THE LIMNER COMPANY



DAVID DES GRANGES (c.1611 - c.1672)

Portrait miniature of King Charles II (1630-85)

Circa: 1651

1651

Watercolour on vellum

Set into the original gold locket, enamelled with designs on base and lid, the lid set with diamonds

Oval, 41mm (1 5/8in) high

The present work is of outstanding importance within the history of English portrait miniature painting. It is the only seventeenth-century portrait miniature gifted from a monarch that can be definitively traced back to the studio of an artist, and as such, plays a crucial role in explaining the function of miniatures in British history. Although rightly vaunted in modern times for their exquisite detail, portrait miniatures played an incredibly important role in diplomacy, and their exchange between friends, family, and political allies is well documented. However, what is rarely encountered are the objects themselves – although their existence is often found recorded in historical records, linking records to specific surviving works is an impossible task. In the case of the present work, however, its history is exceptionally well-documented, and we know more about the portrait than practically any other portrait miniature from the period.

The history of the present miniature is naturally bound tightly to its subject – Prince Charles – who at the moment that this portrait was painted had been recognised as the rightful monarch by both the Scots and the Irish. The portrait has travelled from Scotland to France and then returned to England throughout its long history. To have survived such a journey is nothing short of remarkable.

The years which led to this portrait's commission were the most turbulent in the history of England. Centring around the power struggle between Crown and Parliament, Charles, the eldest son of the king, was only twelve years old when the first battles took place. His mother was immediately sent to The

Hague for her own safety, but Charles remained with his father, who insisted (according to Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon) ‘that the Prince should never be absent from him’[1]. By 1645, after being primarily valued as a pawn in the marriage market (an alliance may have brought in much needed financial aid for Charles I), the fifteen year old prince gained his own council and was promoted as a leader for the royalist commanders. After they considered defeat inevitable, Charles I, fearing for his own capture, became insistent that his son left the country.

In 1648, the young Charles was invited by the Scottish Parliament to lead an invasion of England. In preparation, he moved to The Hague as a guest of the young prince of Orange, who had married his sister, Mary, in 1641. Tensions were high as the eighteen year old prince refused to bow to the Scots demands and they invaded without his support, and were defeated by Cromwell at the battle of Preston.

In January 1649, Charles I was executed. The Scottish Parliament proclaimed Charles II as king, yet the kirk's outrage at the regicide did not significantly improve its attitude towards him. The Scottish parliament demanded from the new king satisfaction concerning religion, union, and the peace of Scotland, according to the covenants. After a final attempt to invade England, Charles’s army was defeated at Worcester in 1651. That year had begun with Charles’s coronation as ‘King of Scots’ in January but he now became a fugitive, hunted through England (hiding from the army's search in, among other places, the famous oak tree at Boscobel), protected by a handful of his loyal subjects until he escaped to Normandy, France in October 1651.

The circumstances of the commissioning of this miniature begin many years before it was painted. Careful research has traced the work back to its first recipient - Henry Seymour (Langley) (1612-1686). Henry began his close allegiance to the Stuart family some years prior, with his appointment as Page of Honour to Queen Henrietta Maria in 1638. This was also his introduction to Charles as Prince of Wales, when he was employed as Groom of the Bedchamber to the eight-year-old. Thus began an extraordinarily loyal relationship which endured until Seymour’s death long after the Restoration. It is no wonder that Seymour was one of the first recipients of this image, directly commissioned and ordered by Charles.

Perhaps no other event illustrates the closeness between the two men than the fact that it was Seymour who was to carry the final message from Charles I to his son, just three days before his execution, which he delivered on 27 January 1649. It is said on hearing the guilty verdict, Seymour broke down, kissed the king, clasped his legs, and moaned aloud.[2] Warmly described as 'a person unbyassed with any faction, and in whose discretion and integrity the king had great confidence', he was also assigned the task of carrying a farewell letter from Charles to his wife, Henrietta-Maria, who was in exile in Paris.[3]

Seymour was frequently on the move after the king’s execution, staying physically close to Prince Charles and entrusted with carrying highly sensitive information to other family members and supporters of the Royalist cause. He was sent to Ireland in September 1649, before travelling with the prince to Scotland in 1650. The Prince and Seymour left Scotland together in the same year and moved to Paris in the autumn of 1651, where Seymour was recorded as once again a member of the Bedchamber and where Charles was reunited with his mother. It was likely at this point that Charles commissioned the present miniature from des Granges.

