

# Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

## Online edition

### SKIRVING, Archibald

Haddington 1749 – Inveresk 1819

Portraitist in miniature, pastel and oil. The son of a farmer, Skirving was probably taught in the early 1770s at the Trustee's Academy in Edinburgh, an institution founded by the French artist William Delacour (*q.v.*) and continued by his compatriot Charles Pavillon. Skirving continued to work as a customs officer, practising his art by night, until in 1777 he decided to move to London (armed with letters of introduction, among them one to John Hamilton Mortimer). Skirving would have found little guidance in pastel in Edinburgh before this trip; the two early pastels attributed to him are very different in approach to his later work. In London he exhibited three miniatures at the Royal Academy in 1778 (from Mrs Milward's, Little Brook Street), but virtually nothing else is known about this period of his career. He returned to Edinburgh in 1784; a letter from his brother Robert in Bengal confirms that Archibald had determined to settle in Edinburgh, and had abandoned miniature painting for crayons "as it will not be so bad for your eyes nor confine your chest so much". The pastel of David Hume's niece, cited in a letter of 1785 (according to Skinner 1970, based on papers belonging to Skirving's descendant Mrs Hoskins since lost), indicates however that he had already become remarkably proficient, and invites speculation as to whether earlier pastels may be languishing under false attributions; the pastel incorrectly identified as of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess of Hertford may be one of these.

Skirving's continued lack of success in Edinburgh led him to contemplate abandoning art. However, with help from Lord Elcho, in 1786 he travelled to Rome, where he stayed for some eight years (he is recorded among the British artists with lodgings in the Palazzo Babuino near the Piazza di Spagna). Initially he copied old masters and made miniatures, but he may well have met Hugh Douglas Hamilton there, and he certainly recognised the potential for making portraits of Scottish visitors to the city. A letter to his brother, of 18.III.1790, lists a number of these. From the same period come the striking self-portrait and the portrait of Gavin Hamilton, perhaps his two masterpieces, both of which illustrate his fastidious technique. He was noted by a number of travellers at the time. Sir William Forbes (whom Skirving introduced to Tischbein) observed that Skirving "paints small portraits with considerable merit but he takes so much time and bestows so much labour finishing his pieces that he can never do much, indeed can scarcely live by his art."

On his return in 1794, his ship was captured and he was imprisoned for nine months at Brest, accused of spying. This episode provoked a serious eye complaint, and also seems to have confirmed his introverted personality (subsequently he is said to have issued an ultimatum to Lady Charlotte Campbell requiring her to stop her distracted behaviour during sittings; the pastel was accordingly never finished). Such a trait, reinforced by stories of his frugality and caustic wit which remind us of

La Tour, was less acceptable in Edinburgh than in Paris, and his social isolation probably accounts for his failure to achieve the fame deserved by his unusual talent. Neither did Skirving's equally bold treatment of his sitters in the portraits themselves meet with critical acclaim: Patrick Gibson (1816) attacked his "bad taste" in carefully and accurately representing "the personal deformities of his subjects" without regard to their feelings. Although it was during this period after his return from Rome that most of his work was done (from an unfashionably small apartment on Leith Terrace), the output was small (Stephen Lloyd estimates that the 25 surviving works may be half the original oeuvre) and his clientèle seems largely confined to family and acquaintances. Exceptionally high prices of up to 100 gns, linked to the need for up to 50 sittings, no doubt account for this. He appeared at the Royal Academy only once after the 1778 submissions: in 1799 his pastel of John Clerk was shown, presumably before final touches (it is dated 1800). After a brief trip to London in 1816, Skirving retired to his sister's farm.

While Raeburn and Danloux may also have influenced the later work, all Skirving's mature pastels display a very personal technique, composition and lighting which are sometimes closer to Liotard and the Swiss school than to the French masters who attracted Ramsay. Although he taught pastel drawing in Edinburgh (among his pupils was Jane Welsh Carlyle, whose husband wrote a memoir of the artist), he founded no school and left no lasting influence.

Skirving used the Edinburgh framers William Chalmers & Son (118 High Street); accounts survive for the period 1814–18.

