

Questions of identification and attribution:  
*Unknown man, formerly known as Joseph  
Wright*, National Portrait Gallery, London

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### Contents

Introduction	page 1
Background and context to the painting	3
Applying the attribution protocol	4
Provenance	4
Iconography	7
Derivative or ancillary works	10
Study of the condition of the work	11
Material studies: The canvas and the frame	12
My hypothesis	18
Questions to test the hypothesis	18
Analysis of candidate authors' careers and oeuvre	21
Connoisseurship	22
Conclusion	25
Acknowledgements	26
Bibliography	26
Figures	31
Appendix: Table 1	54

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“As the art dealer Edmé Gersaint would express in 1745, there is tremendous economic pressure to identify not a painting's geography or period but an individual artist's name when offered for sale.”<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The high financial stakes involved in attributing a work of art have increased substantially since French picture-dealer Gersaint's sentiment (above), and in addition we must be sensitive to the potential threat to reputations of owner, dealer and artist in the face of a new attribution. The College Art Association of America's recommended best practices for authentications and attributions are “Art-historical documentation, stylistic connoisseurship, and technical or scientific analysis”.<sup>2</sup> They urge art historians to provide opinions “in conjunction with a group of other scholars and conservators who can form a consensus” and to rely on specialists for the technical analysis of materials. A contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Pullins, David, ‘The Individual's Triumph’, 2.

<sup>2</sup> College Art Association of America, ‘Standards & Guidelines | Authentications and Attributions’.

attribution protocol<sup>3</sup> describes seven steps: “a study of provenance (the documentary record of sales, ownership, and display of works), material studies (chemical and spectral analysis of pigments, supports, etc.), iconography (study of the items, costumes, material culture, and so on depicted in a work), study of the condition of the work, analysis of candidate authors’ careers and oeuvre (styles at different periods of career), derivative or ancillary works (preparatory studies, cartoons, copies, x-ray, hyperspectral images that reveal spectral information, [pentimenti], and other physical characteristics, as well as yielding information of previous states of a work), and connoisseurship (close visual analysis of the composition, style, brush strokes, shading, etc.).”

I present here - written as a first-person narrative due to the nature of the project – the results of my investigation, using the above seven-part attribution protocol, into the sitter and artist of the oil painting *Unknown man, formerly known as Joseph Wright, c. 1765–1770* (gallery identifier NPG29)<sup>4</sup> (Fig.1). This portrait depicts a cloaked, seated young man in half-length, presenting his left side with arm bent and elbow resting on a portfolio/folder, while his face turns towards the viewer with an intense and melancholy gaze. Having studied the wider oeuvre of Joseph Wright of Derby (1734–1797) but not the details of his portraiture, I became intrigued by this enigmatic painting. When it was presented to the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in 1858 the artwork was believed by the donor and recipient to be a self-portrait by Wright. The idea was promulgated by William Bemrose’s 1885 biography of Wright, where a small oval engraving of the portrait (reversed left–right) was printed and explained thus: “The Vignette of Joseph Wright on the Title Page is reproduced from the Original Picture in the National Portrait Gallery”<sup>5</sup>. However, the consensus now is that NPG29 does not *depict* Wright (with which I agree) but experts disagree on whether it is *by* Wright (Bendor Grosvenor and Martin Postle; personal communication).

I was granted an appointment to view NPG29 - propped on bricks on the floor at the NPG off-site storage site - for one hour in February 2024. A copy<sup>6</sup> (Fig.2) exists in the collection of the Derby Museum and Art Gallery, and I was able to view this painting on an easel in their Study Room in January 2024. These and further investigations were guided by the steps in the protocol, and hence this essay is structured in terms of the protocol but with an adjustment to the order in which each part is described. My starting position is that Wright is the most likely artist, which I develop by interrogating the current evidence and explaining my findings about the painting (also in conjunction with contemporary experts). A part of the protocol that I was able to expand on – material studies, and specifically the picture frame – led me to a line of enquiry that has enabled me to devise a hypothesis about the sitter’s identification and an interesting proposition regarding the artist. I can therefore comment on the extent to which the protocol has proved useful for investigating a mid-Georgian portrait, providing a tool for other art historians.

If the results of my investigations are accepted as support for a firm attribution and new identification, these would be important for the NPG and of wider interest in the field. Wright’s work continues to gain in popularity and appreciation with the publication of new

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<sup>3</sup> Ugail, Hassan et al., ‘Deep Transfer Learning’.

<sup>4</sup> Unknown artist, ‘NPG29 Extended’.

<sup>5</sup> Bemrose, William, *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright A.R.A., Commonly Called ‘Wright of Derby’*....

<sup>6</sup> Unknown artist, ‘Copy of NPG29’.

scholarship such as by Matthew Craske in 2020<sup>7</sup>, and I expect will escalate with a revised edition of Benedict Nicolson's major catalogue raisonné of 1968<sup>8</sup> currently in preparation by Martin Postle at the Paul Mellon Centre. Wright's works are sought after by galleries and private collectors and the few that come to market fetch important sums. His famous candlelight painting, *The Academy by Lamplight*, was listed with an estimate of £2.5-3.5 million in a 2017 auction<sup>9</sup>; a view of Vesuvius realised over £1.2 million<sup>10</sup> and a portrait sold for US \$220,000<sup>11</sup> at auctions in 2021. Most recently, Wright's own *Self-portrait at the age of about forty (1772)*<sup>12</sup>, acquired by Derby Museum and Art Gallery in 2022, was valued at £3 million<sup>13</sup>, being his only self-portrait depicting himself as an artist, holding a porte-crayon (Fig.3).

If NPG29 can be proved to be by Wright, and having been accessioned in 1858, then it pre-dates by five years Wright's *Experiment on a bird in the air pump* which is currently described<sup>14</sup> as "the first of his works to enter a British public collection when it was acquired by the National Gallery in 1863".

## Background and context to the painting

John Ingamells, in his *Mid-Georgian Portraits*, states that the years 1760–1790 "are sometimes described as the Golden Age of British portraiture"<sup>15</sup>. Browsing through this extensive catalogue for the NPG, the variety of images is testament to a boom in the portrait industry to match the Enlightenment's human-centric focus, the enlarging of the Empire, and the stirrings of the Industrial Revolution. Portraiture served more purposes than previously while featuring a wider (though by no means complete) cross-section of society who commissioned their own likeness: nobility and landed gentry of course, but also the growing merchant and industrialist middle classes as well as diarists, poets, singers, stage celebrities and even the head waiter at a coaching inn (in Wright's *Portrait of Old John, Head Waiter at the King's Head Inn*<sup>16</sup>; Fig.4).

Artists of course could paint their own self-portraits and there are many from this period. Wright painted or drew his own likeness at least ten times (including two now untraced) across 40 years<sup>17</sup>. See a second example<sup>18</sup> in Fig.5; he often included an element of 'fancy dress' as with this silk turban, or fur hats, or a 'Van Dyke' costume in his youngest versions. Comparing the facial features in these self-portraits with NPG29 reveals that the latter is highly unlikely to depict Wright, whose broader and flatter face, round eyes, slightly upward-curving nose and detached ear lobe are all different from the sitter in NPG29.

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<sup>7</sup> Craske, Matthew, *Joseph Wright of Derby*.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, *Joseph Wright of Derby*.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'An Academy by Lamplight'.

<sup>10</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Vesuvius in Eruption, Viewed from Posillipo'.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Portrait of Miss Ann Carver'.

<sup>12</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Self Portrait 1772'.

<sup>13</sup> Sherwood, Harriet, 'Rare Joseph Wright of Derby Self-Portrait Donated to Local Museum | The Guardian'.

<sup>14</sup> Sherwood, Harriet.

<sup>15</sup> Ingamells, John, *Mid-Georgian Portraits, 1760-1790*, XV.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Portrait of Old John'.

<sup>17</sup> 'Joseph Wright | Person Extended | National Portrait Gallery'.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Self Portrait NGV'.

Many portraits of the period have plain, brown backgrounds, like NPG29, and are simply composed, although they may include an 'attribute' that indicates the sitter's profession, held by the sitter or on a table next to them – a legal document, a book, writing tools or, in the case of artists or architects, drawing tools (cf. Fig.3) or a folder of drawings, as in NPG29.

## Applying the attribution protocol

I have gathered a wealth of information, set out below under the protocol headings, with the learning summarised at the end of each section, and I offer a hypothesis for sitter and artist that builds on my discoveries.<sup>19</sup>

### Provenance (the documentary record of sales, ownership, and display of works)

#### i. Letter donating the painting to the NPG

The NPG acquired the painting from William Michael Rossetti (1829–1919), writer, literary critic and founder member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. From the painting's registered packet (RP) I have consulted the original letter he sent to the Trustees of the Gallery dated 19 February 1858 to offer them the painting, in which he describes what he knew of its provenance (see Fig.6 for images):

*...“Of the pedigree of the picture  
I cannot state anything that would  
particularly indicate its authenticity.  
It has been in the possession of my mother  
& under my own eye (of course with  
the inscription as it now stands) for  
some 16 years or so [back to 1842]. To my mother it  
came from her father (Gaetano Polidori,  
deceased); to him (I think about 20  
years ago) [c.1838] from an old friend, Signor  
Deagostini, also deceased; & to him, se-  
veral years before that, [c.early 1830s?] from, as far  
as I can gather, a M. Deville, who is  
believed to have been a Hungarian, in  
payment for a debt. For all the time  
as far back as I can trace, it seems  
to have been accepted for certain as*

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<sup>19</sup> I am aware that my investigations cannot be fully comprehensive, because as a private individual I do not have access to conservators for picture cleaning or extensive scientific and technical analyses. Cleaning and conservation of a painting can be crucial to revealing features in the original work and scientific analysis of pigments or the dating of a wooden support can provide a key piece of evidence. Other barriers have included delayed access to inspect works at close hand, and paintings hung out of reach or behind glass, making it difficult to see full details of brushwork or take suitable photographs.

## *the portrait of Wright of Derby."*

This document only helps us reach back to the early 1830s<sup>20</sup>.

Other people have been on this trail and offered further information on the Art UK 'Art Detective' website<sup>21</sup>:

- "The earliest name in the provenance is that of a Monsieur Deville. This Deville is almost certainly Nicolas-Gabriel Deville, secretary to Louis XVI. His son, an officer in the Swiss guards, left an account of (dramatically) escaping from the French revolutionaries in 1792. This hand-written account passed from Deville to Signor Deagostini to Gaetano Polidori - exactly the same line of descent as the NPG painting. Nicolas-Gabriel (or Nicholas Gabriel) Deville was in England from 1797 to 1802."
- "Signor Deagostini must be John Amadeo Deagostini who died in 1835 making Gaetano Polidori his executor, as I learn from his will which is in the National Archives (PROB-11-1849-172)."
- "John Amadeo Deagostini could be as per the *Brighton Patriot* newspaper 28 July 1835, "Notices of death: Mr J. A. Agostini, a native of Italy, and distinguished Italian master in London."

Probing this chronology for possible earlier links, I have researched the name of Nicolas-Gabriel Deville<sup>22</sup> (1741–1806) and his son Gabriel Denis Deville<sup>23, 24</sup> (1772–1839). As Nicolas-Gabriel had been secretary to King Louis XVI he was exiled to London in July 1789 following the French Revolution. He returned to France, but in 1797 resigned his role and again moved to London, obtaining from King George III the right to add O'Keeffe to his surname (through his mother's maiden name). By the time of his death in late 1806 he was back in Paris.

Deville is known to have travelled to Switzerland, but I have not found mention of his having been in Italy. The painting may have travelled to France or Deville may have come into possession of it during either of his sojourns in London, which could take the provenance back as far as 1789 at the very earliest, although his motivation for purchasing the painting is unclear. The note in Rossetti's account that Deville passed the painting on to Deagostini in payment of debt, if true, could indicate that his cash flow was limited at that time. This would correlate with a story dating from 1784 – the affair of Marie Antoinette's necklace<sup>25</sup> – in which a considerable sum of money due to him before the Revolution was never repaid.

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<sup>20</sup> Ingamells (and hence subsequent authors and those commenting on the Art UK website) incorrectly cites the trail as including Rossetti's *father-in-law* instead of his *mother* and then *her father*, despite this being perfectly legible in the hand-written letter. This is an example of how errors can be compounded by repetition without reference to original sources.

<sup>21</sup> Discussion, 'Art Detective'.

<sup>22</sup> 'Deville Nicolas-Gabriel | Family Tree, Profile, Timeline | Geneanet'.

<sup>23</sup> 'Deville Gabriel Denis | Family Tree, Profile, Timeline | Geneanet'.

<sup>24</sup> An account of Gabriel Denis Deville O'Keeffe's involvement in the fall of Louis XVI in 1792 is published in 'Le Figaro' of 4th August 1928. Gabriel Denis is recorded as having been in England and then Ireland during 1792–1802, including as a captain in Roll's Regiment, part of the British Army.

<sup>25</sup> 'Marie Antoinette's Necklace | The Spectator | Google Books'.

I have surfaced no evidence as to why, where and when the painting came into Nicolas-Gabriel Deville's hands.

