Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646-1723) and studio

"The most impressive of all the Newton portraits" (Gertsen, The Newton Handbook, 1986). This is one of three versions of the earliest-known portrait of Newton, known as the "Portsmouth" portrait type, depicting him at the peak of his fame two years after the publication of the Principia Mathematica (1687). It shows Newton dressed informally, without a wig, and in a confident and compelling pose, in which the power and depth of his intellect are portrayed in his striking features and profound gaze. The present portrait was executed by Kneller and his studio, and was commissioned by Newton himself. It is the only contemporary portrait of Newton to have appeared on the market in the past thirty years.

For a supposedly secretive and cautious man, it is surprising that Sir Isaac Newton had himself painted as often as he did. There exist at least seventeen different portrait types, of which only seven were painted for known purposes; two for book illustrations, two for the Royal Society and three commissioned by others. We can only speculate as to why the remaining ten portraits were commissioned. One possibility is that they commemorated exceptional occasions. Thus Jervas's portrait of 1703 celebrated Newton's election to the Presidency of the Royal Society, and William Gandy's portrait of 1706 his knighthood.

The present portrait is of a type that is the earliest known of Newton, and chronologically the closest to the period of intense discovery that was to secure his fame. Three versions of this "Portsmouth" portrait are known:

1) The original is considered to be the picture formerly at Hurstbourne Park in Hampshire, the seat of the Earl of Portsmouth (currently Portsmouth Estates). This picture is smaller (30 x 25 inches) and is signed and dated 1689. It was evidently considered a family portrait, as Newton kept it for the rest of his life, and it passed to Catherine (Barton) Conduit, his favorite niece. She left it to her daughter Catherine, and it went into the Portsmouth collection when Catherine married the Hon. John Wallop, Viscount Lymington in 1740. In 1743 his father became the 1st Earl of Portsmouth.

2) There is also a studio copy of the above in the collection at The Wyne, Basingstoke, Hampshire, belonging to the National Trust.

3) The present portrait, by Kneller and his studio, reproduces the Portsmouth type in what is known as the Kit Cat size, about 36 by 28 inches. Between 1702 and 1717 Sir Godfrey Kneller painted forty-two members of the Kit Cat club, which has been described as the Whig party in its social aspect. The earliest use of this format is thought to be circa 1698, which suggests that the present picture is unlikely to have been painted before then. Kneller would subsequently paint two other portraits of Newton. The one done in 1702, probably to commemorate his appointment to the Mastership of the Mint, is also now in the Portsmouth collection. This second portrait is more formal in manner.

Kneller first painted the Portsmouth picture (#1 above) two years after Newton published his Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica. Immediately following its publication in 1687, Newton helped lead the resistance of Cambridge University to James II's attempts to Anglicize it. As a consequence of this, and of the international prominence he had attained from the Principia, Newton was elected to represent the university in the convention that arranged the revolutionary settlement of 1688.

It is in the context of this rapid rise from academic obscurity to international fame and social significance that we must see the commissioning of the Portsmouth portrait as well as versions #2 and #3. It is possible that the Portsmouth portrait was Newton's way of commemorating the sudden improvement in his fortunes. It was not inexpensive: it probably cost him about £50, that is to say about half a year's salary.

Certainly Kneller has captured his sitter's intellect, with Newton's delicate features staring out to the right of the viewer in deep concentration. This is not a bewigged formal portrait intended to record the sitter's lofty status, like the somewhat pompous picture produced by John Vanderbank in 1726 (Royal Society). Rather it is a completely informal image, showing the sitter in an open white shirt, a brown academic gown and his own carelessly arranged hair. The sitter does not meet our eye, but gazes beyond us deep in thought. We are given the impression of witnessing genius in action. Of all the portraits of Newton, this type is the best representation of the scientist at work, rather than of the Knight of the realm, or the President of the Royal Society. It was chosen to illustrate Newton in the recent exhibition held by the National Portrait Gallery, Great Britons (2002, p. 73).

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Portrait of Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727)
at 47 years old, half length, wearing a brown cloak, leaning on a ledge, c. 1698
Oil on canvas, unrestored,
in its original frame
[89.5 x 68.5 cm / 35 x 27 inches]
PROVENANCE: The Viscounts Galway,
Seribby Hall, Nottinghamshire,
sold Christie's London, 23 March 1979, lot 124
EXHIBITED: "Marlborough and the Reign of Queen Anne," Chesterfield House, March 1934, no. 226, lent Viscount Galway

$165,000

**Continued on back panel**
A VINE PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM HARVEY, discoverer of the circulation of the blood, from the studio of Sir Peter Lely. Depicting Harvey in an intimate, intense manner, aged about seventy, it has remained in the collections of Harvey’s descendents until recently, and is almost certainly a portrait commissioned by the family. A version of this portrait hangs in the Royal Society as the “official” portrait of Harvey, but compared to the present painting is considered inferior in quality.

There are three other accepted portrait types of William Harvey. The first of these, which is in the National Portrait Gallery, is from Rolls Park, the country seat of William’s brother Elab. It is bust length, oval, and shows a man in his mid-forties. The other two, which are in the Royal College of Physicians and in the Hunterian Collection in the University of Glasgow, both show a man in his early sixties seated three-quarter length in front of column bases. They are formal, imposing images, impressing the viewer with the sitter’s status.

