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HOLBEIN At the Royal Court



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Pennethorne Gallery

Early Patrons, 1526–28

Holbein's first patrons in England included Sir Thomas More, William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Sir Henry Guildford, Comptroller of the Household.

These men were prominent at court and close to Henry VIII. Each was a correspondent of Erasmus, who had provided Holbein's initial introduction to England.

With commissions from such senior courtiers, England looked a promising country in which Holbein could increase his reputation. Despite his initial success, however, he only stayed for two years. In 1528 he returned to Switzerland, where his wife and children remained, perhaps worried that he would lose his Basel citizenship.

Sir Henry Guildford (1489–1532),

1527

Black and coloured chalks with touches of brown ink

Sir Henry Guildford probably met Holbein through Sir Thomas More and employed the artist to make temporary decorations at Greenwich Palace for the reception of a French diplomatic delegation in 1527. Guildford commissioned Holbein to paint his portrait in the same year. In this preparatory drawing, Holbein has concentrated on Guildford's face, which he has modelled in coloured chalks. The sitter's clothing is only briefly recorded in black chalk.

RCIN 912266



Sir Henry Guildford, 1527

Oil on oak panel

The finished portrait of Guildford shows him holding the white staff of Comptroller of the Household, the senior court position he had held since 1522. Although Holbein followed his drawing closely, he has lengthened Guildford's face, giving him a more commanding appearance.

Guildford's status is further emphasised by the use of gold leaf to emulate the glow of the gold thread in his doublet.

This portrait was a pair with one of Guildford's wife Mary, now in St. Louis, Missouri: the two were united by a curtain rail which runs across the two portraits and the twisting vines which give depth to the background.

RCIN 400046



Hans Holbein, Mary, Lady Guilford, 1527, oil on panel

Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri

William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury (1450?–1532), 1527

Black and coloured chalks

As Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham was the most senior churchman in England. When he sat to Holbein, he was torn between Church and Crown by Henry VIII's demand for a divorce from Katherine of Aragon. Holbein has studied not only his careworn face, but the rich textures of his garments, combining strokes of brown, yellow and black chalks to reflect the soft fur at his collar, and smudging black chalk to evoke the velvet of his hat and gown.

RCIN 912272

Sir Thomas More, 1527

Black and coloured chinks, the outlines pricked for transfer

This life-size drawing was made in preparation for a portrait, now in New York. Holbein has taken particular care in recording More's face, applying touches of black chalk to hint at stubble around the sitter's cheeks. He left plain areas to convey the sheen of the fur on More's collar. Drawings such as this must have acted as a demonstration of Holbein's skill as well as preparatory work towards a painting.

RCIN 912268



Hans Holbein, Sir Thomas More, 1527, oil on oak panel,

The Frick Collection, New York

Photo: Michael Bodycomb, © The Frick Collection.

29 ½ x 23 ¾ in. (74.9 x 60.3 cm)

Sir Thomas More (verso), 1527

To transfer the image of Thomas More to a panel, Holbein made pin holes through the main lines of his drawing and a second sheet of paper laid underneath. He could rub chalk dust through the holes in the second sheet of paper to create a pattern of dots to be used as a basis for a further drawing or painting. The holes he made are particularly apparent on the back of the sheet.

RCIN 912268

Making Portraits, 1532–43

In 1532 Holbein returned to England, where he would be based for the rest of his life.

He seems to have been busy from the moment of his return. In response to an increasing demand for his portraits Holbein adjusted his drawing technique. He no longer worked at life-size but made smaller drawings on paper which had been painted with a pink preparation to provide a flesh tone. He used a wider range of materials, employing ink, watercolour and metalpoint alongside chalk to achieve the effect he wanted.

The drawings displayed here were made as the basis for finished portraits, many of which have not survived. In each case, the purpose of the drawing was to record

a likeness. Details such as background and clothing were worked up separately to make the final picture. In the case of Sir Henry Guildford, William Reskimer and Lady Audley, finished portraits are also in the Royal Collection, allowing us to follow Holbein's work from beginning to completion.

John Poyntz (c.1485–1544), c.1532

Black and coloured chalks with black ink on pink prepared paper

John Poyntz was closely related to Henry Guildford and may have commissioned his portrait soon after Holbein returned to England. The artist has seated him as if he is looking at something above his head. This pose would have been difficult to hold, and there is a sense of hurry in the rough lines of the collar and an alternative contour for the sitter's cloak. A copy of the lost finished portrait suggests Poyntz was shown leaning on a ledge in the foreground.

