Sitter – Wheatley

**Eight portraits of the Wheatley family by Francis Alleyne (1740–1815)**

In 1786 Alleyne painted a set of eight oval Wheatley family portraits, presumably from sittings at their home, Lesney House, Erith, Kent. In *Country Life* for 5 April 1962 (vol. 131, p. 777) a general sales round-up by Frank Davis reported the dispersal of seven of them in an unspecified auction (but possibly at Sotheby’s): ‘Each portrait is 14 ins. by 11 ins. The mother busy tatting and the father holding documents were sold in one lot for £850. Two boys found an appreciative home for £800 and three other children for £1,050, so these seven very English portraits by a near-unknown, realised £2,700.’

**William Wheatley (1743–1807)** was a Kent landowner who married **Margaret Randall (1751–1824)**, in London in 1768: their portraits from the set are now in the Yale Center for British Art: B1981.2516 (him) and B1981.2515 (her).

Their children were: **Lucy Margaret (1769–1828)**; **William (1771–1812)**, later Major-General William Wheatley of the 1st Foot Guards, who died of illness in Spain during the Peninsular War, leaving three sons and a daughter; **John (1772–1830)**, an Oxford-educated lawyer, now more remembered as an early economist, who died at sea returning from South Africa, also leaving family; **Charles (1774 – 1787)**; **Henry (1777–1852)**, later Major-General Sir Henry Wheatley, 1st Bt., who joined the Grenadier Guards in 1795 and after his military career was in 1830 appointed Keeper of the Privy Purse to William IV and became Receiver-General of the Duchy of Cornwall. He continued as both under Queen Victoria until retiring in 1847 but, having lost his two sons in childhood (one perinatally) and only survived by three of four daughters, the baronetcy died with him. **George (1781–1816)** was the youngest sibling painted by Alleyne in 1786 but two others followed: **Maria Margaret (1790–1812)** and **Leonard Lewin (1795–1854)**. Lucy, George, Maria and Leonard died unmarried.

Although exact details of the 1962 sale are still elusive, its catalogue descriptions of the five children’s portraits can be reconstructed from online extracts in *Art and Auctions* (1962, vol. 6, p. 305) and *Art Prices Current* (vol. 39, p. 99):

**[Lot/list no.?] 175 A** **– ‘Children of the Wheatley family:** John, aged 13, in blue, holding dead game, a pointer beside him; Charles, aged 11, wearing a red coat holding a bird’s nest in his hands, three-quarter length portraits, a pair, both signed, inscr. and dated 1786 on the reverse, oval 14 ½ x 11 [7]/8 ins.’

These were the ‘two boys’ that made £800. They reappeared still as a pair as lot 83 in a furniture sale at Christie’s, London, on 3 March 1994, unillustrated online, but described in slightly variant detail and size as:

‘Portrait of Charles Wheatley, three-quarter length, aged 11, in a red jacket and white shirt, holding a bird's nest in a landscape; and Portrait of John Wheatley, three-quarter length, aged 13, in a blue jacket with a red collar and white shirt, holding a dead grouse, his dog by his side, in a landscape.  
  
The former with inscription 'Charles Wheatley/age 11/Fr. Alleyne - Painted 1786' on the reverse, the latter with inscription 'John Wheately[sic] /age thirteen/Fr.s Alleyne - Painted 1786', on the reverse; ovals 15 x 11 7/8in. (38.1 x 30.2cm.).’

On this occasion they made £14,950 against estimate of £6-8K. MutualArt then records their reappearance at sale as a pair on 12 June 2003, illustrating that of Charles, facing left holding a bird’s nest: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/PORTRAITS-OF-TWO-BROTHERS/126E001D8D817378>.

**[Lot/list no.?] 175 B** **– ‘Children of the Wheatley family:** Miss [Lucy Margaret] Wheatley, aged 16, seated, making lace; Henry, aged 8, a whip in his right hand: George, aged 5; set of three, each … [certainly oval and of presumed same dimensions as the others]’. These were the trio sold for £1,050 in 1962 but which have not yet reappeared.

Alleyne’s eighth Wheatley portrait of 1786 is of the eldest son, William, aged 14, facing left in three-quarter length, wearing an olive-green coat over a white frilled shirt and buff breeches. He holds a cricket bat over his right shoulder, with a set of three stumps in his left hand, against a background of misty trees: <https://apps.lords.org/lords/tours-and-museum/museum/searchthecollections/artefactdetails/Museum/8704?page=1>

This is now in the MCC holdings at Lord’s (ref. TN2009.673) as part of the cricketing art collection formed by Sir Jeremiah Colman (1st baronet, 1859–1942, of Colman’s mustard fame), but is not illustrated in his related book, *The Noble Art of Cricket* (Batsford, 1941). His son, also Sir Jeremiah (2nd bt., 1886–1961) presented most of that to the MCC in 1947 and the residue, including the Wheatley portrait, early in 1952. How or when it was acquired is unknown but, like others of the set, it is the same oval canvas size (recorded as 36.5 x 28.5cm) and bears an inscription in black ink on the reverse noted as ‘William Wheatley aged / Fourteen / Painted by / ? Alleyne January / 1786’. The dimensions currently on the MCC website (53 x 45cm) is of the carved or moulded pierced frame.

Sir Henry Wheatley was also subject of an 1836 half-length portrait by Henry William Pickersgill, subsequently engraved in mezzotint by F.J. de la Ferté Joubert. A Sotheby colour image of the painting illustrates his Wikipedia entry.

*PvdM 13.6.24, based on web-searched details from Marcie Doran and with thanks to Alan Rees, Archive and Library Manager, MCC, for those of their William Wheatley portrait. Note that Ancestry data, including family trees, have so far suggested an unexplained absence of official record for Charles Wheatley (b. 7 July 1774, d. 2 April 1787, according to Burke,* Landed Gentry *[1921] p.1870, ‘Wheatley of Gwersyllt Park’). An obituary notice in the* Salisbury and Winchester Journal *of 16 April 1787 reports that he died aged 13 ‘at Southampton, where he had gone for the recovery of his health.’*