THE LIMNER COMPANY



JEREMIAH MEYER R.A. (1735 - 1789)

Portrait miniature of a Naval Officer, probably Charles Middleton, 1st Baron Barham (1726-1813), wearing naval uniform with gold braid and buttons, his hair powdered and worn en queue, tied with a black ribbon

Circa: Circa 1781

Circa 1781

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration number: 981HGK3K

Gold bracelet clasp frame

Oval, 48 mm (1 $^{7}/_{8}$ inches) high

The sitter's identity here is taken from another portrait miniature, apparently copied from this image by Meyer, which sold at auction in 2022.[1] If it does represent Middleton, then it may be have been commissioned around the same time that Meyer painted his wife, the Slavery abolitionist and artist, Margaret (née Gambier), Lady Middleton (active 1740-died 1792), now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London. Certainly the sitter's features here seem to match those of Barnham, particularly his full lower lip and distinctive nose.

Middleton had a long career in the navy, first entering in 1741 as captain's servant. During the Seven Years' War, from 1754, was stationed aboard HMS Anson during her apprehension and capture of two French ships at Louisbourg, after which he was stationed in the Leeward Islands. In January 1757, an incident over rum rations, during which Middleton lost his temper and physically attacked a sailor ended with the sailor being court martialled and Middleton being transferred and promoted to command of the sloop HMS Speaker.

In 1761, while in command of HMS Emerald, he distinguished himself in the West Indies, taking sixteen French ships and several privateers, and received the gratitude of the merchants in the British colony of Barbados. From March 1762 Middleton took command of the frigate Adventure, patrolling the coast of Normandy.

In 1763, after service aboard the Adventure, Charles moved to join Margaret Gambier, whom he had married in December 1761, at Teston, Kent, and for the next twelve years, he farmed the land belonging to Mrs Bouverie, taking on the role of a country gentleman.

In 1775, at the outbreak of the American War of Independence, Middleton was given a guardship at the Nore, a Royal Navy anchorage in the Thames Estuary, and was subsequently appointed Comptroller of the Navy in 1778, a post he held for twelve years. The present portrait possibly dates to circa 1781, when he was created a baronet, with a special remainder, failing any male issue, to his son in law, Gerard Noel.

In 1784, Sir Charles Middleton was elected Tory Member of Parliament (MP) for Rochester, a seat he held for six years, and on 24 September 1787 he was promoted rear admiral. However, disillusioned with the navy, Middleton resigned his position in 1790 and effectively retired from naval affairs. Despite this, he continued to receive promotions, including to vice admiral, an apportionment on the board of the admiralty and to full admiral in 1795. He was finally, in May 1805 (at the age of 79), appointed First Lord of the Admiralty

In addition to his service in the Royal Navy, Middleton played a crucial role in the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire. He had been influenced by a pamphlet written by Rev. James Ramsay, who served as a surgeon under Middleton aboard HMS Arundel in the West Indies, and briefly lived with Sir Charles and Lady Middleton at Teston. Husband and wife became passionate abolitionists, with Sir Charles suggesting the young Member of Parliament William Wilberforce as the one who might be persuaded to take up the cause. The family home of Barham Court was effectively used for planning the campaign by Lord and Lady Barham, with numerous meetings and strategy sessions attended by Wilberforce, Clarkson, Eliot and Porteus before presenting legislation to Parliament.

The artist Jeremiah Meyer (1735-89) was born in Germany and his father was portrait painter to the Duke of Württemberg. He came to England about 1749, studied under the artist Christian Friedrich Zincke and soon became an important artist for George III and Queen Charlotte. One of his first commissioned was to paint the King's miniature portrait, set in an oval of diamonds in the pearl bracelet given to Princess Charlotte as an engagement present. He also drew the King's profile for the new coinage which earned him a gold medal from the Society of Arts in 1761. He was appointed Miniature Painter to the Queen and Enamel Painter to the King in 1764. A founder member of the Royal Academy, he exhibited miniatures, enamels and watercolour drawings from 1769 to 1783.

[1] Bearnes Hampton & Littlewood, Jan 18, 2022, lot 1008.