

## **Lady Sophia Burrell**

Sophia was born on 11 April 1753 and baptised on 6 May 1753 at All Saints church, West Ham, the daughter of Charles and Sarah Raymond. Her father was making a name for himself in the City of London as a manager of ships sailing for the East India Company, having served as a captain for four voyages to India himself. Her mother was the eldest daughter of John Webster of Bromley, Kent, a wealthy man who died when she was still young leaving her heir to one fifth of his estate. When Sophia was about eighteen months old her father purchased Valentine House in Ilford, Essex, which is now owned by the London Borough of Redbridge see <http://valentinesmansion.com/>

Valentines, and the house in the City where her father had his offices, were Sophia's home until she married. At least three infants had been born to Sarah Raymond and died young, before Sophia was born. However, the move to Valentines must have seemed like a happy omen as she and her two younger sisters all grew up to marry, although the youngest died in 1783, aged 27.

Valentine House was a modest villa built about 150 years earlier, but it was renovated and extended by Charles Raymond so that in 1771 it was described as "This building is one of the neatest, and best adapted of its size, of any modern one in the county; its ornaments are well chosen, and the grounds belonging to it laid out with great judgement and taste."<sup>1</sup> From Sun Fire insurance documents it can be seen that Charles Raymond invested in paintings and glassware and he also possessed fine porcelain dinner and tea services with his coat of arms, especially made for the family in China. Sophia and her sisters grew up in a

home oozing prosperity and in 1771 her father started another successful career as a banker.<sup>2</sup>

On 13 April 1773, just after her twentieth birthday, Sophia married William Burrell at St Martins in the Fields, Westminster. He was the son of her father's cousin Amy Raymond who had married Peter Burrell of Kelsey and of Langley Park, Beckenham, Kent. Amy had her own fortune from her father's involvement with the East India Company while the Burrell family were wealthy from trade with Portugal.<sup>3</sup> William Burrell was over twice the age of his wife, a learned man of the legal profession who had been elected MP for Haslemere in March 1768. He had been elected a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1754 and by 1773 he had started working on a history of Sussex. Soon after their marriage William resigned his legal and parliamentary posts and became a commissioner of excise. He also became a director of the South Sea Company and the Sun Fire Office, where he took the place of his father-in-law. When Charles Raymond was created a baronet in May 1774 it was clear he would have no sons, so William Burrell was named to inherit the title.

William purchased 71 Harley Street, Marylebone, for their first home and Sophia had five sons and two daughters although two of the sons died as infants. When Charles Raymond died on 24 August 1788 Sophia inherited a vast fortune which was shared with her surviving sister. She acquired Knepp Castle in Sussex which is still in the Burrell family and where her portrait still hangs. This shows her to be an attractive woman and confirms a newspaper description of her in 1787 as 'the beautiful daughter of Sir Charles Raymond'.<sup>4</sup>

A year before his father-in-law died William suffered a stroke, so in 1791 he and Sophia retired to The Deepdene in Dorking, Surrey, where one of their

neighbours was Sophia's old friend, Eliza de Feuillide, cousin of Jane Austen.<sup>5</sup> Sir William Burrell died at The Deepdene on 20 January 1796.<sup>6</sup>

Sophia published two volumes of her poetry anonymously in 1793, twenty years after her marriage. The poems show her to be a witty observer of her times, when Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire was the queen of high society. Sophia dedicated three of her poems to Eliza de Feuillide in 1786, 1790 and in 1796 when she compares the merits of a soldier and a clergyman as a husband. The following year, on 23 May 1797, Sophia re-married and her choice was a Church of England clergyman, William Clay. Her comments that a parson's income could not support a growing family did not bother her! Eliza married her cousin, Jane's brother Henry Austen, at the end of that year.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from her anonymous poetry, Lady Sophia Burrell published the *Thymriad* from Xenophon and *Telemachus* the following year, under her own name. In 1797 she published her only novel, *Adeline de Courcey*, again anonymously, and three years later Sophia published two tragedies.

Sophia and her husband William Clay retired to West Cowes on the Isle of Wight where she died on 20 June 1802, aged 49.<sup>8</sup>

## Published works

Poems (1793)

The Thymbriad, from Xenophon's Cyropoedia (sic) A poem (1794)

Telemachus. A poem based on the work of Fénelon (1794)

Adeline de Courcey (1797)

Maximian: a tragedy: taken from Thomas Corneille (1800)

Theodora: or, the Spanish Daughter: a tragedy in five acts, and in verse (1800)

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<sup>1</sup> P.Muilman, *A New and Complete History of Essex by a Gentleman*, Vol.IV, (Chelmsford, 1771), pp.276-279.

<sup>2</sup> Georgina Green *Sir Charles Raymond of Valentines and the East India Company* (2015) has full references for material relating to Sophia, her father and sisters and her childhood home.

<sup>3</sup> John H. Farrant *The Family Circle and Career of William Burrell, Antiquary in Sussex Archaeological Collections* 139 (2001) pp.1-17.

<sup>4</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London) Saturday 1 December 1787

<sup>5</sup> Deirdre Le Faye *Jane Austen's 'Outlandish Cousin' The Life and Letters of Eliza de Feuillide* (British Library, 2002) pp.73, 99, 157

<sup>6</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, entry for Sir William Burrell.

<sup>7</sup> Deirdre Le Faye *Jane Austen's 'Outlandish Cousin' The Life and Letters of Eliza de Feuillide* (British Library, 2002) pp.73-4, 99, 130

<sup>8</sup> Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, entry for Lady Sophia Burrell.