THE LIMNER COMPANY



WILLIAM GRIMALDI (1751 - 1830)

Portrait enamel of Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), in field marshal's uniform

Circa: 1818

1818

Enamel on copper

Oval, 137 mm (5 ⅖ in) high

Signed and dated on the counter enamel: '1818/ William Grimaldi/ Enamel Painter to the/ Prince Regent' lower right, oval, 137mm high, inscribed reverse '..... the/ Duke of Wellington/ Prince of Waterlooe …./ By / W. Grimaldi/ Enamel Painter to His Royal /Highness The/ Prince regent/ London/ 1818'

Further inscribed on a backing card: 'Enamel of/ The Duke of Wellington/ painted by William Grimaldi /R.A / Given to M.B.G by C. G. 187(?)3/ Catalogue no.34.'

Gilt-metal frame

The military historian Professor Richard Holmes wrote that the first Duke of Wellington, 'ranks, with the Duke of Marlborough, as one of the two greatest generals Britain has produced.'[1]

This enamel depicts the Duke of Wellington at the zenith of his military prowess: a highly decorated British field marshal with a string of battlefield victories behind him including the Battle of Waterloo. Datable to 1818, a catalogue number on the reverse of the miniature allows it to be identified within the catalogue of Grimaldi's work written in 1873. The enamel is a copy of his 'own original miniature that the Duke sat 4 times to me and the different orders were taken from nature at the Duke's house'. The

‘Duke’s house’ could refer to Apsley House or to Stratfield Saye, which he had acquired with funds provided by Parliament as a ‘grateful nation’ gift. He had purchased Apsley House, also known as ‘No.1 London’ (being the first house passed after the toll gates on the journey from the countryside) from his brother in 1817 and it was undergoing renovations while this enamel was being painted.

The artist William Grimaldi already enjoyed a longstanding relationship with the Duke, having painted him as a major general, circa 1805, the year after his appointment as ‘Enamel Painter to the Prince of Wales’.[2] In 1814, according to the Grimaldi family papers, the artist was called to Apsley House to paint the Duke from life; a request that was again required in 1818, when the Duke was active in politics, and appointed Master-General of the Ordnance in that year.[3]

This enamel was likely a commission from the Prince Regent, who was a staunch supporter of the Duke. They shared an elite social circle but, like many men and boys of the period, the Prince Regent also hero-worshipped Wellington, seeing in him the embodiment of the glory he craved. In turn, Wellington respected the King's abilities, describing him on his death in 1830 as ‘the most extraordinary compound of talent, wit, buffoonery, obstinacy, and good feeling... that I ever saw in any character in my life’. The firing marks on this enamel meant that it was not considered good enough to present to the prince, despite, as Grimaldi notes, five weeks of labour and a total of 18 firings in the kiln.

Grimaldi has portrayed the Duke in the dress uniform of a British field marshal, a rank to which he was promoted by the Prince Regent with effect from 21 June 1813. The date was that of Wellington’s armies’ victory over the French at the Battle of Vitoria. After that battle, the baton of Maréchal Jean-Baptiste Jourdan was captured and passed to Wellington, who sent it home for the Prince Regent enclosed with his dispatch announcing the victory. In his letter of congratulation, the prince notified Wellington that he had been promoted to field marshal and implied that a British field marshal’s baton would be forthcoming.

Elements of the Duke’s dress in this portrait symbolise the extent to which Wellington was, as Holmes wrote in 2002, ‘[a] commander within [a] coalition’.[4] This is best demonstrated by the variety of insignia of foreign Orders of Chivalry that Grimaldi has minutely depicted, all of which the Duke had received by 1818.

Born in Ireland in 1769, Arthur Wesley, later Wellesley, was a younger son of Garret Wesley, 1st Earl of Mornington (1735-1781). First commissioned in 1787, he spent little time in any regiment as he negotiated his way rapidly upwards through the commissioned ranks of the Army but gained valuable experience of court and politics through being an ADC to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and an Irish MP. The outbreak of war with Revolutionary France in February 1793 provided a stimulus to Arthur’s career: he was in the right place at the right time and well-connected. By September 1793, he was lieutenant-colonel in the 33rd Foot and had, albeit temporarily, abandoned his Irish appointments: at an opportune time, he was ready for active service.

