

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

FORBES, Anne

Inveresk 1745 – Edinburgh 1834

Anne Forbes came from a military family, her grandfather, John Forbes of Pittencrieff and both uncles being soldiers: one was the General John Forbes 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, died without posterity in 1721, his estates falling to Captain George Robertson, son of John and Anne's sister.

Anne 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, a family friend, 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.*). It seems however that while in Rome she turned to oils instead of pastel, no doubt considering this the loftier pursuit. 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 Andrew 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 in 1772 but found 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 Anne was related to Mary Forbes, Mrs Cummins (*q.v.*).

Bibliography

Gaze 1997; Howard 2010; Oxford DNB; Saur; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006

Pastels

J.3196.101 SELF-PORTRAIT, pstl, 52x41 (PC 2004).

Lit.: Oxford DNB, n.r.; Howard 2010, fig. 84 φ



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, con 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]