

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

BELLERS, William

fl. London 1733–73

The topographical artist and printseller William Bellers exhibited landscapes in oil, crayon and chalk at the Free Society between 1761 and 1773. None of these is now known (except from engravings) but they are said to be in the manner of George Lambert (*q.v.*). There are much earlier portraits in the British Museum (one said to be a self-portrait but this seems unsubstantiated) and in a private collection. The descendant and owner thought that the 1740 portraits “have little artistic merit...though probably accurate likenesses enough of the sitters”. The portraits were evidently sufficiently different in subject matter, ambition and competence from the landscapes that it is natural to think that they were made by different artists, and further to assume that these were father and son. But it is not clear which (if either) was the William Bellers who matriculated at the University of Oxford on 9.IV.1734 described as “illuminator”. They are treated together in this article, as it is not impossible that there was a single figure whose technique developed.

William Bellers dealt in prints in Oxford and Cambridge, and was supplied by Arthur Pond (*q.v.*); the business was carried on at Poppins Court, Fleet Street, London from the early 1750s. This was the address given in what seems to be the earliest advertisement (*Public advertiser*, 2.III.1753) for Bellers’s offer by subscription of an engraved perspective view of the London Hospital, Whitechapel. Later advertisements (until 1759) offered topographical prints, drawings etc. from the same address. He was also reported as giving drawing lessons. He was an active member of the Society of Arts, attending 16 meetings in 1762 (more than any other artist). A notice in the *Public advertiser*, 27.XI.1773 (repeated until 14.I.1774), announced the auction at Langfords on 7.I.1774 and following days (not in Lugt) of the collection of prints, drawings, books and copper plates “of Mr Bellers, retiring from Business”; the notice on 10.I.1774 mentioned his collection of crayons.

According to a 1767 probate record, “William Bellers of London, painter” and his wife Ann inherited the estate of his sister Sarah Hodgson, widow, of Boston, New England. As her husband, thought to be James Hodgson, a saddler of Boston, had died in 1756, it seems more likely that she was the sibling of the Oxford Bellers than of a putative son. However the topographical artist was already well established by 1752: an additional generation is chronologically difficult if the illuminator matriculated (or if the printseller retired) at the normal age.

Bibliography

A. R. Bayley, *Notes and queries*, CIII, 1901, p. 413; Timothy Clayton, *The English print 1688–1802*, 1997; Heinecken 1788; *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, CXXXII, 1986, p. 274; Oxford DNB; *The New-England historical genealogy*, 1885, p. 28; Saur

Pastels

J.14.101 ?SELF-PORTRAIT, cr. clr/ppr, 43.7x34.9, sd “Guls. Bellers Pinxit 1733” (British Museum 1908.0511.2. Dr J. Law Adam; acqu. 1908) øδ



J.14.103 Two portraits of members of the BAYLEY family, pstl, sd 1740 (A. R. Bayley 1901)

J.14.104 William COLLINS (1720–1756), poet, bust, age 14, pstl/ppr, 34x26.5 (Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Cunningham 1867). Exh.: London 1867, no. 363 n.r.

J.14.105 Elderly gentleman, pstl/ppr, 36.2x26.1, 1734 (British Museum 1939.0713.1. L. G. Wooldrige; acqu. 1939) ø



J.14.107 Boy in a blue coat, white cravat, pstl/ppr, 44.8x36.8, sd “Guile Bellers Pinxit 1748” (Historic Deerfield, inv. HD 2038) Collections database, n.r., as French anon.[new attr.] v

J.14.108 Two landscapes, crayons, Free Society 1761, no. 119

J.14.109 A moonlight, crayons, Free Society 1762, no. 150

J.14.11 A sunset, crayons, Free Society 1763, no. 9

J.14.111 A moonlight, crayons, Free Society 1763, no. 10

J.14.112 A sun rising, crayons, Free Society 1765, no. 18

J.14.113 A sun setting, crayons, Free Society 1765, no. 19

J.14.114 A moonlight, crayons, Free Society 1767, no. 21

J.14.115 A sunset, crayons, Free Society 1767, no. 22

J.14.116 Head of Our Saviour, crayons, Free Society 1772, no. 239