THE LIMNER COMPANY



John Hoskins the Elder (c.1590 - 1664)

Portrait miniature of a Knight of the Bath, wearing a black doublet, white lace 'falling' ruff and red ribbon sash

Circa: circa 1620s

circa 1620s

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

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

Signed with monogram in gold 'IH'

Associated gilt-metal frame

This portrait of a courtier dates to the mid 1620s, when Hoskins was the favoured limner to the court of the newly crowned King Charles I. It is Bainbrigg Buckeridge (1668-1733), the first historian of British Art, who notes Hoskins's early training not as a miniaturist but as an oil painter and his status as 'a very eminent limner in the reign of King Charles I. whom he drew, with his queen, and most of his court.'[1]

The sitter here is most likely a courtier who wears the red sash of a Knight of the Bath. Knights of the Bath were knighthoods which were originally part of a more formal ceremony than 'dubbing' and associated with important Royal occasions such as coronations, weddings or investitures. It is possible that this sitter was given this honour on the accession of Charles I to the throne. The last of these Knights of the Bath were created at the coronation of Charles II in 1661. These knighthoods predate the modern Order of the Bath, and were not part of a military Order. Given that the miniature was part of a sale in the nineteenth century of the contents from Blenheim Palace, it may be that the sitter was originally related to the Churchill family. One possible contender could be John Jennings (d.1642), grandfather of Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough, and MP for St Albans. Jennings had been knighted in 1626.

It was during the 1620s that Hoskins adopted his two nephews, Samuel and Alexander Cooper. Samuel stayed with his uncle as apprentice, while his younger brother, baptised in 1609, began an apprenticeship with Peter Oliver, probably in the mid 1620s. Hoskins's own son (confusingly, also called 'John'), born between ten and twenty years after his famous painter cousins, also took up the art of limning. The use of the famous and reputable name of Hoskins continued as a 'brand', lasting beyond the originator's death in 1664/5, giving rise to much confusion between the works of Hoskins Senior and Hoskins Junior from the mid 1640s onwards. There can be no such confusion here, as the costume firmly dates the sitter to a period where Hoskins had few equals in miniature painting.

[1] Bainbrigg Buckeridge, The Art of Painting… To which is added, An Essay towards an English-School of Painters, First published in 1706 (3rd edition of 1754; from 1969 Cornmarket facsimile); biography of John Hoskins, p.389.

Exhibitions

Philip Mould & Co., 'Secret Faces: An Exhibition of Unseen Portrait Miniatures from Public and Private Collections', 28 May – 14 June 2008

Literature:

Rutherford, E., Grosvenor, B., 'Secret Faces: An Exhibition of Unseen Portrait Miniatures from Public and Private Collections', catalogue for the exhibition held at Philip Mould & Co., 28 May – 14 June 2008, cat. no.19, p.57