

Peter Gibbard, former Chair of the Friends of York Art Gallery, continues to explore the work of women artists. Here he introduces the earliest woman painter represented in the Gallery's permanent collection. She was a talented portraitist, who is probably unknown to the Friends.

Artwork of the Month September 2021

Ann Beaumont (17th October 1798 – 12th June 1866): *The Groves Quartet* (1854)



Ann Beaumont, *The Groves Quartet* (YORAG: 568), 1854, oil on canvas, 86.4 x 111.8 cm
Photo credit: York Museums Trust, reproduced by permission YMT

Ann was born to Thomas, a merchant, and Catherine Beaumont in the Parish of St. James, London, where she lived until her marriage to William Pierce on 19th March, 1833. Ann and William had two children, Margareta, who married and survived her parents, and John, who died aged 15.

William Pierce (1801-1863) was a partner in Pierce & Koller, furnishing ironmongers, with showrooms at 5 Jermyn Street, London. Selling nationally, they specialised in hot water heating systems, an emerging technology at this time, and a wide variety of metal cast products from Sheffield foundries for residential construction and interior decoration.

Ann first came to public notice when she exhibited at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1820, age 21; and she was to exhibit thirteen works of art in the years until 1832. She is known to have had studio space nearby during this period, at three different central London addresses, shared with other painters and sculptors.

The fact that Ann was exhibiting at such a young age suggests to me that her education in painting technique involved the RA, if only indirectly, possibly through an RA tutor (she lived locally and had studio space on nearby streets dominated by artists). Her work was well positioned at these exhibitions, in rooms displaying art by established figures such as Sir Thomas Lawrence or J. M. W. Turner. The placements might have been by chance, but I think Ann's submissions were more likely to have been highly appreciated by the RA selectors.

Ann painted portraits, and historical subjects depicting people in scenes from such works as Sir Walter Scott's novels. An example is: *Effie Dean, from Sir Walter Scott's The Heart of Midlothian* (1827).

Her portrait subjects may be described as the socially prominent and the landed gentry. The portrait of Georgiana Vernon (engraving below) is a typical example. Georgiana was the 16th child born to the Archbishop of York, Edward Venables-Vernon-Harcourt and his wife, Anne Levesen-Gower; interestingly, their 16 children lived into adulthood.



The work first appeared in the RA exhibition of 1826, the year in which Georgiana married, and was subsequently engraved by J. Thomson, and published on page 43 of John Burke's *The Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Females* in 1833, the source of this image.

There is a gap of seven years from Ann's marriage in 1833 during which no art by her has been identified in the public domain. This may be accounted for by her raising children; or, more simply, her portraiture commissions may not have yet come into the public domain. This gap did not result in the later portraits (1840-1858) being poorly executed; in consequence I believe that Ann continued to paint commissions uninterrupted from her marriage into the late 1850s.

York Art Gallery was gifted one of Ann's works in 1951 by Mrs. Groves and Miss King. *The Groves Quartet* is dated 1854. The musicians, some

of whom are known York residents, are preparing for a concert in the vicinity of Museum Gardens.



This painting, which is in need of conservation, is dedicated to Benjamin Shaw (cello), on the left, who gave his occupation to the census takers as teacher of music and who resided on Gillygate, York, during his more than 30-year teaching career in music. To his left is Mr. Hunt (violin), an unidentified young man, Mr. John Groves (viola), who probably gave his name to the Quartet, and lastly Dr. Simpson (flute). As there is only one Dr. Simpson in the York public records for the 1850s, I believe that this is Dr. Thomas Simpson, who was a founding member of the York Medical Society and active in the York Philosophical Society. Also, this portrait image resembles the photograph of Dr. Thomas Simpson in the YMT collection; the artist may possibly have made use of photographs for her painting.

Music ensembles such as *The Groves Quartet* were popular throughout the British Isles in the 19th century. England had hundreds of them, playing classical compositions that had been arranged by enthusiasts such as Benjamin Shaw. Typically, they were employed for civic events, and in

country and town houses. York's Assembly Rooms and Fairfax House are known local venues from this period.

Paintings by Ann that I have identified after 1832 fall into two groups: one associated with people based in Yorkshire, and the other with people based in Jersey in the Channel Islands. There is no evidence that Ann travelled to either location. It is likely that they sat for Ann in her studio, which for the dates stated on the individual paintings would have been at Elcot House, Belsize Road, London.

Val Nelson, Senior Registrar, Jersey Heritage has kindly provided me with valuable insight into the subjects of Ann's paintings and the two images which follow. They are from families resident in Jersey for a century or more, and the paintings were gifted to secure the family's historical association with Jersey and to benefit the Island's art collection. Two of the six portraits by Ann to be found in Jersey are:



*Portrait of Colonel John le Couteur,
Aide-de-Camp for Jersey to King William IV and Queen Victoria (1840).*



Portrait of Mrs. Harriet du Parcq, age 47 (1856).

Ann printed her maiden name - A. Beaumont - followed by the year on the artworks that I have located.

I have identified fourteen portraits, four imagined historical scenes from novels of the period, and one still life by Ann Beaumont in the course my research. I anticipate that there are many more works by this talented artist yet to be discovered.

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