

## CLIVE, HENRIETTA ANTONIA (1758 - 1830), traveller and scientific collector

**Name:** Henrietta Antonia Clive  
**Date of birth:** 1758  
**Date of death:** 1830  
**Spouse:** Edward Clive  
**Child:** Robert Henry Clive  
**Child:** Charlotte Florentia (née Clive)  
**Child:** Henrietta Antonia Wynn (née Clive)  
**Child:** Edward Herbert Clive  
**Parent:** Barbara Antonia Herbert (née Herbert)  
**Parent:** Henry Arthur Herbert  
**Gender:** Female  
**Occupation:** traveller and scientific collector  
**Area of activity:** Travel and Exploration; Science and Mathematics  
**Author:** Paul Frame

Lady Henrietta Clive (née Herbert) was the daughter of [Henry Arthur Herbert \(Herbert\)](#), first earl of Powis (second creation) and his wife Barbara Herbert (née Herbert, 1735-1786). Henrietta was born on 3 September 1758 at her father's principal residence Oakley Park, at Bromfield, near Ludlow in Shropshire. The only sibling who reached maturity was her elder brother [George Edward Henry Arthur Herbert](#) (1755-1801). Little is known of her early upbringing. By 1771, when she was 13, her father had run into financial difficulties and he sold Oakley Park to the wealthy and famous colonial soldier Robert Clive (1725-1774), first Baron Clive of Plassey, better known today as 'Clive of India'. In the following year (1772) Henrietta's father died and her beloved brother [George](#) became second Earl of Powis. In 1774, 'Clive of India' also died and his eldest son, Edward Clive (1754-1839), became second Baron Clive of Plassey. Prior to his death, Henrietta's father had discussed with Robert Clive the possibility of marriage between Henrietta and Edward. A wedding eventually took place in London on 7 May 1784 with Henrietta becoming Baroness Clive of Plassey, further consolidating her family connection to the wealth Robert Clive had brought back from India, much of it looted in the course of his military career. Henrietta and Edward had four children. Edward Herbert Clive (1785-1848), the eldest, was followed by Henrietta Antonia Clive (1786-1835). Known in the family as 'Harry' she became a proficient harpist and later married [Sir Watkin Williams Wynn](#) (1772-1840). Another daughter, Charlotte Florentia Clive (1787-1866) known as 'Charly', was born in Florence and later became governess to Queen Victoria. Finally there arrived another son, Robert Henry Clive (1789-1854).

In 1801 Henrietta's unmarried brother George Herbert died leaving substantial debts. Although these were reduced by selling off outlying lands of the Powis estate Henrietta did not receive the £500 a quarter bequest George had made for her in his will. Powis Castle he left to Henrietta's eldest son, Edward, on condition he took the name and arms of Herbert in place of Clive. Edward did so by Royal Licence on 9 March 1807. On 21 November 1804 the Powis title, which had died with George Herbert, was recreated for Henrietta's husband Edward who became Earl of Powis (third creation) with Henrietta as Countess.

Today Henrietta's character can only be gauged from her surviving writing and a Joshua Reynolds portrait painted when she was nineteen. In the painting her oval face is fashionably pale, though tinged with rouge, her gaze is open, bold and questioning and her mouth suggestive of determination. These are all traits reflected in her letters and the journal she kept during a journey in India.

Travel played an important part in Henrietta Clive's life, not only for pleasure but also in developing her broader curiosity and her interest in natural philosophy. In late 1786 she and her husband made an extended stay in Europe and their second daughter, Charlotte Florentia, would be born in Florence in 1787. In a likely reflection of her interest in scientific ideas and a willingness to adopt them Henrietta had her baby daughter inoculated against smallpox while in Rome in March 1788. In 1797 her husband Edward was appointed Governor of Madras [Chennai] by the East India Company and on 2 April 1798 Henrietta, her husband, their two daughters (the boys were left at home) and the girls' governess, the Italian artist Anna Tonelli, sailed for India. During a stopover in South Africa a contemporary described her as having a mind open to 'pleasure from everything', a willingness to please whenever possible and a manner 'incapable of offending.' In private, however, and in keeping with the bold questioning nature seen in her portrait, Henrietta did not refrain from feisty even severe judgments on some of her acquaintance. The British society at Chennai she found 'not much enlightened' and the visiting Lord Mornington, Governor General of India, 'extremely pompous' whose authority, when directed at Henrietta, disturbed what she called her 'Welsh Spirit.' Finding little in Chennai but 'business and solitude' Henrietta had a room built in her garden as a form of 'laboratory for all sorts of odd rocks and works' while also learning useful languages. Before her earlier visit to Italy she had learned to read and speak Italian and once in India she began learning Persian (the language of the princely courts) and 'Hindustani', becoming adept enough in the former to attempt a translation of lines by the fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafez or Hafiz (his work was first translated into English by [William Jones](#) in 1771). Such preparations reveal her as someone with a desire to learn about rather than simply observe the country through which she travelled; a traveller rather than a tourist, though one who often expressed disappointment that India did not live up to European Orientalist fantasies, and who had agreed to reside there no matter 'how much I may dislike the country'.

