Sitter

**Admiral Peter Rainier, 1741–1808**

Thomas Hickey, 1741–1824

Oil on canvas (lined), 30 x 25 ins (nominal) in an original early 19th-century frame.

*College of Optometrists, London*

No. 2 on this chronological list of Rainier oil portraits and related prints

1. Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in., previously attributed to Gilbert Stuart, showing Rainier after 1778 as a captain in the 1774–87 uniform: Museum of Fine Arts Boston (since 1904), ref. 04.1757.
2. The current picture, painted in Madras *c.*1800–04, probably either (a) for Rainier but given by him to Basil Cochrane there by 1805, or (b) directly for Cochrane. It shows five complete buttonholes on the right lapel of the uniform coat and two buttons done up below the waistcoat opening.

Engraved: (a) in mezzotint (185 x 146 mm, see NMM PAD4288) in 1824 by Charles Turner for Brenton’s *Naval History* when in possession of Cochrane, but probably also with reference to either nos. 3, 4, or 5 below. Turner’s print shows six complete buttonholes on the right lapel of the coat and three buttons below the opening of the waistcoat, the lowest undone; (b) sole source for another small print, 179 x 111 mm, by an unidentified 19th-century hand (see NMM PAD4289). This exactly matches the oil in the buttoning pattern.

1. A more roughly painted copy of no. 2 (oil, 30 x 25 in.) wrongly ascribed to A.W. Devis when sold by Weschler’s at Rockville, Maryland, 13 May 2022, lot 9, for $500 (est. $1000–$1500) see: [Lot - After Arthur William Devis, (British 1763-1822), Portrait of Admiral Peter Rainier, Oil on canvas; also with two paper labels on verso attributing the work to Gilbert Stuart, 30 x 25 in (76.2 x 63.5 cm) (weschlers.com)](https://www.weschlers.com/auction-lot/after-arthur-william-devis-british-1763-1822_7E142909F0). A small colour photo put in the NMM photo archive before *c.*1981 shows this version then belonged to Mrs Theodore Libbey of Ruxton, Maryland [Barbara Anne, nee Culley, 1921–d. 27 October 2021: probably consigned by her eldest son Theodore W. Libbey Jr. of Rockville]. It shows six complete buttonholes on the right lapel of the uniform coat, most of a seventh and three buttons, all done up, below the waistcoat opening.
2. Arthur William Devis, oil on canvas (14 x 12 1/8 in. / 35.6 x 30.8 cm.), painted for Benjamin William Page, probably based on no. 2 above but updated for sitter age and with slight differences of dress, though still in vice-admiral’s uniform; a painted inscription on the frame reads ‘by A.W. Devis 1805. Adml. Rainier, for Captn Page’ (who became a rear-admiral in 1819). Shows six complete buttonholes on the right coat lapel, five buttons done-up below the waistcoat opening, another five undone above it and a blue-cameo-headed pin in the neck cloth. Given by Page to the Revd W.S. Halliday, then by descent until sold at Christies on 10 July 2015 (lot 184, Old Master and British Paintings, £13,750 (est. £10K–15K). NMM record negatives, taken about 1980 when it was briefly on loan to the Museum, are B1463 (including frame) and B1464 (back, inc. Page’s MS note, see below, and exhibition labels).
3. Arthur William Devis, oil on canvas (sight size 32.5 x 27.5cm/ 12 ¾ x 10 ¾ in.): a second version of no. 5, obtained at unknown date by Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, and first inventoried at Stratfield Saye in 1841, where it remains.
4. Oil on canvas (oval 190 x 166 mm) probably after no. 2 or the Turner print of 1824 (see no. 2 above): possibly the copy given by Admiral Page to the Royal United Service Museum (dispersed in 1963), now NMM BHC3807. NMM also has a similar copy in pastel of unknown origin and history.