RCIN 912233

Sir Nicholas Poyntz (by 1510–56),

1535

Black and coloured chalks with black and brown inks and white heightening on pink prepared paper

Nicholas Poyntz, the nephew of John Poyntz (left), probably sat to Holbein in 1535. In that year he hosted Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn at his magnificent house at Iron Acton near Bristol. Iron Acton was decorated in the latest Renaissance style and Holbein shows Poyntz in a profile pose similar to that found on classical medallions. He has drawn Poyntz in chalks, then worked the head up in ink, using a tiny touch of white to brighten the sitter's eye.

RCIN 912234

Elizabeth, Lady Audley (d. 1557),

c.1538

Black and coloured chalks with black ink and blue watercolour on pink prepared paper

This drawing was used by Holbein to create the miniature displayed nearby. Holbein has largely focused on the sitter's face and has scribbled notes to record the red damask ('rot damast') of her dress, and a small leaf symbol to indicate the green emerald in her brooch. Lady Audley was the second wife of Thomas, Baron Audley. In 1539, Lord Audley described the happiness of his marriage in a letter to Henry VIII, who had played matchmaker for the couple.

RCIN 912191

Elizabeth, Lady Audley (d. 1557), c.1538

Watercolour on vellum laid on playing card

Holbein learned miniature painting techniques from the Flemish artist Lucas Horenbout (d. 1544), who worked for Henry VIII from the mid -1520s. Holbein quickly became a master of the format, creating beautiful portraits which could be held in the hand and studied closely. Holbein has altered some details of his drawing (displayed nearby), notably the brooch which appears simpler, perhaps to avoid distracting attention from Lady Audley's face.

RCIN 422292

William Reskimer (d. 1552),

c.1536–9

Black and coloured chalks with watercolour on pink prepared paper

William Reskimer was a Page of the King's Bedchamber. By the late 1530s, when this portrait was probably made, he had been appointed to a number of lucrative positions and had contracted an advantageous marriage. Holbein has drawn him almost entirely in coloured chalks, with only a touch of greenish watercolour in his eye.

RCIN 912237

William Reskimer (d. 1552),

c. 1536–9

Oil on panel

Holbein made this work on a reused panel that was painted with a decorative marbled effect. He first covered the previous paint with a pink priming. He then traced the outlines of his drawing (left) onto the panel with a stylus before working up the composition further. X-rays suggest that he struggled with the profile of Reskimer's nose, and repeated lines on the drawing show that he returned to his sketch to resolve this area while working on the panel. Reskimer may have been intended to hold an animal or object, but if so this was not painted.

RCIN 404422

M. Zouch, c.1536–43

Black and coloured chalks with black ink, blue watercolour and white heightening on pink prepared paper

Holbein has used a variety of coloured chalks, including a rich salmon pink, to capture this sitter's hair and headdress. Her eyes are painted in blue watercolour, and thin black penstrokes delineate her eyelashes. Her bodice is annotated 'black felbet' (black velvet). Several women at court were called Mistress Zouch and the sitter's identity is not known.

RCIN 912252



Margaret, Lady Elyot (d. 1560),

c.1535

Sir Thomas Elyot (c.1490–1546),

c.1535

Black and coloured chalks with black ink and white heightening on pink prepared paper

Margaret à Barrow and Thomas Elyot married in 1520.

Both were authors and friends of Sir Thomas More, and

by the mid-1530s were largely living away from court in

Cambridgeshire. Holbein has worked each face up in thin

black ink lines and added touches of white to Lady Elyot's

face to suggest the shine of her skin.

RCIN 912204 and 912203

Unidentified man, 1535

Black and coloured chalks, white heightening, black and brown inks and blue watercolour on pink prepared paper

This drawing shows Holbein's masterful manipulation of chalk, which he has sharpened to create hard lines and rubbed to reflect the sheen of the sitter's velvet jacket. In areas such as the inside of the cloak collar, Holbein may have used a damp finger to smudge the chalk to a pale grey. The date 1535 and age 28 are inscribed on a copy of the finished portrait at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The sitter may be Ralph Sadler (1507–87), secretary to Thomas Cromwell and a rising star in the Tudor administration.

RCIN 912259

Gaining Commissions

We have no documents recording commissions for any of Holbein's English portraits.

Tudor elite society was sociable and intertwined, and Holbein's reputation probably spread by word of mouth as relatives corresponded or friends dined together.

Echoes of these connections can be sometimes seen in the surviving portraits. A number of Holbein's commissions, for example, came from the lively intellectual circle around Anne Boleyn and Thomas Wyatt that dominated the court in the years 1532–6. Such networks may also explain the large number of Holbein's sitters who lived in East Anglia, one of the richest areas of the country.

