

Lornette Pemberton

From: Jacob Simon
Sent: 06 November 2016 15:17
To: Lucy Peltz
Subject: William Legg canvas stamp
Attachments: William Legg stamp.docx

Lucy

I am attaching a report of my visit to see the William Legg canvas stamp. Happy to discuss further.

Jacob

William Legg stamp

Lucy

Mrs. Smith, by James Northcote, 1803 (coll: Anjana Ahuja)

As discussed, I went to see this portrait in Gospel Oak on Friday and I was shown the William Legg canvas stamp on the reverse, which reads, "Wm LEGG,/ High Holborn,/ LINEN." There was also an adjoining frame mark of the sort applied at the time by the Excise to indicate that duty had been paid on the linen canvas. Although the mark was partly obscured by the stretcher, the final two digits were visible, 02, of the small date stamp in the mark's end compartment, presumably 1802. This would accord well with the 1803 date of Northcote's signature on the front of the portrait. Although this William Legg canvas stamp has been recorded on other unlined paintings, this is the first that I have come across where a photograph is available.

The owner, Anjana Ahuja, is a *Financial Times* scientific journalist, as I reported to you. It was her husband who originally got in touch with me. In conversation, it became clear that she had already mapped out in her mind a possible feature article in the FT. This could be on the lines of a personal story, she said, which would be exceptional for her since she did not normally write such stories. As far as I could grasp the story would run along the following lines: inexpensive purchase of obscure but documented portrait in obscure auction; discovery of canvas stamp on reverse; her research reveals Northcote catalogue and Legg biographical entry (as it happens, both written by myself); her further online research reveals apparently identical stamp on reverse of Rice portrait; this discovery means.... [story to complete]. She regards it as a fascinating story.

In conversation, I said that:

- I thought that supporters of the Rice portrait would contest that the stamp was identical, despite the very close similarities, and might maintain their theory that there was another undocumented William Legg working in High Holborn
- the whole debate was complex, indeed a quagmire, despite the apparent simplicity of the canvas stamp, and had taken a great deal of Gallery time and my time without convincing the Rice supporters
- I would make the information on the canvas stamp available in the next updating of the William Legg biographical entry on our website, which she agreed
- I had no wish to get involved in a story about the Rice portrait when the debate had proved essentially unproductive
- If she did decide to pursue the story and wanted an input from the Gallery she should get in touch with the press office

The whole occasion was very civilised and I thought that she was sympathetic. However, one never knows whether a story will be pursued or how it will turn out. Although the discovery of the canvas stamp itself is welcome news, the prospect of a press story, even in the FT, is not something that I am enthusiastic about.

Jacob

6 November 2016

