

A guide to Compton Verney's Collection of  
**British Portraits**



Compton  
Verney

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The British collection at Compton Verney features royal and noble sitters from the Tudor (1485-1603), Stuart (1603-1714) and Georgian (1714-1837) eras. It includes portraits of familiar Tudor figures such as King Henry VIII, his children Edward VI and Elizabeth I, and portraits from what is often termed the 'Golden Age' of British painting. These are decades that witnessed the British work of emigré artists such as Canaletto and Liotard and the emergence of home-grown British masters such as Reynolds and Beechey.

**1** Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (1561/2-1636), Flemish: *A Boy Aged Two*



Oil on panel, inscribed and dated *Aetatis suae 2 / Anº 1608*. 114.3 x 85.7cm

The child in this portrait wears a bodice and skirt over a farthingale frame. This was the fashion for dressing boys until they were 'breeched' (dressed in breeches or trousers) at the age of five or six. In his left hand he holds a bunch of flowers and a string attached to a robin. The flowers are pansies and signified innocence and transience, whilst birds are thought to symbolise the human soul flying away at the moment of death.

**2** Jacopo da Trezzo (about 1514-89), Italian: *Queen Mary Tudor*



Silver, 1554. Diam: 6.8cm

**After Jacopo da Trezzo:** *King Philip II of Spain*.



Silver electrotype, 1800s. Diam: 6.8cm

Jacopo da Trezzo was a Milanese goldsmith who specialised in elaborately-worked, cast medals, and worked for King Philip II of Spain. Queen Mary I of England reigned from 1553 until 1558, and she and Philip were married in 1554. The reverse of the Mary I medal suggests that England is a peaceful country under her rule, showing the figure of Peace burning armour and banishing storm clouds. This medal is listed in the inventory of the Chigi family of Rome, dated 22 March 1674.

### 3 Attributed to Daniel Marot, English: *Table*

Wood and marble, about 1690.

H: 80cm



This unusual table is believed to have been designed by the French-born Huguenot architect and designer, Daniel Marot. It was probably commissioned by Queen Mary II for the Water Gallery at Hampton Court Palace and made by the royal cabinetmaker, William Farnborough. It served as a film prop in the studio of the great Hollywood film director Cecil B. DeMille in the 1930s and was recently restored to its original white, gold and blue decorative scheme.

### 4 Attributed to Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (1561/2-1636), Flemish: *Frances Howard, Duchess of Richmond and Lennox (1578-1639)*

Oil on panel, about 1621.

57.5 x 44.5cm



Frances Howard's third husband, the Duke of Lennox (1574-1624), was created the first Duke of Richmond and Lennox in 1623, earning her the nickname of 'Double Duchess'. She is portrayed wearing an eye-catching, low-cut bodice embroidered in silk and gold threads, and a pendant ornament of a heart and half-moon associated with the Lennox family.

### 5 Master of the Countess of Warwick (active about 1567-69), English: *Sir Thomas Knyvet*

Oil on panel, about 1569.

99.1 x 71.7cm

Thomas Knyvet (about 1539-1617) was the son of a wealthy family from Norfolk. His paternal grandmother, Jane Knyvet, was the only surviving daughter of Sir John Bouchier, a descendant of King Edward III and one of King Henry VIII's most trusted courtiers. Thomas Knyvet was knighted by Queen Elizabeth I in 1578 and in the following year he was appointed High Sheriff of Norfolk. He married the daughter of Sir Thomas Parry, Master of the Court of Wards and Liveries and Treasurer of the Household to Queen Elizabeth. He wears a white, slashed doublet and double ruffs edged with gold, and carries an elaborate sword with a green and gold sash and a matching dagger at his back.



