THE LIMNER COMPANY



JOHN BARRY

Portrait miniature of an Officer, wearing scarlet coat with yellow facings and silver epaulettes, black stock and white cravat, his hair powdered

Circa: circa late 1780s

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Watercolour on ivory (licence VFAX8DWX)

Oval, 81mm (3 $^{1}/_{4}$ in) high

Gilt metal frame with twisted rope outer border

This portrait has the distinct ‘brownish shading’ and ‘angular eyebrows’ which Foskett (1987) lists as being characteristics of the work of John Barry, a rather elusive artist working in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is known that Barry exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1784 and 1827, and that he was highly skilled as a miniature painter. Barry’s *oeuvre* is often confused with that of Thomas Hazlehurst (c.1740-c.1821), as he did not often sign his works.

It has not been possible to identify the officer in this portrait, or his uniform. Being painted in one’s military outfit was a popular choice for men having their miniatures taken, and a commission like the present work may have been intended as a departing gift from a soldier to their wife or family, as a way to remember them while they were gone. There were many destinations for a British officer in the 1780s, including India and America, where the events of the Revolutionary War were unfolding.

The background of this portrait is particularly striking, and an example of how artists were able to vary their portraits from the simple blue sky background often expected of them. This gentleman appears to be standing against a sky threatening storm, specked with warm browns, greys, and touches of blue emerging from the clouds.

Literature:

L. Schidlof, *The Miniature in Europe*, Graz 1964 II, p. 912, illustrated III pl.36 no 64;

J Nimmergut & A. M. Wager, *Miniaturen, Dosen*, Munich 1982, illustrated p. 106, no. 1.