

THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN SMART (1741 - 1811)

Portrait Miniature of Sir George Paunceforte-Bromley, 2nd Bt. (1753-1808), wearing a brown coat with gold trim and buttons, a light green waistcoat, and white stock and lace cravat, his hair powdered pink and worn en queue

Circa: 1780

1780

Watercolour on ivory (licence P5142G4W)

Oval, 38mm (1 ½ in) high.

Signed and dated 'JS/1780'

Gold frame with bracelet clasp mount

There appears to have been some confusion about the name of the sitter of this miniature in the past. Where in the previous sale of the portrait, in 2013, he was called 'Sir George Pauncote-Bromley', it can be confirmed that the correct name of the sitter is in fact 'Pauncefort[e]-Bromley'. The confusion in spelling may have come from a historic error. In Foscett's monograph of the artist, the gentleman is simply listed as 'BROMLEY, SIR GEORGE, BART. '. The potential for further confusion arises, given that Sir George was actually born George Smith, the son of Sir George Smith, 1st Baronet. (circa 1714-1769) and Mary Howe (1725-1761). Through his mother, he was a descendant of James I, as her grandmother was Ruperta, the illegitimate daughter of Prince Rupert [1]. This was first changed in 1778 to become George Bromley and then changed again in 1803 to become George Paunceforte-Bromley. The dates of these name changes explain why, in Foscett, the sitter is only named as George Bromley- when the portrait was painted in 1780, this was his name. Both of these name changes took place because George had expected to inherit from family members of these names.

The Smith's family estate included Bromley House Library, Nottingham. The house had been built by George Sr., and was not used by the family when George Jr. had first inherited his father's estates;

instead, it was let out to young men. By the early 1780s, he had moved his business here, turning it into a 'Stamp Office'. George Jr. was also heavily involved in the Town Corporation, having been the Sheriff of Gloucestershire (1775) and Chamberlain to the Mayor of Nottingham (1776). Today, the building is home to the Bromley House Library, originally the Nottingham Subscription Library, and it was sold from the family estates in 1820.

In 1778, George married Esther Curzon (1758-1839), the daughter of Assheton Curzon of Hagley (1729-1820). Given her wealthy background, from this point onward, George lost interest in politics; he now had enough money to live without it. In the same year of their marriage, their only son, Robert, was baptised. Their marriage was not happy and lasting, however. It appears that George was gay, and both his wife and a servant accused him of sodomy. In 1791, he was found guilty. By this point in time, Esther had left with Robert, and George was living alone. Esther soon filed for divorce, as this charge provided her with grounds enough to do so. George's properties were taken away from him and not returned to him until 1799, less than ten years before his death in 1808. Upon his death, his estates were passed to his son. An auction in 1809 saw the sale of a large number of his belongings, but it is believed that many of these were bought back by his family.

When this portrait was painted, George had not yet faced accusations or become estranged from his wife and son. In fact, it is more than likely that the miniature was painted to be given to one of them. He appears to be extremely fashionable; his hair is powdered in colour as was common in the period, and he is wearing a particularly striking green waistcoat. This rather bright colour had been produced traditionally using nettles or grass, but from 1775 onwards was often achieved using 'Scheele's Green'. Invented by Swedish Chemist Carl Wilhelm Scheele, the dye could produce a fantastic green colour, possibly like that in George's waistcoat, but it was also toxic, being produced using arsenic.

John Smart was used to painting portraits of patrons who wished to be depicted in the most recent fashions, especially as he was one of the most fashionable portrait miniature painters of his day. Only five years after this portrait was produced, Smart would travel to India, where he would continue to paint and draw important social figures on a miniature scale. He is regarded as one of the greatest miniaturists of the Georgian period, if not of all time.

For a much more detailed account of the sitter's life, see T. White, The Smith Family of Bromley House, 2015.

[1] George would go on to publish a book of letters, inherited from his mother, highlighting his connections with the Royals, called A Collection of Original Royal Letters (1787).

Literature:

D. Foskett, John Smart, The Man and his Miniatures, 1964, Appendix A, p. 63.