

## GUIDE TO THE CHINNERY FAMILY COLLECTION

### DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

<b>Title:</b>	Chinnery Family papers
<b>Collection dates:</b>	1779-1852
<b>Creator:</b>	Denise Yim
<b>Languages represented:</b>	English, French
<b>Repository:</b>	Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Sydney Library <a href="https://library.sydney.edu.au/collections/rare-books/">https://library.sydney.edu.au/collections/rare-books/</a>
<b>Extent:</b>	2 boxes
<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>The Chinnery Family Papers is a collection of manuscript material relating to an English family who had a wide circle of acquaintance in France. The husband, William Bassett Chinnery (1766-1827), was a Chief Clerk in the British Treasury, and achieved some notoriety in his time for his massive embezzlement of Treasury funds (some £80,000). His wife, Margaret Chinnery (1766?-1840), an intelligent and ambitious woman, educated her own children, twins George Robert Chinnery (1791-1825) and Caroline Chinnery (1791-1812), and a son who died young, Walter Chinnery (1793-1802).</p> <p>The collection also includes the papers of the famous eighteenth century Italian violinist Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755-1824), who lived as a member of the Chinnery household from c.1795 to the end of his life, and the papers of William Robert Spencer (1769-1834), minor poet, who stayed intermittently in the Chinnery home.</p> <p>Although the family is little known today, the papers (mainly correspondence) are of significant interest to musicologists, education historians and general historians of Britain and France of the above period. The Chinnerys had some famous correspondents. Of particular mention are the letters of Viotti (by far the largest number ever found), the hitherto unknown letters (about 35) of the French writer and educationalist Madame de Genlis (1746-1830), as</p>

well as some letters of the British statesman George Canning (1770-1827) and of other members of his family. There is also a significant number of letters from the son of George III, Adolphus Frederick, Duke of Cambridge. Of interest to art historians are three letters of the famous French portraitist Madame Vigee-Lebrun. Along with these are many miscellaneous letters from British politicians, civil servants, antiquaries, musicians, writers, diplomats, and members of Oxford University; and from French musicians, aristocratic emigres, members of Government and diplomats, as well as letters from or concerning many other Continental musicians and diplomats.

- Denise Lim

## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

### **Provenance**

This collection of Chinnery Family papers is part of the same Chinnery Family Papers collection that is to be found at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, and at Christ Church College Library, Oxford. It was discovered by Denise Yim in the possession of Frost and Reed, Fine Art Dealers, in London in September 1996, and was purchased by Fisher Library in early 1997. There are also some smaller collections of Chinnery Family papers at the Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, George Chinnery's Travel Journal at the British Library, and some estrays among the Vietti Papers at the Royal College of Music Library, London.

NB: Microfilm copies of the Christ Church collection, the Yale collection and the British Library travel journal are in Fisher Library.

Frost and Reed originally purchased the present collection at a Sotheby auction on 19 February 1963. It was part of the estate of the late Richard Bentley.

The whole collection of Chinnery Family papers had been kept together by Margaret Chinnery until her death in 1840. It was apparently still in the possession of a family descendant (Algernon Greene) in 1885, according to some documentation which is included in the Vietti Papers at the Royal College of Music. How this part of the collection came into the possession of Richard Bentley is not known.

Item #51 was purchased using the Lundie fund in January 2008. Vendor - David Schulson Autographs, Milburn, New Jersey, USA.

### **Access**

Rare Books and Special Collections is a closed access collection located on Level 1 of Fisher Library. Please make an appointment to use material from Rare Books and Special Collections using the online request form at

<https://library.sydney.edu.au/collections/rare-books/request-form.html>

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### **Preferred citation**

Chinnery Family papers, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Sydney Library.

### **Biographical notes**

Provided by Denise Lim

#### William Bassett Chinnery (1766-1827)

William Bassett Chinnery was born in London, son of William Chinnery Junior, "Madras Merchant" and Elizabeth Bassett. On 21 October 1790 he married Margaret Tresilian, and they lived firstly at 5 Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square, London, then at Gillwell House at Waltham Abbey, Essex, the property that had been settled on his wife on her marriage. Chinnery became a Chief Clerk in the British Treasury in 1799 and also was agent for the Bahamas, for New South Wales and other colonies. In March 1812 he was found guilty of defrauding the Government of £77,000 and dismissed from his post. All his property and effects were subsequently sold up to repay (partly) his debt to the Government.

William fled to Gothenburg, Sweden (1812-1814) and after the Restoration to France, where he remained for the rest of his life. In France he resided first at Calais (1814-1816), and then at Le Havre (1816-1823) where he had a trading business (Cary & Co.) in wine, sugar, coffee and tea which ultimately failed in 1823. He then rejoined his wife in Paris, where he lived until his death.

