

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

SHARPLES, Mrs James, née Ellen Wallas

Lancaster 4.III.1769 – Bristol 14.III.1849
Legend has it that Ellen Wallace [sic], the third wife of James Sharples (*q.v.*), was born in Birmingham, and married him at an unknown date c.1787 after the death of his second wife. In fact (as first published here in 2012), the registers of St Mary's, Lancaster record the wedding on 5.I.1787 of the "portrait painter" James Sharples to "Ellen Wallas" "of this town and Parish" (curiously the marriage bond in Lancashire archives is dated 6.I.1787, and lists the bride as Ann Wallis, a minor, the bond accompanied by a letter of consent). This is confirmed by the baptismal register for 2.IV.1769, where her father is given as Rowland Wallas (no doubt the blacksmith of this name married to a Margaret France at St Mary's on 8.XI.1767, and possibly the son of the homonymous blacksmith listed as a freeman of Lancaster in 1718–19); her signature on the marriage register is "Ellen Wallas". In the tablet at Clifton Parish Church where she is buried, her date of birth is given as 4.III.1769.

Knox's statements that Ellen had been Sharples's pupil in Bath, where she lived with her mother, that she was from a Quaker family and that she was a "young lady of fashion" may be unwarranted, romanticised inferences from unpublished documents; she misreads an account of Sharples's portrait of Ellen as of her mother, and tells us that the mother is buried in some cemetery in Bath "as Mrs Sharples mentions this fact in her Diary." In fact Ellen's journal covers the period from 1803, but was not in fact compiled until c.1841 (when Ellen was 72) from various old notes, letters etc. which limit its reliability. St Mary's, the parish church in Lancaster, where her parents were married and she herself was baptised and married, was Anglican, not Quaker. There is no evidence that James Sharples was in Bath in the period between the death of his second wife and his return to Liverpool; on the marriage certificate he is described as "of Lancaster".

After her marriage, Ellen devoted herself to making numerous copies of her husband's portraits in pastel, watercolour and miniature. The early entries in her diary record pencil drawings, and, in 1803, her "first attempt at miniature painting on ivory". Confusingly, like one of her husband's previous wives, Ellen Sharples also produced needlework, embroidering a copy of the portrait of Washington, according to Dunlap (several other pieces are in the Bristol Museum & Art Gallery). Following Sharples's death in New York in 1811, Ellen and her children James and Rolinda returned to Bristol. She founded the Bristol Academy for the Promotion of Fine Arts (later known as the Royal West of England Academy) with a donation of some £3500, and later bequeathed a group of Sharples pastels to it. Appended to her will is an inventory of other pictures in her house; none is identified as in pastel.

The works securely attributed to Ellen belong to the period after her husband's death, and are outside the scope of this *Dictionary*. The

Sharples children also became successful portrait painters in the nineteenth century: James Jr (c.1788–1839) also produced genre scenes and still-lives in pastel; Rolinda (1793–1838) worked mainly in oil, while James's son by an earlier marriage, Felix (1786–p.1830), produced numerous pastels in America; he was the only member of the family to visit the South, and the only one who remained after 1811. A group of small oval pastels said to be by "Miss Sharples of Bath", in frames by John Forfeit of Maiden Lane (active before 1800), are too early for Rolinda and are probably early work by Mrs Sharples. Other copies of her husband's work which may well be by her (or by other members of the family) are catalogued under his name.

Bibliography

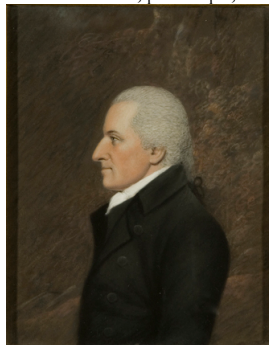
Bolton 1923; Hazel Gower, *Painted out of history, the story of Ellen Sharples*, 2021; Grove; Anna McNay, "Ellen Sharples", *Art quarterly*, Autumn 2019, pp. 48–53; Kathryn Metz, "Ellen and Rolinda Sharples", *Woman's art journal*, XVI/1, 1995, pp. 3–11; Kathryn Metz, in *Gaze* 1997; Quick 1910; Stoddard 2002; Diane Waggoner, *The Sharples collection. Family & legal papers 1794–1854*, Bristol, 2001; Waterhouse 1981

Pastels

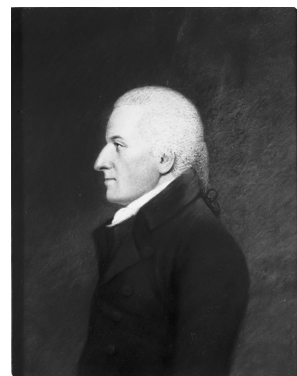
J.6752.101 Richard BRANT (1760–1822); & pendant: J.6752.102 spouse (∞ 1786), née Maria Lee (–1846), pstl, c.1810 (PC 2015) φ



J.6752.105 Arthur M. BROWNE (1756–1805), LLD, MP, prime serjeant of Ireland, Senior Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, pstl, 23x18, 1803 (Bristol, City Museum & Art Gallery, inv. K1028. Acqu. 1931). Lit.: Quick 1910, no. 36 n.r., as by James, but possibly Ellen, Sharples; Gidley 1974; Stoddard 2002, p. 30 repr.; Anna McNay, "Ellen Sharples", *Art quarterly*, Autumn 2019, p. 50 repr., as by Ellen φ



