

Esther Jane Gayton (1791-1875)

Please note: this information has been researched and compiled by Katie Howson, and any use of this should be acknowledged and credited to me.

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Katie Howson, 16th August 2021

☞ *Stage performances are listed separately. Items in bold are major life events.*

- 1769 Esther's future husband, William Murray was born. He was baptised in 1772. His father had died on 21st Sept 1771. His parents were Robert Murray and Susan(na) Renton (b Berwick-on-Tweed). Susan was his father's second wife, first was Janet (also Murray).
- 1790 Esther's parents were married in London: Martha Gore and George Gayton, probably Christ Church, Newgate St, opposite St Paul's.
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1791 Esther Jane Gayton born, daughter of George and Martha Gayton. Baptised on 30th May, parents address given as Charles Street. Baptised at St Andrew, Holborn.

1793 Future husband William Murray ordained as deacon (April) and then priest (December)

1795 Birth of brother George, 9th January - George and Martha, baptised 28th January, St James, Islington (must have died in infancy, as another son born in 1804 also named George)

Future husband William Murray takes up first post as Vicar of Bishop's Lavington, Wiltshire

1797 Birth of sister Ann, 11th May - George and Martha, baptised 10th August, St James, Islington

1800 Birth of sister Martha, 1st January- George and Martha, baptised 30th March, St James, Islington

1801 Land tax shows George Gayton renting a house in Clark's Place, St Mary, Islington £1.4s ...

1802 Birth of sister Sarah, 2nd June - George and Martha, baptised 27th June 1802, St James, Islington;

Future husband takes up position as rector of Lofthouse, Yorkshire, (patron George III)

1803 Sister Sarah died 16th March 1803 (St James), aged 9 months

13th April: first stage performance at Sadler's Wells – a skipping rope hornpipe. The pupil of Mr Jackson, late of Covent Garden theatre.

☞ *See separate document about Esther's stage performances 1803-1809.*

1804 Birth of brother George, 29th January - George and Martha, baptised 26th February, St James, Islington

1806 Birth of sister Mary, 17th June – George and Martha, baptised 28th May, St James, Islington

1808 Taken on as a salaried dancer in James D'Egville's ballet company performing at the Theatre Royal and King's Theatre in central London.

1809 Land tax shows George Gayton renting a house at £62 per annum from the “executors of Halliday” in St Andrew & St George parish, which is Queen Square area.

A brief article about Esther and her mentor James Harvey D’Egville in *The Monthly Mirror*, February 1809 included an engraving of a portrait of Esther, drawn by Adam Buck and engraved by T.B. Freeman and published by Vernor, Hood and Sharpe.

“Young Miss Gayton quits the stage next week, and is to be married to a well-beneficed clergyman who has been her constant admirer at the opera.” (Morning Chronicle, 9.3.1809)

“MISS GAYTON, of Operatical celebrity, married yesterday to a Clergyman with a fortune and preferment, and estate of 2000l. per annum, is the daughter of a hair-dresser at Islington.” (London Star, 13.3.1809)

“A singular connection has taken place between the STAGE and the PULPIT: Miss GAYTON, the pretty little dancer, was married on Sunday to a Clergyman of 2000L a year, besides desirable prospects.” (Morning Advertiser 14th March)

Morning Post - Friday 17 March 1809: “We are authorised to say, that the marriage between Miss GAYTON and Mr MURRAY, brother to Sir JAMES PULTENEY, stated to have been celebrated on Sunday last, has not yet taken place.”

18th March, married Rev William Murray in St George the Martyr, Queen Square, Holborn – Esther “of this parish”. William’s address given as St George’s Hanover Square (Mayfair). Esther was a minor (aged 18) – her father’s consent is on the marriage record. Her mother gave birth to a son just a few days later, so may well not have attended the marriage ceremony.

Hampshire Chronicle, 20th March 1809, (more-or-less as the London Star above), plus an additional sentence: “The elegant MISS GAYTON, of Operatical celebrity, who was married yesterday to a Clergyman with a fortune and preferment, and estate of 2000l. per annum, is the daughter of a hair-dresser at Islington. Her conduct has been irreproachable, both in her professional and private life.”

The marriage was described as “a mighty foolish business” by William’s brother, Sir James Pulteney Murray writing to Sir Charles Hastings on 30th May 1809, “but being, as you say, done, it is useless to think more about it.” – mentioned in “Letters from America 1773-1780” by Sir James Pulteney.

Birth of brother William, 29th March – George and Martha, baptised 14th May, St George, Queen Square

1810 Morning Post, on 29th December 1810, announced “As a variety of reports are still in circulation respecting the marriage of MISS GAYTON, late of the Opera House with the REV. WILLIAM MURRAY, brother to the Right Hon. Sir JAMES PULTENEY, BART. We are authorised to state, that the marriage took place upon Saturday, the 18th day of March 1809, at St George the Martyr’s, Queen-square, and that the ceremony was performed by the Rev JOHN MARTYN, rector of the said parish, in the presence of her father and two friends.”

