

MYSTERIES SURROUNDING FRYDERYK CHOPIN

– a talk given at POSK 19th October 2024

Fryderyk Chopin – one of the world’s most famous composers – was the greatest artist of any sort to come out of Poland, where he enjoys an iconic status similar to that of Shakespeare in Britain.

These two figures represent their countries in a profound and unmistakable way, bound up with the traditions and history of the past and leading positively into the future. But whereas Shakespeare was writing at a time when England was growing in confidence and power, Chopin was composing just when his country was in disarray, with its very nationhood in question.

Also, no one is absolutely sure who Shakespeare was, he is an almost unknown figure, and some say that the plays were written by several different people.

Chopin’s life, on the other hand is well-known and documented. He was socially active from childhood, mixing with the leading artists of his day, as well as royalty and the grandest families of Poland, France and Britain.

Yet the Chopin family were secretive and reticent, which was not surprising as they were living under the yoke of Russian rule where secrecy was a necessity, and plots and conspiracies were constantly being planned.

From Chopin’s death onwards, many books on his life were published, some romantic and fanciful and some scholarly – as far as that was possible when Chopin scholarship was not especially advanced. As more and more has become known – largely because more and more letters have come to light – the books have become better, but there are still several important areas of speculation. Which is why I am giving this talk.

I am not a scholar or a Chopinist, but have simply run the Chopin Society UK for a very long time and therefore have read a lot about Chopin along the way. I am also familiar with his music, having often performed it. Not being a scholar gives me a much freer rein to discuss things that are obscure or unprovable but non-the-less of interest. Many of my conclusions indeed come down to day-to-day common sense.

The first mystery to be addressed concerns Chopin’s parents and their backgrounds.

It is sometimes mentioned that Chopin’s father, Nicolas, used to tell people that he was the son of a Polish nobleman, one version of this being that a Polish nobleman went to live in France and took the name Chopin.

The fact is that Nicolas was born in the village of Murainville in the Lorraine region of France in 1771. His father (Chopin’s grandfather), François, was of peasant stock, a wheelwright and vineyard owner, who besides Nicolas also had two daughters.

When King Stanislas Leszinski of Poland was deposed in 1735, his father-in-law, Louis XV, made him Duke of Lorraine and Bar, an area which he divided up and distributed to Polish nobles of his entourage. Subsequently more Poles came and settled there.

The chateau and village of Murainville became the property of a Count Rutant, a chamberlain of King Stanislas, who had made Nancy his headquarters until his death in

1766, founding an important scientific centre there. Count Rutant died without an heir, so the chateau and village of Murainville were sold to Count Michal Pac in 1780.

By this time François Chopin had become head of the commune and his son Nicolas was 9. Count Pac's agent and representative, Jan Weydlich, looked after the Count's affairs and he, and his wife from Paris as well as the Pac family, took an interest in Nicolas. They took charge of his education and sent him to school in Nancy, where he would of course have picked up the Polish language.

When Count Pac had to sell Murainville in 1787, the Weydlichs returned to Warsaw taking Nicolas with them. They opened a school with Nicolas as the principal teacher, and here he remained for four years.

Nicolas tried to make contact with his parents in France, but received no reply. This may have been due to the chaos caused by the French Revolution, but it is fairly obvious that his Chopin family wanted to cut all ties. When François Chopin died in 1814, his estate was divided between his daughters. Nothing was left to Nicolas.

It is because of the Murainville Chopins indifference that I am inclined to think Nicolas's real father was the owner of the Chateau at Murainville, who might well have made the arrangements for his education. This was pre-revolutionary France, and the practice of the "doit de seigneur" was not uncommon.

Nicolas wanted to be thought of as having Polish blood and of being descended from the nobility, but simply explained it by saying that the Chopins were a noble Polish family who had gone to live in France. He made quite sure that no-one knew he came from Murainville and told his family nothing about his true background.

