

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

ROSCOE, William

Liverpool 8.III.1753–27.VI.1831

Historian, writer, lawyer, politician and amateur artist. He was trained in the “laborious and distasteful profession” of an attorney (apprenticed to John Eyes of Liverpool for 5 years from 12.XII.1769 for a premium of £8, transferring on his death to Peter Ellames, and admitted to the court of King’s Bench in 1774), but he was more interested in literature and the arts. As a result of meeting Henry Fuseli, he was inspired to spend some ten years on a biography of Lorenzo de’ Medici (Stendhal was unimpressed: “Laurent le Magnifique a été peint en pastel (avec des couleurs fausses, qui exagèrent le brillant et ôtent la grandeur) dans l’ouvrage de M. Roscoë. Il jouait bien moins la comédie que ne le croit l’auteur anglaise, qui en fait un prince moderne qui veut être à la mode.”). He played an influential role in the development of Liverpool as a cultural centre, and he was elected its MP in 1806. He was instrumental in establishing the Society of Encouragement of the Arts, Painting and Design in Liverpool, and he appeared at its exhibitions of 1774 (an ink drawing after a French engraving) and 1784 (including a pastel). Among numerous portraits of him are paintings by Richard Caddick (Walker Art Gallery) and Sir Martin Archer Shee. Among his correspondents were Horace Walpole, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Mary Wollstonecraft (whom he supported in her attacks on Edmund Burke).

Bibliography

Haskell 1993; Mayer 1876; Oxford DNB; Rimbault Dibdin 1917–18; Henry Roscoe, *The life of William Roscoe*, London, 1833; Stendhal, *Promenades dans Rome*, 28.X.1828, ed. 1858, p. 191; Wright 2007

Pastels

- J.6276.101 Gentleman, crayons, Liverpool 1784, no. 142
- J.6276.102 Boy sleeping, crayons, Liverpool 1784, no. 143