

Review Paper by Dr Gillian Skinner 'Research on the Burneys and their Circle.'

The first thing to say is that, on the evidence of the twenty papers we've heard over the last three days, research on the Burneys and their circle is currently flourishing. It's truly been a feast of Burney-related research or, as a colleague of mine would say, an *embarrass de richesse*. And all in person, too! The serendipitous coincidence of the start of the conference with the publication of Francesca Saggini's collection, *Frances Burney and the Arts*, is further confirmation, if any were needed, of the health of Burney studies. The range of papers we've heard, while centring on Frances Burney, has given us further insight (and with the promise of more to come) into Dr Burney, Charles Burney Jnr, and Susanna Burney Phillips; it has taken us beyond the immediate family to relatives (Mrs Meeke), and to close friends and associates (Mrs Piozzi, Pachierotti); it has explored the wider contexts of their lives (their associations with Bath, the value of Charles Jnr's newspaper collection for research, the publishing business); and it gave us the chance to remember and reflect on the work of Hester Davenport, who, apart from her wonderful research and writing and boundless enthusiasm, was, I'm grateful to say, responsible for bringing me into the Burney Society, and of course many others too.

I've said the conference has centred on Frances Burney: in fact, just a little less than half the papers focused on her work, so while she remains the dominant figure, for a slim majority of our time our attention has been directed elsewhere. The papers on Frances's work focused pretty equally on *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, with papers too on *Camilla* and on *The Wanderer*. This is not far different from the pattern of publication in recent years: since our last conference three years ago, the MLA Bibliography (which now includes the *Burney Journal*!) records 16 entries for which *Evelina* is a main focus, 8 for *Cecilia*, 5 for *Camilla* and

8 for *The Wanderer*. What is perhaps interesting is that this conference hasn't included any papers on her plays, and the MLA Bibliography's most recent entry for *Edwy and Elgiva* as the main subject focus is 2016 (there are only 7 entries overall) - it has none for *Hubert de Vere*, *The Siege of Pevensey* or *Elberta*; while of her comedies *The Witlings* is by far the most studied (16 entries; 3 in the past four years), there are no entries for *Love and Fashion*, *A Busy Day* or *The Woman-Hater*. Wonderful work has been done on the plays, from Tara Goshal Wallace's edition of *A Busy Day* in 1984, to Margaret Doody's serious consideration of them in her influential *Life in the Works* of 1988, Peter Sabor's ground-breaking 2-volume edition of the *Complete Plays* in 1995, Barbara Darby's pioneering monograph in 1997, and Peter Sabor and Geoffrey Sill's 2002 edition of '*The Witlings*' and '*The Woman-Hater*', but, despite some valuable journal articles, the tragedies especially remain under-studied and ripe for further investigation, and the need for work such as Francesca Saggini's on *Hubert de Vere*, part of her exciting project on Romantic drama, couldn't be clearer.

Since the publication, in 2019, of Volume 6 of *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney* (edited by Nancy Johnson), we've been privileged to live in a world in which all of Burney's extant journals and letters are available in modern, scholarly editions.

Seminal work by Peter Sabor, Lorna Clark, and others, both in the meticulous editing of the journals and letters and in insightful commentary on their style and content, is opening up our understanding of the kinds of documents these are, Burney's practice in producing and editing them, and her presentation and construction of her personal and social world. In a special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Life* in 2018, 'New Perspectives on the Burney Family', Sophie Coulombe wrote,

To researchers working on Frances Burney, we issue a fresh challenge to consider her as an intensely 'connected' writer who first and foremost wrote from, to, and about her family. To scholars in the fields of literature, history, classics, music, and art history who study the lives and works of 'minor' Burneys, we aim to signpost the resources available for studying these figures, and proffer fresh ideas about how we might place them in their kinship and professional contexts.

This is a call to which much of the content of this conference has been a response. The availability of the journals and letters feeds into so much of the research on Burney's life and work, as well as the lives and work of other family members, helping to flesh out our understanding of their relationships, literary and social: recent published essays, for example, have shown the importance of her friendship with Arthur Murphy (Willow White) and the shifts in her views of and relationships with the Bluestockings (Hilary Havens), while John Wiltshire finds Burney 'the founder of the genre now known as "pathography"', patient narratives of illness, suggesting the potential richness of Burney's work in relation to the burgeoning field of medical humanities. The huge value of the ready availability of the journals and letters has been evident throughout the conference and will continue to be so in new work on Burney and her circle going forward. In both what was covered over the last few days and what was omitted, the conference has suggested the great potential still to be unlocked in further consideration of Dr Burney, as the scholarly edition of his letters becomes available; of Charles Burney Jnr, as Sophie Coulombeau's project gathers pace; but also of Susanna Burney Phillips, James Burney, Sarah Harriet Burney and Hester Thrale Piozzi, on whom the work of those such as Philip Olleson, Lorna Clark, Cassie Ulph and others has broken so much ground, with much more potential yet to be tapped.

For me, it has also been wonderful and really inspiring to see how the novels continue to inspire fresh engagement and new approaches. There has been a definite strain of legally inflected approaches, with several papers making us reflect on the legal state of the married woman in different ways, for example. Other papers made us look again at the novels we thought we already knew so well, revisiting them from angles hitherto underdeveloped or unthought of.

Overall, the conference has shown us how strongly fascination with Frances Burney and her work continues, alongside a strengthening and continually broadening interest in the life and work of other Burneys and the many and varied personalities they interacted with, leaving us to contemplate how much more there is still to do, and what we have to look forward to in conferences to come.

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