

Francis Cotes and his family

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[Francis Cotes](#)

GENEALOGY: [Cotes](#); see also [Adderley](#)

FRANCIS COTES (1726–1770) has an excellent claim to being England’s best pastellist. His work was generally more interesting than Hoare’s, and while less prolific than his pupil John Russell, he had a taste for the exquisite and elegant that will always endear him to the true lover of the medium. Although commercial pressures forced him to take up oil painting late in his sadly short career, Walpole was correct in observing that he “succeeded much better in crayons than in oils.”¹ He was the subject of a 1976 study² by Edward Mead Johnson (a graduate of Stanford University, and the great-grandson of the co-founder of the eponymous healthcare company): David Piper noted³ that this biography and catalogue “of a highly gifted and under-



Fig. 1

investigated figure in the history of eighteenth-century British paintings ... must remain the standard work on its subject for many years.” A reasonable assessment of both artist and author (although today we would deplore the use of black and white photography to reproduce the work of an artist whose sense of colour was his strongest claim to our attention); but it is time to remedy a few factual omissions in the monograph⁴ concerning in particular Cotes’s family and that of his wife.

Johnson starts with a short account of the events which led Cotes’s father Robert, mayor of Galway in 1716–17, to resettle in London when charges of failing to enforce anti-Catholic penal laws were brought against him by Protestant aldermen of the city in the Irish House of Commons, which ordered his arrest.⁵ The dates cause some confusion with the apparent age of Cotes’s father in Francis’s 1757 pastel of him (fig. 1) until we

learn⁶ that Cotes became mayor at the age of 21. He decided to settle in London, taking up the profession of apothecary. He resided in the parish of St Mary-le-Savoy at the time of both his marriages, the first in 1721 to an Anna Fowler, who was buried a few weeks after the birth of her son Robert (1722–1723), who did not long outlast her. On 24 August 1725 (at St Katherine Cree, Aldgate) he married Elizabeth Lynn, the daughter of Francis Lynn (1671–1731), chief secretary of the Royal African Company or Society (not the Royal Assurance Company) from 1720 until his death. The pastellist was evidently named after this figure, who soon after was enveloped by

¹ Annotation on the catalogue of the 1767 Society of Artists exhibition, transcribed by Hugh Gatty, Walpole Society, 1939.

² Edward Mead Johnson, *Francis Cotes*, Oxford, 1976. It started life as a Ph.D. thesis supervised by Dr Robert Wark of the Huntington Art Gallery.

³ In a brief review in *The Times*, 26 November 1976, John Sunderland, in the *Burlington magazine* (December 1977, p. 869), largely agreed, although could not refrain from observing that “there is little intellectual content in [Cotes’s] art.”

⁴ Others will be found in my *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*, 2006, and far more in the current online version www.pastellists.com/articles/cotes.pdf.

⁵ There are lengthy accounts in a number of sources; the petition and response were printed in full in various newspapers in October 1717.

⁶ From the obituary for Francis’s brother Samuel in the *Gentleman’s magazine* in 1818.

financial scandal when, in 1729, the company transferred to him £10,000 worth of trust stock without the necessary formalities.⁷

Robert Cotes was involved in a “troublesome and expensive” lawsuit *Kelsey v Lynn* (1746) with Simon Kelsey, a “gentleman of the African House” (first clerk in the accountant’s office of the Company) who had married another of Lynn’s daughters; the financial consequences of this were referred to in his 1774 will, where Cotes still managed to direct token payments of two guineas to each of his wife’s three unmarried sisters, despite their being heavily in debt to him and his having paid “several hundred pounds” for their rent in Bond Street.⁸

Robert Cotes and his second wife had four children: two died in infancy, another Robert (1727–1730), and Frances Maria (1737–1737). Francis’s younger brother, Samuel Cotes (1734–1818), became a successful miniaturist who also occasionally worked in pastel. Johnson suggests that the family moved early to Cork Street,⁹ but in fact the earliest reference to this is in 1751, and they continued to live in Bond Street at least until 1749, according to a polling list.¹⁰ Francis Cotes was still in Cork Street when John Russell joined him as an apprentice in 1762.¹¹

