

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

PETERS, Matthew William

Isle of Wight 1741 – Kent 20.III.1814

William Peters was brought up in Ireland after his parents moved there, his father Matthew (the author of agricultural treatises, and consultant landscape gardener to Lord Charlemont) having a post with the Customs in Dublin. A pupil of Robert West (*q.v.*) at the Dublin Society school, Peters's earliest known work is a curious charcoal self-portrait being drawn by his teacher (NPG). By 1759 he had moved to London, where he is said to have studied under Thomas Hudson; he received a premium from the Society of Arts in 1759. He visited Italy in 1762 with funds provided by the Dublin Society, becoming a member of the Accademia del Disegno di Firenze in 1763 and paying registration fees until 1765. He returned to London (and is not to be confused with Johann Anton de Peters who portrayed Christian VII in Paris in 1768 as in one recent source), and was initiated into the Somerset Lodge of freemasons on 29.II.1769. He exhibited at the Society of Artists (1766–69), the Free Society (1769) and the Royal Academy, of which he became an associate in 1771 and a full member in 1778. His submissions from 1773 were sent from Venice, while in 1774 Walpole noted that he was “just returned from Rome”; he was in Paris in 1775 and 1782–84 (he was a friend of Boilly and of Vestier, *qq.v.*), where he was sent by the Duke of Rutland to copy Le Brun's conversion of Mme de La Vallière at the Carmélites. There, through the British ambassador, the Duke of Manchester, he was authorised to make a portrait of the dauphin.

His early work was in crayon but from around 1768 he seems to have worked mainly in oil or chalk. Relatively few of his pastels are known. But several anonymous pastels showing young women holding a lyre seem to follow the Peters portrait of Lady Charlotte Bertie (medium unknown), engraved by Dickinson in 1778, and it is here suggested that they are also by Peters. One is a posthumous portrait of Lady Diana Duncombe, while another, with an earlier hairstyle, had a name plate which led to an attribution to Lady Diana Beauclerk.

Peters's slightly risqué portraits of young women were incompatible with his subsequent career as a clergyman. Initially intended for the cloth before his youthful enthusiasm took charge, he matriculated at Exeter College, Oxford in 1779, and was ordained in 1781. He became rector of Litchborough in 1782, and later of Knipton (1788), and Woolsthorpe (1788) and Eaton (1795); chaplain in ordinary to the Prince of Wales in 1786 and, in 1791, prebendary of Lincoln. He formally resigned from the Royal Academy in 1790, the year in which he married. But he continued painting, turning to religious and historical subjects, which were attacked by critics such as Paley and Peter Pindar. *An Angel carrying the spirit of a child to paradise*, exhibited in 1782, is now in Burghley, while his *Resurrection of a pious family* was described as “ludicrously wonderful”. These very large oils were popularised by engravings by Bartolozzi and others, published by Boydell, and widely copied.

A memoir appeared in the *Freemason's magazine* for .X.1794 (pp. 260ff) accompanied by a self-portrait in front of a version of the Resurrection. By that stage he was provincial grand master for the county of Lincoln. On 28.IV.1790, at St James's Piccadilly, he married Margaret Hannah Knowsley (1757–1842), niece and heir to Dr John Turton of the Adelphi, physician to George III. His will was made when he was rector of Knipton, Leicestershire but resident in Brasted Place, Seven Oaks; it mentions his wife, sons Edmund (who later adopted the name Turton), John William and George Augustus Peters, and daughter Elizabeth Ann.

Monographic exhibitions

Peters 1910: *Paintings by Rev. W. Peters*, Henry Graves Gallery, London, .XI.1910

Bibliography

Bénézit; Brieger 1921; Crookshank 1969; Crookshank & Glin 1994; *Dictionary of Irish biography*; Dublin 1969; Figgis 2014; Figgis & Rooney 2001; Grove 1996; Ingamells 1997; London 2001c; Manners 1913; Oxford DNB; Passez 1989; Sée 1911; Stewart & Cutten 1997; Strickland 1913; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006; Wynne 1990

Critiques

Anon., “Exhibition of the Royal Academy”, *General advertiser*, 30.IV.1778:

233. *Portrait of a Lady, in crayons*, by William Peters.—This piece possesses great beauty. A peculiar softness and delicacy of colouring characterize this artist's performances in crayons, and give an admirable effect. The disposition of the figure is very sweet: it is happily kept, and accurately executed. We only distinguish one fault, a coldness in the neck, not disgusting, but rather unharmonious.

