THE LIMNER COMPANY



Attributed to GEORGE PERFECT HARDING (1780 - 1853)

Portrait miniatures of Henry VIII (1491-1547), 'Katherine of Aragon' (1485-1536), 'Anne Boleyn' (c.1501-1536), Jane Seymour (c.1508/9-1537), 'Anne of Cleves' (1515-1557), Katherine Howard (c.1523-1542), and 'Katherine Parr' (1512-1548)

Circa 1820s

All watercolour on card

The former oval, 77mm (3 in) high, the latter circular, 52mm (2 in) diam.

This set of portraits, painted in the nineteenth century, is likely to have been painted by an artist keen to capitalise on a new wave of interest in the history of England, sparked by the Romantic movement. Though the seven portraits are labelled with identifications for each sitter, these are not all correct, providing an insight into historic issues associated with identifying portraits of the wives of Henry VIII.

All but two of the portraits are taken directly from Thomas Birch's *The heads of illustrious persons of Great Britain* (1743), which featured engravings by Jacob Houbracken (1698-1780) and George Vertue (1684-1756). The portrait of Henry VIII correlates directly (see British Museum, 1948,0315.3.90), and the same can be said for the portraits of Jane Seymour (BM 1868,0822.6732) and Katherine Howard (BM 1868,0822.6655). The portraits of 'Catherine of Aragon' and 'Anne of Cleves' are also featured in Birch's Heads but are misidentified in this set: 'Catherine of Aragon' is Anne of Cleves (1868,0822.6654), and 'Anne of Cleves' was published by Birch under this identification, but is in fact Louise de Savoy (1476-1531, BM 1868,0822.6731).

There is a portrait of Anne Boleyn printed in Birch's heads, which is considered today to depict a different sitter. However, this does not correspond to the portrait of 'Anne Boleyn' in this set. It has not been possible to identify the exact original work from which the miniature has been copied; however, one close comparison is the print by Cornelis Vermuelen (1644-1708) in the British Museum (1868,0808.1509).

As for the portrait of Katherine Parr, the closest comparison does not come from Birch's Heads but instead from another nineteenth-century copy by George Perfect Harding (BM 1948,0315.1.76). According to the inscription, this is taken from the portrait at Lambeth Palace, which is now identified as Katherine Parr. It is partly this comparison that has led to an attribution to Harding. This is also supported by the fact that he was known for his copies of historic portraits.