with any man breathing – but the next morning, when she had considered well of everything, she declared were he to make her the most solemn offer of his hand, she would refuse him . . . and accept of Charles!”

Because of Hetty’s unusual talents, beauty and charm, “everyone” had expected her to make a very good match, and this Charles Rousseau Burney was not. Goodness he had in plenty, but although the family never lost respect and affection for him, a hard life lay ahead of the couple. He made a living in a musician’s scrambling way, playing the harpsichord at Drury Lane Theatre, teaching pupils of his own and helping Dr. Burney with his overflowing list, as well as composing music in his little spare time. For Hetty, it was constant child-bearing, scrimping and saving, teaching music, and falling ill. They were always poor, the more so in times like the early 1790s when middle-class households were reducing costs and dispensing first with their visiting music masters. Even Dr. Burney, the most popular music master in London, suffered.

The end result of the Seaton affair was the total exclusion of Mrs. Pringle from the Burneys’ lives. A careless chaperone she had proved to be, especially so considering the absence of Dr. Burney on a study-tour of France and Italy, and of Mrs. Burney in King’s Lynn. “Daddy Crisp” gave firm orders that Mrs. Pringle was to be dropped, and Mrs. Burney leased a house in Queen’s Square, Bloomsbury. The family moved into it even

while Dr. Burney was away. Fanny was appalled at the hurt inflicted on their friend, who had never wished them any harm.

“A few days since,” she wrote, “when Miss Allen and I were standing in the parlour window, Miss Pringle passed, but seeing me hurried back and made a motion for me to open the window, which I did, though I was terribly confused what to say, for it was not in my power to explain the reasons of my absence from her; yet with so much kindness and civility as we have met from her. I am sure excuses were very necessary. She asked me how I did, and immediately added ‘Pray, what have I done that you never come near me?’ I was much at a loss what to say, but stammered something about the hurry of moving, want of time, etc. She shook her head – ‘Want of time? What, only next door? ... Well, my dear, I am glad to see you so well —I wish you good morning’ — and walked away. I am truly sorry to say I believe this is the last time I shall speak to Mrs. Pringle.”

So that was that. It was an unhappy ending to life in Poland Street, and Fanny grieved over it for a long time, eventually making at secret return visit in the hope of assuaging Mrs. Pringle’s hurt feelings. But the lady was gone – to her son in the East Indies – or to the Isle of Wight for the sea bathing – or somewhere... No one knew for sure. Just as well for poor Fanny, probably.

*Ed. note: Elizabeth Warburton is a Burney Society member living in New South Wales, Australia.*

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## **Return address**

IN NORTH AMERICA:  
THE BURNEY SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 5424  
FULLERTON, CALIF., 92635 USA

IN GREAT BRITAIN:  
THE BURNEY SOCIETY  
PRIMROSE COTTAGE  
GRACIOUS STREET  
SELBORNE, ALTON  
HAMPSHIRE, ENGLAND  
GU34 3JB.

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## **REGISTER FOR RICHMOND BY SEPT. 20**

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