#### Monographic exhibitions

Skirving 1999: *Raeburn's rival: Archibald Skirving 1749–1819*, Edinburgh, SNPG, 1999. Cat. Stephen Lloyd

#### Bibliography

Bénézit; Thomas Carlyle, *Reminiscences of Adam and Archibald Skirving*, 1974; Edinburgh 2008; Foskett 1987; Patrick Gibson, *Edinburgh annual register*, 1816; Graves 1905, *s.v.* Shrivving; Ingamells 1997; Peter J. M. McEwan, *Dictionary of Scottish art & architecture*, 1994; Oxford DNB; Sée 1911; Skinner 1970; Tanja Sundström, "Aspects of the life and work of Archibald Skirving (1749–1819)", M.Phil. thesis, University of St Andrews, 1994, unpublished; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006

#### Pastels

SELF-PORTRAIT, pstl, 71x55, executed Rome 1790 (Edinburgh, SNPG, inv. PG 595. Patrick Murray of Simprim 1790. Miss Ainslie 1863; desc. David Ainslie; legs 1901). Exh.: Edinburgh 1863, no. 321; Edinburgh 1955, p. 13, no. 75; Edinburgh 1993, p. 90; Skirving 1999, p. 18, no. 61 repr.; Edinburgh 2008, no. 48 repr. Lit.: Smailes 1990; Pat Hardy, review of Edinburgh 2008, *British art journal*, x/1, 2009, pp. 90–91, fig. 1 ☐



~version, pstl, 7.3x5.9 ov. (Edinburgh, SNPG, PG 3148. Don Mrs Nancy Butcher 1999). Exh.: Edinburgh 2005, no. 88 repr. ☐



Robert AINSLIE of Begbie, m/u, letter of 10.III.1796. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.

Elizabeth, Mrs John ARCHIBALD (–1822), wife of Leith wine-merchant, m/u (J. N. Adamson, Broughty Ferry, 1901). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.

Mrs BAILLIE, m/u (Skirving studio contents, 1819). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.

Robert BOSWELL of St Boswells (1746–1804), pstl/ppr, 82.5x64.8, c.1800 (desc.; PC Scotland). Exh.: London 1956, no. 677; Skirving 1999, no. 84 repr. cl. Lit.: Simon 1987, p. 95, fig. 195 ☐



~grav.: N. Chater & Co., a/r cop. by P. Ronan  
Mr BROWN of Boggs, m/u, letter of 10.III.1796.  
Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.

Col. John CAMPBELL of Shawfield (–1809), profile, pstl (the artist's studio –1819. Capt. Wilkie 1863. Mrs Leila Hoskins, Cheltenham; London, Sotheby's, 22.III.1979, Lot 137 with pendant; apparently destroyed, early 1980s). Exh.: Edinburgh 1863, no. 331. Lit.: Skirving 1999, p. 67 n.r.

Lady Charlotte Susan CAMPBELL (1775–1861), author, lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte, ∞ 1818 Edward John Bury, unfinished pstl/ppr, 46x38 ov., c.1802 (the artist's studio –1819. Capt. Wilkie 1863. Mrs Leila Hoskins, Cheltenham; London, Sotheby's, 22.III.1979, Lot 137 with pendant. Edinburgh, Christie's, 15.V.1997, Lot 578 repr., est. £2–3000, b/i; Fine Art Society, London, 1999). Exh.: Edinburgh 1863, no. 352; Skirving 1999, no. 98, fig. 18 ☐



Photo courtesy Sathely's

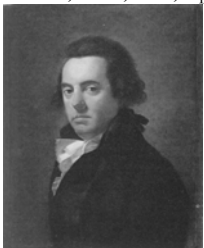
Mrs James CARNEGIE, née Janet Skirving (1772–1853), of Edrom Newton, the artist's half-sister, pstl, 60.3x45, c.1800 (Edinburgh, NGS. Artist's studio –1819; James Carnegie; legs 1899). Exh.: Edinburgh 1863, no. 336; Skirving 1999, no. 85 repr. clr  $\phi$



Mrs Robert Hodshon CAY, née Elizabeth Liddell (1770–1831), pstl, 36x24 (desc.: sitter's son, John Cay (1790–1865), sheriff of Linlithgow 1863. PC 2012). Exh.: Edinburgh 1863. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.

=?Mrs Robert Hodshon CAY, née Elizabeth Liddell in a blue striped dress with black lace shawl, pstl, 68.5x56 (London, Christie's, 11.II.1911, anon., Early English sch., 300 gns)

Hugh CLEGHORN of Stravithie (1752–1837), academic, diplomat and traveller, pstl, 61x51, executed Rome 1790 (desc.; PC 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 64, fig. 10. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.; Skinner 1990, p. 47; Aylwin Clark, *An enlightened Scot: Hugh Cleghorn 1752–1837*, Duns, 1992, repr. frontispiece  $\phi$



John CLERK of Eldin (1728–1812), geologist, author of the *Treatise on naval tactics*, pstl, 59x49, sd  $\tau$  "A. Skirving 1800", Royal Academy 1799, no. 836 (desc.; PC 1999). Exh.: Edinburgh 1981, no. 16; Edinburgh 1986, no. 118, pl. 61; Skirving 1999, no. 92 repr. clr. Lit.: Donald B. McIntyre & Alan McKirdy, *James Hutton: the founder of modern geology*, Edinburgh, 1997, repr. clr  $\phi$



Mrs COCHRANE, m/u, letter of 4.VII.1816. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.