An alternative link to a 'M. Deville' might be James De Ville (1777–1846), or Deville, who was a London-based plaster figure maker, lamp manufacturer, publisher of marked-up phrenological busts and the owner of a museum of phrenological casts<sup>26</sup>. Between 1823 and 1826 he showed busts at the Royal Academy, hence was linked into the London artists' world. What is unclear is the link from James De Ville to Deagostini, which holds more weight for Nicolas Deville. Nothing in the provenance points directly to a role for James De Ville.

## ii. The inscription on the canvas

The next line of inquiry as to provenance is to return to the work itself and use the inscription on the back of the original canvas, as cited by Rossetti:

*"The picture is marked at the | back, in ink, "Joseph Wright, 1775, | painted by himself at Rome, where he | died." (So I read the last word)."*

As the canvas has now been relined, we cannot check this directly, but in the RP I also found a small piece of paper signed "G. S. July 21<sup>st</sup> -1862-" (presumably George Scharf, Director of the NPG 1857–1895) with the same sentence transcribed as if copied in the style of the original writing (see Fig.7a) stating it was "written in brown ink on back of the old canvas..." but also an annotation that the text following the date was "written grey like as if in pencil" (Fig.7b). There is no indication of difficulty in interpreting the word 'died'.

Perhaps the whole text was added to the canvas by someone else? Wright was in Rome for most of the period between 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1774 and 10th June 1775, excepting an excursion to Naples. We know that Wright did not die in Rome but back in Derby two decades later. Might this mean that the other 'facts' here, "1775, painted by himself at Rome", are also fictitious? Wright routinely used brown ink, as I have seen in his Account Book and in letters. However, he did not routinely inscribe the back of canvases but signed on the front corners of paintings, slightly hidden on plinths or tree trunks, for example, and he would use contractions such as 'Jos. Wright pinxt/1777' or 'IW. P.'<sup>27</sup> I have not seen any example where he wrote 'Joseph' in full. The entire labelling on the back of NPG29 is likely to be someone else's addition, at a later time – leading to a statement that is all or part fiction.

**Summary:** The provenance seems to peter out in the 1830s and we are not sure how much of the canvas inscription can be believed.

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<sup>26</sup> Stair Sainty, 'James De Ville'.

<sup>27</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, *Joseph Wright of Derby*.



### **Iconography** (study of the items, costumes, material culture, and so on depicted in a work)

I start by directing attention to the sitter's pose, and then examine what clues may be gained from the folder, the hairstyle and the costume of the sitter. These are the only items available to work on, given the plain setting.

#### **Considering portraits and self-portraits**

Portrait styles were evolving from the seventeenth century's 'Van Dyck' format (50 x 40 inches and larger) that allowed a spacious background setting and body down to the knees or more, into Sir Godfrey Kneller's Kit-Kat portraits of the members of the eponymous club at the beginning of the eighteenth century, which used an elongated canvas proportion (36 x 28 inches) to fit just the top half of the body and have it fill the frame, bringing the sitter much closer to the viewer<sup>28</sup>.

A burgeoning interest in physiognomy - the reading of personality and innate characteristics from a person's face and head shape - was popularised by Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* published in the late 1770s, but earlier than this we can see that portrait artists such as Reynolds from late 1740s onwards were interested in expressing the vital nature of the sitter, not just depicting them with a likeness<sup>29</sup>. This resulted in a move away from idealisation into representing the particularities and even peculiarities of the sitter - what we would today call the psychological character. The sitter in NPG29 looks deep in thought and somewhat morose - there is no hint of a smile playing on the lips or in the eyes. Perhaps the intention is to depict a creative genius with a tortured soul?

The sitter's gaze is very direct, which is a feature of many self-portraits, since Albrecht Dürer's ground-breaking full face in 1500. The artist must intensely study their own reflection in a mirror beside the canvas in order to discern how to re-create the image (see Johannes Gump's *Self-portrait* of 1646 in Fig.8, cleverly displaying the full set-up<sup>30</sup>). A direct translation of the image sideways onto the canvas will result in an image that is reversed left-to-right, so a right-handed artist appears to be left-handed in the final painting and vice versa (if they represent themselves holding a brush for the active hand and/or palette in the other). Joshua Reynolds' famous *Self-Portrait Shading the Eyes*<sup>31</sup> of 1747 is the straight transposed reflection such that his right hand in the image is holding the palette and mahlstick. Some artists, however, would adjust their painted image so that what we should interpret as their right hand in the painting is seen holding the brush (for those that were right-handed!).<sup>32</sup>

In Wright's 1772 self-portrait (Fig.3) we view the *reflection* of his left elbow angled towards the viewer, and of his right hand resting on the left arm and holding the porte-crayon. In NPG29 the sitter's pose is similar to Wright's, albeit in reverse and without the second arm showing, and with his right elbow projecting further sideways. Reading NPG29 as a self-

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<sup>28</sup> Solkin, David H, *Painting for Money : The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, 32-36.

<sup>29</sup> Tscherny, Nadia, 'Likeness in Early Romantic Portraiture', 195.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, Jonathan, *On Reflection*, 187.

<sup>31</sup> 'Sir Joshua Reynolds - National Portrait Gallery'.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, Jonathan, *On Reflection*, 189.



portrait would suggest the sitter may have been left-handed. However, the sitter appears more distant from the viewer, with space between all of his body and the picture plane, while Wright's projecting elbow appears to meet the picture plane, bringing him closer to the viewer, even though in both paintings the bodies take up the same proportion of the canvas.

Opinion is divided as to whether NPG29 is a self-portrait. Rossetti was convinced:

*"The turn of the head & setting / of the eyes seem, in themselves, to be / almost conclusive evidence that the / sitter & the painter are one..."*

Martin Postle (pers. commun.) says "It does have the air of a self-portrait but...we cannot be sure..."; and Bendor Grosvenor believes it is not a self-portrait (pers. commun.; which follows from his conviction that the artist is Wright). Jacob Simon says on the Art Detective discussion forum<sup>33</sup>: "To my eyes this portrait is very likely to depict an artist but it is less certainly a self-portrait". I think it is not a self-portrait due to the physical distance of the sitter from the picture plane, and what I interpret as a psychological distancing of the sitter, despite his direct gaze.

### The attribute of a folder of papers

A folder in a portrait can symbolise an artist or an architect (e.g. George Willison's portrait of Robert Adam holding a giant, bound portfolio), so others' attempts to identify the sitter have also focused on candidates close to Wright such as his pupil Richard Hurlestone and the artist John Downman, who accompanied Wright and his new wife on his journey to Italy, setting off in late October 1773, and the architect James Paine the younger who joined them later, all arriving in Rome in 1774.

I have discounted the possibility that the portrait is of Downman or Paine based on lack of likeness by comparing with other known portraits; we have no known likeness of Hurlestone, who died in 1777 shortly after returning to England. I have looked more widely at portraits of other artists of the period (for example in Ingamells<sup>34</sup> and online) without finding any convincing likenesses.

I have also discounted - on the grounds of artistic style and facial likeness - the possibility that the painting is either of, or by, the American-born artist with the same name as on the back of the canvas, **Joseph Wright** (1757–1793), whose family came to London in 1772 and who studied at the Royal Academy from 1775, moving to Paris and then back to America in 1782, and who produced portraits of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington.<sup>35</sup>

If I were to allow that the folder in the portrait is not a signifier of the sitter's profession then the most similar facial likeness I have seen in someone of the right age is that of Daniel Parker Coke (1745–1825), painted by Wright in the group portrait *The Reverend D'Ewes Coke, his wife Hannah and Daniel Parker Coke, M.P.*<sup>36</sup> of 1780–82, which I have seen at the Derby Museum (Fig.9). The Reverend is the one holding the pencil/stylus and his wife holds

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<sup>33</sup> Discussion, 'Art Detective'.

<sup>34</sup> Ingamells, John, *Mid-Georgian Portraits, 1760-1790*.

<sup>35</sup> 'Joseph Wright (b. 1757) | Artist | Royal Academy of Arts'; 'Founders Online'; 'Joseph Wright, American Painter | Wikipedia'.

<sup>36</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'The Reverend D'Ewes Coke'.

the folder, while Parker Coke compares the drawing with the landscape before them. Parker Coke's eyes, nose and ear are similar, and to be able to see an ear at all is very unusual as period wigs and hair curls usually covered them. Parker Coke studied law and was elected MP for Derby in 1776, and for Nottingham in 1780; he won Wright's painting of *Old John* in a raffle and bought two further Wrights, views of Cromford<sup>37</sup>. While other members of the Coke family were in Italy at the same time as Wright, we do not have information to suggest that Parker Coke himself was there. Intriguingly Nicolson's catalogue of portraits mentions that Wright's account book contains "the entry **Parker Coke Esq<sup>r</sup>**, to which no price is affixed, and the entry is deleted. This may imply that a portrait of D. P. Coke was projected but not executed".<sup>38</sup> (Other Coke family members were painted.) Was it, in fact, made and is now unaccounted for? Clearly Parker Coke did not die in 1775 but in the scenario where we discount the canvas inscription as having any truth, might NPG29 be his lost portrait? I am going to leave this possibility 'hanging' until further evidence is found, because we must ignore the folder attribute to begin considering this identification.

## Wigs and hair

The wig was important at this period but those with their own abundant hair could get away without one. If a wig was worn, it was always powdered (and you can see in Fig.10 that Wright includes in his portrait of *Erasmus Darwin*<sup>39</sup> the powder that has fallen off the wig onto his shoulder). Under the wig the longer hair was tied into a pigtail or two at the back with black silk ribbons; the wig had one or more side curls that often covered the ears.

The sitter in NPG29 wears his own hair pulled back into a pigtail (the end of the tail can be seen to the left of his neck) and the shorter side hair curled up above the ears. This same style is seen on Francis Burdett painted by Wright in 1762 ("The hair is his own arranged at the side in a flicked-up roll"<sup>40</sup>).

## Costume

The materials for the masculine coat were slowly changing in the second half of the eighteenth century from thin ornate materials such as silks and brocades towards cloth, wool and corduroy. The cut of the coat was "nearly knee length, usually worn unbuttoned, without collar...".<sup>41</sup> A small collar reappeared in the late 1760s and became very deep and high up the neck in the 1780s. I suggest that NPG29 shows a cloth, collarless coat; but how far can we take this in dating the picture? Perhaps the absence of a collar is why Ingamells states "Evidently a self-portrait of 1765–70". These fashion trends were of course most closely followed/dictated by the gentry and trickled down in more diluted forms to others. Young men who had no inheritance or who had not yet made their own way in the world, such as unestablished artists or architects, might be expected to be wearing styles that were

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<sup>37</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, 125.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, 188.

<sup>39</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Erasmus Darwin'.

<sup>40</sup> Ribeiro, Aileen, *A Visual History of Costume. The Eighteenth Century*, 81.

<sup>41</sup> Yarwood, Doreen, *English Costume: From the Second Century B. C. to 1967*, 189.

not up to date. I suggest the absence of a collar alone is not sufficient evidence to contradict the date on the back of the picture, i.e. 1775.

The open-necked shirt is relatively unusual - certainly not typical costume of the period; men wore a white 'stock' tied high up around the shirt collar (as in Fig.9) and sometimes brought the black silk ribbons from the wig around to the front on top of the stock. NPG29 has two buttons, again a feature rare on other portraits, although the demonstrator in Wright's *Air pump* has an unbuttoned shirt with one button visible, and the light from the candle shines up through two buttonholes onto his neck (Fig.11). Notably it is Wright who has used the open-necked shirt in several further instances: in his 1772 *Self-portrait* (Fig.3) and in his portraits of *Thomas Day*<sup>42</sup> (Fig.12), *The Indian Captain*<sup>43</sup> (Fig.13) and *Gentleman in a red fur-trimmed coat...*<sup>44</sup> (Fig.14). Interestingly these encompass both informal 'creative' sitters and more formal, military subjects. The portraits of *George Oakley Aldrich*<sup>45</sup> by Pompeo Batoni (Fig.15) and *Johann Joachim Winckelmann*<sup>46</sup> by Angelica Kauffman are the only others I know from this period featuring open-necked shirts, and Aldrich's collar even has two white buttons like NPG29.

**Summary:** The evidence leans away from this being a self-portrait. There are few clues in the sitter's dress and hair to pin down to a narrow date range, so we can continue to consider a date as early as 1765 following Ingamells<sup>47</sup>, up to 1775 following the canvas inscription. The open-necked shirt is a feature in at least five paintings by Wright. Among young artists/architects in Wright's circle I have not tracked down someone with the same likeness, although there is a likeness to the local barrister Parker Coke.

**Derivative or ancillary works** (preparatory studies, cartoons, copies, x-ray, hyperspectral images that reveal spectral information, pentimenti, and other physical characteristics, as well as yielding information of previous states of a work)

The one piece of evidence I have for this part of the protocol is the copy painting, which I have inspected at the Derby Museum and Art Gallery (Fig.2). Confusingly it is listed on the Art UK website as *Self Portrait, Joseph Wright of Derby (after)*<sup>48</sup>. It was given to the Gallery in 1931 by Wright's biographer William Bemrose, who had married a descendant of Wright.