### Margaret Chinnery (1765?-1840)

Margaret Chinnery was the eldest daughter of Leonard Tresilian of Bromton, Middlesex. She was a highly accomplished woman of society (a talented musician and linguist) who educated her children using the rigorous schedules and strict discipline of her mentor Madame de Genlis. Margaret had become a devotee of the writings of Madame de Genlis at the age of sixteen, and commenced a correspondence with the famous writer in Paris in August 1802, when the Chinnery family and Vietti had made a three-month visit to that city.

Margaret was a prominent London society figure, counting among her friends members of the royal family (especially the Duke of Cambridge) and other aristocratic identities, including many writers, poets, musicians, artists and foreign diplomats. After William's flight from England she resided with the violinist Giovanni Battista Vietti, who had been a de facto family member since c.1795. She first rented a house at 10 Charles Street, London (1812-1817) then purchased (1817) a property at 17 Montagu Street, Portman Square, where she resumed her lavish entertaining. The property was eventually sold in 1822. Margaret and Vietti spent the autumn of each year in France visiting William Chinnery and Margaret purchased a property at Chatillon outside Paris in c.1819 when Vietti was appointed Director of the Paris Opera. Here they also entertained members of French society and musician friends. Madame Vigee-Lebrun was a frequent guest.

After Viotti's death in March 1824 Margaret lived in Paris with her husband, having sold her Chatillon home in 1825. She died in Paris in 1840.

### Caroline Chinnery (1791-1812)

Caroline Chinnery was the daughter of William and Margaret Chinnery, twin sister of George and sister of Walter (died 1802). She was educated at home by her mother, and was taught music by her mother, by Vietti, and also tutored by some of Viotti's famous colleagues. She was an accomplished pianist, harpist and singer, often performing in society, sometimes for royalty. (The Prince of Wales invited her frequently to the Pavilion in Brighton in the autumn of 1811, and she sang regularly with the Duke of Cambridge at Gillwell.) She had a very close relationship with the society poet William Robert Spencer, who was her tutor in classics and who taught her versification. The latter was a frequent guest at Gillwell. The two exchanged letters and verses in which he referred to her as his niece. Caroline caught whooping cough in April 1811, and never fully recovered. She died five months after her season in Brighton on 3 April 1812 at the age of 20, probably of miliary tuberculosis.

### George Chinnery ( 1791-1825)

George Chinnery was the son of William and Margaret Chinnery, twin brother of Caroline and brother of Walter. Educated at home by his mother and private tutors until the age of sixteen, he was then sent to Christ Church College, Oxford, where he had a distinguished career ( 1808-1811 ), graduating with first class honours in mathematics and third class honours in classics. In 1809 he was awarded a prestigious Christ Church Studentship, and the following year won the Newdigate Prize for Poetry. He

was also accorded the honour of reciting encaenia verses in 1810 at the Installation of the new Oxford Chancellor. He left Oxford with a high reputation as a gentleman and scholar and as a firm friend of the Dean of Christ Church, Charles Henry Hall, with whom he kept in touch. An accomplished linguist, George had a good command of eight languages, including Greek and Latin, and also took a lifelong interest in fine arts and letters. His attempts to begin a diplomatic career being unsuccessful, he entered the British Treasury as a clerk in 1812. In 1814 he was seconded from the ranks of the Treasury to be made bursar in the suite of Louis XVIII when the latter made his historic journey to France on the Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. In 1814 also, through the introduction of Charles Hall, he became the protege of the statesman George Canning, and accompanied the latter to Portugal in 1815, to Paris in 1816, and on long tours of the Continent in 1819 and 1820. In 1823 Canning appointed George Chinnery his deputy assistant private secretary and took him into the Foreign Office, in 1824 sending him as British Commissioner of Claims to Madrid where he remained until his death in October 1825.

#### Walter Chinnery (1793-1802)

Walter Chinnery, the youngest child of William and Margaret Chinnery, was born on 22 April 1793 and died nine years later in London. Like the other Chinnery children, Walter was educated at home by Margaret and Viotti. He began his classical studies with a private tutor at the age of eight and his linguistic skills were exceptional, as he was more often in the care of Viotti than the other children. He spoke fluent French and Italian. In 1802 he accompanied his family to Paris to meet Madame de Genlis but died of typhoid fever shortly after his return from that city in November 1802.

#### **Scope and content note**

Correspondence, financial record, official documents, journal.

#### **Local Catalogue Headings**

Chinnery family

Chinnery, George Robert

Chinnery, Caroline

Chinnery, Margaret, 1764-1840

Viotti, Giovanni Battista, 1755-1824

Genlis, Stéphanie Félicité, comtesse de, 1746-1830

**DESCRIPTION OF SERIES****Box 1**

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William Chinnery

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Caroline Chinnery

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Giovanni Battista Vietti

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50	Sotheby auction notes [photocopy] for estate of the late Richard Bentley. 19 February 1963.	

Additional purchase

51	Autograph letter signed by Stéphanie Félicité Genlis, in French, Essex, England. 8 August 1810.	
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\*Page numbers refer to the *Guide to the papers of the Chinnery Family in the Fisher Library (Rare Books) University of Sydney*.