

# Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

## Online edition

### VISPRÉ, François-Xavier

Voisey 13.V.1725 – London brd 28.VIII.1792  
François-Xavier Vispré (Vespré, Visprez, Vispray, Francis, Xavieus, Saverino and many other variant spellings are found) worked in pastel, oil, miniature and mezzotint. There are numerous confusions with the work of his younger brother Victor Vispré (*q.v.*) who specialised in glass painting. Many of the secondary sources (including Geysant & Heymer 2013) identify Victor as the elder – apparently an inference from the identification of the exhibitor of two glass paintings in the Free Society exhibition of 1764 as “Mr Vispre Junr” – but this is more likely to have been Victor.

François-Xavier's baptismal record was finally located in 2023; he was indeed Victor's elder brother, son of François Vispré, and was born the year after his parents' marriage. His absent godparents were his grandmother Anne Vispré, still in Besançon, and François-Xavier Maréchal de Longeville, docteur en théologie, prieur et seigneur de Voisey. The father, François or Jean-François Visprez or Vispray, was a limonadier in Besançon, the son of Ursin Vispré and Anne Balanche (they had married in Pontarlier 14.VII.1676); while the mother, Élisabeth Marcoul or Marcoux, came from Voisey (Haute-Marne), where François-Xavier was born. The parents had recently married in nearby Enfonvelle, 10.VII.1724. Since his mother died in Besançon on 18.I.1752, aged 57 (she was buried the following day: Saint-Pierre, registres paroissiaux), it seems unlikely that the family were in Paris (where many sources had suggested François-Xavier might have been born). A sister, Françoise, was baptised in Besançon on 29.XI.1729, the couple's only child recorded there apart from Victor and François-Xavier.

A Vispré family was also resident in Pontarlier; François Vispré, de Besançon, probably Victor's father, was recorded as parrain at the birth of a Claude-François Lamarche, baptised in Pontarlier, 28.II.1753; the mother, Marie-Victoire, was the daughter of Simon Vispré, a marchand, and Antoinette Parguez (they had married in Pontarlier 17.V.1717).

There is no obvious basis for the suggestion that Vispré was from a Huguenot family (his forenames make this improbable), possibly of Swiss origin; but François-Xavier may have been related to Jean-Baptiste Vispré, a soldier in the Swiss service and his wife, née Anne Garnier. Their eldest son, also Jean-Baptiste (1706–p.1779), lieutenant d'infanterie caporal of the Cent Suisse de la garde di roi, was born in Bagnaux (Yvelines); he married Marie-Françoise (1732– ) the daughter of Jean Dorleans, a vigneron in Châtenay-Malabry.

Early records of François-Xavier and Victor in Paris the 1750s are confused. François-Xavier was in Paris in 1750, where he engraved portraits of the royal family after Liotard as well as a pastel by Allais. A portrait of the novelist Meusnier de Querlon, dated 1743–44 according to the lettering on Cathelin's print, suggests that he may have been born earlier than thought

(however the print was probably issued in 1762, and Cathelin's “Aetat. XLII” may have been an error). He is noted in the *Correspondance littéraire* (13.VII.1750) as “un Allemand qui grave en manière noir”. In the *Mercure de France*, .VII.1750, pp. 175f, appeared this notice:

*Vispré* vient de graver en manière noire les portraits du Roi, de Madame Anne Henriette de France, & de M. le Duc de Chartres, d'après les originaux de M. Liotard.

*La manière noire* est une espèce de gravure dans laquelle les Anglois ont excellé, surtout M. Smit. M. Vispré montre beaucoup de talent pour cette manière estimable, en ce qu'elle rend la douceur & le fond de la nature, & qu'elle est éloignée de toute espèce de sécheresse.

On trouvera ces 3 Estampes à Paris, chez l'Auteur, rue des Grands Degrés, la cinquième porte à gauche, en haut par la rue du Pavé de la Place Maubert au rez-de-chaussée.

It is unclear how or where Vispré would have learned to practise mezzotint; an earlier stay in England has not been recorded, nor is there anything to suggest that he was taught by John Smith, the engraver mentioned in the *Mercure* piece, who had died in 1743.

