

Intriguing British Pictures



Margaret Sarah Carpenter (1793-1872) *Portrait of a Lady*

Including a group of remarkable literary portraits

6th - 17th Feb 2018

at 54 Shepherd Market, Mayfair, London W1J 7QX

fine Sim *art*

A group of remarkable literary portraits

“An enviable talent for making striking discoveries”

Huon Mallalieu on Sim Fine Art in The Times.

In the past ten years, Sim Fine Art has established a reputation for making notable discoveries across a range of periods and styles.

The past few years have been a particularly fertile period, with the discovery of important pictures resulting in sales to major international institutions such as the Tate, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the National Portrait Gallery among scores of other museums and private collections.

The rich seam continues, with the recent revelation of a new and previously unknown portrait of George Eliot, painted just before she embarked on her literary career, when she was known as plain Mary Ann Evans. The acceptance of this portrait by two of her most recent biographers – and the surprising story behind its creation – has been hugely exciting. The 200th anniversary of her birth next year will be commemorated by Cambridge University Press with a collected edition of her work – and our picture will be the cover illustration.

The picture will be exhibited for the first time in Shepherd Market, together with other notable literary discoveries spanning two centuries.

Andrew Sim



Mary Ann Evans a.k.a George Eliot (1819-80) Aged 26

c.1845 Attributed to **George Barker jnr (1818-83)**

Chalk pastel



James Pope-Hennessy
Oil on canvas

A Life in the Fast Lane

Michael Bloch on High Society
biographer James Pope-Hennessy



James Pope-Hennessy was born in London on 20 November 1916, younger son of Richard Pope-Hennessy, an army officer, and his wife Dame Una, a formidable literary bluestocking. His mother was the chief influence in his life, instilling in him a fervent Roman Catholicism and a passion for writing. Another role model was his long-dead paternal grandfather Sir John Pope-Hennessy, an Irish adventurer who had impressed Trollope, who fictionalised him as ‘Phineas Finn’, and Disraeli, who launched him on a career as a colonial governor; James sought to emulate this quixotic ancestor, of whom he wrote a biography, *Verandah* (1964).

He was educated at Downside and Balliol, neither of which he enjoyed; he left Oxford without taking a degree, and worked for a publisher in London. Possessing much charm, brilliant conversation and exotic good looks (partly inherited from a Malay grandmother), he attracted many admirers of both sexes. While he delighted women and enjoyed their company, he was thoroughly gay by nature: his lovers included men of all classes and ages, including the writer Harold Nicolson,

the spy Guy Burgess, the diarist James Lees-Milne, and much 'rough trade'.

On the outbreak of war in 1939 Pope-Hennessy was serving as ADC to the Governor of Trinidad, a job which confirmed his jaundiced view of British colonialism. He later worked in military intelligence, in which capacity he spent two years in Washington. Both these jobs led to entertaining books – *West Indian Summer* (1943) and *America is an Atmosphere* (1947).

After the war, thanks to his friendship with Lady Crewe, one of many grand ladies who doted on him, he wrote biographies of her father-in-law, the poet-politician Monckton Milnes, and her husband, the statesman Lord Crewe, works which established his literary reputation. Thanks to the influence of another besotted admirer, the royal private secretary Sir Alan Lascelles, he was then commissioned to write the official biography of Queen Mary. Appearing in 1959, this was his crowning literary achievement – a masterly evocation of lost worlds, it painted a portrait which was respectful and affectionate while subtly making the reader aware that the subject was slightly ridiculous.

Pope-Hennessy was a great traveller, writing books about many of the places he visited, from Provence to Hong Kong. Working on a biography of Trollope in the 1960s he moved to Ireland to avoid income tax, settling in Banagher

where Trollope had lived, and taking Irish citizenship. Two commissions for which he was offered large advances, biographies of Noel Coward and the Duke of Windsor, lured him back to London in the 1970s.

With the onset of middle age alcoholism took its toll. He lost his looks and his personality deteriorated. He ran through a substantial inheritance, and sponged off long-suffering friends. Although he had a steady partner in the shape of Len Adams, an ex-paratrooper from Sheffield picked up on the tube in 1948, he continued to lead a promiscuous and rackety gay sex life, which led to his death at his flat in Ladbroke Grove on 25 January 1974 at the hands of hustlers who were out to rob him.

Michael Bloch, December 2017

Michael Bloch is a freelance historian and writer. He read Law at St. John's College, Cambridge, before being called to the Bar. He later worked with Suzanne Blum, the French lawyer of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and throughout this period had privileged access to the Windsor files in Paris. He has subsequently written six books on the couple, and edited Wallis and Edward: Letters 1931-1937.

