THE LIMNER COMPANY



CHRISTIAN RICHTER (1678 - 1732)

Portrait miniature of Princess Caroline Elizabeth (1713-1757)

Circa: Circa 1728

Circa 1728

Oval, 6.6 cm (2 $^{5}/_{8}$ inches)

Watercolour and body on vellum

Horace Walpole wrote of Princess Caroline Elziabeth, "Her goodness was constant and uniform, her generosity immense, her charities most extensive; in short, I, no royalist, could be lavish in her praise."

The third daughter and fourth eldest (legitimate) child of the (then) Electoral Prince George Augustus of Hanover (1683-1760), she was named after her mother, Caroline of Ansbach (1683-1739). Reportedly her mother's favourite child and a peacekeeper between her many siblings, Caroline Elizabeth is here portrayed as a graceful and serene young lady.

Caroline Elizabeth was born in the elector's palace at Herrenhausen, Germany, a Princess of Hanover. The year after her birth, her grandfather acceded to the throne of Great Britain and Ireland as King George I, and the family[1] sailed to England and moved into St James's Palace.

Unlike her grandfather, Caroline Elizabeth's mother and father tried to ingratiate themselves with the English. By learning the English language, politics and befriending the nobility they distinguished themselves from the King, who surrounded himself with German advisors and courtiers, and spoke poor English. Soon Caroline Elizabeth's parents came to be in political opposition to her grandfather and relations soured. Eventually, a fallout in 1717 over the godparents of her younger brother[2], led to her father being held under house arrest before he was banished from court altogether. Caroline Elizabeth's

mother was initially permitted to stay with the children but refused in solidarity with her husband. The four-year-old Princess Caroline Elizabeth and her siblings therefore remained in the care of their grandfather the King, living in separation from her parents for many years, with only her mother able to visit; even when the King and her father reconciled in 1720, her mother was unable to negotiate the children's return.

Caroline Elizabeth's mother was intellectual and literary, having received a liberal education at the Prussian court. While still separated from her parents, Caroline Elizabeth was able to benefit from her mother's enlightened views when she organised for Caroline Elizabeth, and her siblings Amelia and Frederick, to receive the smallpox inoculation in 1722. The practice had very recently been brought to England by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762)[3], and they were among the first to be immunised in this way (excluding test patients[4]). Also under her mother's direction, Caroline Elizabeth received a rounded education for the period, including music, English, French and German, and a study of the classics.

Caroline Elizabeth would have been reunited with her parents in 1727 - soon after turning 14 - on the death of her grandfather and her father's accession to the throne of Britian and Ireland as King George II, as well as Elector of Hanover. She lived a quiet life, close to her mother and siblings, often the mediator in squabbles. Indeed, she was part of the party her mother assembled to race after elder brother, Frederick, when he absconded from Hampton Court Palace with his wife in labour. Also part of this group was her brother's friend and mother's close ally, John Hervey, 2nd Baron Hervey (1696 – 1743). Hervey had affairs with both men and women, including possibly both Caroline Elizabeth and her brother, Frederick. Whether or not she did have a physical relationship with Hervey (who was already married), it is generally agreed that she was in love with him and her feelings were not returned to the same degree.

In 1743, a marriage to Duke Adolphus Frederick of Holstein-Gottorp, later King of Sweden was being discussed, but never came to pass. Her unrequited feelings for Frederick were said to have caused her great anguish for many years and the impetus for her retirement from public life in St James's Palace, although she continued to give generously to charity. Caroline Elizabeth never married and suffered with fragile health which led her to live in confinement in the 1750s before dying at just 44 years old.

The present miniature by Christian Richter is after a now lost original portrait by Hans Hysing (1678-1752/53), a portraitist favoured by the royal family. The painting was one of a series of George II's three elder daughters, including Anne and Amelia, now known only from contemporary engraving by John Faber Jr (1694-1756) that can be found in the Royal Collection, British Museum and National Portrait Gallery.[5]

Both Richter and Hysing were Swedish by birth, Richter arriving in London in 1700/02. Most of Richter's oeuvre were copies in miniature of larger oil paintings, and he was supposedly confined to being a copyist by a facial disfigurement. He also made copies after leading portraitist of the day including Sir Peter Lely and Sir Godfrey Kneller, as well as another Swedish artist, Michael Dahl.

This miniature is also comparable to a portrait enamel in the Royal Collection painted from life by Christian Friedrich Zincke (1683/4-1767)[6]. One of a series of family portrait enamels commissioned by George II in 1730, it depicts the princess in a very similar attire (perhaps the only difference being the

inclusion of a diadem and her woven silk dress including coloured flowers) but in a landscape. It is a testament to the success of Hysing's image, and the present copy in miniature, that Zincke reused the same composition.

[1] Excluding Caroline Elizabeth's elder brother, Prince Frederick (1701-1751), who remained in Hanover.

[2] Prince George William, who survived less than a year.

[3] Having witnessed inoculation in the folk medicine of Turkey, where her husband was the British Ambassador to Constantinople.

[4] Before subjecting her children to the variolation procedure, the Princess of Wales conducted an experiment on six prisoners and six orphan children. After they survived the inoculation without harm, she directed her children to receive the treatment.

[5] RCIN 603999, British Museum no. 1902,1011.1282, NPG D9140.

[6] RCIN 421798