

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastelists before 1800*

Online edition

HICKEY, Thomas

Dublin .V.1741 – Madras .V.1824

The son of Noah Hickey, a confectioner in Dublin, and his wife, Anne, daughter of Thomas Smith, a cabinet maker in Dublin, who one might infer were married at the time of what is described as a pre-marriage deed of settlement dated 2.VII.1741 (the trustees were Sir John Spring, Bt, of London and Hugh Eccles, a prominent member of the Dublin Society; several unattributed portraits are known of Eccles and his wife, Elizabeth Ambrose). Thomas's date of birth is widely cited as .V.1741 which seems to contradict this; but, while his baptismal entry has not been located, an elder brother, William, was baptised to Noah and Anne at the family church of St Mary's, Mary Street (Church of Ireland) on 6.IV.1740. Several other siblings were baptised there up to Isaac (1.IX.1756); one brother, John (1751–1795), was a sculptor. Of the six sons and two daughters Thomas was the only one omitted from his father's will made in 1763, proved 1766.

Thomas was a pupil of Robert West (*q.v.*) at the Dublin Society school, where he won Dr Madden's premiums for drawings by under-16-year-olds, between 1753 and 1756 (15.II.1753, fourth class, 9s. 1d; 14.II.1754, third class, £1/2/9), first prize in the 12.VI.1755, first class, but second to Hugh Hamilton, £1/2/9; 2.XII.1756, first class, £1/10/-). He travelled to Italy between 1761 and 1767 before returning to Dublin for three years, after which he moved to England. He was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools in London on 11.VI.1771, and exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1772 and 1792 (from Jermyn Street, 1772; Tavistock Row, 1773; Henrietta Street, 1774, Gerard Street, 1775–76; Bath, 1778; and 31 Margaret Street, 1792). Boswell records dining with Hickey and Dr Johnson in 1775 shortly before his move to Bath where he is recorded between 1776 and 1780. John Warren reported (letter to Andrew Caldwell, 25.III.1777) his surprise at Hickey's decision to settle in Bath in view of his competition, some of whom had "a great superiority of Merit & most of them as far as a Head, equal to him"; while Hickey was "much improved", "his flesh is still weak has a limey appearance & is coarsely & ill executed."

Hickey's failure to achieve the recognition he sought in Bath is plain from an advertisement in the *Bath chronicle* for 15.VII.1779 placed by Mr Evatt, auctioneer instructed by the assignees of "Mr Thomas Hickey, Limner, a bankrupt", the sale to take place at his apartment, Cross-Bath Passage, that and the following day. This included, as well as his household furniture, the tools of his trade, including "crayons, bladders of colours, oils, pant brushes, back and white chalk...slabs for grinding colours, straining frames with canvas" etc.

Hickey's bankruptcy, and perhaps the death of his wife, made him consider travelling to India, where artists such as Willison and Zoffany had made fortunes. In July 1780 he set sail for India, armed with a letter of introduction from Sir Joshua Reynolds to Warren Hastings ("Mr Hickey is a very ingenious young Painter"),

but his ship was captured by the French and Spanish fleets and taken to Cadiz. Although released as a non-combatant, he spent three years in Spain and Portugal painting the British residents in Portugal (among them the unrelated diarist William Hickey) before resuming his journey to Calcutta which he reached in 1784 on a Portuguese ship. He was back in London by 1791, but the following year joined Lord Macartney's embassy to China where he remained until 1794. At some time around 1798 he returned to India, with it seems two daughters from an untraced marriage. Humphry, briefly a rival in India, thought he was "a very weak painter", but he caught a good likeness and had the social skills to succeed in India which he made his home.

He worked in oil as well as chalk and pastel, but seems to have abandoned the latter by the end of 1770s. His pastels are rapidly executed in a graphic style, with compositions reminiscent of Hamilton's sketches but a technique closer to Frye, and use a limited range of colours. Some are monochrome, and a couple here attributed to him have survived unglazed, presumably fixed by some robust process. In his later career he continued to make black and white chalk drawings capturing his sitters' spontaneous expressions: William Sydenham reported to Humphry in a letter of 10.X.1800 that Hickey had been "very successful in making black chalk portraits as preparatory studies" for his series of seven paintings of the "success at Mysore", no doubt the fourth Anglo-Mysore war which resulted in the death of Tipu Sultan.