The period from 1790 was a time of great unrest in Warsaw. Nicolas identified total with the Polish cause. From then on, he called himself Mikataj, and fought alongside the Polish army under Kosciuszko. This period of struggle ended with the terrible massacre of Praga and the third partition of Poland in 1795.

Following the French Revolution, many exiled aristocrats from France found work tutoring the children of wealthy Polish families, and this is what Nicolas Chopin did, following his time in the militia.

He was resident tutor of the Dziewanowski family and later the Lyczynski family, one of whose daughters was to become famous as Napoleon's mistress, Marie Walewska.

I think it unlikely that these families would have taken on the son of a French peasant to teach their children. They would have checked up on him and been told of his excellent education and probably the Polish nobleman father, and been reassured.

In 1802 he became tutor to the Skarbek family at Zelazowa Wola, and in 1806 married Justyna Krzyzanowska, who was close to Countess Skarbek and acted as her housekeeper.

Some time ago, I acquired some papers which had belonged to the famous Chopin scholar, Arthur Hedley. Looking through them, I was surprised to find a letter to Hedley saying that not many people realised that Chopin's background was Jewish – at least on his mother's side. Apparently, in the 17th century, Jews in Poland were encouraged to become Catholics, and Krzyzanowska (meaning "christened") was a name they might adopt.

I mentioned this letter to Ambassador Rzegocki some years ago, and he told me that as an incentive to conversion Jews were also offered nobility. This in turn would enable them to marry into the nobility, which many did.

In those days in Poland the nobility was a huge class, ranging from the super-rich and powerful – such as the Radziwills, Potockis, Sapiehas and Czartoryskis – down to people whose lifestyle was little better than a peasant's. But it was still undoubtedly an advantage to belong to it.

It is not impossible that Countess Skarbek, like Justyna, came from a Jewish background.

The daughter of one Jakub Fenger, a banker from Torun – and with a large dowry – she was a good catch for the impecunious Count Skarbek, who after fathering five children and getting through her money abandoned her. Fortunately, she was an excellent businesswoman and managed to buy up several estates, including Zelazowa Wola, where she brought up her family helped by the Chopins, who became virtual members of the family themselves.

In the course of fundraising for the Chopin Society, I found quite a few people were unsympathetic to Chopin because of derogatory antisemitic remarks which appear in his letters concerning his banker, Leo, his publisher, Schlesinger, and others, accusing them of being dishonest and grasping. But he also refers to someone playing “a filthy German trick” on him, and when in England he said “The people are crafty here”.

Chopin would in fact rant about anyone who had displeased him.

He was not impressed by his musical contemporaries Liszt and Berlioz. He was indifferent to Schumann's music. Of Liszt he said, “One of these days he will be a member of parliament or perhaps even King of Abyssinia or the Congo – but as regards the themes from his compositions, well they will remain buried in the newspapers.” Of Berlioz's music he remarked that it looked as if the ink had been spat onto the page. His closest musical friends were Mendelssohn, Moscheles, Alkan and Meyerbeer – all born Jewish. Chopin thought well of them. Fanny Erskine in her memoirs recalled him saying – upon hearing of Mendelssohn's death – how much he envied him dying amongst his family and those who loved him. Moscheles and Chopin admired each other's music and sometimes did concerts together, and he collaborated with Alkan over a *Methode des Methodes*, leaving him his musical executor. As for Meyerbeer, he was a pall bearer at his funeral.

Others of Chopin's circle were the Christianised Jews: Heine the poet; Leo his banker, and Thomas Albrecht the Saxon Consul, as well as several converted Jews who were the friends of Jane Stirling, such as the Richs and the Schwabes, with whom Chopin stayed in Manchester.

