



**Studio of John Hoskins the Elder (c.1590 - 1664)**

**Portrait miniature of an elderly Gentleman, possibly Sir Henry Savile (1549-1622), wearing a black doublet, fur-lined gown and black cap; after 1621**

Circa: After 1621

Watercolour on parchment laid down on card, backed with playing card.

Inscribed on the reverse 'I'

Oval, 2 1/8 in. (54 mm)

Gilt metal frame with pierced spiral cresting.

A version of this miniature by John Hoskins was sold at Christie's in 2005, clearly signed with the artist's monogram, 'IH'.<sup>[1]</sup> The absence of a monogram in the present portrait, as well as the difference in style, suggest that this miniature was painted by an artist from Hoskin's studio. They date among very the earliest works in miniature associated with Hoskins, and show the traditional blue background which Hoskins would later abandon in favour of atmospheric landscape backgrounds.

John Hoskins was one of the great miniaturists of the early seventeenth century. His early work closely follows the style of his illustrious forbears Nicholas Hilliard (1547-1619) and Isaac Oliver (c.1565-1617). He worked at the court of King James VI & I, but emerged as the pre-eminent miniature painter during the reign of King Charles I, who appointed him 'His Majesty's Limner' in 1640. It was in the early Carolean period that he developed a more distinct style and format of his own.

While there are a very small number of late sixteenth- /early seventeenth-century miniaturists (or 'limners') of great renown, most employed a workshop of multiple junior artists. The outputs of the best-known masters were supported by a network of trainee artists or apprentices, some of whom would emerge as the supreme talents of the next generation. Hilliard, perhaps the loftiest of these characters, trained Isaac Oliver and his own son, Laurence (bap.1583 - 1648), as well as numerous other artists. Hoskins, in turn, is thought to have received instruction from either Oliver or Hilliard, the present

miniature serving to illustrate this theory.[2] Hoskins later trained his own son, John Hoskins the Younger (1617/20-1693), as well as his nephews: none other than Samuel (1609-1672) and Alexander Cooper (c.1605-1660).

As is often the case with artists-in-training, their early work is hard to distinguish from those they trained under, and the point at which they emerge from another artist's studio is hard to pin-point. In the case of Hoskins the Younger, for example, a distinct oeuvre has never really emerged. William Sanderson made note of the father and son practice in his 1658 treatise, *Graphicê*: 'For Miniature of Limning, in watercolours, Hoskins and his son, the next modern since the Hilliards, father and son; these Pieces of the father (if my judgement faile not) incomparable.'[3] However, scholarship continues to shed light on these lesser-known artists, and while the artist responsible for this miniature is not yet discernible, they may yet be identified.

That there is more than one version of the present miniature, suggests the sitter must have had significant status. The gentleman in question bears a resemblance with the great Elizabethan scholar, Sir Henry Savile (1549-1622) who was painted by Marcus Gheeraerts (1561/2–1636) the Younger in 1621.[4] The version signed by Hoskins shows a particularly close likeness to the elder Savile. Savile died in 1622 and it may be that these miniatures were produced in memoriam from the Gheeraerts portrait.

Gheeraerts himself was part of a close-knit network of artists at court. His connections included miniaturist Isaac Oliver, who had married Gheeraerts's half-sister, Sara in 1602 (1575-1608) (although Isaac remarried in January 1609, suggesting Sara died before this date).

Savile was one of the great scholars of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean age. His legacy continues today in the professorships of geometry and astronomy he founded at Oxford University, subsequently held by notable figures such as Henry Briggs, Edmond Halley and Christopher Wren. He also donated many books and manuscripts to the university, which survive in the Bodleian Library.[5]

Savile was born in Yorkshire to a learned and prosperous family of landowners. A brilliant mind, Savile attended Brasenose College, Oxford, at the age of 12 and quickly excelled. He was a scholar with a great many interests, including mathematics, geometry, astronomy, philosophy, classics, theology and the history of sciences. He was made a lecturer of astronomy, although his lectures seem to have been interdisciplinary in nature, spanning the breadth of his own studies. Henry Gellibrand (1597-1637) was an indifferent student until he stumbled into one of Savile's lectures by accident.[6] He described becoming so absorbed that he 'immediately fell to the study of that noble science', and eventually became Gresham professor of astronomy.[7] Savile later lamented the state of scientific teaching in England, which likely lead him to found the aforementioned Savilian professorships.

Savile held various offices at the university before being appointed Warden of Merton College in 1585.

The appointment ruffled feathers however, because Savile circumnavigated the normal more democratic election process and obtained the position through the influence of Queen Elizabeth I, whom he tutored in Greek. His presence at court also enabled him to later lobby for the provostship of Eton College, which he won in 1595, thereafter being rarely in residence at Oxford. It was an unpopular arrangement which led to complaints from his fellows, although he was spared by Elizabeth intervening once more on his behalf.

Despite some controversy, the college (and university as a whole) generally benefited from Savile's tenure. He undertook significant building projects (employing Yorkshire builders who had worked on his family's properties), including the fellows' quad and the façade looking onto Christ Church meadow at Merton, and part of the Bodleian Library (the larger completion of which he oversaw after Thomas Bodley's death). Savile tripled the size of the library's printed book collection, and introduced continental-style upright bookstacks (rather than the English practice of lying books flat) - likely as a result of his own extensive travels on the continent in pursuit of knowledge in 1578-82. He also expanded the number of fellows, thereby 'enhancing the college's intellectual reputation'; the number of pupils also increased under Savile.[8] Thus, Savile held on to the wardenship until his death in 1621.

Foremost in Savile's scholarly achievements are his translation of Tacitus's *Histories* and *Agricola*, which led to political controversy, and his *editio princeps* of Chrysostom in Greek, which won admiration across Europe. In 1604, he headed a company of scholars responsible for translating part of the King James Bible. He is also credited with being the first to teach the new astronomy of Copernicus at an English university.[9]

[1] Christie's, Important Gold Boxes and Portrait Miniatures, 6 December 2005, lot 51.

[2] Reynolds, G., *English Portrait Miniatures*, revised edition (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.38

[3] Quoted in *ibid*, p.43

[4] Savile was painted by Gheeraerts in 1621 and two versions of portrait exist, one at Bodleian Library, Oxford [Bodleian Library LP 79], the other (slightly reduced in size) at Eton College [FDA-P.63-2010].

[5] The collection can be viewed online : <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections/savile/>

[6] Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

[7] Ward, J., *The Lives of the Professors of Gresham College* (1740), 81, quoted in ODNB

[8] ODNB

[9] *Ibid*