

Illustrious Heads | Portrait Prints as History

The Lewis Walpole Library

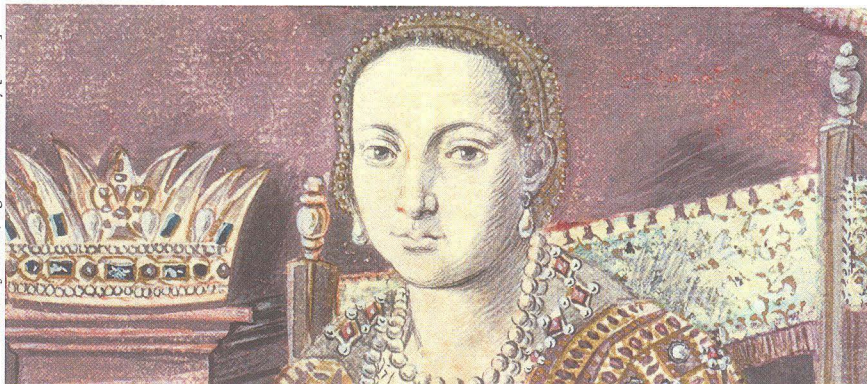
Illustrious Heads | Portrait Prints as History

Engraved “heads,” or portrait prints, in close alliance with literary history and biography, carried substantial power as expressions of political and social preoccupations in eighteenth-century England. Published for both book illustration and independent issue, with and without text, portrait prints recorded and articulated a national past that was conceived as the “portraiture” of illustrious historical persons—a visual and literary representation of a sequence of notable individuals—rather than as a narrative representation of a series of significant political, diplomatic, or military events.

The historical portraits selected for this exhibition suggest the variety of portrait print publications and present some of the diverse ways in which portraits were considered as repositories of history, biography, and anecdote. Throughout the eighteenth century, portraits were widely held to have exemplary and didactic influence as enrichment to selected texts, a function they also increasingly served independently. Examples on display further reveal the engagement of eighteenth-century audiences with questions of sitter classification, authenticity, provenance, and scarcity. Finally, many of the materials shown here demonstrate the ways in which these portrait heads also provide primary resources for scholars of history and art today.

Throughout the eighteenth century, resourceful publishers and printmakers served burgeoning audiences and markets for portrait “heads.” Early canonical history texts, first published without illustration, were frequently republished

Eleanor of Toledo, eighteenth century [detail]



with the addition of engraved portraits. One important early example was the publication in 1714 of eighty-five “Heads of the Great Men on both sides” intended to illustrate Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon’s *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England, Begun in the Year 1641*, which was published initially with only a frontispiece portrait of the author. Similarly, in 1733, as the taste for portraits continued to grow, the engraver and antiquary George Vertue instigated an ambitious plan with the publishers John and Paul Knapton to illustrate Nicolas Tindal’s popular translation of M. Paul Rapin de Thoyras’s *History of England* (first published in 1725) with a series of full-page historical portrait prints by the Dutch engraver Jacobus Houbraken. Following the considerable success of this project, the Knaptons issued a set of “Heads of the most Illustrious Persons of Great Britain” engraved by Houbraken and Vertue to illustrate Tindal’s *Continuation of Rapin*. These engravings were then reissued with letterpress biographies in Thomas Birch’s *Lives and Characters of Eighty Illustrious Person of Great Britain*. Together Rapin’s and Tindal’s literary histories and the engraved “heads” produced by Vertue and Houbraken firmly established the taste for English portrait prints, and portrait subjects began to expand beyond royalty, nobility, diplomats, and military heroes to include professionals, clerics, scientists, explorers, authors, artists, and selected remarkable members of the lower classes.

As the supply of portrait prints multiplied and caught the attention of antiquarian collectors, systems of ordering and taxonomies evolved. Horace

Walpole was among the first historical portrait enthusiasts; he began avidly collecting, ordering, and documenting English “heads” in the early 1740s. Ever an astute commentator and perhaps motivated to record his own formative influence, Walpole later drafted an account of the origins and evolution of the “rage of English heads” in an essay entitled “Of Collectors of English Portrait Prints.” In 1748, Joseph Ames, secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, published *A Catalogue of English Heads; or, an Account of About Two Thousand Prints, Describing What Is Peculiar to Each*. This early effort to record and systematize historical portraits enumerated in alphabetical order the prints known to him primarily through the collection of the Quaker antiquary John Nickolls.

