BENWELL, John Hodges

Woodstock 6.V.1762 – London brd 5.III.1785

According to Edwards, Benwell was the son of an under-steward to the Duke of Marlborough. His social standing may have been rather higher than this suggests, as he was the son of Samuel Benwell, "for many years steward to the Duke of Marlborough". Samuel died in 1777, and his memorial was formerly in Eynsham church. His will bequeathed his estate to James Benwell, a well-known sadler of Bartholomew Lane (and nephew of Mary Benwell, *q.v.*), on trust for his widow Rachel Hodges, to pass to their children on her death (they were presumably minors at the time). Her obituary in the *Gentleman's magazine* for 1788 noted that the fortune of the 70 year old from Enfield devolved to a Mr Hillier, a linen draper in Chandos Street (Robert Hillier of Lambeth, son of the bondsman at Samuel's wedding in Marlborough in 1750, Robert Hillier (–1762), goldsmith of Warminster), implying that all their children were by then dead. James was probably a nephew of Samuel; James's son, also James, was alive in 1791 when a stockbroking partnership was dissolved.

In any case, according to most sources John Hodges Benwell was taught by a portrait painter called Saunders of Great Russell Street (viz. John Sanders Jr, *q.v.*). In fact he was apprenticed to "Joseph Saunders of St Paul's, Covent Garden, crayon painter" for seven years from 21.XI.1776 for a premium of £30 (register of duties paid, 14.XII.1776). Nevertheless Benwell became a pupil of the Royal Academy from 25.III.1779 (aged "17 6th next May", implying that he was born 6.V.1762), silver medallist in 1782, and exhibitor (from 24 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden) in 1784. He also taught drawing in Bath. The *Public advertiser* for 4.III.1785 announced: "A few days since died of a consumption Mr John Benwell, miniature and historical painter, of Henrietta-street, Covent-garden."

Benwell specialised in fancy pictures in a mixture of pastel and watercolour which he combined in a personal technique, rather as Downman had done. Dayes describes it as "fixed crayons". Edwards described his few small pictures as "exceedingly beautiful", and his premature death from consumption much to be lamented. For Sée, his pastels reveal extraordinary talent, refined colours and elegant and exact drawing. The scale of these pictures led them to being described sometimes as miniatures; Byrne, the engraver, apparently had many of them. A number of these were engraved by Knight and Sharp; Bartolozzi was responsible for the well known pendants of a St Giles Beauty and a St James Beauty, identified in 1882 by the owner of one, a descendant, as portraits of the Misses Burrough, apparently members of the family of the old Earls of Huntingdon; other identifications have also been proposed.

Bibliography

Edward Dayes, *The works: Professional sketches of modern artists*, ed. Edward W. Brayley, London, 1805, p. 320; Edwards 1808, p. 114; *Gentleman's magazine*, LXIII, 1788, p. 469; Myrone 2022; National archives; Oxford DNB; Pilkington 1852; Saur; Sée 1911; Sloan 2000; Sloman 2002, p. 200; WMS, *Notes & queries*, 1882, p. 427; William Tyte, *Bath in the eighteenth century*, 1903; Waterhouse 1981; Index of Bath artists

Pastels

J.1426.101 SELF-PORTRAIT with a portfolio under his arm, the other hand over it, holding a portcrayon, m/u. Lit.: Dayes 1805, *loc. cit.*

J.1426.102 Henry CHURCH, pstl, 13x10 ov., 1783; & pendant: J.1426.103 Mary Church, pstl, 13x10 ov., 1783 (Chichester, Stride & Son, 31.X.2003, Lot 682 repr.) φ

J.1426.106 [Mrs William Brooks (∞ 1774), née Priscilla Burrough (1749–1822)], a St James's beauty, pstl, gch./ppr, 17.4x14.2 ov., c.1784 (Manchester Art Gallery, inv. 1945.178. London, Christie's, 12.XII.1908, Lot 43, 85 gns; Pollard) φ

J.1426.107 =? m/u (H. H. Almack 1894). Exh.: London 1894a, no. 167 n.r., as Lady Augusta Campbell (–1831), as grav. Bartolozzi as a St James Beauty

~grav. F. Bartolozzi, as a St James's Beauty

J.1426.109 [Elizabeth Burrough (1747–)], a St Giles Beauty in a painted ov., m/u, 15x11.5 (desc.: WMS 1882. London, Sotheby's, 3.V.1973, Lot 52). Lit.: WMS, *Notes & queries*, 1882, p. 427

~grav. F. Bartolozzi, as a St Giles Beauty

J.1426.111 Cupid disarmed; & pendant: J.1426.112 Cupid's revenge, m/u

~grav. C. Knight 1786