

THE LIMNER COMPANY



SAMUEL SHELLEY (1750/56 - 1808)

Portrait miniature of a Gentleman, traditionally called Peter de Bath, wearing officer's uniform, scarlet coat with blue facings, silver buttons, epaulettes, gorget, and shoulder-belt plate

Circa: circa 1780s

circa 1780s

Watercolour on ivory (licence N4REALEV)

Oval, 73 mm (2 ⁷/₈ in) high

Signed on the backing paper 'S Shelley/Henrietta Street/Cov. Garden'

Gold *fausse-montre* frame, the reverse with central lock of hair tied with seed pearls, set into gold, split pearl border with blue glass surround and gold and white enamel border

As sometimes occurs with portraits, the identification of this portrait as 'Peter de Bath' appears to have been added without justification at some point in its lifetime. There is no evidence of a Peter de Bath having existed during Samuel Shelley's lifetime.

The Marquess of Bath (Thomas Tynne, 1765-1837), who would have been the correct age at the time at which this portrait was painted, does not look like the officer whose likeness Shelley has taken. There is some similarity to James Pulteney (1755-1811), who became the Baron of Bath through his marriage to Henrietta Laura Pulteney, 1st Baroness of Bath (1766-1808), though the marriage occurred after this portrait was painted, and he has no connection to the name 'Peter'. It is possible that this miniature was once in the collection of a 'de Bath' family, and the name was attached to it during this time.

The gentleman wears an unidentified officer's uniform, which was a specialty of Shelley's, alongside his softly rendered portraits of women and children. This softness is conveyed here, in the subtle colouring of the sitter's face and hair, which contrasts against the stronger reds and blues used in his uniform.

Shelley was born in London and spent the rest of his life there, working out of numerous addresses. It is possible to date this miniature to the 1780s from the address inscribed by Shelley on the reverse, as this was the decade during which the artist was working from Henrietta Street. It is known that Shelley taught both Alexander Robertson (1772-1841) and Edward Nash (1778-1821), who went on to have successful careers as miniaturists in their own right.