

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastelists before 1800*

Online edition

DIGBY, Simon

Kilminchy c.1645 – Lacken 7.IV.1720

In 1668 Digby was appointed chaplain to the 1st Duke of Ormond. He became bishop of Limerick in 1678, and thirteen years later was translated to Elphin. An active amateur artist, he was “a great master of painting in little watercolours and by that quality [he] recommended himself to men in power and ladies, and so was early made a bishop.” An examination of his posthumous inventory by Pegum (2013) suggests that he used a wide range of media, including oil, and that he painted more than just portraits.

Digby’s sole known pastel, a portrait of Ormond, is however a copy after Ashfield. It was mentioned in a letter from William Butler to Sir Donat O’Brien (2.v.1711, Inchiquin Mss, no. 2621): “The Duchess of Ormonde lately sent his Grace’s picture to the old bishop [Simon Digby] to be repaired. He returned it ‘amended’, and two nice new copies in return. Whereof she sent pencils and rules to the young damsels who as it is believed will exceed their father in that particular.” It is uncertain whether the picture sent by the Duchess was Digby’s or the original Ashfield; nor is it clear if the daughters (Letitia married Thomas Loftus of Killyan, while Elizabeth married the Very Rev. Jeremy Marsh, Dean of Kilmore) practised in pastel.

It has been suggested without justification that Digby might have taught Henrietta Johnston (*q.v.*).

Bibliography

Crookshank & Glin 1994, pp. 26, 301; Crookshank & Glin 2002; *Dictionary of Irish biography*; Figgis 2014; Caroline Pegum, “Bishop Simon Digby (c.1645–1720): a reappraisal of the nature and status of his artistic practice”, *Irish architectural and decorative studies*, xv, 2012, pp. 34–59

Pastels

J.2752.101 James Butler, 1st Duke of ORMONDE (1610–1688), Lord Steward of the Household, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, pstl/ppr, 25.5x21., a/r Ashfield, inscr. [??] “James, 2nd Duke of Ormonde 1689”, ?1711 (PC). Lit.: Toby Barnard & Jane Fenlon, eds., *The dukes of Ormonde, 1610–1745*, Woodbridge, 2000, fig. 15; Pegum 2013, fig. 4 φ



J.2752.103 ~repl., 1711

J.2752.104 Seven “croine pictures” [crayons], inv. p.m. 1720