

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

FORBES, Ann

Inveresk 31.V.1745 – Edinburgh 27.IV.1834
Ann, or Anne, Forbes came from a military family, her grandfather, John Forbes of Pittencieff (who married Elizabeth Graham), and both uncles being soldiers: one was the General John Forbes (1707–1759) who captured Fort Duquesne (an anonymous pastel of him, apparently dated 1751, may be a later copy by Anne after a miniature of that date). Her father, Hew Forbes, was a Principal Clerk of Session in Edinburgh from 1744; he married Margaret (1716–1800), daughter of William Aikman (1682–1731), a Scottish portraitist trained in Rome. Anne's brother, John Forbes Aikman of Ross (1737–1821), died without posterity, his estates falling to Captain George Robertson, son of John and Anne's sister.

Ann worked in oil and pastel as a portraitist and copyist. She studied under Gavin Hamilton and James Nevey in Rome from 1768, having already impressed Robert Chalmers (1727–1802), a family friend (and distant relation; he was Comptroller-General and an officer of the SPCK), of her ability in drawing in crayon; he arranged for her to receive £200 a year for three years. Her ambition was to acquire “as great fame and as much money as Miss Read” (*q.v.*). Andrew Lumisden's letters to her from Paris in 1769 reckoned that she would require two more years in Rome to improve her “extraordinary talents, which cannot fail to procure [her] immortal honor”. It seems however that while in Rome she turned to oils instead of pastel, no doubt considering this the loftier pursuit. Lumisden suggested that she was “now making as great progress in oyl painting as [she] did in drawing and pastel”, Hamilton having, in a letter of 3.X.1768, reported her progress with pastels, and proposed that “she should begin to paint in oil in the month of October”. In a letter of 29.VIII.1769 from Rome, her mother reported her copies (presumably in oil) made from collections such as that of the bailli de Breteuil, ambassador for the Ordre de Malte in Rome; among the works was Luti's boy with a flute. But she made two copies in pastel from a Guido Reni Sibyl for Lord Bute which may have been done in 1769.

Sir William Hamilton gave her a portrait of George III to copy, which heightened her profile among British travellers; but she did not learn Italian. Despite the efforts of supporters such as Lumisden in arranging access to paintings for her to copy, she failed to develop the skills required to achieve success in the competitive market for portrait painters in Rome, and she fell ill under the stress of trying to do so.

She returned to London, where she exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1772 (four oil portraits, from St Martin's Lane), although her portrait of “an Italian girl” was engraved by John Raphael Smith (as Signiora Maria Giovanna Felice) that year (at his initiative, having seen and admired it at the RA show), and one of Lord Polwarth, in Vandyke costume, by the same engraver the following year.

Correspondence between Ann and her family with Robert Chalmers in Edinburgh in 1772 presents a picture of ill-health and difficulties in

obtaining and completing as much work as she had hoped. A list of some two dozen pictures (apparently to travel on *The Queen*, Capt. Thomson) appended to one of the letters (18.VIII.1772) includes just one pastel, a head, priced at 15 gns, the same as the other oil portraits of this size; a number have only the face finished. Finding her abilities still challenged, she retired soon after to Edinburgh where she was able to make a living as a drawing teacher and occasional portraitist. Some of her oil portraits are of a higher level than the pastels would suggest.

A painting by David Allan (1781, Scottish NPG) shows her holding a portfolio and portecrayon. Allan, who had been in Rome until 1777, obtained materials from the firm of Forbes & Esplin but it is unlikely that Ann was related to Mary Forbes, Mrs Cummins (*q.v.*).

Bibliography

Gaze 1997; Howard 2010; Anne McKim, “The ‘Italian scheme’: Ann Forbes, artist in training”, *Journal of Anglo-Italian studies*, XIX, 2023, pp. 1–19; Oxford DNB; Saur; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006; Andrew Lumisden letterbook, MS 14262, and Forbes–Chalmers letters, National Library of Scotland, signalled Catriona Seth, pr. comm. 2023

Pastels

J.3196.101 SELF-PORTRAIT, pstl, 52x41 (F. A. Hugo Pitman (1892–1963) a.1957; don: Sir Christopher Chancellor (1904–1989). Cambridge, Cheffins, 20–21.IX.2023, Lot 96 repr., est. £800–1200). Lit.: Oxford DNB, n.r.; Howard 2010, fig. 84 φ



J.3196.1015 ?Duchess of ARGYLL, née Elizabeth Gunning, Duchess of Hamilton (1733–1790), pstl, 53.5x42 (F. A. Hugo Pitman (1892–1963) a.1957; don: Sir Christopher Chancellor (1904–1989). Cambridge, Cheffins, 20–21.IX.2023, Lot 97 repr., est. £800–1200) φδ



J.3196.102 Henry Douglas Scott, 3rd Duke of BUCCLEUCH, 5th Duke of Queensberry (1746–1812), head, crayons (comm. 1772, 15 gns; first sitting completed in 1772)

J.3196.103 General John FORBES (1707–1759), as lieutenant-colonel, 2nd Royal North British dragoons, pstl, 1751 (in London 1783. Desc.: William Hamilton Robertson-Aikman, of *The Ross*, 1958). Lit.: *Carnegie magazine*, XXXII, 1958, pp. 266ff, repr., ?by Margaret Aikman, or by Anne Forbes a/r miniature φ



~pnt. (Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, Catterick. Desc.: Col. Thomas S. G. H. Robbertson-Aikman 1905)

J.3196.106 ~~cop. 1937 (Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania)

J.3196.107 Sibyl, pstl, a/r Spada (John Stuart, Earl of Bute, c.1771). Lit.: Francis Russell, “John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute, and his collecting in Venice”, *Burlington magazine*, CLIII, .VIII.2011, pp. 527f, “My Guidos Sybell, 2 copies of it in Crayon/Done from Crayon by Miss Forbes”. [Bute owned a head of a turbaned youth, engraved by Capt. William Baillie as a/r Reni, 1771; Pepper 1984, p. 303, A6, as by Leonello Spada, ??Reni]