Among the most notable and influential catalysts for firmly establishing portrait print collecting as a fashionable pastime in the eighteenth century was the publication of James Granger’s *Biographical History of England from Egbert the Great to the Revolution in 1769*. As made explicit in his lengthy title, Granger’s work was “intended as an essay towards reducing our biography to system, and a help to the knowledge of portraits” and was “interspersed with variety of anecdotes, and memoirs of a great number of persons.” Granger’s compilation, based on the major collections of Sir William Musgrave, James West, and Horace Walpole, firmly merged engraved portraiture with anecdotal biographical history. Granger’s success has been credited with originating the practice of “grangerizing,” or extra-illustrating, volumes with independently published prints.

By the end of the century, re-issues and popularizations extended the audience for portrait heads to wider and less privileged markets. Many historic heads



familiar from early projects were copied and reproduced over and over again in later publications such as James Caulfield's *Members of the Celebrated Persons Composing the Kit-Cat Club* (1821) with portraits copied after John Faber's engravings first published in 1735, and *The Biographical Magazine* and *The Biographical Mirrour*, which reproduced many of the early Vertue and Houbraken heads in modest formats.

Additionally, straight portraits — and increasingly caricatures — of contemporary persons played a vital role in negotiating topical politics and documenting the surrounding discourse for posterity. James Gillray's brilliant caricatured delineations of royals, politicians, and fashionable celebrities offered his audiences satiric reportage, commentary, and fodder for gossip, which continue to amuse audiences and captivate historians and art historians today.

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Cynthia Roman

Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Paintings

The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University



Edward IV K. of England... undated

CHECKLIST

Books

~in chronological order of portrait publication date~

Edward IV K. of England & France, Lord of Ireland, undated

George Vertue (1684 – 1756)

Etching and engraving

In *Heads of the Kings of England, proper for Mr. Rapin's History*, translated by N.

Tindal ... Collected, drawn, and engraven, with ornaments and decorations, by George

Vertue. To which are added, the heads of Mr. Rapin and N. Tindal, M.A. and an

account of the several heads ... Also, twenty-two plates of the monuments of the kings of England, with their epitaphs ... and a brief historical account of them

London: James, John, and Paul Knapton, 1736

Mary Queen of Scots, 1738

Jacobus Houbraken (1698 – 1780) after Isaac Oliver (1558/68 – 1617)

Etching and engraving

In *Thomas Birch, Heads of Illustrious Persons of Great Britain*, engraven by Mr.

Houbraken, and Mr. Vertue. With their lives and characters

London: J. and P. Knapton, 1743

John Hampden, 1740

Jacobus Houbraken (1698 – 1780) after Isaac Oliver (1558/68 – 1617)

Etching and engraving

In *Thomas Birch, Heads of Illustrious Persons of Great Britain*, engraven by Mr.

Houbraken, and Mr. Vertue. With their lives and characters

London: J. and P. Knapton



Richard III., 1764 [detail]



Jacob Hall, undated

Portrait of Lady Mount Edgcumbe, ca. 1762

Samuel William Reynolds (1773 – 1835) after Joshua Reynolds (1723 – 1792)

Mezzotint, “proof”

in L.B. Seeley (ed.), *Horace Walpole and His World*

London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1884

12 volumes, extra-illustrated

Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury, undated

Anthony Walker (1726 – 1765) after Isaac Oliver (1558/68 – 1617)

Etching

In Edward Herbert, *The Life of Edward Lord Herbert of Cherbury*, written by himself

Twickenham: Strawberry Hill Press, 1764

Earl Rivers presenting his Book & Caxton his Printer to Edw 4, the Queen & Prince, 1807

Andrew Birrell (flourished 1769 – 1820)

Etching and engraving

Published 1807, by J. Scott

In Horace Walpole, *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard III*

