

Author biography     **Sophia, Lady Burrell**

Sophia, Lady Burrell, born 11 April 1753, was the eldest daughter of Charles Raymond of Valentines, Ilford, Essex and Sarah, née Webster. Sophia Raymond had two younger sisters, Juliana and Anna Maria, but there is little else known about her formative years. The family lived at Valentines, a reasonably-sized mansion that is more renowned today for the Black Hamburg vine planted in 1758. Burrell has entries in the *Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present* and also in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Many additional details have been obtained from information concerning her father and her first husband, William Burrell.<sup>1</sup>

Charles Raymond amassed considerable wealth during his numerous overseas voyages to India, where he eventually attained the position of captain. Raymond was later a Principal Managing Owner, with the East India Company, and was highly influential during his lifetime, where he oversaw a fleet of 30 ships and responsibility for 77 voyages. When he settled and married, Raymond turned to financial pursuits through banking. In the late eighteenth-century he was a partner in Raymond, Williams, Vere, Lowe and Fletcher Bank, which later became Williams Deacon's Bank and is now part of the Royal Bank of Scotland. Between 1771 and 1772, Raymond was Sherriff of the County of Essex. On 3 May 1774, Raymond was granted a baronetcy. When Sir Charles Raymond died in 1788, the baronetcy was passed to his son-in-law and grandson.<sup>2</sup>

William Burrell, born 10 October 1732, was twice his wife's age when they married on 13 April 1773. At the time it was reported that the young Sophia Raymond was a good catch, worth at least £10,000 and a share of her father's fortune on his death of £100,000. Burrell was a

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<sup>1</sup> Georgina Green, *Valentines Mansion* (29 /12/03)

<sup>2</sup> Green, *Valentines Mansion*

lawyer and antiquary and may have met with Sir Raymond whilst his legal practice was in the Court of Admiralty. Burrell was member of Parliament for Haslemere between 1768 and 1774. The couple had five children, although two boys died in infancy. Their eldest surviving son was Charles Merrick Burrell, who became Member of Parliament for Shoreham, Sussex. During the 1780's, Burrell commissioned a collection of sketches of churches, castles and ruins in and around the county of Sussex. The Swiss born artist S.H. Grimm travelled the breadth of the county to capture the many celebrated buildings in Sussex. Whilst Grimm may have been commissioned by Burrell, both he and particularly his wife painted their own pictures of Sussex buildings. In 1784 William Burrell suffered a severe stroke that limited him thereafter. Sophia Burrell painted numerous pictorial accounts of churches and known houses, between 1773 and 1784, and her paintings are mainly held by the British Library and some by the Eastbourne Library. All the paintings are an excellent record that illustrates how the County looked in centuries past. <sup>3</sup>

Whilst Lady Burrell appears to have enjoyed her artistic pursuits, she also engaged in writing. She commenced with *vers de société*, which were included in Volume One Poems together with ballads and fables (some of which were medieval), ovidian and ossianic imitation, a vindication of Goethe's Charlotte and poems in praise of Elizabeth Montagu and Georgiana Devonshire 1793. This was followed by *Comala from Ossian*, a dramatic poem of three acts in 1784. Prior to publication, Lady Burrell circulated her work in manuscript form amongst her friends and family. This offers some explanation as to why in 1793, volume one of *Poems* was published anonymously. Those who read her manuscripts would probably have recognised the contents of the printed volume quite quickly, so not putting her name to the book would not have been considered unusual. Possibly, as part of the country's gentry, Lady Burrell did not want to

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<sup>3</sup> Sussex Record Office Picture Database]

John Playford, *A Great Sussex Antiquary and His Wife* (1938)

Jennett Humphreys, 'Burrell, Sophia, Lady Burrell (1753–1802)', rev. Rebecca Mills, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2005

associate herself with the ‘trade’ concept of publication. This also suggests that, perhaps, just a small number of copies were printed. The second volume of *Poems* quickly followed the first and Lady Burrell’s name is proudly on the title page. In 1794, the plays *Thymriad*, from Xenophon’s *Cyropoedia* and *Telemachus* (couplets from Fénelon) were published, followed by two tragedies in 1800. *Maximian*, taken from Corneille, was dedicated to William Lock and *Theodora* or *The Spanish Daughter*, dedicated, with permission to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. In 1797 Lady Burrell’s only novel, *Adeline de Courcy*, was published anonymously. In 1814, two volumes of ‘Dramatic Works not yet acted’ were published under the title *The New British Theatre*. Volume One included *Theodora* and the second volume a play entitled *Villario*, a play in five acts.<sup>4</sup>

It was on 20 January 1796 that Sir William Burrell died and the following year, 23 May 1797, Lady Burrell married William Clay, a Church of England clergyman. The couple eventually settled in Cowes, Isle of Wight, where on 20 June 1802 Lady Burrell died. They had only been married just over five years. It is perhaps for this reason that her remains were taken to the West Grinstead church, where Sir William Burrell was buried, and laid beside him in the vault.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Virginia Blain, *Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Batsford, 1990) pp.161-2.

J.R.de J Jackson, *Romantic poetry by Women: a Bibliography 1770-1835* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1993) p. 87.

Paula R.Feldman, ‘Women Poets and Anonymity in the Romantic Era’, in *Authorship, Commerce and the Public: Scenes of Writing, 1750-1850*, ed. E.J Clery, Caroline Franklin, Peter Garside (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p.44

<sup>5</sup> John Playford, *A Great Sussex Antiquary and His Wife*

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