Bibliography

Archer 1979; Bénézit; Thomas Bodkin, "Thomas Hickey", *Apollo*, III, 1926, pp. 96ff; Breeze 1983; Breeze 1984; Crookshank 1969; Crookshank & Glin 1994; Crookshank & Glin 2002; *Dictionary of Irish biography*, Dublin 1969; Figgis 2014; Figgis & Rooney 2001; Sir William Foster, "British artists in India", *Walpole Society*, XIX, 1931; William Hickey, *Memoirs*, 1775, II, pp. 351ff; Irish deeds registry, memorial no. 74365; McGuire 1939, pp. 13f; McIntyre 2003, p. 369; New Haven 1979; Oxford DNB; Sloman 2002, p. 201; Strickland 1913; Thicknesse 1778; Thrift genealogical abstracts; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006; Royal Academy archives

Pastels and drawings

J.39.101 [?]Richard COSWAY (1742–1821), artist, in green coat and vest and white stock, pstl/ppr, 26x20.5 ov., sd → "T. Hickey/1774" (London, Courtauld Institute, D.1952.RW.4557. London, Christie's, 3.XII.1937, Lot 39 n.r., unidentified, 6½ gns; Frost & Reed. Sir Robert Clermont Witt; legs 1952) φ?δ



J.39.104 ?Rt Hon. John FOSTER of Collon, 1st Baron Oriel (1740–1828), speaker of the Irish House of Commons in 1785, pstl, 23x18 ov. (Colchester, Reeman Dansie, 28–29.IX.2010, Lot 1078 n.r., as by Hamilton, with two others, Robert Holford and Lady Louisa Conolly, est. £500–700, £6800) [new attr.; the identification of the sitter has been confused by the swapping of the frames with Holford] φαδν



J.39.106 William Monckton-Arundell, né Monckton, 2nd Viscount GALWAY (1725–1772), MP, master of staghounds, pstl/ppr, c.25x20 ov. [c.1770] (PC 2012) [new attr., ?] φανσ



J.39.108 Harriot [HARDING], in pale pink dress, standing on a terrace, pstl, 39.3x32.3 ov. (London, Christie's, 28.XI.1930, as of Harriot Harding, 70 gns; Agnew)

J.39.109 =?Mrs HARDING, pstl (Agnew's, exh. 1920). Lit.: *Connoisseur*, LVI, 1920, p. 251 n.r.

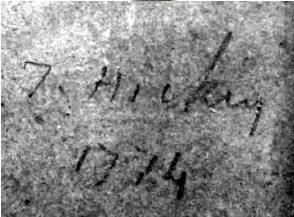
J.39.11 Joseph HICKEY, Jr (1745–1827), attorney, brother of diarist, pstl, bl. chl., 24.8x19.7 ov., sd < "T. Hickey pinxt/1778" (New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, inv.

B1977.14.6201. Roger Roe, Cambridge, 1931; Leonard G. Duke –1961). Exh.: New Haven 1979, no. 67 repr. Lit.: P. Quennell, ed., *Memoirs of William Hickey*, London, 1960, repr. opp. p. 161 φ



Holford, v. Foster

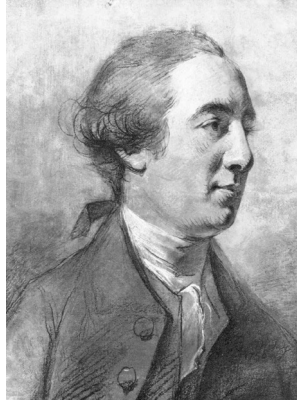
J.39.113 Dr Hugh Alexander KENNEDY (–1795), MD, pstl, 22x17 ov., sd → “T. Hickey/1774” (London, Christie’s, 15.v.1934, Lot 47; [John] Maher 1939. Oxford, Bonhams, 27.xi.2013, Lot 241 repr., unknown subject, est. £600–800; Guy Peppiatt Fine Art 2015; Birmingham, Biddle & Webb, 23.x.2015 Lot 4 repr., all as of “Dr Kennedy”, est. £800–1200; Guy Peppiatt Fine Art, exh. 3–12.x.2016, cat. no. 3 repr., identified as Hugh Kennedy). Lit.: McGuire 1939, fig. v Φσ