Chopin's music was seen as showing the heart and soul of Poland and the glory of its history, much as the bards of old did. In Adam Mickiewicz's epic poem *Pan Tadeusz*, this musical role is given to the old Jewish innkeeper, Jankiel, a virtuoso of the dulcimer, who reduces his Polish listeners to tears and then to cheers as they hear “Poland has not yet perished”. One wonders whether Mickiewicz had Chopin in mind when he wrote about Jankiel's playing. Mickiewicz, who was himself half Jewish, used to rebuke Chopin for not writing an opera, and actually they were not particularly friendly. The origins of Chopin's parents will probably remain subject to conjecture, but I think my theories are certainly a distinct possibility.

The date of Chopin's birth is also something which is unclear and continues to be a constant source of speculation.

When Chopin was christened in the parish church of Bruhów – where his parents had been married – the date of his birth was given as 22nd February 1810. The birth certificate which was prepared on the same day states more precisely that he was born in his father's house “on February 22nd of this year at 6.00 o'clock in the evening”. It was signed by the parish priest and Fryderyk's father, Mikołaj, and I think one can assume that this was the date given by the family and not an error on the part of the priest. Until fairly recently 22nd February was generally seen as Chopin's birthday, and certainly our Chopin Society has always regarded that date as correct. However there is evidence that the Chopin family celebrated his birthday on the 1st of March, and Chopin gave that date when asked by the Polish Library Society in Paris, as well as to Fetis for his ongoing *Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*.

I think now that the 1st of March is the generally accepted date, but there is one small thing which does make me question it.

Around 18th February 1848, Chopin's mother Justyna writes to her son “What shall I say to you on your birthday, and for the day of your celebration? Always the same thing: I commend you to divine Providence; every day I beg it to bless you body and soul”. There is a story that Jane Stirling had said Chopin told her that she was the only one who knew his real birthday. She wrote the date down and put it in a tin which was placed in Chopin's tomb in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

When I heard – just before the Chopin bicentenary in 2010 – that the tomb was going to be opened and renovated, I asked if the tin has been found. I was told that it had been, but it had rusted and water had got in and any possible writing was illegible. I am not sure where this tin is now, though the École des Beaux Arts was mentioned at the time. There is also a small mystery about the year of Chopin's birth.

A press notice about Chopin's performance at a charity concert in February 1818, mentioned that he was 9 years old – when in fact he would have been 8. This is unusual, as people are more inclined to make child prodigies younger rather than older!

I have here a print by Albert Graefle, giving Chopin's dates as 1809-1849. The print was made in the 1880s, but as Graefle painted Chopin around 1840 and also drew him on his death bed, one is surprised that he got the year of his birth wrong.

Also here is a plaque, cast in France to mark the 100th anniversary of Chopin's birth, and it says “1809-1909”. So it seems there was some doubt in France about the year.

Chopin's relationship with women has always been something of a mystery, and the women never seem to come out of it very well.

It is clear that he was fascinated by beautiful women with exceptional voices.

His first love was Konstancja Gładkowska, who he became aware of in 1830. He was infatuated with her and expressed his feelings for her to his friend Tytus Woyciechowski, though he did not dare declare himself to her. His infatuation for Konstancja was somewhat displaced by a passion for the famous singer, Henrietta Sontag, whom he would call on every morning at her hotel. “You cannot imagine how much pleasure I have had from a closer acquaintance – in her room, on the sofa – with this ‘envoy of heaven’”.

He still regarded Konstancja as his ideal, and managed to get up the courage to tell her how he felt a few weeks before his departure from Poland, which must have been rather baffling for her. They exchange rings and agreed to write, and on 25th of October he said farewell to her before leaving Poland forever just a week later.

Upon arriving in Paris in 1831, he found many Polish friends, including the Kumar family, one of whose daughters, the beautiful Delfina, married, but separated from Count Mieczyslaw Potocki, was called “the Great Sinner” by Mickiewicz and was infamous for her many affairs. She had a wonderful voice, and Chopin was enchanted with her. Some said that Chopin was her lover, and in 1945 a lady produced copies of what she claimed were Chopin’s letters to her. At first, they were seen as authentic, but were later dismissed as forgeries.

