

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastelists before 1800*

Online edition

FRYE, Thomas

Co. Offaly c.1710 – London 3.IV.1762

Frye was born in Co. Offaly, it is thought at Edenderry, the son of John Fry (1670–1752) and his wife Anne Harrington. He is said to have been initially influenced by the portrait painter James Latham. By 1732 he had moved to England (earlier than suggested in other sources), marrying Sarah Kirk at Holy Trinity, Kingston-upon-Hull, on 31.VII.1732. A signed and dated oil from this year is in Emmanuel College, Cambridge: it is a copy of portrait of John Balderston (–1719) made in 1684 by David Loggan (cited Figgis 2014). He is also said to have made some pastel portraits vaguely in the manner of Carriera dating from 1734. By 1735 he had moved to London in the company of Herbert Stoppelaer. Here he produced portraits in oil and miniature. A full length portrait of Frederick, Prince of Wales was commissioned by the Saddlers' Company in 1734, and was engraved by the artist in mezzotint to considerable acclaim. In 1744 he helped found the porcelain factory at Bow with Edward Heylyn, but ill health forced him to retire in 1759.

He exhibited portraits in oil, pastel and miniature at the Society of Artists in 1760 and 1761. He also made mezzotint engravings of his own and other portraits. Preparatory chalk studies for these prints have been confused with those of Piazzetta, whose inspiration was mentioned by Frye in an advertisement in *The London chronicle* for 3–5.VI.1760, which mentions "The Portraits of this Gentleman that were at the Exhibition-room, shew him to be eminent as a Painter."

The *Public advertiser* (5.IV.1762) noted the death of "the very ingenious and celebrated Painter Mr Thomas Frye; a Man universally beloved." He died at his house in Hatton Garden. His will was made on 27.III.1762 (St Andrew's Holborn), in which he left everything to his wife Sarah; it was witnessed by the engraver Jonathan Spilbury of Stanhope Street, and proved a week later. Her will, proved 21.VI.1774, was made in 1772: she was then living in Shoreditch. Her brother John Kirk is mentioned (he had lent Thomas Frye some £200), as well as her children, Sarah, Mrs Ralph Willcock and Mary, Mrs Edmund Walton; all three sons appear to have been dead. A pair of anonymous portraits of Frye and his wife in crayons were in Edward Tanner's 1791 sale (v. English sch.).

The pastel of Dr Smyth shows a somewhat loose approach in the chalk strokes on the surplice but the drawing of the face is more blended. Wynne 1977 divides the drawings into three groups: early works, with colour; later works in chalk executed with a light touch, properly regarded as drawings; and a group of chalk drawings with deeper tone quality (executed around 1761, and possibly including those shown at the Society of Artists) which are referred to as pastels. Whether they were executed with fabricated pastels in the strict sense is difficult to establish without scientific analysis.

Frye's later works were original, with larger than life heads often providing a distinctive intensity. His pupil William Pether (*q.v.*) assisted in the engraving of some of these heads, and was commissioned by Boydell to complete the set of mezzotints he had recently begun at the time of his death.

Probably through Pether, Frye's monochrome heads had a direct influence on Joseph Wright of Derby (*q.v.*) during his time in Liverpool (c.1768–71), and the group of artists around him, including the Tates, Thomas Chubbard, and Ottwell Worrall (*qq.v.*), all of whom showed chalk drawings at the Liverpool 1774 exhibition. Although one of Worrall's exhibits was after Frye, there is no evidence that these lost works were in monochrome pastel rather than natural chalks. The attribution of some of the sheets below (e.g. [J.3314.126](#)) has reasonably been questioned, with Wright himself as an alternative: Barker 2009; Bendor Grosvenor, pr. comm. 2023–24).