Pastels

J.5838.101 The artist and his daughter Elizabeth Anne Peters, pstl, 23x16.5 (S. Peters 1910). Exh.: Peters 1910, no. 20

J.5838.102 ?Miss BAMPFYLDE, lady in undress, pstl, Royal Academy 1776, no. 225. Lit.: Manners 1913, pp. 52, 56, 59 [print identified on BM copy]

~grav. Dunkarton 1777, as Belinda

J.5838.104 [?]*Lady Diana BEAUCLERK, née Spencer (1735–1808) as Terpsichore*, pstl/ppr, 91.5x71, old frame label as Lady Diana [illegible] (London, Christie's, 17.III.1970, Lot 196, as unknown lady by Beauclerk. Donnington, Dreweatt Neate, 5.IV.2000, Lot 101, as self-portrait of Lady Diana Beauclerk, est. £2–3000, £3000. Hobbs; London, Criterion Fine, Wandsworth, 28.IV.2014, Lot 1029 repr., as 19th century, anon.; Boris Wilnitsky, as by John Russell) [new attr.] φδv



J.5838.104 ~cop., pstl, 29x22 ov. (Pau, Carrère, 26.III.2022, Lot 342 repr., anon. Euterpe, est. €70–90) φπv

J.5838.106 Lady [Georgiana] Charlotte BERTIE, later Marchioness of Cholmondeley (1764–1838), playing a lyre, m/u

~grav. William Dickinson 1778

J.5838.108 Lady Diana DUNCOMBE, née Howard (c.1720–1770), with a lyre, pstl (Duncombe Park, Ladies' Withdrawing Room). Lit.: *Duncombe Park*, guidebook, 1990, p. 12 n.r. [new attr.] φv

J.5838.11 Lady FRANKLAND (∞ 1775 Sir Thomas, 6th Bt), née Dorothy Smelt (–1820), with her son Robert (1784–1849), pstl, 66x51 (PC) Φ



Photo courtesy owner

J.5838.113 Mrs GRANT, bust, ¾ to left, evening dress, with blue sash, low neck, dark eyes, fair hair with long ringlet on left shoulder, pstl/ppr, 26.5x21.5 (Xavier Haas; New York, Anderson, 20–21.I.1927, Lot 110 n.r.). Exh.: Paris 1919a, no. 154 n.r.; Zurich 1920, no. 70

J.5838.114 Mrs HADDEN-BROWN, pstl, 87x67 (Frantz Wittouck 1911. PC 2014). Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 91. Lit.: Sée 1911, repr. p. 161 Φ



~[?]study, pencil, watercolour/ppr, 26x19 (Xavier Haas; New York, Anderson, 13–14.I.1927, Lot 193 repr.)

J.5838.117 Gentleman [Dr HILL], crayons, Society of Artists 1769, no. 131†

J.5838.118 Mrs KENNEDY-TOMS, of The Manse, Surrey, 88x69, c.1790 (Kennedy 1911). Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 14, as by Cosway. Lit.: Cust 1911, attr. Peters; Sée 1911, repr. p. 119, as by Cosway; Jeffares 2006, p. 130Ci, as by Cosway Φav



J.5838.121 Patience, Mrs Thomas Bridgeman LUXMOORE (1769–1855) of Fair Place in Okehampton, Devon, pstl, 35x45 ov. (Leyburn, Tennants, Lot 681; Boris Wilnitsky Kunsthandel, Vienna, 2005) Φ



Photo courtesy Boris Wilnitsky Kunsthandel

J.5838.124 Mrs Matthew William PETERS, née Margaret Hannah Knowsley (1757–1742), later Mrs John Gibbons, and child, pstl, 23x19 (S. Peters 1910). Exh.: Peters 1910, no. 18

J.5838.125 Mrs Matthew William PETERS, née Knowsley, and two of her sons, pstl, 28.5x21 (S. Peters 1910). Exh.: Peters 1910, no. 16

J.5838.126 Mrs Matthew William PETERS, née Knowsley, and a peasant girl, pstl, 28x21 (S. Peters 1910). Exh.: Peters 1910, no. 19

J.5838.127 Miss Elizabeth Henriette PHELPS, amateur miniaturist, of 5 Downing Street, London, 75x61, Royal Academy 1778, no. 233, unidentified (Mr Phelps 1911). Exh.: Paris 1911, no. 90. Lit.: Brieger 1921, repr., frontispiece; Sée 1911, p. 167; Sée 1911b, p. 30 repr. Φδ