Information about the Bond Street address also comes from a 1736 notice in the *London gazette*¹² advertising a reward of £20 following the theft of some silver spoons from Robert Cotes. His lodger, Nicholas Bayly (1709–1782), offered the same sum; he had lost clothing, a watch and “other Things of Value”. The son of a Whig baronet (and great-grandson of the Earl of Cavan), Bayly was educated at Trinity College, Dublin and in 1734 had been returned (unopposed) as MP for Anglesey where he was supported by Sir Watkin Williams Wynn.¹³ Curiously the King offered a pardon to anyone involved in the theft.¹⁴ A report in the *Weekly miscellany*, 5 June 1736, indicated that Cotes’s journeyman, Patrick O’Henlon, turned King’s evidence against his accomplices, Francis Macguineys and James Scott, and revealed the stolen goods, among them “Mr Bayly’s Suits of Cloaths of Flower’d Velvet, but all the Lace stripped off, his Gold Repeating Watch, his Silver Hilted Sword” etc., as well as Cotes’s five silver spoons. O’Henlon it seemed had treated Macguineys for “Venereal Distemper” (a condition which, if part of Cotes’s regular practice, would no doubt have brought him into an unusually close relationship with patients of all degrees). At the Old Bailey trial¹⁵ on 10 June 1736, Bayly provided more details of his “2 Suits of Velvet Cloaths, one Dove Colour, embroider’d with Silver, and one Chocolate Colour lac’d”, valued at £30. Both defendants produced alibis, and were acquitted, whereupon Cotes moved unsuccessfully that O’Henlon be prosecuted for perjury.

In Cotes’s testimony, he reveals that on the night of the robbery he, with his wife and eldest son (the 8-year-old Francis) had stayed overnight with the Lynns in Dulwich, and had called on Lord

⁷ See Benedict G. Der, “Parliament’s interest in West Africa, 1713–1785”, MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 1967. A diary with an account of his schooldays at Westminster is summarised in *A memoir of Richard Busby, DD*, London, 1895, pp. 95–99. For the Society, see William A. Pettigrew, *Freedom’s debt: the Royal African Company and the politics of the Atlantic slave trade 1672–1752*, 2013.

⁸ Mary Lynn appears in the rates books for a property valued at £20, between Union Street and Shepherd Street.

⁹ Pilkington’s *Dictionary of painters* (London, 1824, misreading Edwards, has Cotes born in Cork Street. “Coates, Esq” appears in the watch rate book for Cork Street on 10 June 1751 (the rateable value was £45), but is absent the previous year. Cotes’s name appears last (just after Lady Fitzwilliam) before Glasshouse Street North, and his property must have been no. 18, on the junction of Cork Street (West side) and Burlington Gardens. General Wolfe’s father, Colonel Edward Wolfe, was the occupant in 1735. It was later the home of the Mayor Gallery. “Coates” appears in the rate books in Bond Street from 1736 (but is not there in 1735) until 1748, the second property after Burlington Street West, several before Clifford Street North.

¹⁰ *A copy of the poll for the City and Liberty of Westminster... 22 November – 8 December 1749*, London, 1749. Cotes voted for Sir George Vandeput, Bt rather than Granville Leveson-Gower, Lord Trentham (later Earl Gower). Trentham was re-elected “after scenes of unprecedented violence” according to Romney Sedgwick, *The house of commons 1715–1754*, London, 1970. Curiously George Knapton voted for Trentham, even though his portrait of Vandeput was engraved by Houston and published a few weeks after the election “at ye request of the Worthy Electors of Westminster” with a caption whose message is quite clear: “By venal Arts who meanly seeks to rise/Shines but the Pageant of the Slaves he buys/While Freedoms Sons ennoble by their choice/And Fames true Patent is the Public Voice.” Vandeput’s heavy expenses forced him to sell Standlynch Park.

¹¹ Register of duties on indentures (PRO IR 1/23). Russell was apprenticed to Francis Cotes “of Cork Street, Burlington Gardens” for five years from 8 April 1762 for a premium of 150 guineas, barely a week after his seventeenth birthday.

¹² 22–25 May; see further below.

¹³ Bayly died in Bond Street. A few years earlier he had commissioned the Adam brothers to undertake extensive alterations to his property there.

¹⁴ *Read’s weekly*, 29 March 1736.

¹⁵ *Old Bailey proceedings online*, ref T17360610-4.

Tyrawley on his return to London. Charles (O'Hara), 2nd Baron Tyrawley (1682–1774), had served with distinction in the war of the Spanish Succession and would later be ambassador to Russia and Governor of Gibraltar; his mother, née Frances Rouse, was possibly a relation of Robert Cotes's mother, a Miss Rous of Elphin. The incident suggests that the Cotes household retained Irish connections at various social levels, and of course it provides colour for the interest in fabrics developed by the future pastellist. But it is also particularly significant for Francis's career because one of Tyrawley's illegitimate children was the actress George Anne Bellamy. Her autobiography,¹⁶ published in 1786, gave an account of her rescue of the Gunning family after they were evicted from their Dublin house; she helped them to get to London, where Cotes made the portraits that transformed his career: his pastels of the Countess of Coventry and Duchess of Hamilton, later of Argyll, were engraved and advertised in 1752 from Cotes's new premises at Cork Street.¹⁷ Johnson knew Bellamy's account of how these "persons ... made a very conspicuous figure in the great world" but, not knowing of the Cotes–Tyrawley connection, concluded that "how the Gunnings came upon Cotes in London is a mystery." He also seems not to have noticed the frontispiece portrait to this volume of Bellamy's autobiography, "the face copied after a Picture by Coates in the possession of Sir George Metham, the figure modernized by Ramberg, and the whole engraved by Bartolozzi."