Be that as it may, Potocka and Chopin had a great mutual admiration for each other, and I am inclined to think she might have had a go at seducing him – possibly with some success. Certainly they remained friends until the very end of his life, when she showed him great kindness.

In 1832 Chopin was very hard up and asking his father for money.

The story goes that Prince Walenty Radziwill introduced him to the Rothschilds, who made some effort to find him pupils and engagements. Two of Chopin’s most recent biographers deny this story, one saying that it is rubbish, the other that it is unproven. When I lived in Paris in the 1970s with a family of Russian émigrés, they often asked an old Polish professor from the Sorbonne to lunch. When not gossiping about mutual friends, Hela Stremoukoff used to rant on about Jews and Communists, but she did me a big favour by giving me a book about my great, great, great grandfather, Baron James de Rothschild.

I did not read the book until much later, when I was pleased to see in it that Chopin had told Prince Radziwill of his financial problems when he bumped into him in the street. The Prince immediately took him to meet Betty Rothschild, James’s wife, who was well-known for launching artists at her musical soirées. A few days later she had him play for her and the following day Chopin found himself with four influential protectors: Maréchale Lannes; the Princess de Vaudémont; Countess Apponyi, wife of the Austrian Ambassador, and Prince Czartoryski. From then on, Chopin was able to choose his pupils. Betty considered the 20 francs he asked for lessons as derisory sum, but from then on, he was free from serious financial worries and able to concentrate on composing.

One part of Chopin wanted to live a conventional life and please his parents by finding a nice Polish wife and setting up a family. In the summer of 1835 he joined them in Karlsbad where they spent a happy month together, before he went on to stay with friends. On his return in September he passed through Dresden, and while there came across Feliks Wodzinski, who was visiting with his family. They were old friends of the Chopins, so Chopin went to stay with them for a couple of weeks.

He was particularly struck with the daughter, Marie, and she with him, as shown in a letter she sent him soon after his departure. Both mother and daughter were concerned that Chopin should help and keep an eye on the son, Antoni, which he did.

However, Chopin returned to Paris in a deplorable state of health to be nursed by his friend Jan Matuszynski, who shared his apartment and was studying medicine.

It was around this time, January 1836 that a new friend came into his life. Astolphe-Louis-Léonor, the Marquis de Custine, was a rich and cultured aristocrat full of charm and wit, who had become notorious following a homosexual scandal in 1824. For a time this had kept him out of society, but by 1836 he was well established once more

amongst “le tout Paris”. He was a great traveller and writer and his villa St. Galien, beside the Lake of Enghien, became the scene for many parties and musical soirées. The writer Sainte-Beuve wrote that St. Galien was “a perfect Sodom and Gomorrah”, but Custine entertained the highest society there and Chopin was frequently invited. In fact Custine seems to have fallen in love with him, courting him with extravagant presents and invitations to stay whenever he liked, remaining a loyal and caring friend for the rest of Chopin’s life.

In July 1836 Chopin heard that the Wodzinskis were in Marienbad and went to join them. There he found Mrs. Wodzinska and her two daughters, and he stayed for the whole of August in their hotel. At some point Custine and a friend visited them.

Accompanied by Chopin the family moved to Dresden, and on his last evening with them he proposed to Marie, who happily accepted. Her mother was not against the engagement, but wanted it kept secret – even from Chopin’s parents – until she had discussed it with her husband. She begged Chopin to look after his health and go to bed early.

Of course Chopin did not listen, and, back in Paris, in October had taken up with the set at the Hotel de France, led by Marie d’Agoult and her lover, Liszt. It was there that he met George Sand (Madame Dudevant) for the first time. He continued with his hectic social life, and of course all this would have been reported back to Mrs. Wodzinska by mutual friends in Paris.