The existence and preservation of a copy tells us that the original was valued in one or more ways. This might be for the sitter, such that another family member wished to have their own version, or because the artist was well known. In the case of Joseph Wright of Derby's self-portraits, for example, several copies are known of at least two from his later years<sup>49</sup>. A painting might also be appreciated directly for its artistic merit, such that another painter wished to learn by making the copy; or when the original was lent to an exhibition or sent to

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<sup>42</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Thomas Day'.

<sup>43</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'The Indian Captain'.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Gentleman in a Red Fur-Trimmed Coat'.

<sup>45</sup> Batoni, Pompeo, 'George Oakley Aldrich'.

<sup>46</sup> Kauffman, Angelica, 'Johann Joachim Winckelmann'.

<sup>47</sup> Ingamells, John, *Mid-Georgian Portraits, 1760-1790*.

<sup>48</sup> Unknown artist, 'Copy of NPG29'.

<sup>49</sup> 'Joseph Wright | All Known Self Portraits and Portraits | National Portrait Gallery'.

storage, a copy might be made so that the image was still available. In either of these cases we might have expected a copy that was more faithful to the original, yet labels on the back of the frame (if it has stayed with this painting) indicate that the copy has indeed been lent to exhibitions in the past.

While the Derby picture is undoubtedly poorly executed - the figure is in the wrong proportions and painted without any of the finesse of the original - it may tell us a little bit about the original if it preserves colour or details better than the original, because the paint is newer and perhaps of better lasting quality and has captured the original before some of the deterioration has occurred. I note that the colour of the draped cloak in the copy is clearly a dark red and this is a hint that the cloak in the original has lost much of its vibrancy.

The copy is in poor condition in terms of apparent overpainting, showing now as glaring grey/white pigment on the eyes, parts of the hair, and fully around the edge of the canvas.

On the Art UK Art Detective discussion about this copy and the original<sup>50</sup>, we have the comment "Lucy Bamford, Senior Curator of Art and the Joseph Wright Collection, says this painting was recently scoured for details, but nothing was found". Bamford believes it dates from the nineteenth century (pers. commun.).

**Summary:** we have learnt nothing from this copy that helps to identify the sitter or the artist in the original, but the existence of the copy supports the idea that the artist of the original was revered.

### **Study of the condition of the original work**

The RP contains two key documents:

i) The *index /accession form* records: "Repaired and restored | September 1878 | J. Reeve" (Fig.16). We can guess this likely occurred when it was relined, as detected in the 1994 examination report (see below). It is impossible to know what constituted this repair and restoration, although a 1994 examination detected a possible repair site, and some dark paint that appears to be overpainting could have been added at this time (see below).

ii) The *examination report* dated July 1994 has comments: "Very fine simple weave canvas which has been glue-paste lined on similar" and "Very discoloured and bloomed varnish, surface dust and dirt". It noted that the paint surface is very brittle and flaking; retouching is detected in the background. There is no indication that any restoration work was undertaken after this report - evidently flaked paint and discoloured varnish remains, and this is a considerable problem for making an attribution due to the occlusion of true colour and the finer details in the brushwork.

My own viewing of the painting, behind glass, found that the surface has deteriorated, usually in horizontal and vertical cracks and then with larger patches of discolouration. On the sitter's face there are patches of red that might be interpreted as skin blemishes but might also be the result of shrinkage of the top layer of paler paint to reveal a darker base layer (Figs.17a-c), for example on the end and side of the chin. Perhaps the sitter had a

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<sup>50</sup> Discussion, 'Art Detective'.

pockmarked face? Wright was known for painting his sitters' features faithfully and often gave them roseate skin. He painted Thomas Day with a red face (Fig.12); Day was described by Anna Seward in 1804 "...his features interesting and agreeable amidst the traces of a severe small pox".<sup>51</sup> Pock marks are different from redness but this might have been how Wright dealt with the disfigurement in this instance.

There was paint that did not seem to be in the same register of colours as the painting as a whole – very dark, almost black, in the hair behind the ear (perhaps the site of a repair that is noted in the examination report) and above the ear, in the lock of hair at left shoulder, rather obvious in the left eye and the hair curl next to it (Figs.17b-e). This out-of-register colour was more prominent when seen at first hand than on the NPG website image. It might be overpainting by another hand, perhaps the 'repair and restoration' of 1878. I also noted the discoloured varnish. What would have been a white shirt with bright highlights is now rather yellowed, suggesting how the whole image has been similarly dulled (Fig.17f).

Interestingly the copy painting shows redness in the face in the same places that we see it in the original, but again whether these are truly skin blemishes or just surface skin colour is unclear (and my photos with all the reflections do not help!). There is no doubt that the paint surface is flaking in parts on NPG29 and confounding my interpretation.

**Summary:** The poor condition of the paint surface may prove a barrier to making a firm attribution and identification because colours can be misinterpreted, and details of original brushwork for the connoisseurship analysis may not be visible. Some small areas of incongruously dark colour, which might be overpainting, exist on the hair and face.

#### **Material studies** (chemical and spectral analysis of pigments, supports, etc.)

Without access to scientific investigative techniques such as infra-red reflectography for underdrawing or underpainting, ultraviolet light for overpaint, pigment analysis in terms of metal ions, and high-resolution microscopy of paint layers in cross-section, I cannot comment on these hidden details in the pigments and the application of paint. There is, however, information to be gleaned from the larger-scale properties such as the canvas and the frame that I noted when I viewed the work first hand.

#### ***The canvas***

This painting is of a standard size used for portraits at this time – it would have started as 30 inches high by 25 inches wide. This size was called a 'three-quarters' because it used about three quarters of a yard of canvas and depicted the body down to the waist. This leads to the anomaly in portraiture that a 'half length' was larger, at 50 in x 40 inches, and referred to a view of the body down to the knees. (Confusingly the terms are now used the other way around, to match what you see of the sitter.) Wright records the sizes in his Account Book (one of two earliest known lists of standard names and measurements<sup>52</sup>):

*"A 3qrs is 2 [feet] 6 [inches] by 2 1. An half length is 4 2 by 3 4".*

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<sup>51</sup> Ingamells, John, *Mid-Georgian Portraits, 1760-1790*, 136.

<sup>52</sup> "'Three-Quarters, Kit-Cats and Half-Lengths'".

Standard sizes meant that artists could buy pieces of canvas ready cut and even primed, including having them sent from abroad, and it was easier and cheaper to purchase and swap frames because makers could hold stock of the standard sizes.<sup>53</sup>

As seen through the paint surface, this painting has a fine plain weave of canvas, meaning it was probably linen or cotton rather than hemp or jute.<sup>54</sup> Lucy Bamford points out that this visibility of the canvas weave is common for Wright (pers. commun.); and it is also possible to see the diagonals characteristic of 'twill' weave in high-resolution images of the portraits of *Erasmus Darwin*<sup>55</sup> (Fig.10) and *Penelope Margaret Stafford*<sup>56</sup> (Fig.18).

### ***The frame***

The frame was regilded in March 1858 according to the index/accession form in the RP (Fig.16). Absence of further comments suggests that the frame was otherwise preserved as donated with the painting.

I showed an archive photo of the corner of the frame to picture frame expert Declan O'Brien, Operations Manager at the antique frame company Arnold Wiggins & Son, Bury Street, London, and his immediate comment was that the frame was 'Roman', i.e. made in Rome. His superior Michael Gregory, holder of the Royal Warrant as Picture Frame Maker to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Her Majesty the Queen since 1991, corroborated this when I sent them further photographs taken when I viewed the painting. I noted that there seemed to be an extra layer to the frame at the back (difficult to view as I was not allowed to touch any part of it). (See Fig.19 for my photos and a comparable frame from Wiggins' stock.)

Michael Gregory (pers. commun.) says:

"...the painting would not have been glazed when painted, in Rome. There was not a need or habit of glazing oils. It is most likely that it was glaze[d] after, or at the time it entered the NPG collection...Frames were regularly adapted for glazing in museums in the 19c due to the smog. It was a way of protecting the painting. The back of the frame would have been built up at this time to accommodate the glazing. This build up prevents us from being able to see the construction and wood used to construct the frame."

"[However,] I am fairly certain that it is a Rome 'Salvator Rosa' frame, based on the images. The...back moulding is separate, you can detect this because of the crack where it has split from the main body of the frame. Italian frames are typically of a half lap construction and the back moulding is attached as a separate moulding to cover the end grain of the half lap. Over time this joint becomes evident. Each side of English frames are made of one piece of wood, therefore no crack."

Putting this in context with Jacob Simons' academic study of the history of picture frames, this frame type was known in England as a Carlo Maratta, taking its name from the Italian

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<sup>53</sup> "'Three-Quarters, Kit-Cats and Half-Lengths'".

<sup>54</sup> "'Three-Quarters, Kit-Cats and Half-Lengths'".

<sup>55</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Erasmus Darwin'.

<sup>56</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'Penelope Margaret Stafford'.



baroque painter<sup>57</sup>. It is recognisable “with prominent curved top edge of distinctive profile” (see Fig.20) usually ornamented with a repeated acanthus motif, but in the simplest form as in our example the ornament is omitted. The Maratta was current in Britain from the 1750s to the 1790s and widely used by Reynolds and other artists, and for portraits brought home by Grand Tourists who had seen this frame style in the palaces of Rome. “In Italy especially the pattern is usually known as a Salvator Rosa frame after the Italian artist to whom the design is attributed.”<sup>58</sup>

Gregory suggests that if the painting is a self-portrait it would typically remain in the artist's studio to provide an example of their work for customers seeking to have a portrait painted. Given that such a painting would not go to a public exhibition, a simple frame would suffice.

Pinning a date and location for a painting by the frame is fraught with hazards: frames might be altered or swapped when the painting changed hands, to suit a new home, when being accessioned into a public collection or due to the subsequent curators' tastes and display revisions, and - in the case of the NPG - when stored unframed during the First World War and put back into the wrong frame afterwards!<sup>59</sup> Portraits that have descended through an artist's family are those most likely to have remained in their original frames; the frame might have been added by the artist or by the family members who are bequeathed the contents of the artist's studio.

Despite these hazards, with a sufficient body of firmly attributed works, “...one could begin to link distinctive frame types with particular artists and even identify an artist's work through his or her frames”, says Simon.<sup>60</sup> In the case of NPG29 the frame style suggests a *place* rather than an *artist*, as this undecorated frame is not typical of Wright. Instead, the sitter may have chosen the frame. Wright started out using Rococo frames for large-scale portraits in the 1760s, then choosing Maratta (Rosa) frames with different degrees of carved enrichment. From the 1770s onwards he adopted the fashion for rectilinear Neoclassical styles<sup>61</sup>, often creating customised forms in collaboration with his framemaker, perhaps to stamp his individuality on later portraits and landscapes for when they appeared in public exhibitions.<sup>62</sup>

Interestingly, Wright does specifically refer to an ‘Italian’ frame as early as 1773 when he is organising to have his painting *The Earthstopper on the Banks of the Derwent* sent to the purchaser. Because he felt the price paid for the painting did not justify it being supplied with a frame, the excuse was to be made that the picture was “exhibited in an old Italian

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<sup>57</sup> Simon, Jacob, *The Art of the Picture Frame*.

<sup>58</sup> Simon, Jacob, 64–66; 207.

<sup>59</sup> Simon, Jacob, 8–18.

<sup>60</sup> Simon, Jacob, 7.

<sup>61</sup> The closest frame in style to NPG29 that I have seen among Wright's paintings, and which is likely to have been the original with the painting, is on Wright's self-portrait of 1765–1768 in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, where one of his descendants emigrated (Fig.5). The gallery note for the frame describes it as “an unadorned classical revival scotia frame” and “credibly believed to be the original eighteenth century frame” because it has remained in the descendant's family until donated to the gallery.

Michael Gregory concurs: “This appears to be an English frame from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century... This is likely the type of frame that might have been put on the painting by the family after [Wright's] death and studio sale.”

<sup>62</sup> Egerton, Judy, *Wright of Derby*, 273–88.



moulding frame which I have had by me for many years and keep for the use of the exhibition".<sup>63</sup>

### Can the inscription date and the origin of the frame in Rome lead us to a sitter?

If the frame is typical of Rome then let us treat the inscription on the back of the picture as partially correct and consider whether it depicts someone who died in Rome 1775. A search through *Hayward's List: British Visitors to Rome 1753–1775*<sup>64</sup> turned up the name of Edward Stevens ARA, an architect, who **died in Rome on 27th June 1775**.<sup>65</sup> He is recorded as having been born c. 1744, so would have been around 31 years old in 1775, an appropriate age for the candidate sitter. My online searches then led to further primary sources of relevance, as described below.