London: J. Dodsley, 1768

Richard Bull's extra-illustrated copy

Milton

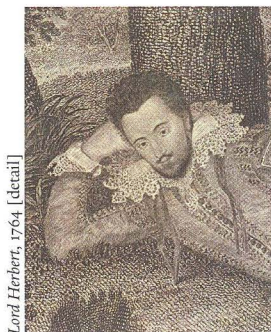
Jonathan Richardson (1694 – 1771)

Etching

In James Granger, *A Biographical History of England, from Egbert the Great to the Revolution*

London: T. Davies, 1769

20 volumes, extra-illustrated



Lord Herbert, 1764 [detail]



Mary Queen of Scots, 1795

Charles Earl of Sunderland, 1746

Jacobus Houbraken (1698 – 1780)

His Royal Highness Prince George of Denmark, ca. 1704 – 1708

John Smith (1652 – 1743) after Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646 – 1723)

In Thomas Pennant, *Some Account of London*, 2nd edition

London : R. Faulder, 1793

4 volumes, extra-illustrated

Sir William Temple, 1794

Anker Smith (1759 – 1819) after Sir Peter Lely (1618 – 1680)

Etching

In *The Biographical Magazine*

London: Harrison & Co., 1794-1796

Mary Queen of Scots, 1795

John Landseer (1763 or 69 – 1852) and Anker Smith (1759 – 1819) after Robert Smirke (1752 – 1845)

Etching and engraving

In *A series of one hundred and ninety-six engravings, (in the line manner) by the first artists in the country, illustrative of the history of England, comprizing historical subjects, portraits, naval and military engagements, ruins of ancient castles, coins, medals, &c., &c. ... with an historical account of each subject, &c., &c., &c.*

London: R. Bowyer, by T. Bensley, 1812

John Milton from an Original Picture in the Collection of Lord Orford, at Strawberry Hill, 1796

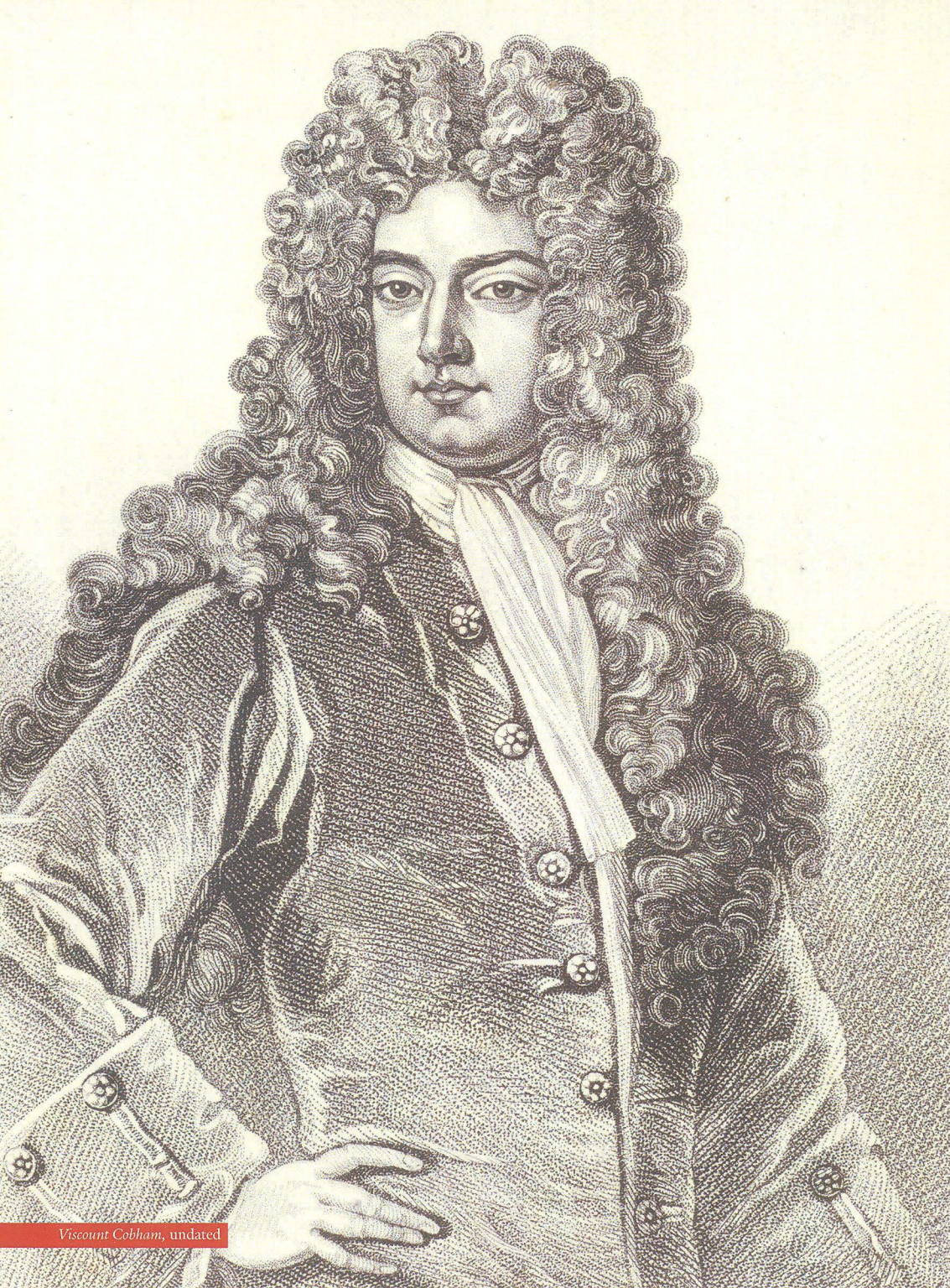
Edward Harding (1755 – 1840) and Sylvester Harding (1745 – 1809)

