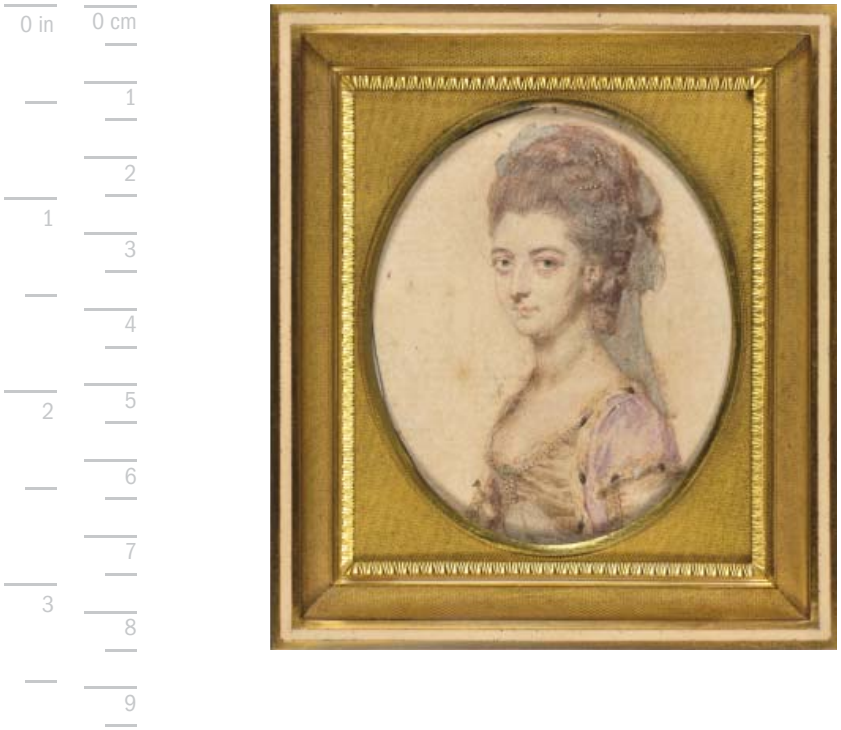
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JOHN SMART (British, 1741–1811)

Portrait of Charlotte Bertie, née Warren, 4th Countess of Abingdon

1778

Graphite and wash on paper; irregular oval, 8.5 x 7.5 cm (3⅜ x 3 in.)

Signature: none; inscribed on back of paper backing in brown ink at top: [L]ady Abingto[n] 1778; inscribed in graphite at bottom: J Smart / Lady Abington

Setting: 1929 square metal frame with narrow border of white enamel around outer edge

The Edward B. Greene Collection, 1941.572

Provenance

Until 1811
John Smart (1741–1811); by inheritance to Sarah Smart (1781–1853), daughter of the artist by Sarah Midgeley.[1]

1811–c. 1853
Sarah Smart.

c. 1853
Gift to Mary Smirke (d. 1853, Slough); by inheritance to her brother, Sydney Smirke (1798–1877).

1853–77
Sydney Smirke; by inheritance to his daughter Mrs. Lange (née Smirke, d. 1928).

1877–1928
Mrs. Lange; by inheritance to her brother, Sir Edward Smirke.

1928
Sir Edward Smirke.

1928
Purchased by Leo Schidlof (1886–1966, Paris) at Christie's (London) sale, December 10 (lot 10?).[2]

1930
Purchased by Edward B. Greene (1878–1957, Cleveland) from Leo Schidlof for £50 ($250.00) in summer; gift to the Cleveland Museum of Art, December 5, 1941.

1941
The Cleveland Museum of Art.

1 Following his first marriage, John Smart had two children out of wedlock with Sarah Midgeley: John (1776–1809) and Sarah (1781–1853).

2 No lot for this sale lists a portrait with the name Abingdon. Lot 10 contained a "Head of a Lady," which was the only unidentified female portrait by John Smart in the auction.

Exhibitions

1904
Moncorvo House, London, *Royal Amateur Art Society Exhibition of Miniatures,* March 5–8 (possibly).

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Milliken, William M., and Harry B. Wehle. *Portrait Miniatures: The Edward B. Greene Collection*, p. 31, no. 40, pl. XIII (repr.). Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1951.

Williamson, George Charles. *The Miniature Collector,* p. 146. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1921.

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ALTHOUGH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to say whether or not it was always part of the artist's process to execute a preparatory sketch prior to painting each miniature, we do know that John Smart retained many hundreds of these sketches. A group of preparatory sketches—of which this portrait is one—descended through the Smirke family after Smart's daughter Sarah gave a sketchbook containing preparatory portrait studies to her friend Mary Smirke, sister of the celebrated Victorian architect Sydney Smirke. This book was probably broken up around 1877 when its contents was divided between Sydney's daughters Mary Jemmett and Mrs. Lange, whose portions were both sold at auction in 1928.