His patrons here included the Dukes of Norfolk and Suffolk, Richard Southwell, John Godsolve, Mary Shelton, Thomas Lestrangle and the Boleyn family.

Holbein's skill, demonstrated by his preparatory drawings as well as his finished paintings and miniatures, must have been a major factor in securing his reputation.

Thomas Vaux, 2nd Baron Vaux, (1509–56), c.1535

Black and coloured chalks with black ink and white heightening on pink prepared paper

Elizabeth, Lady Vaux (c.1504–56), c.1535

Black and coloured chalks with metalpoint, black ink and white heightening on pink prepared paper

The wealthy Baron Vaux was cousin to Henry Guildford and brother-in-law of Thomas Lestrangle, both of whom also sat to Holbein. He married Elizabeth Cheney in 1523. Holbein probably drew Baron and Lady Vaux in 1535. In 1536 the couple, alarmed by religious reform and a 'great many foes', retired from court. Baron Vaux was an

accomplished poet whose work celebrated the 'quiet mind' that is 'clear from worldly cares'.

The drawing of Baron Vaux has been extended at left by Holbein to accommodate the sleeves of his red ('rot') and silver ('silbe') jacket. The strip at the right was added later. The top corners were trimmed in the mid-eighteenth century, probably after damage to the paper.

RCIN 912245 and 912247

Thomas Wyatt (c.1503–42),

1532–7?

Black and coloured chalks with ink and watercolour
on pink prepared paper

The ambassador Thomas Wyatt probably first encountered Holbein through his father who, with Henry Guildford, employed the artist at Greenwich in 1527. Wyatt's close circle included Guildford and John Poyntz and he was a confidante of Anne Boleyn. These friendships were celebrated in his adventurous poems, which introduced new forms such as the sonnet into English. Many of these are known through the Devonshire Manuscript, which was compiled by Mary Shelton (right).

RCIN 912250

Mary Shelton, later Lady

Heveningham (1510/15–70/1),

c.1543?

Black and coloured chalks with black and brown inks and white heightening on pink prepared paper

Mary Shelton was part of the lively young circle centred on her cousin Anne Boleyn. She was a close friend of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. Shelton was one of the compilers of the Devonshire Manuscript, now in the British Library, which preserves poems by Surrey and Thomas Wyatt alongside her own notes and compositions.

This is one of the most meticulously worked of Holbein's drawings. He has used tiny strokes of ink and touches of white to record details of Shelton's features and a thick black ink to convey the velvet of her headdress.

It may have been made while Shelton was engaged to Surrey's esquire, Thomas Clere, who died in France in 1545 after saving his master's life at the Siege of Montreuil.

RCIN 912227



Nicholas Bourbon (c.1503–49/50),

1535

Black and coloured chalks and black ink on pink prepared paper

The poet Nicholas Bourbon was imprisoned in France for his reforming views. On his release, he travelled to England, where he was supported by Anne Boleyn and lodged with the goldsmith Cornelis Hayes, a close colleague of Holbein. This drawing of Bourbon at work must have been made during the sitter's short stay in London between 1534 and 1535. A woodcut copy of the portrait is dated 1535. Bourbon later praised Holbein as an 'incomparable painter'.

RCIN 912192

Lady Ratcliffe, c.1536

Black and coloured chalks with black and brown ink and metalpoint on pink prepared paper

Holbein's drawing records details he would need to complete a finished painting. The sitter's features are drawn in very fine ink and chalk. He has made notes in a mixture of German and English to indicate the black damask ('damast black') and black velvet ('schwarz felbet') of her outfit. To the left Holbein has sketched details of the decoration of the bodice, using a fine point of metal. 'Lady Ratcliffe' could refer to several women and the sitter is unidentified.

RCIN 912236

Lady Ratcliffe (verso), c.1536

Like many of the drawings on display, this side of the paper has not been painted with the pale pink preparation used by Holbein as the base on the front of the sheet. The purpose of the pencil number, which is found on the back of many of the Holbein drawings in the Royal Collection, remains a mystery.

RCIN 912236

Sir Thomas Lestrangle

(c.1490–1545), c.1536

Black and coloured chalks with blue watercolour
on pink prepared paper

Sir Thomas Lestrangle of Hunstanton in Norfolk was married to Anne Vaux of Harrowden in Northamptonshire. The couple's close links with many of Holbein's sitters are recorded in their meticulous household accounts. Lady Lestrangle was the sister of Thomas, 2nd Baron Vaux, and aunt of William Parr. The Lestranges were regularly visited by neighbours such as Richard Southwell, Lady Elizabeth Boleyn (mother of Anne Boleyn) and Anne Shelton (mother of Mary Shelton). Guests sometimes dined on deer sent by the Duke of Norfolk and Earl of Surrey.

