

# Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

## Online edition

### PETHER, William

Carlisle c.1739 – Bristol 10.VII.1821

The son of an organ builder and harpsichord maker, also William Pether, who died in Brownlow Street, London, in 1781; his uncle was an apothecary, John Brussius, while a cousin Abraham Pether (1756–1812) was also an artist, based in Chichester. Pupil, and later partner, of Thomas Frye (*q.v.*); in 1754 he is recorded as decorating porcelain for the Bow factory. He trained at Shipley's drawing school, and received a series of prizes from the Society of Arts: third place and then fifth in the drawing competition for under-17s in 1756 and 1757 respectively, third place in the Duke of Richmond's drawing competition in 1759, and second (worth 10 gns) for mezzotint, in 1762. Pether is best known for his mezzotint engravings, many after Joseph Wright of Derby, with whom Pether shared an interest in scientific matters. One engraving was after a pastel by Russell (a *Bacchante* of 1791), while in 1778 Pether made mezzotints after Vigée Le Brun's lost portraits (perhaps in pastel) of the comte de Provence and his wife. He also worked in miniature, oil and crayon. He exhibited at the Free Society (1761–63), the Society of Artists (1764–80), and the Royal Academy (1781–94, from 12 Frith Street, 32 Oxendon Street and 148 Sloane Street).

Pether advertised prints after his work, such as “the much admired Drawing, and also the Plate” after Nollekens's bust of Charles James Fox mentioned in a proposal for publishing the print (*Morning chronicle*, 8.X.1791), to be seen at Mr Pether's, 231 Piccadilly.

A notice in the *Gloucester journal* of 27.IV.1795 announced—

MR WM PETHER, Portrait-Painter and Drawing-Master, who has regularly studied and followed his Profession many years in London, respectfully informs the Nobility [etc.] that, having been invited to settle in the City of Hereford, he has accordingly accepted it as his present and future place of residence; purposing to practice the art of Portrait-Painting as usual, and also to teach the various manners of Drawing, on moderate terms, either at schools, or in private families, who reside at Hereford, in the vicinity [etc.]

A few years later, the *Hereford journal* (9.I.1799) reported that “Mr William Pether, artist of this city, inventor of ‘The sailor's Preservative from Drowning’”, was publishing a work on the safety of marine vessels.

There has been considerable confusion over Pether's dates. He died in Montague Street, Bristol on 19.VII.1821 and was buried in Holy Trinity, Horfield 25.VII.1781 aged 82, implying a date of birth c.1739. William Pether married Mary Bond at St Andrew's, Clifton (both of that parish, suggesting that Pether had moved from London by that date) on 28.III.1780. The witnesses were George Norman and Ann Abram, the former probably a local carpenter.

The Jones pastel of 1797 is one of only a few examples of Pether's pastels to have survived, but demonstrates a limited, almost monochrome palette, and softly rounded drawing which is likely to be typical of Pether's own creations. As an engraver however his copies after his sources are likely to have been

more precisely drawn. One monochrome pastel, of Wright of Derby himself, is inscribed on the stretcher “Joseph Wright of Derby/copied by Wm Pether”, which has led it to be catalogued as by Pether from 1868 on; however it is in an identical technique to Wright's own monochrome pastels, is lit from the right as are his other self-portraits, and is far beyond the level of most of Pether's work. The recent appearance of the pastel of the Rev. François de Soyres suggests we may need to reconsider this. (The inscription could however refer to a lost copy or print.)

### Salon critiques

Anon., “An historical and critical review of the paintings, &c. now exhibiting at the great room of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts”, from the Universal Museum, repr. *The Beauties of all the Magazines selected*, 1762, pp. 185–87:

53. A head, in crayons, of a Fryar, by W. Pether. Strongly expressive of penitence.

### Bibliography

Alexander 2021; Bénézit; Grove; Oxford DNB; William Strong, *Strawberry Hill catalogue...*, 1843, p. 180, with biographical notes; Waterhouse 1981; Wright of Derby 1990, p. 26; Wright 2006; Wright 2007

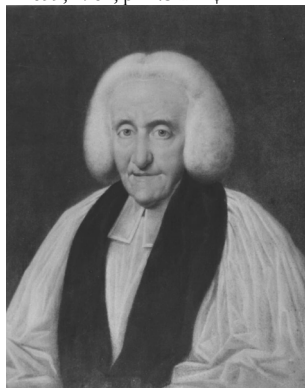
### Pastels

J.584.101 Edmund AYRTON (1734–1808), organist, master of the children of the Chapel Royal, m/u (the sitter; legs: son-in-law Thomas Paris of Cambridge). Lit.: Highfill & al. 1973, I, p. 186 n.r.

