THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD COSWAY (1742 - 1821)

Portrait miniature of Lady Charlotte Townshend, née Loftus (1792-1866), wearing a plum coloured velvet gown with high ruff collar

Circa: 1812

1812

Watercolour on ivory (licence TJPXYVR2)

Oval, 75mm (2 13/16in) high

The reverse inscribed and dated 1812

Gilt-metal frame, the reverse glazed to reveal plaited hair

Given the date on the reverse of this miniature, it is sensible to suggest that it depicts Lady Charlotte Townshend, née Loftus, who married Lord Charles Vere Ferres Townshend (1785-1853) in this year. The Townshend family is vast, and numerous Lady Charlotte Townshends were living in this period. However, the life of this particular Charlotte aligns the closest with the dating of the present work. Charlotte's father, also painted by Cosway in circa 1794, was Colonel William Loftus (1752-1831).

When she married in 1812, Charlotte was marrying her first cousin- Charles was the son of her mother's (Lady Elizabeth Townshend, d.1811) brother, George, 2nd Marquess Townshend (1753-1811). Charles had been disinherited by his father, and it is possible that the marriage was arranged in order to secure a better position for him, following his father's death in 1811. Between 1812 and 1818, and then again in 1820-1834, he was Member of Parliament for Tamworth, the Townshend's family seat. Both Charles and Charlotte are buried in the family's chapel in Raynham. This miniature would have acted as a

commemoration for their marriage and belongs to a period in Cosway's career when he was experimenting with darker tones and a grey stippled background, quite unlike his characteristic bright blue splashes of watercolour.

The Townshend family were well-acquainted with the Cosways. Cosway certainly seems to have painted Charlotte's grandmother Anne on more than one occasion, and they seem to have been regular visitors to the Cosway's home, frequenting their salons and parties at Schomberg House for which Horace Walpole describes as receiving 'bushels of little Italian notes of invitation' from Cosway's Italian wife, Maria.

For all its typical Cosway brilliance, this portrait has been attributed in the past to Anne Mee

(c.1770/5-1851). An inscription on the reverse mentions her name, and it may be that she was a previous owner of the work, or simply that the palette was not thought to be typical of Richard Cosway and more akin to Mee's at this date [1].

[1] For a similar example by Mee, which may explain some of the confusion, see Mee's portrait of Lady Caroline Lamb, née Ponsonby (1785-1828, sold Christie's, London, 20 November 2013, lot 20.