THE LIMNER COMPANY



GEORGE ENGLEHEART (1750 - 1829)

Portrait miniature of Rev. James (John?) Liptrott, wearing a black jacket and spectacles, against a sky background

Circa: 1806

1806

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory license number: 5SMH5XU4

In a gold frame, on the reverse lace under blue glass, surrounding a lock of hair, pearls, and gold wire.

Signed ‘E’, lower right-hand side

Oval, 81 mm (3 $^{1}/_{4}$ inches) high

A portrait of ‘Mr. Rev Liphott’ is recorded to have been painted by Engleheart in 1806, in his fee book.

On the database of the English Clergy, there are two ‘Liptrotts’ recorded to have been involved in the church during the time in which this miniature would have been painted, however, no ‘Liphott’ appears. It is possible that this is a mis-transcription from the original fee-book produced by Engleheart. The result is, though we do have an identification for the given sitter, we have little further information about his life, apart from the fact that he may have attended either the University of Cambridge or Oxford, and that the sitter was involved with the church.

One other piece of information that we have is that this sitter was a glasses-wearer. It is this feature within the miniature that seems to be the most striking- not only is he wearing glasses, but the artist has managed to capture these in a very natural way- they do not cover the whole of his face and there is a side of his eye that is not covered by his lens. Spectacles were not a new invention, however the addition of ‘temples’, or arms as we would call them today, was something that had begun in the 18th century[1]. Few, if any, other portrait miniatures by Engleheart have such a feature, suggesting that this

must have been something that Liphott was keen to depict, or that it was an experiment on the side of the artist.

Also striking is the verso of this portrait. The gold frame encases a bright blue border, around a lock of hair, pearls, and gold wire. This was not an uncommon style for Engleheart's miniatures, and can also be found on the back of his portrait of Sarah Shergold, for sale with the Limner Company. Because such a miniature would have been an intimate record of the sitter, meant for a loved one or family member, this feature makes sense, and provided an actual fragment of the sitter to the one holding the miniature.

Engleheart painted many miniatures during his career, and a large number of these were recorded by the artist in his 'fee book', which has now been transcribed multiple times and provides a useful record of both his sitters and the prices he was charging for painting them. His meticulous attention to detail means that he was able to create extremely distinct depictions of the faces of his sitters, despite the fact some other features of his miniatures, such as their fashion and hair, would often repeat themselves. This present miniature can be easily dated to the beginning of the 19th century, given that the sitter is shown with what is likely to be natural, rather than powdered, hair, the latter becoming less popular at this time.

[1] The history of spectacles, The Royal College of Optometrists online, https://www.college-optometrists.org/the-british-optical-association-museum/the-history-of-spectacles.