Michael edited a number of volumes of the diaries of James Lees-Milne, and was the co-producer of a play based on those diaries, called Ancestral Voices. His biography of Ribbentrop was chosen by Hugh Trevor-Roper as his Book of the Year in the Sunday Telegraph, and he has since written biographies of Wallis Simpson, Frederick Matthias Alexander, and the definitive biography of James Lees-Milne.

A New Perspective on the young George Eliot

*The story of a remarkable literary discovery
by Andrew Sim*

In February last year, at a small general sale in the South Midlands, my attention was caught by a chalk pastel portrait of a young woman. From the dress and hairstyle, it appeared to date from the 1840s – currently an undervalued period for portraiture, stuck as it is between Lawrence and the great Victorian portraitists. The style was reminiscent of George Richmond, the best-known English portraitist of the period.

On closer inspection, I fully took in the face and posture of the woman depicted. The face, in particular, gripped me – a very striking physiognomy. Not pretty but captivating and intelligent-looking, quite unlike the standard female portraits of the time, which can be winsome and simperingly bland. The figure depicted was a woman in her twenties, plainly and demurely dressed, with slightly disordered hair, perched on the edge of a sofa,

Then, with a flash of facial recognition, I said to myself: ‘that’s George Eliot’.

Scepticism fighting with optimism, I checked Eliot’s dates on my phone. She was born in 1819 and this picture dated from the 1840s, and was thus consistent with the age of the woman depicted. How many gentrified Englishwomen of that era had a face like that? Could it really be her?

A quick check of the well-known portraits of Eliot revealed that it was strikingly like the only known photograph of her, which dates from the mid-1850s, which shows the novelist – coming up to 40 years of age - in semi-profile, smiling and animated. The portrait was also virtually identical to an unflattering but physically accurate profile drawing, known to have been traced from Eliot’s shadow by her close friend, Sara Hennell, in 1847.

But this putative new painted portrait of a young Mary Ann Evans/



Mary Ann Evans a.k.a George Eliot (1819-80) Aged 26
c.1845 Attributed to **George Barker jnr (1818-83)**

Chalk pastel

George Eliot was also patently unlike some of the well-known painted depictions that decorate Eliot's novels, which tend to be either prettified (Francois D'Albert Durade's soft focus portrait of 1849 even depicts her with blonde hair) or only partially honest – like Frederick Burton's famous portrait of Eliot in maturity, which is accurate, so far as it goes, but deliberately avoids Eliot's unflattering profile by depicting her face on.

The animation and vitality of this new portrait indicated, furthermore, that it had been drawn by someone sympathetic, even attracted to, his or her subject. But, given Eliot's youth and the comparatively isolated nature of her life at the time of its production, who could have done it?



The portrait in front of me was clearly not by an amateur, but could it really be by George Richmond, the pre-eminent portraitist on paper of his generation, whose clientele included both the gentry and the artistic and cultural elite (Darwin, Charlotte Bronte, Mrs Gaskell)? The outstanding finesse of Richmond's work and the obscurity of George Eliot's early life, as Mary Ann Evans, the daughter of a self-made businessman from Nuneaton, would seem to count against it.

But, intriguingly, Richmond had depicted a significant person in Eliot's early life – Charles Christian Hennell – the free-thinking Unitarian author of *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* (1838), which influenced Eliot's turn away from her Christian faith. In 1843, Eliot was a bridesmaid in his wedding to Rufa Brabant in London.

Hennell's sister, Sara, was an intimate friend of Mary Ann Evans (Eliot) at precisely the period this portrait was painted in 1839-1840, and it is known that Mary Ann/Eliot saw and approved of Richmond's likeness. Intriguingly, Richmond made a posthumous sketch of the novelist in old age, done from memory, so he must have met her at some point (*1). It seems highly unlikely that an artist as professionally busy as Richmond would have made an informal likeness such as the present portrait, without recording it.

The only portraits of Mary Ann Evans/Eliot of this period were produced by Charles Hennell's sister, Sara, her closest friend. She was by no means a professional artist, but interestingly, her aforementioned profile picture, traced from a shadow, does provide the most reliable guide to Eliot's true features – and the most telling connection to the present portrait.

In the mid-1840s, however, Eliot did come into close personal contact with a professional artist, a young man whose identity was, until recently, unknown. This young man, described variously as an artist and 'picture restorer', was employed on the restoration of pictures at a nearby country house, Baginton, belonging to a notable art collector called William Davenport-Bromley. Eliot's half-sister, Fanny Houghton (whose husband had dealings with the Davenport-Bromleys), arranged an introduction. A three-day visit was arranged, during which time the pair fell for one another, the young man proposing marriage to the initially besotted Mary Ann.

