

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

THORNHILL, Katherine

?Derby c.1715 – ?Liverpool a.1778

Nothing has hitherto been known of the pastellist responsible for a portrait of the daughter of a Mayor of Liverpool; she was subsequently portrayed by Joseph Wright of Derby (Fitchburg Art Museum). Sarah Clayton ran a coal business in partnership with her nephew, Thomas Case (1731–1790), which became bankrupt in 1778. The attribution is based on the sitter's 1778 will, in which the "Crayon picture painted by my late worthy friend Mrs Katherine Thornhill" was bequeathed to her niece. It is a version of a pastel attributed unconvincingly first to Cotes, the Hoare (*n. English sch.*) which later belonged to Thomas Edward Walker, né Case, the great-grandson of Sarah Clayton's partner (and descended to his niece, Daisy Radcliffe of Rudding Park), while the Thornhill copy referred to in the will is in the Walker Art Gallery (with a suggested date of c.1757 which seems correct), bequeathed by a clergyman of Liverpool origins, and presumably acquired by his grandfather with the contents of Thingwall Hall bought from the executors of Mrs Clayton's great-nephew, also Thomas Case (1777–1845). (It may be that Mrs Clayton's bankruptcy defeated the terms of her will.) The Rudding Park version, evidently of higher quality, was retained by the family when Thingwall Hall was sold, was plausibly attributed to Cotes in the 1972 sale, and cannot be by Opie as one label suggests.

From the terms of Mrs Clayton's will we can identify Katherine Thornhill as one of the daughters of John Thornhill of Stanton, from a family which Burke describes as "one of the most ancient families" of Yorkshire, while *Familiae minorum gentium* indicates that John Thornhill was the son of the keeper of the Angel Inn at Bakewell, who married advantageously, acquiring the Stanton manor from the Bache family. Like each of her siblings, Katherine received £1200 under her father's will of 13.X.1729 (probated 7.IV.1731), where she and two siblings appear as under 18. Like "Mrs" Clayton, she was unmarried (she was the "Miss Kitty Thornhill" who drank tea with Mrs Isaac Green on 9.IV.1749 during a trip to London) and was dead by the time of Mrs Clayton's will.

Bibliography

Ronald Stewart-Browne, *Isaac Greene, a Lancashire lawyer of the 18th century*, Liverpool, 1921; *Familiae minorum gentium*, I, p. 240; Burke, *Landed gentry*

Pastels

J.7142.101 Sarah CLAYTON (1712–1779), coal merchant in Liverpool, pstl/ppr bl., 61.3x45.4 (Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery, inv. 2544. The sitter; legs 1778 "her [Katherine Thornhill's] niece Mrs Eliz. Simpson if she survive me if not then to her mother Mrs Eliz. Warrington or in case she shall not outlive me to Lady Robinson her sister"; [?desc.: sitter's great-nephew, Thomas Case (1777–1845), of Thingwall Hall; acqu. with Thingwall Hall, Samuel Thompson; his son, Samuel Henry Thompson; his son,] Rev. Samuel Ashton

Thompson Yates (1841–1903), legs 1906. Exh.: Liverpool 1988, repr., as c.1757. Lit.: T. C. Barker & J. R. Harris, *St Helens 1750–1900*. Liverpool, 1954, p. 22 repr.; Nicolson 1968, I, p. 189, fig. 29; Andrew Carrington Shelton, "Storming the Acropolis", in Elise Goodman, ed., *Art and culture in the eighteenth century: new dimensions and multiple perspectives*, Cranbury, New Jersey, 2001, p. 140 n.r., "a decidedly modest affair". A/r English sch., *q.v.* φ