When Francis Cotes made his "Notes on Crayon Painting" (eventually published in the *European magazine* in 1797), among the pastels he thought finest, from his own oeuvre, he mentions his portraits of Robert Cotes and George Knapton: father and master. The portrait of Robert Cotes, made in 1757, was presented to the Royal Academy by the artist's brother Samuel Cotes in 1817; he no doubt had it from his father, of whom he was the principal heir. It has rarely been shown, and Johnson's unfocused, black-and-white reproduction gave a peculiarly inadequate impression of one of the most striking examples of Cotes's work. Perhaps the most salient feature is the contrast between the high level of finish in the sensitively drawn face, and the rugged, almost crude, execution of the drapery, where Cotes seems deliberately to be imitating the broadest of brushstrokes found in oil painting. Johnson convincingly persuades us Cotes knew and admired the French pastellist Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, directly or indirectly through Allan Ramsay; and there is certainly more than an echo of La Tour's portrait of his teacher Dupouch in Cotes's image of his father. Cotes may not have been aware of La Tour's habit of labouring intensively to produce a highly enamelled finish, over which he would then add, as though spontaneously, vigorous, loose hatchings to restore life to his pictures. Something of the same idea no doubt evolved intuitively for the English pastellist.

Of Cotes's wife Johnson tells us practically nothing, beyond her first name, Sarah, that her genealogy is unknown, that she married Cotes in 1765 [sic] and was sole executrix and chief beneficiary in his will. From a diary entry by John Russell cited by Johnson¹⁸ we can probably infer that her religious views were conventional:

I had a religious argument with my Master and Mrs Cotes at dinner today. I had the name of Blasphemer given me because I defended the doctrine of Election and spoke of the Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin.

A wash drawing supposedly of Mrs Cotes (presumably because it bears an annotation which appears to say "Mr F Cotes") in the V&A (fig. 2) is too impressionistic to offer much by way of likeness, but an oil painting from 1770 was with Knoedler in 1920 (fig. 3); the differences in the faces appear to be considerable. A portrait Cotes exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1770, no. 59 ("a lady in crayons") was, we learn from Walpole's annotation, of "His own wife with a shock dog."

¹⁶ *An apology for the life of George Anne Bellamy, late of Covent-garden theatre*, London, 1786, I, pp. 196–202. For Bellamy, see the Oxford DNB.

¹⁷ The advertisement for McArdell's two prints appeared in the *London evening post*, 19 March 1752 and repeated a few days later in the *London daily advertiser*.

¹⁸ Page 41, the entry from January 1767. Mrs Cotes is not mentioned in the incorrect transcription in G. C. Williamson, *John Russell, R.A.*, London, 1894, p. 9.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

The phrase is now obsolete,¹⁹ but current at the time: for example Walpole again writes (not of this, but of Anne Seymour Damer’s terracotta of one in the Twickenham Museum, shown in fig. 4): “Her shock dog, large as life, and only not alive, has a looseness and softness in the curls that seemed impossible to terra-cotta.” So, even allowing a confusion of medium and the poor quality of the image, it does not seem that the dog just visible in the lower part of the 1770 oil could be so described.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Johnson accepted for the Royal Academy exhibit, and reproduced, the pastel (fig. 5) now in the Reynolda House Museum of American Art at Winston-Salem²⁰ (it had belonged to Charles Wertheimer, who lent it to the famous Paris exhibition of *Cent pastels* in 1908). The dog is indeed a shock dog (of a kind that today would be called a Bolognese), but the pastel is neither of Sarah nor by Francis. Judging by the draughtsmanship, colouring and technique, it is surely by Katherine Read.

¹⁹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* records shock-dog, shock or shough between 1599 and 1845.

