

BELL, Lady, née Maria Hamilton

London 1755–1825

Pupil of her brother William Hamilton (*q.v.*) and of Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose paintings (particularly of well-known ladies) she copied. She was also a sculptor. It is unclear how much of her work was in pastel; only one work is listed, from c.1806. On 26.v.1778 (not 1808 as in most sources), at St Margaret's, Westminster, she married Thomas Bell (1751–1824), a leather merchant in St Swithin's Lane (who supplied shoes to the Spanish army), sheriff of the City of London and treasurer and co-founder of the Universal Dispensary for Children; he was knighted in 1816. They lived at 47 Dean Street (with a country house at Cranford, adjacent to Lord Berkeley's estate), near her brother's studio. Her portrait of Bell was engraved by William Dickinson in 1816. She was an honorary exhibitor to the Royal Academy from 1816 to 1820.



In evidence given in 1811 to the Committee of Privileges investigating claims to the Berkeley peerage (arising from a disputed secret marriage of the 5th earl to the daughter of a publican), Bell testified that in 1791, his friend, Colonel John West, cousin-german of his wife, brought "Lady Berkeley" (Mary Cole, 1767–1844) to see her paintings; this resulted in a portrait of Lady Berkeley executed at his house in Leicester Fields. Further portraits of West, Lord Berkeley and his family are also mentioned, all probably in oil (one is described as full length). Colonel West confirmed this in his testimony, adding "Mrs Bell painted very well; she had painted a portrait of me, and several persons" in 1791. Bell confirmed that he had been married for some 30 years; that his wife had not painted professionally before their marriage; and that she had never cleaned, restored or framed pictures.

Bibliography

Bénézit; *Gentleman's magazine*, 1825; Greer 2001; *A narrative of the...evidence respecting the claim to the Berkeley peerage...*, London, 1811; Oxford DNB; Roscoe & al. 2009; Saur; Sée 1911; Waterhouse 1981

Pastels

J.1388.101 SELF-PORTRAIT, m/u, 1810

~grav. George Clint (1770–1854)

J.1388.103 Mrs WAINWRIGHT, a friend of Sir Thomas Bell, pstl, ?61x51 ov., c.1806 (Major Wainwright 1911). Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 4, as 51x51. Lit.: Sée 1911, repr. p. 233 Φ