

Marriage of Sir Stafford Raffles with Sophia Hull at St Marylebone Parish Church 22 February 1817, *one of the very first marriages to be solemnised in the still unfinished new parish church*

Sophia Hull* travelled from Cheltenham to London sometime in the New Year of 1817, and Travers recorded that both he and Ramsay knew, 'long before' the event, that she and Raffles were to be married. On 4 December, in an emotional letter to Maryanne, 'my dear little Puss', Sophia had confessed that 'it is the charm of my existence to cherish those I *do* love with all my heart and soul, but I am too humble to expect the same in return unless I would deserve it.' Her letter collapses into vague haverings about the ways it is possible 'to love a husband.' Sophia had already met Raffles' mother, in Cheltenham. This was rapid but not a runaway romance.

Raffles gave to Sophia as an engagement, an oval gold box decorated with whorls of repoussé filigree, and the initials 'SR to SH' engraved on the bottom. On 20 February he and Travers escorted the two famously pretty daughters of Sir Everard Home to the Queen's Drawing-Room, and on 22 February he married Sophia. He slipped out of the house before breakfast, taking neither Travers nor Ramsay with him. Sir Thomas Sevestre, living in the house, knew nothing about it.

The marriage was solemnised at the still unfinished **St Marylebone Parish Church**, ten minutes' walk from Berners Street. The witnesses were not recorded. Big weddings were not in the culture for people like Raffles and the Hulls. There could, too, be personal reasons why Raffles did not make a celebration of the occasion. Olivia had been a great love, to whom he now had to say goodbye. Marrying Sophia Hull was not something that would greatly interest in his new London acquaintances. He had a fully diary, and a book to get through the press. His marriage was a private matter.

The new couple went off for two nights' honeymoon to Henley-on-Thames – no doubt to the famous Red Lion Inn, where the great Duke of Marlborough had furnished a room for himself, left untouched since his death, to break the journey between London and Blenheim Palace. Boswell and Johnson had stayed at the Red Lion, and it was frequented by royalty.

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*Sophia Hull (b. 5 May 1786, London - d. 12 December 1858) became Raffles' second wife on 22 February 1817. She bore him five children and is famed for penning his biography the Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles which brought recognition to Raffles' accomplishments.

Early life

Sophia was of Irish descent, taking her name after her mother, Sophia Hull. She was the second of 15 children, the eldest of eight daughters. Her parents had married in Bombay where her father, James Hull, had worked as a writer for the East India Company.

Marriage to Raffles

Sophia met Raffles in Cheltenham in August 1816 where she was living with her mother. She was a family friend, particularly close to Mary Anne, Raffles' favourite sister. They were married within six months of their acquaintance on 22 February 1817 in Marylebone Parish Church, London, a quiet affair that had been

kept a secret from even Raffles' close friends. Sophia was then 30, rather beyond the marriageable age and Raffles, at 36 was a widower for slightly more than two years. He was still recovering from the loss of his wife and the recent death of his mentor, Lord Minto. However, Raffles was at his peak in both his career and his vision for the East when they married. Within two months of the wedding, Raffles was knighted by the Prince Regent and by October, they both had set sail for Bencoolen onboard the Lady Raffles.

Accomplishments

Hull bore him five children overseas. All save but one died tragically from illnesses in Bencoolen before they returned to England. She lost Raffles a mere nine years into their marriage and was thereafter strapped with debts imposed by the East India Company. Added to this was the death of her last surviving child, Ella, on the eve of this daughter's marriage which would also have been her 19th birthday.

Her indomitable spirit, however, proved the day for Sophia. She vowed that her husband have a biography written within several weeks after his death. With little literary experience and limited knowledge of Raffles early life and accomplishments, she penned his life story from his personal letters and notations, capturing his work between 1805 to 1816. In the tradition of her day, she took liberties in deleting and adding on to Raffles' original writings. But her biography, *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles*, remains the standard biography of Raffles because of the sheer weight of original materials used.

The first edition under the title *Memoir of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles* was published in 1830 and a total of 1,500 copies were printed and sold at a cost of 2 pounds 12s. 6 d. The publishers were John Murray, noted for publishing works of such authors as Byron, Moore and Jane Austen. However, she changed publishers to James Duncan for the second edition which was published in July 1835, in two volumes, selling at the cost of 1 pound 4s 0d.

Family

Father: James Watson Hull (*b. 11 July 1758 - d. 1831*).

Mother: Sophia Hull nee Hollamby (*b. 5 September 1762 - d. 10 March 1836, Cheltenham*).



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