**Notes based on no. 2 above.**

Sitter shown in flag officers’ full dress, 1795–1812 pattern, as a vice-admiral (two stars on the epaulettes) and wearing spectacles fitted with ‘Martin’s Margins’. Rainer had arrived in Madras (Chennai) as a rear-admiral and C-in-C East Indies in November 1794. If commissioned by him, the obvious point for Hickey to have painted his portrait there was *c.*1800 following his promotion to vice-admiral in 1799 and receipt of the news. It is possible that Rainier left it in Madras as a parting gift to his friend, Basil Cochrane, but if Cochrane commissioned it then it could have been painted as late as 1804, before Rainier sailed for England early in 1805. In that case it would only have arrived in England with Cochrane on his return in 1806 and remained with him thereafter. This assumes it is the prime version: if it is not then no other credible one is known. No. 3 on the list above appears to be a fairly crude early copy with variant dress buttoning rather than a credible but badly damaged prime version.

There is a typed slip of paper loosely stuck on the back of the lining canvas reading ‘NO. 35. ADMIRAL PETER RAINIER. A GREAT FRIEND OF HONBLE BASIL COCHRANE.’ This may repeat something written on the back of the original canvas now covered over, but clearly relates to an inventory. Its claim is corroborated by a late codicil (12 February 1808) to Rainier’s will of 1802 which, among other provisions, left £100 each to three ‘esteemed friends’ including Cochrane, and another £100 to his old shipmate Captain (later Vice-Admiral) Benjamin William Page (1765–1845) who returned to England with him as his flag-captain in 1805. The canvas also formerly bore a small number ‘35’ painted in white in the bottom left corner, as seen in old photos in the NMM archive.

There are several chalked numbers on the stretcher and at its bottom right corner a small brass plate stamped ‘L51–31’. This is a standard NMM tag of the type used in the 1950s/60s confirming it as the canvas on loan to the Museum from 1951 to 1986 with three 19th-century portraits of naval officers of the Cochrane family (Thomas Cochrane, 10th Earl of Dundonald; Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane and Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane). It is noted as by ‘unknown artist’ in the NMM’s published 1958 list of portraits but by 1961 had been attributed to Hickey based on comparison with his 1806 portrait of the sitter’s nephew, Captain Peter Rainier (BHC2962), also painted in Madras and separately acquired by the Museum in 1952. Why that had not been done by 1958 is unknown: it is not of the same quality as that of the younger Rainier but the general style – head and torso, turned half-right against a rich brown background – is sufficiently like to justify a Hickey attribution.

The lender in 1951 was Captain Edward George Godolphin Hastings RN (1887–1973) but the loan continued from his widow (‘Mrs E.G. Hastings’ in the NMM file) and was only terminated by her heirs following her death in 1985. She was the Hon. Grisell Annabella Gem Cochrane-Baillie (d. 1985) and, strictly speaking, all four paintings were hers by descent, not her husband’s. The couple married in 1922 and had three daughters:

Marian Hermione Grisell (no further information – possibly an infant death?)

Sheila Felicity Phoebe (1925– 2015) who in 1954 married John Humphrey Scrimgeour, d. 2004.

Bridget Anne (1928– November 2011) who in 1955 married Patrick Stephens Leigh, d. July 2011.

In March 1990 NMM heard from the last, then living at Lewes, about one of the Cochrane portraits which had been returned from loan in 1986 without its frame, but it seems more likely that the Rainier portrait was inherited by her sister Sheila since, when formally ‘unveiled’ at the College of Optometrists in September 1991, that was done by a ‘Mrs Scrimgeour’. Record photos taken at the time (see for example *The Optician*, 20 Sept. 1991, p.4; *Optometry Today*, 23 Sept. 1991, p.8) show a lady of the age to be Sheila. The Optometrists’ reference for the photos themselves is LDBOA2014.482–484.

She was then reported as a ‘descendant’ of Rainier but this was a mistake (he never married). The British College of Optometrists Finance Committee Minutes for 5 March 1991 note that the portrait had recently been purchased for £4000 by the British Optical Association Foundation. The Foundation was amalgamated into the College from 1993 but no documentation appears to have been retained on the matter. A note in the NMM photo-archive records that it was lot 25 at Christie’s, London, on 1 March 1991 (presumably in a British pictures sale).

