

What is a mezzotint?

A mezzotint (in the Italian sense 'half-tone' is a print made using a copper plate which has been worked over ('grounded') using a semi-circular fine-toothed tool ('rocker') so that the entire surface is roughened. In this state, when inked the plate will print solid black. The design is then created by scraping down and polishing areas of the plate. These will hold less ink and so print more lightly than the unpolished areas. The mezzotint plate is particularly prone to wear during printing. The result is that the earliest impressions are the finest and print very dark with strong definition whereas later ones are noticeably fainter. The early mezzotints published by Tompson and Browne have a characteristic coarse ground. The later ones were 'rocked' more thoroughly usually by apprentices, and present a finer finish.



sir peter lely, Alexander browne mezzotint, 1680



Shepherd piping to a Shepherdess by Robert Robinson

Isaac Beckett (1653–1719) was an English mezzotint engraver.

John Smith (c. 1652 – c. 1742) was an English mezzotint engraver.

Robert Robinson was a painter and engraver.

Bernard Lens II (1659–1725) was an English engraver, pioneer of mezzotint technique, and publisher.

The introduction of the mezzotint

The distinctive printmaking technique of mezzotint was invented in the mid-17th century.

By the 1680s mezzotint was much better known and had been enthusiastically adopted by native printmakers such as Isaac Beckett and John Smith. It became the preferred medium for reproducing portraits due to its ability to reproduce painterly effects and ease of production compared with line engraving. Its commercial potential was also recognised by men such as Richard Tompson, Alexander Browne and Edward Cooper. They commissioned the printmakers to make mezzotints for them and became print publishers. They crucially sought the involvement of the great painters: Tompson and Browne certainly approached Lely while Cooper seems to have had an arrangement with William Wissing. Browne even sought privileges or protection to publish his prints and his Royal Licence of 1684 is of significance to the history of British printmaking.

Mezzotint was also used by Beckett and Smith and artists such as Robert Robinson, Bernard Lens (II) and William Faithorne Jr for 'subject' prints covering the entire range of religious, mythological, landscape, genre and still-life imagery.



