

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

COSTARD, Mrs Edward, née Polly Turner

Liverpool 1757–p.1789

The “Mrs Costard”, amateur exhibitor in 1784, has hitherto remained unknown. She was the daughter of the apothecary–surgeon Matthew Turner (c.1719–1789) who moved to Liverpool shortly before his marriage on 16.X.1756 to a Margaret Johnson. Four children are recorded in the registers of St George’s Liverpool, including Peggy (1759), Ann (1760), Thomas (1762) and Matthew (1763); Margaret died in 1766. The eldest child, Mary or Polly, must have been christened in a different parish. Matthew Turner, whose varied medical practice included his pioneering use of ether, was closely connected to the burgeoning intellectual circle in Liverpool, and, with William Roscoe (*q.v.*), helped found the Society for the Encouragement of Design, Drawing, Painting etc. in Liverpool in 1773. Polly and Peggy were both thought to have been given lessons by Joseph Wright of Derby (*q.v.*), who arranged for them to exhibit drawings at the Society of Artists in London in 1773. They appear in the catalogue as Miss Mary and Miss Peggy Turner, aged “under 16” and “under 14” years old respectively. It has plausibly been suggested that two of Wright’s monochrome pastels depict the girls, whose biographies nevertheless remained obscure.

When Matthew Turner died in 1789, administration of his very small estate (valued at £300) was granted to his two surviving daughters, reported from newspaper sources as Peggy Straton and a Polly Collard (presumably a misreading of Costard); his books and prints were disposed of by auction. And from another newspaper advertisement we learn that Mrs Costard would continue selling Turner’s aether. While Peggy’s married name is correct (she married a James Straton in St George’s, Liverpool on 9.II.1786), Polly married, on 11.II.1781, at Rochdale, an Edward Costard (1752–), of Frodsham, not Collard (her abode was given as Quickwood). It was under this name that she exhibited three pastels at the Liverpool exhibition of 1784. Her sister, still “Miss Turner”, exhibited 13 items, the first three being heads “in chalks” (probably the same monochrome medium used by Wright).

Polly is far too young to be the widow Costard depicted in a genre painting exhibited by Edward Penny at the Royal Academy in 1782. But it is quite possible that she was the Polly Costard, widow, of Liverpool who married a Thomas Tinkler, “horse rider”, on 26.IX.1790 at St Anne Richmond, Liverpool; both their elegant hands are surprising for an apparently lowly profession. In fact Tinkler seems to have been the entrepreneur who established the Christian Street circus in Liverpool in 1789, advertising “circus, repository and livery stables” in *Williamson’s Liverpool advertiser* on 4.V.1789.

Bibliography

Barker 2009; R. J. Broadbent, *Annals of the Liverpool stage*, 1908, p. 178f; Mayer 1876; J. E.

Utting, W. E. Bickerstaffe & J M Hunter, “Matthew Turner: surgeon-apothecary of eighteenth-century Liverpool. His life and background”, *Journal of medical biography*, .N.2002; 10/2, pp. 63–68; Wright 2007

Pastels

J.2416.101 Head of Joseph, a/r Raphael, crayons, Liverpool 1784, no. 129

J.2416.102 Cleopatra, crayons, Liverpool 1784, no. 130

J.2416.103 Calista, from [Rowe’s] *The Fair Penitent*, crayons, Liverpool 1784, no. 131