Stevens was in Rome to study along with the Grand Tourists but had already suffered a bout of illness. On **5<sup>th</sup> August 1774** his trainer and mentor, the architect Sir William Chambers, writes to him from London upon hearing that Stevens has fully recovered (Fig.21):

*"It gives me great pleasure to hear of your perfect recovery. I  
You will now be able to prosecute [sic] your studies properly, not  
by sending I people to study for you, as some of our famous  
architects here did..."*<sup>66</sup>

Chambers spends another two pages providing directions on how Stevens should make the most of all that Rome has to offer for his learning. Artists and architects gathered at the English Coffee House in Rome, and this was often where letters would be addressed from home; Wright's fellow traveller the young James Paine could have introduced him to the architect clique and Wright and Stevens may have met there. The two may also have been acquainted prior to Italy because Stevens and Wright both first exhibited at London's Society of Artists in 1765<sup>67</sup>; Stevens was elected an Associate of the RA in 1770 (having resigned from the Society of Artists<sup>68</sup>) and moved to exhibiting there.<sup>69</sup>

The RA archives include several mentions of Edward Stevens, including in the papers of the miniaturist Ozias Humphry<sup>70</sup>, who was in Italy at this time. Wright had known Humphry through the Society of Artists in London at least as early as 1769<sup>71</sup> and Humphry was evidently lined up to receive Wright on his arrival in Rome, according to a letter<sup>72</sup> from fellow miniaturist Henry Spicer in London to Humphry in Rome on 9<sup>th</sup> Jan 1774.

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<sup>63</sup> Simon, Jacob, *The Art of the Picture Frame*, 86.

<sup>64</sup> Stainton, Lindsay, 'Hayward's List'.

<sup>65</sup> Colvin, Howard, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*.

<sup>66</sup> MS Letter Soane Museum p1.

<sup>67</sup> Colvin, Howard, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*; Hargraves, Matthew, 'Joseph Wright of Derby and the Society of Artists of Great Britain'.

<sup>68</sup> Stevens, Edward, 'SA/36/7'.

<sup>69</sup> Colvin, Howard, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*.

<sup>70</sup> 'Ozias Humphry Papers | Archives | RA Collection | Royal Academy of Arts'.

<sup>71</sup> Hargraves, Matthew, 'Joseph Wright of Derby and the Society of Artists of Great Britain', 56.

<sup>72</sup> Spicer, Henry, 'HU/2/2'.

I have examined at first hand two letters in which Humphry is in correspondence with Stevens' widow, Mrs Rachel Stevens, and the scan of another cited by Bemrose (1885)<sup>73</sup>, written by Wright to Humphry. I present key excerpts below from these three letters, chronologically:

**On 18<sup>th</sup> July 1775** Humphry writes to Mrs Stevens about Wright's movements<sup>74</sup> (as he, his wife and young daughter had left Rome for Florence on **10<sup>th</sup> June 1775**) (Nicolson<sup>75</sup> incorrectly references this letter as being to Mr Stevens) (Fig.22):

Content description: Mr. and Mrs Wright have left Florence and propose to remain in Italy only three more weeks, they go to Bologna, then Venice, back to Bologna then Parma, Mr. Wright will not copy the picture<sup>76</sup> there but wants to return to England;...

My transcription of this section:

*"Mr and Mrs Wright when they left Florence had | no intention to continue in any part of Italy more | than three weeks or a month - they proposed to go from | this city to Bologna and from there to Venice where | they expected to remain 10 or twelve days, barely time | enough to see the principal things and to return again | to Bologna and on to Parma immediately. Mr Wright | does not intend to copy the picture there, but to set | forward with all expedition to England..."*

**On 24<sup>th</sup> July 1775** Wright writes to Ozias Humphry from Parma (Fig.23). My transcription of relevant excerpts:

Pages 3 to 4

*"Mr Jenkins was so obliging | to ship my cases for me.[77] I had desired poor | Mr Stevens to pay Mr Jenkins any | charge there might be upon them. I wish | you would be kind enough to settle it for | me, w<sup>ch</sup> I will repay you, when I have the | pleasure to see you in England."*

Wright also describes making an outline [of the Correggio?] for Humphry:

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<sup>73</sup> Bemrose, William, *The Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A., Commonly Called 'Wright of Derby'* | Ebook, 36–37.

<sup>74</sup> Humphry, Ozias, 'HU/2/31'.

<sup>75</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, 12, Note 1.

<sup>76</sup> A Correggio, says Nicolson.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Jenkins (1722-1798) was an art and antiquities dealer, painter and banker based in Rome across this period, performing many services for the English ex-pat and artist community. For example, he writes on the outside of the letter from Chambers addressed to Stevens at the 'Café Anglois': *"Received and forwarded this | 26 Aug't by Mr Stevens | most Obed't Servant Thos Jenkins"*.

Pages 2 to 3

*"I have left my | outline, with two English three quarter cloths w<sup>ch</sup> you seemed to admire, with | the Custodio of the Academy directed for | you."*

**On 18<sup>th</sup> August 1775** Mrs Stevens at Leghorn replies to Humphry for when he arrives in Florence<sup>78</sup> (Fig.24):

Content description: She rebukes him for his letter where he "rallied" her to taking another husband only three weeks into her widowhood, as if she had no regard for her dear departed Mr. Stevens; Mr. Carter has also apparently behaved insensitively towards her, mistaking her "merry" attitude; she hopes he will finish the portrait of her husband;...

My transcription of the key paragraphs (a few difficult words kindly identified by Mark Pomeroy at the RA Library):

Page 1

*"I am exceedingly obliged by your kind intentions con | cerning my Dear Man's picture, which Col.<sup>r</sup> Kinnear told me of | should you ever find leisure to finish it if the subject not be too dis | agreeable."*

Page 2

*"I own it would give me great pleasure, I felt much disappointment at its | not being done for well knowing your superior abilities. I did depend | on having a good picture of him, which unfortunately I have not, tho' | it has been painted several times, but I beg you'll use no ceremony | nor think yourself any way obliged to perform, what I should suppose | must be a difficult & disagreeable task."*

From these letters together we can understand:

- (i) Edward Stevens had been ill (we don't know with what) and recovered in 1774 but died in June 1775;
- (ii) Mrs Stevens was expected to be interested in Wright's movements;
- (iii) Wright knew Edward Stevens well enough to have asked him to settle a bill;
- (iv) there is mention of a portrait of Edward Stevens that is unfinished and appears not yet to be with Mrs Stevens...
- (v) ...as Mrs Stevens only hears from a third party (Col. Kinnear) that Humphry intends to finish the picture, and she appreciates this may be an unpleasant task for him;

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<sup>78</sup> Stevens, Mrs Rachel, 'HU/2/32'.

- (vi) Wright and Humphry knew each other well, were on good terms, and expected to meet again when back in England;
- (vii) the two artists collaborated on a canvas (regarding making a copy of a painting in Parma, by Correggio).

### **My hypothesis**

I have developed a hypothesis about NPG29 using the above clues in the letters. I propose that NPG29 is a portrait of Edwards Stevens, an architect holding a folder of drawings, that Wright was painting while in Rome but had not quite finished when the process was interrupted by Stevens becoming ill again. Meanwhile the time had come for Wright to set off home. Wright needed to be on his way back to England with his family via other key attractions in Italy, as he was running out of money (in 1776 he declared himself to be on the brink of bankruptcy<sup>79</sup> after this study trip) and had already stayed longer in Rome than planned. “‘I am like all other artists that come here’, he wrote home in May [1775], ‘who much outstay their intended time’”<sup>80</sup>. Wright may have come to an agreement with Humphry that Humphry would finish the portrait, and so Wright left it with him. Then Stevens died, leaving Humphry the distressing task to complete the final elements of the work – maybe no more than the background, or even the cloak, which is ‘sketchier’ and less detailed than costume in other works by Wright, and perhaps he is responsible for the incongruous dark paint? (Figs.17b-e). His actual contribution may be impossible to confirm. Humphry could have added the first part of the inscription – “Joseph Wright | 1775” - on the back of the canvas, as we know from his letters he also used brown ink. Finally a frame would be added – purchased locally by either artist or chosen by the sitter at the outset.

### **Questions to test the hypothesis**

1. Where is Wright’s record of NPG29 and why would he paint Stevens?

There is no entry in Wright’s account book for a portrait of Stevens<sup>81</sup>. However, we know of many extant portraits he made of friends or family that are not recorded in the account book, as presumably they were done for free – for example the portrait of Erasmus Darwin was probably given in exchange for treatment that Wright received from his medically qualified friend. Wright may have begun Stevens’ portrait for free as a friend, or agreed to do it in exchange for Stevens settling the bill with Jenkins, or Stevens may have requested the portrait with the intention of paying for it but with Wright’s departure from Rome and then Stevens’ death, Wright no longer felt he could charge for it.

2. Could Mrs Stevens be referring to a different picture?

There is a work by Humphry, given the title *Portrait of the Reverend Stevens in an Oval, against a Landscape*<sup>82</sup> (Fig.25). It is an undated chalk drawing (with areas of wash?) on paper (around A4 size but wider, judging by the inscription size) in Humphry’s miniaturist oval style, and the subject looks like an older man, aged perhaps 40 or more - although the grey hair may be due to a powdered wig. The only information on provenance held by the Courtauld is the donor’s name and date: Sir Robert Clermont Witt, co-Founder of the

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<sup>79</sup> Hargraves, Matthew, ‘Joseph Wright of Derby and the Society of Artists of Great Britain’, 60.

<sup>80</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, 11.

<sup>81</sup> Barker, Elizabeth E, ‘Documents Relating to Joseph Wright “of Derby” (1734-97)’.

<sup>82</sup> Humphry, Ozias, ‘Reverend Stevens | Art UK’; Humphry, Ozias, ‘Reverend Stevens | Courtauld’.

Courtauld, whose collection of Old Master Drawings and photographs was bequeathed when he died in 1952.

The drawing is inscribed on the verso 'The Rev'd M/W [?] Stevens' (Fig.26). The handwriting is definitely Humphry's, by comparison with his letter to Mrs Stevens<sup>83</sup> (Fig.22) – compare where they say 'Stevens' – and in the first line his contraction for "rec'd" ("*I rec'd your obliging and friendly letter*") looks very similar to the beginning 'Re' of "Rev'd" of the inscription, and the 'v' matches that in 'Stevens' in both places. The proposition that it could read as, for example, 'The Late Mr Stevens' is not at all convincing. Compared with instances of 'Mr' in the letter I read the inscription as "*The Rev'd Mr Stevens*". This is the correct form of address for a priest when the first name is not used/known<sup>84</sup>. This also matches the label to the reproduction in George C Williamson's biography of Humphry (which has no further information).<sup>85</sup>

Mrs Stevens' husband, however, is nowhere recorded as being a Reverend<sup>86</sup> (the clergy database lists only one Edward Stevens, who died in 1614).

Online searches reveal two alternative identities for a Reverend Stevens in the correct timeframe to have been models for this work by Humphry. The drawing does not look convincingly like *The Reverend William Stevens* as painted by Gainsborough<sup>87</sup>. However, a Thomas Stevens (born c.1739) who was Whitehall Preacher in 1772 and Rector of Panfield, Essex, from 1790 until his death in 1809<sup>88</sup> is a potential candidate. While I have no image of him, an image of his son Brooke Bridges Stevens<sup>89</sup> (1787–1834) (Fig.27) has some similarities with the drawing such as the eyebrow arch and chin, potentially indicating a family likeness. But we have no proof that the Humphry drawing is of Thomas Stevens. Neither have I been able to trace details of Edward Stevens' parents or siblings, in case the chalk drawing might be of his close family relative.

Mrs Stevens specifically refers in her letter to pictures of her husband having been "painted" several times without a good result, as if she hopes that finally she will have a decent painting, not a drawing.

### 3. Might Humphry have painted the whole picture?

Mrs Stevens alludes to "my Dear Man's picture" rather than "your picture/portrait of my Dear Man" in her letter to Humphry, and if the painting she was referring to had been entirely Humphry's work then this entreaty might have been phrased differently. She encourages him regarding his talents: "well knowing your superior abilities" in order to coax him to do the job. He was principally a miniaturist but later progressed to larger portraits in oils, an example being that of surgeon *John Belchier* in 1785<sup>90</sup>. Based on his painting style

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<sup>83</sup> Humphry, Ozias, 'HU/2/31'.

<sup>84</sup> Crockford, 'How to Address the Clergy'.

<sup>85</sup> Williamson, George Charles, *Life and Works of Ozias Humphry*, R. A.

<sup>86</sup> Colvin, Howard, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*.

<sup>87</sup> Gainsborough, Thomas, 'Stevens, Reverend William | Wikimedia Commons'.

<sup>88</sup> 'Stevens, Thomas | Clergy of the Church of England Database'.

<sup>89</sup> Francis, J P, 'Stevens, Brooke Bridges | Dictionary of Canadian Biography'.

<sup>90</sup> Humphry, Ozias, 'John Belchier'.

and likely skill in 1775 (see next section on artists' careers), I would propose that Humphry had worked only peripheral elements of NPG29 and possibly added the very dark 'overpaint'.