Bernard Lens mezzotint



John Smith mezzotint



Robert Robinson mezzotint



mezzotint

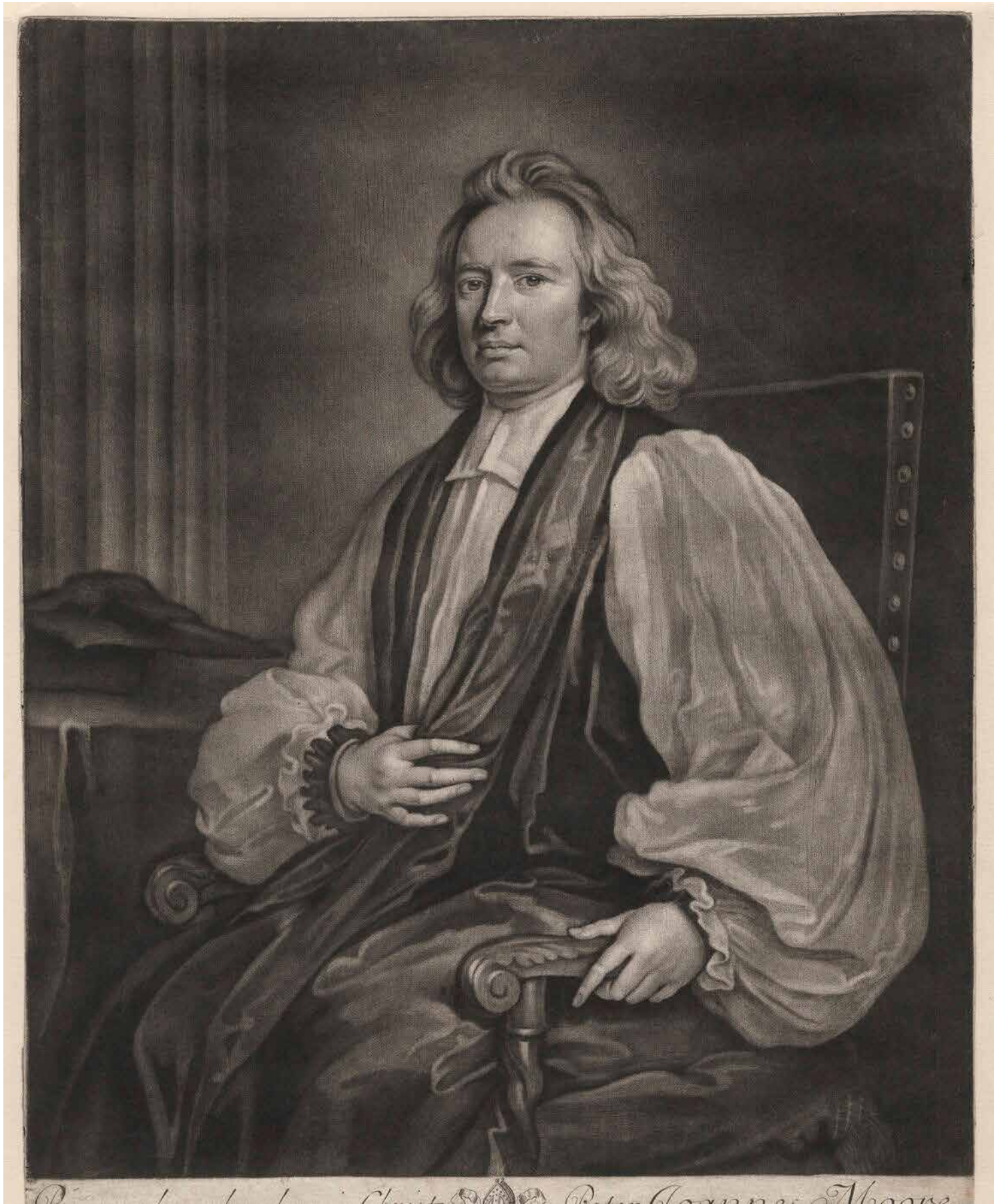


J. Smith ex: 1

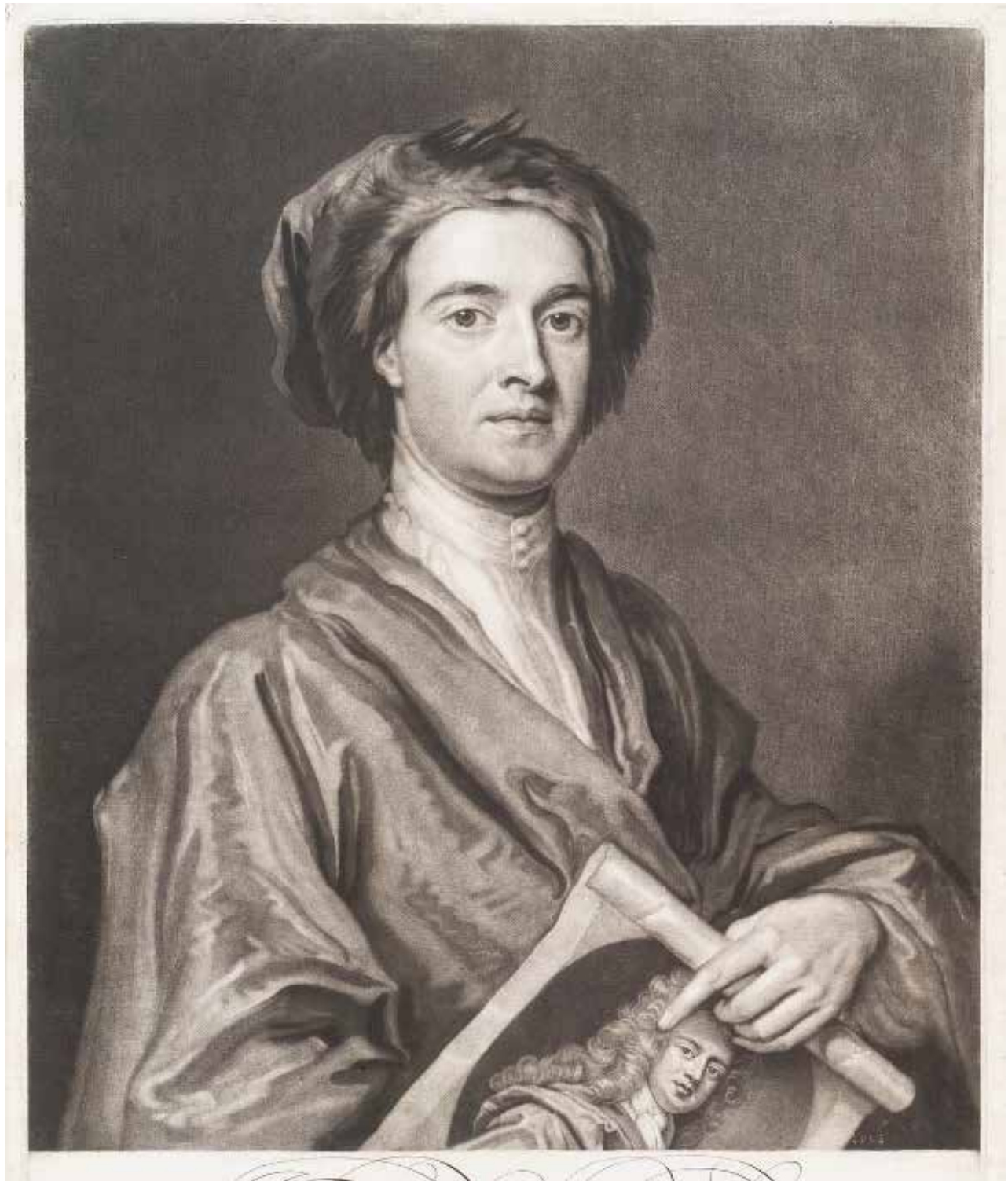
Robert Robinson mezzotint



William Faithorne Jr mezzotint



William Faithorne Jr mezzotint



John Smith mezzotint

The most outstanding practitioner of mezzotint at the turn of the century and the first to gain an international reputation was John Smith. His work is inextricably linked with that of Sir Godfrey Kneller, Bt, who became the leading portrait painter after Lely.

**THE END.
THANK YOU.**