

THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN SMART (1741 - 1811)

Portrait miniature of Elizabeth Anne (nee Cooke) Way (1746-1825), in a pearl-bordered cream silk dress with a fur-bordered pink surcoat; 1768

Circa: 1768

1768

4.4 cm (1 ³/₄ inches) high

Watercolour on ivory

Signed with initials and dated 1768

Paste-set surround

Elizabeth Anne (née Cooke) Way (1745-1825) was the eldest daughter of William Cooke (1711-1797) and Catherine, daughter of Richard Sleech, the canon of Windsor. Her family was closely tied to multiple religious and educational institutions, including various reverends and fellows of Oxford and Cambridge universities. Her father, William Cooke, attended Harrow School and Eton College, before graduating from King's College Cambridge in 1735 as a fellow. Throughout his life, he was unanimously elected both Headmaster at Eton in 1743 and later Provost of King's College Cambridge in 1772. His career peaked from 1772-1773, during which time he was the vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge. His two sons, William and Edward Cooke, were both also fellows of King's College.

Elizabeth married Benjamin Way of Denham (1740-1808), another prominent figure in national intellectual and religious life. Benjamin matriculated from Christ Church College Oxford in 1758, was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1771, as well as being a member of the Society of Antiquaries in London. He was also MP for Bridport in 1765, although reportedly never spoke in the house. Way's societal accreditations continued through his roles as President of Guy's Hospital, High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire and Sub-Governor of the South Sea Company where his father had been Director. Elizabeth and Benjamin married in November 1767 and it is likely that this portrait was painted for the occasion of their wedding. In the 17th century, portrait miniatures were often painted to celebrate marriages and were given as wedding gifts.

John Smart also produced a portrait miniature of Benjamin Way's sister, Abigail Baker Holroyd (1698-1771), in 1769, following her husband John Holroyd's (1735-1821) sudden inheritance of his older brother's vast estates and sudden acquirement of great wealth and unexpected promotion to the societal elite.[1] John Smart was operating out of an independent studio in London in the late 1760s and was well on his way to establishing an esteemed reputation as a highly skilled miniaturist. He had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Artists in 1765, further indicative of his growing status amongst the upper-classes and notable members of society who came to his studio to sit for portraits. It is quite possible that various acquaintances of Benjamin and Elizabeth Way recommended Smart's studio to Elizabeth for her wedding portrait, who then, pleased with the results of her portrait, endorsed Smart upon her sister-in-law's stroke of good luck. Following their marriage in late 1767, Elizabeth and Benjamin had seven sons and nine daughters, of which their two sons Lewis and Sir Gregory are most well known.

Lewis Way (1772-1840) was a renowned religious activist, who was educated at Eton and then diverted from his maternal familial traditions in favour of his paternal, by completing both his BA and MA at Merton College Oxford. Lewis Way was influenced from early in his life by evangelical clergymen at King's College Cambridge, as well as by members of the Clapham Sect including William Wilberforce, distinguished by their commitment to social reform and the abolition of the slave trade. Lewis' religious engagements included being active in the Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst Jews in London. At one point, he let a number of young men into his home, supposedly Jewish converts to Christianity, only to find his hospitality ungratefully received when Way discovered the group had run away with a number of his valuables. In a more positive instance of his religious devotion, Way also sat for four reportedly fascinating audiences with Tzar Alexander I, during the time he spent in Moscow. Elizabeth's fifth son, Sir Gregory Holman Bromley (1776-1844) was an army officer knighted in 1814, who became a knight commander of the Portuguese Order of the Tower and Sword. Prior to this, Sir Gregory's illustrious career had also included his unfortunate repeated capture by naval enemies, becoming a prisoner of French privateers in 1797 in Canada, of the Dutch in 1805 and of the French again by General Brenier in 1808, this time in Portugal waters.

[1] John Smart, 'Portrait miniature of Abigail Baker-Holroyd (née Way) (d.1793), later Lady Sheffield of Dunamore and Roscommon, 1769', accessed through the Historical Portrait online collection, Philip Mound & Co.