#### 4. Who was Kinnear and what was his role?

The 'Col<sup>l</sup> Kinnear' referred to by Mrs Stevens might be *Colonel Kinnear, of the 50th Regiment of Foot* painted in 1761 by Francis Cotes<sup>91</sup> (Fig.28). I have not found further information directly linking Kinnear with Mrs Stevens or Ozias Humphry, but I have located another portrait by Wright of another soldier believed to be in the 50<sup>th</sup> Foot, based on the unique combination of silver lace and black facings in the uniform: *An officer of the 50th Foot, identified as Major Sir Alexander Hope, Bt (1728–94)*<sup>92</sup> (Fig.29). This painting came to auction in March 2002 without provenance and was attributed to Wright by a Sotheby's expert. If the 50<sup>th</sup> Foot identification is firm due to the uniform then this might support a link for Kinnear (as a fellow officer to this sitter) with Wright and the circle including Mrs Stevens and Humphry. Wright painted four people with the surname Hope as listed in his Account Book, but these are not Alexander Hope.<sup>93</sup> Note that a leader of the 50<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot during 1764–1774 was General Sir William Boothby, 4<sup>th</sup> Baronet, grandfather to Sir Brooke Boothby, 6<sup>th</sup> Baronet - who was famously painted by Wright in 1781, and a Derbyshire connection.

#### 5. Might NPG29 depict Richard Hurlestone instead?

Bendor Grosvenor believes that Hurlestone is the sitter in NPG29<sup>94</sup>, but no other painting of him is securely identified, so we cannot make a comparison. In terms of the provenance, we could posit that the painting went back to England with Hurlestone, who died by early 1777, and was retained by his parents based in London (his father was a 'peruke maker' at a London address that Wright once used for correspondence); when the parents died it was sold and came into the hands of Deville when he was in London.

Hurlestone was Wright's pupil, travelling companion in Italy, and friend, and is believed to have painted the portrait of Wright that has a volcano in the background (c. 1774–75 due to dates when both were in Italy); Wright again wears an exotic fur-trimmed turban and the likeness is good compared with his self-portraits (this painting might indeed be Wright's self-portrait if not by Hurlestone). Barker and Kidson suggest that another painting called *Young Artist*<sup>95</sup> (Fig.30), now dated 1775, that could be by Wright or Hurlestone, is a portrait *by* Wright *of* Hurlestone: "Perhaps Wright and Hurlestone exchanged portraits of one another, in this, the most intense year of their friendship?". Alternatively, "could the 'Young Artist' represent the younger painter's self-portrait?".<sup>96</sup>

Nicolson says of the *Young Artist*, dating it c. 1770 and therefore thinking of Wright's acquaintances at that time: "We know he is an artist because he clasps a draughtsman's tool in his left hand; ...We can guess from the nervous tension of cuffs and shirt ruffle...and by the

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<sup>91</sup> Cotes, Francis, 'Colonel Kinnear'.

<sup>92</sup> Cormack, Andrew, 'An Officer of 50th Foot by Joseph Wright of Derby'.

<sup>93</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, 206.

<sup>94</sup> Discussion, 'Art Detective'.

<sup>95</sup> Barker, Elizabeth E and Kidson, Alex, *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool*, 191.

<sup>96</sup> Barker, Elizabeth E and Kidson, Alex, 57.



sympathy expended on the face, that he was a personal friend (in Derby? In Lichfield? In Liverpool?...)"<sup>97</sup>

The sitter in *Young Artist* has certain similarities with the young man in NPG29 – brown eyes and reddish hair, long face, neat mouth. Both might be Hurlestone, although there are some facial features such as the join of the earlobe to the neck, the shape of the eye and its socket, and subtle difference in nose shape, that differentiate them for me.

6. Could the *Young Artist* be Edward Stevens<sup>98</sup>?

The sitter in *Young Artist* is, after all, holding a draughtsman's tool not a normal paintbrush, so might he be an architect? The date of the painting has been revealed on cleaning to be 1775, i.e. different since Nicolson first commented, and now would correspond with the period when Wright was in Italy. This work could be an additional painting of Stevens or it might be the one referred to in Mrs Stevens letter; and then NPG29 might depict Hurlestone or remain unidentified. The young artist is very well dressed in velvet jacket and frilled cuffs, while NPG29 depicts much simpler dress. We could explore further the financial circumstances of the two men, Stevens and Hurlestone, to consider the outfits they could afford. The painting is in a private collection, making further investigation difficult. If a link in provenance could be made to Mrs Stevens this would be compelling evidence that it depicts her husband – as this link is lacking for NPG29 (see point 7).

7. Where is the link from Mrs Stevens to Nicolas Deville as owner of NPG29?

Mrs Stevens lived to the age of 95 and died in 1836<sup>99</sup>, while living in the same household back in England as her daughter and son-in-law. Was the hoped-for finished portrait with her and her family, moving on her death to Deville (remembering we suspect the provenance with Deville, if correct, goes back to the 1830s)? The canvas inscription could have been added by the family, to whom it would have made sense without the sitter's name. Or perhaps Mrs Stevens never received the painting from Humphry, who instead sold it on the continent or when he returned to London in 1777, leaving some time unaccounted until it was Deville's. This is when the inscription could have been compiled from anecdote rather than fact.

**Summary:** My hypothesis is not confirmed, in the absence of sufficient evidence to answer all the 'tests', but at the same time there is no finding that would categorically disallow my proposition.

**Analysis of candidate authors' careers and oeuvre (styles at different periods of career)**

Here I briefly cover the relevant details for both Wright and Humphry corresponding with my hypothesis about NPG29.

The artist practice of running a workshop in which apprentices contributed to less significant areas of an artwork's content is well known from the early Renaissance onwards. Wright's

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<sup>97</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, 36.

<sup>98</sup> Determining the sitter in 'Young Artist' could become another dissertation in itself and cannot be fully explored here, but I hereby lay claim to this potential identification.

<sup>99</sup> 'Stevens, Rachel | WikiTree'.



documented three trainees, Hurlestone, Downman and William Tate, worked with him in Liverpool before the Italy trip. A portfolio of drawings from the Italy trip, sold at Sotheby's in 1966, contained drawings by both Wright and Hurlestone, in which some sketches by Hurlestone had Wright's colour notes added.<sup>100</sup> After this trip we do not hear of apprentices or collaborators in Wright's studio and none of his paintings has been described as including a second artist's contribution, although I propose unique circumstances for the production of NPG29.

Wright was at the peak of his portraiture accomplishments in the years before he visited Italy<sup>101</sup> although portraiture was not his purpose for being there; he was studying the Old Masters in Rome and other locations and enjoying the sights like a Grand Tourist. His output while in Italy was principally of pencil, ink and wash drawings and sketches of what he had seen, but it is understood that some oil paintings were made there – including two landscapes and a large Vesuvius<sup>102</sup> and a study of two marble heads in oil.<sup>103</sup> Most of the Italian-inspired paintings were produced when he had returned to Derby, yet it appears he had with him the materials to do a portrait in oils including “three-quarter cloths”, i.e. canvases, quoted in his letter to Humphry, above.

Humphry had arrived in Rome in 1773 also to study the Old Masters in order to move from a flourishing practice in miniatures to painting in oils, as his eyesight had been damaged by a riding accident.<sup>104</sup> We would therefore not expect him to be expert in oils at the time of NPG29 but we can surmise that he was already starting to use the medium, with the evidence from Wright's letter that Wright was leaving canvases in Parma for Humphry's use. A decade later in his career Humphry could indeed paint compelling oil portraits, such as John Belchier's<sup>105</sup>, but I suspect not at the time of NPG29.

**Summary:** Wright would have been able to paint all or the greater proportion of a portrait in oils, and Humphry would have been able to complete simple unfinished elements.

### **Connoisseurship** (close visual analysis of the composition, style, brush strokes, shading, etc.)

Much has been written and debated about connoisseurship since Roger de Piles (1635–1709) and Jonathan Richardson (1665–1745) described the three central domains: (i) the judgement of an artwork's quality, (ii) the attribution to a certain artist, and (iii) the question of whether the artwork is a copy or the original.<sup>106</sup> Additional practices of comparing and judging play a part in making these assessments, and this is where subjectivity inevitably comes into play. As Heyder continues<sup>107</sup>: “there cannot be any such thing as a ‘neutral’ process of seeing, let alone judging...judgements are necessarily

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<sup>100</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, *Joseph Wright of Derby*, 7, Note 4.

<sup>101</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, 34.

<sup>102</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, 76.

<sup>103</sup> Nicolson, Benedict, Plate 124.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Ozias Humphry | Artist | Royal Academy of Arts’.

<sup>105</sup> Humphry, Ozias, ‘John Belchier’.

<sup>106</sup> Heyder, Joris Corin, ‘Doing Connoisseurship’, 2.

<sup>107</sup> Heyder, Joris Corin, 4.

processual or performative. Usually, it is not clear exactly at what point during the process the judgement has been consolidated. However, the capacity to judge is mostly interconnected with the beholder's movement between a detail and the overall composition of an artwork..."

The connoisseur's brain operates as a uniquely structured 'black box', which Heyder likens to the Artificial Intelligence tools that various researchers<sup>108</sup> are building to determine the hand of a master, because "the results generated by a computer are very much analogous to that of a traditional connoisseur, mirroring a kind of inexplicable intuition"<sup>109</sup>. The connoisseur may be able to articulate specific details that are unique to an artist, and yet they may still also rely on an overall impression of whether a piece 'fits', based on all the examples of an artist's oeuvre they have studied.

Bendor Grosvenor recommends the use of the '4 Cs' in practising connoisseurship when looking at oil paintings by the Old Masters:

1. Change. Can 'pentimenti' be detected: alterations to outlines and shapes made by the original artist, that are evidence of a change of mind during the creative process?
2. Cwality (!). Does the work exhibit the level of technical expertise and compositional harmony expected from the artist?
3. Comparison. How does the work compare at a more detailed level with known pieces by the artist? This could be in terms of canvas type, ground layer (including direction of brushstrokes), surface brushwork, smoothness or impasto in the top layer, colour palette, rendition of highlights, shadows or skin tones, composition, style, etc.
4. Condition. Is there evidence of appropriate age in the canvas, stretcher, pigments, varnish and craquelure? How well has the work survived? Has there been interference by overpainting, additions or destructive restoration attempts?

I present in this section the range of observations that I have been able to make with first-hand, close access to only a few of Wright's works as well as NPG29, and otherwise using online zoomed-in images. These mostly answer to Bendor's practice of **comparison**. (I have discussed condition as part of a separate protocol step.) For the other two elements, I did not observe pentimenti in NPG29; and I do think the portrait head is of Wright's standard.

Table 1 in the Appendix presents a comparison of iconographic, stylistic and material features I have observed in 11 Wright portraits, including two self-portraits, and the unattributed *Young Artist*. First is my finding of what I call '**feathering**', which I first spotted as obvious in *Hon Richard Fitzwilliam, later 7<sup>th</sup> Viscount Fitzwilliam of Merrion* (1764)<sup>110</sup> (Fig.31). Wright applies fine interleaved strokes of different tones of paint, from cream to

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<sup>108</sup> Ugail, Hassan et al., 'Deep Transfer Learning'.

<sup>109</sup> Heyder, Joris Corin, 'Doing Connoisseurship', 9.

<sup>110</sup> Wright, Joseph, 'The Hon. Richard Fitzwilliam, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam of Merrion'.

pink to brown (Fig.32), to create the contours in the face, and still visible as separate colours, allowing the viewer's eye to do the mixing - the technique similar to that adopted by Pointillistes and Impressionists some hundred years later! This appears in several other portraits in the face and neck as detailed in Table 1, mostly in earlier portraits, but I can only detect it at the hairline and possibly the right brow in NPG29 (Fig.17e). The feathering is very obvious with the warm colours in the cheeks of *Penelope Margaret Stafford* (1769) (Fig.18), an effect that Barker and Kidson describe being used for the first time that year as evidence of "a radical change in his approach to colour"<sup>111</sup>, when experimenting with the effects of artificial light, while Wright worked for eighteen months in Liverpool.

In addition, I noted the **grey-green** tone Wright often adopted for shadows in the face, particularly in *Portrait of a gentleman...* (Fig.14) (as well as for the '5 o'clock shadow' of nascent beard growth) and also very green in the NGV self-portrait (Fig.5). Some green has been used in the brow and right cheekbone of NPG29, corroborated by obvious green in the same areas on the copy painting (Fig.2). Green face shadows are used by many artists but Wright's are often intense.

In some cases, but not NPG29, I spotted a characteristic highlight of a little **dot of white** at the end of the nose, and/or on the lip. Barker and Kidson also describe the "nose punctuated by a single white dot at the tip" in *Erasmus Darwin*<sup>112</sup> (Fig.10). Another feature worth examining, because Wright is apparently faithful to individual differences, is ear shape and **earlobe** attachment – in NPG29 the right earlobe is shown joined to the neck and the main earhole has been clearly delineated (Fig.17d).

