THE LIMNER COMPANY



WILLIAM ESSEX (1784 - 1869)

Portrait enamel of George IV (1762 - 1830) when Prince Regent (1811 - 1820) wearing a dark blue coat with fur collar, the Breast Garter star, the Order of the Golden Fleece, and a large sapphire and diamond brooch on a crimson sash suspended from his neck, white chemise and black stock, his brown hair worn short

Circa: circa 1820

circa 1820

Enamel on metal

Oval, 79 mm (3 ⅛ in) high

Gilt metal frame

George IV lived a life scattered with controversy and addiction. The eldest son of King George III (1738-1820) and Queen Charlotte (1744-1818), from a young age he showed tendencies for extravagance. Despite having an annual allowance equivalent to over £14,000,000 today, he accumulated large amounts of debt in his 20s, from heavy drinking and expensive tastes. On top of this, his infatuation with the older, catholic Maria Fitzherbert (1756-1837), led him to break Royal acts that both prevented him from marrying a catholic, and from marrying anyone without his father's permission. The pair married in secret in 1785.

These acts of rebellion all led to George being refused Regency when his father first became mentally unwell in 1788. On top of removing his power, it was not seen as suitable for parliament to help the prince out of his ever-growing debts, and by this point he had been thrown out of his residence Carlton House, and was forced to move in with Fitzherbert. It was only in 1795 that he agreed to marry (legally) Princess Caroline of Brunswick (1768-1821), who had been chosen as a match by George III. The marriage was not successful, and the pair soon split after the birth of their only child, Princess Charlotte (1796-1817). George continued to engage in affairs throughout his marriage, not only with Fitzherbert, but also others, and it is claimed that he had numerous illegitimate children.

After years of powerlessness, George was finally made Prince Regent in 1811, as his father had entered another period of serious mental illness. He became king in 1820. His reign was defined by a large amount of control by the government, and the question of Catholic Emancipation. He tiptoed around removing a Tory government in favour of the Whigs, who were in support of Emancipation, initially claiming that changing the government would have too dire a toll on his Father's health. The government would remain Tory throughout his reign.

William Essex trained primarily in enamel, under Charles Muss (1779-1824), who had been an enamel painter to William IV (1765-1831). He forged his own career as an enamel painter for two monarchs, George IV (painted here, 1762-1830), and Queen Victoria (1819-1901). Though he did paint *ad vivum*, it was usual for enamel painters to copy the work of other artists working in oil. That is the case here; Essex has copied a portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence, which is today in the collection of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (PG 139).

The original portrait is dated to 1820 but is said to be a portrait of George when he was still Prince Regent, so just before his coronation took place. It can be seen here that the King has begun to gain the weight that he also became known for at the end of his life. This had been caused by excessive drinking and dining, which was accompanied by an addiction to the opiate tincture laudanum. It is said that he wore a scarf, like that shown in this portrait to hide his double chins. In the same vein, he preferred darker colours to disguise his weight, and both fashion choices went on to become wider trends in English men's fashion in the period.