

Lot 967 A small portrait of Sir John Smyth, married Elizabeth Astry, 1659-1726. In carved frame.



Image: FAM volunteer. K1711©Bristol Culture, photography by Public Catalogue Foundation/Dan Brown.

This portrait was one of those purchased by Bristol Museums in the 1947 sale.

Western Daily Press of 11th June 1947 reported:

'Bristol Art Gallery purchases

At a cost of £37 the Bristol Art Gallery have acquired four of the Smyth family portraits. High bidding at yesterday's sale at Ashton Court, above the limits laid down, prevented a larger number being bought, a course which may have been desirable in view of the possibility in the future of the estate being taken over by the City Corporation. The four portraits are of Sir John Smyth, Bart, and his wife, Anne Pym, whose portrait is dated 1733; Sir John Smyth who married Elizabeth Astry, 1659-1726; and John, the first Lord Poulett, father of Dame Florence Smyth, 1649.'

The portrait currently hangs in the Small Oak Room at Red Lodge Bristol.

Who was Sir John Smyth and how was he connected to Ashton Court?

Sir John was born in 1659 and was the eldest son of Sir Hugh Smyth the 1st Baronet, and his wife Ann Ashburnham. Sir John married the wealthy Elizabeth Astry in 1692. John and Elizabeth had 8 children. Elizabeth was actively involved in improvements to the house and gardens. Elizabeth was said to be a lively and good-natured person. Sir John was away a lot and had a morbid fear of smallpox, and found it difficult to socialise even when at home. Elizabeth died young, aged only 46. She was outlived by Sir John who died in 1726, his anxious and anti-social nature prompted his daughters to describe Ashton Court as '*a nunnery*'.