G. C. Williamson was the first to suggest that Smart's sketches were well known and that they were preparatory studies for the painted miniatures.[3] Williamson listed the names of sitters from the sketches known to him at the time, and they included Lady Abingdon. Here, Lady Abingdon's head and shoulders face right. Her brown hair is dressed high on her head, and a strand of pearls is woven through the left side of her coiffure. A veil descends from the top of her head, past her shoulders. She has gray eyes. Compared to his contemporaries George Engleheart (1752–1829) and Andrew Plimer (1763–1837), whose female sitters were often painted in similar simple white gowns, Smart often lavished more attention on the costumes in his portraits of women, whose dresses incorporated colored silks, printed fabrics, and luxury trimmings like lace and fur. Thus, Lady Abingdon wears a low-necked, pink dress trimmed with ermine and strands of pearls. The background is unpainted. The removal of the paper backing revealed an inscription in brown ink, written in Smart's hand, dating the work and verifying the identity of the sitter as Lady Abingdon (figs. 1, 2).

Lady Abingdon (d. 1799) was the daughter of Admiral Sir Peter Warren, K.B., M.P. She married Willoughby Bertie, 4th Earl of

Figure 1. Conservation photograph showing the verso of the drawing before the backing was removed.

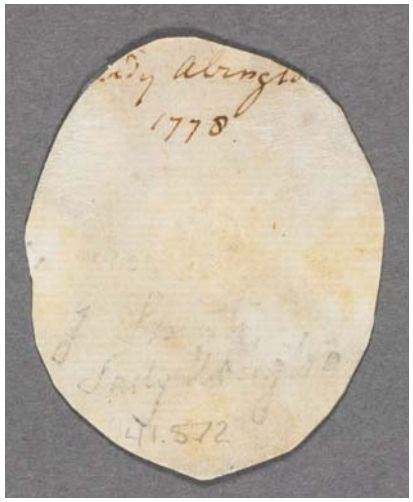

Figure 2. Verso of drawing showing inscription.

3 George Charles Williamson, *The Miniature Collector* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1921), p. 146.

Abingdon, in 1768.[4] They had six children, two of whom died very young. It is for Lady Abingdon that Abingdon Square in New York City is named, courtesy of her father, who had purchased 300 acres of land in Greenwich Village in 1744. Her husband's famous protestations against the British government's treatment of America during the War for Independence ensured that even in 1794, when the New York city council was rooting out British names from public streets and spaces, the name of Abingdon Square was retained.[5]

The family was painted by some of the great artists of the day, including Nathaniel Dance-Holland (1735–1811) and John Francis Rigaud (1742–1810).[6] The formal portrait of 1769 by Dance-Holland, in which Lady Abingdon is depicted in coronation robes and holding her peeress's coronet, conveys the pomp and tradition expected from a marriage portrait of a powerful peer (fig. 3). But even Smart's miniature portrait sketch of almost a decade later maintains some of this grandeur, depicting the countess with aristocratic bearing and wearing the rich ermine-trimmed gown to which her station entitled her.

A miniature on ivory corresponds to this preparatory sketch (fig. 4), although it is dated 1777, suggesting that the sketch may have been executed the following year in preparation for a second version of the portrait. There are slight differences in the details of the dress, particularly the left sleeve—which has been lengthened—and a slight reduction in pearl and ermine trim. The portrait on ivory also has somewhat more softness in the facial features, but many of the details, including the veil and the lock of hair on the right shoulder, are extremely similar. The miniature's current location is unknown.

CORY KORKOW

Figure 3. *Portrait of Charlotte, Countess of Abingdon*, 1769. Nathaniel Dance-Holland (English, 1735–1811). Oil on canvas; 215.9 x 142.2 cm (85 x 56 in.). From *British Pictures (1500–1850)* (London: Christie's, 11 June 1999), lot 41. Current location unknown.

Figure 4. *Portrait of Charlotte Bertie, née Warren, 4th Countess of Abingdon,* signed and dated 1777. John Smart. Watercolor on ivory; dimensions unknown. From *Centuries of Style* (London: Christie's, 7 June 2011). Current location unknown.

4 Horace Walpole, *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: J. Scott, 1806), 4: p. 382–84.
5 Henry Moscow, *The Street Book: An Encyclopedia of Manhattan's Street Names and Their Origins* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1990), p. 20.
6 *Willoughby Bertie, 4th Earl of Abingdon, and Charlotte, Countess of Abingdon, Montague, Lord Norreys, Lady Charlotte and Lady Caroline Bertie, The Hon. Willoughby, The Hon. Peregrine and The Hon. Frederick Bertie,* 1793. John Francis Rigaud (French, active England, 1742–1810). Medium and dimensions unknown. Current location unknown.