Vispré had definitively moved to England by the mid-1750s, no doubt because his work lacked the finish demanded by the Paris market. He was noted in Bristol on 29.V.1756 (Long, cited Foskett); he was there again in 1775. He then worked in London, exhibiting at the Society of Artists between 1760 and 1783 from addresses in Soho (Thrift Street 1764, Craven Street 1769, Porter Street in 1780 and 1783, no. 18 in 1783, while “Mr Vispré, miniature-painter, 17 Porter Street, Newport Market” appears in a trade card, British Museum). He was elected as a director (thus serving on the exhibition committee) of the Society of Artists, among the painters, in various years from 1775 to 1790 (lists in Hargraves 2006, who otherwise omits him).

On 6.XII.1758 a certain Vispré was granted a vicar general marriage licence to marry a Mlle Marteau in the diocese of Canterbury; no other details are recorded. On 6.I.1762 Vispré witnessed the will of his friend, the sculptor Louis-François Roubiliac (also a director of the Society of Artists), immediately before his death; in addition to the pastel of him that Vispré exhibited in 1760, a picture – probably in oil, by Vispré of “A paintress drawing the late Mr Roubiliac's portrait” was sold in London, Langford, 23.II.1763, Lot 47. Vispré also made an oil portrait of Cécile Regnier, mentioned in Roubiliac's will as expecting his child, shown handling a volume of prints.

On 12.IV.1764 the marriage is recorded at St Anne's, Soho between Francis Xavieus Vispre and one Mary Hunter; a mezzotint of a young woman reading, lettered “Vispré Pinxit et Fecit”, has been identified as of “Mrs Vispré” by annotations on the British Museum copy.

On 24.V.1766 a James Vespre, son of Francis Xavieus and Mary, was baptised at St Swithin's Walcot, Bath; he was buried at St Martin in the Fields on 20.V.1768. Another son, John Francis Vispré, was baptised at St Giles-in-the-Fields, 6.VI.1776; he was probably the John Vispré, ensign promoted to lieutenant by purchase in

the 53<sup>rd</sup> Foot in 1795, transferred to the 38<sup>th</sup> Foot in 1796, but deceased by 23.IX.1797 (*London gazette*); he might be the John Vespre, son of Francis, of Little St Helens (described as a merchant), who was apprenticed to James Riley of the Musicians' Company on 15.I.1790.

Mrs Vispré was the plaintiff in “Vispre formerly Hunter *v.* Dyson & ors” concerning the estate of James Webb, a pipemaker of Craven Street, Strand in 1772. From his will with its seven codicils, eventually probated in 1775, it appears that Mary was the, presumably illegitimate, daughter of his servant Elenor Hunter, and was left some £500 (it is unclear if she ever received it).

Vispré was in Dublin 1776–77, at the same time as Victor (although it is not clear that they travelled together or stayed for the same time); in the Dublin exhibition of 1777, he showed miniatures and portraits in crayons, while Victor showed fruit pieces on glass. In 1784 he sent two letters to the Society of Arts concerning the cultivation of vines in England; this was followed, two years later, by the publication of his *A dissertation on the growth of wine in England*, Bath, 1786 (reinforcing the suggestion that he was related to the Bagnaux Visprés), on the basis of which he was included in Felton (1830) as “a most inoffensive man, of the mildest manners, and of the purest integrity”, much esteemed by Sir Joshua Reynolds. A correspondent sent extracts of the *Dissertation* to the *Gentleman's magazine* (.VIII.1791, p. 705), calling the author “an ingenious French gentleman” whom he had met at Sir Gregory Page-Turner's (Vispré exhibited an oil portrait of the baronet at the Royal Academy in 1788). He sent portraits and religious pieces (medium unspecified) to the Royal Academy exhibitions of 1788 and 1789, from 78 St Martin's Lane. Perhaps c.1790 he was in Cambridge: a trade card affixed to the back of a miniature in the V&A (for which a date of c.1794 has been proposed) reads “F. X. VISPRE, miniature & crayon painter, (from London) takes likenesses Prices from Three to Six Guineas. At Mr. Clarke's, Ironmonger, Bridge-Street, Cambridge.”

An announcement in the *Sheffield register* for 5.XI.1790 shows that “F. X. Vispré”, staying at Mr Bourne's, bottom of Norfolk-Street, Sheffield, “takes likenesses in miniature and crayons. – No pay is expected if likenesses are not approved of.” Much the same information was included in *Aris's Birmingham gazette* on 27.IX.1790, where the miniatures were offered at 3 gns, while likenesses “in Crayons, with a gilded Frame and Bohemia Glass” were priced at “five guineas and a half.”

