

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

DARWIN, Erasmus

Newark-on-Trent 12.XII.1731 – Breadsall Priory
18.IV.1802

The radical physician and botanist was, by different wives, grandfather of Charles Darwin and of Francis Galton. He lived in Lichfield and, after his second marriage in 1781, Derby. He was actively involved with the Lunar Society. In a letter of 12.II.1771 to Matthew Boulton, he reports “I am quite undone for the Crayons and must beg you will send them to Lichfield as soon as possible”, adding “If you don’t send the Crayons... I’ll...” [blanks in original]. Boulton asked his chief clerk for a report, and was told that they were on a vessel probbaly frostbound on the Elbe. Darwin was portrayed in pastel by James Sharples (Charles Darwin was also portrayed as a boy by one of the Sharples family in 1816), and a pastel of his second wife, said to be by Wright of Derby, is known. Darwin’s own efforts in the medium have not survived, nor is it known whether he confined his drawings to scientific subjects; however the request for pastels to be obtained in Germany indicates a degree of aptitude.

Bibliography

The collected letters of Erasmus Darwin, ed. D. King-Hele, Cambridge, 2007, pp. xiv, 109; Oxford DNB