²⁰ Inventory no. 1966.2.4. From Charles Wertheimer it passed to Knoedler, who sold it to Walter Lewisohn in New York in 1912. It was subsequently acquired, probably in New York, by member of the R. J. Reynolds family, and entered the museum in 1966 as by Cotes. Unillustrated in the *Cent pastels* catalogue, it was known only from the poor image in Carl Winter, “Francis Cotes, R.A.”, *Connoisseur*, LXXXVIII, September 1931, p. 171. It was reattributed by the author in 2012 when sent a modern image by Allison Slaby, managing curator of the museum (before the emergence of the real Cotes pastel of his wife, in 2014).

A pastel has now emerged in an English private collection (fig. 6) which it is proposed here must be the lost pastel of Sarah Cotes. Signed and dated “FCotes px^t/1769”, it was recorded but not illustrated in a Christie’s sale in 1945;²¹ Johnson lists it as “unverified.”²² Although the Royal Academy catalogue description is terse, the obvious intimacy of the portrait makes this highly plausible, and seems to reinforce also the identification of the lady in the 1770 oil. The powdered hair in the pastel, worn quite high, was newly in fashion by 1769, and this date is confirmed by its stylistic place in Cotes’s œuvre. As an artist he was less prone than others to repeat his compositions, and no other pastel is known which could correspond with the description. Finally the wedding ring is given particular prominence, in a signal of uxorial relationship.



Fig. 6

Francis Cotes was married to Sarah Adderley on 23 October 1764 at St Clement Danes; the witnesses were his brother Samuel and John Adderley, her cousin. Hitherto unidentified beyond her first name, a clue to her family is provided by a reference in Cotes’s will (which Johnson had seen, although he did not follow this up) to her nieces Ann and Elizabeth Adderley. Research in various archives shows that Sarah was baptised in Stroud on 8 November 1718, so that she was considerably older than her husband;²³ her age alone would explain why the couple were childless. She was the daughter of William Adderley or Adderley (1670–1725), a mercer from Stroud, who, among his other enterprises, built a mill to produce rape and linseed oil at Ebley. Her brothers William (1705–1749) and John (1706–1756) were involved in the brewing business, William being lessee of the Mercers’ Arms, which later became part of the Watney Mann empire, while John joined him as a brewer in Long-Acre; a third brother Thomas kept the Crown Inn at Bishop’s Stortford.²⁴

²¹ Capt. Eric Noble, Park Place, Henley-on-Thames; London, Christie’s, 5 October 1945, Lot 55, where the unknown lady is said to be caressing a spaniel. Noble may have inherited the pastel from his uncle, Lieutenant-Colonel Leonard Noble (1859–1943), an “eclectic collector”, to whose substantial estate Noble was co-heir. The purchaser at that sale gave it to the father of the present owner, to whom I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to inspect the pastel.

²² Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 164, no. 36. He seems to have concluded that it cannot have been the lost portrait of Sarah Cotes as the dog portrayed was not a spaniel.

²³ It is in theory possible that this Sarah died young, and Mrs Cotes was given the same name at a later date; but her father certainly died before Francis Cotes was born.

²⁴ She may have been distantly related to John and Thomas Adderley, both recorded as oil and colourmen (at various addresses from Gloucester Street, Queen Square to Bethnal Green and Crutched Friars) among bankrupts in the *London gazette* between 1750 and 1778, but no definite link has been found.

Cotes died on 19 July 1770,²⁵ just a few weeks after the same Royal Academy exhibition closed. Cotes had been troubled by the stone and had undergone an operation in 1768: Russell had visited him immediately before, and recorded that²⁶

He ask'd my prayers for himself in way of Derision with Saint Madan's and Saint Whitefield as he stil'd them. I was affected to see him in so trifling a spirit and under his circumstances. He said his trust was in God – Lord be Thou his saviour.

(Madan and Whitfield were the Methodist preachers whose views Russell could not refrain from trying to impose on a resistant Cotes and his household.) Evidently the symptoms returned, but Cotes chose an even more hazardous attempt to cure himself: as Mary Moser put it in a letter to Henry Fuseli,

Cotes...last week fell sacrifice to the corroding power of soap-lees, which he hoped would have cured him of the stone. Many a tear will drop on his grave, as he is not more lamented as an artist than a friend to the distressed.²⁷

Russell learned of his master's death almost immediately, and was charged with breaking the news to his father and mother, comforting them, according to his account, by speaking "with power on religion". Cotes's three aunts however "express'd themselves like Brutes."²⁸

Cotes was presumably well aware of the risks of the remedy, as he made his will just a month before his death. The principal beneficiary was his "dear wife Sarah". Peter Toms, a studio assistant who painted drapery, was a witness. Johnson's account of its terms was incomplete: a second witness was his pupil, the pastellist John Milbourn whom Cotes had "ordered ... never to go near [Russell] again" (to avoid his proselytising).²⁹ Thomas Ryves, one of Cotes's major patrons, the subject of one of his pastels and himself an amateur artist, is also mentioned. The trustees were Joseph Wilton, the sculptor, and Theodosius (not Joseph) Forrest (1728–1784), a solicitor and amateur with a passion for theatre, music and art.