Away from the intensity of those days, the unsuitability of the match and second thoughts on the part of Eliot herself, meant that nothing

came of the affair, except perhaps, enticingly, this one surviving record, which is not mentioned in surviving correspondence.

Recent research (*2) has indicated that the young artist employed to restore pictures at Baginton in 1845 was the 26 year old George Barker (1818-83). Barker is recorded as an artist and connoisseur of old pictures in local directories from 1833 onwards and the age and profile fit what is known about the artist from Eliot's surviving letters and journals.

As a competent professional artist and restorer, used to adapting himself to a variety of artistic styles, it is perfectly plausible that at some point during their brief but intense three day courtship, a likeness would have been taken – and the manner and style of Richmond's portraiture would have been the beau ideal form.

the artist was clearly taken with the young woman in front of him

What is certain is that the artist was clearly taken with the young woman in front of him, and presented her as she was: not a beauty but a striking, intelligent-looking young woman, poised on the edge of a sofa, as if about to launch herself.

One further detail, however, emerged when the portrait was removed from its old mount for cleaning. The mount had covered a considerable area of the picture's original surface, namely the area of the sofa behind where the young woman sits. Lying on the back of this sofa were the pages of an open book.

At one point in the picture's life, presumably when the sitter's identity had become lost, this was thought to have been a superfluous and distracting detail, but to the artist, and the viewing public today, it provides a revealing insight into the character and occupations of

a bookish young woman on the cusp of her life as one of Britain's greatest writers.

Since its discovery, our portrait has been accepted by noted Eliot scholars, including the leading authority, Eliot's biographer, Professor Nancy Henry and her most recent biographer, Professor Kathryn Hughes.

Significantly, our portrait has also been chosen to illustrate the prestigious and authoritative Cambridge University Press' forthcoming 200th anniversary edition of George Eliot's collected works, which is due out in 2019 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of her birth in 1819.

*Andrew Sim, Sim Fine Art
January 2018*

1 * Late in his career, in 1881, George Richmond did produce a hurried sketch of the recently deceased George Eliot. It is little more than a caricature, exaggerating what could be seen as the witch-like quality of her profile.

Metropolitan Museum, New York <http://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/420456>

2* <http://www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/directory-of-british-picture-restorers/british-picture-restorers-1600-1950-b.php>

Intriguingly, Barker can most likely be identified as the 'desperately smitten' young artist who proposed marriage to the writer Mary Ann Evans, later known as George Eliot, when staying at Baginton, near Coventry, in spring 1845: 'We liked his letters to her very much – simple, earnest, unstudied', one of her Coventry friends wrote, adding, 'the only objections seemed to be that his profession – a picture-restorer – is not lucrative or over-honourable' (Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters*, vol.1, 1954, pp.183-4; see also Jacob Simon, 'Desperately smitten', *Times Literary Supplement*, no.5531, 3 April 2009, p.15).

A Romantic Poet Re-discovered

Dr Andrew Keanie on a discovery that sheds new light on neglected genius, Hartley Coleridge.

Dr Keanie is a lecturer in English at Ulster University and an expert on the Romantics. He is the author of Hartley Coleridge: A Reassessment of his Life and Work, as well as books on Samuel Taylor Coleridge, De Quincey, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron and Shelley.



Hartley Coleridge (1796-1849), the eldest son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was four years younger than Percy Bysshe Shelley and a year younger than John Keats. Like them he was a genius. Unlike them, however, he would never be recognised as among the most important poets of the English Romantic era.

The neglect is odd. After the publication of his *Poems, Songs and Sonnets* (1833) Hartley Coleridge was recognised – in the *Quarterly Review*, for example – as the most promising poet of his time, and toward the end of the nineteenth century it would be said that ‘after Shakespeare our sweetest English sonneteer is Hartley Coleridge’ (Samuel Waddington, *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century*, 1891).

There is a portrait of Hartley at the age of ten done by Sir David Wilkie. It is the picture of a sweet, though rather sad and vulnerable, child looking decidedly unlikely to grow into the sort of crude, insistent and passionate creature one needs to be to get on in the world. There is also a portrait of Hartley in middle age, by William Bowness, showing a white-haired apparition too dreamy and quizzical to be of any consequence.

*Together we must dwell, my dream and I, –
Unknown must live, and unlamented die...*

Having thus been projected as the lost boy or the lost man-child, Hartley Coleridge has become known (if known at all) as something of an eccentric Lakeland recluse, a scholar gypsy

fading into alcoholism, lingering immaturity and obscurity, despite having been so full of potential.

