THE LIMNER COMPANY



GEORGE ENGLEHEART (1750 - 1829)

Portrait miniature of General Sir Thomas Brotherton (1785-1868), wearing the uniform of a Colonel of the Coldstream Guards

Circa: 1803

1803

Watercolour on ivory (licence 9Y89VJS2)

Oval, 92 mm (3 ⅝ in) high

Signed ‘E’, lower right

Later silver gilt frame with the sitter’s identification engraved on the reverse

Sir Thomas Brotherton entered the military at the age of fifteen, and boarded a ship to his first posting, in his own words, ‘so weak that I was taken down to Gravesend and carried on board in a blanket in my father's arms’[1]. Around three years later, he was painted here by George Engleheart, appearing much healthier, and as a young man, rather than a boy. Between this portrait being painted and his first entry into the military, he had joined Lieutenant-General Sir Ralph Abercromby (1734-1801) in the Coldstream Guards at the Battle of Abukir (1801). He returned to England in 1802, at which point he was receiving half pay (and was therefore being paid a wage but not on active duty).

This portrait is one of only two known depictions of Brotherton, the other being a full-length oil painting attributed to the circle of Sir Martin Archer Shee, P.R.A. (1769-1850) which was sold in 2000. That portrait was painted much later in Brotherton’s long military career, which continued almost up to his death in 1868. In the time that had passed between the two commissions, Brotherton had fought alongside the Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) in the Peninsula War, been held as a prisoner of war, and was appointed the Aide de Camp to King William IV (1765-1837) in 1830. In 1812, while fighting in the Iberian Peninsula, Brotherton was injured at least three times. One of these injuries resulted in him not being able to play the fiddle, a significant consequence as he was also a famed violinist. He later suffered a wound in his right side and was bound to bed rest but insisted on returning to battle a few days later. This was not to his advantage and resulted in his surrender and imprisonment by French

Troops until the end of the Peninsula War in 1814. Sweetman summarises the impression given by his service in this period: ‘[he had] undoubted bravery and [an] indifference to wounds, which sometimes resulted in a lack of sympathy for others’.

Other accounts of Brotherton’s life give a similarly strong impression of his resilience and awkward character. In fact, his autobiography was only written at the ‘particular request’ of his children and grandchildren, and when he did write this, it was only four pages long- a surprisingly short summary of a long and interesting career.

It has been possible to date this portrait with a cross-examination of George Engleheart's sitters’ fee book, in which he recorded the names and dates of the majority of his commissioned portraits. 1803 was rather late in Engleheart’s career, and by this point, he was working on larger pieces of ivory, sometimes rectangular, and this is reflected in the size of Brotherton’s portrait. Scholar Daphne Foskett states that at this later stage of his career he ‘did not attempt to flatter his sitters’[2], and if this was the case, he must have seen Brotherton as a handsome young man.

Engleheart was one of the finest miniature painters of his generation and was producing alongside the likes of John Smart and Richard Cosway. He was extremely prolific, but his portraits were all of an exceptional quality, meaning he continued to gain commissions until he was over sixty years old, at which point he largely stopped taking these on.

[1] T Brotherton, *The Autobiography of General Sir. T. Wm. Brotherton G.C.B.*, 16 July 1861, MS., taken from R Haynes, GENERAL SIR THOMAS WILLIAM BROTHE,RTON G.C.B., published online, accessed 27/05/2026, see https://edlhs.budecomputers.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/GENERAL-SIR-THOMAS-WILLIAM-

BROTHERTON-G.pdf

[2] Foskett, D., *Miniatures: Dictionary and Guide*, 1987