William, Lord CRAIG (1745–1813), Scottish judge, pstl, 68.8x55.9, Edinburgh c.1800 (Edinburgh, SNPG, PG 279. Maxwell of Dargavel; desc. Sir Edward Playfair; don

1996). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 89 repr. clr. Lit.: Smailes 1990 repr.; *Burlington magazine*, 1997, p. 582 repr.  $\phi$



~grav.: George Dawe, mezzotint, 1801

Maria CUNNINGHAME of Lainshaw, later known as Edmonstoune-Cranstoun of Corehouse (–1863), pstl, 68.6x55.8, c.1805–25 (artist's studio 1819; Col. Cranstoun 1970; desc., PC 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 100, fig. 19, as unfinished by Skirving, the dress added later by an unknown artist, c.1830  $\phi$



Sir John DALRYMPLE-HAMILTON-MAKGILL, 4<sup>th</sup> Bt (1726–1810), m/u, unfinished

Henry Home DRUMMOND, 6<sup>th</sup> Laird of Blair Drummond (1783–1867), deputy-lieutenant and MP for Perthshire, pstl, 60x44.4, c.1798 (desc.: Major Home Drummond of Abercairney 1970; PC 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 87, repr. clr  $\phi$



Robert DUNDAS of Arniston (1797–1838), pstl, 106x65, c.1800 (desc., Dundas-Becker, Arniston House, 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 95 repr. clr  $\Phi$



Photo courtesy owner

"Lady DUNDONALD'S hands", crayons (artist's studio 1819, no. 31, 8 gns)

=?, pstl, 25.4x21.5 (desc.; Elisabeth A. McIntyre 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 176 n.r., attr., unknown sitter

Francis Charteris, Viscount ELCHO of Amisfield (1749–1808), heir to 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Wemyss, pstl, 58x47, 1790 (Amisfield, Musgrave's lists, 1796; desc.: Earl of Wemyss). Exh.: Skirving

1999, no. 62 repr. clr. Lit.: Skinner 1990, p. 47  $\phi$



=?pstl (Stanway). Lit.: Cockayne 1959, XIII/2, p. 474 n.r., anon.

*Elcho, v.q. Wemyss*

Professor Adam FERGUSON (1723–1816), philosopher, m/u (Mrs Stark 1868). Exh.: Glasgow 1868. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.

John FLAXMAN (1755–1826), sculptor, pstl, 24.1x19, c.1790 (York Art Gallery. Agnew's; Edward Croft-Murray 1950; London, Christie's, 9.VII.1996, Lot 17, as by John Raphael Smith; London, Christie's, 24.XI.1998, Lot 49 repr., as Smith, est. £4–6000, £3800 [=£4370]). Exh.: London 1950, no. 814. Lit.: *NACF review*, 1998, repr., attr.  $\Phi$



Photo courtesy Christie's

William GILLESPIE of Cleardean, East Lothian, m/u. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r., as in SNPG

Lord George GORDON (1751–1793), politician, m/u (F. A. Newdegate 1912). Exh.: London 1912b. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 45 n.r.

Mrs GRAHAM of Glasgow, m/u (Skirving studio contents, 1819). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 54 n.r.

Gavin HAMILTON (1723–1798), artist, pstl, 61x49, c.1788 (Edinburgh, SNPG, inv. PG 2472. Artist's studio –1819; Mrs Leila Hoskins, Cheltenham; don 1981). Exh.: Edinburgh 1986, no. 119, pl. 11; Edinburgh 1993, p. 25, repr. clr pl. 12; Skirving 1999, no. 60 repr. clr; Edinburgh 2008, no. 47 repr. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.; Smailes 1990 repr.; Green 2009, fig. 68  $\phi$



~grav.: Robert Scott 1793

=?Sir William Hamilton (1730–1803) in dressing-gown and night-cap (untraced). Lit.: George Cleghorn, *Ancient and modern art*, Edinburgh, 1848, II, p. 203, as comm. by Sir Wm Hamilton, 200 gns; cited Skirving 1999, p. 18, as of Sir Wm Hamilton [?confusion with Gavin Hamilton]

~version, min. (comm. Lord Gardenstone, Rome). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.