J.6752.107 ~version, pstl/ppr, 22x18 (n/k)φβ



J.6752.109 Lady William CAVENDISH-BENTINCK, née Lady Mary Acheson (c.1783–1843), pstl, 24x20 (London, Bonhams, 8.III.2005, Lot 40 repr., est. £1000–1500) φ



J.6752.111 Rev. Charles CURTIS, 29x23.9 (Charles Constable Curtis; desc.; London, Sotheby's, 14.IV.2002, Lot 146, £1410 with other item) φ



Photo courtesy Sotheby's

J.6752.114 Timothy CURTIS, RN, 29x23.9 (Charles Constable Curtis; desc.; London, Sotheby's, 14.IV.2002, Lot 146, £1410 with other item)

J.6752.1145 Charles DARWIN (1809–1882), with his sister Emily Catherine (1810–1866), pstl, 1816 (PC) φ



J.6752.115 Robert FARADAY (1788–1846), brass founder and gas engineer, brother of Michael Faraday, seated wearing a blue coat, white waistcoat and stock, pstl, 22.5x22, inscr. *verso* [c.1812] (Oxford, Bonhams, 14.IV.2010, Lot 34 n.r., as by James Sharples, est. £300–500) [attr., ?] φ



Mrs Robert Eglesfield GRIFFITH, née Maria Thong Patterson (Baltimore Museum of Art, inv. 1986.117). Exch.: Baltimore 2023, no. 56 repr., p. 145, as by Ellen Sharples, v. J. Sharples, J.675.314

J.6752.118 John Claremont WHITEMAN (1796–1866), commander in the Hon. East India Company's service, pstl, 23x21 (London, Sotheby's, 14.X.2003, Lot 155 repr., est. £800–1200) φ



Photo courtesy Sotheby's
Mr WOODLAND; & pendant: spouse (London, Christie's South Kensington, 2.IX.2008, Lot 163 n.r./repr., attr.) [v. Hayter]

J.6752.123 Boy in black coat, in profile, to left, pstl/ppr, 23.7x18.5 (London, Courtauld Institute, D.1952.RW.3693. Sir Robert Witt; legs 1952) φα



J.6752.125 Gentleman, pstl, 24x21.5 (London, Sotheby's Olympia, 26.IX.2001, Lot 18 repr.) φ

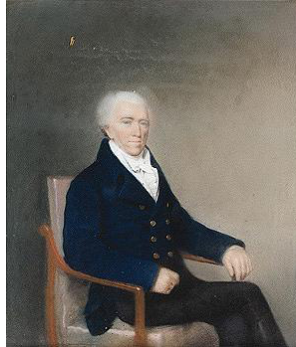
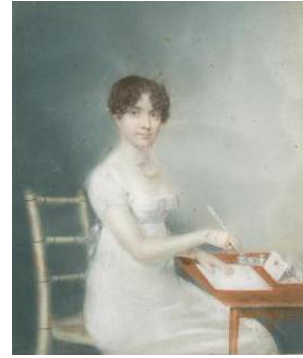


Photo courtesy Sotheby's
J.6752.126 Gentleman, pstl, 26.1x22.2 (London, Bonhams, 18.II.2025, Lot 83 repr., attr., est. £1000–1500) φα

J.6752.128 Young boy in a blue coat, pstl, 24x19 (London, Bonhams, 9.III.2004, Lot 31 n.r., as by Ellen Sharples, est. £800–1200. London, Bonhams Knightsbridge, 11.III.2008, Lot 87 repr., as by James Sharples, est. £700–1000, £1080. Essex, Massachusetts, Kaminski, 27–29.III.2010, Lot 354 repr., [?][?][George Washington Lafayette, James Sharples, est. \$7–8000) φα



J.6752.13 Young woman writing a letter, pstl, 23.5x20 (London, Bonhams, 9.III.2004, Lot 30 repr., est. £800–1200) φα



J.6752.132 Young lady in Regency dress with a red shawl, pstl, 22.5x20; & pendant: J.6752.133 Young lady in Regency dress with a blue, red and white shawl, pstl, 22.5x20 (London, Bonhams, 8.III.2005, Lot 41 repr./n.r., with pendant, est. £1000–1500. Lauder and Howard Fine Art, Freemantle; Judith Rooney, Sydney; Sydney, Bonhams, 12.xii.2024, Lot 40 repr., est. A\$2–4000) φα



J.6752.135 Two children wearing pale yellow dresses standing beside a table, pstl/ppr, 27.8xc.22.9 (London, Bonhams, 23.XI.2005, Lot 120 repr., attr. Ellen or James Sharples, est. £1500–2500) φα



J.6752.137 A boy and a girl standing in a landscape, pstl/ppr, 27.8x22.9 (London, Bonhams, 23.XI.2005, Lot 121 repr., attr. Ellen or James Sharples, est. £1500–2500) φα



J.6752.139 Eight pstls of unknown sitters, 24x19 ov. (Major H. J. Lloyd-Johnes, Dolau Cothy, Carmarthenshire, a.1957). Lit.: Steegman 1962, p. 56 n.r.

J.6752.151 Six of a group of nine pstls, pstl/ppr, 24.5x19.5, labels *verso* "Miss Sharples of Bath", "Forfeit, frame-maker", a.1800 (Gloucester, Chorley's, 29–30.I.2019, Lot 774 repr., attr. Rolinda Sharples, est. £800–1200) [John Forfeit *fl.* a.1800, excluding Rolinda as artist; perhaps there was an unrecorded aunt, or the reference was to Mrs Sharples] φα

