

Lot 1040 Portrait of Lady Marlborough, wife of William Ashburnham, Esq. 90 in. x 55 in. In carved and gilt frame. Attributed to Lely School.

It has not been possible to identify the current whereabouts of the portrait of Lady Marlborough that used to hang in the Great Hall, shown on the left in this image.



Images: Mb6061©Bristol Culture.

In 2015 a very similar portrait of similar dimensions was sold at a South Africa auction for the equivalent of just under £7000. It was said to be:

'portrait of a lady, said to be Jane Ashburnham (1604-1672)'



Image: courtesy of <https://www.straussart.co.za/auctions/lot/12-oct-2015/492>

This portrait was said to have been painted in the studio of Willem Wissing and the provenance was:

'By descent from the sitter until sold at Sothebys, London, 15th July 1953 lot 95 ...'

1953 was the date of the sale of the contents of Ashburnham Place so clearly not the Ashton Court portrait.

Willem Wising 1656-1687 arrived from The Hague in 1676. He became an assistant in Lely's studio and remained there after Lely's death in 1680 after which he was employed in completing Lely's works.

A portrait in Arundel Castle gives weight to the 1947 sale catalogue assertion that lot 1040 was of the Lely School.



Image: FAM volunteer

Here the portrait is of Jane Bickerton, second wife of the 6th Duke of Norfolk, 1677. Note that the composition, size and posture exactly match that of the Ashton Court portrait the only difference being the head of the sitter.

Who was Jane Ashburnham and how was she connected to Ashton Court?

Jane Ashburnham (1604-1672) was the daughter of John 1st Lord Boteler [Butler] of Bramfield and Elizabeth Villiers. Jane married first James Ley first Earl of Marlborough, Lord High Treasurer of England, who died 1629. He left her '*a young, beautiful & rich widow*'. Her second marriage was to William Ashburnham, whose portrait also hung in the Great Hall at Ashton Court and was sold in the 1947 sale as lot 1042.

Copies have been found of the William Ashburnham portrait but the one from Ashton Court is yet to be discovered.