According to Felton, he died poor, in St Martin's Lane, before 1800; in fact Francis Xeveramas Vespre [sic] of St Martin's Lane was buried at St Martin-in-the-Fields on 28.VIII.1792, and the fee recorded in the parish burial account book, £1/18/8, was among the highest noted, suggesting that he was far from a pauper.

“Mrs Mary Vespre”, his widow, was recorded in the rates books as the proprietor of property in Ealing until at least 1798. Mary Vispré died in

.VII.1800 and was buried in St Martin-in-the-Fields (index to death duty registers); her will was given probate in London in 1800: among other bequests, she left to the author Samuel Felton of King's Arms Yard, Coleman Street, "the picture of myself and my late husband as well as the fruit piece on glass and the two miniatures painted by my late husband". (Felton, a scrivener and attorney from Market Drayton and of Curzon Street before his bankruptcy in 1795, was best known as the owner of a Shakespeare portrait. He was recorded in Northumberland Street before a spell in the Fleet prison in 1806, which might explain why, in 1830, he did not know the whereabouts of the pastel of Vispré bequeathed to him.) The residual beneficiary and executor was Charles Angibaud, a surgeon and grandson of the famous Huguenot apothecary to Louis XIV and Charles II. Both François-Xavier and Victor had used Angibaud's address, in St Martin's Lane, in their submissions to the Society of Artists exhibitions in 1772 and 1775.

Vispré's pastels are said to show the influence of Perronneau, but that of Liotard is more evident in the Ashmolean picture, which closely resembles the *Dame lisant sur un sofa*; it is on vellum. A pastel of George III, a pseudopendant to Liotard's Viscount Downe, is close to the signed Garrick pastel, and is tentatively attributed to Vispré. Some idea of his art may also be gained from the mezzotints he engraved after Liotard. The handful of signed works do not allow one to resolve the evident confusion between Vispré's work and that of his brother, although Victor's recorded work all seems to have been painted on glass. (One wonders if this is a reference to a number of trompe-l'œil paintings depicting framed pictures with broken glass.) Provisionally therefore one assigns all the Vispré pastels to François-Xavier, who also worked in miniature, oil, watercolour and on glass. One should note that his use of paint was very similar to pastel, and some records have been confused. An anonymous pastel of Lucy Louthenbourg, attributed to Vispré by Waterhouse, is probably too good to be his work.

A group of four etchings after Zucchi with themes from *Il pastor fido* refer to "Vispré" near Mr Slaughter's Coffee House, St Martin's Lane, no doubt with Charles Angibaud, whose address was given by both brothers in 1774. Vispré's work was also engraved by artists such as John Raphael Smith (*q.v.*).

**Bibliography**

Alexander 2021; Bénézit; Edwards 1808, p. 160; Samuel Felton, *On the portraits of English authors on gardening*, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1830, p. 157; Gault de Saint-Germain 1808, p. 311; Geyssant & Heymer 2009; Geyssant & Heymer 2013; Grove 1996; Lemoine-Bouchard 2008; Long 1929; R&L p. 715; Schidlof 1965, no. 1228, pl. 609; Stewart & Cutten 1997; Strickland 1913; Waterhouse 1978; Waterhouse 1981; Wright 2006 Gordon Balderston, pr. comm. 2017–23

GENEALOGIES [Vispré](#)

**Salon critiques**

Society of Artists 1760, *Imperial magazine*, 1760, p. 246: Mr Vispré. A celebrated painter in crayons, has two portraits, one of them the famous sculptor Roubiliac, the man himself alive, breathing and just going to speak; most admirable! and himself never cut in marble a better...

**Pastels**

J.763.101 SELF-PORTRAIT, crayons, ov. (?the sitter's widow –1800; legs: Samuel Felton).

Lit.: Felton 1830, n.r., "I have seen his portrait in crayons, in an oval, finely finished by himself, but know not now where that is"

J.763.102 Samuel DERRICK (1724–1769), master of ceremonies at Bath 1761–69, m/u ~grav. William Hibbard



M<sup>r</sup>. Derrick  
Master of the Ceremonies at Bath  
Vigneron pinx.

