THE LIMNER COMPANY



ENGLISH SCHOOL (17th century)

Portrait miniature of a Lady, wearing blue gown with pink sleeves, ochre background

Circa: circa 1670

circa 1670

Watercolour and gouache on vellum

Oval, 120 mm (4 3/4 in) high

Associated turned wood frame

Although the artist of this larger than average miniature is yet to be identified, a very similar portrait, formerly said to be Anne Scott, Duchess of Monmouth and Buccleuch, is in the collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum (EVANS.50). This miniature was attributed to various artists of the period, including Nicholas Dixon, Charles Beale and Peter Cross. John Murdoch, who wrote the catalogue entry for the museum catalogue in 1997 suggested that it might have been painted by one of the children of Richard Gibson (1615-1690); 'synthesising their father's dense painterly manner with then lighter, more fashionable stipple of Cross.'

Although our sitter has previously been named as the Duchess of Portsmouth, facially she bears a closer resemblance to a portrait said to be of Lady Johanna St John (1631-1705), by Godfrey Kneller and now in the collection at Lydiard House, Swindon. Johanna was born in 1631 the third child and eldest daughter of Oliver St. John, Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, and his first wife Johanna Altham. Johanna was descended from the senior Bletsoe branch of the St. John family when in 1649 she married a distant cousin, Walter St. John, who descended from the junior branch at Lydiard Tregoze.

Johanna was a knowledgeable gardener and herbalist and has left a unique record of her work. Johanna used plants from the formal gardens at Lydiard, formerly located at the front of the medieval manor house and stretching down to the lake, sourcing the more exotic ingredients such as unicorn horn

and bezoar stones from elsewhere.

Lady Johanna's Recipe Book dated 1680 is a rare survivor of a 17th century collection of herbal remedies and is held in The Wellcome Library in London. In her will Johanna bequeaths "my great Receit Book" to her daughter [Anne] Cholmondeley.

The size of this miniature, almost a small painting, would have likely been planned for display in a cabinet room, such as the Green Closet at Ham House. It is so close in style to the oil portraits painted by Lely and Kneller at the time that it may have been painted by an accomplished amateur artist who found a larger piece of vellum easier to work on than miniatures destined to be worn as jewellery.