

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

CAY, Mrs Robert Hodshon, née Elizabeth Liddell

Tynemouth, Northumberland 22.II.1770 –
Edinburgh 27.X.1831

The daughter of John Liddell of Dockwray Square, North Shields and his wife, née Jane Hubback, in 1789 she married an Edinburgh judge, Robert Hodshon Cay, from a family based in North Charlton, Northumberland. Cay evidently had interests beyond the law; he was president of the Speculative Society in 1781, and in 1796 he was engaged with Sir Walter Scott to organise the medals collection of the Advocates' Library. They had nine children, one being the mother of the physicist James Clerk Maxwell. Elizabeth Cay was an amateur pastellist and pupil of Skirving (*q.v.*), who portrayed her in pastel (which she in turn copied). There are Raeburn portraits of Robert Cay and of his mother-in-law, Mrs John Liddell (Fogg and Hunterian museums); Bewick made a bookplate for Barbara Liddell, one of Elizabeth's numerous siblings.

Elizabeth's surviving works, kept at the Maxwell family house, 14 India Street, Edinburgh, depict herself (after Skirving's portrait) and four of her own children. Her workbox, at the V&A (inv. P.42-1922), contains bottles of dry powder and a set of leather stumps indicating that she adopted a method recorded as being used by pastellists ranging from Wallerant Vaillant to James Sharples (*q.v.*): Norgate (1628), attributing it to Dumonstier, called it the worst of the three ways of working in pastel. The box is thought to date from the end of the eighteenth century or possibly slightly later, although the known examples are all from well into the nineteenth century. It seems unsafe to infer that she did not also use fabricated sticks which would seem to be easier to use to cover extended areas, with the powder-and-stump technique being confined to highlights. This would seem to have been common practice: in the 1708 anonymous pastel supplement to Boutet's *Traité*, it is suggested that a pastel box should have room for "quelques Couleurs en poudre fine, dont on peut servir quelquefois au lieu de Pastel. Pour les appliquer on se sert de la pointe d'un petit papier roulé, qu'on appelle *Estampe*, & qui tient lieu de Pinceau dans cette manière de Peindre." Another anonymous treatise, of 1790, indicated that the method might be used for a handful of pigments which were too expensive to be made up into sticks.

Bibliography

Anon. 1790; Boutet 1708, pp. 167f; Burns & Roy 2014, pp. 279–88; Rutherford J. Gettens & George L. Stout, *Painting materials: a short encyclopedia*, 1966, p. 315; Jo Kirby & David Saunders, "Fading and colour change of Prussian blue", *National Gallery technical bulletin*, XXV, 2004, pp. 73ff, as "Elizabeth Carey"; *A history of Northumberland*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1907, VIII, p. 130; clerkmaxwellfoundation.org

Pastels

J.213.101 SELF-PORTRAIT, in blue striped dress with black lace shawl, pstl (James Clerk

Maxwell Foundation. Don Barbara Wallis).
A/r Skirving ϕ



J.213.103 ~?pstl, 70x57 (London, Christie's, 11.II.1911, Lot 53, anon., Early English sch., 300 gns; Doig, Wilson & Co) [Attr.; cf. Skirving]

J.213.104 ~version (Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery. Desc.: don 2008)

J.213.105 Jane CAY (1797–1876), aunt of James Clerk Maxwell, pstl (James Clerk Maxwell Foundation. Don Barbara Wallis) ϕ

J.213.106 Robert Dundas CAY (1807–1888), uncle and lawyer of James Clerk Maxwell, registrar of the Supreme Court, Hong Kong, pstl (James Clerk Maxwell Foundation. Don Barbara Wallis) ϕ

J.213.107 John CAY (1790–1865), FRSE, uncle of James Clerk Maxwell, sheriff of Linlithgow, pstl (James Clerk Maxwell Foundation. Don Barbara Wallis) ϕ

J.213.108 Mrs John CLERK MAXWELL, née Frances Cay (1792–1839), mother of James Clerk Maxwell, her sister Jane Cay (1797–1876), pstl (James Clerk Maxwell Foundation. Don Barbara Wallis) ϕ