

Two Ladies of the Lake Family

A painting by Sir Peter Lely and is known to have been at Ashton Court until 1930.



Image: Sir Peter Lely, c1660, © Tate. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lely-two-ladies-of-the-lake-family-t00058>

In the 1901 Inventory it was in the South Corridor listed as “Group portrait – May Lake, Lady Chandos & Lady Lake”.

In the 1915 inventory it was in the Upper Corridor as “Group portrait – May Lake, Lady Chandos & Lady Lake. Lely.”

In 1930 Esme Smyth sold this painting to Messrs. Duits. At the same time she donated the portraits of Dame Emily Smyth and Sir Greville Smyth to the Bristol Art Gallery.

A letter from Frost & Reed, fine art dealers of Bristol, to Esme Smyth dated April 1934, details pictures sold to Mr Denham (possibly a representative of Duits) for £300 in 1930. Included with this picture called ‘Portrait of two ladies’ by Lily [sic] were ‘Two pictures by Stocks (found in attics) and a Dutch sea picture.

Distant relatives, the Smyth-Pigotts, who had a similar collection of portraits, also disposed of some of theirs when times were hard:

‘As a group, the portraits have considerable historical interest. Artistically, they vary in quality. The best include works by Thomas Gainsborough, John Hayls, Thomas Hill, William Hoare, William

*Hobday and Emmeline Deane. Others are merely copies of originals sold in 1911 when times were bad for landowners'. **

The Tate Gallery acquired the picture in 1955 and details its ownership history as follows:

'...; probably 1st Duke of Chandos by 1725 ('Sr. Lanc. Lake of Cannon's Lady, and Lady Essex check') and apparently sold Cock, 6-8 May 1747 (112, as Lady Drax, and Mrs. Francklin playing on a guitar); ...; Sir John Hugh Smyth, Ashton Court, near Bristol, died 1849 (as A portrait of the Ladies Lake); Sir John Henry Greville Smyth, 1885 (as Portrait of Lady Lake and Mary Lake Lady Chandos, seated in a landscape); Hon. Mrs. Esme Smyth by whom sold to Messrs. Duits, 1930; Leggatt Bros; private collection; Leggatt Bros, from whom purchased by Tate.'

Who were Messrs. Duits?

Messrs. Duits were a London Art Gallery dealing in old Master paintings. The firm started in Dordrecht in 1836 before moving to Amsterdam in 1875. In 1920 Charles Duits opened a gallery in London in partnership with his brother and son. The London gallery closed in 1985. Their archives are held at the Getty Research Institute

http://primo.getty.edu/GRI:GETTY_ALMA21126816740001551

Who were Lady Chandos and Lady Lake and how were they connected to Ashton Court?

The two ladies in this portrait dated to c1660 cannot be identified firmly.

One of the ladies could be Essex Lake born in 1639. She was the daughter of Sir Lancelot Lake and his wife Frances Cheek. Essex Lake later became Lady Drax.

The Duke of Chandos took over Sir Lancelot Lake's estate in 1713. The Duke of Chandos was married to Mary Lake, sister of Sir Lancelot.

There is no obvious connection to Ashton Court.

However, John Hugh Smyth (1734-1802) was a cultured man and interested in the arts. It is possible he may have acquired the portrait to hang in the Long Gallery. The Tate provenance is confusing as Sir John Hugh Smyth died in 1802 and it was his nephew Sir John Smyth who died in 1849.

Anton in his book* elaborates:

'The Library and the Picture Gallery at Ashton Court were slowly being transformed by the touch of a connoisseur, and the transition began from a barn-like bleakness of the 1740s inventories to a repository of Art and Culture.'

References

*The Last Smyths of Ashton Court. Part 3, 1900-1946 by Anton Bantock.

* The Later Smyths of Ashton Court: from their letter 1741-1802 by Anton Bantock.

*1901 Inventory (Bristol Archives 41648/P 1/71)

*1915 Inventory (Bristol Archives 41648/P 1/72)

*1947 Sale Catalogue (Bristol Archives 44440/1)

*Portraits of the Smyth-Pigott Family: a catalogue of the oil paintings and busts in Woodspring Museum, Weston-super-Mare.