THE LIMNER COMPANY



CHARLES BEALE (1660 - ?1726)

Two portrait miniatures of Jemima, 1st Countess of Sandwich (1625–1674) and her husband, Edward Montagu, 1st Earl of Sandwich (1625–1672)

Circa: Circa 1675-80

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7.5 x 0 cm (3 x 0 inches)
Watercolour on parchment

These portraits of husband and wife the Earl and Countess of Sandwich were reunited by the present owner after the miniature of Edward Montagu was spotted in a London saleroom. Although they are by different, but contemporary, hands, both have inscribed labels which would appear to be in the same hand, suggesting that at one stage they were together in the same collection. Given that the portrait of the Earl is taken from a portrait ostensibly by Peter Lely, it is likely that while Jemima sat to Beale's son for her miniature, that of her husband was copied from the oil painted by the Beale's friend and neighbour, Sir Peter Lely (1618-80).

Both Jemima and her husband were central in the social and political scene of the mid to late seventeenth century. The daughter of John Crew, Baron Crew of Stene, Jemima married Edward Montagu in 1642. They were close to the diarist Samuel Pepys, with Edward acting as his patron. The two men were cousins, and Sandwich was considered as Pepys's protector at the Admiralty, (Sandwich being Lord High Admiral of England). In turn, Pepys, who referred to Jemima in his diaries as 'my lady', was influential in the marriage arranged between the couple's daughter (also called Jemima) and Sir Philip Carteret in 1665.

Edward Montagu, 1st Earl of Sandwich (1625-1672), was an English Admiral and politician who fought on the side of the Parliamentarians under Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) during the Civil War. After Cromwell's death in 1658, Montagu switched allegiance and, alongside George Monk, became an architect of the Restoration. Having secured Charles II's journey from Holland over the Channel, Montagu had his loyalty rewarded by the newly appointed King who created the Earl of Sandwich in 1660.

As a newly appointed Knight of the Order of the Garter, Montagu went onto serve as Ambassador to Portugal in 1661 and Spain between 1666 and 1668, where he helped negotiate the 1667 Treaty of Madrid. Montagu commanded squadrons during the Second and Third Dutch Wars and was killed during the latter at the Battle of Solebay in June 1672.

The attribution of Jemima's portrait to Charles Beale is based on the portrait of his mother, Mary (1633–1699) (now in the collection at Tate Britain), which through a reassessment of documentation, was shown to be by his hand.[1] Sharing the same technique and palette, this would have been an important commission for the young Charles. The portrait of the Earl may also be by his hand, as the work appears to have been based upon a portrait of the Earl by Sir Peter Lely dating from the mid-late seventeenth century.[2] Lely was a close friend of the artist's parents and Charles himself would often make copies of the Court painter's masterpieces. This portrait of the Earl may have been commissioned after his death from the Beales as a companion piece to the earlier miniature. Although Jemima would have been in her forties in this portrait, as in the 1679 portrait of his mother Charles portrays her as a much younger woman.[3]

The head of the sitter is recognisable from the portrait of Jemima attributed to John Hayls (Fig. 1 Attributed to John Hayls, Jemima Crewe (1625-1674), 1st Countess of Sandwich, oil on canvas, Hinchingbrooke House) and from the now lost portrait of her by Samuel Cooper. The style of the dress and neckline relate to the fashions of the later 1670s. Jemima never remarried, so it can be assumed that this portrait was painted as a gift to her husband.

Mary Beale was taught to paint by her cleric father, John Cradock (d. 1652), who was an amateur artist himself, in Suffolk, but only took up painting professionally full-time in the 1670s. This was partly to support her family, as her husband, Charles Beale, had left his job as Deputy Clerk of the Patents, after the Restoration. Upon moving to a studio in fashionable Pall Mall, Charles acted as his wife's studio manager and colourman, experimenting with pigments and materials. He also kept detailed notebooks documenting his wife's career, which make clear the extraordinary (for the time) equal partnership the couple shared both domestically and professionally. Their son Charles was probably taught by his mother, but they also called on other artists to provide tuition, including their friend Thomas Flatman (1635-1688) who painted miniatures.[4]

The Beales moved would have certainly known the Montagu family. Not only were they depicted by Peter Lely, neighbour and friend of the Beales, but were also well-acquainted – and related - to Samuel Pepys (as were the Montagu family). Mary Beale's brother in law, Bartholomew (who took his own life in 1674), was related to Pepys by marriage. The Beales would also have known Pepys via the Royal Society. The close proximity of the families and the characteristic technique of these portrait miniatures – particularly Jemima's – evidences the attribution to Charles Beale and Mary's studio.

[1] Tate Britain, T14107. The portrait was sold to Tate Britain by Philip Mould & Co. – for a full catalogue description see http://www.historicalportraits.com/Gallery.asp?Page=Item&ItemID=1817&Desc=Mary-Beale-%7C-Charles-Beale-II

[2] Sir Peter Lely, Edward Montagu, 1st Earl of Sandwich (1625-1672), oil on canvas. Private Collection. A copy of this painting is held in the Collection of the National Portrait Gallery under the NPG number 609.

[3] Mary would have been forty-six in her portrait miniature by Charles but looks much younger.

[4] Flatman's portrait miniatures in the Victoria and Albert Museum include a portrait of Charles's father, also called Charles, dated 1660.