## 6 English School: *Queen Elizabeth I*

Oil on panel,  
about 1590.  
114 x 88cm



In this portrait, painted late in her reign, Elizabeth is presented as an ageless symbol of the nation, immersed in jewels and rich costume. Tudor portraiture, in contrast to the painting of the Italian Renaissance, rarely employed realism and perspective as many Protestants were concerned that such images mimicked God's work and were the cause of idolatry. Instead, artists relied on a rich tapestry of signs and symbols which were designed to be 'read' by the viewer. Here, Elizabeth wears an open-worked crown representing her sovereignty, and beneath it is the great central diamond known as the 'Mirror of Portugal'. On her bodice is a jewel in the form of a moon, evoking Diana, goddess of the hunt and of chastity.

## 7 Follower of Hans Holbein the Younger (about 1497- 1543), German: *Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VI*

Oil on panel, about 1542.  
53 x 41.5cm



Prince Edward, the only son of Henry VIII and his third wife Jane Seymour, was born at Hampton Court Palace, London, in October 1537. His mother died within twelve

days of his birth and he was given a separate household from the age of two. This portrait was painted when he was five and depicts him as a small but powerful figure, wearing a red doublet with gold thread and a black feathered cap.

## 8 Attributed to William Scrots (active 1537-53), Flemish: *King Edward VI*

Oil on panel, about  
1550. 58 x 68cm



Edward VI became King in 1547 at the age of nine and ruled for six years until his death in 1553. This important profile portrait includes both the red and white rose, emblems of the Houses of Lancaster and York respectively, which were the two dynasties united by Edward's grandfather, Henry VII (1457-1509) in 1485. Edward is shown with a group of heliotropic plants that, instead of turning toward the sun, face the young King. Rich in symbolism, they include (from left to right): *calendula officinalis* (Pot Marigold), known as the herb of the sun; *dianthus caryophyllus* (Clove Pink), associated with the Roman god Jupiter; *viola tricolor* (Heartsease), a symbol of thought and remembrance; and tall blue wild chicory, a plant that only flowers in sunlight. The inscription beneath, in both Italian and Latin, reiterates the power of the King as mightier than the sun and establishes him as a 'second Jupiter' – a worthy successor to his father, Henry VIII.

**9** After Hans Holbein the Younger (about 1497-1543), German: *King Henry VIII*



Oil on panel, about 1560.  
98.2 x 72.5cm

This portrait is a version of the last official portrait painted of Henry VIII (reigned 1509-47). The King employed court painters to fulfil the many demands for his likeness and used these images as a propaganda tool to inspire loyalty and devotion in his subjects. Holbein's original painting was copied many times, and the demand for images of Henry VIII lasted well beyond his reign. This version dates from the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (reigned 1558-1603) and would have been designed to assert the legitimacy of the Protestant succession.

**10** Sir William Beechey R.A. (1753-1839) British: *Mirza Abu'l Hassan Khan*



Oil on canvas,  
1809-10. 144.2 x 137.8cm

Mirza Abu'l Hassan Khan was sent to the court of King George III in 1809 by the Shah of Persia, to help negotiate a treaty of alliance between Great Britain and Persia (Iran). He became a figure of fascination, and many parties were held in his honour. By this time Beechey was known as one of the foremost portrait painters of his day and painted two recorded portraits of this sitter. In his diplomatic diary Abu'l Hassan

describes visiting Beechey's house in Harley Street and his joy at meeting the artist's children. On arrival back in Persia in 1811, he was given the honorary title of Khan, in recognition of the role he had played in the treaty negotiations.

**11** Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-92), English: *Mrs Baldwin in Eastern Dress*



Oil on canvas, 1782.  
141 x 110cm

Mrs Jane Baldwin (1763-1839) was the daughter of William Maltass, a merchant who traded with the East through the Levant company. She was born in Smyrna, Turkey in June 1763 and married George Baldwin who became British Consul-General in Egypt. She was a celebrated beauty and Sir Joshua Reynolds paints her in a Persian-derived costume, consistent with the fashion for depicting sitters in fancy dress. Mrs Baldwin wore this costume on several occasions, including a ball in London given by the King, and was known as the 'pretty Greek'.

