

# Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

## Online edition

### **BENWELL, John Hodges**

Woodstock 1764 – London 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 presumably the grandson 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 saddler of Bartholomew Lane, on trust for his widow Rathell, to pass to their children on her death. 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, implying that all their children were by then dead. James may have been a brother of Samuel; James's son, also James, was alive in 1791 when a stockbroking partnership was dissolved. There is no obvious relationship with Mary Benwell.

In any case, John Hodges Benwell was taught by a portrait painter called Saunders of Great Russell Street (presumably the John Sanders Jr, *q.v.*, who exhibited from this address in 1788), becoming a pupil of the Royal Academy from 1779, silver medallist in 1782, and exhibitor (from 24 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden) in 1784. He also taught drawing in Bath.

Benwell specialised in fancy pictures in a mixture of pastel and watercolour which he combined in a personal technique, rather as Downman had done. Their scale led them to being described sometimes as miniatures. A number of these were engraved by Bartolozzi, Knight and Sharp. 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.

#### **Bibliography**

Edwards 1808, p. 114; *Gentleman's magazine*, LXIII, 1788, p. 469; National archives; Oxford DNB; Pilkington 1852; Saur; Sée 1911; Sloan 2000; Sloman 2002, p. 200; William Tyte, *Bath in the eighteenth century*, 1903; Waterhouse 1981

#### **Pastels**

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



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



~grav.: F. Bartolozzi

A St Giles Beauty in a painted ov., m/u, 15x11.5 (London, Sotheby's, 3.V.1973, Lot 52)

~grav.: F. Bartolozzi

Cupid disarmed; & pendant: Cupid's revenge, m/u

~grav.: C. Knight 1786