Bendor Grosvenor says (pers.commun.) he looks out for a **half-moon shape** (which I see more like a crescent shape) in the iris, and the '**porcelaneous**' complexion (which I interpret as smooth and luminous) that Wright often gave his sitters to a greater extent than other artists of the time, and these can be seen in several examples in the table. In NPG29 the left eye has some dark paint for the pupil that obtrudes on the crescent shape of the iris (Fig.17c) in a manner uncharacteristic of other Wrights [although in *Portrait of a gentleman...* (Fig.33c) there is a small deviation from circular in the right pupil].

NPG29 has an **open-necked shirt** that appears in several more Wrights, and is otherwise unusual at this period. Both collars and floppy or frilled **shirt cuffs** in several Wrights are technically advanced (e.g. Figs 10,29,31) and close inspection of these for comparison with a cleaned version of the collar in NPG29 may provide clues about brushwork.

**Attributes, background** palette and any clues about canvas **weave** are also tabulated. Wright often went for very dark plain backgrounds or used a 'brooding' sky for landscape settings. NPG29 notably has a lighter background than these other examples, perhaps pointing to a choice by Humphry? – similar to his later *John Belchier*<sup>113</sup>.

The sitter's hair in NPG29 appears beautifully rendered except where the darkest paint tone is less delicately applied. Wright was expert at rendering hair tresses (e.g. Fig.18), as well as

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<sup>111</sup> Barker, Elizabeth E and Kidson, Alex, *Joseph Wright of Derby in Liverpool*, 59.

<sup>112</sup> Barker, Elizabeth E and Kidson, Alex, 152.

<sup>113</sup> Humphry, Ozias, 'John Belchier'.

fur (e.g. Figs 3,14). Without access to high-resolution images or seeing originals very close, it is not possible to determine whether the dark tones are or are not likely to have been by Wright's hand.

**Summary:** NPG29 shares a few of the characteristics of the other portraits presented in Table 1, although there is no clear pattern across the table to confirm or disprove Wright as the principal artist. The open-necked shirt is a 'Wrightesque' feature. Overall the technical mastery in the head is up to Wright's standards. I would want to see a cleaned and restored version to see if feathering is used on the face and to tease out whether any of the dark paint is overpainting. I cannot confirm whether Humphry contributed to any specific element.

I think the 'black box' of Bendor Grosvenor's intuition is telling him that the artist is Wright, or else he is not willing to reveal the specific features of this case that persuade him!

## Conclusion

Having completed this investigation, can I identify the sitter in NPG29 and can I attribute the painting to Wright? There will never be absolute proof of either in the absence of the painter's signature or specific documentation about the work, but I have created **a novel interpretation of the painting using my research and deductions from applying the attribution protocol. I suggest that the sitter is Edward Stevens ARA and that the painting is largely by Wright's hand, with some final elements completed by Ozias Humphry.** I also turned up two possible alternatives for the sitter that would require further research, Richard Hurlestone and Daniel Parker Coke; a further project would be determining whether Edward Stevens is the sitter in *Young Artist*, and to make an attribution for that portrait. I would like to join forces with Bendor Grosvenor on the main artist attribution for NPG29, although he has stated<sup>114</sup> that he "hopes one day it can be cleaned", presumably believing that little more can be confirmed ahead of that.

In conclusion, I have demonstrated the use of an attribution protocol to investigate a 250-year-old art historical mystery. Oil paintings abound in collections across the country with the title 'unknown man/woman/person', many of which are also 'unknown artist' (e.g. there are 60 oils titled 'unknown man' at the NPG alone). Therefore peer researchers may benefit from my reflections on using the protocol. The key point is the extent to which the completed process was non-linear, and at times circular. Using the seven protocol steps as a starting point was helpful for analysing the painting and consulting other sources in a systematic way, yet I had to adjust the order in which the steps were approached due to external factors controlling access to evidence, and then adjust the order again for presentation here, to create a more logical narrative<sup>115</sup>. For example, I discuss the derivative work – the copy – before the condition of the original, as being the order in which I inspected them first hand; features in the copy alerted me to additional elements to look for in the original. I discuss the material studies after the condition of the work because my hypothesis about the framed painting required reflecting back on all my previous findings.

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<sup>114</sup> Discussion, 'Art Detective'.

<sup>115</sup> An approach commonly taken in presenting research results - including, I suspect, in art detective TV programmes.

Other researchers are likely to access evidence in a different order (whether original works, derivatives, private collections, archives, expert comment, etc.), and at each stage newly revealed information may require revisiting the clues, extracting further evidence and reinterpreting the findings of previous steps in the protocol.

I have also shown that despite not having access to scientific techniques that might be applied in the material studies step, I was able to expand on evidence about the frame and combine this with provenance evidence to generate a productive line of enquiry. Researchers of other unidentified portraits of this period may benefit from scrutinising frames, where these are considered likely to be original.

Finally, while I have offered my original observations about Wright's painting technique in other portraits, the condition of the paint surface in NPG29 has prevented me from securely identifying characteristic marks that might help confirm the principal artist attribution. This same problem can confound attempts to study other unattributed mid-Georgian portraits because of the prohibitive cost involved in cleaning and restoration, unless a positive attribution to a well-known and currently sought-after artist is seen as the likely result, due to the economic pressure of today's art market – just as in 1745.

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## Figures

*All paintings are by Joseph Wright of Derby, and of oil on canvas, measurements H x W, unless otherwise specified.*

Figure 1. *Unknown man, formerly known as Joseph Wright*, by Unknown artist (NPG29)  
c. 1765-1770 [gallery label], 28 ½ x 23 ¾ in. (72.4 x 60.3 cm)  
National Portrait Gallery  
© National Portrait Gallery, London



Figure 2. *Self Portrait, Joseph Wright of Derby (after)*. Copy by unknown artist of NPG29.  
[Date?], 74 x 62 cm  
Derby Museum and Art Gallery  
Image credit: Derby Museums (CC BY-NC-SA)

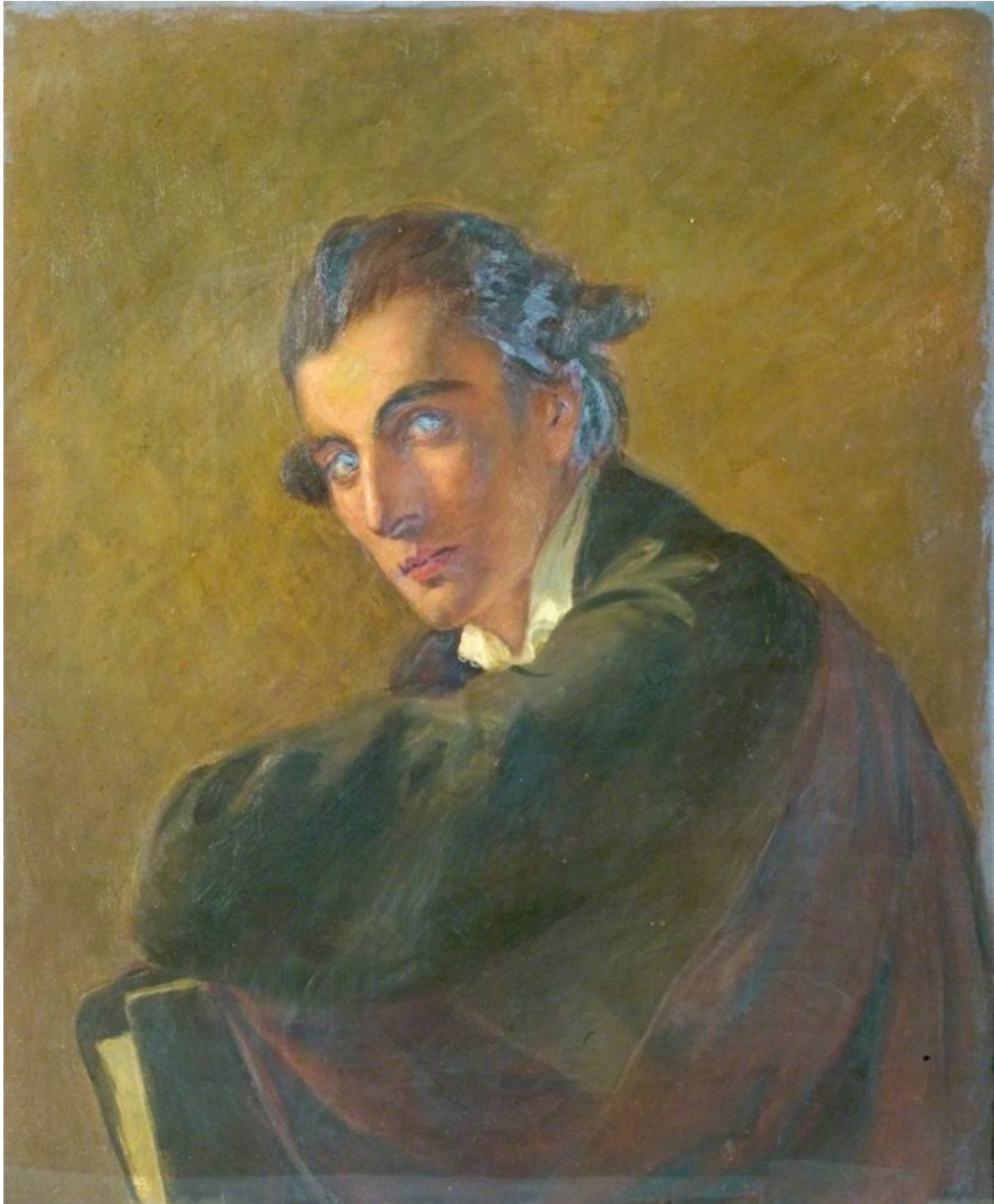




Figure 3. *Self-portrait at the age of about forty*  
c. 1772, 29.9 x 25 in.

Derby Museum and Art Gallery

Image credit: Omnia Art Ltd. Courtesy of Derby Museums (CC BY-NC-SA)



Figure 4. *Portrait of Old John, Head Waiter at the King's Head Inn in Derby*  
[Date?], 30 ¼ x 25 ¼ in. (77 x 64.2 cm)

Sold at auction 2017; image copied from Christie's website.



Figure 5. *Self-portrait*

c. 1765-68, 69.8 × 58.0 cm (image) 70.2 × 58.7 cm (canvas)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Alina Cade in memory of her husband Joseph Wright Cade, 2009