The Lestranges may have commissioned portraits from Holbein after seeing those the artist made of Baron and Lady Vaux displayed nearby.

RCIN 912244



Sir Thomas Lestrangle (verso),

c.1536

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RCIN 912244

Politicians, Poets, Soldiers and Ships' Captains: Holbein's Patrons

The commission of a portrait from Holbein was a statement of affluence available to only the most privileged members of Tudor society.

Portraits were made to cement friendships, to mark marriages and the birth of children, or to assert status and prosperity.

Holbein's patrons came from across the Tudor court. He painted wealthy landowners and prosperous merchants, courageous soldiers and daring sportsmen, reforming Protestants and committed Catholics.

We have no record of Holbein's own views on religion or the political factions which made life at court so precarious for his sitters. Some of the men and women he painted, like Richard Southwell and Henry Guildford, were able to maintain their position despite the shifting power balances. Others, among them Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, found themselves on the wheel of fortune, sometimes in royal favour, sometimes at risk of imprisonment or execution.

Richard Southwell (1502/3–64),

1536

Black and coloured chalks and black ink on pink prepared paper

Richard Southwell was a ruthlessly ambitious politician.

This drawing was made in preparation for his painted portrait, now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Holbein

has noted the words to be included on the finished work, stating that Southwell is 33 years old and, along the right-

hand edge, observed that his eyes are 'ein wenig gelbatt' (or a little yellowish). Southwell's will reveals his

accumulation of luxuries such as metalwork, tapestries and books as a demonstration of his success. Holbein's

portrait must have acted as a similar assertion of prestige.

RCIN 912242

Charles Wingfield (1513–40),

c.1538–9

Black and coloured chalks with black and brown ink
on pink prepared paper

This drawing is a mystery. Little is known about Charles Wingfield, the son of an ambassador. Unusually, he is shown bare-chested and without headgear: his only adornment is a medal around his neck. Holbein carefully recorded the details of Wingfield's torso, suggesting that these were intended to appear in the finished portrait. This may have been commissioned to commemorate an achievement, perhaps a victory at some form of competition.

RCIN 912249

Hat badge with St George and the Dragon, c.1520

Enamelled gold with saltwater pearl

This hat badge may have been made in the Southern Netherlands. It is a masterpiece of enamelling, in which powdered glass is heated over metal until it melts to become a colourful coating. Here, the coating is applied in deep relief to give a three - dimensional effect.

The history of this badge is not known. It has by tradition been thought to have belonged to Henry VIII. Similar decorations were worn by many of Holbein's sitters. Among them was William Parr (displayed nearby) on whose drawing Holbein has sketched a badge with a figure holding a sword.

RCIN 442208



Hat badge with St George and the Dragon, reverse

William Parr, later Marquess of Northampton (1513–71), 1538–9

Black and coloured chalks with black ink and white heightening on pink prepared paper

The pleasure-loving William Parr was a patron of music and enjoyed playing tennis and gambling. This portrait may have been made on the occasion of his knighting in 1538 or his creation as Baron Parr in 1539. Holbein has recorded the magnificence of Parr's purple velvet ('burpor felbet') jacket and sketched the detail of his gold hat decorations.

RCIN 912231

George Brooke, 9th Baron

Cobham (c.1497–1558), c.1538–9

Black and coloured chalks with a touch of black ink on pink prepared paper

As Deputy of the English-controlled town of Calais from 1544, Baron Cobham was notable for his diplomatic charm as well as his military expertise. Holbein has concentrated on Cobham's face, modelling the shadows in subtle layers of black and red chalk. The finished portrait is lost, but a later copy suggests it was circular. It may have been commissioned for the family residence, Cobham Hall in Kent.

RCIN 912195

A Merchant of the Steelyard, 1532

Oil on panel augmented with canvas

This portrait is dated to July 1532 by the inscription on the paper lying on the table. The address on the letter held by the sitter shows he was from Antwerp and was attached to the Steelyard, a compound in London where Hanseatic merchants lived and traded under special privileges. The Hanseatic League was formed by merchants from Central and Eastern Europe to protect trading interests. The Steelyard merchants were among Holbein's first patrons after his return to London in 1532. The portraits they commissioned recorded their prosperity: conservation of this painting revealed the gem-set rings on the sitter's left hand, which had previously been obscured by discoloured varnish.