J.5838.1271 cop., pstl, 49x37 rect., s ∨ illisible (Rouen, Bismar, 29.I.2017, Lot 48 repr., anon., inconnue, est. €80) φπ

J.5838.129 Richard Brinsley SHERIDAN (1751–1816), dramatist, pstl, ov. (Berlin). Lit.: Brieger 1921, repr. p. 188 Φ



J.5838.131 R. B. SHERIDAN, half-length, cr. clr, 22x16.5, sd 1784 (London, Sotheby's, 25.X.1933, £4)

J.5838.132 Gentleman, crayons, Society of Artists, no. 131†

J.5838.133 Lady, pstl, Royal Academy 1774, no. 208

J.5838.134 Young lady, pstl, Royal Academy 1776, no. 224

J.5838.135 Venetian lady, pstl, Royal Academy 1776, no. 226

~grav. J. R. Smith 1776

J.5838.137 Head of a woman, pstl, 61x44.5 (Tankerville Chamberlayne 1910). Exh.: Peters 1910, no. 25. Lit.: Manners 1913, p. 58

J.5838.138 Lady (PC 1921). Lit.: Brieger 1921, repr. p. 186; Manners 1913, repr. opp. p. 36 Φα



~[?]study, pencil, watercolour/ppr, 26x19 (Sir Tollemache Sinclair. Xavier Haas; New York, Anderson, 13–14.I.1927, Lot 194 repr., as ?sketch for Duchess of Rutland's portrait)

J.5838.141 Girl in white dress with large black hat, pstl, in painted ov. (London, Christie's, 31.VII.1931, Lot 29 n.r.) J.5838.142 Lady in white dress with pink sash, pstl, 74x62 (London, Christie's, 25.VI.1943, 18 gns; Smith)

J.5838.143 Lady in a straw hat with blue ribbons, pstl/ppr, 55x45.5 ov. (Köln, Van Ham, 14.V.2010, Lot 217 repr., attr.; Lowell Libson Ltd 2012) φ



J.5838.144 Lady in a black dress, white lace bonnet, pstl, 24x20 ov. (Durrow, Sheppard's, 1.XII.2016, Lot 1584 repr., est. €500–800) φ



J.5838.145 Two portraits, ¾, pstl, Royal Academy 1773, no. 223

J.5838.146 A fortune teller, m/u ~cop. Miss Linwood, needlework (exhibitions Miss Linwood's embroidered pictures, Saville House; London, Christie's, 23.IV.1846; Lot 52, £10/15/-)

J.5838.148 The three holy children, m/u (acqu. Boydell 150 gns)

~?Children in adoration, pnt., 198x145 (London, Christie's, 28.XI.1903)

~grav. Peter Simon 1788

J.5838.151 ~pstl, 102x71 (Tankerville Chamberlayne 1910). Exh.: Peters 1910, no. 5. Lit.: Manners 1913, p. 58

J.5838.152 The bird, pstl, 27x20 ov. (London, Christie's, 28–29.VII.1926, Lot 18 n.r., 16 gns; Wells. Sir Stuart M. Samuel, Bt, of 12 Hill Street, Berkeley Square, London, Christie's, 25.III.1927, 15 gns; Nicholson)

J.5838.153 Three children with blue curtain background, pstl, 79x79 (Upsall Castle, Thirsk, North Yorkshire, a UK heritage asset, 2009)

The resurrection of a pious family, m/u. Corinthians 1st Epistle XV/55

~pnt., 249x183 (Totteridge Church –1886)

~other versions, various media

J.5838.157 ~drawing ([PWilliamson]; London, Christie's, 8–9.V.1913, Lot 198 n.r. with The Guardian angel and The Spirit of a Child, 15 gns; Leger)

~?cop., John Norris Hewitt, v. J.3893.146

~grav. Benjamin Smith, for Boydell

J.5838.16 ~cop. Joseph Webster Jr (1774–1796), m/u. Lit.: *Gentleman's magazine*, .VIII.1796, p. 702

Anon. related pastels

Countess of BURLINGTON, née Lady Elizabeth Compton (1760–1835), in a white dress and yellow bow, 1780

=?pnt., 76x63 (Pym's Gallery 2001, no. 9)

~grav.: John Raphael Smith

~cop., different colours, pstl, 58x44 (West Sussex, Bellmans, 7–12.IX.2019, Lot 1060 repr., as a/r J. R. Smith, est. £100–150; South Cerney, Cirencester, Dominic Winter, 9.III.2022, Lot 24 repr., as a/r J. R. Smith, est. £200–300) φκ