J.763.105 Charles EISEN (1720–1778), dessinateur des estampes, pstl

~grav. Ficquet 1761 (FD 725), for La Fontaine, *Contes et nouvelles en vers*, éd. des Fermiers généraux, illustrated Eisen, 1762. Lit.: *Affiches, annonces et avis divers*, 31, 4.VIII.1762, p. 123, "gravé su un Pastel de Vispré, Peintre Suisse actuellement à Londres"



J.763.108 Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-André-Timothée d'Éon de Beaumont, dit le chevalier d'ÉON (1728–1810), m/u, Society of Artists 1765, no. 146



~pnt. Robert Edge Pine, 123x100, 1759

J.763.112 John FARR (1733–1797) of Blaise Castle, Bristol, and Redland, reading Horace's *Odes*, pstl/pchm, 44.8x60.5, s "Vispré pinx", ?1750 (Oxford, Ashmolean, inv. WA 1978.53. Desc.:

sitter's sister, Esther Joanna Farr, Mrs George Gibbs of Belmont; her great-nephew, Henry Huck Gibbs, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Aldenham 1906; Alban George Henry Gibbs, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lord Aldenham; London, Sotheby's, 24.II.1937, Lot 127, as Victor Vispré, unknown man, £50; Gerald Reitlinger; don 1972). Exh.: London 1906, upper gallery, no. 106. Lit.: John Arthur Gibbs & al., *History of Antony and Dorothea Gibbs...*, 1922, p. 454; Brown 1982, no. 1851; Charles Saumarez Smith, *Eighteenth century decoration*, London, 1993, repr. clr; Whiteley 2000, no. 828; Roy Porter, *Enlightenment*, London, 2000, repr.; Outram 2006, pp. 76f repr.; R&L p. 400 n.r. [sitter gen in *Miscellanea genealogica et heraldica*, III, 1874, p. 252] φσ



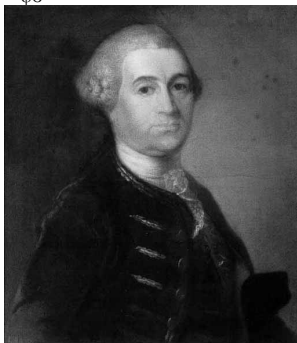
J.763.114 David GARRICK (1717–1779), actor, in a blue coat, pstl, 57.2x49.5, s → "Vispré", c.1760; & pendant: J.763.115 spouse, née Eva Maria Veigel (1724–1822), dancer *s.n.* Mme Violette, in a blue dress and black lace shawl, pstl, c.1760 (Joseph Wight (–1770), reading clerk of the House of Lords, of Wandsworth Common, friend of Garrick; his niece, Martha Dunwell. Mynors, surgeon, of Chancery Lane, a.1832. Brigadier-General Sir William Bromley-Davenport (1862–1949) of Capesthorpe, Cheshire; London, Sotheby's, 11.VI.1947, Lot 3 n.r., as unknown sitters, by T. X. Vispré). Lit.: John Taylor, *Records of my life*, London, 1832, II, p. 129f n.r., "admirable likenesses...painted in the meridian of the lives of Garrick and his wife...by Vispre, who put his name to them"; Ingamells 2004, p. 186 n.r. φ



J.763.118 ~repl. (Garrick), pstl, 57.2x48, s ✓ "Vispré", c.1760 (London, Garrick Club. Don Major R. Woodhouse 1924). Exh.: Buxton 1981, no. 27. Lit.: Highfill & al., VI, 1978, p.



84, no. 57, as by Victor Vispré; Ashton & al., 1997, no. 245 repr.; Ingamells 2004, p. 186 n.r. φσ



1.763.12 GEORGE III, in a blue coat, pstl/ppr, 58x48 (Wykeham Abbey, desc.). Lit.: Millar 1963, p. 190, related to Liotard; R&L R12, fig. 816, ??Liotard; Jeffares 2009 [new attr., ?] φν



1.763.127 Small child, ?of the NEVILL family, in a blue outfit, pstl, s → “Vispré” (PC 2024) φδν

~pseudo-pendant, Viscount Downe, v. Liotard

1.763.123 Mrs Philippe-Jacques de LOUTHERBOURG, née Lucy Paget (1745–1828), widow of Thomas Corson of Staffordshire, in a blue dress, pstl, 64x49.5 ov. (the sitter; legs “large oval picture in crayons of myself”: great-niece, Lucy Monteith, daughter of niece Ann Monteith; desc.: A. E. Saunders. London, Sotheby’s, 21.III.1974, Lot 63, £1400, adv. *Burlington magazine*, CXVI/852, .III.1974, p. xli repr. London, Christie’s, 22.XI.1977, Lot 105 n.r., as Francis Cotes, £700. London, Sotheby’s, 19.III.1981, Lot 134 repr.). Lit.: Olivier Lefevre, *Philippe-Jacques de Loutberbourg*, Paris, 2012, pp. 368, 38, fig. 13. Attr. Vispré suggested Sir Ellis Waterhouse [patr.; cf. Lion] Φα