The present image is, by contrast, a more intimate affair. It shows a man who is about ten years older than he was in the Royal College and Hunterian pictures, and the face has a care-worn and melancholy air. Sir Oliver Millar has examined the picture, and believes it to be a version from Lely’s workshop of c.1650, which would mean that the sitter was in his early seventies.

Harvey was greatly affected by the execution of King Charles I in 1649. Although he had not been much interested in politics, he felt a deep personal regard for the sovereign, a former patient. During Cromwell’s Protectorate Harvey was regarded as a political delinquent, and was forced to spend most of his time lodging in one or the other of his brothers’ houses outside London. Having met with substantial opposition to his anatomical theories in the years since the 1628 publication of his masterpiece, de Motu Cordis, his passionate desire to establish scientific truth had remained unsatisfied. He was, in short, a weary man, and it shows in the picture.

Given its provenance, it is reasonable to assume that the portrait was commissioned, and intended to be seen, by his family: for nearly two hundred and sixty years the present portrait hung in one of the great Georgian country houses of England, Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire. It very probably arrived there in 1730, when Harvey’s great-nephew Daniel Finch died. Thomas Watson-Wentworth, Lord Malton and the First Marquis of Rockingham, the proprietor of Wentworth Woodhouse at that time, had been one of the executors of Daniel’s will.

In 1716, Watson-Wentworth had married Daniel’s daughter Mary, granddaughter of Heneage Finch (1621-1682). Heneage was Lord Chancellor and the Earl of Nottingham, an intimate friend of William Harvey and the executor of his will. In 1646 Heneage had married William’s niece Elizabeth Harvey, the daughter of William’s brother Daniel (1587-1647). Heneage left his entire property to his son Daniel Finch (1646-1730), that is, to Watson-Wentworth’s father-in-law.

If the present picture does indeed date from the early 1650s, it would have been made for Heneage and Elizabeth, who were married in 1646, rather than for Elizabeth’s father Daniel, who died in 1647. It was certainly at Wentworth Woodhouse by the time that George Vertue, the famous engraver and art historian, saw it there in 1730 (see literature).

The beautifully lettered inscription on the present portrait must have been made in Lord Malton’s day. An inscription with identical lettering exists on at least one of the other pictures listed by Vertue, namely Daniel Mytens’s portrait of George Calvert, 1st Baron Baltimore (1580-1652), the Secretary of State to James I (the Mytens was exhibited at the Royal Academy, 17th Century Art, 1938, no. 352). In fact when Vertue writes that the sitters are the famous Physician and Sec. State. To K. James 1st, he is quoting these inscriptions. They must therefore have been in place by 1730.

According to Vertue, the present picture hung between portraits of Baron Vere of Tilbury (1565-1635), believed to be the greatest soldier of his day, and Richard Gascoigne, a 16th-century ancestor of Lord Malton’s. Also in the gallery, among others, were portraits of Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645) and Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642). Thus William Harvey appears to have taken his place in a

Portrait of Doctor William Harvey (1578-1657)
bust length, wearing a black jacket and skullcap, c. 1650
Oil on canvas, unrestored, in its original frame [75 x 64.1 cm/29 x 25 inches]

INSCRIBED: The Famous Dr Williajm Harvey Who Discovered The Circulation of The Blood...

PROVENANCE: Heneage Finch (1621-1682), see below;
his son Daniel Finch (1647-1730);
Thomas Watson-Wentworth (1693-1750),
Lord Malton and 1st Marquis Rockingham;
by descent until sold at Christie’s, 11 July 1986, lot 60

$165,000

Continued on back panel
Dr. William Harvey (continued from page 3)

“worthies gallery,” a display of portraits of eminent men, deriving from the medieval literary concept of the “nine worthies.”

Another version of this portrait exists at Weston Park, the seat of the Earls of Bradford. The Weston Park picture was acquired at the sale of Sir Peter Lely’s estate in 1683. In Lely’s sale catalogue under “Heads of Men” there is a “Doctor Harvey”; it is described as a “copy after Sir Peter Lely.” The painting was sold for £10 shillings to Lord Newport, the First Earl of Bradford. It is smaller than the present picture, being 24.2 x 21 inches. (The Lely catalogue is British Museum, Add.Ms. 16174, and is published in the Burlington Magazine, LXXXIII [1943], 185-191, see p. 188). Besides the Weston Park picture there are two further versions of the picture: the above-mentioned copy at the Royal Society (29 x 24 ins), presented by Dr. Mapetrof in 1683/4, and that at the University of Newcastle (29 x 23 ins), left to the university by Dr. F. C. Pybus in 1965.

John Aubrey relates that William Harvey was rapid in utterance and short of temper, but ready at all times to instruct any that were modest and respectful of him. His numerous idiosyncrasies included keeping sugar in his saltcellar, combing his hair outdoors; and treating his own gout by putting his legs in a bucket of cold water and afterwards roasting them in front of a fire. He was educated at King’s School, Canterbury (1588-1593), Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (1593-1599) and the University of Padua (1599-1602). On his return from Padua he joined the staff of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital (1603-1643), and was closely connected with the Royal College of Physicians (1604-1654). He first described his theory of the circulation of the blood in the Lumleian lectures at the Royal College of Physicians in April 1616.