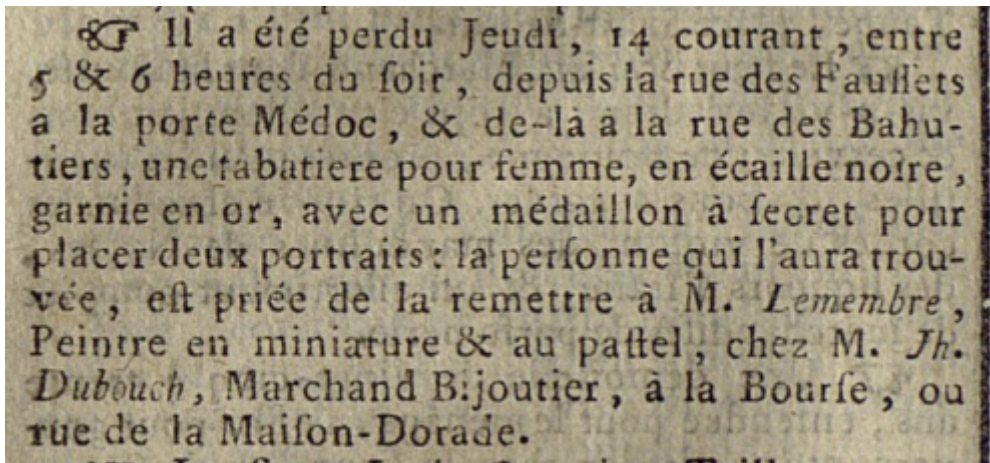


Lost & found: some absent-minded pastellists¹

NEIL JEFFARES

The pages of eighteenth century newspapers can occasionally yield unexpected nuggets, throwing a rather different light on the daily lives of artists than we find from studying only their works. If, that is, we can find those works...for who remembers “M. Lembre, Peintre en miniature & au pastel”? Little did he realise that his entry into the *Dictionary of pastellists* would be based not on any evidence of artistic merit, but on the misfortune he describes in the *Affiches de Bordeaux* for 21 January 1779:



Snuff-boxes of course were particularly subject to such loss. Because princes preferred to make gifts rather than use cash, they were often used (particularly when enhanced with jewelled settings) as diplomatic presents, and it was accepted practice for them to be converted back into money on presentation to the jeweller who had supplied them. (There is an excellent account of this almost incredible practice in Sir Francis Watson’s [introduction to the Wrightsman collection](#), 1970.) Losing even an ordinary one was a tedious business, as Maurice-Quentin de La Tour would discover when, on 25 August 1763, crossing the King’s apartments at Versailles, he was robbed. The subsequent paperwork in the archives du Châtelet (Y 9689) must have irritated him as much as [my encounter with Plod](#) as previously recounted in this blog:

L’an mil sept cent soixante trois, le Samedi vingt sept aout en l’hotel et par devant nous Pierre Chenon, conseiller du Roi, commissaire au Chatelet de Paris, est comparu S. Maurice-Quentin Delatour, pensionnaire du Roi, conseiller de l’Academie royale de peinture, demeurant aux galeries du Louvre à Paris. Lequel nous a dit que jeudi dernier fête de St-Louis, sur les dix heures du matin en traversant les appartemens de Versailles, il lui a été volé dans la poche droite de sa veste, une tabatiere de chasse en or ayant des Trophées, dont celui de dessus sont des attributs de la chasse, le dessous les attributs de l’amour, les deux cotés des attributs de musique et les deux bouts des rosettes de fleurs, lesdits attributs en or de couleur; de laquelle déclaration nous lui avons donné acte et a signé en notre minute.

Chenon.

Vu la déclaration, je requiers pour le Roy être informé des faits contenus, pour, l’Information faite à moi communiquée, requérir ce que de raison, fait ce premier septembre 1763.

Moreau.

¹ This essay first appeared as a post on my blog, neiljeffares.wordpress.com, on 28 February 2015. It may be cited as Neil Jeffares, “Lost & found: some absent-minded pastellists”, *Pastels & pastellists*, <http://www.pastellists.com/Essays/AbsentMindedPastellists.pdf>.

Soit fait ainsi qu'il est requis fait, ce deux Septembre 1763.

