

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

MILBOURN, John

fl. London 1763–1816

Awarded premiums at the Society of Artists in 1763, 1764 (“1 guinea to Mr John Milbourn, Jun., St John-street, Oxford Market”) and 1765, John Milbourn (also spelt Milbourne, the form adopted by his children) was admitted as a student at the Royal Academy Schools on 14.II.1769, obtaining a silver medal the following year.

While there is no indication of his parentage or age in these records, we note that a “Mr Milbourne, painter, died in St John Street, London, 20.XI.1774 (*London evening post*); although unrecorded as such, parish records indicate that he was the Luke Milbourne of St John Street, buried at St James’s, Clerkenwell four days later, aged 37, “poor”; the age and address suggests he may have been John’s brother. He was evidently the Luke Milbourn baptised to Thomas and Elizabeth at St Mildred, Bread Street on 3.IV.1737; his parents were probably the Thomas and Elizabeth, née Potter, married on 3.XI.1728. They had a son, John, baptised at St Giles, Cripplegate, 9.XI.1730 who (first suggested here in 2023) *may* have been the pastellist.

John Milbourn was a pupil of Cotes (and witnessed his will in 1769), whose influence is said to be evident. His fellow pupil John Russell (*q.v.*) mentions him in his diary on numerous occasions. In 1767 Russell took him on a trip to Guildford where Milbourn met Russell’s parents and climbed the tower of Holy Trinity Church. Russell tried to convert him to Methodism, and recorded in his diary (11.V.1768) “Cotes ordered Milbourn never to go near me again.” Nevertheless he took Milbourne to hear De Courcy and Atkinson preach several times. Russell had to reprove Milbourn (whom he described as his late fellow apprentice) at the Academy for “filthy discourse” mocking Russell’s piety in front of his students.

Russell and Milbourn (along with Liotard, Bartolozzi and Lawranson, *qq.vv.*) were both consulted by the Society of Arts in 1772 in connection with Charles Pache’s pastels: on 4.XII.1772–

the Secretary acquainted the Committee that he had seen Mr Russell & Mr Milbourne two Pupils of the late Mr Cotes & who frequently had been employ’d in making Crayons for him, who inform’d the Secretary that [Pache’s] Crayons were in every respect equal to the best made by Mr Stoupan of Lausanne of whom Mr Cotes always bought crayons.... Mr Russell, & Mr Milbourn added also that the Dark Colours made by Mr Pache are superior to those made by Mr Stoupan, or any others they have seen.

Milbourn exhibited pastels including some full-lengths in small format at the Royal Academy between 1772 and 1774 (from Harley Street, 1772; Mr Gibson’s, Berwick Street, 1773; and Mr Conaway’s, Queen Street, 1774). He worked in oil and pastel. None of his portraits has survived, but two genre pictures are known, both from engravings by Thomas Gaugain in 1789, entitled *Courtship* and *Matrimony* (British Museum, inv. 1917, 1208.3206–3207).

According to Farington (whose diaries record Milbourn’s friendship with artistic figures such

as Edward Edwards, Giuseppe Marchi and Paul Sandby) he earned some £500–600 p.a. as a drawing-master. He is recorded as such in the New Road, Marylebone in 1795 (by Walpole and *The gentleman’s magazine*, carrying a report of the death of his 15-year-old son Frederick). His versatility extended to restoration and copying. Walpole was among his clients, and the Strawberry Hill sale included his copy of a Holbein. In 1764 he undertook picture cleaning and varnishing for the Duke of Marlborough, including treating works by Rubens, Van Dyck, (bill for £5/16/-, 14.VII.1764: British Library, Add. MS 61678, f.89, Blenheim papers, signalled Jacob Simon, pr. comm.).

A letter from Sir Christopher Sykes to Milbourne includes a list of pictures with a bill for cleaning, 23.IX.1799 (East Riding of Yorkshire archives). A document in the papers of the Baker Wilbraham family of Rode Hall (Cheshire and Chester Archives, DBW/N/A/A/105) of 1811 records the address of Mr Milbourne of Marylebone, crayon painter, with a note in Maria Baker’s hand: “repaired my F[ather]’s Picture July 1811”; it is unclear if he made the original.

Farington recorded that Milbourn’s wife predeceased him, and that he had at least four sons; one “a Captain of Engineers in India, another a clerk at the Bank ... and a third who is a Lieutenant in the Navy.” As first analysed here (in 2023), the naval lieutenant was Charles Robert Milbourne, who died in 1833, aged 37 according to his headstone, although he was surely Charles Robert Milbourn was baptised to John and Jane on 7.VI.1790 at St Marylebone. A Thomas Frederick Milbourne, son of John and Jane, was baptised at St James’s Piccadilly on 17.VII.1780. Richard Edward Milbourn, baptised 7.IX.1783 at St Marylebone to John and Jane, was recorded as a cadet (India Office records, BL) in 1806. The painter Henry Milbourne (who exhibited in the Royal Academy and the Paris salons), stated to be aged 35 in the RA Schools lists on 26.X.1816, was in fact baptised to John and Jane on 20.VIII.1778 in St Marylebone (consistent with his entry in the 1851 census). Charles Robert’s will mentions two further siblings, Emma (1786–1883), who married Henry Frederick Amedroz in 1812 (her father signed the register), and Percival Williams Milbourne (1792–1876). These details allow us to identify the artist as the John Milbourn who, on 14.VII.1771 at St Clement Danes, married Jane Myers, his name recorded as Milburn although he signed Milbourn (the witnesses were William Betney, vstry keeper at the church, and R. Harlison). She may the Jane Milbourn buried at St Marylebone 27.VI.1798.

No burial entry has been found for her husband, although he was still alive in 1812 (*v. supra*) and presumably also in 1816 when he copied a posthumous portrait of John Bowdler for an engraving by Edward Scriven published in 1816 (British Museum, inv. 1877,0811.460). He cannot be the homonym born in Marylebone in 1733 and died there in 1798, buried in St Marylebone 7.III.1798 whose details appear in an online genealogical website

conflated (without evidence) with the husband of Jane Myers.

A John Milbourne and Son carried on as oil and colourmen in Soho, advertising in the 1770s. Any relationship is uncertain at present. He is not to be confused with the Charles Milbourne, a theatrical scene painter active at Covent Garden who visited the USA in 1792.

Bibliography

Farington 1978, *Diary, passim*; Oxford DNB; Society of Arts minutes, reproduced in TREATISES; Sée 1911; Waterhouse 1981; Williamson 1894, p. 10

Pastels

- J.539.101 ?Sir George BAKER, 1st Bt (1722–1809), physician, m/u (family PC 1811)
- J.539.102 Gentleman, crayons, Royal Academy 1773, no. 196
- J.539.103 Gentleman, crayons, Royal Academy 1774, no. 183
- J.539.104 Lady, crayons, Royal Academy 1772, no. 157
- J.539.105 Child, 58x49 ov. (Young 1911). Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 86