Figure 6a. Rossetti letter side 1. National Portrait Gallery Archive and Library

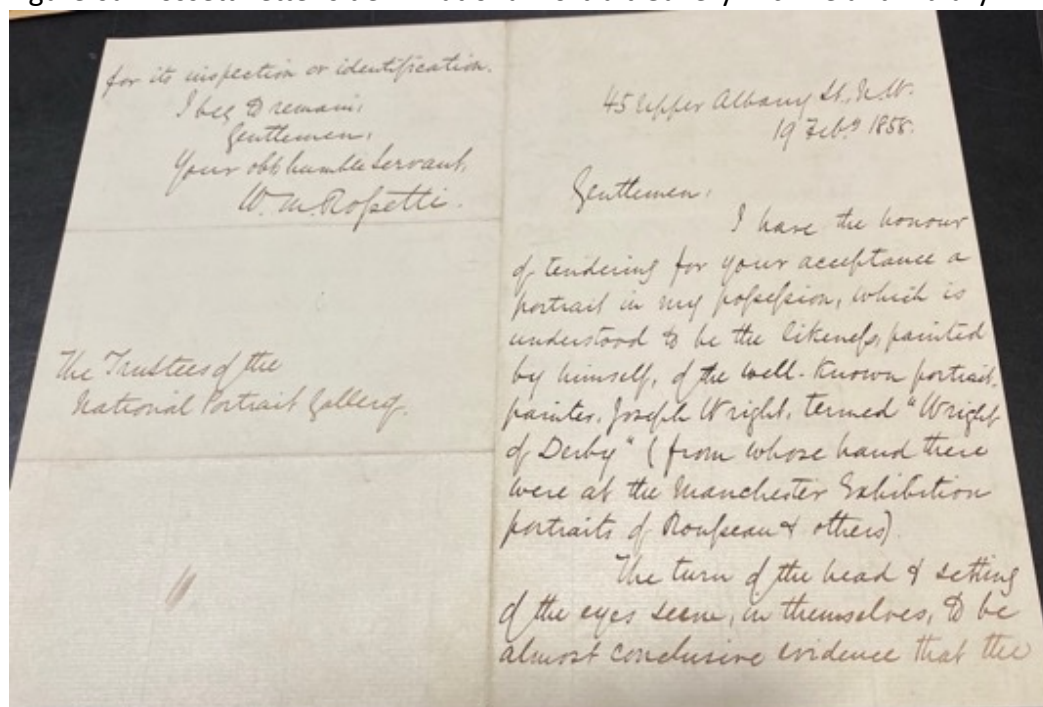


Figure 6b. Rossetti letter side 2. National Portrait Gallery Archive and Library

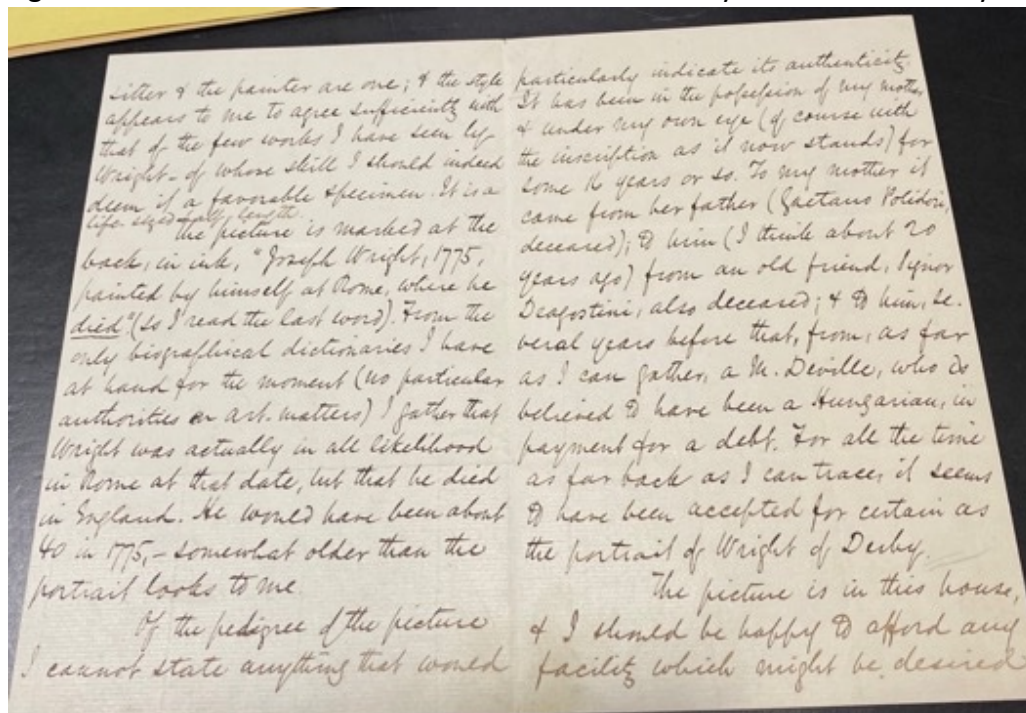


Fig 7a. Transcription of writing on the back of the original canvas, from the RP for NPG29. National Portrait Gallery Archive and Library

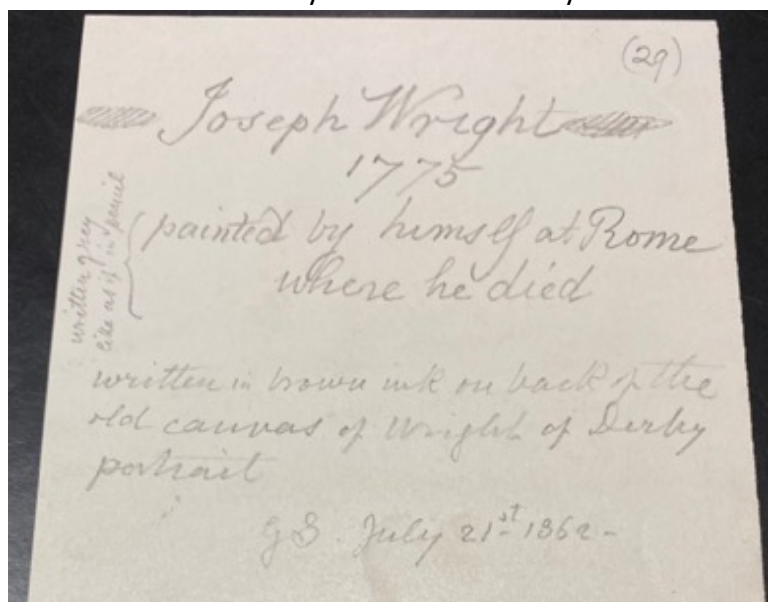


Fig 7b. Close-up on annotation at left side of Fig. 7a "written grey | like as if in pencil". National Portrait Gallery Archive and Library

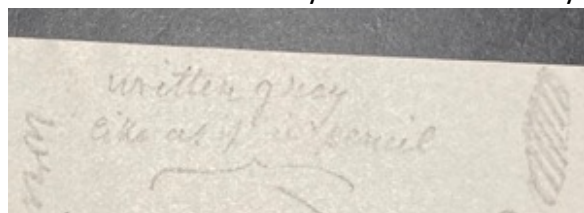




Figure 8. *Self-portrait* by Johannes Gump  
1646, [size?]

Private collection (there is also a tondo version in Galleria degli Uffizi).



Figure 9. *The Reverend D'Ewes Coke (1747–1811), His Wife Hannah, and Daniel Parker Coke (1745–1825)*

c. 1782, 152.4 x 177.8 cm

Derby Museum and Art Gallery

Image credit: Derby Museums (CC BY-NC-SA)



Figure 10. *Erasmus Darwin* (1731–1802)

c. 1770, 74 x 61 cm

Darwin College, University of Cambridge

Photo credit and © The Masters and Fellows of Darwin College in the University of Cambridge.



Figure 11. Detail from *Experiment on a bird in the air pump* showing open shirt collar with button and buttonholes

1768, 183 x 244 cm

Image credit: The National Gallery, London

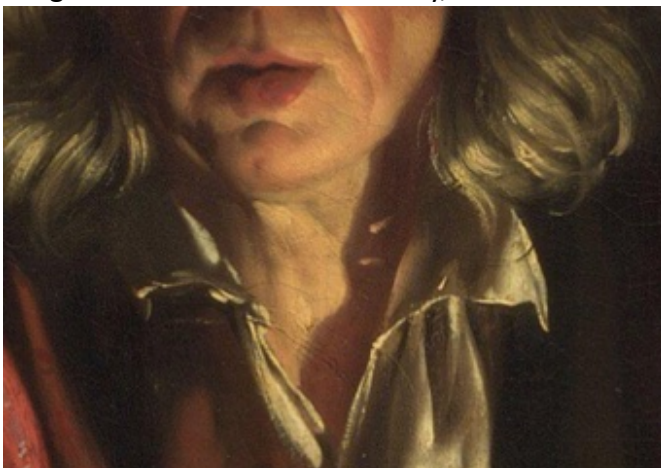


Figure 12. *Thomas Day* (1748-1789)  
1770, 48 x 38 1/2 in. (1219 x 978 mm)  
National Portrait Gallery  
© National Portrait Gallery, London





Figure 13. *Portrait of a Man, Known as the "Indian Captain"*  
ca. 1767, 90 1/4 x 54 1/2 in. (229.2 x 138.4 cm)  
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (CC0 1.0)



Figure 14. *Portrait of a gentleman in a red fur-trimmed coat, frogged waistcoat and a white turban*

c.1767?, 25 x 21 in. (63.5 x 53.5 cm)

Sold at auction 2023; attribution to Wright confirmed for Christie's by Martin Postle; image copied from Christie's website



Figure 15. *George Oakley Aldrich (1721–1797)*

by Pompeo Batoni, c.1750, 64.5 x 49.5 cm

Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford

Image credit: Simon Gillespie Studio

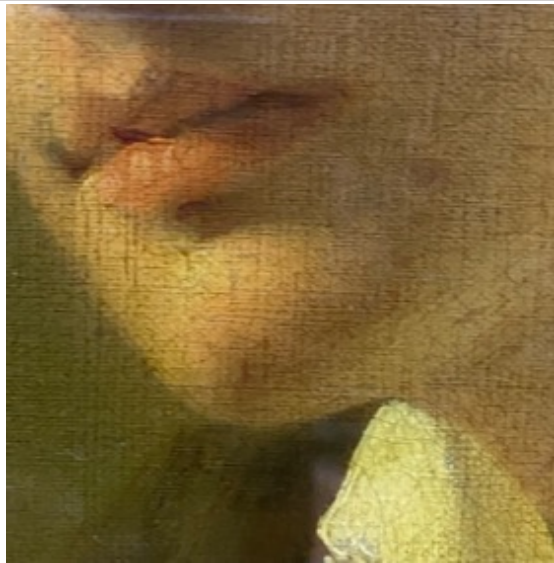


Figure 16. The index/accession form in the RP for NPG29 shows that the picture was 'repaired and restored' in 1878, while the frame was regilded in 1858 and glazed in 1873. National Portrait Gallery Archive and Library

		REGISTER NUMBER [ 29 ]
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.		
1. Name of Portrait	1. Joseph Wright, A. R. A.	
2. Name of Artist	2. Himself.	
3. Register Number	3. 29.	
4. Date of Acquisition	4. February, 1858.	
5. From whom acquired	5. W. M. Rossetti.	
6. How acquired	6. Donation.	
7. Restored—	7.	
(a.) How	(a.) Repaired and restored	
(b.) When	(b.) September, 1878.	
(c.) Restorer	(c.) J. Reeve.	
(d.) Cost	(d.) £4.	
8. Framed—	8.	
(a.) How	(a.) Regilded.	
(b.) When	(b.) March 1858.	
(c.) Frame-maker	(c.) Ford & Dickinson.	
(d.) Cost	(d.) 14/6	
9. Glazed—	9.	
(a.) How	(a.) Best Plate glass.	
(b.) When	(b.) May, 1873.	
(c.) Glazier	(c.) H. Britchfield.	
(d.) Cost	(d.) £2. 5.	
10. Dimensions—	10.	
(a.) Sight Measure	(a.)	
(b.) Frame Measure	(b.)	



Figure 17. Photos of details in NPG29 (through glass) showing: (a-c) poor surface condition of paint; (b-e) possible overpainting in very dark colour; (f) discolouration of varnish.



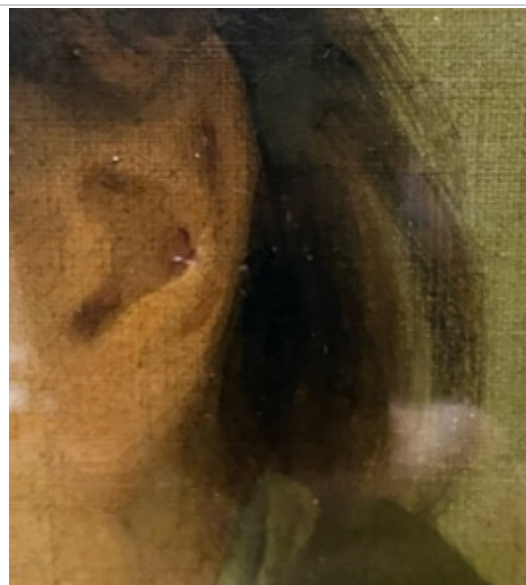
a. Chin with dimple/pock mark and spots at side? or paint damage



b. Right eye with neat dark pupil plus lashes; and cracked paint on eye and skin



c. Cracked paint surface and red on cheek. Left eye with messy dark pupil shape - cf. right eye in (b) - and lashes and hair curl in dark paint



d. Dark paint behind ear. (Is this the site of a repair?) Ear shape defined with lobe attached



e. Dark paint above ear (lower right) and 'feathering' effect on hairline (and brow?)



f. Collar with two buttons shows yellowed varnish on white shirt

Fig.18. *Penelope Margaret Stafford*

c. 1769, 76.2 x 63.5 cm

Pickford's House Museum of Georgian Life and Historic Costume, Derby.

Image credit: Derby Museums (CC BY-NC-SA)



Figure 19. Photos of the frame on NPG29 (a,b) and of a comparable 'Roman' frame from Arnold Wiggins & Son (c,d).



a. NPG29 in its frame, at the off-site store



b. Side view of top right corner of NPG29 shows curved profile and extra layer at back



c. Side view of bottom right corner of Roman frame from Wiggins stock shows curved profile



d. Back view of Roman frame from Wiggins stock shows characteristic construction



Figure 20. Diagram of profile of typical Carlo Maratta (Salvator Rosa/ Roman) frame featuring curved top (outer) edge. Reproduced from Simon, Jacob. *The art of the picture frame*. Fig. 190, Page 213.