Photo courtesy Sotheby’s

1.763.126 Anne-Gabriel MEUSNIER DE QUERLON (1702–1780), homme de lettres, m/u, ?1743/44 ~grav. Cathelin 1762



1.763.127 Small child, ?of the NEVILL family, in a blue outfit, pstl, s → “Vispré” (PC 2024) φδν



1.763.129 Louis-François ROUBILIAC (1702–1762), pstl/ppr, 62.2x54.6, Society of Artists 1760, no. ?63 (New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, B1977-14-132. Sitter; his daughter, Amelia Roubiliac; desc.: great-grandson, François Roubiliac Conder, 1870; his daughter, Maude Reignier, Mrs Julian Lousada 1928; her son Sir Anthony Lousada (1907–1994); London, Christie’s, 20.III.1953, Lot 53, as by La Tour. David Drey, London, 1976; Cyril Humphris; acqu. Paul Mellon, .XI.1976). Exh.: New Haven 1979, no. 51 repr.; New Haven 2001, no. 6 repr., attr. Lit.: *The art journal*, .VII.1870, 259; Esdaile, *Roubiliac*, 1928, pp. 180–90; Johnson 1976, no. 82, as Cotes; Kerlake 1977, I, p. 238; II, pl. 697, attr. Vispré; Tessa Murdoch, “Louis François Roubiliac and his Huguenot connections”, *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, XXIV, 1983, pp.40–42, 45, pl. VI; Tessa Murdoch & Sandra Robinson, “Roubiliac and Sprimont: a friendship revisited”, *Burlington magazine*, CLXV, .VI.2023, p. 600 repr. Φ



Photo courtesy Christie’s

~pendant: Mme Louis-François ROUBILIAC, née Céleste Regnier, pnt., 76x63.5, c.1760 (London, V&A, inv. P.43-1953; dep.: Osterley. Sitter; desc.: Anthony Lousada; London, Christie’s, 20.III.1953, Lot 120). Lit.: Murdoch, *ibid.*, pl. V, as pstl

Miss VERNON (*Attingham Park, National Trust, inv. 607876*), v. Cotes

1.763.134 Mrs François-Xavier VISPRÉ, née Mary Hunter (–1800), m/u (?the sitter’s widow – 1800; legs: Samuel Felton)

~grav. Vispré, mezzotint, identified on BM copy

1.763.137 Nobleman, pstl, Society of Artists 1772, no. 342

1.763.138 Gentleman, pstl, Society of Artists 1775, no. 280

1.763.139 An artist, pstl, Society of Artists 1783, no. 300

1.763.14 Young gentleman, m/u, Royal Academy 1788, no. 331

1.763.141 Gentleman, m/u, Royal Academy 1789, no. 305

Man (*London, Sotheby’s, 21.I.1982, Lot 74, attr., unknown man*) [v. a/r Mengs, Conyngbam]

1.763.143 Venus, pstl, Society of Artists 1760, no. 65

1.763.144 Lady, pstl, Society of Artists 1773, no. 358‡

1.763.145 Lady, pstl, Society of Artists 1775, no. 278

1.763.146 Lady with a dog, pstl, Society of Artists 1775, no. 279

1.763.147 Lady, pstl, Society of Artists 1776, no. 160

1.763.148 Lady, pstl, Society of Artists 1780, no. 303\*

1.763.149 Lady, m/u, Royal Academy 1788, no. 290

1.763.15 Lady, m/u, Royal Academy 1788, no. 292

1.763.151 Lady, m/u, Royal Academy 1788, no. 330

1.763.152 Lady, m/u, Royal Academy 1789, no. 290

1.763.153 Portraits, pstl, Society of Artists 1760, no. 63

1.763.154 Fancy head, pstl, Society of Artists 1760, no. 64

1.763.155 Pastel, Society of Artists 1770, no. 142

1.763.156 Conversation piece, pstl, Society of Artists 1772, no. 343

1.763.157 Portraits, crayons, Dublin 1777

1.763.158 An Infant Jesus considering the cross, m/u, Royal Academy 1788, no. 3

1.763.159 St John the Baptist, m/u, Royal Academy 1789, no. 110