Given the later invitation to Mrs Scrimgeour, it seems likely that she sent it to Christie’s and that the BOAF made contact with her either before or after securing it. Optical historians had certainly known of it earlier, however: the NMM supplied an image (from NMM neg. 966 or SNR neg. 5783) for a piece focused on the sitter’s glasses in *From the Master and Wardens* (Newsletter of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers) in November 1990, though the way that is written suggests the writer thought it was then still at Greenwich, four years after its loan there ended.

Charles Turner produced a mezzotint from the portrait in 1824 (plate size 9 5/8 x 6 1/8: 243 x 154 mm) for Brenton’s *Naval History*. The artist is not stated, only that his source was the present ‘ex-Hastings’ version then ‘in the possession of the Honble Basil Cochrane’. Turner’s version shows the sitter’s hair less solidly rendered, with six buttonholes on the uniform coat, three at the bottom of the waistcoat (with the lowest undone) and more of a pot belly: the present oil only shows five on the coat, two at the bottom of the waistcoat and a greater height of background above the sitter’s head. This suggests Turner may also have seen either no. 3 or one of the Devis versions (nos. 4 and 5), which both show only six coat buttonholes, many more waistcoat buttons, and looser hair. That said, there is no way of entirely reconciling the Turner print with any of the painted versions, even the present ‘ex-Cochrane/Hastings’ one on which it claims to be based.

There is also another anonymous print of about the same image size as Turner’s but only bearing ‘Admiral Rainier’ as title (NMM PAD4289). This shows the same ‘five and two’ button pattern as the present ex-Cochrane/Hastings oil, with the same proportion of background above the sitter’s head and so was probably taken directly from it: they are to all practical purposes congruent, including in minor detail. The two engravings are not so, making it unlikely that the anonymous print was copied from Turner’s.

Being an ‘esteemed friend’ of Rainier, it would be understandable for Cochrane to have a copy of his portrait; less so to have the original and particularly so within the lifetimes of Rainier’s principal residual heirs, his nephews Dr Peter Rainier (early 1777–1837) and Rear-Admiral John Spratt Rainier (late 1777–1822), sons of his elder brother Daniel (1739–1802). The former was a bachelor and had no children: the latter (m. 1806) had just one daughter. They had no family connection to Basil Cochrane (1753–1826) who made a fortune in India, also based at Madras. This is where he first knew Rainier, since from 1792 he took over from his brother John Cochrane as the prime Navy supply contractor there until he himself returned home immensely rich in 1806, a year after Rainier. All that said, if the present oil is the prime version the simplest explanation is that, even if commissioned by Rainier, he gave it to Cochrane before they both left India or – at latest – Cochrane had it from Rainier’s death in 1808.

Devis’s versions seem to be copied from it in terms of pose and in showing Rainier as a vice-admiral (despite the fact he rose to full admiral in November 1805) but updated a little for age and with considerable variations of the waistcoat buttoning: he shows ten waistcoat buttons in all with five done-up below the opening rather than just two or three, and a blue cameo-headed pin inserted in the neckcloth. If the one done for Page (no. 4) was painted in 1805, as inscribed on the frame, it could only have been done if the original returned with Rainier to England in October that year, and ignoring that Rainier was promoted to admiral in November, making the two epaulette stars shown out of date. It was more probably done in 1806 at earliest – after presumed arrival of the original in England with Cochrane – and before Rainier’s death in 1808 if an update sitting was involved.

Page added a long biographical sketch of Rainier on the back after 1822 (see below for text) but other dates are adrift in that – including his memory of exactly when they both got home from India. It is therefore likely that the 1805 inscription on the frame, whenever added, is unreliable. Page eventually gave his Devis to the Revd W.S. Halliday of Glenthorne, Lynton, Devon, who lent it to the South Kensington National Portraits Exhibition, 1867, no. 772, and the Leeds National Exhibition of Works of Art, 1868, no. 1068. It was also on loan to the NMM for a short while around 1980 when the Museum took record photographs still in its file, including the frame and of Page’s text and the exhibition labels (as above) on the back.

Rainier’s original 1890s DNB entry presumes it was the source of the earlier engraving(s). It is clearly not, save in general pose, but the error is understandable given it by then had a public exhibition record. The ‘Hickey’ versions do not.

