

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

ASHLEY, Mrs James, née Mary Wickstead, Mrs Thomas Worlidge

?Widcombe c.1720 – ?London ?1790

Mary's father John Wickstead (or Wicksteed) was a seal engraver with a workshop in Widcombe, near Bath. He and his wife Sarah ran the celebrated Toy Shop in Orange Grove, Bath, where engravings (among them, by Thomas Worlidge, *q.v.*) were sold as well as seals. Mary Wickstead married Thomas Worlidge in Bath, 12.vi.1743, after the death of his first wife. She has been confused with an imaginary Elizabeth said to have become Worlidge's third wife in 1763 (but documents make it clear that Worlidge was married to Mary until his death).

The *Public advertiser* in 1767 printed some verses "On seeing a picture of the late duke of York at Langford's sale, done in crayons by Mrs Worlidge". Earlier verses in the same periodical praised her copies of prints made in needlework, and it is in this medium that she appeared as an honorary exhibitor at the Society of Artists and the Free Society between 1765 and 1767 as Mrs Worlidge. Her husband made several portraits of her, one in the guise of Sophonisba, at an easel with a mahlstick and a brush or perhaps a chalk-holder in her hand. She wound up Worlidge's affairs after his death in 1766, continuing to sell prints in his house at Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields which he had taken in 1763; it had previously belonged to the painter Thomas Hudson. She was soon remarried, to James Ashley the younger (proprietor of the London Punch-house at Ludgate Hill in Fleet Street, described in his will as a "dealer in brandy"), who had been a friend of Worlidge. Under the name of Mrs Ashley she exhibited portraits, landscapes, still lifes and genre pieces in oil, crayon and needlework at the Society of Artists and the Free Society. Her submission of "a drawing" to the latter in 1768 elicited Walpole's annotation "widow of Worlidge the Painter, and remarried to Ashley who kept the London Punchhouse."

James Ashley's will, made 12.xi.1771, was proved 11 days later; in it he left everything to his wife Mary (as sole executrix, she advertised in the *Gazetteer* 11.i.1772). (His father, also James, continued the business at Ludgate Hill, selling brandy until his death in 1775, aged 78.) The Great Queen Street property remained with Mary: it was let briefly in 1774 to the actress Mary Robinson, who recorded:

On our return to London after ten days' absence, a house was hired in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields. It was a large, old-fashioned mansion, and stood on the spot where the Freemasons' Tavern has since been erected. This house was the property of a lady, an acquaintance of my mother; the widow of Mr Worlidge, an artist of considerable celebrity. It was handsomely furnished, and contained many valuable pictures by various masters. I resided with my mother; Mr. Robinson continued at the house of Mr. Vernon and Elderton in Southampton Buildings.

Mrs Ashley is said to have remarried again, to a Captain Robinson (perhaps a confusion with her tenant, although a Mary Ashley married a William Robinson on 17.i.1773 at St Martin-in-

the-Fields), and became the keeper of the Star & Garter inn at Richmond (where, according to Fanny Burney, Sir Joshua Reynolds dined). She died in or around 1790.

Bibliography

Chaloner Smith 1883, p. 1006; Oxford DNB; Foskett 1987, *s.v.* Ashley; *Memoirs of the late Mrs. Robinson*, London, 1803, I, pp. 74f; Saur, *s.v.* Ashley; Sloman 2002; Strange 1907; *Public characters of 1799–1800*, London, 1799, pp. 552f; Walpole 1828; *Survey of London: Parish of St Giles-in-the-Fields*, 1914, p. 77

Pastels

- J.1132.101 CHRISTIAN VII, konge af Danmark (1749–1808), crayons, Free Society 1771, no. 2
- J.1132.102 Gentleman, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 5†
- J.1132.103 Lady, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 4
- J.1132.104 A Magdalen, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 5
- J.1132.105 A bunch of grapes, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 2
- J.1132.106 A bad man trumpeting ill in a good man's ears, crayons, Free Society 1769, no. 3