THE LIMNER COMPANY



ANDREW PLIMER (1763 - 1837)

Portrait miniature of Thomas Henry Liddell (later 1st Baron Ravensworth) (1775-1855), wearing a green coat, white waistcoat and tied cravat, his hair powdered and worn 'en queue'

Circa: circa 1790

circa 1790

Watercolour on ivory (licence FA6L6RGR)

Oval, 76 mm (3 in) high

Gold frame, with glazed reverse to reveal plaited hair, the surround engraved 'Sir TH Liddell Cr. B. Ravensworth 1821 died 1855'

Thomas Henry Liddell was born to Sir Henry George Liddell, 5th Bt and his wife Elizabeth Steele, the eldest son and heir to a wealthy family in the north of England. Their estates included Ravensworth Castle, Eslington Park and significant coal mining interests.

Liddell was educated at Eton College and Trinity College, Cambridge, and may have then split his time between Northumberland and London after his father's death in 1791. It was in London that Liddell married Maria (or Mary) Susannah Simpson (d.1845), the granddaughter of Thomas, 8th Earl of Strathmore, on 26 March 1796. The present miniature dates to around this time and was painted by Andrew Plimer, who ran a studio in London's fashionable Golden Square, Soho.

Liddell had returned home to Northumberland by 1804 when he was served as High Sherriff of the county. He was elected as Tory MP for County Durham in 1806-7, and the following year, embarked on major works at the family seat of Ravensworth Castle.

In 1808, the castle was demolished and Liddell commissioned John Nash (1752-1835) to design a

grand gothic revival mansion to replace it. While, like a number of Nash's projects, it received some criticism, the new Ravensworth castle remained a distinguished landmark of the north and was visited by the Duke of Wellington.[1]

Another legacy was Thomas's patronage of the engineer, George Stephenson (1781-1848). Stephenson had worked at Killingworth Colliery since 1804, owned by Liddell. His talent as an enginewright and problem-solver raised Stephenson to a high position responsible for machinery across numerous collieries.[2] In 1815, his innovative Safety Lamp was introduced, which prevented explosions often caused by the flame of a lamp igniting the gaseous atmosphere in mines. Around the same time, Stephenson began to experiment with the locomotive at Killingworth, funded by Liddell. Later in life, Stephenson remarked, "The first locomotive that I made was at Killing-worth Colliery, and with Lord Ravensworth's money. Yes, Lord Ravensworth and partners were the first to entrust me with money to make a locomotive engine."

Liddell's personal life was also fruitful. He was survived by seven daughters and six sons, among them the writer and courtier, Georgiana Bloomfield, Baroness Bloomfield (née Liddell) (1822-1905), and cricketer, George Augustus Frederick Liddell (1812-1888), who was also Groom-in-Waiting to Queen Victoria, and Deputy Ranger of Windsor Great Park.

Other illustrious descendants include Guy Maynard Liddell CBE (1892-1958), the present sitter's great-grandson, who was MI5's head of counter-espionage during World War II; and Alice Pleasance Liddell (1852-1934), the girl who inspired Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass.* Alice was the present sitter's great-niece, and she visited Ravensworth just a few years after his death. A photograph of Alice dressed as a 'beggar maid' (1858), was taken by Carroll (real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) in the grounds of Ravensworth.

[1] The castle was ultimately abandoned and ruined in the 20th century due to subsidence caused by the Ravensworth coalmine which had extended beneath the house itself.

[2] Owned not just by Liddell but the Grand Allies, a group of landowners with significant coal mining interests.