

Lot 926 Portrait of the Lady Helena Gorges, Mother of Dame Elizabeth Smyth, in scarlet and ermine dress. 72 in. x 48 in. Elizabethan Period.



Image: Attribution Robert Peake the elder, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

This magnificent portrait of Helena of Snakenborg, Marchioness of Northampton, in robes for the coronation of James I (James VI of Scotland), was painted in 1603 by Robert Peake the Elder (1551-1635).

It has a caption in the top left:

Inscriptions	Caption recto top left in gilt paint: <i>HELENA, RELICT OF WILL^M PARR MARQUIS OF NORTHAMPTON, AND WIFE TO SIR THO^S GORGE OF LONGFORD NEAR SALISBURY, DAUGHTER OF WAFANCUS KNACENBURG OF SWEDEN. SHE WAS CHIFE MOURNER AT THE FUNERAL OF QUEEN ELIZABETH APRIL 28, 1603.</i>
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In the 1901 Inventory it was listed as:

'Large portrait – Helen – Wife of Sir T. Gorges'.

The items in the 1901 Inventory are listed by their room location. This portrait and 2 other large portraits and an additional 23 other portraits were listed in a room described as *'Lavatory'*. It is not possible to know for sure which room this was. In the 1915 inventory it is still hung in the Lavatory and is described as *'Portrait of Lady Northampton'*.

Anton Bantock reported that the portrait had originally been in the Long Gallery and had been re-sited by Emily Smyth. In the 1947 sale catalogue it is listed as being in The Gallery.

However in the images taken by Hector Paterson (c1927) it is clearly visible in the Great Hall above and to the left of the west front entrance doorway.



Image: Mb6063©Bristol Culture

In the 1947 auction sale it was purchased by Tom Cottrell-Dormer for £130 and is now at Rousham House.

The Western Daily Press of the 11th of June reported:

'Highest price yesterday, when over 150 pictures were sold, was realised by a portrait of the Lady Helena Gorges, mother of Dame Elizabeth Smyth, in scarlet and ermine dress. This cost the successful bidder £130'.

A second similar portrait of Helena was sold at the auction for further details see Lot 496.



Image: courtesy of Charles Cottrell-Dormer, photography Francis Hamel-Cooke

Who was Helen of Snakenborg and how was she connected to Ashton Court?

Briefly, she was born in Sweden in 1548 or 9. Her first marriage was to William Parr, Marquess of Northampton. She was chief mourner at the funeral of Elizabeth I. After William died she married Thomas Gorges. Helena and Thomas's eldest daughter was Elizabeth Gorges (1578-1659). Elizabeth's first marriage was to Sir Hugh Smyth and her second marriage was to Ferdinando Gorges. Helena died in 1635 and was buried in Salisbury Cathedral.