**Solomon Cole, *c.*1806 – 1893**

A portrait painter based in Bridge Street, Worcester, who from about 1837 and starting with Christopher Henry Hebb (1772–1861), Mayor of Worcester in 1836 –37, painted a number of portraits of his mayoral successors for the Worcester Guildhall. One of John Wheeley Lea (briefly mayor in 1835–6, then in 1849–50, and co-founder of the Lea & Perrins sauce company) took a different family route into the City museum. When the Hebb portrait was delivered in 1840, a local commentator (*Worcestershire Chronicle*, 26 February 1840) reported it as the first full-length by Cole that the writer had seen and suggested his style was perhaps modelled on that of Thomas Phillips or Richard Pickersgill. He had in fact started as a ceramic painter in the Worcester porcelain factories from 1821 and as a pupil of Thomas Baxter. He exhibited 17 portraits at the Royal Academy from 1845 to 1859, only omitting 1848–49. In 1845 he gave his address as ‘Worcester and 11 George St., Hanover Square, London’, but all his other appearances were also from good London addresses. His RA subjects had no obvious Worcester connections and some had unusual foreign ones: these included ‘the late John Thomas’ who had been HM Commissioner for suppression of the slave trade at St Paul de Loanda, West Africa (1845); two portraits of Henry Mann (1846 and 1857), the earlier when he was attaché at the British Embassy in Persia; and the ‘Rev. Montesquieu, minister of St John’s church Calcutta’ (1852). It is not yet clear if ‘Mrs S.C. Cole’, shown in 1850 was his wife or perhaps elderly mother. In 1879–80 Worcester entrusted him with the restoration of about 16 portraits in the Guildhall, including three of his own, one by Reynolds of George III, and others dating back to the seventeenth century. This suggests that he probably returned to live there permanently there in later years.

*Summarised from Art UK discussion on the portrait of J.W. Lea at Worcester, now attributed to Cole as a result*

PvdM

July 2021