

Portraits of the Bishops of Bath and Wells
CATALOGUE OF THE COLLECTION BELONGING TO
THE SEE

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Bishop of Bath and Wells*

THE collection of episcopal portraits, housed in the Palace at Wells, owes its origin to the fortunate inspiration of George Henry Law, who was Bishop of Bath and Wells from 1824 to 1845. Enquiries regarding the collection seem to have been made at the instance of Lord Arthur Hervey, who succeeded to the bishopric in 1869. Henry Law, Dean of Gloucester, wrote to Canon Beadon in September, 1871 :

It is my persuasion that in 1827¹ the Palace did not hold a single picture of a preceding occupant. When my father converted the Passage Gallery into a family room, he saw that the proper decoration of the walls would be the Pictures of his Predecessors. He believed that pictures must have been taken of all of them—that by search and enquiry he might discover (the Pictures).

The most important of the portraits had been 'discovered' and brought to the Palace before the publication of Cassan's *Lives of the Bishops of Bath and Wells* in 1829. When Bishop Law found that he was unable to acquire originals by gift or purchase, he secured existing copies or commissioned copyists to fill gaps in the series. Several of Law's acquisitions had considerable artistic consequence in addition to their interest as portraits; notably the pictures of Bishops Godwin, Lake, Curle, Ken, Hooper, Wynne, Willes, Moss and Beadon. Law's own portrait by Sir William Beechey is an outstanding example of the artist's work. Portraits of the six succeeding bishops have been added to the collection; some of these were painted with the express intention that they should hang in the Palace.

The provenance of most of the paintings is unknown, but

¹ Dean Law may have intended 1824, the year of his father's succession.

information regarding the history of certain of them—possibly from the recollections of Dean Law—has been preserved in manuscript notes made by Lady Arthur Hervey in 1898.

The Corporation of Wells own portraits of some of the bishops, but owing to war conditions it has not been possible to examine them while these notes were in course of preparation.

The series in the Palace begins with Bishop Fox, and is complete from Bishop Godwin, d. 1590, to Bishop Underhill, d. 1943.

CATALOGUE

1. RICHARD FOX. 1492–1494.

Panel, $13\frac{3}{4} \times 11$ in. After *Johannes Corvus (Jan Rave)*.

The original, painted in 1516 after Bishop Fox had become blind, is at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and has been reproduced on many occasions. A good copy or version, probably early nineteenth century.

2. THOMAS WOLSEY. 1518–1523.

$44\frac{1}{2} \times 37\frac{1}{4}$ in.

A vigorous mid-eighteenth-century copy or version of the portrait at Christchurch, Oxford.

3. WILLIAM BARLOW. 1548–1553.

A portrait of Bishop Barlow, found at Winchester, was stated by Dean Law to have been in the collection. It was already missing in the episcopate of Lord Arthur Hervey.

4. THOMAS GODWIN. 1584–1590.

Panel, $39\frac{1}{2} \times 30$ in.

This remarkable character-study was found in a manor-house in the parish of Banwell, perhaps the house at Towerhead, built by Bishop Godwin.² Inscribed 'Thomas Godwin, D.D. aet. 72. Bishop of Bath and Wells 1584.' As Godwin is thought to have been born in 1517, it would appear that the portrait was painted c. 1589, the year before his death, and not long after he had incurred the displeasure of Queen Elizabeth by his second marriage. So little is known of the Elizabethan English portrait painters that it is hard to find a satisfactory attribution. With the inscription are the arms of

² *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, li, ii, 63.

the See impaling Godwin, and the Bishop's motto—*Wyn God —Wyn All.*

5. JOHN STILL. 1593–1608.

22 × 17 in.

Inscribed '1607 Aet. 64.' Appears to be a satisfactory copy, perhaps from the portrait in the possession of Mrs. John Hughes, c. 1866.³

6. JAMES MONTAGUE. 1608–1616.

29 × 24 in.

A copy of no great merit. Bishop Montague 'did much for the interior of the Palace—put up the present staircase.' He was Prelate of the Garter while Bishop of Winchester, 1616–1618.

7. ARTHUR LAKE. 1616–1626.

Panel, 18 × 12 in.

Robert Greenbury.

'Found in the Palace at Peterborough.' The inscription, with the date 1618, may not be contemporary. The condition is fair, and as a well-authenticated work by a known Jacobean English artist, the picture is of considerable interest. The colouring is delicate, and the values are evenly sustained in a low tone. Engraved by Wenceslaus Hollar, 1641.

8. WILLIAM LAUD. 1626–1628.

49 × 39 in.

After *Vandyck.*

An indifferent copy of the portrait of Laud at Lambeth Palace.

9. LEONARD MAWE. 1628–1629.

Panel, 18½ × 13 in.

Clearly a copy. The authenticity of the original is not established.

10. WALTER CURLE. 1629–1632.

29½ × 24½ in.

