

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

WILLIAMS, Ann, Mrs Spence

fl. London 1768–87

Portraitist and pastellist, she exhibited at the Society of Artists (1768, from Mr Shelley's, near Norfolk Street, Strand), the Free Society (1770–83, from Mrs Towers's, Sherrard Street; then from Mr Butcher's toy shop, Haymarket (found also in *Kearsly's pocket ledger*, 1778); 35 Brewer Street in 1778–79) and the Royal Academy, including two pastels in 1778 and one in 1779, from addresses between Soho and the City. Most of these records do not include any detail, although one portrait is described as “painted on marble with crayons”, a technique that does not seem to have been repeated. For her final exhibit (1783) she showed a map of England in needlework.

These addresses allow us to identify her as the anonymous advertiser in the *Gazetteer and new daily advertiser*, 17.IV.1770:

To the LADIES.

The daughter of a late eminent Portrait-Painter, instructed by her Father, proposes teaching Ladies Drawing, and the manner of painting in Crayons, on the following terms, viz. Two Guineas entrance, and One Guinea and a half per mont. Any Lady this may suit by directing a line for A. B. at Mrs Towers's, snuff-shop, next Sherrard-house, Sherrard-street, Golden-square, shall be waited on. NB Portraits painted in Crayons at one Guinea a head.

We learn her forename from her advertisement in the *Public advertiser*, 5.III.1779:

Ann Williams, at No 35 Brewer Street, continues to teach Ladies Drawing and Painting with Crayons. She flatters herself, as she was regularly taught by her late Father, who was an eminent Artist &c.... Also makes and sells Crayons ready prepared in Tints, either for Portraits, Fruit or Flowers: The Tints for each so justly prepared and harmonised, that the superior Advantage to the young and Inexperienced Pupil is obvious on the least Inspection.

She may have been the Miss Williams whose pupil Master Dorrington exhibited “a drawing in chalks from plaister, first attempt” at the Free Society in 1773.

Her father was the painter John Michael Williams (1712–1766) of Scotland Yard (he was buried at St Martin-in-the-Fields on 29.X.1766); he may be the “Williams, pupil of Richardson” who is credited with a rather garbled lot in Joseph Nollekens's posthumous sale (London, Christie's, 2nd day, 4.VII.1823): lot 102 reads “A Female Portrait, a Lady in Crayons, Rosalba, Portrait of Mr. Nollekens and his Wife”. This conjecture is supported by Royal Academy council minutes: on 7.I.1772 they recorded that the daughter of “John Williams painter deceased” was in distress as she was about to give birth and her husband was in prison; she was sent 5 gns. Fifteen years later, on 23.XI.1787, another appeal by Edward Burch on behalf of “Mrs Ann Spence”, as she then called herself, elicited a further 5 gns.

Despite these details, a search of Westminster parish records has not identified any marriage between an Ann Williams and a Mr Spence, no child baptised in early 1772, nor any Spence sent to jail in 1771. She is likely to have been born between 1730 and 1750, and may have died soon after the 1787 appeal.

Bibliography

Bénézit; Sée 1911; Waterhouse 1981; Richard Stephens, ed., Royal Academy minute book, RAA/PC/1/1, RAA/PC/1/2, in press [private communication 18.IV.2019]

Pastels

- J.797.101 Joseph NOLLEKENS (1737–1823), RA, sculptor; & pendant: J.797.102 spouse (∞ 1774), née Mary Welch (–1817), ?pstl (London, Christie's, 2nd day, 4.VII.1823, Lot 102) [Attr.]
- J.797.103 Gentleman, crayons, Free Society 1774, nos. 310–311; 1778, no. 147
- J.797.104 Young gentleman, crayons, Free Society 1776, nos. 232–233; 1778, no. 185
- J.797.105 Young gentleman, crayons on marble, Free Society 1776, no. 234
- J.797.106 Young gentleman, crayons, Royal Academy 1778, no. 350
- J.797.107 Lady, crayons, Society of Artists 1768, no. 181; Free Society 1778, no. 146; 1780, no. 212
- J.797.108 Young lady, crayons, Free Society 1778, no. 184
- J.797.109 Young lady, crayons, Royal Academy 1778, no. 349
- J.797.11 Lady, crayons, Royal Academy 1779, no. 351
- J.797.111 Portrait, crayons, Free Society 1770, no. 275; 1771, no. 280; 1772, no. 226; 1779, no. 185; 1782, no. 37
- J.797.112 Fancy head, crayons, Free Society 1770, no. 275; 1772, nos. 227–230; 1780, no. 213