This miniature has been previously attributed to Nathaniel Thach (1617-after 1652), a contemporary of

des Granges, and also an artist who accompanied the King in his exile. The Victoria and Albert Museum changed the attribution several times while the work was on loan between 1967 and 2007 – some curators favoured Thach while others suggested des Granges. Further research into the life of Des Granges and his family has shown that the artist had relocated from London to Edinburgh by 1649, where they baptised a son named Samson, after his grandfather, in Canongate. Although it has been suggested that Des Granges

followed Charles II to Edinburgh, when the future king arrived in the city in June

1650, Des Granges had been there at least a year.[4]

A recent discovery of a drawing of the portrait in the renowned 'Stowe sale' of 1848, has now proved conclusively that this work is, in fact, by David des Granges. This new information on the provenance has also allowed historians to reconstruct the exact whereabouts and purpose of the portrait from the day it was painted to the present.

The miniature was due to be sold in the Stowe Sale in 1848 but was dramatically withdrawn at the last moment and sold to 'Mr Langton Esq.', the brother-in-law of the consignor, the spendthrift 2nd Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, who was heavily in debt. Its withdrawal, according to an annotated copy of the sale catalogue, 'occasioned some disappointment, several collectors having arrived from London expressly to purchase it.' This decisive action did, however, allow the portrait to remain within the family, who generously loaned it to the Victoria and Albert Museum for forty years between 1967 and 2007.

The present work – lauded as 'the celebrated miniature portrait of Charles II' appears on page 173 within the Stowe catalogue and is accompanied by an illustration of the work and its enamel frame on the facing page. The catalogue entry is extensive and richly detailed, reflecting its importance within the family. Unusually for the period, it also reveals how the work was displayed within the family home; it was placed on a pedestal, suspended from an oak tree made of bronze.[5] On the pedestal was inscribed the family legend of the portrait, which was summarised in the auction catalogue:

"This picture was sent by Charles II., in 1651, to Henry Lord Beauchamp, eldest son of William Marquis of Hertford,[6] with his request that it might be given to the son, of which Mary Lady Beauchamp, daughter of Arthur Lord Capel, was then delivered; and that it might pass forever in succession to the next of blood of the Lord Hertford, whom he acknowledged as his nearest of kin, descended from Mary Queen of France, daughter of their common ancestor, Henry VII. This son, afterward William Duke of Somerset, died in 1761 without issue, leaving a sister, the Lady Elizabeth Seymour, his heir general, who married Thomas, second Earl of Aylesbury. This picture was delivered to her eldest son, Charles Lord Bruce, afterwards third Earl of Aylesbury, in 1708, by his grandmother, Mary Lady Beauchamp, above mentioned, then re-married to Henry, first Duke of Beaufort. From the said Charles, third Earl of Aylesbury, it came to his daughter, Mary Duchess of Richmond, at whose decease it passed to Anna Eliza Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos, the daughter and heiress of James, the last Duke of Chandos, who was the son of Henry Brydges Marquis of Carnarvon, and of Mary, his wife, the daughter of Ann, who was the first wife of Charles, the third Earl of Aylesbury, above mentioned…"

This fulsome family account has been checked against the accounts kept by David des Granges as recorded in the Treasury Papers from 1671. These papers record a request made by des Granges for payment for portraits he painted for Charles while he was the King's Limner in Scotland, including the present work.

In ‘A Schedule of Work done by David de Grange Intertained Limner to His Majty during Y or Royal abode at St.Johnstons at Scotland’, des Granges lists miniatures, including ‘One to Mr. Seymour of Y or Majties Bed-chamber which Mr. Chiffinch received of Mr. Fox that… ye 2nd of December 1651.’[7] This information provides the exact date and place where the miniature was painted, St Johnston’s being the 17th century name for Perth, the city closest to Scone Palace where Charles II had just been crowned King.[i]

Although it can be proved that the miniature was at Stowe in 1848 (and indeed earlier in 1818), the description in the Stowe catalogue of the first recipient of the miniature as Henry Lord Beauchamp was incorrect, as ‘Mr. Seymour’ of ‘Y or Majties Bed-chamber’ was Henry Seymour (Langley) (1612-1686). As Henry Seymour’s line died out with his son, who had no children, the miniature, over the next 100 years, took a rather convoluted journey through the family. It was likely at Stowe from at least the middle of the 18th century and its position in the house records that it was venerated as a highly valued work of art – as much for its history and connection to the royal family as its artistic worth.