She and her husband had not given the go-ahead to the engagement by Christmas, and though Chopin and Marie exchanged presents, he was hardly writing her the sort of love letters she might have expected from a fiancé. She wrote a sad little letter to Chopin in May 1837. One feels very sorry for her, and Chopin felt very sorry for himself when he heard that the Wodzinskis would not be leaving their Polish estate that summer.

He received the news while on a trip to London in July with his friend Camille Pleyel. Chopin travelled incognito as Monsieur Fritz, and as their friend Kozmian said, they were there to do London and spend lots of money.

It has been said that Camille Pleyel was not interested in women and that he only married his wife – the beautiful pianist Marie – so she would show off his pianos. This was the reason given for her blatant promiscuity.

Anyway, the Wodzinskis would not have been pleased to hear of the London jaunt with Pleyel, and they decided not to leave Poland to meet Chopin that summer.

He remained in contact with Mrs. Wodzinska, who perhaps may have hoped that things could be revived. She was certainly very fond of Chopin, but he seems to have calmly accepted that the engagement was at an end. He was apparently distressed, and put all Marie’s letters into an envelope on which was written “My sorrow”. Realistically speaking though, if he had married Marie and settled down with her in Poland he would soon have become bored and unhappy, and there was no way he could have maintained a family in Paris. Nor were the Wodzinskis wealthy.

His parents would have liked to see him settled down with a wife, and he wished to please them. But Paris, its social and cultural life and the possibilities it offered him, were necessities for his creativity. From now on, Marie was to be placed beside Konstancja as an unattainable ideal.

Chopin is seen as the great representative of Polish music, which he is, and some feel he should be the representative of Polish manhood as well – which he certainly is not.

His appearance was not effeminate, but very elegant, modelled on the image of the English dandy – everything in perfect taste – unlike Liszt, for example, who could be very over the top.

None-the-less there was something feminine about him. He loved scents and flowers around him, and Custine used to refer to him as “the sylph of the piano”. The parents of his aristocratic pupils had no fear of putting their daughters into his hands, feeling sure that no improprieties would occur.

The only thing resembling a love letter he seems to have written was to his friend Tytus Woyciechowski: “I must go now and wash. So don’t embrace me now if I anointed myself with fragrant oils from the East, you wouldn’t embrace me ... but there are forces in Nature, and tonight you will dream that you are embracing me”. Another time he writes, I swear that only you have power over me, you and no one else”.

Nor did Chopin express these kinds of emotions to George Sand, who was to be the next woman in his life, and in a more real sense than Konstancja and Marie.

A Polish lady decided to fill in this gap by producing a forgery which has appeared in virtually every book about George Sand ever since. “I have had further meetings with her. She gazed deep into my eyes while I played what were her eyes saying, those dark, those curious eyes, so intently fixed on mine? She leaned on the piano, and her gaze was like a fiery flood Flowers all about us. My heart is captured! Since then I have seen her twice again she loves me Aurore, what a lovely name”.

I did not think this sounded like Chopin’s style, so I asked the well-known Chopin scholar Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger what he thought. He told me it was a forgery from 1911, claiming to be from Chopin’s diary of October 1837, but biographers had latched on to it as there is so little otherwise.

It was Liszt’s idea to encourage George Sand to take an interest in Chopin. He could see that what Chopin really needed was someone to look after him, indeed, to mother him, and he knew that this was something Sand liked to do with her young men.

Sand was indeed interested, though she had a lover at the time, her children’s tutor Mallefille. In the spring of 1838 while staying in Paris with her friends the Marlianis, she had plenty of opportunities to be with Chopin and listen to him play, as he was a frequent guest. By May she had fallen in love with him and it seemed that her feelings were reciprocated. However Chopin hung back from a physical relationship and it became clear to Sand that he thought of sex as disgusting and felt it would sully the memory of the time he had spent with her.

