

Portrait of Hugh Smyth (1527-1627) at Sherbourne School.



Image: courtesy of Sherbourne School Archives, photography by Rachel Hassell.

The portrait by an unknown artist was painted on board in the early 16th century.

This portrait has been in the possession of the school since at least 1815 when it is referred to in Hutchin's history of Dorset (2nd ed. 1815) as follows:

"In the library is a curious large three quarter length portrait upon wood, of a young man in red hair, great ruff, quilted doublet, gold buttons, truncked hose, thick twist of gold around the neck like a collar, right hand on sword in point, and in the left hat and feather. Behind the head are the arms of Snell quartering Talbot. Before his head on a table a plated coat of mail, and out of it a lance, sword, and banner. Motto: AMBIO ET SPERO. It is not known for whom this picture was painted, or how it came to be deposited in this place."

Over the years the School Historians, Librarians, and Archivists have investigated the portrait and tried to discover how it arrived at Sherbourne School.

In 1983 a report by the Chester Herald at the College of Arms was commissioned. His investigations were able to confirm beyond reasonable doubt that the portrait depicts Sir Hugh Smyth of Long Ashton.

The Herald suggested that Sir Hugh's son Thomas, who was at Sherborne with the Marquis of Hertford during the Civil War, may have conveyed his father's portrait to Sherborne in the course of his travels. Thomas was known to have been fighting at Sherbourne in 1642. Although Thomas survived the war he died shortly after.

Another theory is that the portrait came to Sherbourne through the Phelips family who lived at nearby Montacute House.

The Phelips and the Smyths were linked by marriage. Sir Robert Phelips, M.P. (d.1638), son of Sir Edward Phelips the builder of Montacute House, married Bridget daughter of Sir Thomas Gorges, who was presumably a younger sister of Elizabeth Gorges, additionally Thomas Phelips of Montacute (1500-1588) married Elizabeth a daughter of John Smyth of Long Ashton.

It has been suggested that it is pair with the portriat of Elizabeth Gorges (lot 940 in the 1947 sale). The measurements are similar, they are both painted on a panel and have a similar black and gilt frames.

Another theory is that Thomas's family gave the portrait to Sherbourne in thanks for kindnesses their father received when quartered there.

It is unlikely that this portrait ever hung at Ashton Court.

The portrait is currently hung in the School undercroft.



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