*For sweet is hope's wild warbled air,
But oh! its echo is despair.*

Some critics have wondered why Hartley did not become as great as his father. They have missed the point. While some children of famous fathers are destroyed, and others empowered, Hartley is both. The paradox may be part of what is hard to pin down about Hartley in this recently-discovered picture by John Harden (1772-1847), who was born in Ireland but died in Ambleside. Hartley expressed his fondness and admiration for Harden in *Blackwood's Magazine* ('had he [Harden] not been too happy to wish for greatness [he] would have been a great painter'), seeming to recognise something of himself in his portraitist: great ability unaccompanied by great renown.

Following a brilliant undergraduate career at Merton College, Oxford, Hartley had been awarded a probationary Fellowship at Oriel College, but drink was his undoing and the Fellowship was withdrawn from him in 1820, and he never got over the shame of the whole business for the rest of his life. Or so goes the story of ruin and waste as told by his brother, Derwent Coleridge, in the memoir that accompanied the collected edition of Hartley's poems. Derwent's narrative became the preconceived understanding of Hartley Coleridge as a failure,

albeit a charming failure. For the next two centuries Hartley Coleridge studies would continue to be characterised by tenured academics' expressions of interest, but typically in the context of their moralising condescension.

It is a mystery where John Harden's drawing of Hartley has been all these years. But it is liberating to have it on view now. It shows neither a lost boy nor a lost man-child, but instead a rather handsome and distinguished young man who, crucially, has also something contemplative and captivating about him. Almost two centuries after the supposedly defining Oriel College disaster, we now have a new visual image of the breathing and blooming man in his prime, at ease in the company of a good friend, and setting himself up as a Poet. It is a likeness that could send readers back to his work re-sensitized.

*Whither is gone the wisdom and the power
That ancient sages scatter'd with the notes
Of thought-suggesting lyres? The music floats
In the void air; e'en at this breathing hour,
In every cell and every blooming bower
The sweetness of old lays is hovering still...*



Louis-Pierre Spindler (1800-89) Elizabeth Gaskell

This recently discovered portrait of the celebrated Victorian novelist, Elizabeth Gaskell, dates from the 1850s, some time after George Richmond's portrait of 1851 but before the matronly photographs of 1860. The artist is the Frenchman, Louis-Pierre Spindler, who although born in Basel and educated in Paris, worked as a portrait painter in the Hulme district of Manchester in the 1840s and 50s, exhibiting at the Royal Manchester Institution and elsewhere. Although the identification of the sitter as Mrs Gaskell and the sitter's status as a writer, with quill pen poised, are clear, there is, as yet, no documentary evidence to confirm that the novelist ever sat for the Frenchman, although its specificity would suggest that she had.

Elizabeth Gaskell
Oil on stamped canvas, signed

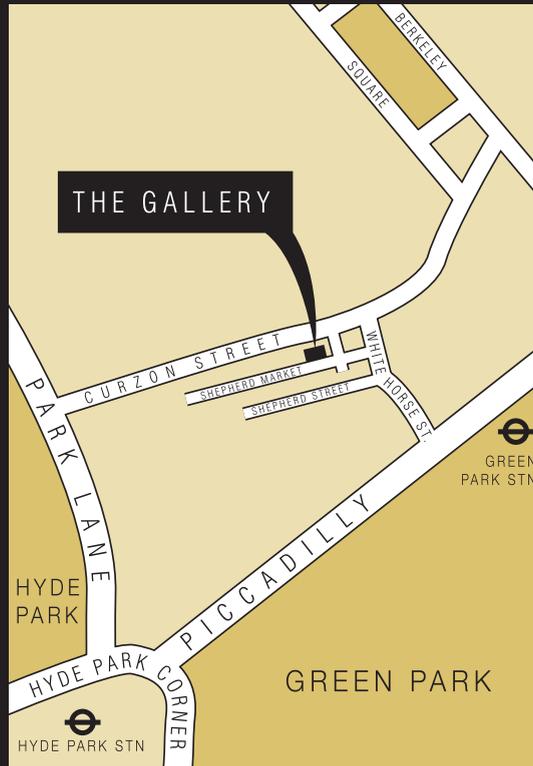
Louis Béroud (1852-1930)

Palais des Machines at the 1889 Paris Expo

Louis Béroud was best known for his paintings of the interiors of French museums and galleries and the *beau monde* that inhabited them – and achieved a curious niche in art history as the man who discovered the notorious theft of the Mona Lisa from the Louvre in 1904 (he was there to paint a copy). In this characteristic painting, Béroud captures the then unprecedented scale of the interior of the *Palais des Machines* at the *Paris Exposition Universelle* in 1889 with the positioning of a single figure in the foreground, staring down from a balcony to the gallery floor below.



Interior of the Palais des Machines, Paris Expo' 1889
Oil on board



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