There seems little doubt that his first experience of modern warfare was a formative one for the young lieutenant-colonel. Among other things, it taught him the value of sea-power in support of land forces and of the importance of logistics; it also enabled him to exercise battlefield command of bodies of troops, in which he acquitted himself well. Wellesley was one of the few who emerged from the debacle of the Flanders campaign with any merit: he had found his *métier* and gained golden opinions from his

superiors.

If Flanders was Wellesley's baptism by fire, India was the making of him: those consecutive experiences gave Britain the ablest battlefield general of his generation. The India in which Wellesley arrived in 1797 was one in which the British were still comparative newcomers and so one in which riches, as well as reputations, were to be won; Wellesley went home eight years later with both, as well as a knighthood and the rank of major general. Tipu Sultan of Mysore (1750-1799) was finally beaten, the French deterred from conquests in India and the battles of Assaye, Argaon and Gawilgarh, were fought and won against the Maratha confederation. By 1805, India was far more British than when Wellesley arrived. By the age of thirty-six, his professionalism was complete and he was hungry for more challenges.

Those came with the Peninsular War and an opportunity, at last, to take the war on land to the French. After a false start in 1808, Wellesley returned to Portugal in 1809 in command of an expeditionary force that, with its Portuguese and Spanish allies and supported by the Royal Navy, would eventually constitute the 'Spanish ulcer' credited by Napoleon as the cause of his destruction. Initial success, at Talavera, brought him a peerage, and the title 'Wellington' to public attention. Retrenchment behind the Lines of Torres Vedras followed, wearing down the French forces. Further victories brought steps in the peerage in 1812 and 1813. A final and inexorable advance on France's south-western flank during 1813-14 paralleled similar pressure on her north-eastern borders from Austria, Russia and Prussia and resulted in Napoleon's abdication. Wellington emerged from Spain into France in 1814 a duke, a Knight of the Garter and, at home, the Hero of the Hour.

A period as a diplomat followed before he faced the greatest challenge of his military career: Waterloo, 18 June 1815. Commanding an army with little of the campaign-hardened strength of that which he had led in the Peninsula, and reliant at last on the coming of either 'Night or the Prussians', Wellington prevailed – as the world knows – but, as he said, it was, 'a close-run thing'.

For the rest of his life, Wellington was a politician, championing Catholic emancipation but resisting Parliamentary reform. Remaining a soldier too, he was the Army's Commander-in-Chief twice. This was the period when the expression 'The Duke' could mean only one man: the subject of many biographies and portraits, Wellington was a figure who was instantly recognisable. Ten years after this enamel was painted, he served as Prime Minister (1828-30). He continued to be one of the leading figures in the House of Lords until his retirement in 1846 and remained Commander-in-Chief of the Forces until his death in 1852.

[1] E.R. Holmes, *Wellington; the Iron Duke* (London, 2002), p. 300.

[2] C. Wellesley, Marquess of Douro, *Wellington Portrayed* (London, 2014), p. 159. Grimaldi's official appointment as Enamel Painter to the Prince of Wales came the year after the Prince presented Wellington with the field marshal's baton.

[3] Op. cit. Holmes, p. 300

[4] Details of his rapid progress from ensign to lieutenant-colonel in six-and-a-half years are as follows: ensign, 73rd Foot, March 1787; lieutenant, 76th Foot, December 1787, exchanged to 41st Foot January 1788 and to 12th Light Dragoons June 1789; captain, 58th Foot, June 1791, exchanged to 18th Light Dragoons October 1792; major, 33rd Foot, April 1793; lieutenant-colonel, 33rd, September 1793. The colonel of the 33rd in 1793 was Charles, 1st Marquess Cornwallis, a coincidence that brought together two soldier-statesmen of the 18th and 19th centuries. Wellesley became colonel of the 33rd after Cornwallis's death in 1805; after Wellington's death in 1852 the regiment adopted his title as its subtitle – 'The Duke of Wellington's'.

Literature:

A.B Grimaldi, *A Catalogue, Chronological and Descriptive, of Paintings, Drawings, & Engravings, by and after William Grimaldi, R.A., Paris*., London, 1873, no. 34, p. 12.