THE LIMNER COMPANY



RICHARD COSWAY (1742 - 1821)

Portrait miniature of John Bowes, 10th Earl of Strathmore (1769-1820), wearing a light blue coat, yellow waistcoat, and white frilled cravat, his hair powdered white

Circa: 1791

Watercolour on ivory (licence PQ58X2YT)

Signed and dated 1791

Gilt metal frame with hairwork reverse

Oval, 8.6cm (3 2/5in) high

This charming portrait depicts the last Baron Bowes of Streatlam Castle, and 10th Earl Strathmore, John Bowes. He was the son of Mary Bowes (1749-1800) and John Lyon, later Bowes, the 9th Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne (1737-1776). Mary was one of the wealthiest heiresses in Georgian England when her father, George, died in 1760. It was partially for this reason that both of her husbands (John and Andrew 'Stoney' Robinson Bowes (1747–1810)) took her surname. Despite having a wealthy childhood, John's was not likely to have been a happy one. His father died when he was only seven, and his mother's second husband, Andrew, was known to be abusive and cruel. In 1786, for example, he kidnapped Mary, following her filing for divorce.

When John inherited the numerous family estates in the North of England, including Gibside, Streatlam Castle, and St Paul's Walden Bury, he began to improve their upkeep. This was especially the case at Gibside, where his mother had built an orangery in the early 1770s. She was a keen botanist; however, this hobby had fallen aside under her second marriage.

By 1791, John had retired from the military, where he had ended his career as a Captain in the 65th foot. It was also in this year that he met the Countess of Tyrconnel, Sarah Hussey Delaval (1763-1800), the wife of George Carpenter, 2nd Earl Tyrconnel (1750-1805). They met at Sarah's family home, Seaton Delaval, where she had been performing in The Fair Penitent (written by Nicholas Rowe in

1703). During their affair, Sarah began living openly at Gibside. She died there from a cold in 1800, though in her obituary, it is recorded by her father that she died at Seaton Delaval.

Aside from this affair, John is also remembered for another affair he had with Mary Milner, an employee of the Streatlam estate. She gave birth to his son, also John Bowes, in 1811. This was John's only child, and though illegitimate, a large amount of effort was put into ensuring that the younger John received a good education. Unfortunately, when the elder John died in 1820, he was not given the entirety of his inheritance and only received the English estates. The rest were inherited by his uncle, Thomas Bowes. This did not stop the younger John from having a successful career as both a politician and, more famously, the founder of the Bowes Museum.

Cosway's skill in capturing the exact nature of his sitters is clear in this portrait. John appears to be incredibly charming- his father, the 9th Earl, had also been known for his good looks. By the 1790s, it had become extremely fashionable to have one's portrait taken by an artist such as Richard Cosway, who was known by some as 'The Macaroni Miniature Painter', and often held large and extravagant parties and salons at his Pall Mall residence. This extravagance is reflected here, especially in the large frilled cravat that John is wearing.