Bibliography

Alexander 2021; Bénézit; Bourke & Bhreathnach-Lynch 1999; Brieger 1921; Bryan 1816; *Burke's Irish family records*, 1976, p. 485; Crookshank & Glin 1994; Crookshank & Glin 2002; *Dictionary of Irish biography*; Dublin 1969; Figgis 2014; Figgis & Rooney 2001; Foskett 1987; Grove 1996; Nicolson 1968; Oxford DNB; Pilkington 1852; Stewart & Cutten 1997; Strickland 1913; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006; Wright 2007; Wynne 1970; Wynne 1972; Wynne 1977; Wynne 1982

Pastels

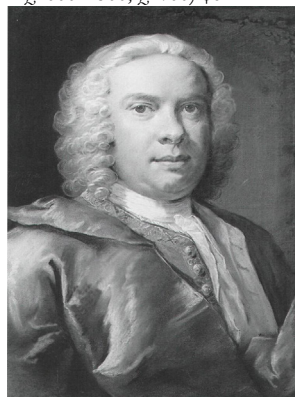
[J.3314.101](#) Sir John BELLEW, 4th Bt (1728–1750), pstl/ppr, 58.4x43.2 (PC, Ireland, 1982). Lit.: Wynne 1982, no. 8 n.r.

[J.3314.102](#) Lady BELLEW, née Eleanor Moore, widow of Sir Edward Bellew, 3rd Bt (c.1695–1741), pstl/ppr, 55.9x43.2 (PC, Ireland, 1982). Lit.: Wynne 1982, no. 7 n.r.

[J.3314.103](#) [Awnsham] CHURCHILL [(–1773) barrister, of Henbury, Dorset, father of Mary, Mrs Edward Drax], in red doublet overcoat and turban, pstl/buff ppr, 28x23 ov., s "T. Frye Fecit", inscr. *verso* "Judged to be the Portrait of Ansham Churchill, Esq. from the Resemblance...at Mrs Drax's 1820. Mrs Drax, the daughter of Ansham Churchill, the brother of Ansham" (Belfast Castle, Christie's, 18.IX.1991, Lot 63 n.r., as of Joshua Churchill, est. £300–500, £450) φ



[J.3314.105](#) Gentleman, ?father of Benjamin COLE, pstl/ppr, 51x43 (London, Christie's South Kensington, 23.X.1996, Lot 182 repr., est. £1000–1500, £1700) φδ



Thomas EYRE; & pendant: spouse, née Anne Cooke (Dublin, Office of Public Works), v. Hone

[J.3314.107](#) Richard LEVERIDGE (c.1670–1758), singer and composer, in the manner of Rembrandt, m/u

~grav. Daniel Dodd, *Daily advertiser*, 28.XI.1752

[J.3314.109](#) Dr F. Arthur SMYTH (1707–1772), Archbishop of Dublin, pstl/ppr, 58x44.5, 1740/53 (Kenwood, English Heritage, 88028351, dep.: Marble Hill. Desc. Earl of Iveagh; legs). Lit.: Wynne 1982, no. 12, fig. 52 Φσ



LARGER IMAGE

Photo courtesy English Heritage

[J.3314.112](#) Sir Peter THOMPSON [(1698–1770), Kt, FRS, merchant of Bermondsey and Poole]; & pendant: [J.3314.113](#) [?step-mother] Mary, wife of Captain Thomas Thompson, pstl, 57x43, s "T. Frye Fecit" (London, Christie's, 5.II.1910, Lot 50, 6 gns; Parsons. (*Mary*): Webb. Xavier Haas; New York, Anderson, 20–21.I.1927, Lot 64 repr., \$75). Lit. Wynne 1972, no. 33 n.r. [attr. Mary; ?pastiche or restored] -/φπ



J.3314.115 A boy, pstl/ppr, 56x43.2, sd "T. Frye fecit 1734" (Earl of Iveagh 1972; PC 2002). Lit.: Wynne 1972, no. 1, fig. 17; Crookshank & Glin 2002, n.r.; Oxford DNB, n.r. φ



J.3314.117 Man, pstl/bl. ppr, 36.4x27.3, sd ✓ "T. Frye fecit 1734" (New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, inv. B1975.4.1519). Exh.: New Haven 1979, no. 246 n.r., attr. φα



J.3314.118 Gentleman in a blue coat, pstl/ppr, 61.2x46.2, c.1745 (Dublin, NGI, inv. 7342). Exh.: Dublin 2023. Lit.: Wynne 1982, no. 5 n.r.; Le Harivel 1983, repr., attr. φ



