

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

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ASHLEY, Mrs James, née Elizabeth Wickstead, Mrs Thomas Worlidge

fl. London 1765–90

The Wickstead (or Wicksteed) family ran the celebrated Toy Shop in Orange Grove, Bath, where engravings (among them, by Thomas Worlidge, *q.v.*) were sold. Elizabeth became Worlidge's third wife, probably in 1763 (but some sources say 1743, possibly by confusion with his second wife Mary). The *Public advertiser* in 1767 printed some verses "On seeing a picture of the late duke of York at Langford's sale, done in crayons by Mrs Worlidge?". Earlier verses in the same periodical praised her copies of prints made in needlework, and it is in this medium that she appeared as an honorary exhibitor at the Society of Artists and the Free Society between 1765 and 1767 as Mrs Worlidge. Her husband made several portraits of her, one in the guise of Sophonisba, at an easel with a mahlstick and a brush or perhaps a chalk-holder in her hand. She wound up Worlidge's affairs after his death in 1766, continuing to sell prints in his house at Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields which had taken in 1763; it had previously belonged to the painter Thomas Hudson. She was soon remarried, to James Ashley (proprietor of a well-known punch tavern in Fleet Street) who had been a friend of Worlidge. Under the name of Mrs Ashley she exhibited portraits, landscapes, still lifes and genre pieces in oil, crayon and needlework at the Society of Artists and the Free Society. Her submission of "a drawing" to the latter in 1768 elicited Walpole's annotation "widow of Worlidge the Painter, and remarried to Ashley who kept the London Punchhouse."

The Great Queen Street property remained in Ashley's name until his death, aged 78, in 1775. However it was let briefly in 1774 to the actress Mary Robinson, who recorded: "On our return to London after ten days' absence, a house was hired in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. It was a large, old-fashioned mansion, and stood on the spot where the Freemasons' Tavern has since been erected. This house was the property of a lady, an acquaintance of my mother; the widow of Mr Worlidge, an artist of considerable celebrity. It was handsomely furnished, and contained many valuable pictures by various masters. I resided with my mother; Mr. Robinson continued at the house of Mr. Vernon and Elderton in Southampton Buildings." After this Mrs Ashley is said to have remarried again, to a Captain Robinson (perhaps a confusion with her tenant), and became the keeper of the Star & Garter inn at Richmond (where, according to Fanny Burney, Sir Joshua Reynolds dined). She died in or around 1790.

Bibliography

R. Ackermann & F. Shoberl, *Repository of arts...*, 1817, p. 219; Chaloner Smith 1883, p. 1006; Oxford DNB; Foskett 1987, *s.v.* Ashley; *Memoirs of the late Mrs. Robinson*, London, 1803, I, pp. 74f; Saur, *s.v.* Ashley; Strange 1907; *Public characters of 1799–1800*, London, 1799, pp. 552f; Walpole

1828; *Survey of London: Parish of St Giles-in-the-Fields*, 1914, p. 77

Pastels

CHRISTIAN VII, konge af Danmark (1749–1808), crayons, Free Society 1771, no. 2
Gentleman, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 5‡
Lady, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 4
A Magdalen, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 5
A bunch of grapes, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 2
A bad man trumpeting ill in a good man's ears, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 3