Painted wearing the robes of a prelate of the Garter. Inscribed 'Gaulterus Curle Ep^s Winton. Aetatis suis 61. Ano. 1635': arms of Winchester impaling Curle. The head is, no doubt, the work of one of the Flemish artists of note who visited the court of Charles I. The robes are by a com-

³ Mrs. John Hughes was a descendant of Bishop Still. Hutchins's *Dorset*, iii, 75.

petent drapery painter; the quality of the head, however, makes this one of the most interesting pictures in the collection.

11. WILLIAM PIERSE. 1632–1670.

(i) $28\frac{1}{2} \times 24$ in.

Apparently a copy which has been subject to injudicious restoration. There is an attribution in the Hervey notes to Gerard Soest, but Pierse was a much older man than he is here represented when he could have been painted by that artist. Cassan states that there was no portrait of Pierse at the Palace (1829). The authenticity of the portrait has not been established, and its provenance is at present unknown.

12. (ii) $30 \times 24\frac{1}{2}$ in.

A free rendering of (i), not without charm: probably mid-nineteenth century, perhaps painted for Lord Arthur Hervey. Must be regarded as an ideal rather than an actual portrait of Pierse.

13. ROBERT CREIGHTON. 1670–1672.

17×13 in., oval.

A nineteenth-century copy from the portrait given to the Corporation of Wells in 1866. The features of this bishop are well known from the effigy on his tomb in Wells Cathedral which conveys a more definite idea of personality than the portrait.

14. PETER MEWS. 1672–1684.

$49\frac{1}{2} \times 39$ in. Early copy: original ascribed to *Sir Peter Lely*.

Painted after his elevation to the See of Winchester, wearing the robes of a Prelate of the Garter. On his face, a black patch covering a wound received while serving in the army of Charles I. He was already Bishop of Winchester when he returned to Somerset in 1685 and directed the artillery at the battle of Sedgemoor. The head is by a good hand: the greater part of the picture has suffered from repainting.

The Corporation of Wells has a portrait of Bishop Mews (58×51 in.) presented, according to tradition, by James II.

15. THOMAS KEN. 1685–1690.

$49 \times 39\frac{1}{2}$ in.

F. Schiffer.

This remarkable portrait of the saintly bishop is in excellent order and has not suffered from restoration. It was 'be-

queathed to Bishop Law by a gentleman at Salisbury'. The signature of the artist, who is little known, has a date appended, probably 1707. The whole is painted with a crisp and sure touch, and the head is of fine quality. The general effect, however, is marred by the surprising weakness in sense of scale shown in the drawing of the hands.

16. RICHARD KIDDER. 1691–1703.

29 × 24 in.

After *Mary Beale*.

Painted wearing a full surplice. The original is at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was engraved in stipple, 1794, by R. Clamp after a drawing by S. Harding.⁴ The copy seems to be contemporary. It was in the great storm of 26 November 1703 that this bishop and his wife were killed at the Palace by the fall of a chimney-stack.

17. GEORGE HOOPER. 1704–1727.

(i) 29 × 24 in. Formerly attributed to *Sir Godfrey Kneller*.

Painted in a moulded oval on a rectangular canvas. A nineteenth-century copy of some merit. The original is unlikely to have been by Kneller. Probably acquired after Bishop Law's time. The portrait shows Hooper in middle life as we may suppose him to have been in 1685, when he was a King's chaplain, and by order of James II attended the Duke of Monmouth at his execution.

18. (ii) 30 × 25 in.

Thomas Hill, 1723.

Bishop Hooper was born on 18 November 1640, and was therefore aged about eighty-three when he was painted by Hill. The plate by G. White, from a free rendering of this portrait, was stated by Noble to be the first in which line was combined with mezzotint: It may be seen from the impression in the Braikenridge Collection at Taunton Castle that line was used to conceal deficiencies rather than to enhance effect. The portrait is a lively and interesting example of a competent but little known artist of the early eighteenth century whose work has often been attributed to Hogarth. Redgrave described Hill's portraits as 'full of character and expression but not elevated'. The varied experiences of Hooper's long life had developed in him a wise and judicious personality, which it is clear was fully appreciated by the artist. Inscript-

⁴ There is an impression in the Tite Collection at Taunton Castle.

tions in Greek and Latin were added on the canvas after Hooper's death.

A full-length portrait of Bishop Hooper, also by Hill and of about the same period, hangs in the Hall of the Vicars Choral at Wells. Another portrait, of finer quality and by a later hand, in the same hall has been supposed to be of one of the bishops, but the arms of Eyre are introduced in the background, and there can be little doubt that the subject was Thomas Eyre, LL.D., Treasurer of the Cathedral, who died, 1812, aged 81. *Jewers's Wells Cathedral*, 201.

The Corporation of Wells also has a portrait of Bishop Hooper, painted at the cost of and given by the bishop's daughter, Abigail Prowse of Axbridge.

19. JOHN WYNNE. 1727-1743.

29½ × 24 in.

Francis Hayman, R.A.

Has the naïve quality characteristic of the work of this artist, which always has an appeal disproportionate to its artistic value. His contemporary popularity seems to have been due to his social powers and his talent in 'fixing a likeness'.