She returned to the country, and meanwhile Chopin asked his friend Grzymala for advice. Grzymala wrote to Sand, asking him to be very careful with Chopin’s feelings as he had recently been very hurt by the ending of his engagement to Marie Wodzinska.

Sand replied with a 32-page letter!

She returned to Paris in June and things took their natural course. Finally the affair was consummated.

To spend the winter in a warm climate and escape the fury of her former lover, Mallefille, in November Sand took Chopin and her two children with a maid to Majorca, where the eventually ended up in the disused monastery of Valldemossa. They rented a cell there, consisting of three rooms and a small garden. One feels they must have also used the cell next door, as they were joined by a woman who offered to cook and clean for them and who brought another helper and a little girl. With all of them in one cell there would

have been no chance for any kind of intimacy between Chopin and Sand, but anyway he was ill for much of the time.

There has, until very recently, been a bit of a mystery about which cell at Valldemossa Chopin and Sand rented.

In 1911 the famous harpsichordist, Wanda Landowska, visited Majorca to give concerts. She visited the descendants of the Canut family who had bought Chopin's Pleyel piano from George Sand back in February 1839. It was described in the papers how she played this piano with tears streaming down her face. She then offered them 15,000 francs for it, but they declined. Later, she went to visit Valldemossa where, in Cell No.4 belonging to a Dr. Tortella, she saw what she was told was the Majorcan piano made by Bauza that Chopin had used before the arrival of the piano Pleyel sent, which had been held up at the Customs in Palma. The doctor had bought it from the Lapenas who had used Cell No. 4 in the summer months and then sold him all the fixtures and fittings. Landowska offered to buy this piano, but did not actually acquire it until 1913.

Whether it was the actual piano Chopin used is dubious, as we are told it was rented and would more likely have been returned to the shop after the Pleyel arrived.

In 1917, the Ferra family, who rented and later owned Cell No.2, opened a Chopin Museum there, which became a sort of shrine to visitors. An upright Majorcan piano claiming to have been the one used by Chopin took pride of place.

Meanwhile, the Pleyel became the property of Gabriel Quetglas Amengual and was installed in Cell No.4, which he also owned. The famous Chopinist, Edward Ganche, visited and authenticated the piano as being Chopin's, also declaring that Cell No.4 was the authentic one. A marble plaque was mounted on the wall outside Cell No.4 giving Ganche's authentication, but people still seemed to regard Cell No.2 as the right one, in spite of Ganche publishing his findings and Quetglas setting up a rival museum.

Mrs. Ferra was a friend of General Franco, and during the Franco era she had Ganche's plaque whitewashed over – or so I was told.

In 2010 the Quetglas family went to court and the judge concluded that Cell No.4 was indeed the Chopin Cell. The Majorcan piano in Cell No.2 was proved to have been built in the 1850s, years after Chopin's death.

There are still two museums at Valldemossa, but the whitewash has been removed from Ganche's plaque!

The Sand/Chopin party returned to France in February, and after a stay of several months in Marseilles to allow Chopin's health to recover and a quick jaunt to Itay, they arrived at Sand's country estate of Nohant on 2nd June.

Sand carved the date 19th June 1839 on the panelling of her bedroom, and people have of course asked themselves "What does it mean?" I would hazard a guess that it was the date of the anniversary of the consummation of her and Chopin's affair, but some have suggested it was the date when she ceased to have a physical relationship with him. She did say after she broke up in 1847, that for seven years she had lived as a virgin. So who knows!

Certainly their relationship had quite early on turned into that of nurse and patient, and there is no doubt that her medical expertise and wonderful care prolonged his life by a good few years.

There has always been a bit of a mystery about the nature of Chopin's illness.

He was diagnosed with TB on Majorca, but there was a difference of opinion between the Spanish and French doctors, and when Chopin returned to France the doctor George Sand found did not think that was the problem. Instead it was thought to be bronchitis. Sand agreed and nursed him accordingly. As Chopin lived for another eleven years after the Majorcan diagnosis, and Sand nursed him for nine of those years, she evidently made the right decisions with regards to his health, and had Chopin remained with her he might have lived for even longer.

