

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

CUMMINS, Mrs Robert, née Mary Forbes

fl. Edinburgh 1797–1801

An advertisement in *Caledonian Mercury* (28.VI.1800) by “R. Cummins, carver and gilder, opposite the Cross Well, Edinburgh”, offering busts of Pitt and Dundas for 3 gns the pair, includes by way of a postscript—

PORTRAITS painted in Crayons, by Mrs CUMMINS, 24 inches by 18, at Two Guineas each— and in Oil, 30 inches by 25, at Five Guineas.

Subsequent advertisements in the *Edinburgh evening courier* (11.X.1800, 11.VII.1801) describe Mrs Cummins as a painting teacher at 5 South Frederick Street. Of her output, no pastel survives, and the only indication is a mention in an account of the Edinburgh “rejoicings” to celebrate peace with France, 13.X.1801) of “an elegant transparency, designed by Mrs Cummins”, showing Peace with Britannia and Plenty, at the Toneine Tavern, with a similar work at the Crown & Sceptre (*Edinburgh magazine*, XVIII, 1801, p. 313).

Mary Forbes of Old Kirk parish, daughter of James Forbes, a paper stainer, became the second wife of Robert Cummins, carver and gilder in Edinburgh on 18.II.1797; his consistorial process of divorce against Jean Anderson, daughter of a coachman to the Duke of Hamilton, took place 25–26.VI.1795 (Commissariat of Edinburgh, XXIII 109); they had married on 20.III.1789 (where his name appears as Cumming). In 1797 Cummins was involved in a controversy over the appointment of a master at the Edinburgh drawing academy; according to Cummins some chalk drawings claimed by a John Wood had been largely executed by an engraver called Edward Mitchell. Three children followed before Cummins’s death in 1802, aged 35.

Mary Forbes’s father James and, presumably her uncle, John Forbes, paper stainers, were tried, but acquitted, in the Edinburgh High Court in 1794 for counterfeiting paper duty stamps. John Forbes (1751–1799) had married a Janet Esplin in Edinburgh, 1.IX.1781; the firm of Esplin & Forbes, paper stainers, was recorded in Parliament Square in Denovan’s directory for 1804, but is known to have supplied wallpaper and artists’ materials in the late eighteenth century (the accounts of Lady Mary Hog show purchases from the firm, including watercolour supplied in shells, used in her lessons with the painter David Allan from 1785). In 1790 they established a circulating library, lending prints and drawings. Given the difference in social standing, Mary is unlikely to have been related to Anne Forbes (*q.v.*), the subject of a portrait by Allan, who had been master of the Edinburgh drawing academy from 1786.

Bibliography

The book of the Old Edinburgh Club, XXVII, 1949, p. 74f; British bronze sculpture founders and plaster figure makers, 1800–1980, at npg.org.uk, *s.v.* Robert Cummins; Laura Houlston, “Frame making in Edinburgh 1790–1830”, *Regional furniture*, XIII, 1999, pp. 58–77; Margaret Swain,

“Lady Mary Hog and the Newliston needlework”, *Country life*, 12.VIII.1982, p.470f; *The Scots magazine*, LVI, 1794, pp. 509ff