20. EDWARD WILLES. 1743-1773.

29½ × 25 in.

Thomas Hudson.

Appears to have been cut from the three-quarter length, engraved in mezzotint by Thomas Faber in 1750. An impression from his plate is at Taunton Castle. The effect was dependent on the complete composition, which is shown by the engraving to have been of some merit, and is ruined by the reduction of the canvas—Hudson's brushwork alone providing little compensation.

21. 13½ × 11¼ in.

A small eighteenth-century portrait of an ecclesiastic, the history of which appears to be unknown. If the portrait is of a bishop of Bath and Wells, it may be of Bishop Willes.

22. CHARLES MOSS. 1774-1802.

50 × 40 in.

John Hoppner, R.A.

A remarkable attempt by Hoppner to emulate the Venetian grand manner. There is much dark varnish, and it is difficult to determine whether the picture was ever finished. The narrow frame, which seems to be contemporary, is such as might have been used for an unfinished picture regarded as worth hanging, but hardly massive enough for so monumental

a composition had the picture been completed. It was clearly earlier in date than Hoppner's charming and vivacious portrait of Moss, painted in 1800 when the Bishop was eighty-nine. Of the latter there is an admirable mezzotint by S. W. Reynolds in the collection. The print was given in 1930 in accordance with the wish of the late Mr. W. B. Lillington, to whom it had belonged.

23. RICHARD BEADON. 1802-1824.

29 × 24 in.

Francis Lemuel Abbott.

An attractive example of this artist's work at his best period; probably painted in or soon after 1789 when Beadon became Bishop of Gloucester. The portrait is reminiscent of Abbott's manner in his well-known portraits of Nelson.

24. GEORGE HENRY LAW. 1824-1845.

(i) 56 × 44 in.

Sir William Beechey, R.A.

In episcopal robes. Painted in 1815 while Law was Bishop of Chester and Beechey was at the height of his powers. An admirable example for comparison with the contemporary work of Lawrence, Beechey's sole rival. When Cassan published his *Lives* (1829), this portrait hung above the fireplace in the Gallery. Engraved by Henry Meyer for the frontispiece of Cassan's book, and on other occasions.

25. (ii) 55 × 43 in.

Attributed to *Henry William Pickersgill, R.A.*

Bishop Law is here shown seated at a writing-table, a view of the Palace at Wells in the background. Probably painted c. 1830. A fine portrait, which perhaps reflects the taste of the sitter as well as of the artist. Added to the collection by Mrs. Wynne-Willson, 1931.

26. (iii) A poker-work panel.

Portraiture in this medium was a recognized art in the early nineteenth century. A bishop wearing episcopal robes, said to be Bishop Law, but this is doubtful.

There is also at the Palace a small seated figure in plaster of Bishop Law as an old man, modelled no doubt c. 1840. A full-length statuette of Bishop Law in the act of confirming his daughter Joanna,⁵ who kneels before him, is in the possession of her grand-daughter, Miss K. C. Powell. It is by

⁵ Afterwards Mrs. Powell of Hurdecott, Wilts.

Richard Cockle Lucas, and is of unusually large size for the medium—white wax. Lucas also modelled small busts of the first Lord Ellenborough and other members of the Law family.

The Corporation of Wells has the portrait of Bishop Law presented by him, 12 January 1842.

27. THE HON. RICHARD BAGOT. 1845–1854.

55 × 43 in.

Appears to be a copy. The original was painted while Bagot was Bishop of Oxford. He wears the robes of a Chancellor of the Order of the Garter.

28. LORD AUCKLAND. 1854–1869.

30 × 24½ in.

George Richmond, R.A.

This has been said to be a copy, but the freshness of execution and delicacy of touch, which are so marked in the whole picture, make it probable that it was a first attempt by Richmond himself, perhaps left unfinished. Lady Arthur Hervey added a note to her catalogue in reference to Lord Auckland's portrait:—'Daughter taught swans to ring bell.'

29. LORD ARTHUR CHARLES HERVEY. 1869–1894.

37 × 28 in.

Miss Pertz after Sir William Blake Richmond, R.A.

The original, now in the possession of the Corporation of Wells, is a notable picture, and was regarded as one of Sir William Richmond's most successful portraits. It was presented by the mayor, J. H. Holloway, on behalf of the subscribers, 19 December 1889, in commemoration of the bishop's golden wedding-day, 30 July 1889.

30. GEORGE WYNDHAM KENNION. 1894–1921.

39½ × 29 in.

Wilfred Gabriel de Glehn, R.A.

31. ST. JOHN BASIL WYNNE-WILLSON. 1921–1937.

40 × 30 in.

Adrian Savage.

32. FRANCIS UNDERHILL. 1937–1943.

50 × 40 in.

Harry Morley, A.R.A.

The writer must be regarded as responsible for any errors in attribution or appraisal which may be found in these notes. He wishes to thank Mr. S. C. Kaines Smith, M.B.E., F.S.A., formerly Keeper of the Birmingham Art Gallery, for help and advice during their preparation; and Mr. R. Granville Harris for the loan of notes in his care.