However Sand gradually came to the conclusion that his “malady” (as she called it) was largely psychological and self-destructive, and got fed up with having to cope with it. At the beginning Chopin had been an ideal substitute father to her children and lent stability to the household, which was one reason why she was allowed the custody of her children. Later in 1846-47, when both Maurice and Solange began to give problems – Maurice resenting Chopin’s presence and Solange and Chopin siding together against Maurice and Sand herself – she fell into a rage and got rid of Chopin, even accusing him of being in love with Solange.

At the end of 1847 he found himself alone, but was sustained by his friends and pupils, who were naturally anxious for him. His Scots pupil Jane Stirling and her sister, Mrs. Erskine, came to the rescue and in April 1848 took him to London.

People have been unkind about Jane Stirling, and in her attraction to Chopin she did become rather ridiculous. But she was totally devoted, kind and generous, and did significantly make life better for him in his last year and a half.

Following the revolution which broke out in Paris in the spring of 1848, Chopin would have found himself destitute had she not taken him to London and found him pupils and engagements, and, when the summer came, she and her family looked after him. She obviously couldn’t care for him in the way George Sand had, as she was not close enough to him for that, and it was in Scotland that his health seriously declined and the symptoms of TB really took over. Jane has been accused of dragging him interminably around her family, but Chopin became depressed if he was left alone and required endless social activity.

Was she in love with Chopin? We are told she was, but Professor Eigeldinger has said her real love was Thomas Tellefsen, Chopin’s Norwegian pupil. I think she might have liked to marry Chopin, and after his death wore widow’s weeds, but he was horrified at the thought.

One serious incident is said to have occurred, but it is almost certainly fictitious.

The French critic and Chopin biographer, Bernard Gavoty, claimed to have bought a letter written by Chopin to Solange in which he describes how, when he was performing his *Funeral March* sonata at a soirée in Manchester, he saw frightening apparitions emerging from the piano. After Gavoty died, people searched through his papers looking for this letter but did not find it. It seems to have been yet another invention.

Chopin was to meet the famous Swedish singer Jenny Lind in London. Quite recently a small booklet was published, claiming that Chopin had known, and had an affair, with Lind long before in Paris, but there is no evidence for this in his letters.

He mentions in the long letter written to his family from Scotland in August that Madame Grote introduced him to Jenny Lind and took him to hear Lind in *La Sonnambula*, later inviting him and Lind to dinner, where they stayed at the piano from 9 to 1 in the morning!

They became great friends, but there is no sign of any closer relationship than that, and no evidence that they had had an earlier relationship.

Prince and Princess Aleksander Czartoryski came over to Scotland and then to London for the Polish Ball at which Chopin was to give his last-ever performance.

Some people have suggested that Chopin had an affair with Princess Marcellina Czartoryska, who was probably his best pupil, but that is even more unlikely.

With his health in a deplorable state, Chopin returned to Paris at the end of November and went straight to his flat in the Place d'Orléans, where he continued to give lessons to his most talented pupils, including Delfine Potocka, Baroness Charlotte de Rothschild and Princess Marcellina. Delacroix became his closest companion and musical soirées were given.

Some days were better than others, but it was decided that he should move out of the centre of Paris to somewhere he could breathe more freely. He moved to a flat at Chaillot, where half the rent was paid by Princess Obreskoff.

In June there was a musical soirée at which Jenny Lind and Delfina Potocka took turns to sing in front of the Rothschilds and the Princess de Beauvau and other friends.

Princess Marcellina and Delfina Potocka were busy trying to arrange a passport for Chopin's sister Ludwika, so she could come to France and join her brother.

Meanwhile, Jane Stirling had turned up and caused Chopin some annoyance.

