

Lot 1032. Portrait of Sir John Smyth, Bart., married Anne Pym. 48 in. x 40 in.



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This portrait was one of those purchased by Bristol Museums at 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 of John Smyth, 3rd Baronet, is a pendant (i.e. one of 2 pictures designed to be hung together as a pair) to the portrait of Ann Pym, his wife, which is also owned by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and purchased in the 1947 sale.

It is part of the City of Bristol Collection and is currently (2022) in Store.

At the time of Hector Paterson's photographic images of the interior of Ashton Court in the late 1920s it was hung in the Great Hall where it can be seen above the door to the Inner Hall.



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

John Smyth was born on the 24th of July 1699 and was baptised at Long Ashton on the 7th of August the same year. He was the son of John Smyth (1659-1726) 2nd Baronet, and Elizabeth (nee Astry 1669-1715).

John was educated at Oxford and was held in high regard and affection by his younger sister, Florence, who wrote to him c1719 after a visit to Oxford:

**'You were so kind to desire you might hear how we got home, which I take the first opportunity to let you know that we go very well to Ashton. The place I must needs tell you seems very dismal after being in so much good company. The remainder of our journey after we left you we [sic] was very melancholy'.*

John Smyth married Ann Pym on the 26th of November 1728 at St. Benet's, Paul's Wharf, City of London. Ann was a 'commoner' and so possibly brought no fortune to the house. There were no children of this marriage and Ann died young in 1733.

After his first wife died he married Hester (or Esther) Luton on the 24th of April 1740 at Long Ashton. Similarly to his first wife it is likely that Hester did not bring a fortune to Ashton court. This marriage was also childless and John died shortly after in 1741.

Sir John Smyth was profligate and spent much of the family fortune. In this portrait, painted c1720, he is a young man, and wears a fashionable wig known as a campaign or hunting wig.

Evidence of John's profligacy comes from the records of Jarrit Smith, initially his friend and solicitor, and later the second husband of his sister Florence. After John Smyth died in 1741 Jarrit, in settlement of his claim for debts of between £20000 and £30,000 he obtained the entire mansion and park of Ashton Court.

After John's death in 1741, because his 2 younger brothers and four elder sisters had pre-deceased him, Ashton Court passed to John's surviving younger sister Florence and then to her descendants.

Such was her regard for her brother that in 1742 she commissioned an impressive silver salver (Lot 1290) complete with engraved coat of arms in his recognition and honour.

References

*Abstract of Toland, L. (2017). Late-Adolescent English Gentry Siblings and Leave-Taking in the Early Eighteenth Century. In: Bailey, M., Barclay, K. (eds) *Emotion, Ritual and Power in Europe, 1200–1920*. Palgrave Studies in the History of Emotions. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44185-6_4 (Abstract accessed 2022)

* <https://www.familysearch.org/>