

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

WILLS, Rev. James

fl. Italy 1737; England 1740; –1777

Wills studied history painting in Rome before returning to England by 1740. He may well have visited Florence, as his pastel self-portrait was acquired by the collector Gabburri and lent to the exhibition at SS. Anunziata in 1737. He published a translation of Du Fresnoy's *De arte graphica* in 1754. He joined the St Martin's Lane academy, of which he became director and, from 1768, chaplain. In 1754 he was privately ordained deacon at the request of Charles Yorke (who later married a pastellist, *q.v.*); he was for many years curate of Canons, Middlesex, and in 1772 was appointed vicar by the living's patron, William Hallett. However he continued to exhibit in London, at the Free Society and at the Society of Artists.

Although known to have made pastels, none is known today with certainty after his Italian period. Wills's oil portraits are not uncommon, and a number of prints are also extant where the medium is unspecified and might include crayons. Alastair Laing (in Maddison 1995) identifies Wills as the more likely author of a 1754 pastel bearing the initials JW, traditionally attributed to James Worsdale (*q.v.*).

Bibliography

Bénézit; Brownlow 1847; Waterhouse 1981; Whitley 1928, II, p. 275

Pastels

AUTORITRATTO, pstl, Florence 1737 (Gabburri).

Lit.: Turner 1993, p. 215 n.r.

Sir John Perceval, 1st Earl of EGMONT (1683–1748), pstl, 1740. Lit.: *Diary of the 1st Earl of Egmont*, London, 1923, III, 28.v.1740, "Sat for my picture in crayons to Mr Wills"

Mrs William WINDHAM, pstl, sd "JW 1754" (Felbrigg Hall, National Trust. Ketton-Cremer), v. Worsdale