

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

BURGESS, Thomas

London 1721–1794

Portrait and history painter, draughtsman and teacher. He studied at the St Martin's Lane Academy and was mentioned by Shipley as the assistant hired by the Duke of Richmond for his gallery – “Mr Burgess, who is an excellent draughtsman” – in a letter to Ozias Humphry of 5.XII.1758. Burgess was teaching independently by 1763, when he appeared as a drawing master at Duke Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields in Mortimer's *Universal director*. He was admitted as a student to the Royal Academy Schools on 31.I.1769 (Burgess is the spelling in the register, Burgess in the council minutes), but rapidly became involved in controversy: in a letter of 1.V.1769, he complained that of the two oil portraits and four drawings he had submitted for exhibition, only one – the worst – had been accepted. Even that one did not appear in the printed catalogue. He did not start to exhibit until 1774, but then appeared at the Society of Artists (1774–75), the Free Society (1770–73) and the Royal Academy (1778–91), his addresses being Gloucester Street, Red Lion Square (or Queen's Square), 1770–73, 35 Lamb's Conduit Street, 1774–75; Kemp's Row, or Kemp's Town, Chelsea, near Ranelagh, 1778–80, 33 Great Maddox Street, 1782–85; 54 Theobald's Road, 1786–90 (he was listed there as a “Limner, art” in Wakefield's *Merchant and tradesman's general directory for London*); 11 Spa Fields, Clerkenwell, 1791. None of these exhibits is evidently in pastel, although a few landscapes “in chalks” might be, but he evidently taught the medium.

Thomas Burgess “of Kemps Row, Chelsea”, “drawing master and painter” died in 1794, when his will was proved (6.X.1794, by his widow Elizabeth Palairt whom he had married in St George's Hanover Square on 16.XII.1775). Other members of the family were artists, notably his only son William (*q.v.*, by his first marriage), and their records are confused between Bryan, Graves etc. Thomas Burgess was in fact older than most sources suggest: he was 25 on 27.I.1747 when he made an allegation prior to his marriage to the 21-year old Laetitia Carte at St Giles-in-the-Fields. It seems likely that another son was also called Thomas (only a Henry is recorded, born 1751); a Thomas Burgess exhibited topographical pictures at the Royal Academy from 1802 on, from Sloane Square.

Among his pupils were William Bond (*q.v.*) who exhibited at the Free Society 1772 as “pupil to Mr Burgess Senr”; Charles Shirreff in 1770 and 1772 and Peregrine Phillips 1771–73 (*qq.v.*) exhibited drawings at the Free Society from Mr Burgess's, drawing master. Miss Isaacs (*q.v.*) was another pupil, and may have provided the connection with the priest of the Great Synagogue whose portrait Burgess exhibited twice.

Bibliography

Alexander 2021; Bryan 1889; Graves 1907; Myrone 2022; Royal Academy archives; Saumarez Smith 2012, p. 125; Saur; Waterhouse 1981

Portraits

J.1872.101 High priest of the great synagogue in London [Rev. Isaac Elias POLACK (1726–1802), Hazan of the Great Synagogue, Duke's Place, London], chalks, Free Society 1771
~grav. James Bolton 1779