J.39.116 Sir Edward LOFTUS, Bt (1734–1818); & pendant: J.39.117 spouse, née Anne Read (–1818), black, white chlk/br. ppr, 46x36, sd ↓ “T. Hickey/1759” (desc.: 1995; Mount Loftus, Mealy’s, 11.viii.1995. Lot 544/545; PC). Lit.: Breeze 1983, fig. 2/-, as sd 1758; Loftus 2013, pp. 185f, repr., as sd 1759 φ



J.39.12 Dr Charles LUCAS (1713–1771), MP, pstl or charcoal with white chlk/ppr, sd “T. Hickey 1758” (Dublin, NGI, 2437. Sold Dublin 1832. P. Walsh & Son, Dublin; acqu. 1901). Lit.: Bodkin 1926, p. 101; Crookshank 1969, fig. 6; Le Harivel 1983, repr. φ

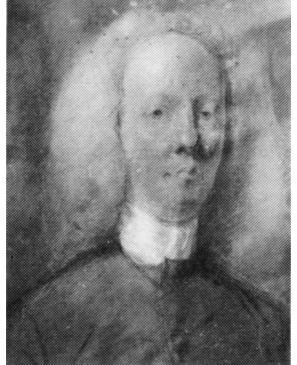


~grav. Patrick Halpin (fl. 1755–87) 1771

J.39.123 Henry MOSSOP (1729–1773), artist, charcoal with white chlk/ppr, 18.6x16.8 ov. (Dublin, NGI, 2589. Rimell, London; acqu. 1908). Lit.: Le Harivel 1983, repr. φ



J.39.125 Sir Fielding OULD (1710–1789), male midwife, charcoal with white chlk/card, sd “T. Hickey 1759” (Dublin, NGI, 2154. Don Lieut.-Col. R. F. Morrison 1888). Lit.: Le Harivel 1983, repr. φ

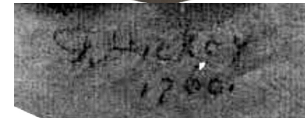


J.39.127 [Mrs John PARKER, née Sarah Denne (1743–1808)]; & pendant: J.39.128 ?[son, John Parker Jr (c.1767–)], pstl, c.22x18 ov., inscr. verso “...Parker of London, sister of William & David Denne”, c.1775 (desc.: sitter’s nephew, William John Denne; his dau., Mrs G. L. Robson, née Mary Jane Denne; her dau., Mrs W. J. Collis, née Mabel Robson. London, Chiswick High Road Auctions, 30.x.2012, Lot 28/32, as Victorian, unknown sitters, est. £70–100, b/i/£80–120; £180) [new attr., ?] φαδνσ



John Baker Holroyd, 1st Earl of SHEFFIELD (London, Christie’s, 11.xii.1909, Lot 3). Lit.: Harding 1804–20, as Hickey; Ingamells 2004, p. 427 n.r., as Hickey [v. Hamilton]

J.39.132 Bernard Smith WARD (c.1743–1770), as an undergraduate at Trinity College Dublin, MP for Enniskillen 1769, nephew to Lord Erne, black, white chlk, 45.2x35.7 ov., sd ↓ “T. Hickey/1760” (London, Christie’s, 7.vii.2010, Lot 378 repr., est. £15–20,000). Lit.: Crookshank & Glin 1978, repr. p. 75 φσ



J.39.136 Unknown men, pstls (Abbey Leix, Co. Laois, 2003). Lit.: *Country life*, 24.vii.2003, repr. p. 55

J.39.137 Boy, pstl, 24x19 ov., sd “T. Hickey 1774” (Eastbourne Auction Rooms, 27.xi.2008, Lot 1099 repr., est. £300–400) φ



J.39.138 Man in brown coat, striped waistcoat, pstl, 30.4x25.4 ov. (Guy Peppiatt Fine Art, cat. 2025, no. 63, Irish sch.) [new attr., ?] φαν



J.39.139 Young lady, chlk, 38.1x28 (London, Christie's, 17.XI.1987, Lot 129, £4200)

J.39.14 Seven crayon drawings, Royal Academy 1774, no. 121