Lenoir.

And so this was followed by (Châtelet, Y 9689) –

Information faite par Mons. Pierre Chenon, Conseiller du Roy, commissaire au Chatelet de Paris, à la Requete de Monsieur le Procureur du Roy, au sujet du vol fait au S. Delatour, suivant sa déclaration en datte du vingt sept aoust dernier.

En execution de l'ordonnance de M. le Lieutenant Criminel, Du Mercredy vingt in septembre Mil sept cent soixante trois, dix heures du matin, S^r Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, agé de cinquante neuf ans, pensionnaire du Roy, Conseiller de l'Académie Royale de peinture, demeurant aux galeries du Louvre à Paris, assigné par exploit du jour d'hier dont il nous est apparu après serment par luy fait de dire vérité et qu'il a déclaré n'être parent, allié, serviteur, ny domestique des parties, lecture a luy faite de sa declaration.

Dépose que le jour de la feste de S^t-Louis dernier, sur les dix heures du matin, en traversant les appartements de Versailles, il luy a été volé dans la poche droite de sa veste une tabatiere de chasse en or ayant des Trophees dont celuy de dessus est des attributs de chasse et dessous des attributs de l'amour, les deux cotés des attributs de musique et les deux bouts des rosettes à fleurs, lesdits attributs sont en or de couleur qui est tout ce qu'il a dit savoir. Lecture a luy faite de sa deposition a dit icelle contenir vérité, n'a requis taxe et a signé en nottre minutte.

Chenon.

Vu la Déclaration et l'Information, je requiers pour le Roy icelle être continuée. Fait le 23 septembre 1763.

Moreau.

Soit fait ainsi qu'il est requis, fait ce 27 septembre 1763.

Lenoir.

I hope he took more care next time. Of course miniatures were equally easy to lose, as Samuel Cotes, who also worked in both pastel and miniature, found. Here is his plea in the *Public Advertiser* for 9 October 1769:

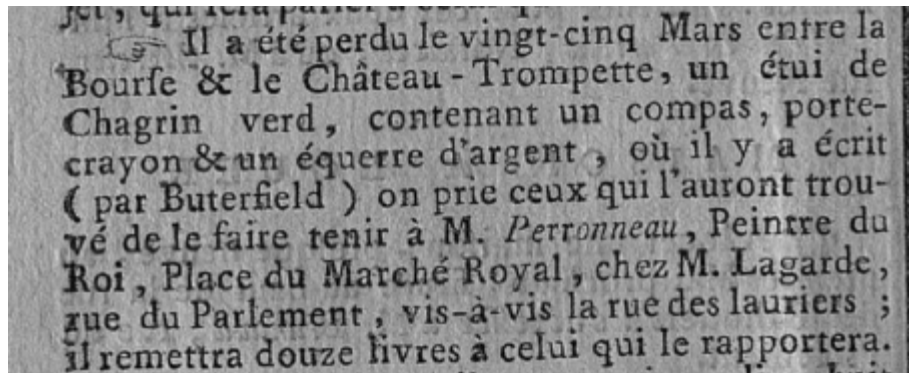
LOST about a Month since, a small Miniature Picture, in Water Colours within a black Case, of a Girl about nine Months old, dressed in a white Frock, the Sleeves and Bosom of which are trimmed round with Lace, the Cap puffed with Lace, and pale Pink Ribbon in Rows, round the Neck a Coral Necklace, from which a black Cord falls with a very small Marquesate Cross and Button hanging to it. Any Person that will bring the above Picture to Mr. Samuel Cotes, Miniature Painter, in Percy-Street, Rathbone Place, will receive One Guinea Reward. No greater Reward will be offered.