Given the straightened financial situation that Charles found himself in once in Paris, the extraordinary enamelled locket was likely commissioned by Seymour in deference to the royal family whom he served. This would also be in line with the tradition which began with the miniatures given to courtiers by Elizabeth I, where the recipient was expected to fund a suitably fine receptacle for the image of the monarch.

The design of the enamelled locket is in line with other similar lockets and watch cases made in Paris from the middle of the 17th century. The exceptional enamelled base and lid display imagery which crystalises the moment in which this gift was given. On the inner lid of the locket there is a painted scene showing figures in a boat crossing a narrow stretch of water, detailing the moment that Charles escaped to the Continent, crossing the English Channel. Birds circle the party as they cross towards banks thick with vegetation. The lid is encrusted with diamonds, the border with a design typical of work carried out by Parisian enamellers of the mid-17th century. The back of the locket shows the royal crown held aloft by angels – a reference to the death of Charles I and his subsequent status to some as martyr. This final image also recognises Seymour’s personal devotion to the royal family; a loyal servant who risked his own life to save the crown.

[1] Clarendon, Hist. rebellion, 3.449.

[2] Taken from Burke, John and Burke, Sir Bernard (1844), "Seymour of Langley", A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England, Ireland and Scotland (2 ed.), J. R. Smith, pp. 478–479.

[3] A collection of original letters and papers, concerning the affairs of England from the year 1641 to 1660. Found among the duke of Ormonde's papers, ed. T. Carte, 2 vols. (1739), Vol. 1, p. 337.

[4] Information provided by Sophie Rhodes, August 2024.

[5] Christie’s, Stowe Sale, 15 August – 7 October 1848, lot 280.

[6] It is likely that this information comes from an inscription of an illustration of the miniature in the Windsor Engraved Royal Portraits. See Gibson (1997) , p.42.

[7] The 'Mr. Chiffinch' noted in the Treasury papers was Thomas Chiffinch (1600-1666), who was in the service of Charles I and was also a page to the young Charles, becoming one of his closest and most trusted servants.[7] The trust shown by Charles in ensuring that this delicate portrait reached its ultimate destination continued into the Restoration almost a decade later, when Chiffinch was assigned the an important role in the king's art collection. Both men were connoisseurs of painting, with Chiffinch a principal guiding hand for the royal collection.

Mr. Fox was Stephen Fox (1627-1716). A childhood friend of Charles II, he had been introduced to the royal nursery by his older brother, John, as 'supernumerary servant and play-fellow'.

[i] This information was provided by Sophie Rhodes who discovered that up until the mid-1600s Perth was known as 'St John's Toun' or 'Saint Johnstoun'. Personal communication September 2024.

Exhibitions

On loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum from 1967-2007 (loaned by 'Greville Gore Langton, Esq.', possibly Walter Grenville Algernon [Temple-Gore-Langton], later 8th Earl Temple of Stowe).

Literature:

Anon, 1817 Stowe; A Description of the House and Gardens of the Most Noble and Puissant Prince Richard Grenville Nugent Chandos Temple, Marquess of Buckingham, London (J. Seeley), p. 52; at this date, the miniature was in the Manuscript Room at Stowe, described as in a frame of 'crimson velvet' over the chimney;

John Murdoch, Seventeenth-Century English Miniatures in the Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1997, ill. P.85 (as by Nathaniel Thach).

John Murdoch et. al., The English Miniature, London, Yale University Press, 1981, p. 141 (As by Nathaniel Thach).

Garth Hall et. al, Summary Catalogue of Miniatures in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1981, 0389A, p.15 (as by des Granges).

Katharine Gibson, "Best belov'd of kings": The Iconography of Charles II, Ph.D Thesis, London, 1997, cat. no. 252, p. 289 (as by Nathaniel Thach).