THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN DOWNMAN (1749 - 1824)

Portrait miniature of George Carpenter, 2nd Earl of Tyrconnel (1750-1805), wearing a blue jacket with a white waistcoat and cravat, his hair powdered

Circa: Circa 1790

Watercolour on ivory (licence LM3EQSBA)

Gilt metal frame with hairwork reverse

Oval, 8.2 cm (3 1/5 in) high

Born the first son of the 1st Earl of Tyrconnel, George Carpenter (1723-1762), and Lady Frances Clifton, much of George Carpenter's life as a politician has been overshadowed by the dramatic circumstances of his two marriages, both of which failed. He firstly married Frances Manners (1753-1792), the daughter of John Manners, Marquess of Granby. Through this marriage, he became the Member of Parliament for Scarborough, an area close to the interests of his wife's family, her being the granddaughter of the 3rd Duke of Rutland.

This was not a happy marriage, however. In 1777, the pair were divorced, following Frances's embarking on an affair with Charles Lorraine Smith (an artist and sporting personality), and eloping with him in 1776. The whole affair is recounted in the Town and Country Magazine, in its 'Tête-à-tête' section, from February 1777. Despite the separation, George remained the MP for Scarborough for the next nineteen years. In the years that followed, George also began an affair with Elizabeth Sewell, sparking the beginning of a divorce settlement between her and her husband, and this is recorded in another 'Tête-à-tête' article from June 1779.

George's second wife, Sarah Hussey Deval, was 'slim, wild, lovely and rakish' when at 17 she married him in 1780. Where there had been no children in his first marriage, the second was more successful, and the pair had two children: John Carpenter (1781-1790) and Lady Susannah Carpenter (1784-1827). The birth of two children did not prevent the marriage from breaking down, however. In the late 1780s, Sarah began to grow close to Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany (1763-1827). By

1787, Frederick had leased ‘Oatlands’, a house nearby, with the intention of allowing them to meet more easily. This affair did not last, given that Frederick married Princess Frederica in 1791. However, Sarah soon began another affair, this time with John Lyson-Bowes, 10th Earl Strathmore (1769-1820). In 1792, she went to live with her lover in the North. When she died at his home, Gibside, in 1800, she was only 37.

These affairs became synonymous with George Carpenter, and he, his wives, and their lovers were the subject of numerous satirical prints and publications, including the ‘Tête-à-tête’ articles mentioned above. In the Complete Peerage, it is quoted that Lord Fife wrote, ‘This Lord will never keep a wife, he must tie the next to a bedpost[1]’. He did not marry again and died in 1805, universally beloved[2]’.

John Downman was known as a draughtsman, miniaturist and oil painter and appears to have taken likenesses of Sarah, George, and John. Another version of the present work by Downman was sold at Christie's, 24 November 1981, as just ‘a gentleman', despite being offered alongside a portrait of both Sarah and her Father, John Hussey Delaval. It is possible that the collection of miniatures offered at this auction came directly from the descendants of the family. It seems that this portrait was painted at an earlier date than the version in the 1981 sale, and it is remarkably close to a drawing of George, recorded as having been offered by Thos Agnew and Sons in 1959. Downman also drew numerous portraits of George’s daughter, Suzanne, in the early 1790s, three extant examples being in the British Museum’s Collection[3]

[1] The Complete Peerage by G.E.C., Volume XII, 1959, p. 127, under (e).

[2] The Gentleman’s Magazine, v. 75, I, 1805, p. 390.

[3] See accession numbers 1967,1014.181.15, 1967,1014.181.14, and 1967,1014.181.13.