## 12 A pair of George II Library Armchairs, 1755

Mahogany with needlework covers. H: 104.7cm



The arched backs of these library chairs are decorated with gros and petit-point needlework scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. One is decorated with the story of Vertumnus and Pomona from Book XIV, and the other with the story of Meleager and Atalanta from Book VIII. This has a scene of a boar hunt on the seat.

The chairs were originally at Compton Verney and owned by the Willoughby de Broke family, and are visible in images of the Adam Hall from *Country Life* in 1913. Like much of the other furniture, they were sold in the early 1920s when the family moved out of the estate.

## 13 Samuel Cooper (1608-1672), English: Oliver Cromwell

Watercolour on vellum, signed and dated SC/1657. H: 10.4cm



Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) was one of the most controversial figures in British history. A radical puritan, he established a professional army known as the 'New Model Army'. When civil war broke out between King Charles I and Parliament in 1642, Cromwell was instrumental in bringing Charles I to trial and

execution, and making England a republic. Samuel Cooper was one of the most important and influential miniaturists of his day. Painted in 1657, this uncompromisingly honest portrait of Cromwell, wearing simple armour, has been referred to as 'one of the most penetrating studies of a public figure ever produced'. It is believed that Cromwell's comment urging the artist to paint him 'pimples, warts and everything as you see me' related to this portrait.

## 14 Lemuel Francis Abbott (1760-1802): Horatio, Admiral Nelson, KB

Oil on canvas, 1797. 76.2 x 63.5cm



Painted shortly after Nelson lost his arm in a battle at Santa Cruz, Tenerife, this portrait was commissioned by his captain, William Locker while Nelson was convalescing at Locker's home in Greenwich.

## 15 Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702-89), Swiss: Lady Fawkener

Pastel on vellum, about 1754. 73.6 x 58.8cm



The sitter is Harriet Churchill, the wife of Sir Everard Fawkener (1694-1758), English ambassador to Constantinople (now Istanbul) from 1737 to 1746. Fawkener and the Swiss pastel painter had become acquainted in the Turkish capital,

where the artist produced portraits for members of the British colony. In the mid-1750s the two met again in London, where this delicate portrait is thought to have been produced.

**16** After a bust by Gianlorenzo Bernini, English: *King Charles I*

Lead, about 1675.  
H: 66cm



This important piece is one of only three versions known to be in existence, taken from a marble bust by Gianlorenzo Bernini which was destroyed in the Whitehall Palace fire of 1698. Although the sculptor of this bust is undetermined, one suggested possibility is John Bushnell (1636-1701). Bushnell trained in Italy before returning to England in 1668/69, and in 1671 created a statue of Charles I in Purbeck stone, which is also thought to be based on Bernini's bust.

**17** Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as Canaletto (1697-1768), Italian: *The Interior of the Rotunda Ranelagh.*

Oil on canvas, 1751.  
70.5 x 96cm



The popularity of Canaletto's view paintings among English grand tourists and patrons led him to leave Venice for London in 1746. For a period of almost ten years the

buildings, landmarks and fashionable public spaces of Britain became his principal subject.

Ranelagh Gardens, a public pleasure garden situated in Chelsea (then outside London) opened in 1742 to great acclaim. The rococo rotunda, designed by William Jones (d. 1757), formed the centrepiece to the gardens and played host to the nine-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91) in 1765. This is one of two interior views of the rotunda painted by Canaletto, the other being in the National Gallery in London.

**18** Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as Canaletto (1697-1768), Italian: *The Grand Walk, Vauxhall Gardens*

Oil on canvas,  
about 1751. 70 x 96cm



Vauxhall Gardens was one of the most fashionable venues for public entertainment in London. Located in Kennington on the south bank of the River Thames and known as New Spring Gardens from its opening around 1660 until 1785, Vauxhall Gardens became a venue for musical performances, including the *Music for the Royal Fireworks* by George Frederick Handel (1685-1759) which attracted an audience of over 12,000 when first performed here in 1749.



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