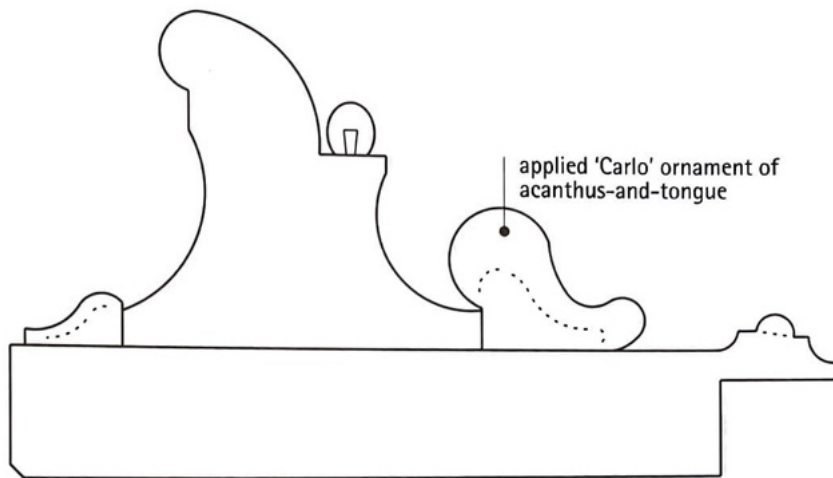


Figure 21. Letter from William Chambers to Edward Stevens (excerpt)  
Soane Museum MS

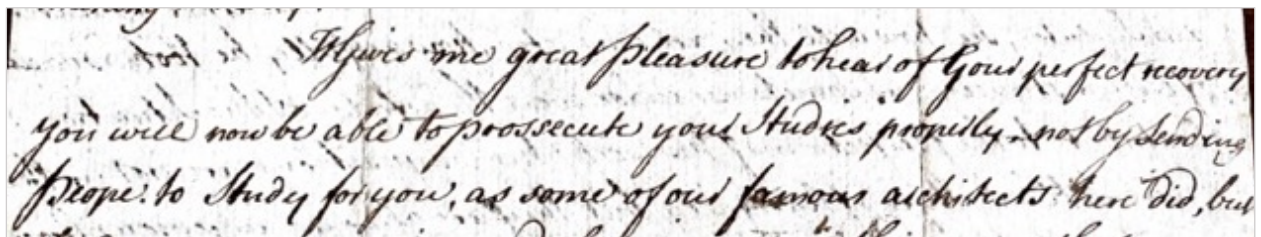


Figure 22. Letter from Ozias Humphry to Rachel Stevens (excerpt)  
RA HU.2.31

Dr. Mr. Stevens

I recd. your obliging and friendly letter, and should have answered it immediately by the first post but it did not come to hand till a few minutes before the departure of the post for Rome —

M<sup>r</sup>. & M<sup>rs</sup>. Wright when they left Florence had no intention to continue in any part of Italy more than three weeks or a month — they proposed to go from this City to Bologna and from thence to Venice where they expected to remain 10 or twelve days, barely time enough to see the principal things and to return again to Bologna and on to Parma immediately — M<sup>r</sup>. Wright was not intend to copy the picture there, but to set forward with all expedition to England — It is

Figure 23. Letter from Joseph Wright to Ozias Humphry (two excerpts)  
Derby Local Studies Library MS 8962, no.1  
Pages 2 to 3

but that is inter nos — I have left my

outline with two English three quarter cloths w<sup>th</sup> you seemed to admire, with the Custodian of the Academy directed for you — I am quite tired of seeing pictures

England - Mr. Jenkins was so obliging  
to ship my cases for me. I had desired from  
Mr. Stevens to pay Mr. Jenkins any  
charge there might be upon them. I wish  
you would be kind enough to settle it for  
me, w<sup>ch</sup> I will repay you, when I have the  
pleasure to see you in England. If you will

Figure 24. Letter from Rachel Stevens to Ozias Humphry (two excerpts)

RA HU.2.32

Page 1

I am exceedingly oblig'd by your kind intentions, con-  
sidering my Dear Mother's picture, which Col. <sup>2nd</sup> Hincks has done of  
should you ever find leisure to finish it, & the subject not be too dis-  
agreeable.

Page 2

I own I should give me great pleasure, I felt much disappointment at its  
not being done for well knowing your superior abilities, I had depend-  
ed on having a good picture of him, which unfortunately I have not, tho'  
it has been painted several times, but I beg you'll use no ceremony  
nor think yourself any way oblig'd to perform, what I should suppose  
must be a difficult & disagreeable task.



Figure 25. *Portrait of the Reverend Stevens in an Oval, against a Landscape, 'chalk drawing'* by Ozias Humphry, [Date?], [size a bit wider than A4?]  
Image credit © The Courtauld

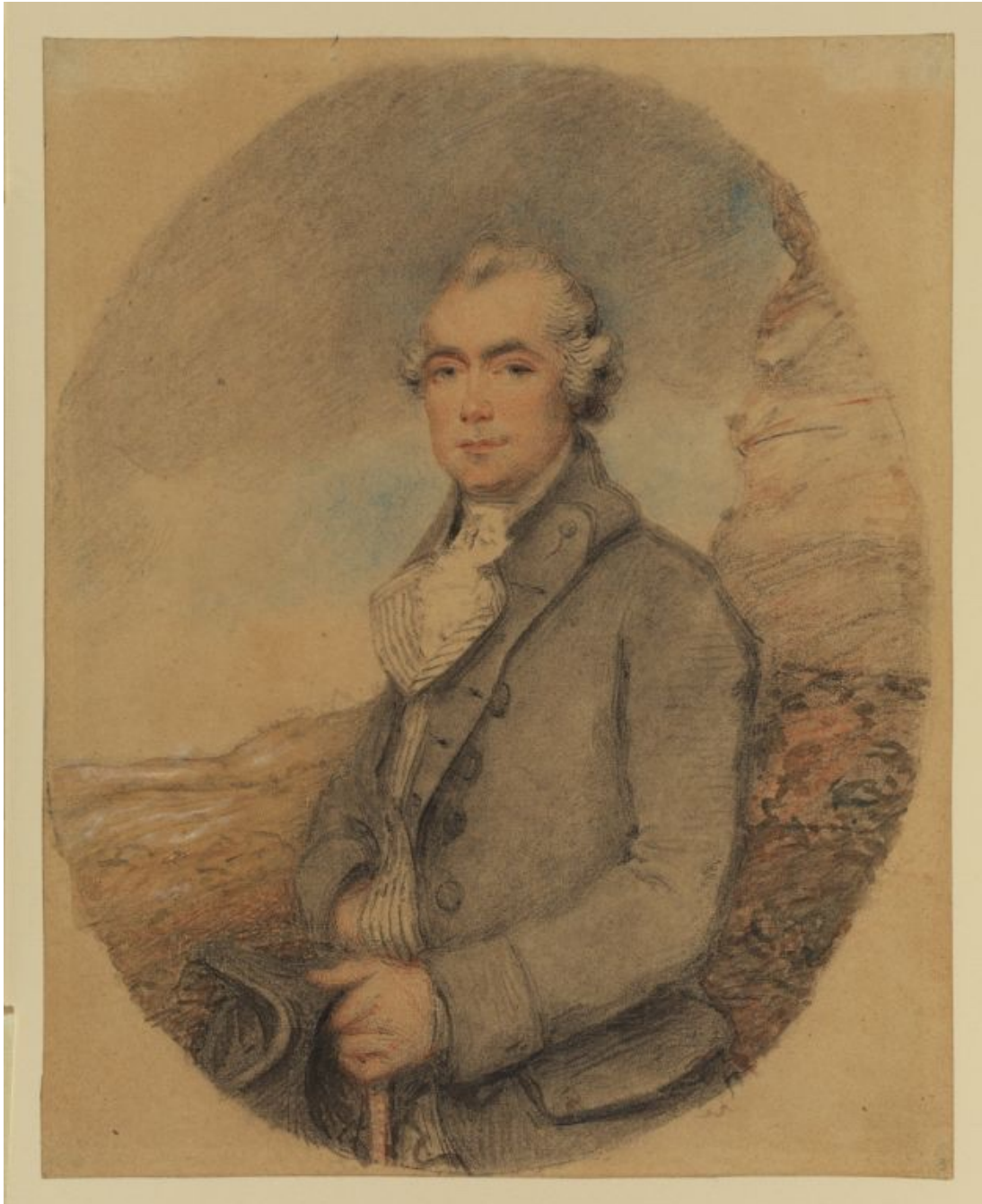


Figure 26. Inscription on verso of Fig.25  
Image credit © The Courtauld

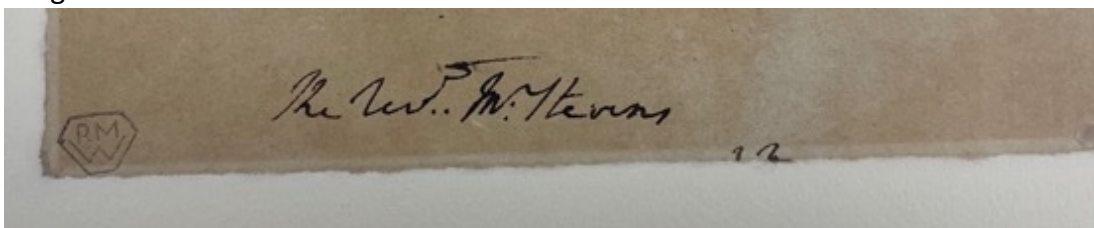


Figure 27. Image of Brooke Bridges Stevens, son of Thomas Stevens  
[Date and size?] Online Dictionary of Canadian Biography



Figure 28. *Colonel Kinnear of the 50th Regiment of Foot*  
By Francis Cotes, 1761, 75 x 62.2 cm  
Weston Park  
Image credit: Trustees of the Weston Park Foundation



Figure 29. *An Officer of the 50th Foot, identified as Major Sir Alexander Hope, Bt (1728-94)*  
c. 1764. [Size may be the same as the Reynolds from which the pose is copied: *Portrait of Sir John Lockhart-Ross, Bt*; approx. 50 x 40 in.]

Auctioned Sotheby's 2002

Image courtesy of Richard Green Gallery, London [reproduced from  
[\*Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research\*](#)]





Figure 30. *Young Artist*

? by Richard Hurlstone or Joseph Wright, 1775, 30 x 25 in. (76 x 63.5 cm)

Private collection, UK.

[Image photographed from Barker & Kidson, p191]



Figure 31. *The Hon. Richard Fitzwilliam, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam of Merrion*  
1764, 74.9 x 62.2 cm  
The Fitzwilliam Museum (BY-NC-ND)



Figure 32. Detail of Fig.31 showing some of Wright's characteristic techniques: 'feathering' on cheek, half moons of green in irises with black pupil and eyelash line, and white dot highlights on nose and lip





Figure 33. Examples of Wright's feathering technique for blending face shadows, and black pigment for pupils and eyelashes  
 Details from: a, Fig.18; b, Fig.13; c and d, Fig.14.



a. Feathering on upper and lower curve of cheek



b. Feathering on curve of brow, cheek and neck; black pupil and eyelash line



c. Feathering on curve of brow and cheek; black slightly non-circular pupil and black lashes



d. Feathering on neck



## Appendix

Table 1. Comparing stylistic, iconographic and material features in 11 portraits by Joseph Wright of Derby and in the work 'Young Artist' (attribution not confirmed)

Painting	NPG29 (NPG)	Self-portrait age ~40 (Derby)	Old John (auction)	Self-portrait (NGV)	Erasmus Darwin (Darwin College)	Thomas Day (NPG)	Indian Captain (YCBA)	Gentleman in red fur-trimmed coat (auction)	Penelope Margaret Stafford (Derby)	Officer of 50 <sup>th</sup> Foot (auction)	Young Artist (private collection)	Viscount Fitzwilliam (Fitzwilliam Museum)
Figure no.	1	3	4	5	10	12	13	14	18	29	30	31
Date	1775	1772	?1780	1765–8	c.1770	1770	c.1767	c.1767?	1769	c. 1764	1775	1764
Feathering	Hairline and brow	No	On face	Hairline and hand	Less delicate version on face	Have not viewed close enough	Temple, cheek, neck	Temple, cheek, neck	Temple, cheek, neck	On cheek?	Have not viewed close enough	Temple, cheek
'Rougher' skin colours (Barker & Kidson)	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Skin shadow colour	Greenish on brow and cheekbone	Browny grey (greener '5 o'clock shadow')	Pinky grey	Very green grey	Some greenish and grey	Grey green	Grey green	Browny grey (grey green '5 o'clock shadow')	Grey green	Very grey	More dark brown	More dark brown
White dot nose	No	No	Yes	Lightly done	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes?	Yes	Yes
White dot lip	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Line	Yes	line	Yes	Yes
Earlobe attachment	Joined, with inner shape evident	Lobe not joined	-	Lobe not joined	-	-	-	Joined/ not distinct	Lobe not joined	Joined	Lobe not joined	Lobe not joined

<b>Half moon in iris (Bendor Grosvenor)</b>	Shape messy in left eye	Yes in light brown	Yes	Yes in light brown	Yes	Have not viewed close enough	Yes	Shape slightly messy in right eye	Sideways on	Yes	Have not viewed close enough	Yes in green
<b>Porcelaneous skin (Bendor Grosvenor)</b>	Forehead	Not smooth	No	Forehead, nose	Not smooth	Part of forehead?	Forehead	Small area forehead	Forehead, cheek, décolleté	Forehead, cheeks	Forehead	Forehead, around mouth
<b>Open-necked shirt</b>	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	No	No	No
<b>Style of shirt cuff</b>	-	Gathered	-	Gathered	Frills	Gathered	Gathered	-	-	Frills	Frills in excess	Frills
<b>Attribute</b>	Folder	Folder and tool	-	-	-	Papers	-	-	-	-	Tool	-
<b>Background colour</b>	Light chestnut brown, sand and green	Very dark brown	Very dark brown	Very dark brown	Dark brown and plum brown	Brooding sky	Multiple	Chestnut brown and paler brown	Brooding sky	Brooding sky and multiple	Pale brown, green, blue grey	Very dark brown, some sand and green
<b>Weave of canvas</b>	Plain	Plain	Not obvious	Plain	Twill	Not visible	Not visible	Not visible	Twill	Plain?	Not obvious	Hardly visible