Devis’s slightly smaller second version (no. 5) has been in the Wellington collection at Stratfield Saye since before 1841. How Arthur Wellesley (1st Duke) obtained it is unknown, or how well he knew Rainier, but they would certainly have had official contact when both were in India the 1790s and from where Wellesley returned about three years earlier.

The small oval portrait (no. 6 above) – which seems to be based either on the present oil or the Turner print of 1824 – was formerly in the Royal United Service Museum collection and is one of many items transferred to the NMM when that was dispersed in 1963. Page is noted as having given the RUSM a Rainier portrait so this may be it, but if so it was clearly not primarily copied from the Devis version that he later gave to Halliday.

The 2015 Christie entry on the Page/Devis version includes this note on the sitter’s glasses:

The spectacles Admiral Rainier is depicted wearing are very unusual, and were probably invented by Edward Scarlett (1627-1730), a London optician, whose design was improved by James Ayscough in 1752. Ayscough designed several other types of spectacles, which had lenses 3/4in. in diameter and including the frame were 1¾in. across. The Admiral's spectacles have ‘Martin's Margins’, which are rims of tortoiseshell or horn, designed to reduce the amount of light reaching the eyes.

This feature was designed by the London spectacle maker Benjamin Martin (1704–82) in the 1750s. Rainier’s eyesight was clearly bad: the post-1778 portrait of him as a captain in the 1774–87 full-dress (no. 1 above) which has been in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, since 1904 also appears to show him in similar ‘Martin’s Margin’ glasses. If so, they are less convincingly observed since the tortoiseshell margins are narrower than in pairs that survive.

Page’s MS note on Rainier, written after 1822 on black-edged writing paper, and stuck on the back of his Devis (no. 4), with the later exhibition labels for South Kensington and Leeds, reads as follows:

‘Admiral Peter Rainier was born at Sandwich, Kent - the 2d of three Sons, their Ancestors Hugonots [*sic*]- who fled from persecution on Religious topics & settled as Wine Merchants at Sandwich, became often Mayors &c supporting Mr Secretary Stephens as MP for that Borough for many years - the Admiral was a Midn. with Captain (the lamented drowned) Kempenfelt in India & a Lieutt. at the Peace of 1763. Commanded a Merchants Ship to America till the Rebellion there & being made a Commander into HM Sloop Ostrich of 16 guns, captured the Privateer, Oliver Cromwell of Superior force, after severe loss of Life on both sides & took her into Port at Jamaica - was made Post Captain & on recovery from severe Wounds 1778 was appointed to the Burford of seventy Guns & sent to the East Indies with Admiral Sir Edward Hughes KB 1779 - fought the Burford nobly in all the Five Battles with Suffrein [*recte* Suffren] 1782-3 & conducted her home, a wreck nearly, 1784 - in 1786 he was appointed 2d in Command to Jamaica & in 1790 to the Monarch 74, as a Guardship - in 1793 to the Suffolk 74 as a Channel Cruizer & sent by Lord Howe, in May 1794 to Convoy the East India Ships there, continued Commander in Chief on that Station for nearly Twelve Years, with great approbation & acquiring a very large Fortune, most honorably - the King rec’d him in Oct. 1805 most graciously, & meant to give him the KB Honors, but was never again able to go from Windsor.

The Corporation of Sandwich voluntarily elected their Townsman Admiral Rainier MP for that Borough & on his lamented demise, 1809 [*recte* 1808], chose his Nephew, Admiral John Spratt Rainier, his successor & he also died so [in 1822].

The above little sketch was thus roughly penned [by] his shipmate & patronized Lieutt at Jamaica for four Years & in the 74s above named, his First Lieutt till Promoted 17[9]8 Post [Captain] & his Captain again in India, till paid off, 1805-6 –

B.W. Page [indecipherable date]

‘Mr Secretary Stephens’ is Sir Philip Stephens (1723–1809) Secretary to the Admiralty. The death of John Spratt Rainier in 1822 shows the note post-dates that. Page’s memory of dates also seems adrift since\ he made Post Captain in December 1796 not 1798 and both he and Rainier paid off on return from India in the *Trident* (64) in October 1805 not 1806.

PvdM 8.7. 22