RCIN 404443

James Butler, later 9th Earl of Ormond (c.1496–1546), 1537–8

Black and coloured chalks with brown and black ink, red and blue watercolour and white heightening on pink prepared paper

James Butler probably had his portrait taken when he visited London between August 1537 and early 1538. He was Lord Treasurer of Ireland and heir to the earldom of Ormond. Holbein has captured Butler's features in chalk, brown ink and watercolour, and drawn his magnificent doublet in bold strokes of black ink. Butler's pose and Holbein's confident draughtsmanship proclaim his status as a significant figure at the Tudor court.

RCIN 912263



Unidentified man, c.1537

Black inks over black and coloured chalks with white heightening on pink prepared paper

This drawing probably dates from c.1537, since it is on the same type of paper that Holbein used for his drawing of James Butler (displayed nearby). The identity of the sitter is not recorded, but his magnificent jacket of satin ('atlass' / 'at'), and his commissioning of a portrait from Holbein, suggests that he was a man of substance.

Although the finished portrait does not survive, a copy suggests that it was circular like those of Baron Cobham and George Cornwall.

RCIN 912258

Henry Brandon, later 2nd Duke of Suffolk (1535–51), c.1541

Watercolour on vellum laid on playing card (a King)

Charles Brandon, later 3rd Duke of Suffolk (1537–51), c.1541

Watercolour on vellum laid on playing card (the Ace of Clubs)

Henry (here aged five) and Charles Brandon (aged three) were the two sons of Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, and his fourth wife Katherine. Holbein has captured at tiny scale the luxury of the fabrics worn by the two boys, including the shimmering shot silk of Henry's sleeve.

Henry inherited the dukedom of Suffolk from his father in 1545, and died of sweating sickness in 1551, half an hour before his brother.

RCIN 422294 and 422295



Back of miniature of Henry Brandon, mounted on a playing card (a King) published by Valery Faucil.

Katherine Brandon, Duchess of Suffolk (1519–80), 1541?

Black and coloured chalks with black ink on pink prepared paper

Katherine Willoughby d'Eresby inherited her father's extensive Lincolnshire lands at the age of seven. In 1533, she married Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, as his fourth wife. The duchess was a significant patron of reforming clerics and encouraged the publication of evangelical texts. This drawing was probably taken in 1541, when Holbein made miniatures of the couple's two sons Henry and Charles (nearby). Katherine's finished portrait may also have been a miniature to form a series of Brandon family portraits.

RCIN 912194

Unidentified man, perhaps

George Cornwall, c.1543?

Black and coloured chalks with black and brown inks
on pink prepared paper

This drawing may show George Cornwall, a naval commander who was knighted in 1544. The finished painting survives in Frankfurt and shows Cornwall holding a carnation, perhaps commemorating his marriage to Mary Brydges in 1543. Holbein made significant changes between the drawing and the finished painting, in which the sitter has a full beard and different dress.

RCIN 912208



Hans Holbein, Unidentified man, perhaps George Cornwall,
1543?, oil on panel, Städel Museum, Frankfurt

© Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main

John Godsalue (c.1505–56),

c.1543?

Black and coloured chalks with watercolour and black and brown inks on pink prepared paper

This drawing is perplexing. Unusually, Holbein has worked it up in colours, including a bright azurite blue. The face and hands are very carefully modelled in ink. It may have been intended to be mounted on a panel and displayed on the wall like an oil painting. The drawing, however, is not finished. The hat badge has been left blank and the sleeves are not modelled. It was presumably among the drawings remaining in Holbein's studio in 1543.

Was he still working on it at the time of his death?

John Godsalue was Clerk of the Signet, responsible for the administration of the licences and warrants granted by the king. This role brought him into contact with many

immigrant craftsmen, who visited him for grants of money, passports to travel, or letters confirming citizenship.

RCIN 912265



Unidentified artist

John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester

(c.1469–1535), 1550–1600?

Black and coloured chalks with wash and ink on pink prepared paper

This drawing has traditionally been thought to be by Holbein, but its draughtmanship is less assured. It is more likely to be by a later artist familiar with Holbein's technique of using chalk, ink and wash on pink prepared paper.

John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, was imprisoned in March 1533 due to his opposition to Henry VIII's move to divorce Katherine of Aragon and was executed in 1535. After his death, Fisher was revered as a martyr and demand for his portrait grew.

This drawing was probably made in response to that interest, presenting an idealised image of the bishop rather than his true likeness.

RCIN 912205