

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

DENYS, Peter

London 16.VI.1760 – Easton Neston brd
15.VII.1816

The Peter Denys who exhibited a pastel from 12 Charterhouse Square in 1779 must be the Swiss emigrant's son and draughtsman Peter Denys (sometimes Denyss), who became drawing-master at Eaton Neston on the recommendation of George Michael Moser of the Royal Academy. His father was a language teacher; his younger brother a musician, and his sister kept a boarding school in London. Although "very plain in person and near sighted" he married (in Easton Neston, on 21.VII.1787, following her father's death) his pupil Lady Charlotte Fermor (1766–1835), daughter of the 2nd Earl of Pomfret; she had £4000 a year, with which Denys acquired property, notably the Pavilion, Hans Place (on the site of which Cadogan Square was later built) and Fremington, Yorkshire. Their son was the MP George William Denys (1788–1857) upon whom a baronetcy was conferred on the advice of the 3rd Earl of Pomfret after some debate as to whether the father should receive it. Peter Denys did however become sheriff of Northamptonshire, and presented a portrait of Spencer Percival to the corporation of Northampton. Although buried at Easton Neston, Denys died in the Pavilion, Hans Place according to the obituary in the *New monthly magazine* (1.VIII.1816, confirmed in the *Gentleman's magazine*), which praised "his liberal patronage of musical genius." He was said to have been greatly distressed by the death of a favourite daughter, the subject of some rather mawkish verses by John Taylor. A satirical print from 1812 includes, inter alia, five print-sellers delivering their wares to the Pavilion. Denys also paid £15,000 to the sculptor Pierre-Nicolas Beauvallet for a replica of the *Suzanne au bain* (the original was commissioned for Napoleon for only £9000). Gilray satirised Denys in a print of 1802 called *Scientific researches*; it seems they had been fellow students at the Royal Academy Schools before Denys's marriage allowed him to pass himself off as a gentleman. Sir Thomas Lawrence also made a cruel caricature of the Harpsichord lesson at Mr Blencowe's (Ashmolean Museum), in which an untalented "short fat girl" plays the harpsichord, very badly, to accompaniment from Peter Denys, said to have been an admirable performer on the violin.

Bibliography

Alexander 2021; Farington 1978–84; R. Thorne, *The history of parliament: the House of Commons 1790–1820*, 1986; Waterhouse 1981

Pastels

J.268.101 A dog, crayons, Royal Academy 1779, no. 68