THE LIMNER COMPANY



ENGLISH SCHOOL (17TH CENTURY)

Portrait of Gentleman, possibly a member of the Ernle family, wearing black doublet and white lace collar drawn with tassels, his natural hair worn to his shoulders

Circa: 16th Century

16th Century

Oil on copper

Contemporary gold and enamel locket frame, the pale blue lid and base decorated with gilded quatrefoils, the inside of the lid bearing a family coat of arms consisting of a diagonal band of three demi-eagles upon a shield surrounded by acanthus leaves with studded helmet and demi-eagle cresting

Oval, 1 7/16 in (36 mm) high

This oil on copper miniature, painted either by an itinerant Dutch artist or a Dutch-trained English artist, is still housed in its original locket. This is extremely rare, as most enamelled lockets of this period were damaged and the lids usually broken off. The retention of the lid has allowed research into the coat of arms, leading to the Ernle family of Devon, who moved to neighbouring Dorset around 1500.

The Ernle family were short-lived, as the male line died out on the death of General Thomas III Erle (1650–1720) without male progeny. His daughter and sole heiress Frances Erle (d.1728) married Edward Ernle, to which family the estate passed. Female heiresses subsequently brought the Erle/Ernle estates to owners with different family names.

The family house still exists - named Charborough House or Charborough Park, it is a Grade I listed building, the manor house of the ancient manor of Charborough. Charborough was acquired during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) by Walter I Erle (c.1520–1581), an officer of the Privy Chamber to King Edward VI and to his sisters Queen Mary I and Queen Elizabeth I.

The most likely candidate for the sitter in the present portrait is Thomas Erle or Ernle (1621–1650) an MP in the Long Parliament with his father (Col. Sir Walter Erle (1586–1665). He served as a Member of Parliament for Milborne Port in the Short Parliament and for Wareham (a pocket borough controlled by his family) for the Long Parliament in November 1640. He married Susanna Fiennes, a daughter of William Fiennes, 3rd Viscount Saye and Sele.