Fig. 7

The posthumous auction took place in London on 21–23 February 1771, as directed in his will, and the lease of 32 Cavendish Square (which Cotes had taken the year before his marriage) was acquired by George Romney. It is tempting to think that the portrait Romney made around that time of his fellow academician Mary Moser (National Portrait Gallery) was a conscious tribute to the pastel of Sarah Cotes. Wertheimer's Read may also have been made around this time.

After Cotes's death, his widow and parents left the house in Cavendish Square. Sarah remained inconsolable: Russell in his diary records drinking tea with her on 7 December 1771: "the things said on Religion where [sic] without Power"; and again on 6 March 1772, when she supped with the Russells, he had "been able to say very few profitable things." Robert Cotes died at New

²⁵ Inexplicably in Richmond; he is buried at St Mary Magdelene there.

²⁶ John Russell, *Diaries*, MSS, V&A, vol. III, p. 81, 11 June 1768, unpublished.

²⁷ Cited by Johnson from J. T. Smith's *Nollekens and his times*, London, 1895, p. 82. There is an extensive literature from the period (for example in the *Gentleman's magazine*, 1767) concerning the use of soap-lees for renal and bladder stones; its inefficacy and hazards were well known, but this did not prevent its widespread use.

²⁸ *Diaries*, vol. IV, p. 37.

²⁹ Russell's diary entry for 11 May 1768.

Charles Street in 1774,³⁰ making his surviving son Samuel the chief beneficiary; Sarah Cotes was left a mourning ring. Elizabeth, the artists' mother, was portrayed in widow's clothing in a miniature³¹ by Samuel in 1775 (fig. 7); her will has not been located, but she may well be the Elizabeth Cotes buried in Westminster on 19 January 1776. By 27 March 1776, when Sarah made her will, she had moved to Reading where her cousin John Adderly resided (he died in 1783, leaving her an annuity of £200 p.a.). The amounts in this and the other Adderley wills suggest a modest fortune, but not up to the level required to keep on Cavendish Square.

Sarah Cotes died in 1784. She left £2000 capital and the residue of her estate to her Adderley nieces, and £100 to the Asylum, or House of Refuge, for Orphan Girls, a charity founded in 1758 by Sir John Fielding: the trustees for both sums were her brother-in-law Samuel Cotes and Theodosius Forrest. Specific bequests included her own portrait (quite probably fig. 6) and Cotes's self-portrait (which she evidently inherited from his father), left to her nephew Francis Hawes with 100 guineas for a ring. (Francis Hawes lived at Bishop's Stortford, where he inherited the Crown Inn from his uncle Thomas Adderly, and is not to be confused with the homonymous owner of Purley Hall of which Cotes made one of his rare landscape drawings). Sarah also had Cotes's portrait of George Knapton, which she bequeathed not to Knapton himself (who was still alive at the time the will was drafted), but to his niece Mrs James Samber, née Maria Beata Knapton of Lymington – a fact which, as well as confirming the strong ties between the families, has provided new genealogical information on Knapton: he was born in Lymington, not London, a year earlier than the date normally given.³² Like Cotes's self-portrait this pastel has yet to emerge: while the Knapton was listed among Cotes's favourite pastels, the quality of the sensitive and moving portrait of his wife would surely have merited inclusion in his list had he updated it before his death.

Neil Jeffares

³⁰ The *General evening post* for 21–24 May 1774, followed in other papers, reported the death “Yesterday, in a very advanced age, Mr Robert Cotes, at his house in Charles-street, Cavendish-square.” Charles Street was renamed George Street in 1872.

³¹ Included in the Derwydd Mansion, Llandeilo sale conducted by Sotheby's, 5 September 1998, Lot 134.

³² And he was indeed the nephew of the bookseller James Knapton. See the updated entry in my online *Dictionary* and genealogy. George was baptised at Christchurch, Hampshire on 21 September 1697 to William Knapton of Brockenhurst Manor and Elizabeth, née Odber. His elder brother Odber Knapton (1696–1746), an attorney and town clerk in Lymington, married a Mary Chadwick; two younger brothers, Charles and James, were both baptised at Christchurch in 1698 and 1701. Mrs Samber's birth certificate has not so far been located; her husband was a Royal Naval lieutenant in 1760 and captain in 1783. She died in 1824.