1811 William’s half-brother Sir James Pulteney Murray died (26th April, Buckenham, Norfolk). His wife had died before him and they had no children. James was 7th Baronet of Clarendon, Fifeshire. His half-brother John then inherited the title. The Suffolk Chronicle (4.5.1811)

describes the manner of James' death – an accident whilst inventing a new design of gun – and the inheritance arrangements - £200,000 to Rev William Murray “who some time ago married Miss Gayton the dancer.”

1812 “This was an action brought by a Bricklayer, against the father of Miss Gayton, late of the Opera Ballet, and now the wife of the Rev. Mr. Murray, who when he took the daughter off the stage placed the father upon it, establishing him in business as the proprietor driver of an Edmonton stage coach, running four horses ...” (Kentish Weekly Post or Canterbury Journal - Tuesday 07 July 1812)

1813 Esther & William's first son James Pulteney baptised, 13th April – Daventry, Northants, Wm Murray given as Rector of Lofthouse, Yorkshire.

1815 Son Robert born, 1st February

1816 Son Arthur born (n.d.)

1817 Son John born, 16th Nov (bap 28th Sept 1825- this and all following baptisms at St Mary Woolnoth Church, London, near the Bank of England.)

1819 Daughter Sophia born, 26th Jan (bap 28th Sept 1825)

1820 Son William born, 25th May (bap 28th Sept 1825)

1821 Daughter Madeleine born, 29th July (bap 28th Sept 1825)

On 31st December, their young son James accidentally shot dead Esther's 16 year old sister, Mary. 22, Charles St, Berkeley Square

1824 Son Horace born, 28th September (bap 28th Sept 1825)

1826 Daughter Esther Jane born, 6th January (bap 13th June 1827)

1826 22 Charles St (a five storey house in Mayfair) has a plaque saying HRH Duke of Clarence (later King William IV 1830-1837) lived there in 1826.

1827 William wrote his will – signed on 23rd July. On the very same day, the following was published in the Stamford Mercury in an article defending the morals of the Duchess of St Albans (formerly Miss Mellon, actress): “The following are among other similar instances of the success in life of British actresses [...] Lady Murray (late Miss Gayton) ...

William inherited title of Baronet of Hillshead after his brother John died on 15th October 1827. (His mother Susan died on 12th December 1827 too.)

1839 Son Robert married at St George's. His father Rev Sir William Murray (“of Hillhead”) officiated. Robert's address given as Bond St.

1841 Esther not found in census.

William Murray, clergyman, found in Cadogan Place, Belgravia, aged 70, with Madeline (both born Scotland, no relationship specified) aged 65 and children aged 25-15: this seems likely to be “our” William and his sister Madeline and some of the children, including Susan Murray, who would be Robert's wife (m.1839).

1842 William Murray died, 14th May at Halkin Street, Grosvenor Place, London. His will was proved on 24th September. **There is no mention anywhere of Esther.**

- 1843 Son James Pulteney died, 22nd Feb, aged 29, unmarried.
- 1846 Daughter Madeline married to Charles Roderick MacKenzie, Esq. St George's Hanover Sq, March 28th, by licence.
- Daughter Sophia married, James Edward Jerningham Esq., St George's Hanover Sq, 19th May, by licence.
- 1848 22nd Aug, Daughter Sophia died.
- 1851 Esther Murray, aged 60, visitor in a boarding house in Marylebone, but described as born in Scotland. The woman on the line above her (Jemima Catherine Varenne) is the widow of a clergyman (also with married daughters), and the whole establishment is clearly very well-to-do. This seems fairly likely to be "our" Esther".
- 1852 6th May, Son Horace died, Andhra Pradesh, India
- 1853 Daughter Esther Jane married at St George's, Hanover Sq, 29th January.

1861 Not found in census.

- 1871 Esther Murray, aged 80, visiting Jane Nicoll (aged 60) in Elgin Crescent, Notting Hill. They seem to be at no. 52, which is in multiple occupancy. Jane Nicoll was the daughter of a clergyman.

Esther seems to have lived on at the same Elgin Crescent address after Jane's death in May 1874 until her own death in February 1875.

1875 Lady Esther Jane Murray died, Elgin Crescent, Notting Hill, 6th February

The death certificate confirms Esther's address as 52 Elgin Crescent. The cause of death was given as paralysis (7 days) and present at the death was Rosa Thornbury, who was listed as Esther's servant on the 1871 census. The certifying doctor was given as C. R. Nicoll who is very likely to be Jane Nicoll's brother, John Charles Thomas Nicoll, a surgeon living in nearby Shepherd's Bush at this time.

The cemetery record (Kensal Green) shows she is buried in the same plot as her son-in-law John DeMonte Arbuthnot (married to her daughter Esther Jane) and grandson Horace Arbuthnot.

Her death occasioned only a couple of short notices:

"MURRAY —6th inst., at 52, Elgin-crescent, Notting-hill, Esther Jane, Lady Murray, relict of the Rev. Sir William Murray, Bart., of Hillshead, N. B., aged 83." - (Sun (London) - Thursday 11 February 1875)

Online family histories do not mention her dancing career.