??Francis Seymour-Conway, 1<sup>st</sup> Marquess of HERTFORD (1718–1794), pstl/ppr, 58.5x48.5 (London, Wallace Collection. Mrs Edward

Evelyn Morley, née Rose Georgette Schiff (1874–1962). London, Bonhams Chelsea, 26.III.2002, Lot 63 repr., attr. Hoare, unknown sitter, est. £600–800, b/i; London, Sotheby's, 4.VII.2002, Lot 129 repr., attr. Hamilton, est. £2–3000, £3200 [=£3824]; PC; don Mr & Mrs John Lewis 2005). Lit.: Jeffares 2006, p. 574Aii, as anon., ?Hertford [new attr., ?; pstl c.1780] **Φ**



Photo courtesy Sotheby's

??Countess of HOPETOUN, pstl/vl, 72.4x59.6, sd  
 \ “A. Skirving 1803” (Edinburgh, SNPG, PG 377. H. W. Cage 1901; Esmé Church; Lewes, Clifford Dann, 15–16.IV.1980, Lot 172; McEwan Gallery, Ballater; PC 1999; dep. 1999–). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 99 repr. clr, unknown sitter, possibly Mrs Tait; Edinburgh 2008, no. 49 repr.  $\varphi$



~version, miniature, 9.2x9.2 (London, Bonhams 21.XI.2007, Lot 239 repr., as by John Comerford). Lit.: Foskett 1979, p. 236, pl. 57B; Skirving 1999, p. 68; Edinburgh 2008, s.no. 49, ??Comerford, attr. Skirving

Dr John HUNTER, principal of the University of St Andrews, m/u (James Leslie, Edinburgh, 1883). Exh.: Edinburgh 1883. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.

Miss HYSLOP, m/u (Skirving studio contents, 1819). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.

Mrs Robert JOHNSTON of Hutton Hall ( $\infty$  1785), née Catherine Hume of Ninewells (1760–1820), niece of David Hume, pstl, 63x51, c.1785 (Edinburgh, NGS, inv. D1914. Legs Miss E. K. H. Scott 1939). Exh.: Edinburgh 1993; Skirving 1999, no. 88 repr. clr; Edinburgh 2008, no. 46 repr. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r., cited in letter of 1785  $\varphi$



Miss KEAN, m/u (Skirving studio contents, 1819). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.

John LOCKHART, m/u, letter of 22.VIII.1785. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.

Mrs LOCKHART, mother of John Lockhart, m/u, letter of 22.VIII.1785. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.

Mr MACKIE, m/u, 1776. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r., citing Skirving manuscript note

Sir John MACPHERSON, 1<sup>st</sup> Bt (1745–1821), acting governor-general of India, pstl, 58.5x47, letter of 18.XII.1790, Rome (desc.: Rev. Hugh Alexander Macpherson, Glendale, Skye; sale p.m., London, Christie's, 27.II.1909, Lot 24, 35 gns; Eyre & Son). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.

Allan Maconochie, Lord MEADOWBANK (1748–1816), lord of session, pstl (comm. 30 gns, a.1802). Lit.: cited in Skirving's letter to his brother, 17.VI.1802; Skirving 1999, p. 32 n.r.

Alexander Maconochie, Lord MEADOWBANK (1777–1861), Lord Advocate of Scotland, pstl (comm. 30 gns, a.1802). Lit.: cited in Skirving's letter to his brother, 17.VI.1802; Skirving 1999, p. 32 n.r.

Henry Dundas, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount MELVILLE (1742–1811), pstl a/r David Martin, 44x39, c.1770 (desc. Dundas-Becker family, Arniston House, 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 4, fig. 6, attr. **Φ**



Photo courtesy owner

[?]Patrick MURRAY of Simprim, m/u, Rome, a.1791 (PC, dep.: Edinburgh, SNPG, as unknown). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.; Ingamells 1997, n.r.; Skirving 1999, p. 18 n.r.

?Lady PRINGLE, née Emilia Anne Macleod (1786–1830), pstl/ppr, 55x41, inscr. “AS” (Sir John Pringle, Bt; desc.; PC 2011) [new attr., identification, ?]  $\varphi$



Mrs John PRINGLE of Stithell, née Mary Drummond (1719–1804), pstl/ppr, a/r Danloux, 63.5x47.6, c.1798 (desc.; PC 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 86 repr. clr  $\varphi$



?George RENNIE, m/u (PC Ilminster 1970). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r., attr.