It's too late to collect your guinea, but do let me know if you recognise the object. Cotes had married the year before the advertisement; let us hope the infant was not Samuel's own daughter, whose death was recorded in 1774 in the *Town and Country Magazine*:

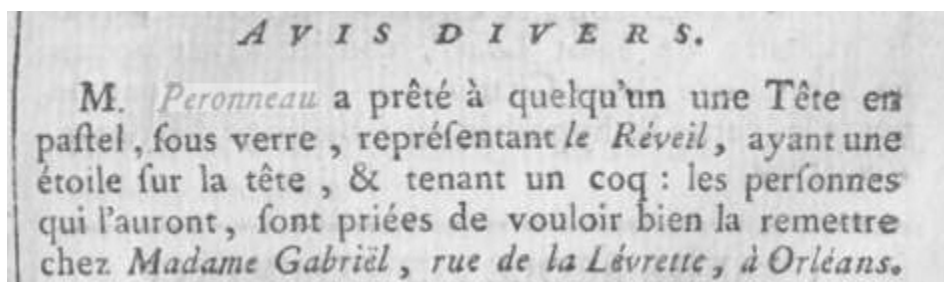
29. Miss Cotes, only child of Samuel Cotes, Esq; of Percy-street, Rarthbone-place.

She was probably Mary Elizabeth Eleanor, baptised 31 July 1770 (her mother died at the time of the birth). She may of course have had a sister who died earlier and would have been ignored in 1774.

Back in France, the great pastellist Jean-Baptiste Perronneau was known for his life as a “gyrovague”, travelling around provincial France and across Europe in search of business. One of the vignettes discovered in Vaillat & Ratouis de Limay’s 1923 monograph was an advertisement in the *Affiches de Bordeaux* for 9 April 1767 which we repeat as their transcription was not quite accurate:



An instrument set by Michael Butterfield would have been a deluxe object at the time (and an antique, as Butterfield himself died in 1724: but perhaps the misspelling suggests that a later set had been passed off as his). In any case, since abandoning engraving many years before, Perronneau had scarcely drawn a straight line, let alone needed a set square or compass. A misfortune nevertheless; but a pattern amounting to carelessness emerges with the same artist, this time in Orléans, as his notice in the *Annonces, affiches, nouvelles et avis divers de l'Orléanois* for 30 May 1766 indicates:



Here I claim my guinea: the pastel described corresponds to that now found in the musée des Beaux-Arts at Orléans, representing the artist’s wife:



As it is signed and dated 1767, the year after the advertisement, we cannot be sure if he recovered it and made some further changes (it was already “sous verre” when lost), or whether this was a repetition. But we do at least know the name, *Le Réveil*, that the artist himself gave to a work which has usually been called *L’Aurore* or *Le Matin*.

It is also interesting to pursue “Madame Gabriël” a little further: one assumes he was staying at this address. The name is common enough, but the street is sufficiently specific. And indeed a perusal of the *Annonces, affiches...* shows that Mme Gabriel was in the habit of letting several properties in Orléans: a notice on 2 May 1766, for example, offered a house in the rue de la Charpenterie until next St Jean, i.e. 24 June. We can identify her from the legal notice that appeared in the *Journal general de l’Orléanois* of 10 October 1788 concerning the sale of property:

Exposés au Palais le 7 Octobre 1788.
865. Marie-Madelaine-Charles-Gabrielle de Villedieu, damoiselle, veuve messire Augustin-Pierre-Marie Bigot, vicomte de Morogues, chevalier, seigneur de Villefaleur, ancien lieutenant des vaisseaux du roi, lieutenant de nosseigneurs les maréchaux de France au département d'Orléans, demeurant à Orléans, rue de la Levrette, paroisse St. Pierre - Ensentellée, a vendu une maison située à Orléans, rue neuve, paroisse sainte Catherine, qui compose trois maisons se joignantes; mouvant à la venderesse comme faisant partie des biens qui lui ont été constitués en dot par Marie-Madelaine-Étiennette de Combault, damoiselle, sa mere, veuve Messire Albert-Louis-Gabriel de Villedieu.

Perronneau's landlady was thus Marie-Madeleine-Étiennette de Combault, the widow of Albert-Louis Gabriel de Villedieu (1716–1753), trésorier des bâtiments du roi; they had married at Dry (Loiret), 19 November 1748, and her husband was buried five years later, in Orléans (Saint Pierre Ensentelé, 26 May 1753). He was the son of Jacques V Gabriel and brother of Ange-Jacques Gabriel, the architects. The later was not merely directeur of the Académie royale d'architecture, but an honoraire amateur de l'Académie royale de peinture. Was it pure coincidence that his fellow academician chose to stay with his sister-in-law in Orléans?

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