

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

BEATSON, Helena, Lady Oakeley

Kilrie, Fife 23.III.1762 – Lichfield Palace
19.II.1839

Daughter of the writer Dr Robert Beatson (1742–1818) of Kilrie; niece and pupil of Katherine Read (*q.v.*), and subject of two of her portraits. She was extraordinarily precocious, with her anonymous submission to the Society of Artists in 1771, no. 309, of “sketches by a child of eight years old” picked out as “wonderful” by Walpole, who identified the artist as a “niece of Miss Reade”. She was also exceptionally well-travelled: the Charleston *South Carolina gazette* (1.XII.1772) announced “A Lady arrived here a few days ago, who is a Niece of her Majesty’s Portrait-Painter, the celebrated Miss Read, and was by her instructed in the Art of painting portraits in Crayons, which we are informed, she intends following here.” The Royal Academy exhibition of 1774 included two drawings of gypsies and dancers “designed by Miss Beatson, aged eleven years”; she exhibited at the Society of Artists the following year. Fanny Burney visited Read and Beatson in Welbeck Street, in .II.1774; she did not find Read particularly congenial, but was more impressed by Beatson, “a most astonishing genius, though never taught...a very wonderful girl”. She travelled to India with her aunt (her brother Alexander (1759–1830) went out as an ensign at the same time), and there, in 1777, she married Sir Charles Oakeley, Bt (1751–1826), who became Governor of Madras. The following year, at the age of 16, she gave birth to a son, and thereafter she seems to have abandoned art. She is also reported to have neglected her aunt, who decided to return to England.

Bibliography

Archer 1979, p. 120; Alexander John Beatson, *Genealogical account of the families of Beatson*, Edinburgh, 1860; Bénézit; Edwards 1808, p. 75; Rutledge 1949; Saur; Steuart 1905; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006

Critiques

Anon., *Morning chronicle & London advertiser*, 29.V.1772:
Honorary Exhibitions.

A Kidnapper, in Crayons. By Miss Beatson, nine years old.
Blindman’s-buff, ditto. By ditto.
Sketches. Ditto.

If this young artist rises in reputation proportionally as she has done, the greatest efforts of genius may very reasonably be expected from her.

Pastels

J134.101 A Kidnapper, pstl, Society of Artists
1772

J134.102 Blindman’s-buff, pstl, Society of Artists
1772