Rev. Daniel ROBERTSON, professor of Hebrew at St Andrews, tutor to Patrick Murray, m/u, Rome, a.1791 (Patrick Murray of Simprim 1791). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.; Ingamells 1997, n.r.; Skirving 1999, p. 18 n.r.

Mrs Richard Brinsley SHERIDAN, née Elizabeth Linley (1754–1792), m/u (Mrs Hoskins 1970). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 55 n.r.

Mark SPROT (1743–1808), financier; & pendant: spouse, née Joanna Stewart of Physgill (–1828), pstl, a.1800

~grav.: William Ward

~cop. (*Mr Sprot*), anon. 19<sup>th</sup> century, pnt. (PC 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 140

Mrs Craufurd TAIT of Harviestoun, née Susan Campbell (–1814), daughter of Sir Ilay Campbell, pstl, sd 1803 (Edinburgh, Lyon & Turnbull, 4.XI.1950, Lot 91). Lit.: Skirving 1999, p. 68 n.r.  $\varphi$



Isabella Fraser TYTLER (1784–1841), pstl, 62x54, c.1801 (J. S. Fraser Tytler 1880; desc.; The Sir Henry Wade Trust 1999). Exh.: Edinburgh 1880, no. 427. Skirving 1999, no. 96 n.r.

Mrs William Fraser TYTLER, née Margaret Cussans Grant (–1862), pstl, 62x54, c.1801 (desc.: Lady Erskine 1999). Exh.: Edinburgh 1880, no. 427; Skirving 1999, no. 96 n.r.

Mrs John WELSH of Haddington, née Grace Baillie (–1841), mother of Jane Welsh Carlyle, m/u (Mrs Carlyle, Surrey, 1884). Exh.: Edinburgh 1884. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 56 n.r.

Francis Charteris, later 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of WEMYSS and 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of March (1772–1853), 58x47, 1790 (Earl of Wemyss). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 63 n.r.

*Wemyss, v.g. Elcho*

Mrs John WILSON, née Margaret Sym (1753–1824), pstl, 68.5x56, c.1800 (Edinburgh, SNPG, PG 2613. Desc. Miss Marjorie A. Wilson, don 1984). Exh.: Edinburgh 1990, no. 29; Skirving 1999, no. 90 repr. clr. Lit.: *Burlington magazine*, 1985, fig. 100; Smailes 1990 repr.  $\varphi$



Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord WOODHOUSELEE (1747–1813), lawyer and historian, pstl, 70x57, 1798 (G. M. Fraser Tytler, Edinburgh, 1880; Skene Tytler estate; Keith Marischal; Commander Christopher Hallewell; acqu. Lady Erskine 1957). Exh.: Edinburgh 1880, no. 412; Edinburgh 1955, no. 79; Skirving 1999, no. 91 repr. clr  $\varphi$



Mrs Charles WRIGHT of Shallope, née Euphan or Euphemia Guthrie (1739–1831), pstl, 58.5x46. c.1796–1810 (C. E. G. Wright 1906.

Miss Guthrie Wright, 2 Lansdowne Crescent, Edinburgh; sale p.m., London, Christie's, 15.v.1908, 50 gns; Agnew). Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 56 n.r.; Skirving 1999, s.no. 132 n.r. ~cop., anon., min. Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 132 n.r.

Benjamin YULE of Wheatfield (c.1740–), royal baxter in Edinburgh, pstl, 28.5x25.3, c.1800; & pendant: spouse, née Marion Sprot (1750–1808/12), sister of Mark Sprot, pstl, 28.5x25.3, c.1800 (desc.: Sprot of Riddell 1903; ; PC 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 93, fig. 16/17. Lit.: George Tancred, *Annals of a border club*, Edinburgh, 1903, pp. 456f; Skinner 1970, p. 56 n.r. φ



An India gentleman, an architect, m/u, letter of 18.XII.1790. Lit.: Skinner 1970, p. 48 n.r.

Gentleman in dark coat, striped waistcoat, pstl, 54.5x42 (Sewanee: The University of the South. Bath, Bonhams, 16.VII.2007, Lot 630 repr., Éc. fr., est. £1200–1800, £1380, acqu.) [new attr., ?] φ



Gentleman in blue coat, resting his chin upon his right hand, pstl, 57x42 (London, Christie's, 18.III.1912, Lot 21, 2 gns; Moore)

Girl, pstl, 53.3x43.2, c.1770–80 (desc. Mrs A. A. Scott-Skirving; Elizabeth McIntyre 1999). Exh.: Skirving 1999, no. 4, fig. 7, attr. φ



Cop. pnt belonging to Sir William Hamilton, pstl, 1790. Lit.: Edinburgh 2008, p. 90 n.r.