J.584.102 John BOYDELL (1719–1804), engraver and print-seller, lord mayor of the City of London 1790, pstl, Free Society 1763, no. 156. Lit.: *Walpole Society*, XXVII, 1939, p. 74; Ingamells 2004, p. 68 n.r.

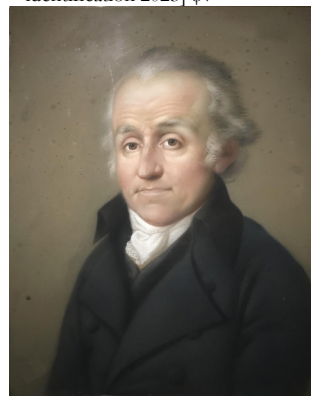
J.584.103 John Hooke CAMPBELL-HOOKE, né Campbell (c.1733–1795), Lord Lyon King of Arms 1754, black, white chlk/buff ppr, 31.4x26 (San Marino, Huntington Library, inv. 63.52.171). Lit.: Wright 2007, fig. 131, as pstl  $\phi$

J.584.104 John BUTLER (1717–1802), bishop of Hereford, half length, slightly to left, short white wig, pstl, 46x38, inscr. *verso* “drawn by Wm Pether” (Hereford, Bishop's Palace, 1972, 1981. Acqu. 1875; not located 2005). Lit.: Ormond & Rogers 1972, n.r.; John Ingamells, *The English episcopal portrait, 1559–1835*, 1981, p. 143 n.r.  $\phi$



J.584.105 Rev. John JONES (1762–1817), bust-length, pstl, 39.3x31.6, inscr. *verso* “The Rev. John Jones/of Trinity College/Oxford/Vicar of Foye/died on Jan 15th 1817/aged 54 yrs/drawn by Wm Pether/in the yr 1797/cost £4?” (Durham PC; London, Christie's, 28.IX.2005, Lot 146 n.r., est. £500–700, b/i)  $\phi\sigma$

J.584.106 Rev. François-Jourdan de SOYRES (1751–1807), pastor of the Bristol French Church, in a black coat, pstl, 46x36, inscr. *verso* (desc.: family. Cirencester, Moore Allen & Innocent, 9.II.2023, Lot 311 repr., as unknown man by William Pether, est. £100–150; Cirencester, Moore Allen & Innocent, 19–20.II.2025, Lot 426 repr., identified, est. £200–300; Cirencester, Moore Allen & Innocent, 19–20.III.2025, Lot 397 repr., identified, est. £100–150) [new attr., identification 2023]  $\phi\psi$



J.584.107 Dr TROUGHTON, bust length in clerical dress, pstl, 36.5x28.5, sd *verso* “Wm Pether Delint./1796”, inscr. “Dr Troughton given by Miss Dorny” (Nottingham, Mellors & Kirk, 28–29.II.2008, Lot 643 repr., est. £300–400. Nottingham, Mellors & Kirk, 21–22.VI.2017, Lot 112 repr., est. £200–300)  $\phi$



Joseph WRIGHT of Derby (*Derby Museums and Art Gallery*). *Lit.: Wright 2007, no. 49, as ?Wright or Pether [v. Wright]*

- J584.11 Boy's head, crayons, Free Society 1761, no. 6
- J584.111 Gentleman, crayons, Free Society 1761, no. 82
- J584.112 Gentleman, crayons, Free Society 1762, no. 46
- J584.113 Head of a Fryer, crayons, Free Society 1762, no. 53
- J584.114 Head of a disbanded soldier, crayons, Free Society 1763, no. 155
- J584.115 Gentleman, crayons, Free Society 1763, no. 156
- J584.116 Turk's head, crayons, Society of Artists 1764, no. 83
- J584.117 Gentleman with a pipe in his hand, crayons, Society of Artists 1765, no. 98
- J584.118 Lady, crayons, Society of Artists 1777, no. 91