THE LIMNER COMPANY



ANDREW PLIMER

Portrait miniature of a Young Boy, traditionally called William Beckford

Circa: Circa 1810

Circa 1810

Oval, 90mm. (3 $^{1}/_{2}$ in.) high

Watercolour on ivory

Ivory registration no: CS28KYHX

Gold frame with white and blue enamel border, the reverse with various exhibition and collection labels

With a long history of exhibitions and publications, the young man in this portrait miniature has traditionally been identified as William Beckford (1760-1844), a society figure described by John Ingamells as a ‘Dilettante’, known for building Fonthill Abbey and filling it with his collection of art and antiques. There is an issue with this identification, however, as Andrew Plimer was not only three years younger than Beckford, but the child wears the fashions of the early 1800s.

It is not known why this portrait has since been possibly erroneously identified, though this was the name given to the miniature in the exhibitions it entered while in the collection of Henry Drake Esq., including the major Brussels International Exhibition of Miniatures in 1912. It was seen as, and still is, a fine and important example of the work of Andrew Plimer, who had been a student of another great miniaturist, Richard Cosway. Andrew had begun as his manservant in the early 1780s, when his family had moved to London. Throughout his career, he took the opportunity to travel across the country to find patrons. These travels included tours of Devon, Cornwall, and Scotland.

Plimer only painted a small number of portraits of children, but as can be seen here, did this with a high level of sensitivity. Even the detail of his hair, parted in his fringe in an odd pattern, reflects the fact that this is a young, naive sitter. The pale skin of the sitter and sky background he stands against are both

distinctive to the work of Plimer.

Exhibitions

London, Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1889, Case XXX, no.19, as William Beckford (?), 1760-1844; London, New Gallery, 1891; London, Amateur Art Exhibition, 1895; Brussels, International Exhibition of Miniatures, 1912. (no.96?)

Literature:

J. J. Foster, Miniature painters, British and foreign : with some account of those who practised in America in the eighteenth century, London, Dickinson's, 1903, illustrated plate LXV, n.124; The Connoisseur; A Magazine for Collectors, July 1912, p.163, illustrated fig. IV; G. Williamson, Richard Cosway R.A., 1897, p.135, illustrated; G. Williamson, Andrew & Nathaniel Plimer, 1903, p.48, illustrated.