J.3314.12 A boy, pstl/ppr, 56x43.2, c.1734 (Earl of Iveagh 1972; PC 2002). Lit.: Wynne 1972, no. 2, fig. 17; Crookshank & Glin 2002, n.r.; Oxford DNB, n.r. φ



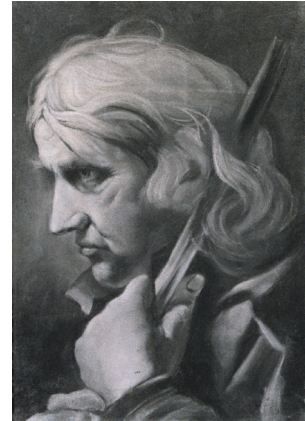
J.3314.122 Scholar, half length, wearing a turban, pstl/gr. ppr, 44.5x33.2, c.1755 (London, Christie's, 20.VI.1978, Lot 80 n.r.). =?Lit.: Wynne 1982, no. 13 φ



J.3314.124 Man leaning on a staff, pstl/ppr, 43.2x30.8, c.1761 (Somerville & Simpson, London, 1975, exh.; PC England 1982). Lit.: Wynne 1977, fig. 203; Wynne 1982, no. 26 n.r., as pstl [?attr.; cf. Wright] φ?α



J.3314.126 Man, in profile, to left, leaning on a staff, black, white chlk or monochrome pstl/ppr, 40x32.5, c.1761, inscr. *verso* "Mr Tate to Mr Benson" (New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Fund, inv. B2007.1. ?William Tate; his brother-in-law, John Benson of Liverpool. Somerville & Simpson, London, 1975, exh.; Dr Michael Wynne; Dublin, James Adam, 28.IX.2005, Lot 35 repr., est. €3–5000, €32,000). Exh.: Wright 2007, no. 54. Lit.: Wynne 1977, fig. 204; Wynne 1982, no. 27 n.r., as pstl; Wright 1990, p. 61 repr.; Barker 2009, n.24, ?attr. [?attr.; cf. Wright] φ?α



~figure in Joseph Wright of Derby, An experiment on a bird with an air pump, pnt., 1768 (Tate)

J.3314.129 Gentleman, seated, pstl (London, Christie's, 25.V.1914, Lot 57 n.r., £1/8/- with another item; Justice)

J.3314.13 Gentleman, pstl 59.6x44.4 (Adare Manor, Ireland, Christie's, 9–10.VI.1982, Lot 137 repr.) φ



J.3314.132 Lady [?pstl]

~grav. Lit.: Brieger 1921, repr. p. 158, as pstl [one of a series of ladies engraved as mezzotints] Φ

J.3314.134 Lady [?Maria, Countess of Coventry], to front, facing and looking left, lace cap, flowers and jewels, earring, necklace, right hand on left wrist, pstl, 51x33 (Vice-Admiral A. J. L. Murray; London, Sotheby's, 27.X.1943, Lot 29 n.r., £10)

~grav. Frye 1761 (Chaloner Smith 1883, no. 20)

J.3314.135 Girl with a kitten, bl., white chlk/ppr, 43.2x30.8, c.1761 (British Museum, inv. 1975.1206.1. Somerville & Simpson, London; acqu. 1975). Lit.: *Burlington magazine*, .XII.1975, p. 819, fig. 41; Wynne 1977, fig. 202, as pstl; Crookshank & Glin 1978, fig. 33, as chlk; Wynne 1982, no. 25 n.r. φ



J.3314.137 Young boy, half-length, in a brown coat and blue waistcoat, pstl, pencil,

31.1x25.1, sd √ “T.Frye Pinx/1746”; & pendant young girl, half-length, in a blue dress, pstl, pencil, 31.1x25.1 ov., sd √ “T.Frye Pinx/1746” (Michael Moseley 1939; desc.; London, Christie’s, 12.v.2006, Lot 19 repr., est. £10–15,000, £9500). Lit. Wynne 1972, no. 26/27 n.r.; Baetjer 2009, -/fig. 48 φ



J.3314.14 Three portraits, pstl, Society of Artists 1761, no. 32