Etching

In Sylvester Harding, *The Biographical Mirrour, comprising a series of ancient and*



Mary Queen of Scots... 1736 [detail]



Viscount Cobham, undated

modern English portraits, of eminent and distinguished persons, from original pictures and drawings with some account of their lives and works
 London: S. and E. Harding, 1798

The Right Honourable Charles James Fox. Member of Parliament for the City of Westminster, 1796

Artist unknown

Mezzotint

Published by Laurie and Whittle

In L.B. Seeley (ed.), *Horace Walpole and His World*

London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1884

12 volumes, extra-illustrated

Portrait of Richard Temple Viscount Cobham, undated

Cooper after Godfrey Kneller (1646 – 1723)

In James Caulfield, *Members of the Celebrated Persons composing the Kit-Cat Club; with A Preparatory Account of the Origin of the Association illustrated with Forty-eight Portraits*

London: Hurst, Robinson, and Co., 1821

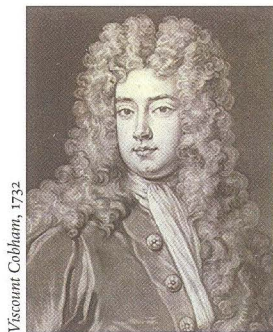
Prints and Drawings

Jacob Hall, undated

P. de Brune after Jacob Van Oost, the elder (1603 – 1671)

Etching with Horace Walpole's mss note in pen

25.4 x. 18.5 cm (trimmed)



Viscount Cobham, 1732



John Milton, 1740

Richard Temple Viscount Cobham, &c., 1732

John Faber the younger (c. 1695 – 1756) after Sir Godfrey Kneller (1646 – 1723)

Mezzotint

35.2 x 25.3 cm

James Stuart Duke of Richmond and Lenox, 1740

Jacobus Houbraken (1698 – 1780) after Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599 – 1641)

Etching and engraving

37.5 x 23.7 cm (plate mark)

Published 1740, by Knapton

John Milton, 1740

Jacobus Houbraken (1698 – 1780)

Etching and engraving

37.4 x 24.3 cm (plate mark)

Published 1741, by Knapton

John Locke, ca. 1740

George Vertue (1684 – 1756)

Pencil, watercolor, and wash

14.6 x 11.8 cm; 23.4 x 21.2 cm (wash-line mount)

from “Portfolio of Original Drawings of Heads, Antiquities, Monuments ... &c.”

