THE LIMNER COMPANY



GEORGE ENGLEHEART (1750 - 1829)

Portrait miniature of a Lady, called Miss Topham, wearing white dress with yellow sash, her hair worn up and powdered, with a white bandeau

Circa: 1795

1795

Watercolour on ivory (licence RCLPKT2F)

Oval, 79 mm (3 ⅛ in) high

Glazed reverse with hairwork

Miss Topham was painted by Engleheart alongside Mrs Topham, presumed to be her sister-in-law, in 1795. Engleheart was known for meticulously recording the names of his sitters and the years in which he painted them, which provides an invaluable resource for dating them today. Miss Topham's clothes are also key identifiers for dating her- her decollete dress verges on the neoclassical, which came to be popular in the early nineteenth century, and her hair is lower than that common in the preceding decades- partly because of changing attitudes towards the extravagance of the court in France, as the revolution was progressing.

If previous cataloguing, and a label on the reverse of a miniature of 'Mrs Topham' is correct, then this Miss Topham is the sister of Henry Topham Esq (d.1790). It has not been possible to trace any further information about her given name or her own life. As she was painted in the same sitting as her sister-in-law, it is implied that she was either living with or remained close to her sister-in-law even after her brother's death. Because there is no record of her marriage, it can be suggested that Miss Topham lived with her brother and sister-in-law. It was traditional for unmarried sisters to move in with their eldest brother, especially if their parents had died, as these women had few other means through which to support themselves.

Having one's portrait painted by George Engleheart, one of the most fashionable portrait miniature

painters of his day, was highly regarded, and it is therefore not surprising that two members of the same family would be painted at the same time. By the mid-1790s, Engleheart was enjoying the peak of his career and receiving a high number of commissions from across the upper circles of Georgian London.