In 1800 she found herself able to travel more widely in India than before, the East India Company in 1799 having defeated and killed Tipū Sultān, ruler of the Indian state of Mysore [Mysuru], with whom they had fought several wars. Without her husband but accompanied by her two young daughters, their artist/governess Anna Tonelli, and a company of over seven hundred and fifty, including a body-guard, Henrietta made a thousand mile journey through southern India beyond British held territory. She started from 'Madras' [Chennai] on 4 March moving inland to 'Vellore' [Velur], 'Bangalore' [Bengaluru], 'Mysore' [Mysuru], 'Coimbatooor' [Coimbatore/Kovai] and returning via 'Trichinopoly' [Tiruchirappalli] and 'Tanjore' [Thanjavur]. She reached the east coast again south of Chennai at 'Tranquebar' [Tharangambadi] on 29 September before travelling north to 'Pondicherry' [Puducherry] finally reaching Chennai again on 17 October. The journal kept on her journey together with related letters were edited and published in 2009; they are one of the earliest written accounts of India by a British woman. Henrietta made observations on landscape, wildlife, plants and minerals, art, religion, and culture, though the context of travelling through recently conquered territories was rarely far from the surface. She occasionally took on a quasi-diplomatic function, giving and receiving messages on behalf of her husband the governor, and traces of colonial warfare remained obvious in her surroundings. At the recently besieged and ransacked 'Serिंगapatam' [Srirangapatna], for instance, she passed by 'the gate where Tipu was killed. It was low and there were still many marks of blood on the walls. Bodies were so heaped above and below that all passage was impossible'. Henrietta had benefitted directly from this imperial slaughter; before leaving on her journey, she had been gifted 'one of the jewelled tygers' from Tipū Sultān's throne.

As a curious colonial traveller with a clear interest in the developing field of what was then called natural philosophy, and which we today term science, Henrietta was a keen collector. 'I ramble about all day hunting for plants' she noted at Cape Station in South Africa on her outward journey to India. In developing her interests and collections she corresponded and talked with others in various fields. They included a 'boor' she had met at Cape Town, otherwise known as Dr William Roxburgh, superintendent of the botanic garden established by the East India Company near Calcutta [Kolkata], and Dr Benjamin Heyne of the botanic garden in Chennai. She also bought and exchanged minerals with collectors and dealers of the time such as James Sowerby and the Countess of Aylesford. With an emphasis on botanical and mineral collecting, as well as birds and insects, Henrietta had many examples sent home to Wales. Some remain at Powis Castle and what remains of her one thousand specimen mineral collection, 'arranged systematically by chemistry' and recorded in two handwritten catalogues, is now housed in the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff where it forms one of its most important historic collections.

As a collector and catalogue Henrietta was not a leader in scientific endeavour but collections and the ideas that developed from their availability are crucial to the development of science. She also has importance as a woman undertaking a pursuit otherwise dominated by men, a situation she was not unaware of as she informed her husband: 'If you want collectors or collectoresses I think I should like to extremely... and grab over strange countries, particularly near Hyderabad. I should delight in it above all things. It is hard that we poor females are not to get anything in this Asiatic world.'

Henrietta died at Walcott, the Clive family estate, aged 72 on 3 June 1830 and was buried at Bromfield, despite her wish to be buried in the family vault in Welshpool.

### Authors

Paul Frame

## Sources

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## Images

Joshua Reynolds, [Lady Henrietta Antonia Herbert \(1758-1830\), Countess of Powis](#), painted 1777-1778, held at Powis Castle; can be seen at ArtUK website

## Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [Henrietta Clive, Countess of Powis](#)

## Additional Links

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