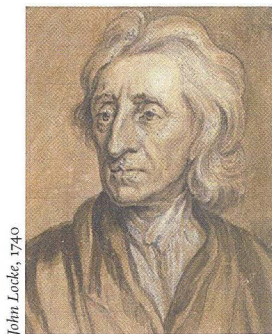
Elizabeth Canning, ca. 1754

Louis-Philippe Boitard (f. 1733 – 1770)

Etching and engraving

24.5 x 18.6 (plate mark)

Printed for & sold by Thos. Bowles in St. Pauls Church Yard & John Bowles & Son at the Black Horse in Cornhill



John Locke, 1740



The brave old Hendrick, the great Sachem or chief of the Mohawk Indians: one of the six nations now in alliance with & subject to the King of Great Britain, ca. 1755

Artist Unknown

Etching and engraving with stipple

36.6 x 26.3 cm (plate mark); 39 x 27.5 cm (sheet)

Sold by Eliz. Blakewell, opposite Birchin Lane in Cornhill

Eleanor of Toledo, eighteenth century

Artist Unknown

Watercolor

33.6 x 19.6 cm (plate mark)

Richard III and Queen Anne, mid eighteenth century

George Vertue (1684 – 1756)

Pen and black and brown ink, in period frame

51.5 x 38.2 cm (framed)

John Wilkes, Esq., 1763

William Hogarth (1697 – 1764)

Etching and engraving

34.6 x 22.9 cm

John Wilkes Esqr. Member of Parliament for the County of Middlesex, friend to Liberty, a lover of his King, opposer of ministerial tyranny & defender of his country, 1768

John Kitchingman (1740 – 1781) after Robert Edge Pine (?1720 – 1788)

Mezzotint



Emma Gilbert, ..., 1780



William Pitt, 1789

50.1 x 35.2 cm (plate mark)

Published May 23, 1768, by M. Darly

Emma Gilbert, Lady Mount Edgcumbe, 1780

James Gillray (1756 – 1815)

Etching with hand coloring

8.8 x 7.0 cm (sheet)

Published May 18, 1780, by H. Humphrey

William Pitt, 1789

James Gillray (1756 – 1815)

Etching

49.9 x 37.3 cm (plate mark)

Published by S.W. Fores, 1789

Charley Boy crying for the loss of his Political Father, 1796

Artist Unknown

Etching with hand coloring

20.1 x 14.2 cm (plate mark)

Published May 12, 1796, by William Dent

A Connoisseur examining a Cooper, 1792

James Gillray (1756 – 1815)

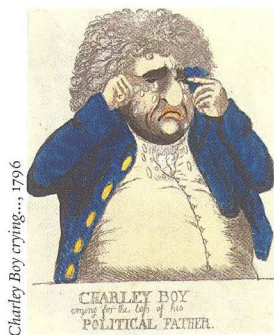
Stipple engraving with etching; with hand coloring

35 x 25 cm (plate mark)

Published June 18, 1792, by H. Humphrey

The Royal Cock=Pitt, 1796

Robert Dighton (1752 – 1814)





Etching with hand coloring

23.3 x 18.3 cm (plate mark)

Published December 20, 1796, by Robert Dighton

His Most Excellent Majesty George the Third, 1810

William Skelton (1763 – 1848) after William Beechey (1753 – 1839)

Etching and engraving

50.5 x 38.5 cm (plate mark)

Published October 25, 1810, by Skelton



A Commoisseur examining a Cooper, 1792



The brave old Hendrick..., ca. 1755

Selected Sources

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*Earl Rivers presenting his Book & Caxton his Printer
 to Edw. 4. the Queen & Prince; from a curious M.S. in the
 Archbishop's Library at Lambeth. The Portrait of the
 Prince (afterw^d. Edw. 5th) is the only one known of him, &
 has been engraved by Vertue among the Heads of the
 Kings. The Person in a Cap & Robe of State is proba-
 bly Richard D. of Gloucester, as he resembles the King,
 and as Clarence was always too great an Enemy of
 the Queen to be distinguished by her Brother. The
 Book was printed in 1477, when Clarence was in Ire-
 land, & in the beginning of the next Year he was murder'd.*





The Lewis Walpole Library

Yale