He had recently told his friend Franchomme the cellist, that he was short of money.

Franchomme told Jane Stirling, and she expressed great surprise as she had apparently sent him 25,000 francs in March. A search was instigated, a medium involved as well as the concierge, and the money turned up behind the concierge's clock, where the medium had said it was. Chopin was very upset by the whole thing and only accepted 15,000 from Stirling as a loan.

At the beginning of August, Chopin's sister arrived with her husband, Kalasanty and daughter Ludka. Kalasanty soon returned home.

Unaware of just how ill he was, Chopin hoped to go and stay with Delfina Potocka at her villa in Nice, where she herself then was. Instead he moved into No.12 Place Vendôme, as the doctors thought he should stay in Paris in a warm, sunny flat for the winter.

The archivist at the jewellers Chaumet, who now occupy the building, told me that the house at the time belonged to Delfina Potocka's lover, the Russian Ambassador, who had given her the use of it, so perhaps it was she who arranged Chopin's move. His friend, Thomas Albrecht, was another occupant of the building.

Chopin was not religious, but he was persuaded to receive the last rites by an old school friend, Father Alexander Jelowicki.

On the 15th of October, Delfina Potocka returned from Nice and Chopin begged her to sing for him. Franchomme and Princess Marcellina played Mozart.

On the 17th, according to one biographer, Chopin died in the arms of his pupil, Gutmann, with Solange Sand holding his hand and his sister Ludwika, Princess Czartoryski and Thomas Albrecht round the bed.

Another biographer says that Ludwika, Solange and the painter Kwiatkowski, the priest Jelowicki, Gutmann and Dr. Cruveillier were present, and it does seem likely that the Doctor would have been there.

Almost immediately, Solange's husband, the sculptor Clésinger, rushed to take casts of Chopin's face and hand and then Dr. Cruveillier carried out an autopsy and embalmed

the body. The cause of death was given as tuberculosis, though some damage to the heart was also noted.

Chopin's body was then laid out, surrounded by flowers, for people to view.

The funeral took place at the Madeleine two weeks later, with over 4,000 people present. Jane Stirling covered most of the expenses as well paying for the monument over Chopin's tomb in Père Lachaise cemetery, and the death mask.

George Sand said that the only woman Chopin had truly loved was his mother, and it was to his mother that he called out on his deathbed.

If one had asked his contemporaries about his private life, some might have said that he was an effeminate dandy with his carefully arranged hair and pink gloves, others that he was too sickly to contemplate physical relationships, and put all his passion into his music.

He adored women, but put them on a pedestal. His passionate friendships were with his men friends such as Tytus Woyciechowski, Jan Matuszynski, Fontana and Gutmann, and he shared apartments with the last three.

After Chopin died, the composer Liszt wrote a biography of him. He sent a questionnaire about Chopin's life to Louise (?) who passed it to Jane Stirling to answer. Amongst others, there were questions about what his relations were with Madame Sand. Jane replied "Chopin's intimate life was a sanctuary that for him was equally intimate. He was too sparing of details for them to find a place in his biography".

Chopin was born with a colossal talent which was appreciated and nurtured from the start, and which opened the door to the highest society in his homeland of Poland and then to the *crème de la crème* of society and the artistic world in his adopted country, France.

Yet all his life he was to be racked with social insecurity, doubts about the future and psychological torments which not only undermined his health but probably caused the collapse of his marriage hopes with Maria Wodzinska and his relationship with George Sand. Yet it was these dark sides of his character that enriched and deepened so much of his music. He truly had to suffer to bring forth his creative masterpieces.

I hope with this talk I have managed to clarify some aspects of Chopin's life, though questions about his father's background or the date of his birth are not definitely answered. I have simply put down what I think is likely or most probable.

But I think perhaps it is time for the Chopin Society UK to accept the 1st of March as Chopin's birthday, because it is evidently that date which the Chopin family wanted.